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## A Phenomenological Study on the Perceived Impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership

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A Phenomenological Study on the Perceived Impact of Bass's Four I's of  
Transformational Leadership

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

April 2024

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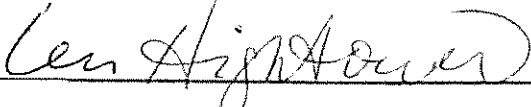
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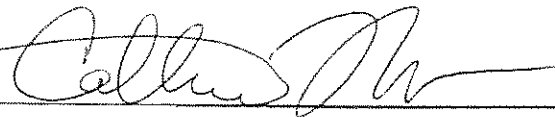
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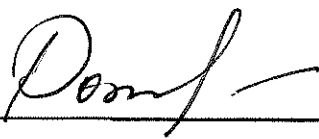
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Transformational Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

A Phenomenological Study on the Perceived Impact of Bass's Four I's of

Transformational Leadership

by Yarissa Marn

**Purpose:** The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe World of Warcraft game leaders' perceptions of the impact on their guilds regarding Bass's 4 I's of transformational leadership.

**Methodology:** This qualitative study interviewed 13 World of Warcraft game leaders who have led their guild members for at least one year. The main source of data collection was semi-structured open-ended interview questions with other resources to include artifacts. The researcher coded and analyzed data for themes and patterns.

**Findings:** Several domains of Bass's Four I's Transformational Leadership framework were found to have an impact on World of Warcraft game leaders' experiences, influencing communication, motivation, challenges, creativity and innovation, and guild culture.

**Conclusions:** Frequent and consistent communication, inspiration, organizational culture, creativity, innovation, and female leadership capacity serve as a foundation for leadership development in online gaming. Game leaders shared their leadership perceptions and experiences, providing insight on transformational leadership development.

**Recommendations:** Game leaders should foster a guild culture and community that is suffused in transparent communication, active motivation and encouragement, strategic visions and goals, and deliberate on promoting creativity and innovation. Game leaders

can increase the engagement of guild members by creating safe spaces where guild members can share their ideas and trust that game leaders are listening, being considerate of their needs.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

World of Warcraft or WoW is one of the most popular and played online games (Koptur, 2016). Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game or MMORPG has developed a large and diverse gaming community. Further, an MMORPG is a video game that allows players to role-play with avatars simultaneously with other players in an online gaming world (MasterClass, 2021). MMORPGs have garnered interest in leadership development, researchers have attempted to find a link between online games like WoW and the potential for these games to develop leaders (Guillot, 2015). For instance, Jang and Ryu (2011) explored the in-game experiences of MMORPG players with a focus on game leadership and offline leadership. The topic of MMORPGs and leadership development requires further research due to the exploratory shift from traditional to virtual leadership development.

In efforts to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon – online gaming and leadership development, research on this topic could prove beneficial, showing an adequate avenue to train future leaders. Koptur (2016) supported this line of thinking, providing data on skills learned that may transfer to real life in his research. Effectively, research on online gaming and leadership development may provide the research community a path towards demystifying this phenomenon and enable organizations to gain a clearer understanding of what has been and could be done to develop leaders using an online platform.

According to Mysirlaki and Paraskeva (2012), the need for collaboration in teams and leadership is evident in MMORPGs. They examined what characteristics related to the social nature of massively multiplayer online games that activate leadership skills.



Consequently, looking at this aspect of leadership development in online gaming poses other questions such as how these games can develop leadership skills. Concepts such as building relationships, sharing, and delegating within online gaming may build leadership skills. If individuals can play an MMORPG game like WoW and develop leadership skills, then researchers need to explore how leaders within the game develop. Namely, they should examine the type of leadership skills leaders develop.

Interactions among people and the influence individuals have on others is implicit to leadership (Akindele & Afolabi, 2013). In effect, leadership research in online games, specifically MMORPGs, may call for a narrower approach. By using the lenses of transformational leadership, researchers may gain insight on how to gauge the impact MMORPGs have on the development of leadership skills. For instance, Lisk et al. (2012) studied multiplayer online environments to gain a better understanding of how online players, specifically leaders in the game, developed transformational leadership skills.

In WoW, guild masters/leaders or G.M.s lead, manage, and guide guilds (a group of players under a specific name/banner within the game). These G.M.s are responsible for leading their respective guilds through game encounters, dungeons, and quests. The population within one server in WoW can have up to 125 guilds (Entertainment Software Association [ESA], 2021). With a focus on a large population of G.M.s, researchers may be able to identify and describe the impact MMORPGs have on leadership skill development. Still, the focus needs to be backed by a well-tested type of leadership, bringing transformational leadership to the forefront. A direct examination of transformational leadership skill development allows for researchers to concretely ascertain the impact MMORPGs have on G.M.s – leaders in an online platform.

## **Background on Leadership Development Through Online Gaming**

Playing MMORPGs is a multi-generational, cross-gender phenomenon (ESA, 2021). As a result, research on leadership development in online games like the MMORPG World of Warcraft is growing (Guillot, 2015). For instance, the MMORPG WoW in 2017 had 20 million registered players (Apolinario, 2022). This number increased in 2020 to approximately 100 million subscriptions (Apolinario, 2022). Therefore, scholars have continuously researched elements of leadership development such as team collaboration (DeMarco et al., 2007; Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2012), problem-solving, decision making (Bonk & Dennen, 2005; Lisk et al., 2012), and self-efficacy (Ee & Cho, 2012) . Knowing how a leader develops while playing MMORPGs provides rich detail for future leadership development training.

Li-Chun and Chia-Ping (2015) emphasized that leaders can develop leadership skills while playing an MMORPG. They provided insight into components of transformational leadership, specifically idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. For example, in an MMORPG, leaders must communicate and coordinate with others to defeat a boss encounter or complete a quest/mission. Effectively, Li-Chun and Chia-Ping (2015) studied how players communicated and engaged in social interactions, collaborating to reach a certain goal in-game. They also noted leaders who demonstrated difficulty motivating and communicating, consolidating group goals, shaping the community's perceptions, mentoring other players, and performing management functions (Li-Chun & Chia-Ping, 2015).

Other researchers like Koptur (2016) highlighted MMORPG's potential in facilitating motivation and engaging environments. Koptur (2016) focused on the transferability of skills learned in-game to in real life or IRL. Koptur (2016) proposed that leadership development was “not necessarily intentional but emergent” in WoW (Koptur, 2016, p. 15). Similarly, Lisk et al. (2012) stated that one of the best avenues to understanding leadership development was studying teams and guilds in MMORPGs. Their study supported the exploration of MMORPG's capability to develop transformational leadership skills in players, specifically G.M.s.

### **Earliest Works on Transformational Leadership**

According to Burns (1978), “one of the most universal cravings of our time is a hunger for compelling and creative leadership” (p. 1). As one of the seminal authors on transformational leadership, Burns (1978) focused on the idea that by analyzing and researching the experiences of leaders across cultures and time, development of a sound theoretical foundation in aims of understanding leadership development will evolve. Burns (1978) explained that transformational leaders engaged with others to heighten levels of morality and motivation and emphasized that a transforming leader lifted people into their better selves by treating them like people, not pawns.

Another influential author on transformational leadership, Bernard Bass, further detailed the characteristics of transformational leadership. Bass (1993) discussed the four separate characteristics/dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Bass (1993) emphasized that transformational leaders facilitated and taught followers,

fostering a culture of creative change and growth as opposed to a culture that maintained the status quo

### **Historical Perspectives on Leadership Development**

The idea that individuals can learn leadership skills through online games is present within the litany of research on leadership development. For instance, Ee and Cho (2012) used Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory to examine the development of leadership skills in online games. They used interviews to assess the gaming environment, players' actions, and personal factors, exploring the influence these concepts had on leadership development. What researchers haven't explored is the replication or similar use of theoretical frameworks supporting their studies. The research currently available on leadership development does not focus on specific leadership skills or concepts. Some focuses on team collaboration, while others involve communication or disparate leadership styles. Therefore, in an effort to promote research replicability, this study explored leadership development within the confines of Bass's (1993) four I's in transformational leadership.

### **Women in Leadership and Transformational Leadership Styles**

Before delving into Bass's theory on transformational leadership, there may be meaning in exploring if there is a difference between female and male G.M.s. Females, according to Bass (2006), outperform males in emotional communication, suggesting females may have better interpersonal skills – a key factor in two out the four characteristics of transformational leadership: individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Supporting female outperformance, Gobaw's (2017) research on female leaders yielded considerable evidence indicating that females gravitate to a

specific leadership style, specifically transformational leadership. As such, attempting to identify the perceived impact of transformational leadership skills in G.M.s may provide richer data and a starting point for future researchers to base their studies on. Thus, a developing question is – are there 'implications of gender differences for transformational leadership' (Bass, 2006, p.113)?

In substantiating this notion, Lopez-Zafra and Garcia-Retamero (2010) found that participants with feminine characteristics and components of emotional intelligence served as predictors for a transformational leadership style. They stated, “...transformational leadership is positively correlated to femininity” (Lopez-Zafra & Garcia-Retamero, 2010, p. 63). This statement indicates that the higher levels of feminine personality attributes, the higher levels of transformational leadership. Further, taking a deeper look into the potential existing differences between female and male G.M.s leading their respective guilds may shed light on how individuals gain transformational leadership skills in a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

According to Burns (1987), transforming [transformational] leadership is complex but more potent than other leadership styles. Thus, it is important to understand each of the four characteristics/dimensions of transformational leadership as they relate to this study.

#### **Inspirational Motivation**

Inspirational motivation explains how leaders “motivate and inspire those around them” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 6). It includes providing meaning and challenge, painting an optimistic future, molding expectations, creating self-fulfilled prophecies, and thinking

ahead (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By looking at inspirational motivation, scholars can interview leaders about the challenges faced within their respective organizations focusing on organizational artifacts, values, and underlying assumptions, as the leader attempted to reinforce the importance of a specific effort. In detail, with inspirational motivation, research can delve into a leader's strategies, how they addressed the thoughts and feelings of members, and describe the organizational structure of the organization as it embarks in efforts to accomplish a task.

### **Idealized Influence**

Idealized influence, according to Bass and Riggio (2006) has two aspects: a leader's behavior and elements followers attribute to that leader. It is the leader serving as role model for their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 6). Idealized influence can assess leaders on their role in building trust, confidence, and respect. This concept, according to Bass (1993), shows how effective a leader is in communicating a vision as well, as their ability to motivate members. Therefore, exploring organizational culture levels may help researchers evaluate how an organization's artifacts, values, and assumptions facilitate or hinder a leader's idealized influence.

### **Intellectual Stimulation**

Creativity is supported in the characteristic of intellectual stimulation (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Moreover, criticism is pushed aside to welcome new ideas and creative problem-solving, having “no public criticism of individual mistakes” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 7). Intellectual stimulation allows for the leader to get their followers to look at problems from various angles (Bass & Riggio, 2006). With this characteristic, research

can explore a leader's ability to empower members, potentially challenging the status quo in the organization (Bass, 1993; Mbindyo et al., 2021).

### **Individualized Consideration**

An example of individualized consideration is when leaders act as mentors, and are aware of each follower's need for achievement and growth (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The leader works to develop followers “to successively higher levels of potential” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 7). Research can evaluate the attentiveness of a leader to each of their member's needs. In addition, a leader's ability or capacity to mentor, coach, or guide can be explored. Finally, this characteristic can assess the authenticity of a leader, attempting to gain a better understanding of their ability to empathize, actively listen, and have a genuine interest in members (Mbindyo et al., 2021).

### **Problems Identified from Literature**

Although scholars to date have examined the development of leadership skills in online gaming, there is still much to uncover as to how these leadership skills develop in this interface. For instance, Mysirlaki and Paraskeva (2012) developed a study that examined leadership skill development in MMORPGs. Even though they were able to establish the emergence of leadership skill development in online gaming, these researchers recommended further studies to focus on what social structures of a group help develop leadership skills. Still, Li-Chung and Chia-Pung (2015) explained that group climate, game design, and leadership efficacy have a positive influence on leadership. However, they questioned what proven theories supported the development of leadership skills in online gaming. In addition, Ee and Cho (2012) wondered how leadership development occurs in online games based on well-established theories. Their

study focused on a social cognitive theory-based approach to leadership capabilities in MMORPGs.

Various studies suggest thoughts or propose concepts to foster leadership development. These suggestions are prescriptive in nature, lacking examination of “how their proposed ideas can do so” (Ee & Cho, 2012, p. 25). Additionally, standing research exposed negative influences of online gaming without focusing on the potential positive aspects individuals gain from them, specifically leadership capabilities (Nuangjumnong & Mitomo, 2012). Thus, researchers should focus on how, what, and where leadership skills develop in online gaming to include a singular well-established theory to identify and describe the impact online gaming has on leadership development. It beckons other researchers to apply “well-established” (Ee & Cho, 2012, p. 12) frameworks to attain a better understanding of leadership development in online gaming.

### **Purpose Statement**

This phenomenological study identified and described how current World of Warcraft (WoW) Game Leaders perceived the impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds. In addition, the study identified and described differences in the perceived impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership between male and female game leaders.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds?



2. What differences in perceived impact of Bass's Four I. of Transformational Leadership exist between male and female game leaders?

### **Sub Questions**

The following sub questions also guided this study:

- How do game leaders perceive the impact of Idealized Influence in their guilds?
- How do game leaders perceive the impact of Inspirational Motivation in their guilds?
- How do game leaders perceive the impact of Intellectual Stimulation in their guilds?
- How do game leaders perceive the impact of Individualized Consideration in their guilds?

### **Significance of the Problem**

Guild leaders or G.M.s reside and lead in a virtual gaming world that provides opportunities for leadership development (Reeves et al., 2008). G.M.s have a position in-game closely resembling a leadership position in-real-life. For instance, G.M.s may display *inspirational motivation* as defined by Bass (1993) by reinforcing a guild member's efforts during in-game boss encounters or addressing the thoughts and feelings of guild members. According to Bass (1993), they may partake in communicating a vision and/or motivate guild members through *idealized influence*. Moreover, G.M.s have opportunities to empower guild members as *intellectual stimulation* suggests (Bass, 1993; Mbindyo et al., 2021). Lastly, their potential and capability for *individualized consideration* gauges their ability to be attentive, authentic, empathetic, and genuine towards guild members (Bass, 1993, Mbindyo et al., 2021). These characteristics of

Bass's four I's can paint a vivid picture of what and how transformational leadership skills could develop through online gaming.

The implication of MMORPGs in leadership research should not be dismissed, for it may provide an understanding of how leadership skills develop (Ee & Cho, 2012). Ee and Chang (2012) explored factors in MMORPGs that influenced leadership. Their findings suggested an extension of frameworks to apply to MMORPG leadership.

Exploring leadership development in MMORPGs may provide corporate, academic, and government personnel with an avenue to increase learning and develop higher levels of thinking (Brown, 2011). Such a venture requires researchers to narrow their focus to specific aspects of online gaming. In accordance with this notion, Reeves et al. (2008) compared online game leaders to business leaders, presenting organizational and strategic examples of the similar challenges these two groups faced. Reeves et al. (2008) described that future generations who are currently immersed in gaming may pave the way for changes in leadership in real life (IRL). That is, the next generation may provide game-informed ideas about the best modalities for leading (Reeves et al., 2008).

The characteristics of Bass's four I's may identify and describe leadership development in MMORPGs in-depth. Previous research studies constantly use Bass's (1993) theoretical framework to ascertain leadership development IRL. Transformational leadership provides the context for more effective organizational performance (Bass, 1993). Therefore, applying Bass's (1993) well-tested theory on transformational leadership to MMORPG leadership can help close the gap in knowledge on leadership development within online domains.

This study researched the perceived impact of Bass's four I's of transformational leadership as identified and described by G.M.s. It contributes to filling the gap in online gaming literature by examining game leaders' experiences. Further, the perceived impact of transformational leadership in online gaming may result in a clearer understanding of leadership development, facilitating other modes of training future leaders. The study could provide up-to-date information regarding transformational leadership skill development in an MMORPG. Research corroborates this line of thinking, calling for more studies in online gaming leadership with the backing of evidence-based theoretical frameworks (Brown, 2011; Ee & Cho, 2012; Farrar, 2012; Koptur, 2016; Li-Chun & Chia-Ping, 2015; Lisk et al., 2012; Mysirlaki, 2012; Nuangjumnonga and Mitomo, 2012).

### **Definitions of Terms**

To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to define terms used in this study clarifying concepts commonly used in online gaming. While many of these terms are typical to the online gaming scene, the author's audience can benefit from the definitions to facilitate applicability of the study's results (Creswell, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

#### **Theoretical Definitions**

##### ***Emotional Communication***

“This is a process of mutual influence between the emotions of communication partners (Bartsch & Hübner, 2005, p. 2).”

### ***Emotional Intelligence***

Based on Dan Goleman's definition, “emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, assess, and control one's emotions, the emotions of others, and that of groups (Karafyllis & Ulshöfer, 2008, p. 135).”

### ***Leadership***

Leadership is the practice of influencing the values and behavior of others; to manage culture, facilitate change, and achieve shared goals. It is the skill of influencing people to work toward goals for the common good (Hunter, 2004; Kezar, 2014; Kotter, 2012; Northouse, 2015; Schein, 2010).

### ***Transformational Leadership***

This is a type of leadership that focuses on organizational change through an inseparable link between leadership and followership (Burns, 1978)

### **Operational Definitions**

#### ***Damage Dealers (DPS)***

Damage dealers are players who are responsible for dealing damage to monsters/bosses (Wowpedia, 2023).

#### ***Discord***

Discord is a voice, video, and text chat app that's used by tens of millions of people ages 13 and older to talk to and hang out with their communities and friends (Discord, 2022).

#### ***Dungeons***

Dungeons are an areas that are inhabited with enemies designed for a party of players consisting of a one tank, one healer, and three damage dealers (Wowpedia, 2023).

### ***Guild***

A guild is an in-game association of player characters. Guilds are formed to make grouping and raiding easier and more rewarding, as well as to form a social atmosphere in which to enjoy the game (Wowpedia, 2023).

### ***Healer***

A healer is a player that is responsible for keeping the raid/dungeon/pvp group alive (Wowpedia, 2023).

### ***META***

META is this is the most effective tactic available for a game. It is an effective way to achieve the goal of the game (Grammarly, 2024).

### ***Online Gaming***

Playing a video game over the internet with other people on a personal computer is online gaming (National Online Safety, 2023).

### ***Parse***

A parse is a measure of your damage on a specific fight (or over the course of a raid) versus all of the logs that have uploaded to a website for that particular encounter or raid. It compares how well your performance was to the entire player base of your specific character's specification, whether they performed better than you or not (WoWhead, 2023).

### ***Player Versus Player (PVP)***

PVP is a game feature which allows players to interact in battles against each other (PCMag, 2024).

### ***Raids***

Like the basic composition of a dungeon, a raid has up to 40 players divided into groups of five. A raid requires a team of players to work together in defeating enemies in the adventuring area (Wowpedia, 2023).

### ***Role-playing (RP)***

In World of Warcraft, RP means taking on the role of a character and acting it out in-game through emotes, /say, /yell, and sometimes other channels (Wowpedia, 2023).

### ***Tank***

A player that is responsible for holding the monster's/boss's attention, keeping it from dealing damage to the healers and damage dealers/DPS is a tank (Wowpedia, 2023).

### ***Wipe***

Wipe is short for wipeout, meaning a situation where the entire party or raid is killed (Wowpedia, 2023).

## **Delimitations**

I delimited the target population for this study to include game leaders who represented four of the five following criteria: (a) game leader currently active within the WoW community Discord Servers, (b) game leader with a guild population of at least 10 members, (c) game leader with a minimum of one year of experience in their guild, (d) game leader with a minimum of two years of experience in raiding, and (e) game leader leads a guild successfully through game content to reach specified guild goals.

## **Organization of the Study**

The remainder of this study is organized into four more chapters, a reference list, and appendices. Following Chapter I covered in this section, Chapter II is a review of

literature that focuses on the macro to micro progressions of research in leadership development and online gaming, parallel to the background this chapter detailed. Chapter III presents this study's research design, methodology, and limitations. Chapter IV offers a detailed synthesis and analysis of the respondent data to include a discussion of the findings. Finally, Chapter V summarizes key findings, offering conclusions, identifying implications for action, and proposing recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In Chapter II, a review of the literature is provided. The literature review has six main sections. To guide and support the development of this review, a synthesis matrix was established (see Appendix H). The literature review provides a thorough analysis of elements that are pertinent to this study on transformational leadership and its perceived impact on online game leaders.

The first section provides the background for the study through an examination of online gaming and its potential for developing leadership skills. The second section summarizes key theories and theorists whose work supports the development of leadership skills in organizations like the virtual world. The third section, first in a broad context, examines leadership development through Bass's Four I's of transformational leadership. In addition, this section also reviews females in leadership roles, focusing on transformational leadership styles. The fourth section considers transformational leadership development and game leaders within the context of online gaming. The fifth section provides a summary of research focused on online gaming and leadership development.

### **Online Gaming**

Online games, games that are played over an Internet connection, have become a cultural phenomenon (Crawford et al., 2013). This phenomenon can be dated as far back as 1978, when Multi-User Dungeons/Domains or MUDs emerged (Crawford et al., 2013). A MUD is a multiplayer real-time virtual world that is text-based or storyboarded (Williamson, 2020). Still, experts in the field attribute the beginnings of online gaming to a system the University of Illinois developed, Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations (PLATO) (Beasley, 2000). PLATO enabled users to communicate with one



another via terminals connected to a mainframe (Beasley, 2000). In these virtual environments such as MUDs, systems like PLATO enabled a group of people to interact with one another (Preece et al., 2003). In 1978, Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle of Essex University developed one of the first MUDs which was still running at this time of this study (Beasley, 2000). In 1983, quickly following the release of this multiplayer real time world, Internet access became available, heralding a new era of online gaming (Datapath, 2017).

