

1-2023

Initiation Into Formal Organization, Leadership and Top Leadership: An Exploratory Study

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Recommended Citation

Lucy, Denise, "Initiation Into Formal Organization, Leadership and Top Leadership: An Exploratory Study" (2023). *Barowsky School of Business | Conference Presentations*. 1. <https://scholar.dominican.edu/barowsky-school-of-business-conference-presentations/1>

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Winter 2023 Online Conference

January 4-6, 2023

“Initiation Into Formal Organization, Leadership and Top Leadership:
An Exploratory Study”

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**DOMINICAN
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**Institute for
Leadership Studies**



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Who are we ...



THE PA PLATFORM

DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SAN RAFAEL, CA

Dominican University of California

Founded 1890 –Marin County (N of Golden Gate Bridge) California



- **Our Mission** – Educate and prepare students to be ethical leaders and socially responsible global citizens who incorporate the Dominican values of study, reflection, community and service into their lives.

- **Our Values** - The University is committed to diversity, sustainability and the integration of the liberal arts, the sciences and professional programs.
- Bachelors thru Doctorates
- Credential and Exec Ed

Andrew P. Barowsky School of Business

- Accredited by AACSB



- We facilitate students to develop a global orientation, an entrepreneurial attitude, a commitment to sustainability, and a strong sense of ethics and social responsibility.

Institute for Leadership Studies

Creating Leaders at all Levels



- Through the study, teaching, and practice of effective ethical leadership, the Institute for Leadership Studies develops people to become better leaders.
- Our goal is to facilitate positive individual, organizational and societal change, engaged citizenship, and socially responsible leadership.

Our Leadership Think Tank Mission

- Conducts research and convenes forums to advance the study, teaching and practice of effective leadership.
- Leadership Think Tank scholars form a learning community, contributing to
 - academic literature and applied research
 - seeking to develop innovations and best practices that improve leadership and team development,
 - and systems for constructive change in the workplace and society.



Study's Purpose Explored Personal CEO Leadership Journeys in Organizations

- To better prepare leaders for the personal challenges



Capture the key experiences of moving up in formal organization.

Literature Review Suggests

Career literature focuses on

- How individuals advance hierarchically through promotions
- Performance outcomes that qualify them for advancement.

Subjective experience of moving up to executive leadership is understudied.

- What are the trials and tribulations of that journey?



Theories Applied to Analyze the Stories Are:

- Applied theories to understand:

- 1) Stakes of the events
- 2) Subjective impact of stakes
 - INITIATION Theory



Initiation Theory Applied to Leadership Theory is a New Application

- Primarily utilized in Anthropology
- One goes through test or trial
- Pass or fail, there is “coming of age”
- When going through rituals, the person is not same person anymore
- Going through these stages, status has changed in our modern society
- Apply Initiation Theory in Management





Bring an Initiation Lens to Leadership Theory

This application is
new to the field

Methodology of the Interviewing

- Interviewed 30 Presidents & CEOs
- Described their career paths
- Events they considered most significant to their advancement
- Their experience of these events



Methodology Gathered Narrative Bio Data

- What do Presidents & CEOs consider as significant experiences in their advancement on the path to the top office?
- One Instruction: “Describe your path to the top office, in particular, the experiences that have been most formative to your advancement.”



Methodology used Gilchrist Informant Interviewing Method

1. Most subjects asked is if they should start with childhood.
2. Most recounted significant experiences from childhood to present.
3. We concluded by asking for a recap of significant experiences on the way to the organizations top
4. Most interviews 90 minutes.
5. Used Gregg Shorthand and transcribed within 48 hours



Methodology – Continued

- Expert Interviewing Technique:
 - Active listening skills draw out the interviewee's knowledge and experience:
- Asked to provide context, background



- Explain why experiences were significant at the time
- Explain why they are significant in retrospect

