UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

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"YOU'RE NOT A LEADER BECAUSE YOU STAND ABOVE EVERYONE. YOU'RE A LEADER BECAUSE YOU'RE WILLING TO… WALK WITH EVERYONE": A STUDY OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN A PEER-ASSISTED LEARNING PROGRAM AT AN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY.

A thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Meet-Up was a peer-assisted learning (PAL) program at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. As with most PAL programs, its goal was to assist participating students by offering them opportunities to increase their understandings of discipline-specific concepts and study skills advice. The focus of much of the research in PAL is on the participating students; there have been relatively few studies of university student leadership within PAL programs, particularly from the student leaders' perspectives. This study was designed to redress this gap.

Specifically, the aim of the research was to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of student leadership in higher education, and of the ways that the student leaders in the Meet-Up program made sense of their role. To achieve this, the study engaged a phenomenographic approach (Marton, 1981) and a sensemaking lens (Weick, 1995). The pairing of these two analytical frameworks, operating in tandem, resulted in the realisation of the research aim: phenomenography yielded the participants' understandings of the phenomenon of student leadership; sensemaking generated an understanding of the participants' experiences and enactments in their role as Meet-Up leaders.

Twenty student leaders from the Meet-Up program were interviewed for the study. The interviews were conducted using the phenomenographic approach of broad, open-ended questions. Analysis of the interview data revealed distinct variations in the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon of student leadership, generating three categories of description of student leadership and forming the outcome space:

- Category A: Student leadership as personal: it involves utilising and developing personal characteristics.
- Category B: Student leadership as contextual: it is defined by the operating environment or context.
- Category C: Student leadership as relational: it is about the relationships that develop.

Application of the sensemaking lens to the participants' responses determined that they made sense of their role as Meet-Up leaders by engaging their personal characteristics to enact the behaviours required. In addition, sensemaking established that the participants' enactments in the role had shaped their development as individuals, students and leaders.

The findings from the study could be used to inform the design, implementation and practice not only of PAL programs, but also potentially of other student leadership programs that promote the development of leadership in students.

Keywords

peer-assisted learning, phenomenography, sensemaking, student development in higher education, student leadership in higher education

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

This Thesis is entirely the work of Rosalind Kimmins except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Fernando Padrò

Associate Supervisor: Professor Patrick Danaher

The student's and the supervisors' signatures are held at the university.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT

PERSONAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all those who believe in me…

My supervisors:

Sincere thanks to my supervisors for listening to me and respecting my initially naïve writings and expressions of doubt, uncertainty and insecurity in undertaking the doctoral journey; and for encouraging, challenging and guiding me through feedback and conversation as gradually my thoughts clarified and took shape. I value their wisdom and knowledge and I am so grateful for their patience.

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And finally… to Lewis Carroll, with apologies

So…this is the *end of all my adventures*; *I began at the beginning* and went on *until I came to the end,* and now *I have stopped. My head is feverish after so much thinking and needs fanning*. I have *said things which fixed them and now I must take the consequences*.

Reading *filled my head with ideas, only I didn't know what they were* at the start. *I thought that I would not be able to believe impossible things* because I hadn't had much practice, but I did try. I learnt that *it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place - that if you want to get somewhere you must run at least twice as fast as that.*

I lived my doctorate journey *backwards, which made me a little giddy at first*. But the *one great advantage in it* was that *my memory could work both ways, as it's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards*. Now, *I hardly know who I am,* as *I have been changed several times* since the beginning of my adventures*. But, one thing is certain: there is *no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then*.

DEDICATION

To the participants and all the student leaders with whom I worked

Working in peer-assisted learning programs, I engaged with so many wonderful student leaders who generously devoted the time they did not always have to guiding and encouraging students in their learning. Without the experiences I had interacting with these special people, my life would have been so much the poorer. I admired the dedication, humility and enthusiasm that these student leaders committed to their role; it was what inspired me to embark on this doctorate. Without them, my thesis would not have been attempted, never mind completed. They have my lifelong appreciation, and I dedicate this doctorate to them.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Assurance
AUSSE	Australasian Survey of Student Engagement
CAS	Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education
EI	Emotional intelligence
GPA	Grade point average
HEI	Higher education institutions
HERI	Higher Education Research Institute
IEO	Input-environment-outcome model
LAMP	Leader Assistant in the Meet-Up program
LAP	Learning assistance programs
LID	Leadership Identity Development model
LPI	Leadership practices inventory
LTSU	Learning and Teaching Support Unit
MSCEIT	Mayer, Salovey and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test
MUSC	Meet-Up Student Community
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement
OPACS	Office of Preparatory and Continuing Studies
PAL	Peer-assisted learning
PALS	Peer-Assisted Leaning Strategy
PASS	Peer-assisted study sessions
RLT	Relational leadership theory
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
RQ	Research question
SaP	Students as partners
SEQ	Student engagement questionnaire
SI	Supplemental Instruction
UMKC	University of Missouri Kansas City
USQ	University of Southern Queensland

1 INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

1.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the main elements of my research. The aspects are covered only briefly here, as is the nature of an introduction, and are dealt with more fully in the following chapters. The chapter firstly provides the background to the research in the form of my personal story as researcher, followed by a sketch of the specific context of the study: the two are closely related. This flows into an outline of the research aim and goals, and the research questions that stem from them. The reasons for the choice of the method of inquiry, phenomenography, and an explanation of it are provided. In addition, as I chose to use the sensemaking process to assist in realising my research aim, it too is briefly outlined. A glossary of terms used throughout the study is presented, the significance of the study and its contribution to new knowledge are noted, and the organisation of the study is outlined. Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided. This chapter sets the pattern for the remainder of the thesis: each chapter begins with an Introduction and concludes with a Summary. First person is employed as it is considered appropriate to the personal nature of this doctorate.

1.2 The researcher: A personal story

I was employed by the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) for about 30 years. My work involved daily contact with people who were enthusiastic, passionate, committed; they had good personal and academic skills; they had a strong desire to assist and guide others in their learning; they had a keen willingness to share their university experiences with others. These amazing people were the student leaders in peer-assisted learning (PAL) programs, and I loved working with them. My work involved preparing, guiding and advising the students who accepted the student leadership positions; their role was to encourage and facilitate the development of students' understanding of course concepts and terms whilst also helping to increase students' familiarity and comfort with their chosen discipline and the institution. The work was enjoyable because of the enthusiasm of the students selected for the PAL leader position and their willingness to grow both themselves and the role within the parameters of the program.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) posited that happiness does not have an extrinsic base, but rather comes from dedicating effort to a cause greater than self. The sense of enjoyment comes from involvement in working on tasks that have clear goals that mirror the individual's personal goals, and engagement then becomes almost total. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) called

this state "flow" (p. 40). With increased experiences of flow, concern for self disappears, yet "the sense of self, paradoxically, emerges stronger after the experience" (p. 49) and contributes to the further development of self. The flow I experienced working in PAL and the passion that I felt for the work stirred in me the desire to explore it further and in more depth, and so I decided to embark on a doctorate.