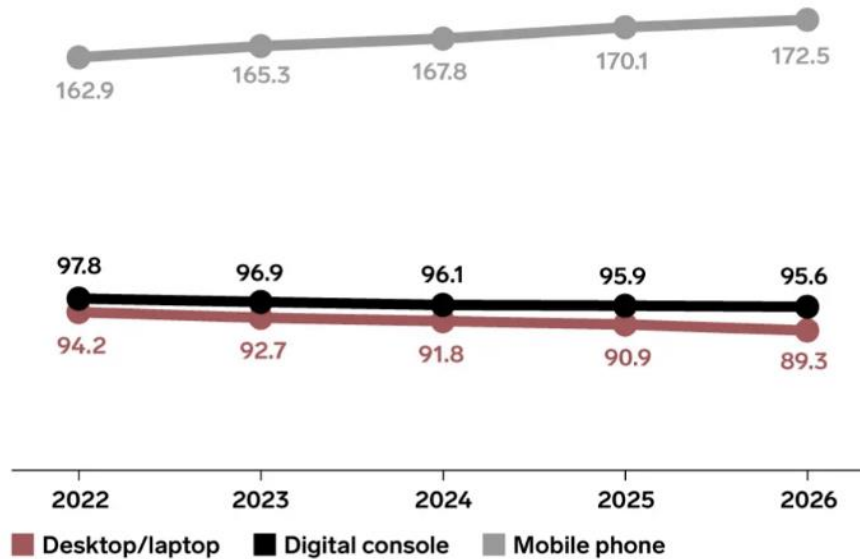
Between 1983 and 1987, game graphics, worldwide computer networks, programming and more ensued, bringing to the forefront gaming moguls like Atari into the fray (Datapath, 2017). Atari developed a game that connected 16 consoles. Though, in pursuit of better online gaming provisions, I.P. Multicast was developed and other large companies like Sega capitalized on this system, bringing online gaming across the Internet in 1989 (Datapath, 2017). This system, I.P. Multicast, conserves bandwidth, reducing traffic as it simultaneously delivers a single stream to thousands of players (Cisco, 2001). However, it wasn't until 1997 when a game called Ultima Online popularized online gaming (Crawford et al., 2013).

In effect, online communities developed, giving players a purpose that is supported by technology and guided by norms and policies (Preece, 2000). These online communities of gamers through game time and subscriptions in 2002, became a six-billion-dollar market (Beasley, 2002). In 2021, the online gaming market revenue was \$178.2 billion dollars (Hadji-Vasilev, 2022). Additionally, it is estimated that more than half of the United States (U.S.) population in 2022 were online gamers (Lis, 2023).

Figure 1 illustrates the overall online gaming population in the U.S. that includes console, mobile phones, and personal computers.

**Figure 1**

*US Digital Gamers, by Device*



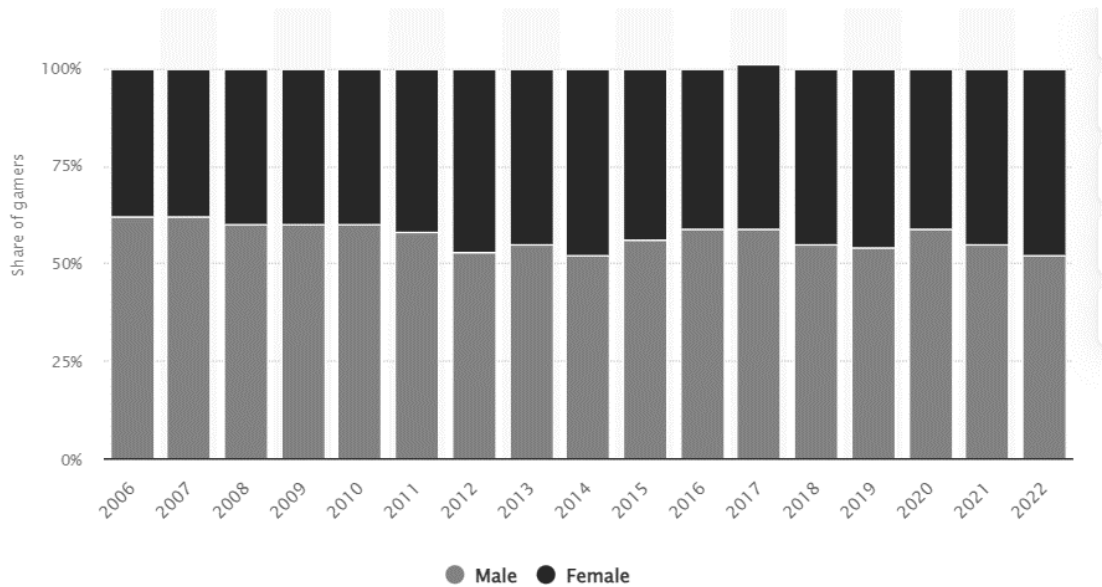
*Note.* Adapted from “US video gaming industry in 2023: Gaming devices and video game content viewership trends,” by Insider Intelligence, 2023 (<https://www.insiderintelligence.com/insights/us-gaming-industry-ecosystem/>).

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Recently, gender parity has also increased in online gaming, as the ratio of female to male players nears a close parallel. In 2022, the Entertainment Software Association or ESA identified a narrowing gender gap, with 55% of males and 45% of females playing online games (Hadji-Vasilev, 2022). Today, the ratio is even closer with 52% of males to 48% females playing online games out of the 215 million online gamers in the U.S. (ESA, 2023). Figure 2 shows the narrowing gender gap from 2006 to 2022.

**Figure 2**

*Distribution of Gamers in the U.S.*



*Note.* Adapted from “US video gaming audiences 2006-2022 by gender,” by J. Clement, 2022, (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/232383/gender-split-of-us-computer-and-video-gamers/>). Copyright 2022 by Statista.

Consequentially, as online gaming continues to grow as a leisure activity, researchers have highlighted some of its similarities to organizational experiences in real life (Jang & Ryu, 2009). For instance, online gamers build game communities and other small teams in virtual worlds (Jang & Ryu, 2009). These gaming communities foster communication, interaction, and facilitate cooperation (Childress & Braswell, 2006); staples in expanding the collective capacity of community members to engage in leadership roles and processes (Day, 2000).

### **Online Gaming and Leadership**

The rapid growth of online gaming over the last ten years has positioned it as an educational tool in learning and training (De Freitas & Griffiths, 2007). Better stated,

online gaming is argued to have the capacity to support collaborative learning approaches (De Freitas & Griffiths, 2007). With over 70% of adults in the United States playing online games (Clement, 2023), research on a population this large could yield relevant information on leadership development.

For instance, over the last decade, scholars have conducted a considerable amount of research focused on leadership development through gamification, adding game mechanics into nongame environments (BI Worldwide, 2020). Researchers in this field are attempting to find transferability from online gaming to real life scenarios. Some researchers like Cebulski (2017), have proposed designing online programs with the intention of enhancing leadership development. Others have argued that leadership development within online games is simply an emergent approach to instruction (Kapp, 2012). Still, some researchers have shown that individuals engaged in online gaming discovered the value of leadership and collaborative work, developed through gamified activities (Hernández et al., 2021). In support, Cook (2013) stated, that by 2015 "...50 percent of organizations that manage innovation processes will gamify them" (p. 48). Cook (2023) also added that online games can increase long-term retention rates up to 10 times. Taking this idea, Algaba et al. (2022) presented that gamification sets the stage for transferability to real life by making online elements available to individuals.

Similar to Algaba's research, Xanthopoulou and Papagiannidis (2012) applied the concept of transferability to test spillover effects from gaming into work among 79 employees. Namely, they sought to identify a correlation between active learning and transformational leadership. Results revealed that virtual games may present an avenue for the development of new organizational training techniques. In addition, their research

showed that high performance in-game yielded greater spillover of transformational leadership in employees (Xanthopoulou & Papagiannidis, 2012). Further research into online gaming and leadership by Barnett and Coulson (2010) found that virtual games could be used to learn leadership aspects. In effect, with past researchers identifying a connection between leadership development and online gaming, it would prove beneficial to further explore the relationship between these elements, to potentially affirm a connection to online gaming and leadership development. Some of the past research includes Ee and Cho's (2012) examination of leadership skills in online gaming, Mysirlaki and Paeaskeva's (2012) investigation of leadership skills in online gaming, and Lisk et al.'s (2012) study on transformational leadership development in online gaming. Consequently, if there is a solid connection between online gaming and leadership development, one may wonder if there notable differences in leadership development between male and female online gamers.

### **Women and Leadership**

Throughout recorded history, males have held almost all the most powerful leadership positions (Rhode, 2017). Holding only a fifth of leadership positions in both public and private sectors, females in the United States are underrepresented in leadership roles (Rhode, 2017). Although females today lead and manage complex and various roles within an organization, playing a vital role in an organization's development (Ceil, 2012), Rhode (2017) argued that underrepresentation in leadership positions is propelled by unconscious bias, in-group favoritism, and inhospitable work-family structures. Others blame a concept called the leadership labyrinth, where females are faced with barriers in human capital differences, gender differences, and prejudice (Hoyt & Simon, 2016).

Further, the barriers to human capital differences that are part of the leadership labyrinth include education, work experience, developmental opportunities, and work-home conflict (Hoyt & Simon, 2016). Even though females have vast skills, generating new ideas and possessing mental flexibility that makes them world-class leaders, human capital may still impede their rise to leadership positions (Ceil, 2012). The leadership labyrinth details barriers to a female's style and effectiveness, commitment and motivation, self-promotion, and negotiation (Hoyt & Simon, 2016). In addition, females are continually assigned roles that often encumber their growth opportunities (Ceil, 2012). The prejudice barriers in the labyrinth involve gender stereotypes, biased perceptions and evaluations, vulnerability and reactance, and cross-pressures – "...expectations that women take care and men take charge" (Hoyt & Simon, 2016, p. 406). In support, Ceil (2012) argued that females face cultural barriers, stereotypical office policies, and lifestyle conflicts that further obstruct their growth as leaders. In sum, research supported that females encounter various obstacles that make it challenging to attain leadership positions. Yet, females are in leadership roles and attaining higher education.

Compared to males, females earn 57% of bachelor's degrees, 61% of master's degrees, and more than half of the doctoral degrees in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Table 1 shows conferred degrees by males and females in the U.S. from 2019 through 2020, indicating females confer the larger portion of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Although the journey to collegiate access was limited in the past, females' collegiate journeys have come a long way. Beginning with Oberlin College in 1837, females finally gained access

to postsecondary education (Owen, 2020). Still, critics in 1873, such as Edward Clarke, a Harvard Medical School professor, believed a female's reproductive health was endangered when using their limited energies to study (Owen, 2020). Clarke's anti-coeducation treatise, *Sex in Education or A Fair Chance for Girls*, propelled the idea that females should not enroll in higher education programs for decades (Seller, 1983).

**Table 1**

*Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctor's Degrees Conferred by Postsecondary Institutions, 2019-20*

All Fields of Study	Bachelor's Degrees			Master's Degree			Doctor's Degree		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
	2,038,431	1,177,168	861,263	843,449	517,785	325,664	190,178	104,953	85,225

*Note.* Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs.

Adapted from “Fall 2020, Completions component. Bachelor’s, master’s, and doctor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions, by sex of student and field of study:

2019-20,” by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2020

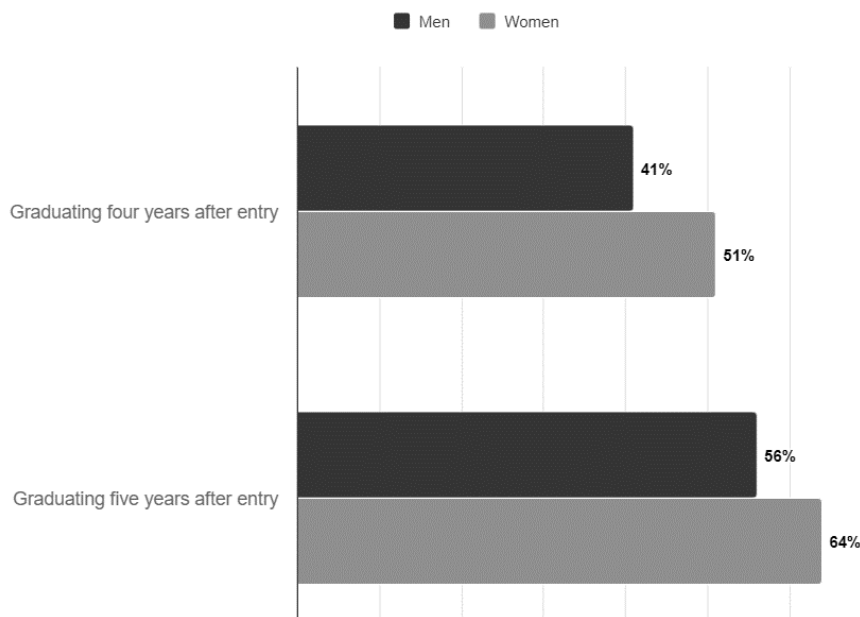
([https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22\\_318.20.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_318.20.asp)). Copyright 2022 by the United States Department of Education.

Many higher education institutions opened doors to females during World War II (Owen, 2020). By 1979, female enrollments soared to 57% in pursuit of undergraduate degrees (Renn & Reason, 2021). Yet, individuals like Lawrence H. Summers, in a 2005 lecture, continued to undermine females’ achievements, suggesting that the lack of females in science and engineering was due to the intrinsic differences between the

intellectual abilities of males and females (Hemel, 2005). Albeit narrow-minded ideology towards a female's biological makeup and sentiments of male intellectual superiority, 95% of female students enroll and attend coeducational colleges and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Figure 3 depicts the graduation successes of females versus males in bachelor's degree-seeking students.

**Figure 3**

*Completions Rates for First-time, Full-time Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students, by Sex in 2014*



*Note.* Adapted from “Women continue to outnumber men in college,” by J. Bryant, 2022, (<https://www.bestcolleges.com/news/analysis/2021/11/19/women-complete-college-more-than-men/>). Copyright 2022 by Best Colleges.

Additionally, with the number of females holding collegiate degrees, females hold more than half of all management and professional positions but still have fewer developmental opportunities than males (Catalyst, 2014). Therefore, exploring the



environments of which they are leaders could aid in improving the attainment of leadership roles for other females.

In exploring environments where females are leaders, Surawicz (2016) presented steps that could secure and harness the skillset of female leaders: improving institutional cultures, making sure males and females have equal pay and advancement opportunities, and providing mentoring and leadership training. In addition, Surawicz (2016) stated, “ensuring resources exist to help with work-life balance” are further measures organizations can implement for females to equally attain leadership roles (p. 1433). Essentially, organizations need to create an environment that is not only inclusive but cognizant of obstacles their female members may face, learning to understand what obstacles create a burden for females seeking growth and leadership roles (Hoyt & Simon, 2016). According to Elias (2018), further research on workplace environments that foster growth and development for females suggest females need to create and nurture professional networks, learning how to support and mentor one another. With the knowledge of how an organization’s environment could lead to females attaining leadership roles, it may be beneficial to identify female leaders’ traits to understand their success better. Reviewing research that addresses differences between male and female leaders may further identify salient leadership qualities that female leaders possess.

### **Leadership Differences in Men and Women**

Research on the differences between female and male leaders continues to grow, specifically with the advent of females taking more leadership positions (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Brown et al. (2011) addressed these differences in their study on female and male leaders, hypothesizing “that gender stereotypes... include beliefs that link

women with change and men with stability” (p. 931). The results presented evidence that when an organization faced challenges or threats, it preferred a change in leadership, benefitting female leaders because they gravitate to change leadership styles. Brown et al. (2011) proposed that future research should examine underrepresented groups, such as females, to assess whether their leadership styles are associated with change rather than stability. Similar comparison research conducted Eagly (2003) conducted attested to differences in female and male leadership styles; however, they argued that contemporary research has “established a mixed picture... for female leadership” (p. 9). Eagly (2003) attributed the mixed picture to the attitudinal prejudices against female leaders. Thus, despite current research hinting at female leaders manifesting valued, effective leadership styles more than males, there is inconclusive evidence that differences in leadership styles equate to perceived effectiveness (Dirik, 2021). Moreover, Chapman (2017) argued that the lack of evidence in gender-related leadership differences lies in societal and cultural pressures, highlighting that females are deemed to be passive and males aggressive. Supporting this notion of cultural and societal pressures, Kubu (2018) reiterated that cultural factors, organizational demands, and second-generation bias has an impact on a female’s ability to lead.

In their early research on gender differences in leadership, Wexley and Hunt (1974) showed that female leaders agreed more often and asked for suggestions more frequently than male leaders did. Accordingly, some researchers have found that female leaders gravitate to a different leadership style than males – a participative, team-oriented, and charismatic leadership style (Paris et al., 2009). In alignment, Johnson et al. (2007) reported that female leaders lead with sensitivity versus strength when compared

to male leaders. Based on Johnson et al. (2007), this difference in leadership style is confounded by their followers' descriptive and prescriptive biases when they evaluate their female and male leaders. Still, research seeking to identify gender differences in leadership between female and male leaders is broad. Hence, Shen and Joseph (2020) conducted a study to narrow the focus using Campbell et al.'s (1993) theory on job performance. The narrowed focus contributed to a clearer understanding of (a) gender differences in leadership outcomes, (b) gender differences in leader behaviors, (c) gender differences in skill and motivation, and (d) potential mediated or indirect relationships between gender and theory's criteria on job performance (Campbell et al., 1993). Similar research on gender differences in leadership by Hasan and Othman (2017) found that females' leadership styles can be more effective and productive, specifically in present-day organizations that are moving away from hierarchical systems. Additionally, female leaders tend to be more collaborative and participatory in nature (Hasan & Othman, 2017).

However, when studying leaders at West Point, Morgan (2004) found that there were minimal differences in female and male leadership. Yet, Morgan (2004) found that female and male leaders differ in their styles of leadership. Findings in Andersen and Hansson's (2011) study revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between female and male managers, specifically regarding their behaviors as leaders. Going as far back as the nineties, Powell (1991) proposed leadership difference between the genders is statistically insignificant, stating, "...male and female leaders exhibit similar amounts of task-oriented and people-oriented behavior" (p. 70). In effect, there is no definitive answer to gender differences in leadership. There are, as explored

previously, findings alluding to differences in leadership styles between females and males. Nevertheless, in comparing female and male leaders, research is inconclusive, requiring further exploration.

There is a growing body of research on the differences between female and male leaders. However, standing research does not consistently present these differences to identify traits or elements that clearly separate female and male leaders. Larsson and Alvinuis's (2020) indicated that there are differences in female and male leaders in female-dominated and mixed-gender work settings. Still, in male-dominated environments Larsson and Alvinuis (2020) found no gender difference in leadership behaviors. According to Larsson and Alvinuis (2020), an implication for this result could be due to the negative, cultural, and societal attitudes towards female leaders. Therefore, examining differences in leadership styles and effectiveness in male-dominated organizations and within the confines of well-tested theories may uncover if there are actual differences between female and male leaders.

### **Leadership Traits in Women and Their Effects on Organizations**

“The future of business depends on women” (Hefferman, 2002, p. 9). However, research on the female advantage in leadership roles, although documented, is coupled with disadvantages surrounding prejudice and stereotypes (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Still, females in leadership exceed males in democratic or participatory styles, making them more apt to transformational leadership behaviors (Eagly & Johannesen, 2001; Hoyt & Simon, 2016). Supporting this research, Bass et al. (1996) studied differences in leadership styles regarding gender and found that females were more transformational than males. Accordingly, with transformational leadership's focus on the welfare of

others and ethical behavior, females in leadership, Hoyt and Simon (2016) argued, are more effective today. Rhode (2017) supported this argument by detailing how females gravitate to transformational leadership, focusing on their followers' self-interest and inspiring and enabling them to contribute to their organization. As such, female leaders are an asset in most leadership environments utilizing this collaborative and interpersonally sensitive approach (Elias, 2018; Rhode, 2017).

With some of the traits of females in leadership roles discussed, it could be equally important for researchers to note how these traits affect their respective organizations. For instance, organizations with the highest representation of female board directors in Fortune 500 companies have higher financial performance (Catalyst, 2017). According to the Atlantic's Marketing Team (2019), females bring different eyes and a different mindset to formerly male-dominated organizations. They are at the forefront of innovative ventures that create new products and launch novel strategies (Atlantic's Marketing Team, 2019; Chandler, 2011). Additionally, female leaders can provide valuable consumer insight because females account for \$20 trillion dollars in annual consumer expenditure (Amar, 2023).

Similarly, Hong and Page (2000) found that diversity in organizations led to optimality, highlighting the effects of females' problem-solving skills. Capturing the impact females in leadership roles have shown in organizations, Nicholas Kristof, a New York Times journalist, said, "... their [Women's] historical record puts men's to shame" (para.1). One may wonder whether this has a similar impact in online gaming.

## **Women Leaders in Online Gaming**

Female players in online gaming face marginalization and discrimination (Piggot et al., 2022). To deal with online game-related harassment, female gamers have developed strategies to cope and have positive gaming experiences by hiding their contributions in-game or avoiding instances that could further lead to harassment (Cote, 2017). Although female players are as competitive as male players, their male counterparts often render females invisible or actively marginalize them (Cote, 2017). Furthermore, Beck et al. (2012) showed that games with sexualized female characters or avatars had a statistically significant increase in rape myth acceptance in male gamers. Still, female players are incredibly competitive in online games. For instance, professional female gamers' earnings ranged from \$20 thousand dollars to well over \$200 thousand dollars, making even more than males in online gaming (Wirtz, 2023). Additionally, Shen et al. (2016) showed that females outperformed their male counterparts in multiplayer online games. One may wonder how females are leading in a male-dominated industry that reinforces the assumption that females are sporadic, occasional participants in online games.

Between 2003 and 2006 Nick Yee conducted surveys of online leaders to provide insight into online gaming leadership. For instance, a female guild leader stated, "being a guild leader has taught me about personality types and how to manage people more than any job I've ever worked on" (Yee, 2006, para. 5). Another female guild leader posted, "I learned to delegate authority without releasing responsibility. I am very proud to say that my experience strengthened my diplomatic skills, which had never been a strong point prior to my experience" (Yee, 2006, para.25). In addition to the narratives captured from

this project, female leaders in the online gaming community are growing. According to Clement (2023), females hold 24% of executive positions in online gaming leadership.

Moreover, as a marginalized population, females are speaking up and taking the lead in the industry by designing games, founding organizations, and streaming on platforms like Twitch (Payne, 2022). Females are also gaining more representation in the industry as game developers, gaming executives, and female CEOs (Team JST, 2021). More so, females are participating in larger numbers in electronic sports (eSports), multiplayer online gaming played competitively for spectators (Chapman, 2016). One of the leading female gamers, Sasha Hotyn, has earned over \$453,647 by playing *StarCraft II* (Echarts, 2023).

Not all females in the online gaming industry are competitive players or pro gamers. For instance, Tina Amini is the editor-in-chief of games for IGN Entertainment, an Internet media company focused on video games and entertainment, and Amber Dalton is the senior director of sales and sponsors for Twitch, an interactive livestreaming service (Spiegelman, 2020). Both females are leaders in their respective fields of the online gaming industry. Females in online gaming are breaking barriers and becoming prominent figures, leading in different areas in this industry. In effect, defining leadership and seeking to understand its development may provide insight on how some of these females lead.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

According to Northouse (2016), leadership “is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 6). Leadership is an interactive event where leaders influence or affect their followers (Northouse, 2016).

Moreover, a leader's attention to common goals stresses the importance of leaders and followers having a mutual purpose and working together toward a common good (Rost, 1993). In effect, this study applied Northouse's (2016) definition of leadership to explore its development within the confines of prominent types of leadership and theories. This includes the trait leadership theory, leader-member exchange theory, path-goal theory, team leadership, and transformational leadership.