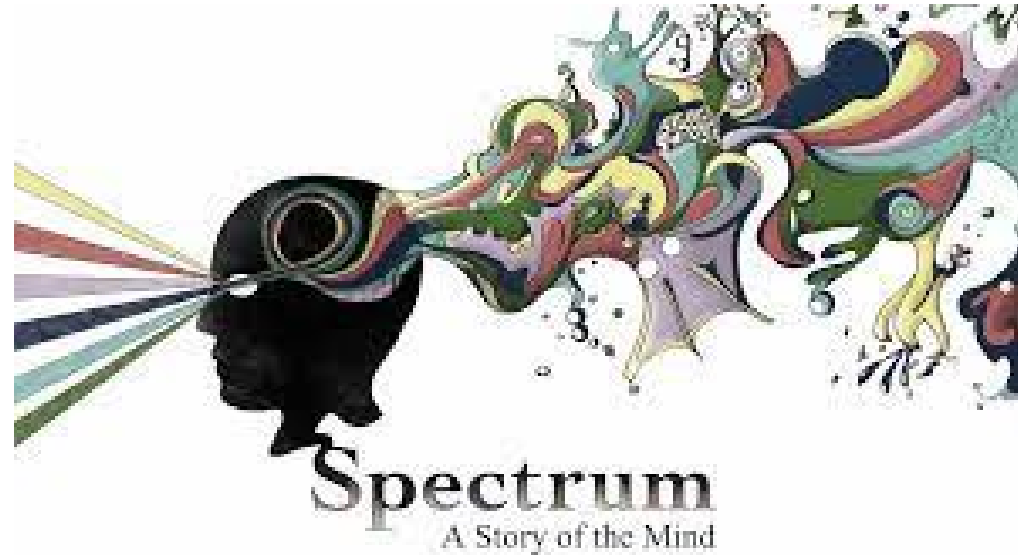
Data Analysis – A Spectrum of Stories

- 239 **TOTAL** experiences that explained their leadership development growth
- Transcribed verbatim -explained their leadership through spectrum of stories
- 148 **KEY** experiences
- Some had many stories
- Others had one story
- Authors discerned breaks of significant experiences.



Data Analysis: Chronologically

- Broke down into
 - Early Career
 - Mid-Career
 - Office Taking



- Identified common personal challenges
- Status changes at each period



Major Findings:

Data Analysis: Applied Initiation Theory As it Focuses on Challenges & Changes:

We Posit 3 Key Initiation Stages:

1. Organizational Coming of Age (OCCOA)
2. Leadership Coming of Age (LCOA)
3. Top-leadership Coming of Age (TCOA)



Organizational Coming of Age (OCOFA)

- In OCOFA, the individual enters an organization, projects the experience forward & makes a career resolution



Leadership Coming of Age (LCOA)

- The individual undergoes a high-stakes organizational challenge (turnaround, startup, or major change) that is also a high-stakes personal challenge with risk to self-concept

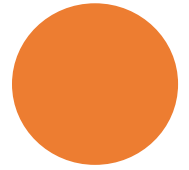


Top-Leadership Coming of Age (TCOA)

- The individual comes to terms with the visibility, scale, and responsibility of the top office
- Executives who come from the outside undergo additional status change from outsider to insider



Some Faced More Than One at Same Time



Most Difficult is Doing All 3:

- Initiation from outsider to insider
- Initiation into saving an organization
- Initiation into the top office



Other Findings

- Most frequently cited in LCOA was a turnaround
- In passing the LCOA, one may not be aware of significant impact on her/his reputation & those who helped or hindered
- Some interviewees gave most credit to themselves;
 - Others gave most of the credit to others.
- Some experiences were as simple as a passing or casual remark that individuals took seriously and changed their lives.

Practical Take Aways. 1

- Individuals will be better prepared for formal organizational leadership if they are aware of the predictable personal challenges along the way.



Practical Take Aways. 2

- Individuals can use Initiation Theory to make sense of their experience and lead their development.



Practical Take Aways. 3

- Organizations can use Initiation Theory to understand the personal challenges that young and new leaders may experience.



Discussion

- Path to top leadership in formal organizations is an initiation with increasingly higher stakes.
- Initiation Theory holds that membership is a distinct status that is fundamental to social life.
- Formal organization – a specific social context and advancement is a membership process
- Individuals undergo Initiation when they enter the organization.
- They have profound experiences & make life decisions as enter the organization
- As they advance, they undergo tests
- They win a reputation & opportunities
- At the top, they feel “the buck stops here

Scholarly Contributions

- Contributes to research in career development.
- It answers calls for 1) greater contextualization 2) theoretical enrichment
- Initiation Theory is a powerful lens – it gets to human dynamics, membership and belonging, or ostracism & severance
- Initiation theory lends fresh insight to Career mobility which merits further attention
- Fundamentally: Shining a light on initiation helps outsiders become insiders.
- INITIATIONS are decisive to careers
- The study highlights career GUIDES, TESTS & STATUS CHANGES

Future Research

- Expand the data set
- Gather data to enable triangulation (beyond self-reported data).
 - More sources than only self report.
- Study individuals who failed in the LCOA or TCOA stage
 - We chose those who had success from our perspective.



Future of
Research

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Reciprocal Causation. Theory

- Reciprocal causation says there is mutually defining interaction between the subjective experience
- (such as undergoing personal trial) and the social situation (status change).
- A change in my social status changes my lived experience and vice versa.