I have now retired from my last position at USQ, Peer Learning Coordinator, and I have put my extra time, energy and passion into this thesis. The decision to undertake my doctoral journey has gifted me the opportunity to look back not just with the passion that I always had for my work, but also with the power and additional insight that reflection over time affords. It is in some ways the culmination of my work. In the interests of transparency and clarity, I felt it important to include my story as background to my thesis.

1.2.1 Let's start at the very beginning

My work at USQ always involved assisting students with their learning. Having completed a Bachelor of Arts (Language and Literature) degree at USQ, I accepted a position in a section called the Department of Higher Education Studies where I tutored in a communication course in a program known as the Tertiary Preparation Program. The program was designed to advise and guide students about how to learn and study in higher education prior to the commencement of undergraduate studies. Later I was asked to guide and encourage students as a tutor or advisor in the Learning Centre, which had been established to assist students with the challenges that they faced in understanding what was expected of them in assignments and examinations, and helping them to make sense of the exciting but unfamiliar and often daunting place called "university" in which they found themselves. I enjoyed guiding and advising these students, knowing from their feedback that what I did made a difference to their capacity to understand their discipline's concepts and to become more comfortable in the university environment. Working with the students in these positions over a number of years provided a solid base or foundation for what turned out to be the work that I loved the most – working in PAL programs.

1.2.2 And so to PAL and my role in more detail
1.2.2.1 SI: The beginning of PAL at USQ

"Supplemental Instruction (SI)" was established in 1973 by Deanna Martin at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) in order to provide students with opportunities to learn from and with their peers in an informal, friendly, non-threatening environment

(Martin et al., 1993). The focus of SI was about guiding students with not just what to learn, but also how to learn it. The "how to learn" element was considered to be the area where "expert" peers could play an invaluable role in advising novice students to explore a range of useful learning strategies. They could also share their experiences of the cognitive demands of a course that they had previously studied and passed (Arendale, 1993).

Proponents of SI believed that many students struggled with certain courses as a result of the mismatch between their levels of preparedness and their expectations of university on the one hand, and the expectations of their teachers on the other (Arendale, 2014). SI was therefore offered in units or courses with high failure rates – 30% or higher (Martin et al., 1993, p. 3) – with the intention of guiding students in useful ways to understand what they needed to learn. At USQ, in Semester 2 1995, a trial of SI in a nursing course with low passing grades was instigated. The section in which I worked had been renamed the Office of Preparatory and Continuing Education (OPACS), and, as an academic in OPACS, I was asked to assist in the trial. It was considered a success as participating students appreciated the program, and the course achieved a "normal" grade outcome (Anderson, 1995, p. 2). SI was consequently rolled out to other courses at USQ. More details about SI and the trial at USQ are provided in Chapter 2.

1.2.2.2 My role in SI

From the very start, it was clear to me that SI helped participating students. While lecturers, tutors and advisors could guide from a position of authority, students could advise and encourage from the level of a peer, people just like them. This peer-to-peer element – sharing concerns with fellow students, but with students who were a step ahead, as it were – seemed to encourage students and help them to realise that they could manage and succeed in their learning. The guidance was not just appreciated; for some students it was anecdotally critical.

But that for me was not the only drawcard of working in such a program. The students who took on the positions at USQ, "student instructors" (Anderson, 1995, p. 2) as they were initially called, were keen and passionate. They were committed to the program and to continually improving their capacity and their skills in assisting participating students. Students' light bulb moments thrilled and delighted them. They put much time and effort into the position, generally above and beyond what was required; they were a pleasure to work with. Furthermore, I enjoyed the work so much that I felt my passion for being a part of students' learning journeys had found a home – a program through which to engage with both

students and student instructors as they developed their capacity for and interest in improving their skills and knowledge.

1.3 Context: The PAL program known as "Meet-Up"

In 1999, the PAL program at USQ stepped out from under the umbrella of SI in order to focus more specifically on the needs of USQ students. The name of the PAL program was changed by the coordinator at the time to "Peer-Assisted Learning Strategy (PALS)". My work in the program continued, until in 2008 I became the coordinator and the sole staff member involved in the program. With the advice and assistance of my work supervisor at the time, I decided to change the name of the program to a title that sounded less like a common brand of dog food, that would hopefully appeal to students and that would hint at the informal, friendly, peer-led structure of the program. After further consultation with my supervisor, the name "Meet-Up" was chosen.

As an adaption of SI, Meet-Up, like PALS before it, maintained the same theoretical underpinnings: namely, a focus on peer group learning (collaborative learning), whereby participating students were encouraged to construct their own knowledge (constructivism), and to share and analyse their learning (metacognition) with one another in a non-threatening environment (social learning community) (Arendale, 1993). Meet-Up sessions involved students working together to achieve common or mutual goals through exercises, problems or activities constructed by a peer leader who was an experienced student, having previously completed the particular course successfully and progressed to the next or subsequent year levels. The interactions involved in Meet-Up sessions guided, encouraged and motivated students to learn and understand course concepts and to share their learning experiences with their peers in the Meet-Up space.

The title of "Meet-Up leader" or simply "student leader" was given to the students who were selected and then trained to plan, prepare and deliver the peer led sessions. The goal and the resultant focus of most academic PAL programs are to offer support and guidance in learning to the participating students (Shook & Keup, 2012; Topping & Ehly, 1998). Meet-Up was no different, and consequently the emphasis of the training was on advising the student leaders about how to do that well. By extrapolation then, the success of the program hinged on the student leaders' development and management of the learning activities within the PAL environment and the engagement of participating students. Thus, while the student leaders were recognised as being pivotal to Meet-Up, little attention was

given to their own personal development beyond the scope of their capacity to assist participating students satisfactorily.

The growth of the student leaders as individuals had fascinated me from the beginning. I watched sometimes insecure, under-confident, timid students blossom into competent, capable, responsible, creative student leaders, who then proceeded to achieve high quality jobs on graduation (or sometimes even before that final tertiary education milestone). What exactly was happening? I was hungry for more in-depth analysis of what was occurring in this program. I began to contemplate the student leaders' apparent growth more deeply.

They seemed to me to be developing what I considered to be leadership capabilities and behaviours, but as I lacked knowledge of leadership theories I was not sure. (This would be addressed in the review of literature that I would undertake.) I realised that I was interested in finding out what the students themselves thought about their learning journeys rather than what employers or academics thought of them. In addition, I was particularly interested in how the leaders themselves perceived their experiences as student leaders. Did they feel, as I did, that they had developed as leaders not just nominally but also in actuality? So, finally, the decision was made; I began my doctorate to find out. And I considered that the Meet-Up program was the clear choice as the context for this research. It was the PAL program in which I had spent most of my working life, I still had contact with many Meet-Up leaders, and the program was still running on my retirement.