### **Trait Leadership Theory**

Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) posited "... that in the realm of leadership...the individual does matter" (p. 59). Trait leadership theorists claimed that traits are strongly associated with individual's perceptions of leadership (Lord et al., 1986). In support, other theorists proposed that leaders were bestowed with certain physical traits and personality characteristics that distinguished them from non-leaders (Nawaz et al., 2016). For instance, Mann (1959) listed intelligence, masculinity, dominance, conservatism, and extraversion as traits found in leaders. Lord et al. (1986) also highlighted intelligence, masculinity, and dominance as integral traits in leaders. Foundationally, trait leadership theory listed attributes that were typically associated with males who were thriving leaders (Fleenor, 2006). Table 2 shows the development of trait theory through studies conducted from 1948 through 2004.



**Table 2***Studies of Leadership Traits and Characteristics*

Stodgdill (1948)	Mann (1959)	Stodgdill (1974)	Lord DeVader, and Alliger (1986)	Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991)	Zaccaro, Kemp, and Bader (2004)
intelligence	intelligence	achievement	intelligence	drive	cognitive
alertness	masculinity	persistence	masculinity	motivation	abilities
insight	adjustment	insight	dominance	integrity	extraversion
responsibility	dominance	imitative		confidence	conscientiousness
initiative	extraversion	self-confidence		cognitive	emotional
persistence	conservatism	responsibility		ability	stability
self-		cooperativeness		task	openness
confidence		tolerance		knowledge	agreeableness
sociability		influence			motivation
		sociability			social
					intelligence
					self-monitoring
					emotional
					intelligence
					problem solving

*Note.* Adapted from “The bases of social power,” by J. R. P. French, Jr., and B. Raven, in D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory* (pp. 259–269), 1962, Harper and Row; Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader (2004). Northouse (2016, p. 22).

Critics of this theoretical approach dubbed it *dustbowl empiricism*, reaching conclusions simply by empirical observations and collecting data lacking a theoretical basis or framework (Fleenor, 2006). Still, this theory which began with identifying qualities of great male persons, has shifted to include the impact of situations on leadership, focusing on the role of traits in effective leadership (Northouse, 2016). This shift cleared the path for assessing the impact of traits on leadership (Northouse, 2016). For example, measuring the emotional intelligence of a leader aids in gauging a current leader’s ability to (a) perceive and express emotions, (b) use emotions to facilitate

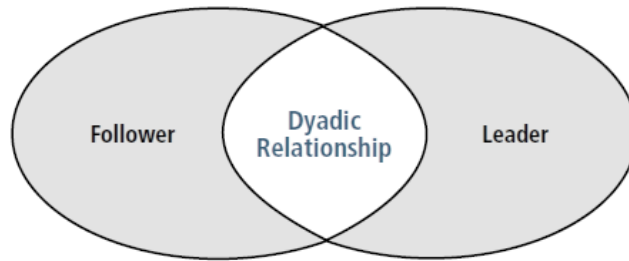
thinking, (c) understand and reason with emotions, and (d) effectively manage emotions within themselves and in relationship with others (Mayer et al., 2000). The trait leadership theory allows leaders to analyze their traits for personal awareness and development, providing them with “a clearer picture of who they are as leaders...” (Northouse, 2016, p. 29).

### **Leader-Member Exchange Theory**

Different from the emphases on leadership traits and development included in trait leadership theory, the leadership-member exchange theory or LMX focuses on the dyadic relationship between leaders and their followers (Northouse, 2016). It stresses the importance of the quality in the exchange relationship developed between leaders and followers (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015). Introduced by Fred Dansereau, George Graen, and William Haga in 1975, LMX consists of three stages: role-taking stage, role-making stage, and role-authorization stage (Wang et al., 2016). In the role-making stage, the leader and subordinate are strangers, attempting to get a feel for one another (Goldberg & McKay, 2015; Northouse, 2016). Once they become acquainted, the leader and subordinate become acquaintances, establishing mutual respect in the role-making stage (Goldberg & McKay, 2015; Northouse, 2016). As time goes by, the leader and subordinate move into a partnership in the role-authorization stage (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Northouse, 2016). According to Atwater and Carmeli (2009), LMX served as way or rather mechanism to nurture people’s feelings, enhancing their creativity. Figure 4 depicts the dimensions of leadership in LMX.

## Figure 4

### *Dimensions of Leadership*



*Note.* From “Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader–member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level, multi-domain perspective,” by G. B. Graen and M. Uhl-Bien, 1995, *Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), p. 219-247. Northouse (2016, p. 138). Copyright 1995 by Elsevier.

In addition to LMX enhancing creativity, researchers Harris et al. (2009) explored how LMX related to empowerment. Individuals that are empowered contribute more (Northouse, 2016). This theory is “highly salient and influential to followers” (Lee et al., 2010, p. 1931). Nonetheless, critics of LMX point out that this approach to leadership marginalizes by supporting privileged groups in the workplace (Northouse, 2016). For instance, LMX has two groups of followers; the in-group and the out-group. According to McClane (1991), this grouping may have unwanted effects on an organization. The argument is that LMX does not include strategies to address fairness in *distributed justice* (pay raises and promotions), *procedural justice* (decision-making rules), and *interactional justice* (communication within the organization) (Northouse, 2016). However, LMX provides leaders with insight into their leadership, enabling them to be sensitized to how in-groups and out-groups form within their respective organizations

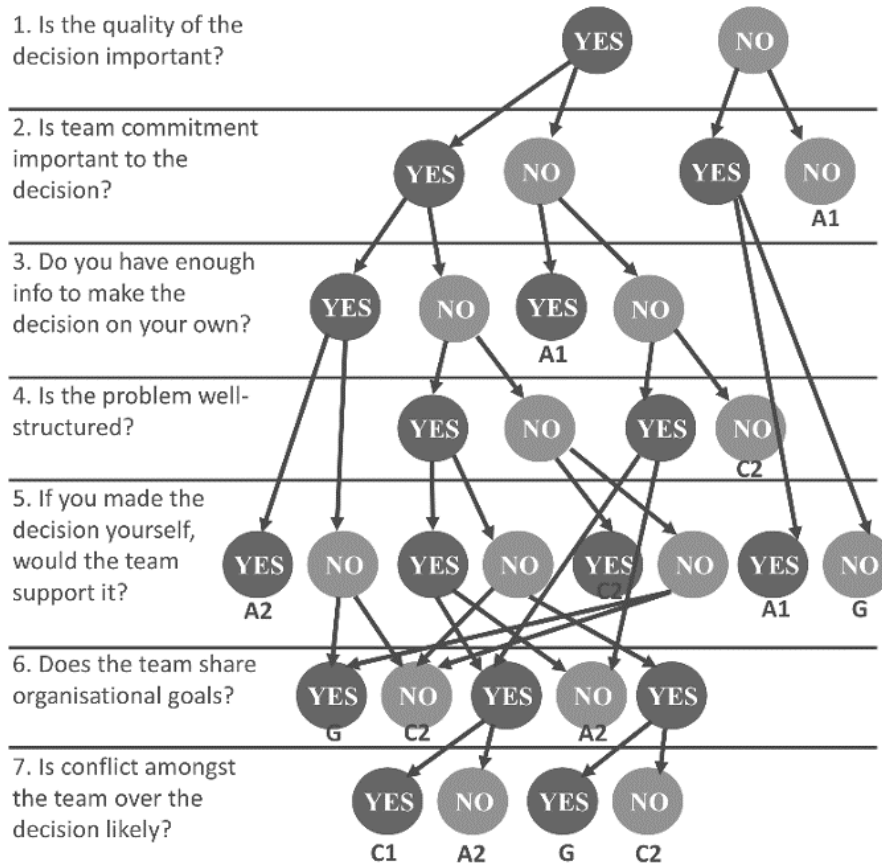
(Northouse, 2016). LMX is a theoretical approach that could potentially help leaders find ways to motivate followers.

### **Path-Goal Theory**

First-appearing in the 1970's, the path-goal theory focuses on how leaders motivate their followers to accomplish goals (Northouse, 2016). To motivate followers, leaders increase their followers' payoffs (House & Mitchell, 1974). According to Vroom (1964), followers are motivated if they believe: (a) they have the capacity to perform their work, (b) their efforts will result in a specific outcome, and (c) the payoffs for doing their job are worthwhile. In addition, Vroom and Jago (2007) explained that leadership was a process of motivating individuals to "work together collaboratively to accomplish great things" (p. 18). Similarly, House and Mitchell (1975) stated that leaders using the path-goal theory "make paths to payoffs easier to travel by ... reducing roadblocks ... pitfalls and increasing the opportunities for personal satisfaction" (p. 5). Figure 5 illustrates the paths leaders can choose from as they make decisions based on their respective leadership styles: autocratic, consultative, and collaborative (Vroom & Yetton, 1973).

**Figure 5**

*Vroom-Yetton-Jago Decision Model*



*Note.* Adapted from *Leadership and decision-making* (p. 326), by V. Vroom and P. Yetton, 1973, University of Pittsburg Press.

Research on the path-goal theory highlights the theory’s framework as it helps understand the effects of directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership styles on followers’ productivity and satisfaction (Alanazi et al., 2013). In theory, the path-goal approach proposes that leaders must choose a leadership style that best fits their followers’ needs and their work (Northouse, 2016). This aspect of the path-goal theory, based on critics, fails to explain the relationship between leadership behavior and follower motivation (Northouse, 2016). The path-goal theory fails to describe a

leader's style, clouding understanding of a follower's competency for success. Still, the path-goal theory may provide a roadmap for leaders on ways to increase followers' motivation.

### **Team Leadership**

Harvey and Drolet (2006) explained that ethnic, cultural, and family diversity is expanding and "so too has the workforce become more diverse" (p. 4). The diversity expansion has led to organizational changes as they continue to globalize and depend on work teams (Northouse, 2016). According to Ilgen et al. (1993), effective work teams operate collectively towards a goal and aim for desirable outcomes, such as greater productivity, better decisions and problem-solving. In effect, team leadership focuses on a leader's actions as they monitor their team and follow through by taking action whenever it is needed to ensure team effectiveness (Northouse, 2016).

Noting that work teams have increased decision-making responsibilities, team leadership researchers study the entire work team (Horner, 2003). According to Day et al. (2004), the decision-making responsibilities develop into *shared leadership*, covering the leadership range of the entire team. Thus, for a work team, leaders develop effectiveness by keeping the team focused on an objective (LaFasto & Larson, 2001). In addition, having an appropriate structure that includes good communication, clear roles for all team members, emphasis on fact-based judgments, and methods of assessing individual performance helps teams to accomplish their objectives (Larson & LaFasto, 1989).

Team leadership faces some challenges. For instance, a team leader must decide whether to act or monitor situations occurring within the workgroup (Northouse, 2016). More so, team leaders are constantly rotating; leaders become followers and visa versa,

making it integral for those leading in the moment to determine their weaknesses in team leadership skills to take action, develop, and/or improve (Cobb, 2012; Salas et al., 2004). In essence, it may take time to develop an effective work team, but the current team leader gains the opportunity to transform their team by deciding to act or monitor.

### **Transformational Leadership**

The term *transformational leadership* was first introduced by Downton in 1973 (Northouse, 2016). It is a type of leadership that focuses on organizational change through an inseparable link between leadership and followership (Burns, 1978). The leader focuses on goals and is cognizant of their followers' needs. According to Burns (1978), a transformational leader engages with followers, creating a connection that raises their level of motivation and morality. Based on Eagly and Carli (2007), transformational leaders present themselves as role models and gain followers' trust by empowering and raising their potential. In support, Roberts (1985) explained that transformational leadership facilitates the redefinition of a follower's mission and vision, renewing their commitment and restructuring their systems to accomplish goals. In their research, Leithwood (1992) found that transformational leaders, specifically school leaders, continually pursued three goals: helping staff members develop and sustain a collaborative culture, fostering teacher development, and helping staff solve problems together. Burns (1978) referred to these goals as a process in which a transforming leader engages followers in a mutually elevating process.

Similarly, Bennis and Nanus (1985) concluded that transformational leadership is empowerment via increased stakeholder participation in organizational functions. Bass (1985) expanded on this by holding that a follower's performance was contingent upon

meeting their reordered needs. Consequently, looking at other transformational perspectives may help understand this theory's complexities.

### ***Bennis and Nanus***

Bass (1985) and Burns (1978) were integral in the foundational development of transformational leadership theory. Still, other seminal authors such as Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Kouzes and Posner (1987) offered insight into transformational leadership that provides a holistic view of the theory presented by Burns and later conceptualized by Bass. For instance, Bennis and Nanus (2007) revealed four competencies transformational leaders embody: attention through vision, meaning through communication, trust through positioning, and deployment of self through positive self-regard.

According to their research, a transforming leader has a clear vision for the future of their organization (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). This helps them create a platform for communicating direction as social architects (Northouse, 2016). Moreover, as they communicate, transforming leaders create trust, making their positions known and standing by them (Bennis & Nanus, 2007; Northouse, 2016). In addition, transforming leaders are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, focusing on positive self-regard (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). Table 3 depicts the major competencies of Bennis and Nanus's (2007) theory on transformational leadership.



**Table 3**

*Bennis and Nanus Competencies of Transformational Leadership*

Transformational Leadership Competencies	
Competency 1	Leaders have a clear vision of organization's future state
Competency 2	Leaders are social architects of their organization
Competency 3	Leaders create trust by making explicit their values and views
Competency 4	Leaders use creative deployment of themselves through positive self-regard

*Note.* Adapted from *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7<sup>th</sup> ed., p.173), by P. Northouse, 2016, Sage. Copyright 2016 by Sage.

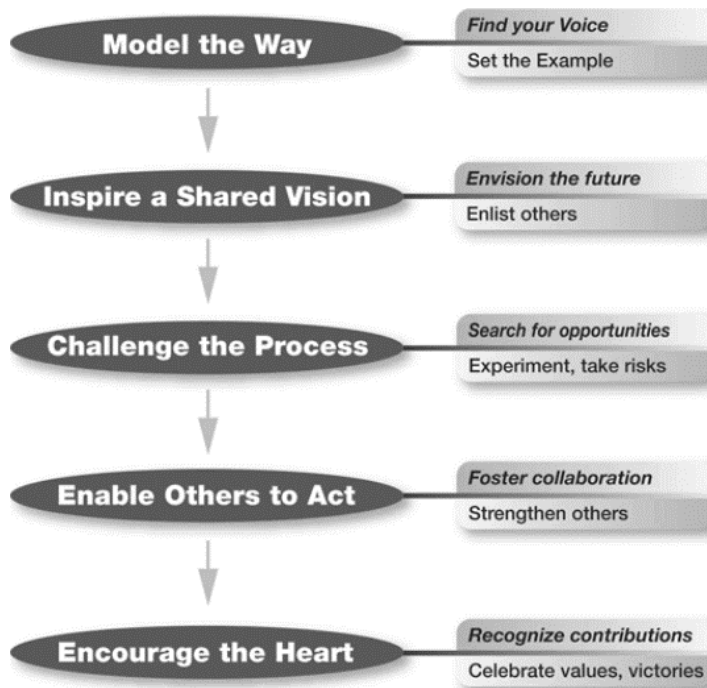
This enabled transforming leaders to impact followers, creating feelings of confidence and high expectations in them (Northouse, 2016). One may wonder, then, if this is how leaders impact their followers' confidence and foster feelings of high expectations. Further, one may ask what elements or components are integral in transforming leaders to facilitate change.

***Kouzes and Posner***

Kouzes and Posner (2012) better detailed a leader's impact on followers within their leadership model. It consists of five fundamental practices which facilitate the achieving of extraordinary goals by (a) modeling the way, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) challenging the process, (d) enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Northouse, 2016). Figure 6 summarizes the elements in the five fundamental practices of Kouzes and Posner's leadership model.

**Figure 6**

*Kouzes and Posner Leadership Model*



*Note.* Adapted from *The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). by J. M. Kouzes and B. Z. Posner, 2012, Jossey-Bass.

According to Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2012), leaders model the way by going first, setting an example to build commitment through acts that create progress and momentum. To inspire a shared vision, transformational leaders believe they can make a difference by envisioning the future and establishing a matchless illustration of what their organization can develop into. Based on Northouse (2016), leaders inspire visions that challenge followers to transcend an organization's status quo.

Leaders challenge the organization's current state, which catapults leaders and their followers into uncharted territory, into the unknown. Transformational leaders challenge processes, putting their skill set to the test as they seek innovative ways to

improve their organization (Abu-Tineh et al., 2008). As they begin to challenge processes and systems in place, transformational leaders enable others to act by fostering collaboration and empowerment (Abu-Tineh et al., 2008). Kouzes and Posner (2012) ascertained outstanding leaders effectively work with others by building trust and promoting collaboration. To acknowledge followers' efforts, leaders encourage their hearts by rewarding followers for their accomplishments (Northouse, 2016). Researchers Bennis, Nanus, Kouzes and Posner have helped to understand what constitutes a transforming leader and how these leaders foster an environment to effect transformation within their organizations. Thus, exploring the current state of transformational leadership theory requires a review of its application in today's organizations.

### ***Transformational Leadership Today***

McColl-Kennedy and Anderson (2002) described transformational leaders as individuals who create a clear strategic direction for the future, look outside the organization's boundaries, and motivate people to pursue new directions. In addition, other transformational leadership scholars in the last two decades have linked transformational leadership to subordinate work attitudes and performance, employee creativity and well-being, financial performance, and increased strength in influencing networks (Barling et al., 2000). Transformational leadership stimulates change from the bottom up, meaning, leaders facilitate change connected to organizational goals (Barling et al., 2000).

Critiques of transformational leadership highlight transformational leaders' influence, creating opportunities to manipulate their followers to achieve their objectives rather than those of their respective organizations (Greaves et al., 2014). Moreover,

transformational leaders' charisma may facilitate their climb to positions of authority where they utilize their charm repressively (Lundskow, 1998). Nonetheless, cult leaders, dictators, business leaders, and other political leaders who have fallen into these power abuse patterns operate outside the ideal transformational leadership standard (Stone et al., 2003). Therefore, delving into the main components of transformational leadership, as presented by Bass (1985), may provide a clearer picture of transformational leadership's framework.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As introduced earlier, transformational leadership is socialized leadership; a leader focuses on the collective good of an organization that transcends their interests (Howell & Avolio, 1993; Northouse, 2016). It is a leadership style that hones into the needs of followers and builds relationships with them to ensure their needs are met. According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership motivates followers to do more than expected, putting their self-interests aside to address higher-level needs. This leadership style focuses on improving the performance of followers and developing followers to their full potential (Aviolo, 1999; Bass & Aviolo, 1990). Transformational leadership is consistent with followers' prototypes of an ideal leader (Bass, 1997).

Transformational leadership has four characteristics: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). Noting these characteristics, Kuhnert (1994) claimed that transformational leaders have strong internal values and ideals; thus, they effectively motivate followers to perform in ways that support the greater good. Bass (1985) argued that transformational leaders raised their followers' levels of consciousness, pushed followers to transcend their

interests, and moved followers to address higher-level needs within the organization. Bass (1985) explained the rationale behind this argument by focusing on the four characteristics. Figure 7 summarizes the elements within each of these characteristics.

**Figure 7**

*Transformational Leadership Framework*



*Note.* Adapted from *Transformational leadership* (2nd ed., p. 104),” by B. M. Bass and R. E. Riggio, 2006, Psychology Press. Copyright 2006 by Psychology Press.

**Idealized Influence**

Also described as charisma, idealized influence describes how a leader acts as a strong role model for followers (Northouse, 2016). It is an emotional characteristic of transformational leadership that enables followers to identify with and emulate their leaders (Antonakis, 2012; Northouse, 2016). In addition, these leaders are respected by their followers who trust them greatly (Northouse, 2016). These visionary leaders give followers a sense of mission (Northouse, 2016). They have a vision and can project it to followers through idealized influence. Followers gauge a leader's idealized influence by their perceptions of their leaders and observations of their behavior (Northouse, 2016). As

a leader, what they believe is possible determines what their followers believe is possible (Avolio, 2004). Based on Bass (2005), with idealized influence, a leader instills pride in followers for being associated with them. Moreover, a leader specifies the importance of having a strong sense of purpose (Bass, 2005).

### **Inspirational Motivation**

Inspirational motivation, also referred to as inspiration, describes leaders who communicate high expectations to followers and accordingly inspire these followers by motivating them to become committed to the shared vision of the organization (Northouse, 2016). This characteristic enables followers to challenge their personal constraints and boundaries, motivating them to take greater responsibility for leadership (Avolio, 2005). Like virtual teams, a rapidly growing phenomenon propelled by the pandemic, inspirational motivation enhances team spirit (Northouse, 2016). Leaders use symbols and emotional appeals to focus their followers' efforts to achieve more than they would if they were to seek and follow their self-interests (Northouse, 2016). Leaders communicate with followers to bring forth their selfless interests by motivating them.

### **Intellectual Stimulation**

Bass (2006) described intellectual stimulation as a way for transformational leaders to “stimulate their follower's efforts to be innovative and creative” (p. 7). With intellectual stimulation, followers are encouraged to seek and attempt new approaches without reproach (Bass, 2006). Accordingly, Gasper (1992), in explaining Bass's viewpoint, expressed leaders achieve intellectual motivation by communicating a vision that projects an improved state of an organization. As followers consider novel ideas and

approaches, they are supported; ideally, they are intellectually supported to reach new heights.

### **Individualized Consideration**

The fourth component of Bass's (2006) theory is individualized consideration. Leaders individually consider the needs of each of their followers while providing a supportive climate (Bass, 2006). Northouse (2016) explained that leaders who practice individualized consideration treat their followers with care and uniquely. They coach and advise their followers while assisting them in becoming "fully actualized" (Northouse, 2016, p. 169). In addition, leaders show individualized consideration by attending to each of their follower's needs, making them aware of the unique talents that each follower brings to the organization (Towler, 2019).

In effect, transformational leadership is a process "that changes and transforms people" (Northouse, 2019, p. 161). This leadership style applies to different types of organizations because it encompasses influencing followers to accomplish more than expected (Northouse, 2016). For instance, it moves from one-on-one interactions to broad attempts to impact an entire organization, emphasizing supporting the greater good versus self-interests (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Northouse, 2016). Accordingly, Avolio and Gibbons (1988) believed that transformational leadership enables leaders to become strong role models as they emphasize the greater good due to their highly developed moral values and self-determined sense of identity.

Leaders following the transformational leadership approach can become effective at working with people. Therefore, exploring different types of organizations may broaden our understanding of how leaders under this leadership style build trust and

foster collaboration. For example, organizations today are shifting from in-person to virtual teams. With a greater need to collaborate with members virtually, organizations seeking to transform and succeed may need to understand the dynamics technology introduces. Consequently, an area that may be similar to today's organizational virtual structure is that of online gaming, an organization that constantly changes and adapts (Avolio, 2011).

### **Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games and Leadership**

If leadership skills could develop through online gaming, research could identify valuable insight into leadership development through exploring G.M.s. For instance, Ee and Cho (2012) explored leadership development in MMORPGs using Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. They attributed leadership development in MMORPGs to a game's design, communication, and collaboration structures. In another study, Nuangjumnonga (2012) used Fred Fiedler's Contingency Model and Kurt Lewin's Leadership Model to investigate the relationship between leadership development and online gaming, specifically multiplayer online battle arena games. Findings identified specific styles of leadership in-game leaders: authoritarian, democratic, or laissez-faire. Prax (2010) studied G.M.s in WoW and compared them to real-life organizations to support leadership development through online gaming. The study used the Four Capacities Framework and the leadership Grid to compare interview results from G.M.s and real-life leaders, finding guild leadership to be like real-life leadership. Both online and real-life scenarios require long-term political decisions, policy setting, and good work in human resources (Prax, 2010). Aligning with this finding, Hettrick (2012) revealed the existence of leadership roles in online gaming and opportunities for leadership development.



Hettrick (2012) used the Sloan Leadership Model developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to compare leadership skills displayed by players while playing WoW, demonstrating the use of an online game to develop leadership skills (Hettrick, 2012). Further seeking a correlation between leadership development and online gaming, Lisk et al. (2012) argued that online gaming provided a robust platform to test leadership skills. They suggested that today's workforce; which is comprised of distributed teamwork through globalization, technological change, and hierarchies; could be enriched by studying online gamers. "...the closest thing to them...teams and guilds in video games" (Lisk et al., 2012, p. 145).

There is ample backing to continue studying online gaming and leadership development. Using well-established theories such as transformational leadership may aid in further identification of leadership skills and development within online games. More so, looking at specific online games that have organizational elements that include teams, collaborating, and communicating virtually may help in identifying leadership development.

### **World of Warcraft**

Blizzard Entertainment launched the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft (WoW) in November 2004 (Game Industry International, 2004). Players worldwide can log into the game using their avatars to complete quests, collect trade goods, explore dungeons, defeat raid bosses, or hang out with friends. Many of these players are affiliated with a guild. A guild has a guild leader (GM), guild officers, and the rest of the members. Guilds are formed for various purposes or a mix of many. They can be *social hangouts* questing and having fun with other

players; *raid-centered*, working in teams to defeat challenging bosses; *player versus player* (PvP) focused, working in teams to defeat other players; and more (Wowpedia, 2023). For example, when a guild is raid-centered, the G.M. or another officer takes the lead and organizes players in groups of 10, 20, 25, or 40 to defeat challenging groups of nonplayer characters (NPCs) and bosses (Wowpedia, 2023).

A guild is a community of players under one banner. In 2010 WoW had over 1,400 guilds (Thurau & Bauckhage, 2010). With such a large number of guilds, there is a rich opportunity to explore how leadership qualities develop. In forming a guild, leadership characteristics may emerge that leaders could employ in a real-life organization (Mendoza, 2014). G.M.s must manage diverse groups of players, leading them through collaboration and teamwork (Magner, 2014). According to Jang (2011), individuals may grow their leadership skills while playing MMORPGs and possibly transfer them into the real world. Supporting this notion, Koptur (2016) found that learning happens in MMORPGs and may transfer to real life. Effectively, to further explore this phenomenon, going deeper into online gaming and leadership development could present a viable and relatable area of study.

### **Research on Online Gaming and Leadership**

Ee and Cho (2012) proposed examining leadership development with narrower lenses; that is, using a framework that could potentially capture the essence of leadership development rather than examining the phenomenon through prescriptive methodology. Brown (2011) conducted a study on MMORPGs to determine if online gamers exhibited behavioral changes in their work environments with specific leadership competencies and performance elements. Overall, the study showed that participants developed skills in-

game that they readily applied to their work setting. However, Brown (2011) noted that this was a case study of three participants and future research should expand the participant number as well as the length of time they are observed.

In another study, Mendoza (2014) explored the online game WoW to provide insight on leadership development as it mimics those of current organizations. Mendoza (2014) interviewed six leaders using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) which is integral to the transformational leadership theoretical framework. Mendoza (2014) proposed that future studies should alter and explore other dynamics of leadership development, potentially uncovering cognitive and identity insights of leaders. MMORPGs “can be an excellent sandbox to develop future leaders” (Mendoza, 2014, p. 265). In support, Guillot (2015) discovered that leadership is porous, noting, it is important to look at how leadership is structured in online games, specifically in WoW. In addition, Guillot (2015) found that technology and community were integral in leadership development within WoW. Still, Guillot (2015) ascertained that in WoW sociotechnical practices of leadership is a form of learning leadership, opening the way for future research to further examine how individuals could learn or hone leadership in a virtual world. In support, Magner (2014) studied performance and leadership in online gaming. Magner (2014) found that leadership is an essential component of multiplayer online gaming, stating that “by understanding the nature and structure of ... leadership in greater depth it may be possible to identify stronger linkages with offline leadership” (p. 123).

### **Research in the Last Five Years**

As organizations globalize, researchers have explored greater interest in practical platforms to practice and develop leadership skills (Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Gupta &

Pathak, 2018; Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2020; Schwarzmüller et al., 2018; Toepfl, 2018). Leaders are required to develop digital and human skills to communicate effectively, create cohesion between geographically spread followers, and deal with complex and fast problem solving (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). However, there is a gap in literature. Previous studies on leadership development and online gaming date back to the dawn of online gaming and seem to plateau in 2018. Table 4 shows some of the salient research on leadership development in virtual teams and leadership development. Therefore, examining leadership development in online gaming presents an opportunity to lessen gaps in literature. It may help uncover how leadership develops in this fast-paced environment which mimics those of virtual teams that are steadily supplanting traditional teams in organizations. In addition, more could be learned on gender comparisons in leadership, such as whether there any differences between female and male leaders.

**Table 4**

*Salient Research on Virtual Leadership*

Authors	Year	Research
Avolio, Kahai, and Dodge	2000	E-leadership in Organizations
Pulley and Sessa	2001	E-leadership – Digital Technology on Leadership
Bartol and Liu	2002	Information Technology and Network Centricity
Hambley, O’Neil, and Kline	2007	Virtual Team Leadership
Lee	2009	Trust in Work-Related Virtual Teams
Jawadi	2013	E-Leadership and Trust Management
Avolio	2014	Leadership and Organizational Behavior
Gupta and Pathak	2018	Virtual Team Experiences
Schwarzmueller et al.	2018	Digital Transformation and Organizations

*Note.* Adapted from “The role of leadership in a digitalized world: A review” by L. Cortellazzo, E. Bruni, and R. Zampieri, 2019, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, p. 8 (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01938>). Copyright 2019 by Frontiers in Psychology.

Mendoza (2014) supported this inquiry into leadership development in online gaming, presenting a study that found online gaming as a highly complex ecosystem that mimicked modern-day organizations. Moreover, Guillot (2015) examined how individuals practiced leadership in online gaming and concluded that they could learn leadership through a game’s community within social and cultural dimensions. Additionally, Farrar (2012) identified persistence in an online gaming community, highlighting how online leaders can establish an environment for success by focusing on relationships, common goals, and challenges. In effect, these studies conducted on leadership development in an online gaming environment recommend further exploration. Scholars recognized the impact online gaming could have on leadership development and urged researchers to further explore the phenomena, indicating online gaming may serve as a “sandbox specifically for transformational leaders” (Mendoza, 2014, p. 32).

### **Synthesis Matrix**

Researchers use a synthesis matrix to organize study variables, was used (Ingram et al., 2006). The matrix allows the researcher to categorize different themes and arguments presented on specific topics (Ingram et al., 2006). To facilitate organization of references and relatability of these to a study, I used a synthesis matrix (Appendix H).

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Overview**

This chapter contains a detailed description of the methodology I used in this study. Using phenomenological inquiry to examine the lived experiences of game leaders, this study sought to identify and describe how game leaders perceived the impact of transformational leadership within their respective guilds. Chapter III provides the purpose statement and research questions as justification for the research design. In addition, it includes information on the population and sample for the study. The chapter details the procedures and protocols I used during the interviews, data collection, and analysis. It also addresses the study's limitations and ends with a summary.

### **Purpose Statement**

This phenomenological study identified and described how current World of Warcraft (WoW) Game Leaders perceived the Impact of Bass' Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds. In addition, the study identified and described differences in perceived Impact of Bass' Four I's of Transformational Leadership between male and female game leaders.

### **Research Questions**

To provide a better understanding of the perceived impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership on guilds, this study investigated the following research questions and subsequent questions:

1. How do game leaders perceive the Impact of Bass' Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds?
2. What differences in perceived impact of Bass's Four I. of Transformational Leadership exist between male and female game leaders?

## **Sub Questions**

The following sub questions also guided the study:

1. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Idealized Influence in their guilds?
2. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Inspirational Motivation in their guilds?
3. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Intellectual Stimulation in their guilds?
4. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Individualized Consideration in their guilds?

## **Research Design**

Qualitative methods develop from the power of observation, openness to understanding, and inductive analysis (Patton, 2014). This study used qualitative phenomenological research to uncover how game leaders perceived the impact of Bass's Four I's of transformation leadership in their guilds. To yield the most credible and adequate answers, this I followed McMillan and Schumacher's (2010) approach, basing its design on what will provide the best answers to its research questions. I applied a qualitative phenomenological design to address specific research questions, as designs are structured and should follow a logical plan in which the researcher collects, analyzes, and interprets data (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014).

## **Method**

Ethnography, case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and critical studies are five of the major qualitative traditions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The most appropriate research inquiry for this study was the phenomenological approach.

According to Patton (2015), a phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of what people experience to understand the “meaning, structure, and essence, of lived experience” (p. 98). Moreover, the focus of inquiry – the phenomenon, could be an emotion, experience, relationship, program, organization, or culture (Patton, 2015). A phenomenological study is unique, for it explores the assumption of shared meaning related to commonly occurring phenomena within a culture (Creswell, 2015; Patton, 2015). The phenomena I studied in this study was the game leaders’ perceived impact of Bass’s Four I’s of Transformational Leadership in a guild. Like other phenomenological research, I conducted in-depth interviews with game leaders to better-understand their perspectives on their everyday lived experiences with the phenomenon (Coughlan et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The game leaders’ experiences were “described, explicated, and interpreted” to broaden understanding on the phenomenon (Patton, 2015, p. 116).

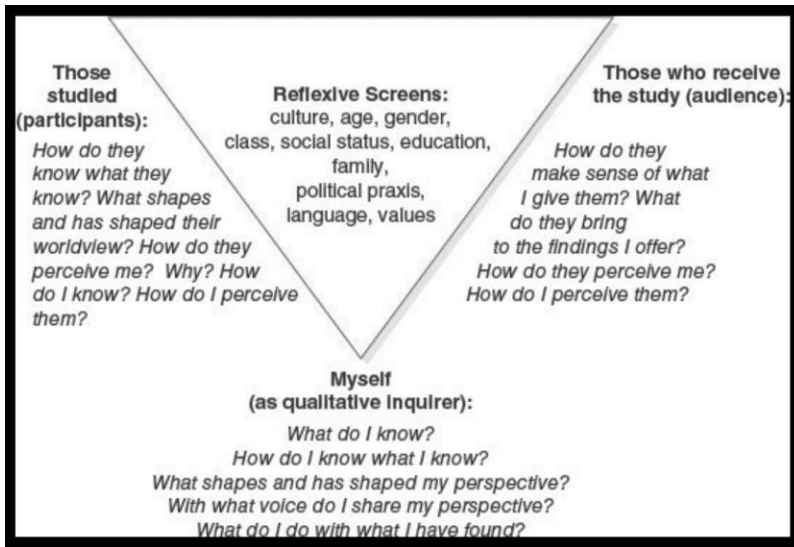
### **Rationale**

Qualitative research such as this phenomenological study includes a substantial amount of adaptability, allowing the researcher to use methods that potentially increased the effect of reflexivity (Patton, 2015; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Reflexivity purportedly improves the legitimacy of findings by enhancing credibility in a qualitative study, lessening the impact of a researcher’s biases (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Critical to fieldwork, reflexivity is “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher” (Patton, 2015, p. 70). For this study, Figure 8 illustrates the process for how the research questions developed.



**Figure 8**

*Reflexive Questions*



*Note.* Adapted from *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (p. 72), by M.Q. Patton, 2015, Sage. Copyright 2015 by Sage.

This study applied McMillan and Schumacher’s (2010) non-experimental approach, describing, and examining the phenomena “without any direct manipulation of conditions that are experienced” (p. 22). A phenomenological design aligned with the purpose of this study because I explored the essence of human experience around a phenomenon (Creswell, 2008, 2015). I explored the experience of game leaders and the phenomena of online gaming leadership.

### **Population**

According to Patton (2015), a population is a large group that conforms to specific criteria researchers use to generalize the results of research. Game leaders in the massively multiplayer online role-playing game or MMORPG World of Warcraft served as the population for this study. These game leaders are typically referred to as guild

leaders, officers, and/or raid leaders. There are over 700,000 WoW players in this population (ESA, 2021).

### **Sampling Frame/Target Population**

Asiah et al. (2017) described a target population as a more refined group of individuals with specific attributes of interest and relevance in comparison to the general population. For manageability, I used a smaller, targeted population of game leaders playing World of Warcraft that communicated via Discord servers.

Discord is a chat application that includes voice, video, and texting, used by tens of millions of people (Discord, 2023). The application has servers made up of specific communities and friend groups. Included in each server are channels with both voice and text that have specific topics and user rules. WoW players, in effect, have their own servers, clusters of players who utilize the application to communicate online. There are 372 public WoW Discord servers with a total of 108,631 players (Discord, 2023).

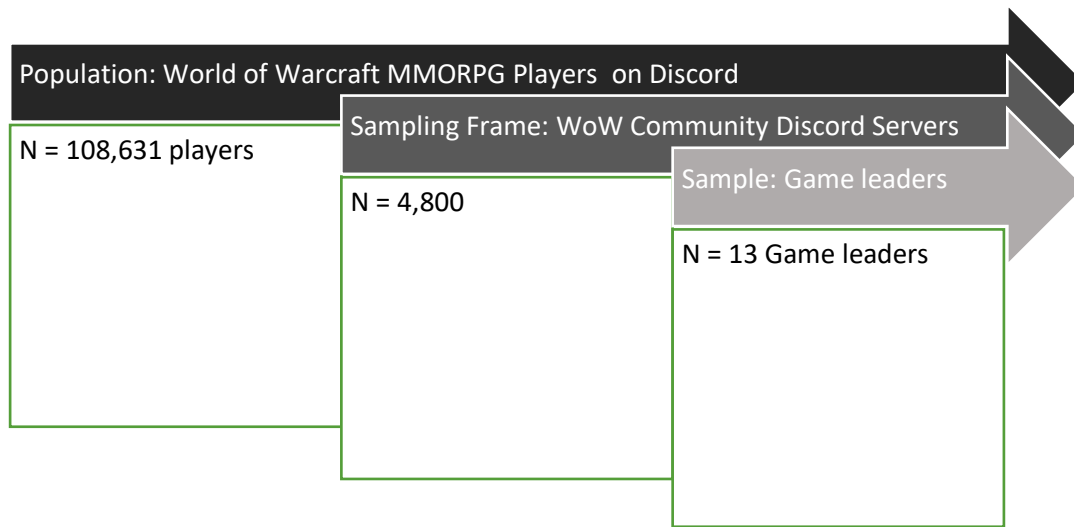
McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described the sampling frame as the representation of the total group of individuals from which a sample could be drawn. In accordance, the sampling frame I pulled from the WoW population were game leaders on Wow Discord servers. These servers had over 101 guilds accessible on a communication site called Discord, providing a sizeable target population. In effect, both the sampling frame and target population are defined (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Purposive sampling hones on strategically selecting participants in alignment with the research questions, purpose, and data collection (Patton, 2015). It enables researchers to focus on selecting information-rich individuals that will “illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2015, p. 264). I used purposive sampling from the population of

game leaders on the WoW servers currently using Discord, the main hub of communication for most WoW players. I interviewed 13 game leaders to promote credibility and manageability (Patton, 2015). Criteria in the purposive sampling included: (a) game leader currently active within the WoW community Discord Servers, (b) game leader with a guild population of at least 10 members, (c) game leader with a minimum of one year of experience in their guild, (d) game leader with a minimum of two years of experience in raiding, and (e) game leader leads a guild successfully through game content to reach specified guild goals.

**Figure 9**

*Purposive Sample Breakdown*



**Sample**

I selected the server I used for this study through convenience sampling. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), in convenience sampling “a group of subjects is selected on the basis of being accessible or expedient” (p. 137). Hence, I used WoW community Discord servers, a community of 4,800 female and male players. I had experience with these servers and chose them for their smaller population and alignment

with the purpose of the study. These servers provide a safe networking community for all WoW players in a space that is inclusive.

Nonprobability sampling techniques, purposive and convenience sampling, did not include any form of random selection from the WoW Discord server population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Still, the selected participants were accessible and met pre-established criteria (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The small sample size provided me with a greater depth of understanding for the phenomenon, information needed to address the purpose of the study and research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Thus, the researcher deemed a sample size of 13 participants an appropriate size for this study.

### **Instrumentation**

Patton (2015) summarized that the researcher is the instrument of inquiry – a source of direct experiential insight. Accordingly, researchers use questionnaires with open-ended questions, interviews, and artifacts to collect data for qualitative studies (Coughlan et al., 2007). Interviews and participant observation are the most common methods of data collection (Coughlan et al., 2007). According to Patton (2015), interviewing participants many times yields a large amount of data and therefore needs fewer participants in a phenomenological study, approximately six to 10 participants.

Qualitative interviews can be informal conversations, interview guide based, or standardized open-ended interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Each type of interview has strengths and weaknesses (Patton, 2015). For instance, informal conversational interviews are open and gather different information from each respondent, leading to a less systematic and comprehensive approach (Patton, 2015).

However, a lot of information can be collected from each respondent being that informal conversations do not use predetermined questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The interview guide approach has specified topics and issues where researchers decide the sequence and wording (Patton, 2015). This approach may inadvertently omit important/salient topics and can reduce the comparability of responses collected during the interview (Patton, 2015). With standardized open-ended interviews, the researcher uses exact wording and sequence of questions, asking each respondent the same questions in the same order (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Using this approach may limit spontaneity and relevance of questions and answers, but increases comparability of responses (Patton, 2015).

I combined the standardized open-ended interview and interview guide approach to develop semi-structured standardized open-ended interview questions in this study. According to Patton (2015), this approach lessens variations between respondents and promotes consistency and organization. The combination limited the my ability to ask questions outside the interview protocol but I incorporated the use of probing questions to gain a better understanding of the respondents' responses (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

In a phenomenological study there is emphasis placed on the quality and depth of data collected and the sample size is often smaller than quantitative research, lending itself to an increase in transferability of qualitative study results (Cypress, 2017). In support, Patton (2015) asserted that a smaller sample size allows for greater attention to detail and depth of exploration. Thus, I developed structured interviews as one of the

study tools to gather rich and meaningful data. I conducted interviews using platforms that facilitated facetime, specifically, Discord.

### **Development of Interview Questions**

To develop an interview protocol of seven semi-structured standardized open-ended interview questions, I worked with faculty, specifically the chair of this study (Appendix A). Moreover, the addition of probing questions included for further clarification and depth from respondents' answers (Patton, 2015). I based the interview questions on Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Each characteristic had one interview question and one probing question.

### **Primary Instrument**

The development of questions applied a variation of the standardized open-ended interview approach, following a semi-structured interview protocol. This interview protocol allows for participants to answer questions conversationally while being recorded (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The interviews were the primary instrument of data collection. Each interview question was aligned to the characteristics of Bass's 4 I's of Transformational Leadership, two questions per characteristic. For each characteristic, the questions related to their definition and conceptual elements. The questions also aligned to the purpose of the study to examine the game leader's perceived impact of transformational leadership in followers.

### **Field Test**

Central to identifying and reducing errors in a qualitative study, I tested the primary instrument. Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008) proposed that field testing enabled

refinement of a data collection instrument, increasing the reliability of a study. “The more times you test and improve your design, the better it will be” (Schell, 2008, p. 80). In effect, I conducted a field test with a representation of my intended study sample using the seven interview questions and prompts. During the field test, I chose a respondent aligned with the research criteria and included an observer. In addition, interviewee, observer, and I had the same set of questions prior to the field test (Appendix B). Both the respondent and observer provided me with feedback (Appendix C). My chair and I reviewed the responses and feedback. We discussed the results and made changes to improve the instrument which led to the development of the final interview questions.

### **Interview Protocol**

An interview protocol details information for the participants on the primary focus of the study, definitions that may clarify concepts for the participants, and the assurance of confidentiality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Thus, this study’s protocol included an introduction from me, the purpose of the study, an interview script, the seven interview questions, prompts, and definitions (Appendix D). In addition, participants received the University of Massachusetts Global Institutional Review Board Research Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix E), informed consent, and audio recording release (Appendix F). Prior to conducting the interview, I received both the informed consent and audio recording release from participants. I conducted a total of 12 interviews using the seven interview questions and prompts. This is displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5***Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions and Literature*

Research Question	Interview Questions	Definition	Literature Connection
Opening	Q1: As an overview, can you describe how you feel about your leadership experiences within your guild?		
How do game leaders perceive the impact of Idealized Influence in their guilds?	Q2: How do you perceive risk-taking in your guild?	Idealized Influence is the quality in transformational leaders that includes risk-taking, ethics, and role modeling.	Bass & Reggio, 2006
How do game leaders perceive the impact of Inspirational Motivation in their guilds?	Q3: Describe your experience with challenging your guild and what motivated them to take on the challenge?	Inspirational Motivation is a quality in transformational leaders that includes motivation, optimism, enthusiasm, and provision of challenges.	Bass & Reggio, 2006
How do game leaders perceive the impact of Intellectual Stimulation in their guilds?	Q4: What experiences do you feel have encouraged or impacted creativity and innovation in your guild? What practices, if any, have you used to coach and mentor guild members?	Intellectual Stimulation is a quality in transformational leaders that includes encouragement in creativity and innovation and includes followers' perspectives.	Bass & Reggio, 2006
How do game leaders perceive the impact of Individualized Consideration in their guilds?	Q5: Looking back at your experiences with the guild, what practices, if any, have you used to coach and mentor guild members?	Individualized Consideration is a quality in transformational leaders that includes coaching, mentoring, being considerate to others' differences, and needs, and effective listening.	Bass & Reggio, 2006
What differences in perceived impact of Bass's Four I. of Transformational Leadership exist between male and female guild leaders?	Q6: How would you describe your guild members' feelings towards your leadership style?	Transformational leadership is a type of leadership that focuses on organizational change through an inseparable link between leadership and followership.	Burns, 1978
Research Question	Interview Questions	Definition	Literature Connection
Closing	Q7: Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your perceptions on (experiences with) how your leadership impacts your guild?		