1.4 The subject under investigation

In my role as coordinator, my time had been consumed with the practical matters of getting the program up and running each semester. There was a myriad of administrative tasks and procedures that needed to be completed for the program to function. This absorption of time stifled my capacity to engage in much research; however, I became aware that a new term, "employability", was entering discussions and publications in the sector. It seemed that employers were not just after graduates with high scores in their university courses; they wanted more. They wanted people with skills that would complement the knowledge that they had acquired at their higher education institutions. In 2011, the University of Glasgow was commissioned to investigate employers' opinions of the skills of graduates on entering the workplace. One of its key findings was that, "Employers expect graduates to have technical and discipline competences from their degrees but require graduates also to demonstrate a range of broader skills and attributes that include team-

working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving and managerial abilities" (Lowden et al., 2011, p. vi).

With leadership and other employability skills being increasingly demanded of graduates on their entry to the workplace, universities typically posited that the development of leadership skills in students was one of their educative goals. For example, in USQ's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, Objective 3 under the overarching goal for the pillar of Education stated that the university aimed to: "Enhance our global standing as a source of graduates who excel in the workplace and develop as leaders" (https://www.usq.edu.au/about-usq/governance-leadership/plans-reports). The 2021-2025 USQ Strategic Plan stated that one of its intended impacts was: "[to] Support our students to amplify their life and work experiences through life-long educational pathways as they become leaders in their chosen field" (https://www.usq.edu.au/about-usq/governance-leadership/plans-reports).Yet Cress et al. (2001) pointed out that generally little attention is given to providing programs for such goals to actually be achieved; other priorities (often economic or financial in nature) combine to push this goal to the side. Similarly, Campbell et al. (2012) argued that higher education has responded by and large poorly to the need to develop leadership in students, teaching leadership skills to students almost by default. While there may be some short-term leadership courses or programs on offer, students often develop their leadership skills incidentally or "along the way" (Micari et al., 2010, p. 218) in other programs such as PAL programs.

I thought about my work with the student leaders in Meet-Up, PALS and SI; it seemed to endorse this perception. Student leaders were provided with training, the aim of which was to help them to construct valuable sessions whereby participating students could develop their understanding of course and discipline knowledge and procedures. Hence initially, there was little focus in the training on encouraging the student leaders to develop and consider their leadership skills. Yet, as noted above, my observations of the student leaders, in addition to other anecdotal evidence from the programs indicated that they did develop as individuals and increasingly exhibited leadership skills while in their role as leaders in the PAL programs. I considered this to be a positive outcome that could perhaps be encouraged and developed.

As a result, I began to introduce a session in the Meet-Up training and development workshops where the student leaders were asked to consider the term "leadership", what it meant to them, and whether they considered themselves to be leaders. While Meet-Up leaders had the term "leader" in their title, many of them seemed reluctant to view themselves as

leaders. I wondered what their conceptions of leadership entailed. I also wondered if the apparent leadership skills and behaviours that I had perceived would more generally be considered leadership, and what part the peer leadership role in Meet-Up played in the development in these students of these leadership competencies. These questions fascinated me and governed the formulation of my research goals.

1.5 The research aim and the research goals

I established the aim of my research as being to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of student leadership in higher education by determining the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership and the ways that they made sense of their role. And, in order to achieve this aim, I developed a set of goals of the study. They were as follows.

Table 1.1: The research goals

I.	To provide contextual information about the Meet-Up program and the Meet-Up leaders.
II.	To achieve an understanding of university student leadership by identifying the conceptions of student leadership held by the student leaders in USQ's PAL program known as "Meet-Up"
III.	To make sense of the ways that the Meet-Up leaders understood the impact of their student leadership experiences on their own development
IV.	To produce useful research findings about student leadership that could inform the implementation and practice of PAL programs in higher education institutions

1.6 The research questions

To realise these research goals, I wanted to see student leadership through the eyes of the student leaders themselves. To do so, I decided to interview a number of them. I applied for and was granted approval by the Ethics Committee at USQ to undertake the interviews. I developed a set of research questions, seeking through the interview process, the perspectives and conceptions of the student leaders in Meet-Up that I then analysed and interpreted.

1.6.1 Research Question 1

To achieve Research goal I, I needed firstly to establish what the Meet-Up program was, and then, by extension, who the student leaders were. Information about the program could be addressed from my knowledge as coordinator of the program. Information about the student leaders could again be gleaned in some measure from my knowledge as program

coordinator and selector of the student leaders, but the intention in my research study was to encourage the participants to tell me about themselves: who they were, what was important to them. The first research question was clear and simple:

1.) What was the Meet-Up program and who were the Meet-Up leaders?

1.6.2 Research Question 2

But I wanted more than that. I also wanted to know what the student leaders in Meet-Up had thought and felt about their role as student leaders. I therefore required the participants to tell me what they understood student leadership to be from their perspective. Did they all view student leadership the same way? Or did their understandings of student leadership vary significantly? My second research question therefore was about ascertaining these understandings:

2.) What were the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership?

1.6.3 Research Question 3

To achieve Research goal III and to generate new knowledge, I invited the participants to make sense of their experiences as student leaders. What did they do in the role and how did they do it? Did they believe that their experiences in their role as student leader in the Meet-Up program had an influence on their development as individuals? Thus, the third research question sought to discover how the participants made sense of the experiences they had in the role, and how I, as researcher, made sense of their sensemaking:

3.) How did the Meet-Up leaders make sense of their development as people, students and leaders?

1.6.4 Alignment

For clarity, the alignment between the research goals and the research questions is represented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: The alignment of the research goals and the research questions

Research goals	Research questions (RQs)	Location in thesis
I) To provide contextual information about the Meet-Up program and the Meet-Up leaders	RQ 1: What was the Meet-Up program and who were the Meet-Up leaders?	Chapter 2 Chapter 6
II) To achieve an understanding of university student leadership by identifying the conceptions of student leadership held by the student leaders in USQ's PAL program known as "Meet-Up"	RQ 2: What were the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership?	Chapter 7
III) To make sense of the ways that the Meet-Up leaders understood the impact of their student leadership experiences on their own development	RQ 3: How did the Meet-Up leaders make sense of their development as people, students and leaders?	Chapter 8
IV) To produce useful research findings about student leadership that could inform the instigation and practice of PAL programs in higher education institutions	RQs 1, 2 and 3	Chapter 9

With the research questions decided and the alignment with the research goals clarified, an appropriate research method then needed to be selected.

1.7 The research method and the interpretive lens

1.7.1 Phenomenography

I had personally observed, and also been provided with other anecdotal evidence, that the student leaders developed as individuals and increasingly exhibited leadership skills while involved in Meet-Up. My interest was firstly in the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of what student leadership was (RQ 2). While they all performed the same tasks in the role of Meet-Up leader, they nevertheless may have understood or experienced the phenomenon of student leadership differently. For this reason, I chose to employ the phenomenographic approach which would capture any variance.

Phenomenography concentrates on the relationship between the experiencer and the phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997) and on the different ways that something (a

phenomenon) can be experienced. It is about melding the two earlier opposing foci on knowledge acquisition: the "inner" (mental or cognitive acts and structures); and the "outer" (behaviours, environment, context, the physical and social world) (Bowden, 2005). This is the essence of nondualism (Marton & Booth, 1997). It posits that experiences are internal relationships or interactions between an individual and the world around her, and that those experiences form an individual's awareness of the world.

People are different from one another, and they therefore experience phenomena differently; these variations are the foci of phenomenographic research (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111), and the different ways of understanding are the outcome of that research (Jackson, 2013). "Phenomenography is simply an attempt to capture critical differences in how we experience the world and how we learn to experience the world" (Marton, as cited by Dall'Álba & Hasselgren, 1996, p. 187). This approach would allow me to explore as fully as possible the leaders' different ways of knowing the phenomenon of student leadership.

The most common method of obtaining phenomenographic data is interviewing (Jackson, 2013), which affords the participants plenty of time and a feeling of freedom in which to respond (Bruce, 1994). I interviewed 20 participants to cater adequately for variation in the data. Previous and current purposively selected student leaders in the Meet-Up Program were interviewed in order to find out their different understandings of the phenomenon of student leadership (RQ 2). Questions were generally open-ended and comparatively unstructured, as in traditional phenomenographic interviews (Bruce, 1994). Each interview took from 40 to 60 minutes, and I encouraged the leaders to describe their understandings as fully as they chose (Trigwell, 2000). I used pseudonyms for the participants to uphold their anonymity when I quoted their words.

From a phenomenographic perspective, analysis is really about discovery (Prosser, 2000), unlike in other research approaches that focus on verification. I developed a set of categories of description from the transcribed responses that recorded as faithfully as possible what the student leaders said. I went over the transcripts multiple times and adjusted the categories to ensure that they were "stable" (Prosser, 2000, p. 37). The final set of categories of description of the conceptions that the student leaders held of the phenomenon of student leadership and the relationship between them, became the "outcome space" (Trigwell, 2000, p. 79), and addressed RQ 2.

1.7.2 Sensemaking

The phenomenographic inquiry method therefore provided me with qualitative data taken from the interviews about the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership. But with the aim of my study (as declared previously) being to make sense of and contribute to a greater understanding of university student leadership, it was also imperative that I explored and interpreted the ways in which the Meet-Up leaders' voiced their endeavours to make sense of their enactments as student leaders and of their development as individuals, students and leaders (RQ 3). To achieve this, I employed the elements of Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework.

Weick's (1995) sensemaking concept is literal; it is about "the making of sense" (p. 4). Weick nominated seven characteristics of sensemaking to distinguish it from other processes such as interpretation. I could immediately see the relevance and appropriateness of the second one: "retrospective" (p. 17). In fact, in my study, two perspectives of retrospection were explicitly engaged: firstly, that of the Meet-Up leaders as they recalled their journey and their experiences as student leaders, and secondly mine as researcher as I sought to both interpret and make sense of their responses to the interview questions. And as I studied it more, I realised that the other characteristics of Weick's (1995) sensemaking process also resonated with my research goal.

Furthermore, as I read more of Weick's (1993, 2006) works on sensemaking and that of others, and thought about my observations of the Meet-Up leaders over many years, I believed that the Meet-Up leaders had also utilised sensemaking in their role as student leaders. According to Weick (1993), when an individual finds herself in situations where the organised plan is not working, she can improvise on the known and accepted procedures to determine a satisfactory action for that particular situation: this is sensemaking. I was aware that Meet-Up leaders had engaged in improvisation in their sessions when they had realised that their planned activities or exercises were not what the students needed. Perhaps they were therefore tacit sensemakers; that is, whilst they had engaged in sensemaking processes, they had not articulated their actions in that way (Polanyi, 1966). I therefore considered that sensemaking would be an appropriate lens to examine more closely and to help me make sense of the voicings of the Meet-Up leaders in the study. Sensemaking is explored in greater detail in Chapter 5.

1.8 The glossary of terms

1.8.1 Conceptions

The definition of the term "conception" as used in my study is a way of experiencing something or a way of understanding something which is the definition generally accepted in phenomenographic research (Marton & Booth, 1997). The participants' descriptions of student leadership (conceptions) are distilled, then categorised (Marton & Booth, 1997), and a set of the collective conceptions of the phenomenon of student leadership called the categories of description is determined. This set and the relationships or structure between each category are reviewed multiple times, until ultimately, the final outcome space is established (Akerlind, 2005).

1.8.2 Higher education institutions

In the education system in the United States, there are learning institutions called "colleges", and others known as "universities". Both are higher education institutions (HEI's). The distinction between them is not of importance to this study, and, to avoid any confusion, I have tended to use the term "higher education institution" where possible to cover institutions, either in the United States or elsewhere, that may be either colleges or universities. In some instances, however, I may have deemed the word "college" or "university" more appropriate to be true to the source, and have used it accordingly.

1.8.3 Leadership

Bass and Bass (2008) wrote a comprehensive text on leadership, and as such I chose a definition of leadership for my study from this text. This study endorses the following definition of leadership: it is the "interaction among members of a group that initiates and maintains improved expectations and the competence of the group to solve problems or to attain goals" (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 26). The authors posited that a thorough exploration of leadership requires an examination of both individual competencies or traits and the context in which the leader operates, as both are important to the leadership outcome (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 135). My study acknowledges the significance of this position.

1.8.4 Peer-assisted learning (PAL)

The definition of PAL used in this study has also been taken from an important work on the subject. This definition of the term mirrored the accepted understanding of what PAL

was when Meet-Up was developed. It is an explanation that has stood the test of time, being still relevant at the time that this thesis was written.

PAL is:

The acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions. PAL is people from similar social groupings, who are not professional teachers, helping each other to learn and [,] by so doing, learning themselves. (Topping & Ehly, 1998, p. 1)

In this thesis, this term was used as an inclusive one that covers a range of PAL programs, including SI and Meet-Up.

1.8.5 Student leadership

Bass and Bass (2008) suggested that attempting to provide a single definition of leadership was fruitless as the definition should depend on the specific aspect of leadership of interest or under study. Yet, in the field of student leadership, researchers and practitioners settled on definitions of student leadership that emphasised the social context – in particular the importance of the development of socially responsible leadership (Campbell et al., 2012; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Komives et al., 2013). My study of leadership from the perspective of the student leaders in a PAL program in higher education provided a clear, specific context that warranted the development of a definition of student leadership in that context. My definition is as follows:

Student leadership in a PAL program involves directing and focusing passion and enthusiasm for, and cognitive competence in, a specific course, together with commitment to the role of student leader and empathy for peers, to the preparation and delivery of learning activities. These activities are conducted in sessions where leaders interact with participating students, developing their trust and encouraging them to engage with both the activities and their peers, thus enabling them to construct knowledge and understandings of discipline concepts, which is the joint goal. The term "student leadership" in this thesis refers to student leadership in higher education institutions generally.

Concomitantly, student leadership in a PAL program involves the development of servant leadership attributes, emotional intelligence capabilities, transformational leadership competencies and recognition by student leaders that they are role models for their peers with leadership now part of their identity; they have become leaders in actuality and not just nominally.

1.8.6 Unit and course

For the purpose of clarity for the reader, I believe that an explanation of USQ's study terminology is also useful here. When a PAL program was initiated at USQ in 1995, the study terms in use were "unit" and "course". Students were offered semester-length individual subjects known as "units" of study, which together combined to become a complete "course" in a particular discipline area – for example, a Bachelor of Arts. The terminology was changed in 2002, and a "unit" of study was replaced by the word "course", and the previously employed term "course" or discipline area of study became known as a "program".