**Validity**

According to Patton (2015), the period following an interview is critical to the validity of qualitative inquiry. The validity of an instrument is the extent to which the



instrument measures what the researcher designed it to measure (Creswell, 2008; Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In addition, the goal of a valid instrument is to enable the researcher to determine conclusions from the studied population sample (Creswell, 2008). Thus, building the validity of an instrument requires utilizing various methods: multi-method strategies, multiple researchers, and participants reviews of the data collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I established validity for this phenomenological study using several strategies: content validity, participant language and verbatim accounts, mechanically recorder data, participant review, and multi-method strategies.

### ***Content Validity***

To measure the phenomenon of interest, content validity measures how well the researcher-developed items yield an adequate and representative sample of all items (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). By guiding the development of the interview and probing questions, content validity for this study relied on the expertise of the chair and committee members who were directly involved in this study (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008).

### ***Participant Language and Verbatim Accounts***

I phrased the interviews in language that the participants could understand, not in abstract social science terminologies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). With the expertise of the chair, committee members, and the feedback from the field test, I developed and critiqued the interview questions prior to the interviews to avoid the use of complex language, enabling participants to clearly understand the questions.

### ***Mechanically Recorded Data and Participant Review***

I recorded all interviews using Discord and backed them by Kaltura video recording. Each interview was transcribed and sent to the participant for review. Based on McMillan and Schumacher (2010), participants can then edit any information from the interview data for accuracy.

### ***Multimethod Strategies***

Being that most qualitative research uses multiple data collection techniques, selecting one as the primary method, multimethod strategies allowed for the triangulation of data across different techniques (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This study's primary instrument was the interview and artifacts I collected contributed to the triangulation process.

### **Reliability**

Given the purpose of a study, a researcher's best attempt in establishing reliability is to fairly represent the data, and communicate what the data reveals (Patton, 2015). Additionally, integral to reliability in qualitative research is consistency (Leung, 2015). "The degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another" (Stake, 2010, p. 151). Thus, the researcher can focus the reliability of qualitative data through triangulation, audit trail, member checks, and intercoder reliability (George & Apter, 2004; MacPhail et al., 2016).

### ***Triangulation***

According to Patton (2015) triangulation makes a study stronger by combining methods or data. It is a process where the researcher uses more than one source for data collection and analysis (George & Apter, 2004). In this study, interviews served as the

primary data collection method. In addition, reviewing artifacts helped identify themes and patterns across different sources of data.

### ***Audit Trail***

To minimize bias, maximize accuracy, and report impartially, researchers establish an audit trail, helping to verify the rigor of their fieldwork (Patton, 2015). The audit trail also corroborates the “confirmability of the data collected” (Patton, 2015, p. 106). It is the documentation of how the interpretation of the data drove a researcher’s decision, enabling other researchers to understand what was done, as well as the rationale (George & Apter, 2004; Grossoehme, 2014).

### ***Member Checks***

I recorded the interviews with an audio recorder. Additionally, I transcribed the interviews and sent them to each interviewee to ensure accuracy of the data collected. Member checks, in essence, allow the participants to determine if the transcribed interview accurately represented their attitudes and experience (George & Apter, 2004).

### ***Intercoder Reliability***

Using multiple coders to calculate intercoder consistency establishes validity and reliability of patterns (Patton, 2015). Intercoder reliability facilitates agreement from different coders on how they each assign codes to text segments of data (Lippman et al., 2016). Intercoder reliability is crucial to qualitative research because it reduces researcher bias and aids in providing sound interpretation of the themes and patterns of the data collected. Based on Lombard et al. (2002), intercoder reliability enables a researcher to create a representative set of units to test reliability. More so, under the same conditions, the coding decisions need to be made independently (Lombard et al., 2002). Prior to

coding, an external coder with a doctorate degree and experience in qualitative coding set a level of .80 agreement. This external coder reviewed over 10% of the data from this study. The .80 agreement, according to Lombard et al. (2002) is acceptable in most exploratory research.

### **Data Collection**

In this phenomenological study, the researcher collected data through virtual interviews from 13 game leaders who led members in their respective guilds and artifacts that included blogs, forums, and posts on online media. To maintain confidentiality, I kept audio recordings from each interview password secured on my personal computer. In addition, I secured and stored interview notes in key-locked file cabinets in my home. Moreover, approval from the University of Massachusetts Global Institutional board authorized data collection from research participants.

Participants received an invitation through a Discord link to join the server I designed to host interviews for this study. I included an introduction with contact information, the purpose of the study's overview, the time commitment to participate in the study, and the nature of the study on this server.

### **Interview Process**

I conducted the interviews over facetime in private rooms with each participant on the my Discord. After a brief introduction, the I reviewed the purpose of the summary and consent forms. I reminded participants about privacy protections, specifically anonymity, the time frame and voluntary nature of the interview. They also had the chance to ask questions to include clarifications on concepts within the study they did not understand.

I began recording after the consent forms and participants' questions were answered. Through Discord, I recorded the interview backed by an online voice recorder powered by Google. I took notes throughout the interview, recording nonverbal communication of the participants not captured solely by audio. During the first portion of the interview, I had participants review Bass's 4 I's of transformational leadership. Then, I asked both the prepared questions and probing questions to encourage participants to share more in-depth information. At the end of the interview, I thanked each participant and provided an opportunity for them to share final thoughts.

An online transcription service transcribed each interview. After transcription, I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. Participants received the transcripts and had the opportunity to edit their responses. I documented any request to modify or edit the transcript and then carried it out. I then analyzed and coded participant responses for qualitative themes.

### **Artifacts**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described artifacts as tangible manifestations that express an individual's experience, knowledge, and values. As a part of data collection, I gathered artifacts in addition to the interviews to contribute to triangulation. The artifacts included public information from WoW forums, player's blogs, articles on WoW, and player's posts in WoW Discord servers. These data were coded for patterns and themes. I compared the results from the artifact data to the interview data analysis, contributing to triangulation, and enhancing the reliability and validity of the study's data.

## Data Analysis

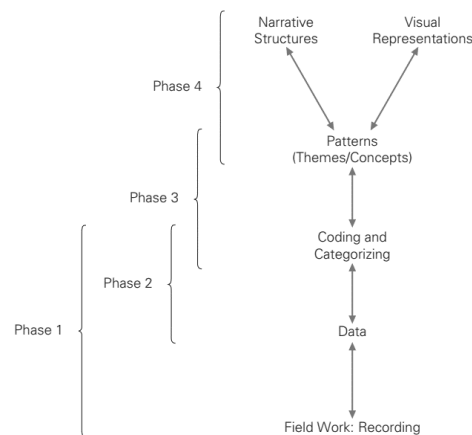
Raw data is transformed into a final description, narrative, theme, or category during qualitative data analysis (Coughlan et al., 2007). Inductive analysis, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), is the most used method of analysis in qualitative research. I used the process of inductive analysis, beginning with data which in turn, developed into categories, patterns, and themes (Patton, 2015). Commonly, steps for inductive analysis include:

- collecting and documenting data
- coding data
- identifying themes and patterns
- presenting findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Figure 10 illustrates the general steps of inductive data analysis.

### Figure 10

#### *Steps of Inductive Data Analysis*



*Note.* Adapted from *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry* (p. 368), by J. H. McMillan and S. Schumacher, 2010, Pearson Higher Ed. Copyright 2010 by Pearson Higher Ed.

## **Collecting and Documenting Data**

Essential to data analysis is the organization of data, facilitating the organization of large amounts of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is an ongoing process, enabling the researcher to begin identifying possible themes and patterns during interviews. Moreover, the researcher may begin to adjust and adapt to emerging discoveries as data collection during interviews progresses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). During the interviews of this study, however, I asked all participants the same interview and probing questions to minimize bias and enhance validity. Using Discord, I audio recorded the interviews and transcribed them. Participants had the opportunity to review the transcription and offered feedback to adjust for accuracy.

## **Coding Data**

Once the data was fully transcribed, the I began the process to formalize codes and categories. I used the qualitative software NVivo© to code the transcriptions. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) data parts or segments are text containing comprehensible ideas, episodes, or pieces of relevant information. These segments are then analyzed “to come up with codes so that each segment is labeled by at least one code” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 371). Codes can be participant perspectives, events, processes, quotations, and activities that give value to the data segments (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). I arranged codes and examined their frequency to identify themes and patterns in the data using the software NVivo©.

## **Identifying Themes and Patterns**

Comprised of grouped codes, researchers use themes to give meaning to the codes that are combined (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Themes are the first level of

induction, ranging from six to eight themes in qualitative studies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I used Bass's transformational leadership theoretical framework which focused on four characteristics: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual motivation, and individualized consideration to guide the process of identifying themes. By reexamining and scrutinizing the data, I attempted to find relationships among the themes. Supporting this process, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stressed that it is important in achieving the ultimate goal of making general statements about relationships amongst themes, to discover patterns in the data.

### **Presenting Findings**

A feature or rather hallmark of qualitative research is found in the narrative presentation of evidence and diversity of visual representation of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In effect, the narrative structure utilized depends on the study's purpose, qualitative design, and audience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For phenomenological studies, the emphasis is on textual descriptions of what occurred and how the phenomenon was experienced (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To accurately frame the lived experiences of participants, I presented the findings with direct quotes.

### **Limitations**

Stating the limitations of a study illustrates the researcher's knowledge of threats to internal and external validity in their proposed study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Often, limitations connect to the capability of study findings to generalize to a larger population. However, generalization is not always central to qualitative studies. The focus is on obtaining external validity through data collection procedures and attention to academic rigor (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).



## **Researcher as the Instrument**

Since 2005, I have played the MMORPG WoW intermittently as a guild member. In addition, I was part of guilds that successfully completed game content based upon the respective guild's goals and objectives. Due to the potential for bias, using the researcher as the data collection instrument is a limitation of qualitative design. Still, by using standardized data collection procedures and rigorous analysis techniques, Patton (2015) explained this method limits bias and increases the credibility of study findings. The researcher of this study used a set protocol when conducting all interviews (Appendix D). During the study, I applied reflexive practices to monitor for bias. Additionally, with the standardized processes for data collection, organization and analysis, I further limited the potential for bias. Furthermore, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program course (Appendix G).

## **Sample Size**

Like other qualitative research, the purpose of the study, availability of participants, and collection strategy impacted the sample size of this study. In accordance, the small sample size, common to qualitative studies, provided the researcher with an abundance of information-filled data. Delimited to 13 game leaders from WoW community Discord servers with a population of over 4,000 online gamers, I applied meticulous academic standards into its design. Each game leader participant played WoW in different realms and expansions of the game and were part of separate guilds across the game which hosts over 700,000 players.

## **Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the selected phenomenological methodology which followed the study's purpose and research questions. Moreover, I provided a rationale for selecting the qualitative phenomenological study design and the criteria I used to determine the population and sample size. The instrumentation aligned with the purpose of the study: to examine how game leaders perceived the impact of Bass 4 I's of transformational leadership. In addition, this chapter covered the reliability, validity, data collection, and data analysis used. Lastly, the limitations of this study focused on the researcher and sample size.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Research on leadership development is not new, yet little is known about leadership development in online gaming, specifically Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games or MMORPGs. In the last decade, much of the research on online gaming and leadership development has focused on disparate theoretical frameworks void replicability and consistency (Bonk & Dennen, 2005; DeMarco et al., 2007; Ee & Cho, 2012; Lisk et al., 2012; Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2012). This research provides an avenue for replicability by applying a well-tested theoretical framework to online gaming and leadership development. By interviewing 13 game leaders in the MMORPG World of Warcraft and asking them to describe their leadership experiences in the game, this research aimed to uncover or rather demystify the concept of leadership development in an online platform within the confines of Bass's (1993) four I's of transformational leadership. This chapter presents the findings of the research. Beginning with a restatement of the purpose statement and research questions, this chapter includes a brief review of the research methods and procedures. Additionally, this chapter describes the methodology, population, and samples I used for the study as well as a detailed review of the data collected. Finally, I present the findings for each research question.

### **Purpose Statement**

This phenomenological study identified and described how current World of Warcraft (WoW) Game Leaders perceived the impact of Bass' Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds. In addition, this study identified and described differences in the perceived Impact of Bass' Four I's of Transformational Leadership between male and female game leaders.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Bass' Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds?
2. What differences in perceived impact of Bass's Four I. of Transformational Leadership exist between male and female game leaders?

## **Sub Questions**

The following sub questions also guided this study:

- How do game leaders perceive the impact of Idealized Influence in their guilds?
- How do game leaders perceive the impact of Inspirational Motivation in their guilds?
- How do game leaders perceive the impact of Intellectual Stimulation in their guilds?
- How do game leaders perceive the impact of Individualized Consideration in their guilds?

## **Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

This qualitative research study used a phenomenological approach to identify and describe the experiences of World of Warcraft game leaders, a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game or MMORPG. I used standardized, semiconstructed interviews and artifact analysis to collect data. I used predetermined questions that aligned with the study research questions to obtain in-depth information about the

perceptions game leaders in WoW held about the impact of Bass's Four I's of transformational leadership within their respective guilds (Appendix D).

This study, approved by UMASS Global's Institutional Review Board, utilized research questions, research design, and interview protocol (Appendix J). Participants received informed consent and the university's bill of rights documents detailing the data collection process. Participants electronically signed consent forms prior to interviews. I conducted the interviews via Discord and transcribed them in-real time through an application called Scriptly. I also collected artifacts from online, public forums, articles, and blogs.

### **Population**

Game leaders (guild leaders, officers, or raid leaders) in the MMORPG WoW served as the population for this qualitative study. To generalize the results, I selected a more manageable subset that conformed to the specific criteria from this population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

### **Sampling Frame/Target Population**

A more refined group of individuals with specific attributes of interest and relevance compared to the general population served as the target population for this study (Asia et al., 2017). I used a smaller, targeted population of game leaders playing Word of Warcraft for manageability. These game leaders use the chat application Discord, which includes voice, video, and texting.

In accordance, I pulled the sampling frame from the WoW population of game leaders on WoW Discord servers, a representation of the total group of individuals from which a sample could be drawn (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I used nonprobability

sampling techniques such as purposive and convenience sampling and I selected accessible participants who met pre-established criteria (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

### **Demographic Data**

For demographic information, Tables 6-8 provide contextual data about the study sample, including gender, age, number of years leading in WoW, and the highest level of education achieved. Of the 13 participants, four identified as female and nine as male.

**Table 6**

*Participant Demographics: Gender*

Participant Group	Female	Male
Guild Leader	2	5
Raid Leader	1	2
Officer	1	2
Total (All Categories)	4	9

Participants ranged from 30 to 53 years of age. Table 7 includes a summary of the ages of study participants.

**Table 7***Participants Demographics: Age*

Participant Group	30-39	40-49	50-59
Guild Leader	5	1	1
Raid Leader	3		
Officer	3		
Total (All Categories)	11	1	1

Table 8 shows the spread of the highest degree achieved for all. Most participants held bachelor's degrees, and very few did not have degrees or trades.

**Table 8***Participants Demographic: Highest Level of Education*

Participant Group	No College	Associates	Bachelors	Masters
Guild Leader	1	1	4	1
Raid Leader			3	
Officer		1	2	
Total (All Categories)	1	2	9	1

Most of the game leaders had led guild members for over a year, the highest being 15 years. Table 9 shows the demographics of time in years leading in the MMORPG WoW.

**Table 9***Participant Demographics: Game Leader Number of Years in Leadership*

	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-20 years
Number of Participants	10	1	2

In addition to collecting data on the number of years in leadership, each participant self-identified their race/ethnicity. The categories are shown in Table 10.

**Table 10**

*Participants Demographics: Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity*

Participant Group	White/Caucasian	Asian, Pacific Islander, South Asian	Biracial
Guild Leader	6		1
Raid Leader	1	1	1
Officer	1	1	1
Total (All Categories)	8	2	3

As detailed in Chapter III, I provided each participant a unique alias for anonymity of which I refer to in the study findings and results, ensuring their confidential responses. Table 11 lists the alias participants of this study are associated with henceforth.

**Table 11**

*Participants and Aliases*

Participant	Alias
Participant 1	Respondent 1 (R1)
Participant 2	Respondent 2 (R2)
Participant 3	Respondent 3 (R3)
Participant 4	Respondent 4 (R4)
Participant 5	Respondent 5 (R5)
Participant 6	Respondent 6 (R6)
Participant 7	Respondent 7 (R7)
Participant 8	Respondent 8 (R8)
Participant 9	Respondent 9 (R9)
Participant 10	Respondent 10 (R10)
Participant 11	Respondent 11 (R11)
Participant 12	Respondent 12 (R12)
Participant 13	Respondent 13 (R13)



I gave each a unique identifier throughout this section, see Table 12.

**Table 12**

*Artifacts Listed by Type with Identifiers*

Types of Artifacts			
Blogs	Forums	Online Articles	Webpages
B17	F5	A4	W11
	F6	A13	W19
	F7	A16	
		A18	
		A22	
		A23	
		A25	

### **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

I organized the information on the data and findings of this research to focus on the two central questions and the four sub-research questions. This section of the study presents the findings that emerged from the research and analysis of data.

#### **Research Question 1: How Do Game Leaders Perceive the Impact of Bass' Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds?**

An analysis of data collected during the study yielded four major themes. The four major themes that emerged were: (a) communicating and talking to guild members; (b) opinions on mentoring and coaching; (c) insights on creativity and innovation in the guild; and (d) views on guild culture and community. During the analysis, artifacts were used to triangulate and confirm themes that emerged from the interviews. Artifacts reviewed included online articles, blogs, forum posts from Reddit and Blizzard, and public posts from LinkedIn. Consistent use of language regarding the data analysis emerged from the interviews and artifacts.

Table 13 displays the frequency and sources of themes from interviews and artifacts.

**Table 13***Frequency of Themes and Sources from Participant Responses and Artifacts*

Theme	Interviews		Artifacts	
	Freq.	Sources	Freq.	Sources
Communicating/talking to guild members	66	12	44	10
Opinions on mentoring and coaching	59	13	25	10
Insights on creativity and innovation in the guild	51	13	45	5
Views on guild culture and community	50	10	56	11
Perceptions on motivating guild members	23	8	13	4
Risk-taking sentiments	12	6	2	2

In addition, subthemes emerged from interview data with high frequency across the four major themes. Table 14 shows the distribution of subthemes that emerged from the analysis of interview data. The subthemes provided integral context for understanding the game leader's leadership practices.

**Table 14***Frequency and Distribution of Subthemes*

Main Themes Group	Subtheme	Freq.
Communicating/talking to guild members	Using communication that is patient	45
	Using communication skills	65
Opinions on mentoring and coaching	Helping guild members understand game mechanics	30
	Helping guild members succeed in their roles	33
	Helping guild members achieve goals	11
	Helping guild members improve themselves	10
Insights on creativity and innovation in guild	Encouraging guild members to share ideas	55
	Encouraging guild members to be creative	41
Views on guild culture and community	Developing a culture that cultivates a sense of community	45
	Developing a culture that cultivates collaboration	61

***Communicating/Talking to Guild Members***

Throughout data analysis, game leaders expressed the importance of communication within their guilds. For instance, if a guild member did not understand a game mechanic or seemed confused about what piece of item was better for their in-game avatar, participants indicated that it was best to directly communicate with the guild member to explain the mechanic or direct them to resources available for them to navigate better in-game. “It’s simple communication...you just kind of be casual about it and say hey, this is what’s happening. You got to change this” (R 11).

### ***Using Communication That is Patient***

In accordance, Respondent 5 described how communication can have an impact on guild members:

I find myself being more patient, especially with individuals who are learning the game, because you can pretty quickly tell. I think it also – depending on your attitude when you're talking to somebody, they can understand like, oh, this person is kind, or this person is patient, and they'll be willing to listen to what I have to say. (R5)

Another participant expressed that “patience is definitely key” to clear up what “at hand was a misunderstanding all along” (R6). In support, other participants acknowledged that patience facilitates “understanding people” (R7). Respondent 7 went on to describe their experiences with communication in the guild:

I feel like if you take enough time to...sit down and figure out how to communicate with someone...that's the most important thing. I feel like that's where people just like ...I don't know if it's like they lose their patience or if they're just not aware of exactly how to do it but...there's ways to communicate with everyone. (R7)

### ***Using Communication Skills***

Participants valued good communication skills, reflecting on experiences that showed how detrimental a lack of or inability to communicate with guild members could hurt the guild. Respondent 13 described such an instance:

I had an officer who was absolutely ice cold at his role, phenomenal. And he was propped up into officership based on performance alone. However, leadership

skills were pretty abhorrent, dismal. The guy just could not communicate effectively with the players. And to the point that it came to the detriment of the guild overall. (R13)

Highlighting how important it is for guild members to understand what is communicated, Respondent 2 explained that if a person in leadership does not “have good communication skills, they’re gonna have a negative impact on the people around them. It’s gonna be drama” (R2). In effect, participants concurred that communication is essential to leadership.

An artifact collected for this study stressed that “communication is key...have[ing] a line of communication open with you will make all the difference in their gaming experience” (A13). Similarly, some participants described how talking with guild members facilitates open interaction between leaders and followers. “...where it's just really open and like you're not afraid to ask questions or worry about corrupt leadership or toxicity or clicks or anything like that” (R4).

### ***Opinions on Mentoring and Coaching***

Some participants felt that rather than using the words mentoring and coaching, they were more likely to describe these efforts as helping their guild members achieve a goal. One artifact stressed:

WoW [World of Warcraft] is a social game, creating relationships is a huge part of building a strong guild. Much of my time is spent working on making the game time more enjoyable for the members of my guild and ensuring our success in achieving our goals. This means that myself and the officers are spending the time helping the members key for instances, complete their quest lines to upgrade their

gear and working hard with the guild to learn boss strategies in addition to the day-to-day operations of the guild. You need to be in the trenches with the members and officers. (W11)

### ***Helping Guild Members with Mechanics***

Respondent 8 expressed that mentoring and coaching boiled down to “help[ing] everybody understand how they can better themselves with whatever class they're playing” (R8). Point in case, Respondent 4 expanded on this, stating:

Or we just leave it open to them, like, here's what we need to do. How do you think you can contribute to hitting that goal? An' then they'll come back with something like, Oh, I feel like...I don't quite have the rotation, or I'm not really sure when to use this cool down. So maybe that'll help. (R4)

In an artifact focused on running a successful guild/raiding team one of the forum posts explained that “the best way to deal with someone making a mistake is to re-explain exactly how to avoid said mechanic with the mistake as an example” (F6). Within the same artifact, another post proposed taking a minute after each wipe (all players dying in an raid/dungeon) to review logs and discuss [what] went wrong. This, according to the post, “will likely help others in the raid understand the mechanics a bit better themselves” (F6).

### ***Helping Guild Members Succeed in Their Roles***

Other participants were enthused about coaching and mentoring. They relived experiences where they coached or provisioned coaching opportunities for guild members. Respondent 3 spoke about how their guild created a coaching opportunity for specific avatar classes. They explained:

So, an example would be I have a druid who is a really good druid in my guild. I know that there's two other druids in other teams. I set up a channel where they can all talk Druid talk and the lead Mythic Druid kind of looks over their logs and says, hey, you should try this trinket or your kind of not your play style is more towards this build, try this talent. (R3)

One artifact expanded:

Again, this game is supposed to be fun...This just means it will take more time and effort from your players who have both qualities (good attitude and good numbers) to help with grooming the people who struggle a little bit. There are things you can do, such as making a list of all the class discords so that people can easily find access to information about their class from some of the best players. (A13)

### ***Helping Guild Members Achieve Goals***

Regardless of the type of coaching, mentoring, or helping taking place, participants agreed that aiding their guild members improved their guild's performance. Respondent 4 stated, "people come in with their own goals and their own wants and needs. So it's less about...forcing stuff on people and more about...drawing things I of them... hidden talents, ideas, goals..." (R4). Sharing a similar view, Respondent 2 explained how they "literally are building a mentoring program. It will actually be a very large-scale program that supports everyone from 'he player who's trying to fix their rotation...to the player that is trying for hall of fame in WoW" (R2). Respondent 2 went as far to describe themselves as "a strength-based, coaching-style leader" (R2).

### ***Helping Guild Members Improve Themselves***

Other participants took mentoring and coaching opportunities that extended beyond the game, helping guild members cope with real-life situations. Respondent 10 elaborated:

We had a character in our guild...and he had a lot of personal problems, whether in real life, through mental health and other things. A lot of the people in our leadership, myself included, have had mental health issues in the past or sought therapy or... other avenues to better ourselves. And we went as far as to having hour-long conversations with him, showing him places where he lives that he can seek help and go, and have someone to talk to, resources that were available for free. There were moments where we even called a wellness check on him to make sure that he was okay. (R10)

Overall, participants viewed mentoring and coaching as an opportunity to not only improve their guild members' performance in-game but also as a way to help them in their personal, real-life growth and development. "...if somebody was willing to learn, connect them with someone who knew what they needed to learn" (R12).

### ***Insights on Creativity and Innovation in Guild***

Participants described their experiences with creativity and innovation in different ways. Some participants focused on ways they used creativity and innovation to improve or organize the game experience. For example, one used Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to organize their raids (R1) or developed add-ons to assist guild members with health conditions or impairments (R6). Other participants expanded on time management and efficiency to gain faster results for their avatars:



Anyone who is sort of worth their salt as a gamer, whatever, as an MMO player, as somebody who understands the mechanics, is always going to find ways to improve upon old standards. So, with that being said, creativity and the innovation, that came in different forms...people who are starting to think industriously about time management and benefiting their main character...create a secondary account...like a farming machine, a character of a class, like a mage for example, who is much more efficient at farming dungeons for materials or herbs for alchemy. (R13)

### ***Encouraging Guild Members to Share Ideas***

Using a different approach, some participants fostered a think-tank environment, encouraging guild members to share their ideas, make suggestions for improvement, or develop fun activities. Respondent 3 explained:

We built a place where everybody has feedback, everybody has the ability to say, hey, we should do this. Or during the holidays, someone said, you know, let's everybody take our real-life pets and dress them up and let's, you know, do it blind and try to figure out whose pet is who. (R3)

Another participant expanded on guild members sharing their ideas, stating "...one of the things that I see is my job. I didn't get this earlier, but certainly in the last year, I've really recognized it. My job is to take people's ideas, give them the tools...the structure, and the support to actually make those things come to fruition" (R2). Not only did participants encourage creativity and innovation, but they created spaces within their respective guilds where guild members could share ideas and provide input. "...one thing we try to do is if somebody has an idea, we just really encourage them to run with it and give full guild

resources and support” (R4). Accordingly, one artifact explained, “the concept of guilds really started early on in Medieval times where merchants or artisans formed guilds to share ideas, effectively teach others, form close relationships with others of common interests, and organize trade” (A16).

### ***Encouraging Guild Members to Be Creative***

Respondent 3 stated:

I think letting people have the ability to tell you what they want to do and just have that creative input in what happens on a day-to-day basis in your guild, kind of allows them to kind of be creative and it helps me kind of see what’s working and what's not working for people. (R3).

On a similar note, Respondent 7 gave an example of a guild member creating an event, Dungeon Week:

Like Dungeon Week ...we were obviously using it so that people would have a bit of extra incentive to do the things that we felt were required at the time to continue pushing in raids and pushing in that environment the way that we wanted to. (R7)

Likewise, Respondent 1 summarized:

I've seen people set up hide and seek games and then use the pictures iDiscord. And there's watch together parties that we'll do while we're doing other stuff. Or there's activity gaming within Discord and all of those things to me as an old gamer, is creative in itself. (R1)

### ***Views on Guild Culture and Community***

Participants addressed their experiences with developing a community within their guilds. The resounding theme rested on cultivating a culture that was inclusive, fostered collaboration, and built relationships. Reinforcing participants' views on community and culture, an artifact on building guild communities detailed, "creating an inviting atmosphere is key for successful social interaction within the guild. Having a positive guild culture starts with reinforcing good behavior through engagement strategies such as team-building activities" (A13).

### ***Developing a Culture That Cultivates a Sense of Community***

Regarding the development of culture, Respondent 10 stated:

I've always been the culture [person] and trying to keep people. I got us together and help us build the community of people that like enjoy each other's time and spending it together which to me is probably the greatest thing about the game.

(R10)

Other participants relived the experience of forming their guilds, emphasizing on the guild's longevity based on their established community/culture-centered foundation. "Just create and maintain a good community...that people trust, want to be part of, want to help run, and want to see continue seems to be working very well for us" (R6). Relatedly, Respondent 9 stated, "in general, the culture is the most important versus actually the meta [most effective tactics available]" (R9). Likewise, other participants echoed this sentiment, "...the emphasis was always on the social aspect...keeping the culture of having love for each other and just being friends" (R7).

### *Developing a Culture That Cultivates Collaboration*

Participants continued to stress the importance of community; a theme repeated throughout their experiences. “We work really hard...to keep our community engaged and cross collaborate... get really strategic and really intentional about what we are, who are we, what do we offer as a community” (R2). In alignment, Respondent 3 reflected, “you know, so just having my members have the ability to like contribute to how we shape our community really helps...” (R3).

Another artifact focused on being inclusive and transparent, offering guidance on how to run a successful guild. “Being inclusive of all officers, and as inclusive as you can with your guild/community/team will lead to people being much happier and feeling like they have a voice.” The artifact further explained, “officers should be officers for the positive attitude they show, and the work they put in to make the community better” (F5). Additionally, one artifact reinforced participants’ experiences with developing a community within their guild. “I’ve been a casual player since 200Ikeep coming back because of the generally amazing community and rich gameplay” (A4).\ Still, an artifact’s author stated, “navigating disputes that arise within a guild can be tricky, but with the right strategies and techniques for conflict resolution, it is possible to foster a positive culture of collaboration” (A13).

### **Research Sub Question 1a: How do Game Leaders Perceive the Impact of Idealized Influence in Their Guilds?**

Participants recounted their experiences regarding idealized influence. Table 15 shows the themes I analyzed from interviews on idealized influence: (a) risk-taking, (b) ethics/morals, and (c) role modeling.

**Table 15***Frequency of Themes and Sources from Participant Responses and Artifacts*

Theme	Interviews		Artifacts	
	Freq.	Sources	Freq.	Sources
Risk-taking	120	13	6	3
Ethics/Principles	10	4	2	2
Lead by example	8	5	1	1

***Risk-Taking***

An artifact covering leadership lessons from WoW stated, "...if you're not constantly innovating and evolving, you'll quickly fall behind your competitors who are willing to take risks and try new things. Leaders who are afraid of change will find themselves at a disadvantage" (A25). Accordingly, some participants described risk-taking during raids/dungeons, focusing on the game content. One artifact focused on taking risks for continuous improvement explaining, "the only way to succeed is to try and try again" (A22). Similarly, Respondent 10 stated, "I'm more willing to take risks...during a fight. I kinda like taking risks...because...all the best strategies are risky" (R10). Respondent 12 delved further and said:

...most of the risks I can think about were us Ing new strategies on bosses...And it pretty much came down to, at least in our guild, like how much I wanted to push for it or how much other people wanted to push for it. Because if you took the risk and it worked out, you know, nobody said anything, but if you wiped [killing everyone in raid/dungeon group] the whole raid, people definitely complained.

(R12)

Other participants described risk-taking related to investing or taking a chance on individual players versus strategy in-game solely. For example, Respondent 3 explained:

...we risk it for the biscuit. You know, we try the plan, we see if it works. But it really depends on what we're talking about...Risk taking in who I choose for an officer as opposed to risk taking on a strategy for a boss or strategy for a team. Like, I would never choose an officer or let that go on for a long time where it would affect my [guild], the rest of my team...and just explode it all. (R3)

Still, some participants clearly stated they were “risk averse” (R5). Although Respondent 3 explained risk-taking above, they also stated that “...when it comes to decision-making within the guild, I’d say I am risk averse” (R13). Respondent 13 emphasized, “we were risk averse overall because we knew that certain risks don't really yield positive results” (R13). In alignment, an artifact agreed, “raid leaders are constantly assessing threats to their team and making decisions based on the inherent risk to success they may pose” (A23).

### ***Ethics/Morals***

Speaking to ethics/morals, an artifact stated, “they just want everything to run “right”...right as defined as according to their morals or how they would want the guild to conduct themselves” (F6). With a similar sentiment, Respondent 3 said:

I will never risk my morals or what the guild morals are, you know, for something that would just like cause something to implode. So you get those type of situations where not everybody is [going to] be okay with your leadership, but...you have to kind of say, this is what we're [going to] stand for, these are our morals, this is what we're [going to] do going forward. (R3)

Respondent 9 shared a similar response and stated, “but they know that we are committing to those principles that we promised them when they came in and we said

you know we prioritize this, we stick to that” (R9). Another participant elaborated on strong principles/standards their guild upheld. For instance, Respondent 6 explained, “...we're explicitly a leftist and LGBTQ+ positive guild with zero tolerance for racism/sexism/transphobia, etc.” (R6).

### ***Lead by Example***

Few participants described instances within their experiences that expressed role modeling for their guild members. Some identified leadership goals. “...the people at the very top of our community...and myself as guild masters...we will lead by example” (R2). Another participant detailed comparable leadership views and stated:

I think one thing people tend to forget when it comes to leading people and something I'm like annually reminding myself is like when you're leading a community... make sure ...you're actually providing what people want...And of course lead by example. (R4)

Similarly, one artifact explained that to maintain guild members motivated, game leaders had to show their guild members “what’s possible with hard work” (A13).

### **Research Sub Question 1b: How Do Game Leaders Perceive the Impact of Inspirational Motivation in Their Guilds?**

There were many ways participants described inspirational motivation. Participants experienced being enthused/optimistic in inspiring their guild members to detailing opportunities to motivate/challenge their fellow members. On maintaining motivation, one artifact explained “...it is important that you find ways to maintain motivation within the group” and that game leaders shouldn’t “be afraid to try new things

when [trying to keep] everyone motivated” (A13). Table 16 shows the frequency and sources of themes for inspirational motivation.

**Table 16**

*Frequency of Themes and Sources from Participant Responses and Artifacts*

Theme	Interviews		Artifacts	
	Freq.	Sources	Freq.	Sources
Enthusiastic/Optimistic	50	13	18	6
Motivator/Challenger	125	13	23	10

***Enthusiastic/Optimistic***

Regarding enthusiasm and optimism within a guild, one artifact posed, “one way to keep people excited about a guild and to help make the guild self-sufficient is to promote contributors to higher ranks. People like having more power within a guild and love the feeling of being rewarded for helping” (A20). Relatedly, another artifact stated, “positive reinforcement and gentle suggestions get more results” (F6). Accordingly, Respondent 12 offered:

And it was just a matter of setting standards early on and encouraging people to meet those standards. Mainly...through Warcraft logs, you know, you get excited when people post a strong parse [comparison of a player’s performance during a specific fight to an entire player base] and then other people want to post a strong parse and have people get excited for them. (R12)

Another participant speaking to positivity and optimism within a guild explained that:

...everyone should find something passionate that they're trying to do and then to form a group around it because then you get the opportunity to tailor the group to your specific interests. If you're somebody who is passionate about playing the



game...find yourself with people who are also passionate about exploring the world and enjoying the people that they play with. (R5)

Correspondingly, on artifact added, “players who receive frequent rewards are more likely to stick with the game and keep playing. Leaders who take the time to give positive feedback will have a better chance of retaining” (A25).

One participant who focused on positivity and optimism, stated “...in general, we try to focus on the team 's a whole: ‘we can do 'his,’ ‘we're almost there,’ ‘we're getting better every week,’ ‘next time we got this for sure’ and try to remain positive and optimistic” (R6).

### **Motivator/Challenger**

Artifacts and participants explained and discussed motivating and challenging guild members in various instances. For example, participants experienced moments when they motivated members to reach a goal or encouraged them in the guild. One artifact said, “...offering rewards or incentives within your guild can be a great motivator for players to continue playing and being active participants” (A13). To add, another artifact stated that game leaders “must constantly motivate their team” (A22). Supporting this sentiment on motivation, Respondent 3 expressed, “It's always a challenge to try to motivate everybody at once, but you try to do enough motivating...and different ways of motivating people, that you kind of motivate everybody at some point or another” (R3). Other participants pinpointed moments they explicitly tried to motivate their guild members:

...the best example with this current guild of trying to motivate them to do something happened in Burning Crusade [an expansion of the game WoW] ...we

were probably stuck...for like a good three weeks, a month... The way that we motivated them was by fine-tuning what they were best at. (R3)

Other participants detailed instances where they either challenged the guild or motivated them through a challenge. For instance, Respondent 7 relived a moment where they challenged the guild to achieve a specific feat:

I think speaking most specifically toward the Scarab Lord grind [a reputation grind requiring a collection of in-game items]...the fact that everyone at that one time...was so willing to hop on board and, you know, accomplish a feat that we weren't even really sure that we would be able to accomplish...their motivation just being...this is our guy...let's make this happen. Also, while we're doing it, we're...have[ing] fun together. (R7)

With another challenge, Respondent 2 stated:

I challenged my guild to celebrate its 10th anniversary with a week-long adventure of events and starting with an opening ceremony, culminating in a stream...with a keynote speech and a guild meeting in the between and probably 20 events. I challenged my guild and they met the challenge. (R2)

Respondent 13, likewise, stated:

So a challenge, you know, is convincing players to come prepared with the goods, come with consumables-health pots, mana pots, to come with all of their armor enchanted, to come with all of their armor repaired, you know, like you don't you don't want to be the [person] whose armor breaks halfway through a raid and then they have to stop, hearth out [teleporting to another location], holds up the raid. (R13)

Some participants expressed their need to keep their guild motivated. Respondent 4 said:

So one thing we try to do is if somebody has an idea, we just really encourage them to run with it and give full guild resources and support. Like, oh, you want to do a board game night. Here's your very own channel and voice chat. (R4)

Additionally, one artifact stated, “everyone plays this game to have fun. ’f a majority of your guild/team isn't having fun... plan some fun events to do instead of raiding... These are much appreciated by guild members” (W19).

**Research Sub Question 1c: How Do Game Leaders Perceive the Impact of Intellectual Stimulation in Their Guilds?**

Each participant described the importance of intellectual stimulation, encouraging guild members and listening to their views and opinions. Table 17 depicts the frequency of themes and the sources related to intellectual stimulation.

**Table 17**

*Frequency of Themes and Sources from Participant Responses and Artifacts*

Theme	Interviews		Artifacts	
	Freq.	Sources	Freq.	Sources
Follower’s views/opinions	35	13	15	11
Encouragement	4	4	3	2

***Follower’s Views/Opinions***

One artifact, a forum post, gave advice for new guild masters, stating “become really chatty in guild chat...ask what they would like to see or do in guild” (F7). Another artifact stressed that to know their follower’s views, it “...comes down to clear communication” (A18). To add, the artifact gave examples of ways to listen to guild member’s opinions, “if you wish to stay after the raid and chat, we will address your

concerns then” (A18). Following this example, Respondent 1 commented on guild members being able to voice their views, stating, “people really feel safe, I think, voicing their loud gamer opinions” (R1).

Participants agreed that fostering an environment where guild members were able to share their views, positive or negative, was important. For instance, Respondent 2 expressed:

Leaders at this level in a community this big, usually the feedback that they get 's when they do something people don't like. So, [I] get a lot of negative feedback as a leader because that's when people voice their opinions. [Still]...we're feeding their desire to become great at the game, to pull them into the community. (R2)

Another participant shared how listening to a fellow member's idea help their guild succeed in the game:

...we sort of went in with a completely different strategy, until we adopted the strategy... and that was actually suggested by somebody else... We were going with a different strategy... we'd throw out strat ideas and people were like, yeah, this will work. And somebody who wasn't even on that council was like, what if we try it like this? (R4)

### ***Encouragement***

Participants and artifacts alike detailed encouraging guild members to do be active, communicate, share ideas, and other activities. An artifact speaking to the longevity of a guild, said, “however, if you are in it for the long run and want to have a really well-organized guild, encourage communication” (W11). In addition, to maintain engagement within the guild, another artifact stated, “establish rewards for completing

certain tasks or milestones set by the guild...to motivate players and encourage them to stay active within the guild” (A13). In agreement, Respondent 1 commented:

And then, you know, we just kind of put some pressure and like encouraged and it became this really kind of fun mini culture within our guild of the people that were helping, and we set up...movie watching on discord while we were doing all the farming. (R1)

Respondent 12 elaborated on encouragement, stating, “you know, we're trying to play the game, have fun, and encourage everybody to play it well, because it's...more fun when you play it well” (R12).

Participants used encouragement in various ways. For example, Respondent 4 said, “...we really try to encourage...thinking outside the box. So...people aren't afraid to bring up strategy adjustments. But we definitely encourage...longer, more in-depth talks...outside of raiding hours” (R4). Accordingly, Respondent 5 continued to push their guild forward during a difficult time, “...keeping people encouraged and motivated to try even failure attempts just to brute force the boss, for lack of a better term, because we're still trying to figure it out at the time” (R5).

### **Research Sub Question 1d: How Do Game Leaders Perceive the Impact of Individualized Consideration in Their Guilds?**

All 13 participants shared moments of consideration towards their guild members. They relived experiences regarding individualized consideration when they listened and met guild member's needs. Table 18 illustrates the frequency of themes from both the participants and artifacts.

**Table 18***Frequency of Themes and Sources from Participant Responses and Artifacts*

Theme	Interviews		Artifacts	
	Freq.	Sources	Freq.	Sources
Considerate to others' needs	59	13	20	17
Effective listening	2	2	2	2

**Considerate to Others' Needs**

“I always tell my guildies to give each other grace... I don't know why I care... But I think it takes a particular person to get that many people herded together and working as a team” (R3). Sharing a similar experience, Respondent 5 delved into the formation of a guild:

And depending on how you tailor the group, you can figure out who you are. Do you care about completing the objective and being as efficient as possible? Then you want people who are very analytical. Do you want people with character? Well then, it's more important...for people to have a good time in a social setting than it is to complete the objective. (R5)

To be considerate to all types of players, Respondent 2 stated:

When I have people in leadership who really care about the META, that really shows up. And in a community like ours, when a team only cares about the META, they are not a healthy part of the guild. So...one of my biggest focuses is to increase the engagement of those members. And strategically, the way we do that is to give them support for the META. You have to kind of feed the beast in order to get that engagement and get them out of their silo. (R2)

As addressed by Respondent 2, one artifact focused on being considerate to all, new and current, players within a raid:

Guild leaders...shouldn't ever put a new guild member into the center of the action. Even if the new guild member is talented, putting them in "the most critical" spot in the game can ruin a raid. People, even talented players, can make mistakes. New members need to train before they can take on key roles in important raids. (B17)

Other participants expressed that being considerate included understanding and explaining systems to their guild members. One artifact explained, "for new guild members, it helps, tremendously, to make sure they understand how raiding within your guild works. If their expectations are different from the guild's that can lead to unhelpful commentary" (A18). Likewise, Respondent 6 said, "...helping people understand each other better. A lot of it is just recalibrating expectations if needed and cultivating patience" (R6).

By explaining how understanding guild members led to consideration of their differences and needs, Respondent 7 said:

...it's getting to know people in the exact same way as real life, other than the fact that like, you can't touch them. But after a while...you see their pictures [on Discord] ...you understand who they are as people, you understand...what type of family they come from, or what type of family they're in. (R7)

### ***Effective Listening***

Regarding effective listening, few participants addressed instances when they took the time to listen to what their guild members were telling them. One of the artifacts

gave further details, stating, "...surround yourself with officers who share your passion for the work involved in running the guild, allow them to be active in the leadership process and listen to their advice" (W11). In alignment with this detail, Respondent 3 said, "but as long as I tell them that I'm listening and that I care about what they're saying back, I feel like...they're always pretty receptive" (R3).

**Research Question 2: What Differences in 'Perceived Impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership Exist Between Male and Female Game Leaders?**

Four of the participants were female and nine participants were male as shown in Table 19. Data analysis of their responses yielded the following subthemes across 2 main themes shown in Table 19.

**Table 19**

*Subthemes Related to Communication Styles and Leadership Traits Between Women and Men*

Main Theme	Subtheme	Freq.	
		F	M
Communication/talking to guild members	Assertive/Confident Communication	12	3
	Strong/Aggressive Communication	2	0
	Passive Communication	1	1
Views on guild culture and community	Leaders motivating and encouraging/motivators	11	7
	Leaders influencing/influencers	11	8
	Leaders stimulating change/changemakers	7	5
	Leaders focusing on relationships/supporters	14	12



### *Communication/Talking to Guild Members*

Female and male participants approached communicating/talking to guild members in different ways. Participants, when communicating were: (a) assertive, (b) aggressive, or (c) passive.

#### *Assertive/Confident Communication*

Some of the female participants expressed themselves in assertive ways. For instance, Respondent 1 explained:

It comes out still sometimes where I kind of have to be the enforcer, because there is something unique about that female voice, I think like it's not expected necessarily so when it comes out sometimes it actually works to be like oh shit it's time to get serious. (R1)

In another example of assertive communication, Respondent 2 said:

...my job at leading 1300 people is not to tell people how to behave, but it end' up being my role anyway. And there's some conflict with me coming in and saying, hey, you know what, this is not okay. I have a very solid vision of what I want to do. (R2)

Similarly, Respondent 3 stated, "...I do and have come across people who have an issue dealing with me because I'm an assertive woman...But, you know, I've had to let seven mythic raiders go because they thought sexual harassment was okay..." (R3).