1.9 The significance of the research

A review of the literature about leadership and student leadership conducted for this research revealed that detailed studies of student leadership in higher education generally from the student leaders' perspectives, and of student leadership in PAL programs more specifically, from the student leaders' perspectives, have not been conducted in large numbers. My research therefore has significance because it has gone some way to addressing this gap. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 3. My research also has significance in a number of other ways.

In addition to the application of the phenomenographic method of inquiry, sensemaking was utilised as a lens through which both the participating student leaders themselves and myself as researcher could interpret what had happened to the student leaders as people, student and leaders during their time in the Meet-Up program. The engagement of phenomenography and sensemaking in tandem has significance in its rarity and constitutes a methodological contribution to knowledge.

My research included the construction of a conceptual framework that mapped the journey of initially novice student leaders, through their involvement in Meet-Up, to their emergence as individuals with leadership competencies. The framework therefore offers a contribution to theoretical knowledge. I based the framework on the work of influential and respected scholars in student development in higher education, and the framework contributes significance because it endorses the relevance of these theories to the student leaders in my study. In addition, the framework, while being peculiar to the Meet-Up Program, may potentially be used by other PAL practitioners to demonstrate similar development in the student leaders in their programs.

Furthermore, because Meet-Up was a PAL program, further significance of my research is that it can inform higher education institutions of the value of PAL, not only to those students who choose to attend, but also to those students who elect to become the student leaders. My research determined that these individuals developed as student leaders in actuality as well as nominally.

1.10 The organisation of the thesis

This introductory chapter is followed by Chapter 2, The Meet-Up Program as context. The chapter explains the history of the program from its genesis at USQ to the time of my retirement. It includes discussion of its theoretical basis, the way it was practised, and my role in the program. Chapter 3, The literature review explores the literature that served as the foundation for my research, which is discussed under the topics: PAL programs; Student Leadership; and Leadership. Chapter 4 relates the groundwork behind the development of a conceptual framework that mapped the journey of initially novice student leaders to their emergence as individuals with leadership competencies through their involvement in Meet-Up.

The research design of the study is described in Chapter 5. Here the research method, phenomenography, is explained and the reasons behind its selection are presented. Sensemaking, which I use as an interpretive lens, is also discussed. In addition, ethical considerations, particularly those related to phenomenography and the researcher's role in the project, are discussed.

The analysis of the data begins with Chapter 6. In this chapter, a description of each of the participants is provided. The descriptions are based on my analysis of the stories that the participants told me about themselves in the interviews. Some additional details about the Meet-Up Program that are not discussed in Chapter 2 but are necessary for a clear understanding of the leaders and their roles, are also outlined in this chapter. Chapter 7 continues the analysis of the data. It presents my analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions that pertained to their varying understandings of student leadership, and the resultant set of categories constructed to synthesise those different conceptions.

The phenomenographic inquiry element of my study concluded with the previous chapter, and a new lens was applied. Chapter 8 introduces the process of sensemaking. In this chapter, I examined the participants' responses to the interview questions which asked them to reflect on their experiences of student leadership. The discussion involves how the

participants made sense of those experiences and how they contributed to their growth and development as people, students and student leaders.

The final chapter of my thesis, Chapter 9 draws the study to a close, offering a summation of each of the elements of my thesis. It articulates the following: the findings of the study; the usefulness of the conceptual framework; a summary of the answers to the research questions; an outline of the significance of the research and the study's contributions to knowledge; a reflection of my growth and development as the researcher; and finally, the implications of the research for PAL programs.

1.11 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has provided an introduction to my thesis by outlining some important details or features of the study. The aspects were covered only briefly here, as is the nature of an introduction, and are dealt with more fully in the following chapters. I began with an explanation of my close relationship with the subject of the research because of its impact and influence on both the subject of the thesis and the way that the study has been conducted. The context of the study, the Meet-Up Program, is integral to every aspect of the thesis, and thus a short description was offered. This brief description was followed by an outline of the research aim and goals, and the research questions.

I chose phenomenography as the most appropriate method of inquiry to determine the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership, and I selected sensemaking as a process to assist in understanding how the Meet-Up leaders made sense of their role as student leaders and how they thought about their personal growth and development during their time in the role. Phenomenography and sensemaking were briefly summarised and the reasons that I chose them specified. For clarity, I also included in this chapter a glossary that provided definitions of some of the terms used that were central to the study. The significance of the study and its contribution to new knowledge about student leadership were indicated, and lastly the organisation of the thesis was outlined. The following chapter is an outline of the Meet-Up Program.

2 THE MEET-UP PROGRAM AS CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

Research Question 1 asked: What was the Meet-Up program and who were the Meet-Up leaders? The purpose of this chapter is to address the first part of this question. While the second part of the question is touched on in this chapter, it is dealt with in much greater detail in Chapter 6. I have elected to explain the Meet-Up program directly after the introductory chapter as a clear perception of the context is essential in order for all the other chapters in my thesis to make sense. In addition, because of its impact and influence, my role in PAL generally and Meet-Up in particular, which runs as a thread throughout the thesis, is outlined. This chapter therefore explains in detail the Meet-Up program at USQ: its history, its theoretical basis, and its evolution from its inception in 2008 to my retirement as Coordinator of Peer Learning at USQ in 2017.

A discussion of Meet-Up would, however, not be complete without first describing the other PAL programs from which Meet-Up was developed. To this end, this chapter includes in considerable detail an explanation of SI, its origins and history, the theories on which it was based, and its design and structure. If it were not for the implementation of SI at USQ, Meet-Up may not have existed. SI was fundamentally the underpinning of Meet-Up; it provided the foundation from which Meet-Up was developed. It was my work in SI that initially ignited and inspired my lifelong passion for PAL.

Over the years that I worked in PAL at USQ, I accumulated a wealth of information about SI, PALS and Meet-Up. My research project, however, was not about PAL and its effectiveness in assisting students to succeed. Rather my focus was on the people who were the student leaders in Meet-Up. Therefore, in this chapter, indeed in this whole study, I have included the particulars of PAL program information only where I believed it necessary to paint a clear picture of Meet-Up as context for analysing that focus. Table 2.1 below provides a timeline of the main events in PAL at USQ: events that mark as steppingstones its developmental journey.

Table 2.1: PAL timeline at USQ

Date	Event	Brief details
Semester 2 1995	SI pilot	A pilot SI program was run in a first year nursing course on the recommendation of a USQ academic who had witnessed firsthand an SI program at UMKC. The pilot was offered by OPACS.
Semester 2 1999	PAL program name changed to PALS	Student support staff members in OPACS decided to develop a home-grown PAL program that was an adaptation of the original SI but of more relevance to USQ students.
Semester 2 2008	PALS changed to Meet-Up	Restructures at USQ resulted in a new name for the section managing the PAL program (LTSU) and a decrease in the number of staff members dedicated to assisting with PAL. This contributed to a name change for the PAL program and the inception of new models.
Semester 1 2010	Funding sought and received from Student Amenity Fee	Further restructures at USQ heralded changes to faculties' capacity to finance student support programs, resulting in the need for funding for Meet-Up to be sought elsewhere.
Semester 2 2012	The inception of Meet-Up Student Community (MUSC)	Meet-Up was extended to make provision for the introduction of a generic model of PAL. MUSC was later adapted for Australian Indigenous students.
Semester 1 2013	LTSU Director appointed an Administrative Officer to Meet-Up	This move provided me with both much appreciated administrative support and a colleague to share the joys and the challenges of PAL.
Semester 2 2013	The employment of Leader Assistants Meet-Up Program (LAMPs)	The growth in the number of offerings of Meet-Up models and sessions across all USQ campuses and online resulted in the incapacity of the coordinator to be able to supervise and guide all Meet-Up leaders adequately. Senior leaders stepped into this space with capability and commitment.
Semester 1 2016	I was made Peer Learning Coordinator	A restructure of the Academic Services Division at USQ resulted in my position in LTS being converted to Peer Learning Coordinator, Library Services, and administrative support was removed.
Semester 2 2017	My retirement from USQ	I concluded my working life at USQ as Peer Learning Coordinator in November 2017, knowing that the Meet-Up Program (and SI and PALS before it) had benefited an incalculable number of students, both as participants and as student leaders. I also knew that Meet-Up would continue at least into its 11th year, 2018.

2.2 In the beginning there was Supplemental Instruction (SI)

2.2.1 An historical overview

This subsection describes the SI program as it was at the time of its formation in the United States and at the time of its implementation at USQ in 1995. SI has changed and developed over the years since then, but its relevance to my study is confined to the way that it was manifested prior to the origin of Meet-Up. Similarly, most of the literature cited here was used for the rationale for the implementation of SI at USQ, and therefore does not include more recent literature. Further literature about SI is reviewed in Chapter 3.

2.2.1.1 A brief outline of SI

SI was established in 1973 by Deanna Martin at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC). Dissatisfaction with attempts to teach study skills in isolation rather than in context, and the conviction that they needed to be integrated (Martin et al., 1993, p. 1), were the initial driving forces behind the development of the program. It was intended as a "student academic assistance program that increased academic performance and retention" (Martin et al., 1993, p. 3) by providing students with opportunities to learn from and with their peers in an informal, friendly, non-threatening environment.

The program aimed to make course content and concepts more understandable for novice students, motivating them to achieve better grades than they would have achieved without the intervention. Martin et al. (1993) noted and agreed with Astin's (1984/1999) view that students who increased their involvement with the university would also increase their personal development, particularly if their involvement included "substantive academic work" (Astin, 1985, p. 6, as cited by Martin et al., 1993, p. 17), which is what is offered in SI sessions.

The focus of SI was on guiding students with not just what to learn, but also how to learn it. The "how to learn" element was considered to be the area where "expert" peers could play an invaluable role in advising novice students to explore a range of useful learning strategies. They could also share their experiences of the cognitive demands of a course that they had previously studied and passed (Arendale, 1993). Proponents of SI believed that many students struggled with certain courses as a result of the mismatch between their levels of preparedness and their expectations of university on the one hand, and the expectations of their lecturers on the other (Arendale, 2014).

2.2.1.2 Where it was offered

SI was therefore typically offered in courses with high failure rates. This was considered to include courses with "a 30% or higher rate of D or F grades [that is, students

who did not finish or who failed] and/or withdrawals" (Martin et al., 1993, p. 3). The belief of Martin et al. (1993) was that students new to university struggled because of the structure and the "academic rigour" of "high-risk courses" (p. 4); they were disinclined to label struggling students as underprepared. Martin et al. (1993) suggested that the blame for the mismatch between students' expectations and institutional demands should be removed from individual students and placed squarely in the hands of course teachers. This stance was endorsed firmly by John N. Gardner (p. i) in his preface to Martin et al. (1993), where he suggested that, if large numbers of students were unsuccessful in certain courses, then the way that the courses were being taught and assessed needed to be examined.

2.2.1.3 The structure of SI

The newly created program recognised the benefits of PAL to attending students and the opportunity it provided to learn from and with their peers. In SI sessions, students were afforded a place where they could engage with both their immediate peers and a senior peer or peers who conducted the sessions. These senior peers were called "SI leaders" (Martin et al., 1993, p. 6). Students of all academic abilities and expectations were welcomed in SI sessions; these sessions were not remedial. Attendance was voluntary and SI leaders did not share attendance sheets at SI classes with lecturing staff members; nor were academics in the course invited to attend SI sessions even briefly. The reason for this was to ensure that those who were responsible for marking students' work and grading it were not aware which students attended SI or how frequently. As a result, SI was considered by students to be a safe, informal space where questions that they may have felt were silly could be asked of a peer leader without fear of losing face or losing marks.

The roles of all stakeholders in SI had a distinct demarcation, and were outlined clearly in the *SI Supervisors Manual* (UMKC, 1995). The university staff members who coordinated and managed the SI program were called "Supervisors". To earn this title, interested teaching staff were required to attend workshops run by accredited SI trainers. This ensured that the staff members involved in SI in any institution were knowledgeable and familiar with SI history, theory, and practice. Having attended the training workshops, these people were then officially considered to be SI Supervisors. Their role in the SI program at their institutions was to train student instructors, called student leaders, and then observe their sessions regularly to offer advice and encouragement. SI supervisors' remit was to adhere to SI principles in establishing and managing SI programs and to ensure that student leaders also followed SI protocols.

For example, it was made clear to the student leaders in their training sessions that they were peer leaders, not counsellors. While they could listen to and empathise with students who shared personal problems with them, they were directed to recommend that the students seek appropriate assistance from relevant staff members such as student advisors or counsellors. Similarly, student leaders were also reminded that they were not lecturers or tutors. Their role was not to replace or replicate formal teaching but to guide students in their learning based on the leaders' own learning experiences. In essence, the SI leader was a "facilitator" (Martin et al., 1993, p. 7). As such, in the training sessions, student leaders were advised to avoid re-teaching or directly answering questions, but rather to encourage attending students to work collaboratively in small groups to solve problems and to complete the activities offered. These activities were developed and provided by the SI leaders in collaboration with faculty members.

2.2.1.4 Theoretical underpinnings

Researchers dating back to the early 20th century have focused on the importance of students developing as individuals during their college or university years (Rentz, 1996). The original SI creators were committed to this developmental perspective, and anchored SI's framework in studies by researchers who were writing at the time, such as Piaget. Piaget's work (1958, as cited in Martin et al., 1993) was considered to be a foundation for constructivism, which emerged later. Piaget (1958, as cited in Martin et al., 1993) claimed that students needed to be able to construct their own knowledge at university in order to understand it, as students operated at different stages developmentally when they started their studies. It was this belief and observation that have resulted in Piaget's work being considered the underpinning of constructivism (Arendale, 1993; Martin et al., 1993).