Some male respondents, however, shared experiences using a modest approach to communicating. One male participant explained:

I am fair...' won't put up with...dumb stuff...I won't put up with people just being mean. It's...a strong point for me. If someone's just being mean for the sake of

being mean, like bullying o' something along those lines, I don't put up with it. I find it...unacceptable. (R10)

Other male participants shared experiences noting their confidence in communicating with guild members, especially during raids. Respondent 11 stated:

People, when it comes to leading a raid, like, the most important thing in my opinion is knowing what's going on in the raid. I mean, obviously we have tools for that, but... knowing what's happening in the raid and being confident in your shot calling, and usually people are pretty good. (R11)

Like male Respondent 10, during raids, male Respondent 12 developed an indirect communication strategy:

I kind of intentionally made it so that, because I wanted people to listen to me when I was raid leading...always have the second in command be the hard ass so that no one's not listening to the to the leader. (R10)

### ***Strong/Aggressive Communication***

Some of the participants displayed strong communication in the way they communicated with the guild. One example, from a female respondent explained:

Personally, I have kind of done the gauntlet of am I an angry officer? Do I yell at people? ...but 40-man raids were a completely different world from current raiding. So sometimes it was a lot more reason to be the strong fist. (R1)

In a similar way, another female respondent expressed strong communication experiences:

You're either on that page or you're not. And if you're not on that page, then we can have a discussion about it. But if you're definitely not [going to] align with our goals or morals, then let's just part ways right now. (R3)

In comparison, male participants did not share experiences with strong communication towards their guild.

### ***Passive Communication***

Participants in this study experienced instances where they displayed passive communication. One example was Respondent 6, as he preferred “working in the background to make sure things run smoothly” (R6). Another female participant stated that she has taken “the back seat with other leadership and just kinds of be really chill” (R1). She added, “I’m going to be the one to talk to with questions or things like that. So it’s just being there and being reliable” (R1).

### ***Views on Guild Culture and Community***

Table 19 illustrates the frequency of subthemes related to the main theme - views on guild culture and community. It captures the different experiences between female and male respondents.

### ***Leaders Motivating and Encouraging***

Participants spoke about encouraging and motivating their guild members in various ways. Both female and male respondents used examples of communicating with their guild members to encourage and/or motivate them, projecting their views on culture and community. For example, female Respondent 4 spoke to guild members in preparations for a raid. In this experience, she gave a glimpse her guild’s culture and community:

Mention...make sure you're enchanted. If anybody needs accommodations, please let us know. And they've all sort of like responded...thanks for doing this. And like people start throwing in tips for people who may have missed...Smolderon [raid boss] ...people were like, hey, some of you are having trouble with this. Here's the colorblind modes we tried and stuff like that. People were coming together, sort of cheering each other on. (R4)

Male Respondent 5, also spoke of experiences when he encouraged guild members. His guild's focus encouraged members to do what felt right to them:

...you can do whatever you want in this game. If you want to roleplay as an orc who only uses swords, which is, as you know...not the best damage, who cares? It's an MMO. No one's [going to] tell you you're doing the wrong thing. (R5)

Other participants had similar experiences of encouraging their members, attesting to the type of culture and community they built. However, they took a different approach, driving/influencing their respective guild's culture and community.

### ***Leaders Influencing***

The type of community and/or culture that some of the participants want to create or have created through their experiences required them to influence their guild members. According to male Respondent 13 "...the synchronicity...between hardcore players and casual players...[required] trying to influence players to take their roles, their responsibilities, the preparedness a little more serious" (R13). He continued to speak about it being a challenge to convince players to be prepared for raids and events. "...you are trying to push the dial forward...inspire a sense of self-accomplishment, self-

fulfillment” (R13). Similarly, female Respondent 2 explained that as a leader, she tried to influence a sense of inclusion within her guild’s community/culture:

Because we have a great deal of change, both outside of our community and within our community, especially our guild is very large. We work very hard to accommodate people through changes in life so that they don't have to go find another guild. (R2)

In addition to influencing inclusion within a guild, female Respondent 3 focused her influence to ensure members within her guild enjoyed the game as “an escape from...everyday life” (R3). She continued that guild members wanted a place to unwind “and if that place is a contentious and heavy place to be...What's the point?... having my members have the ability to like contribute to how we shape our community really helps that” (R3). However, she added that “...it's especially hard to do it as a female and have to deal with people's personalities and perceptions about how you should act” (R3).

Still, few participants shared different experiences with influencing their guild members but relied on stimulating change within their guild’s community and culture.

### ***Leaders Stimulating Change***

In stimulating change within their guild, participants, both, female and male shared similar experiences related to raiding, routines, and strategies in-game. For example, female Respondent 1 stated, “we are a pretty low-key guild and if we...sort of recommend or think about changing any kind of routine, there’s at least some amount of pushback” (R1). Likewise, male Respondent 11 explained that it can be risky to change what a guild has always done, especially in a raid:

...anytime you change a strategy and people die, that was a big risk... like changing strategy on one boss... All I wanted to do was change the positions of the tank... And there was some...minor amount of aversion to that. (R11)

Another participant expressed how he protected his guild's core values and politics from potential recruits with different views. Respondent 9 stated:

...the guild is very leftist and very queer... I want different things out of the game compared to what plenty of other guilds have. That's why I'm in this guild... And I just try to put it across that way to potential applicants... Like, well, maybe this is not a culture fit for you. Please go somewhere else. (R9)

### ***Leaders Focusing on Relationships***

Fostering relationships was important to guild culture and community for some participants. Their experiences varied; however, some participants had become long-life friends with guild members, remained in the same guild for years, or created an inseparable bond with their leadership. One participant, male Respondent 6 stated:

I keep being voted back in to various roles and several of them have told me that they'd go where I go next expansion because this sort of guild is the experience they were looking for and they want to stick with the team. (R6)

'another male participant stated, "I've said a few times at this point...the social aspect of it is what everyone was there for" (R7). Respondent 8 agreed on the social aspect.

Remembering his early morning raids, he just wanted to make "sure everybody was having a better time than they could have been for such an early morning" (R8).

Few participants remained in their guild for a long time. They were so in-tuned with their guild members that they sometimes felt like the guild mom or dad. For

instance, male Respondent 10 stated, that “...in this current guild and if [co-guild leader] was the mom...[he] was the dad that the kids come to after mom says no” (R10). This was a shared sentiment with Respondent 1 in the way her guide perceived her. She stated, “and so that kind of naturally puts me as like kind of this affectionate mom role that people view me as” (R1). Likewise, in fostering relationships with her guild members’ Respondent 3 stated:

I feel like I'm a mom setting up play dates really, that's the joke. I'm a mom, I set up a play date in a discord, I say, hey guys, you guys play the same class, why don't you guys' nerd out about it. (R3)

Some participants developed friendships that extended beyond the game.

Respondent 7 talked about his relationship with guild members. He expressed that his guild members were like family and some became “real-life friends” (R7). Respondent 7 also detailed his experiences with meeting several online guild members in-person:

I've been able to establish so many real-life friends and just meet so many different people and experience different things with these people that I wouldn't have otherwise got to experience if it weren't for the social aspect of it. (R7)

### **Summary**

Chapter IV began with a brief overview of the purpose statement, research questions, and methodology guiding the collection and analysis of data. This was followed by the review of the population, sample, and demographic information for all 13 participants. Data analysis identified four emergent themes, each based on the experiences of game leaders in the MMORPG WoW. Participants’ experiences highlighted (a) communicating/talking to guild members, (b) opinions on mentoring and

coaching, (c) insights on creativity and innovation in guild, and (d) views on guild culture and community. Within these major themes, I incorporated 10 subthemes into the analysis. Each participant experienced unique leadership experiences within their respective guilds.

Participants shared views on the perceived impact of transformational leadership within their guild. The sub questions covering each dimension of transformational leadership yielded several themes per dimension: (a) idealized influence: risk-taking, ethics/principles, and leading by example; (b) inspirational motivation: enthusiastic/optimistic and motivator/challenger; (c) intellectual stimulation: follower's views/opinions and encouragement; and (d) individualized consideration: considerate to others' needs and effective listening. The themes per dimension also included a data analysis of artifacts.

Data analysis on the second research question for two of the main themes included subthemes, comparing experiences between female and male participants. The first main theme, communicating/talking to guild members, developed the following subthemes: (a) assertive/confident communication, (b) strong communication, and (c) passive communication. The second main theme, views on guild culture and community, emerged the following subthemes: (a) leaders motivating and encouraging, (b) leaders influencing, (c) leaders stimulating change, and (d) leaders focusing on relationships.

Chapter V provides an expanded analysis of the findings for this study. It also includes implications for action, suggestions for further research, and conclusions drawn from the analysis of data.



## CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Summary**

This phenomenological qualitative research study identified and described World of Warcraft game leaders' perceived impact of Bass's Four I's of transformational leadership in their guilds. The four domains I explored within Bass's theoretical framework were idealized influence, inspirational motivations, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1983). An extensive and thorough analysis of interview and artifact data led to 21 themes across the data sources.

Interviewees were game leaders who resided and led in a virtual world that provided opportunities for leadership development (Reeves et al., 2008). Their experiences were similar to business leaders in that they faced organizational and strategic challenges (Reeves et al., 2008). Thus, I used Bass's theoretical framework, a well-tested theory, to analyze game leaders' experiences to better understand past research findings on online gaming and leadership development (Brown, 2011; Ee and Cho, 2012; Farrar, 2012; Koptur, 2016; Li-Chun and Chia-Ping, 2015; Lisk et al., 2012; Mysirlaki, 2012; Nuangjumnonga & Mitomo, 2012).

This chapter begins with a restatement of the purpose of the study; the research questions; and a summary of the research methods, population, and study sample. Following the restatements, I present a summary of major findings for each research question as well as unexpected findings that emerged from data analysis. In addition, I provide an overview of conclusions drawn and implications for action from these

findings. After an outline of the recommendations for future research, I provide closing remarks and reflections.

### **Purpose Statement**

This phenomenological study identified and described how current World of Warcraft (WoW) Game leaders perceived the impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds. In addition, I designed the study to identify and describe differences in the perceived impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership between male and female game leaders.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds?
2. What differences in perceived impact of Bass's Four I. of Transformational Leadership exist between male and female game leaders?

### **Sub Questions**

The following sub questions guided this study:

1. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Idealized Influence in their guilds?
2. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Inspirational Motivation in their guilds?
3. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Intellectual Stimulation in their guilds?
4. How do game leaders perceive the impact of Individualized Consideration in their guilds?

## **Methodology**

I used a phenomenological approach to identify and describe the experiences of World of Warcraft game leaders, a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game or MMORPG. I collected data using standardized, semiconstructed interviews and artifact analysis and used predetermined questions that aligned with the research questions to obtain in-depth information about the perceptions game leaders in WoW held about the impact of Bass's Four I's of transformational leadership within their respective guilds (Appendix D).

This study, approved by UMASS Global's Institutional Review Board, utilized research questions, research design, and interview protocol (Appendix J). Participants received informed consent and the university's bill of rights documents detailing the data collection process. Participants electronically signed consent forms prior to interviews. I conducted the interviews via Discord and transcribed them in-real time through an application called Scriptly. I also collected artifacts from online, public forums, articles, and blogs.

## **Population**

Game leaders (guild leaders, officers, or raid leaders) in the MMORPG WoW served as the population for this qualitative study. I selected a more manageable subset that conformed to the specific criteria from this population to generalize results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

## **Sampling Frame/Target Population**

The target population for this study was a more refined group of individuals with specific attributes of interest and relevance compared to the general population (Asia et

al., 2017). For manageability I used a smaller, targeted population of game leaders playing Word of Warcraft. These game leaders used the chat application Discord, which includes voice, video, and texting.

In accordance, the sampling frame pulled from the WoW population were game leaders on WoW Discord servers, a representation of the total group of individuals from which a sample could be drawn (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This study used nonprobability sampling techniques, purposive and convenience sampling. Selected participants were accessible and met pre-established criteria (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

## **Major Findings**

### **Research Question 1: How Do Game Leaders Perceive the Impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership in Their Guilds?**

#### ***Major Finding 1***

“Leadership today and in the future relies much on communication technology...many leaders and followers communicate more electronically than face-to-face” (Bass & Riggio, 2005). In this finding, game leaders referenced how communication was one of the most important skills a leader could possess. Their perceptions in this study show that communication skills were essential in projecting their visions, goals, and objectives; fostering an environment where guild members could openly engage and interact with them, i.e. asking questions, offering opinions, and sharing ideas. Participants experienced how communication enabled them to help guild members achieve goals, succeed in their roles, motivate, and improve themselves. This finding is consistent with earlier research which found that gaming communities foster

communication, interaction, and facilitate cooperation (Childress & Braswell, 2006). More so, it aligns with seminal authors' views on transformational leadership who posited there was an inseparable link between leadership and followers, brought to the forefront when a leader focuses on goals and is cognizant of their followers' needs (Burns, 1978). Additionally, Burns (1978) continued stating that transformational leaders engage with followers, creating a connection that raises their level of motivation and morality. Bass and Riggio (2006) added that transformational leaders were more efficient at getting followers committed to organizational goals, due to their "better abilities to communicate with followers" (p. 130). By communicating with guild members, game leaders enable followers to assess the game leader's authenticity and gain a better understanding of their leader's ability to be empathetic, actively listen, and have a genuine interest in them (Mbindyo et al., 2021).

### ***Major Finding 2***

Participants shared experiences about their respective guild's community which focused on a culture of inclusivity, collaboration, and relationship-building. Their communities, according to participants, also centered on ethics/morals, the identity of their guild. Participants expressed that their guild community and culture afforded them the ability to motivate and encourage guild members, influence guild members, focus on relationships with guild members, and stimulate change within their guild. "We work really hard...to keep our community engaged and cross collaborate... get really strategic and really intentional about what we are, who are we, what do we offer as a community" (R2). Participants agreed that between guild members, WoW guild communities aided in the development of "tight, lifelong (R13)" friendships.

This finding supports previous leadership research on how online leaders can establish an environment for success by focusing on relationships, common goals, challenges (Farrar, 2012) and collaborating with one another (Li-Chun & Chia-Ping, 2015). In addition, Bass (1993) emphasized that effective organizations require both tactical and strategic thinking as well as culture building by their leaders. They continued, stating that an “organization’s culture develops in large part from its leadership while the culture of an organization can also affect the development of leadership” (Bass, 1985).

### ***Major Finding 3***

Research on transformational leadership explains that within the domain/characteristic of idealized influence, a transformational leader takes risk, is ethical, and role models (Bass & Reggio, 2006). Participants shared varying experiences on risk-taking. These experiences included taking risks on new strategies, introducing a new guild member into leadership, and completing in-game quests (tasks) against the META. Bass and Riggio (2006) stated, “...that transformational leaders are...more likely to be risk takers” (p. 168).

Still, the most cohesive or agreed upon sentiments related to ethics/morals and role modeling. According to Bass (2005), a leader specifies the importance of having a strong sense of purpose. It is an emotional characteristic of transformational leadership that enables followers to identify with and emulate their leaders (Antonakis, 2012; Northouse, 2016). Participants expressed how they viewed role modeling, a way to lead by example. They also focused on their respective guild’s identity, stressing the importance of sharing their ethics/morals with guild members and abiding by them.

#### ***Major Finding 4***

According to Bass (2006), the qualities of a transformational leader within the domain of inspirational motivation includes being enthusiastic and optimistic, a motivator, and a leader who provides challenges to followers. Effectively, most participants shared similar experiences on motivating and challenging their guild members. This domain enables followers to challenge their personal constraints and boundaries, motivating them to take greater responsibility for leadership (Avolio, 2005). Shared participant experiences focused heavily on accomplishments where they motivated their guild members to successfully meet challenges the game leader presented. Previous researchers on inspirational motivation posed that leaders who communicate high expectations to followers, inspire these followers by motivating them to become committed to the shared vision of the organization (Northouse, 2016).

#### ***Major Finding 5***

The fifth major finding of this study is that game leaders encouraged guild members to share creative and new ideas within the guild and listened to their guild members' ideas. Supported by previous research, Korejan and Shahbazi (2016) explained that leaders create an environment where there is a free flow of ideas and imaginations, enabling followers and subordinates to attempt to reach new techniques and approaches. Similarly, Bass (2006) added that intellectual stimulation is a way for transformational leaders to “stimulate their follower's efforts to be innovative and creative” (p. 7).

#### ***Major Finding 6***

“Leaders need to be individually considerate and understand followers' expectations of leaders” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 184). Participants agreed that being

considerate to guild members was important. They shared experiences that included listening to and being considerate to guild members' needs. Research established that leaders practicing individualized consideration treat their followers uniquely and with care (Northouse, 2016). Moreover, leaders demonstrated individualized consideration by attending to each of their follower's needs (Towler, 2019). Additionally, participants concurred that being considerate to guild members included understanding them as people first: what they wanted, where they came from, and who they were; thus, making them aware of the unique talents that each follower brought to the organization (Towler, 2019).

**Research Question 2: What Differences in Perceived Impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership Exist Between Men and Women Game Leaders?**

***Major Finding 1***

“Women have become generally more assertive, less dependent, better educated, and more career oriented” (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Female participants displayed more assertive and stronger communication than male participants when communicating with guild members. Out of the 13 participants, four were female. These four female game leaders were assertive, expressing their adherence to their guild's core values, goals, and morals. This finding is supported by researchers noting that transformational leaders possess strong internal values and ideals, are visionary, and have a strong sense of purpose (Avolio, 2004; Bass, 2005; Northouse, 2016). Moreover, Bass and Riggio (2006) posed that females, as emotional communicators, communicate inspiring emotional messages. Females have some advantage over males, as they have good interpersonal



skills (Riggio, 1992) “...providing individualized consideration and being intellectually stimulating” (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

### ***Major Finding 2***

Female participants experienced barriers in communicating with guild members based on their gender. They agreed that as females they had a harder time in communicating with guild members. Negative, cultural, and societal attitudes towards female leaders could attribute to these communication barriers (Larsson & Alvinus, 2020). According to Eagly and Carli (2003), females in leadership roles face disadvantages surrounding prejudice and stereotypes when attempting to assess or compare differences in leadership styles between females and males.

Although females faced communication barriers, participant demographic findings showed that female participants possessed higher levels of collegiate degrees to include one with a masters. Compared to males, females earn 5% of bachelor's degrees, 61% of master's degrees, and more than half of the doctoral degrees in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Supporting research attributes this demographical spread to the fact that 95% of female students enroll and attend coeducational colleges and universities, resulting in females conferring the larger portion of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Albeit communication hurdles, female game leaders possessed education-enforced skills to navigate communication with their guild members.

### **Conclusions**

After the review of literature and the findings of this study, I offer the following conclusions:

- Game leaders frequently and consistently communicate with their guild members. Capitalizing on communication technology advancements, game leaders actively pursue ways to effectively communicate with guild members. They encourage two-way communication exchanges with guild members that considers and is tailored to their guild member's needs. Literature confirmed that personalized interactions such as a leader remembering previous conversations, a leader being aware of individual concerns, or a leader seeing a guild member as a person are characteristics of individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2005).
- When game leaders clearly articulate their vision, they add inspiration and increase the intrinsic value to goal accomplishment (Bass & Riggio, 2005). Focusing on goals and objectives, game leaders visualize successful ventures and embolden guild members. They share their visions and clearly communicate their expectations to guild members. This aligns with earlier findings which describe leaders as being compelling when they articulate a vision of the future under the domain of inspirational motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2005).
- Game leaders establish an organizational culture that emphasizes principles and customs. Intrinsic to the guild, game leaders focus on cultivating and fostering an identity. According to Bass and Riggio (2005), organizational culture affects leadership as much as its leadership affects culture. "It is the glue that holds the organization together as a source of identity and distinctive competence" (Bass, 1992). Under idealized influence, transformational leaders emphasize the greater good to their highly developed moral values and self-determined sense of identity (Avolio & Gibbons, 1988).

- Game leaders intentionally and actively pursue new ideas and fresh perspectives. They provided an environment where guild members could share new and creative ideas, supporting guild members as they attempted their new and creative approaches. This may explain how they intellectually stimulated one another, challenged assumptions, and questioned traditional ways of doing things (Bass & Riggio, 2005). Guild members felt comfortable offering new ideas. The game leader may intellectually stimulate their guild members by supporting followers who voiced unusual or provocative ideas (Bass & Riggio, 2005).
- Possessing an equal to a higher capacity to lead, female game leaders rivaled male game leaders in leadership roles. They used emotional communication to communicate with guild members effectively and accurately. Previous research indicated that females are better emotional communicators than males (Bass & Riggio, 2005; DePaulo & Friedman, 1998). Although hindered by gender-based barriers in communicating, female game leaders were open and authentic, and communicated with guild members without guilt, shame, or embarrassment (Hernández-Jorge et al., 2022). In addition, female game leaders maintained an attitude of respect and tolerance, valuing the preferences, experiences, and ways of dealing with guild members (Hernández-Jorge et al., 2022).

### **Implication for Action**

After the review of literature, research findings, and study conclusions of this study, I suggest the following implications for action. See Appendix K for the alignment between major findings, conclusions, and implications for action.

- Game leaders should vigorously work on communicating with their guild members, gaining a better understanding of their needs. They should exploit varying mediums of communication. In addition, game leaders should establish a system or structure of communication within the guild that enables guild members to interact with game leaders, creating opportunities for personalized interactions. As part of the communication system or structure, game leaders should develop a communication statement or outlined plan that notes how, when, and where members can tap into dialogue with the leader and other guild members. With chat apps such as Discord, game leaders can create various channels with specific topics and interest areas.
- To be a compelling leader, game leaders should articulate and visibly communicate their visions such as having an outlined, written plan in pursuit of their vision. Game leaders should find ways to convey their vision, utilizing available means of communication. Additionally, the game leader should steer their guilds towards the vision by aligning this vision to their guild's purpose, goals, and aspirations. This can nurture a sense collaboration across their guilds, working together to accomplish these visionary aspirations. Moreover, game leaders should find ways to stimulate the participation of guild members towards their vision, motivating them to bring the vision to fruition. Such stimulation might include breaking down the vision to smaller, attainable tasks.
- Game leaders should actively strive for an organizational culture steeped in transparent communication, collaboration, mentoring, coaching, and incentivized with group activities. They should prioritize developing their guild's identity by

reinforcing norms and behaviors. To do so, game leaders should work with guild members, strategically and purposefully developing a charter that defines who they are, what they stand for, their purpose, and what they aim to accomplish. Establishing a charter can help game leaders provide guild members with opportunities for engagement, relationship-building, motivation, and empowerment.