Vygotsky (1978) took Piaget's idea of students constructing their own knowledge one step further to suggest that the learning was advanced even more if one of the interactants were more expert than the other, so that she/he could guide, encourage and stimulate the learner (Arendale, 1993; Foot & Howe, 1998). Vygotsky (1978) called this concept the "Zone of Proximal Development". "Expert" students or peer leaders strove to facilitate the construction of learning by devising activities that allowed students to build on their existing knowledge and to develop as individuals. Peer learning also contributed to this development as the friendly, informal interactions among the students involved in the sessions and with the peer leader encouraged or stimulated the students to develop by learning in new or different ways (Foot & Howe, 1998).

Early in this current century, McGuire (2006) noted that students were much more diverse than their predecessors, and that many came to university unequipped with the skills needed to succeed in their studies. McGuire (2006) claimed that, to succeed, it was important that students had an understanding of learning processes and the realisation that at university it was important to engage in deeper or higher-level learning skills. This was where PAL played an important role, according to McGuire (2006). Leaders advised students about what to learn as well as how to learn, which facilitated the development of higher order thinking skills:

> The prognosis for SI is excellent, because it has proven its effectiveness in helping higher education institutions achieve their most important objective: producing graduates who have achieved the student learning outcomes necessary for success in their courses, in their careers, and in making a significant contribution to the global society. (p. 9)

In SI sessions, collaborative learning techniques were used to facilitate the construction of learning. All work was achieved in group settings with students feeding off the ideas, questions and general input of their peers. Research suggested that collaborative learning promoted the development of critical learning skills as a direct result of the students' active engagement in activities that rely on peer collaboration (Johnson & Johnson, 1986 as cited by Martin et al., 1993). Collaborative learning was also credited with the improvement in students' grades (Martin et al., 1993).

Thus, SI was based on two main concepts that contributed to student development (Astin, 1985, as cited in Martin et al., 1993): peer-assisted learning (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Martin et al., 1993); and constructivism (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958, as cited in Martin et al., 1993), utilising collaborative learning strategies. These congruent foundations established SI as a worthy program for encouraging and facilitating not only student success, but also student development and growth.

2.2.1.5 The rationale behind SI

To elaborate, SI was developed as an intentional and deliberate breakaway from the traditional model of student support operating in the United States at the time. In this model, it was the students who were viewed as having the problem with learning. They were termed "high-risk" or "at-risk" (Martin et al., 1993, p. 41). SI's non-traditional approach was based on three main features that clearly differentiated it from traditional student support: voluntary participation; early intervention; and proactive advice. It delivered services that adhered to the following six strategies:

1. Identification of high-risk courses rather than high-risk students.
2. Delivery of the service from the start of the semester rather than waiting for issues to appear.
3. Integration of study skills advice along with course content.
4. Delivery of the support service in regular classrooms rather than in a separate support centre.
5. Encouragement of peer collaborative learning in the sessions.
6. Participation being voluntary. (Martin et al., 1993)

These strategies encouraged student participation in the friendly environment that was SI, and facilitated a depth of learning and understanding of course content in those who attended.

2.2.1.6 What SI leaders did

As experienced students, SI leaders assisted their peers from their position and perspective as effective learners in the course. Having firstly received a high grade followed by SI training in facilitation strategies, they were well placed to advise and guide novice students, and to help them to understand the nuances of college/university learning. The SI leaders' role was not only to design useful activities but also to encourage attending students to develop sound study strategies (Arendale, 1993; Martin et al., 1993; SI Supervisor Manual, 1995). The catch cry for SI programs focused on this point as the strength of what the student leaders and the program offered: "what to learn as well as how to learn".

In the early model of SI, SI student leaders were expected to re-attend lectures in the course to re-acquaint themselves with the course content and to note any significant changes from when they had studied it (Martin et al., 1993; SI Supervisor Manual, 1995). Then, using their notes as well as the memory of their own experiences when they took the course, they began to plan and develop sessions designed to facilitate understanding and learning of course concepts for the current cohort of students in the course. They generally worked in pairs. They communicated regularly, usually weekly, with the lecturer of the course to finalise plans for the next session and to debrief the previous one. The fundamental difference between SI leaders and other faculty teaching staff was the emphasis in SI on collaborative, informal learning activities and the construction of friendly, empathetic peer-to-peer relationships (Martin et al., 1993; SI Supervisor Manual, 1995).

2.2.1.7 The effectiveness of SI

The purpose of SI, as noted earlier, was to increase students' academic performance, thereby also generally increasing persistence or retention (Martin et al., 1993). Research from

UMKC in the 1980's and 1990's, demonstrated that SI attendance did just that – it had a positive impact on the academic performance of students participating in SI classes (Blanc et al., 1983; Martin et al., 1993). Blanc et al. (1983) suggested that this was the result of a combination of factors inherent in SI's makeup including its proactive, voluntary and non-remedial nature; its situation within a course so that all learning guidance and study skills advice are contextual; and its promotion of a high degree of student interaction and peer support within its classes. Research by Martin et al. (1993) compared the grades of students who attended SI classes (attendance being generally defined as attending more than three times in a particular course) with those of students enrolled in the course who did not attend. Grades of attendees were commonly higher than the grades of those who did not attend (Martin et al., 1993).

As institutions from other parts of the world began to implement SI, their early research also endorsed the effectiveness of SI in contributing positively to students' academic success and retention (Arendale, 1993; McGuire, 2006); this included some Australian studies (Murray, 1999).

2.2.2 Commendation for SI

SI provided students in higher education in the United States with an opportunity that had not existed before, and that was the possibility of meeting regularly with their peers and learning from and with them in informal, friendly, yet structured, peer-led sessions. The success of SI resulted in the program receiving commendations. For example, the program was endorsed by the United States Department of Education in 1981, and again in 1992, as an Exemplary Educational Program (Martin et al., 1993). The Department validated the SI program based on its effectiveness in the following areas:

1. Students participating in SI "earn higher mean final course grades" (p. 26) than students who do not participate in SI.

2. Students participating in SI "succeed at a higher rate" (p. 26) (that is, their withdrawal rate is lower and they receive a lower percentage of non-completion or failing final course grades) than those who do not participate in SI.

3. Students participating in SI "persist at the institution" (p. 26) (that is, they re-enrol and graduate) at higher rates than students who do not participate in SI.
The endorsements demonstrated recognition by educators that the program was meeting its objectives and was making a difference to participating students.

2.3 The USQ SI experiment

2.3.1 An outline of the pilot project

In February-March 1995, the USQ Quality Assurance Committee provided funding for USQ academic David Anderson (1995a) to attend a training workshop in this innovative program known as SI at UMKC. His report noted that it was a "stimulating and rewarding experience" where he found "many new ideas and constructive approaches to student support and teaching" (p. 11). He continued:

> A lot of what I found can be incorporated in, and enhance the quality of SI work and
> study skills at USQ. My only negative feeling is the realization of how much more I
> can, and still need to learn about education matters. (p. 11)

And so, after Anderson's return, and on his advice, the USQ Quality Assurance Committee in Semester 1 1995 "supported the trial of a programme that promised to improve students' chances in difficult units and so enhance the quality of the services offered to students" (Anderson, 1995b, p. 8). Senior academic staff members in the Nursing Department at USQ were briefed about SI, and they chose a unit of study to support a trial. The unit chosen for the trial to be held in Semester 2 1995 was a first year Nursing unit, Nursing Foundations 2. This course was selected as it had "reported disappointing failure rates in previous years" (Anderson, 1995b, p. 2). A management committee of academics and Directors from across a range of university sections at the time – the Office of Preparatory and Continuing Studies (OPACS), the Psychology Department, Special Projects, First Year Nursing, Staff Development and the Faculty of Education – was set up to advise on the trial's implementation (Anderson, 1995b).