- Game leaders should be intentional about encouraging creativity and innovation within their guild. They should have open dialogue with guild members, creating a safe place to share ideas and suggestions. This may include creating specific chats or channels in apps like Discord to inspire guild members and promote discourse on novel ideas or creative ventures. More so, game leaders should widely advertise channels or chat rooms as part of the guild's charter, increasing the organization's resilience and adaptability to inherent changes within the gaming world such as new expansions, adventures, raids, or dungeons.
- Organizations should consider MMORPGs like WoW as a viable tool for developing leaders. With this research study and real-world shifts towards online communication, collaboration, team building, and creativity; organizations should steer away from archaic methodologies and embrace gamification as an addendum. Today's leaders need practical, immersive environments to hone and develop their leadership skills.
- Game developers should provide more opportunities and spaces to develop female leaders in online gaming. The game developers, for one, should practice inclusivity by creating safe, misogynous-free spaces for potential female online

players seeking advice, mentors, and coaches to develop as leaders within the gaming world. Female players have shown they have the capacity and ability to lead, at times surpassing their male counterparts. Thus, game developers should aim to provide safe spaces void of bias, threats, and criticism.

- Game developers should showcase leading female online players, increasing awareness of female capacity, competence, and successes. Game developers should promote inclusivity and diversity, lessening negative sentiments towards female online players. This may include portraying female avatars in games like WoW as assertive, powerful beings, focusing on their abilities versus their sensualized representations. By reducing the use of overly sexualized female avatars and characters, game developers can begin to herald a culture of diversity and inclusion.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As one of the largest Massively Multiplayer Role-Playing Games, World of Warcraft creates an environment for leadership to emerge. This study has suggested that the transformational leadership theoretical framework by Bass impacts online game leadership. To further explore and extend literature related to this topic, the I offer the following recommendations for future research:

- This research study sampled participants who were game leaders and members of WoW community Discord servers. Future research should focus on replicating this study with a larger population that includes more female game leaders and marginalized minorities.

- Another recommendation is to use the interview guide to learn more about the experiences of game leaders in other MMORPGs like WoW to determine how their perceptions differ from those of WoW game leaders.
- Several findings in this research study related to the use of communication. A study focused on the significance of communication within a guild could aid in expanding the literature on online gaming leadership.
- Future research should also include the experiences of game leaders who have left their guilds. A research study focused on discovering the factors explored in this study that fueled their decision to leave the guild could address a potential gap in the literature.
- This study's results indicated that community and culture were vital to game leaders. A study examining the particular factors and practices that develop community and culture could provide significant insights in online gaming leadership.

### **Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

Research on online gaming and leadership predominately surfaced in the last 10 to 12 years (Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Gupta & Pathak, 2018; Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2020; Schwarzmuller et al., 2018; Toepfl, 2018). Studies have shown that online gaming and leadership development are emergent and necessitate more research (Brown, 2011; Ee & Cho, 2012; Farrar, 2012; Koptur, 2016; Li-Chun & Chia-Ping, 2015; Lisk et al., 2012; Mysirlaki, 2012; Nuangjumnonga & Mitomo, 2012). However, what is not constant or even replicated are the theoretical frameworks supporting these studies. Still, the research currently available on leadership development does not focus on specific

leadership skills or concepts. Some focus on team collaboration, while others focus on communication or disparate leadership styles. This research effort sought to address this deficit by studying game leaders who have led guilds for at least one year.

As a 19-year veteran WoW online player, myself, it was fascinating to learn a substantial amount about the leadership experiences and perceptions of game leaders. The research has increased my interest in leadership development and the integral aspects of community and culture. Moreover, it was surprising to uncover how game leaders fostered a culture of well-being in their guilds that included building relationships and connections, giving purpose/significance, allowing self-expression, and developing competence. Better stated, game leaders met their guild members' common needs for human needs.

I wholeheartedly believe that WoW game leaders are exercising leadership skills tantamount to real life organizations. More so, it was impactful to explore the experiences of female game leaders, having to navigate through misogyny and successfully assert themselves as leaders within their respective guilds, a testament to female leadership capacity.

I partially designed this study due to personal experiences as a guild member in various WoW guilds. Some of the experiences were positive, while others were negative. Still, interviews and artifact data helped confirm findings that online games similar to World of Warcraft provide an environment for leadership development. Game leaders develop leadership skills while managing and leading their guilds. They communicate, provide challenges, take risks, motivate, encourage, listen, and consider the needs of their guild members which are key elements of transformational leadership.



Flash forward to present-day, online games like MMORPGs with guild members across states, countries, and even time zones serve as a training tool for game leaders. Today's organizations have shifted, moving from in person meetings to online, virtual gatherings. These organizations copiously rely on platforms such Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and other virtual communication platforms. In effect, game leaders, immersed in virtual communication, are readily positioned to thrive in today's organizations, having the knowledge and experience of leading in an online world.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions

#### Opening

1. As an overview, can you describe how you feel about your leadership experiences within your guild?

#### Idealized Influence

2. How do you feel risk-taking is perceived in your guild?

*Prompt: What examples can you provide of experience with risk-taking in your guild?*

#### Inspirational Motivation

3. Describe your experience with challenging your guild and what motivated them to take on the challenge?

*Prompt: What might be an observation you had while your guild experience a challenge?*

#### Intellectual Stimulation

4. What experiences do you feel have encouraged or impacted creativity and innovation in your guild?

*Prompt: What might be a situation where you experienced creativity and innovation in your guild?*

### **Individualized Consideration**

5. Looking back at your experiences with the guild, what practices, if any, have you used to coach and mentor guild members?

*Prompt: Describe an example of how guild members reacted your mentoring or coaching.*

### **Differences in Perceived Impact of Transformational Leadership**

6. How would you describe your guild members' feelings towards your leadership style?

*Prompt: What feedback, if any, have you received from guild members on your leadership?*

### **Closing**

7. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your perceptions on or experiences with how your leadership impacts your guild?

### **Demographic Questions**

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Ethnicity:
4. Highest level of education:
5. How long have you been a leader in World of Warcraft?

## APPENDIX B

### Field-Test Questions

#### Interviewer Reflection Questions

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

#### Observer Field Test Questions

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?

5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

## APPENDIX C

### Field Test Participant Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview you should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation. Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

Before the brief post interview discussion, give the interviewee a copy of the interview protocol. If their answers imply that some kind of improvement is necessary, follow up for specificity.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to answer the question?
2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?
3. Were the questions clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked? If the interview indicates some uncertainty, be sure to find out where in the interview it occurred.
4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing or not properly explained? Please give specifics.
5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview?

## APPENDIX D

### Qualitative Study Interview Protocol

**Start Interview:** “My name is Yarissa Marn and I am a director of an early childhood program. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts Global in

Organizational Leadership. I am conducting research to identify and describe how current World of Warcraft (WoW) Game Leaders perceive the impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds. In addition, the study was designed to identify and describe differences in perceived impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership between men and women game leaders.

I am conducting interviews with game leaders in WoW. The information you give, along with the others, hopefully, will provide a clear picture of perceptions on transformational leadership characteristics in online gaming. The questions I will be asking are the same for everyone participating in the study. I will be reading most of what I say. The reason for this is to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating leaders will be conducted pretty much in the same manner.”

**Informed Consent** *(required for Dissertation Research)*

“I would like to remind you that any information obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas. Did you receive the Informed Consent and University of Massachusetts Global Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?” *(collect the signed documents at this point, bring blanks in case they do not have it on hand, get it signed before proceeding)*

“We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point in time during the interview, you may ask that I skip a question or stop the interview altogether. For the ease of our discussion and accuracy, I will record the conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent. Do you have any questions before we begin? Just a reminder that this study is about your perceptions on the impact of transformational leadership characteristics in your guild. Okay, let’s get started, and thanks so much for your time.”

The definitions for idealized influence, inspirational motivations, intellectual motivation, and individualized consideration (and the questions for today) were sent out a week ago. *(Provide an extra copy and give it to them in case they do not have it in front of them).*

*(Introduce definition of key concepts before start and pause before moving on to the next one - so they can follow along. Suggestion: Thank you and we are now moving to the next section.)*

## **Probes**

Possible Probes,

1. *“Would you expand upon that a bit?”*
2. *“Do you have more to add?”*
3. *“What did you mean by ...”*
4. *“Why do think that was the case?”*
5. *“Could you please tell me more about.... “*
6. *“Can you give me an example of ....”*
7. *“How did you feel about that?”*

*When you review, please add others you think would be appropriate.*

**End Interview:** “Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of our research are known, we can send you a copy of our findings.”



## APPENDIX E

### UMASS Global University Institutional Review Board

#### Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects.

The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Brandman University IRB

Adopted

November 2013

## APPENDIX F

### **Informed Consent and Audio Recording Release**

#### **INFORMATION ABOUT:**

The perceptions of game leaders on the impact of Bass's 4 I's of transformational leadership in their guilds.

#### **RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:**

Yarissa Marn

#### **PURPOSE OF STUDY:**

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Yarissa Marn, a doctoral candidate of Organizational Leadership from the School of Education at University of Massachusetts Global. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and describe how current World of Warcraft (WoW) Guild Leaders perceive the impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership in their guilds. In addition, the study was designed to identify and describe differences in perceived impact of Bass's Four I's of Transformational Leadership between male and female guild leaders.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will include an interview with the identified student investigator. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and will be scheduled at a time and location of your convenience. The interview questions will pertain to your perceptions and your responses will be confidential. Each participant will have an identifying code and names will not be used in data analysis. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

#### **I understand that:**

- a) The researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes safe-guarded in a locked file drawer or password protected digital file to which the researcher will have sole access.
- b) The interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted, and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings, transcripts and notes taken by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be destroyed.
- c) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not to participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I choose. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

d) If I have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Yarissa Marn, at [ymarn@mail.umassglobal.edu](mailto:ymarn@mail.umassglobal.edu) or by phone at 707-639-2450; or Dr. Hightower (chair) at [whightow@umassglobal.edu](mailto:whightow@umassglobal.edu)

e) No information that identifies you me will be released without my separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, you I will be so informed and consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.

f) If I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, University of Massachusetts Global, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

Signature of Principal Investigator

APPENDIX G

**CITI Program Certificate of Completion**



Completion Date 21-May-2022  
Expiration Date N/A  
Record ID 48965677

This is to certify that:

**Yarissa Marn**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Human Subjects Research**  
(Curriculum Group)  
**Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers**  
(Course Learner Group)  
**1 - Basic**  
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**University of Massachusetts Global**

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.



Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w56b8f3d1-8250-4a46-b27e-ccfb9e53d03d-48965677](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w56b8f3d1-8250-4a46-b27e-ccfb9e53d03d-48965677)

APPENDIX H

Synthesis Matrix

	46	139	57	32	56	1	17
Synthesis Matrix	Theoretical Framework	Leadership	Online Community	WoW	Women in Leadership	Research Methodology	Methodology
Abu-Tineh, A. M., Khasawneh, S. A., & Al-Omari, A. A. (2008). Kouzes and Posner's transformational leadership model in practice: The case of Jordanian schools. <i>Leadership &amp; Organization Development Journal</i> , 29(8), 648–660.		1					
Akindele, S. T., & Afolabi, Y. A. (2013). Leadership and its place in organizations: A theoretical synthetic analysis (Note 1). <i>Public Administration Research</i> , 2(1), 33. <a href="https://doi.org/10.5539/par.v2n1p33">https://doi.org/10.5539/par.v2n1p33</a>		1			1		
Alanazi, T. R., Alharthey, B. K., & Rasli, A. (2013). Overview of path-goal leadership theory. <i>Sains Humanika</i> , 64(2).	1	1					
Algaba, E., Brink, R., Salonen, H., & Vidal-Puga, J. (2022). Essays in game theory in tribute to Francesc Carreras – SING 15. <i>Annals of Operations Research</i> . 318. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s10479-022-05000-y">https://doi.org/10.1007/s10479-022-05000-y</a> .		1	1	1			
Amar, S. (2023). Why everyone wins with more women in leadership. <i>Forbes</i> . <a href="https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2023/02/07/why-everyone-wins-with-more-women-in-leadership/?sh=1f62adc13cdd">https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2023/02/07/why-everyone-wins-with-more-women-in-leadership/?sh=1f62adc13cdd</a>		1			1		
Andersen, J. & Hansson, P. (2011). At the end of the road? On differences between women and men in leadership behavior. <i>Leadership &amp; Organization Development Journal</i> , 32. 428-441. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731111146550">https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731111146550</a> .		1			1		

Antonakis, J. (2012). Transformational and charismatic leadership. In D. V. Day & J. Antonakis (Eds.), <i>The nature of leadership</i> (2nd ed.), 256–288. Sage.		1					
Apolinario, T. (2022). How many people play world of warcraft? Fiction Horizon. <a href="https://fictionhorizon.com/how-many-people-play-world-of-warcraft/">https://fictionhorizon.com/how-many-people-play-world-of-warcraft/</a>			1	1			
Atlantic Marketing Team. (2019). Follow her lead. The Atlantic. <a href="https://www.theatlantic.com/sponsored/deloitte-2019/follow-her-lead/3052/">https://www.theatlantic.com/sponsored/deloitte-2019/follow-her-lead/3052/</a>		1			1		
Avolio, B. J. (1999). Full leadership development: Building the vital forces in	1	1					
Avolio, B.J. (2011). Full range leadership development. Sage. <a href="https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483349107">https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483349107</a> ,	1	1					
Avolio, B. J., & Gibbons, T. C. (1988). Developing transformational leaders: A life span approach. In J. A. Conger & R. N. Kanungo, <i>Charismatic leadership: The elusive factor in organizational effectiveness</i> , 276–308. Jossey-	1	1					
Avolio, B. J., Waldman, D. A., & Yammarino, F. J. (1991). Leading in the 1990's: The four I's of transformational leadership [Article]. <i>Journal of European Industrial Training</i> , 15(4). <a href="http://doi.org/10.1108/03090599110143366/full/">http://doi.org/10.1108/03090599110143366/full/</a>	1	1					
Bass, B. M. (1985). <i>Leadership and performance beyond expectations</i> . Free Press.	1	1					
Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. <i>Organizational dynamics</i> , 18(3), 19-	1	1					

Bass, B. & Riggio, R. E. (2006). Transformational leadership (2nd ed.).	1	1					
Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1993). Transformational leadership and organizational culture	1	1					
Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., & Atwater, L. (1996). The transformational and transactional leadership of men and women. Applied Psychology, 45(1), 5-34.	1	1			1		
Barling, J., Slater, F., & Kelloway, K.. (2000). Transformational Leadership and Emotional Intelligence: An Exploratory Study. Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 21, 157-161.	1	1					
Barnett, J., & Coulson, M. (2010). Virtually real: A psychological perspective on massively multiplayer online games. Review of General Psychology, 14(2), 167-179.			1	1			
Bartsch, A., & Hübner, S. (2005). Towards a theory of emotional communication. CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, 7(4). <a href="https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1278">https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1278</a>		1	1	1			
Beasley, D., & Mbps, T. (2002). The growth of the online gaming industry relating to the Internet. citeseer. ist. psu. edu/555749. html.		1	1	1			
Bennis, W. G., & Nanus, B. (1985). Leaders: The strategies for taking charge. Harper & Row.	1	1					
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## APPENDIX I

### **Introduction Discord Post**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts Global, conducting a study exploring World of Warcraft game leaders' perceptions on the impact of Bass's 4 I's of transformational leadership characteristics: individualized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration in their guilds. You provided your username pseudonym in response to my invitation from Discord. I would very much appreciate including your perceptions on the impact of transformational leadership characteristics in your guild. If you volunteer to participate, I will want to schedule a one-hour interview via Discord in November or December. All interview responses are confidential, and the interview questions will be available to you before we meet. Please let me know if you would be willing to help contribute to this study.

Thank you for your time,

Yarissa Marn

Discord Username: Lisalisa

## APPENDIX J

### IRB Approval to Conduct Research

From: **Institutional Review Board** <[my@umassglobal.edu](mailto:my@umassglobal.edu)>  
Date: Mon, Dec 4, 2023 at 12:08 PM  
Subject: IRB Application Approved: Yarissa Marn  
To: <[ymarn@mail.umassglobal.edu](mailto:ymarn@mail.umassglobal.edu)>  
Cc: <[dlong@umassglobal.edu](mailto:dlong@umassglobal.edu)>, <[whightow@umassglobal.edu](mailto:whightow@umassglobal.edu)>, <[irb@umassglobal.edu](mailto:irb@umassglobal.edu)>

Dear Yarissa Marn,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at [IRB.umassglobal.edu](http://IRB.umassglobal.edu)

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

IRB  
Academic Affairs  
**UMass Global**  
16355 Laguna Canyon Road  
Irvine, CA 92618  
[irb@umassglobal.edu](mailto:irb@umassglobal.edu)  
[www.umassglobal.edu](http://www.umassglobal.edu)

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at [irb@umassglobal.edu](mailto:irb@umassglobal.edu).

## APPENDIX K

### Alignment Matrix: Major Findings, Conclusions, and Implications for Action

Major Findings	Conclusion	Implication for Action
<p><b>RQ1 Finding 1</b> - In this finding, game leaders referenced how communication was one of the most important skills a leader could possess. Their perceptions in this study show that communication skills were essential in projecting their visions, goals, and objectives; fostering an environment where guild members could openly engage and interact with them, i.e. asking questions, offering opinions, and sharing ideas.</p> <p><b>RQ2 Finding 1</b> - Female participants displayed more assertive and stronger communication than male participants when communicating with guild members. Out of the 13 participants, four were female. These four female game leaders were assertive, expressing their adherence to their guild's core values, goals, and morals.</p>	<p>Game leaders frequently and consistently communicate with their guild members. Capitalizing on communication technology advancements, game leaders actively pursue ways to effectively communicate with guild members. They encourage two-way communication exchanges with guild members that considers and is tailored to their guild member's needs.</p> <p>Focusing on goals and objectives, game leaders visualize successful ventures and embolden guild members. They share their visions and clearly communicate their expectations to guild members.</p>	<p>Game leaders should vigorously work on communicating with their guild members, gaining a better understanding of their needs. They should exploit varying mediums of communication. In addition, game leaders should establish a system or structure of communication within the guild that enables guild members to interact with game leaders, creating opportunities for personalized interactions. As part of the communication system or structure, game leaders should develop a communication statement or outlined plan that notes how, when, and where members can tap into dialogue with the leader and other guild members. With chat apps such as Discord, game leaders can create various channels with specific topics and interest areas.</p> <p>Game leaders should articulate and visibly communicate their visions such as having an outlined, written plan in pursuit of their vision. Game leaders should find ways to convey their vision, utilizing available means of communication. Additionally, the game leader should steer their guilds towards the vision by aligning this vision to their guild's purpose, goals, and aspirations.</p>

Major Findings	Conclusion	Implication for Action
<p><b>RQ1 Finding 2</b> - Participants shared experiences about their respective guild's community which focused on a culture of inclusivity, collaboration, and relationship-building. Their communities, according to participants, also centered on ethics/morals, the identity of their guild. Participants expressed that their guild community and culture afforded them the ability to motivate and encourage guild members, influence guild members, focus on relationships with guild members, and stimulate change within their guild.</p> <p><b>RQ1 Finding 3</b> - Participants shared varying experiences on risk-taking. These experiences included taking risks on new strategies, introducing a new guild member into leadership, and completing in-game quests (tasks) against the META. Participants expressed how they viewed role modeling, a way to lead by example. They also focused on their respective guild's identity, stressing the importance of sharing their ethics/morals with guild members and abiding by them.</p> <p><b>RQ1 Finding 4</b> - The qualities of a transformational leader within the domain of inspirational motivation include being enthusiastic and optimistic, a motivator, and a leader who provides challenges to followers. Effectively, most participants shared similar experiences on motivating and challenging their guild members. Shared participant experiences focused heavily on accomplishments where they motivated their guild members to successfully meet challenges the game leader presented.</p> <p><b>RQ1 Finding 5</b> - The fifth major finding of this study is that game leaders encouraged guild members to share creative and new ideas within the guild and listened to their guild members' ideas.</p> <p><b>RQ1 Finding 6</b> - Participants agreed that being considerate to guild members was important. They shared experiences that included listening to and being considerate to guild members' needs. Moreover, leaders demonstrated individualized consideration by attending to each of their follower's needs. Additionally, participants concurred that being considerate to guild members included understanding them as people first: what they wanted, where they came from, and who they were; thus, making them aware of the unique talents that each follower brought to the organization.</p>	<p>Game leaders establish an organizational culture that emphasizes principles and customs. Intrinsic to the guild, game leaders focus on cultivating and fostering an identity.</p> <p>Game leaders intentionally and actively pursue new ideas and fresh perspectives. They provided an environment where guild members could share new and creative ideas, supporting guild members as they attempted their new and creative approaches.</p>	<p>Game leaders should actively strive for an organizational culture steeped in transparent communication, collaboration, mentoring, coaching, and incentivized with group activities. They should prioritize developing their guild's identity by reinforcing norms and behaviors. To do so, game leaders should work with guild members, strategically and purposefully developing a charter that defines who they are, what they stand for, their purpose, and what they aim to accomplish. Establishing a charter can help game leaders provide guild members with opportunities for engagement, relationship-building, motivation, and empowerment.</p> <p>Game leaders should be intentional about encouraging creativity and innovation within their guild. They should have open dialogue with guild members, creating a safe place to share ideas and suggestions. This may include creating specific chats or channels in apps like Discord to inspire guild members and promote discourse on novel ideas or creative ventures. More so, game leaders should widely advertise channels or chat rooms as part of the guild's charter, increasing the organization's resilience and adaptability to inherent changes within the gaming world such as new expansions, adventures, raids, or dungeons.</p> <p>Organizations should consider MMORPGs like WoW as a viable tool for developing leaders. With this research study and real-world shifts towards online- communication, collaboration, team building, and creativity; organizations should steer away from archaic methodologies and embrace gamification as an addendum. Today's leaders need practical, immersive environments to hone and develop their leadership skills.</p>

Major Findings	Conclusion	Implication for Action
<p><b>RQ2 Finding 2</b> - Female participants experienced barriers in communicating with guild members based on their gender. They agreed that as females they had a harder time in communicating with guild members.</p>	<p>Possessing an equal to a higher capacity to lead, female game leaders rivaled male game leaders in leadership roles. They used emotional communication to communicate with guild members effectively and accurately. Although hindered by gender-based barriers in communicating, female game leaders were open and authentic, and communicated with guild members without guilt, shame, or embarrassment. In addition, female game leaders maintained an attitude of respect and tolerance, valuing the preferences, experiences, and ways of dealing with guild members.</p>	<p>Game developers should provide more opportunities and spaces to develop female leaders in online gaming. The game developers, for one, should practice inclusivity by creating safe, misogynous-free spaces for potential female online players seeking advice, mentors, and coaches to develop as leaders within the gaming world. Female players have shown they have the capacity and ability to lead, at times surpassing their male counterparts. Thus, game developers should aim to provide safe spaces void of bias, threats, and criticism.</p> <p>Game developers should showcase leading female online players, increasing awareness of female capacity, competence, and successes. Game developers should promote inclusivity and diversity, lessening negative sentiments towards female online players. This may include portraying female avatars in games like WoW as assertive, powerful beings, focusing on their abilities versus their sensualized representations. By reducing the use of overly sexualized female avatars and characters, game developers can begin to herald a culture of diversity and inclusion.</p>