The appointment to the committee of a number of people in upper management positions across the university suggested that the university took the trial seriously. Because of his recent experiences and instruction in SI, David Anderson was the obvious choice to be coordinator of the pilot project, and he prepared a report about the project on its conclusion. As an academic in OPACS, I was asked to assist with its implementation; I was about to gain my first taste of peer-assisted learning. Unknown to me then was how contagious and enduring David's quiet but emphatic enthusiasm for SI was going to prove to be for me.

2.3.1.1 The SI student instructors at USQ

Seventeen students were selected as "SI instructors" from the pool of 53 who, to the surprise of staff members, applied; approximately 12-15 had been expected to demonstrate interest (Anderson, 1995b, p. 3). Students were selected by the Nursing Department's senior

staff members based on the following criteria: "grade in that unit, overall grade point average, assessment of a one-page exposition on why they wanted to be SI instructors, and their impressions of the students' enthusiasm and sense of responsibility in being group leaders (Anderson, 1995b, p. 3).

The successful student instructors were trained by USQ staff members under David Anderson's guidance in the SI principles of small group management techniques, the development of problem-solving activities, redirecting questions skills and applied study skills (Anderson, 1995b, p. 4). They were prompted to encourage students in their SI sessions to ask questions and to be "socially supportive learners" (Anderson, 1995b, p. 4). All successful SI student instructors received an *SI Instructors Manual* from UMKC to serve as both a training guide and a resource.

2.3.1.2 A seed of passion

My involvement in the trial was a defining moment in time for me – a watershed in my university career. I was captivated by a program that demonstrated such respect for students and that had such a strong theoretical foundation in research over many years. I was excited by the philosophy of student development: the notion that university was about more than students just needing to pass, but included also a focus on the students' personal growth both as individuals and as learners.

From the very start, I enjoyed my conversations and interactions with the students who were selected for the pilot. They were keen and enthusiastic, and willing to give of themselves to help to make the trial a success. Students who attended SI classes in the pilot were given a questionnaire to gauge their satisfaction with the intervention. In response to Question 1, "What did you like about SI?" (Anderson, 1995b, Appendix B), students' comments included the following:

- They [SI student instructors] help us to understand things a lot. Although they do not tell us the answer, they head us in the right direction.
- The third year students [SI student instructors] knew what we wanted to do and were able to give us really good advice based on their experiences.
- [SI student instructors] had good advice, more understanding because they've already done the subject. Organized and knew their work.
- It [SI] gave us the chance to benefit from students who have been where we are and can therefore give us the most help because they knew how we would be feeling. (pp. 1 – 4)

These comments demonstrated clearly that the learning advice, guidance and insights into the unit and its content from the perspective of successful student peers who had completed the unit recently, were considered invaluable by participating students. My eyes were opened instantly to the wisdom of these "expert" learners and the significance of peer-assisted learning. A seed was sown.

2.3.1.3 The outcomes of the trial

The trial was considered a success. The success was attributed to "the excellence of the materials, the support of university staff and the dedication of the student instructors" (Anderson, 1995b, p. 9). 171 students attended the sessions. Anderson's report (1995b) claimed that what was most evident in the feedback provided by attending students on the questionnaire was a "sense of appreciation of the benefits of group learning, the realization that other students had problems, the friendliness of the sessions, the effectiveness of SI in helping students to learn, and the confidence imparted by the SI instructors" (pp. 7-8). After the SI intervention, the unit also achieved a "typical university unit profile" (Anderson, 1995b, p. 6): the intervention of SI brought the unit results back in line with the USQ average.

Anderson (1995b) noted in his report that the support from the Vice-Chancellor Academic was "instrumental" (p. 9), and that the pilot program would not have been possible at all without "the positive attitude and total support of the Nursing Program. [They] spoke encouragingly to the students and at lectures advertised the sessions. Their open support gave the students an additional motive to attend" (p. 9). Anderson's (1995b) report about the trial noted what the staff members involved believed were the benefits of SI:

> It is a social experience. In a relaxed atmosphere, students learn effectively while meeting other students, making friends, and generally enjoying themselves. They believe they have access to an instructor who is trying to help them in a unique way; someone who will share the secrets of how to understand and how to learn this unit, and someone who encourages them to ask questions, particularly questions that could not be asked of a lecturer or tutor who will grade them. It does not interfere with teaching and is non-threatening to the lecturers and tutors. (p. 3)

On Anderson's recommendation, SI was then rolled out to other units at USQ, initially Data Analysis and Economics.

2.3.2 What happened next

With the success of the pilot project in Semester 2 1995, it was decided to offer SI in 1996 in a small number of USQ's larger units with high failure rates and where there was support for the intervention from the department and its academic staff members, in keeping with standard SI preferences. The units offering SI were selected based on the team's cognisance, based largely on reputation and hearsay, of units with high failure rates and of which students tended to be wary and that they considered difficult. Data Analysis was one such unit; Economics another. A coordinator for the program was nominated from OPACS, and other staff members from that section, including myself, assisted with recruiting and training student leaders, observing sessions and with the general management of the program. My life in peer-assisted learning had truly begun.

After the pilot, the student SI instructors at USQ became known as "student leaders". This title is more indicative of the role, which is concerned with facilitating learning rather than with formal instruction. The term "student leader" or "peer leader" is also the preferred term in other SI and PAL programs For example, at the University of Wollongong, the term "peer leader" is favoured (https://www.uow.edu.au/student/services/pass/index.html).

Successful applicants for the positions of student leader at USQ continued to be selected based on their grade in the unit and their grade point average (GPA). And, while the one-page written application was discontinued, the applicants' reasons for hoping to become student leaders, such as an enthusiasm to assist their peers, were still considered crucial criteria for their success in gaining a position in the program. Academics held a tacit belief that a high grade and a high GPA were important in order for student leaders to inform and guide students appropriately, but no prescribed grade limit or recommendation was set in place at this time. It was considered equally imperative that the students who were offered the positions of leader were motivated by a desire to encourage and assist their peers to learn, accepting a preparedness to shoulder responsibility to meet this aim and a commitment to the PAL program and the university community.

To ascertain if prospective student leaders held these desires and motivations, they were selected at the time through a group interview. In these interviews, applicants were asked about their reasons for wanting to be PAL leaders. Staff members who conducted the interviews required applicants to voice empathy for their peers, signal a strong commitment to PAL and indicate that they would accept responsibility for encouraging students in their learning in order to be successful. The successful applicants were subsequently trained in collaborative learning techniques at group training sessions over a two-day period.

With the university's endorsement to continue the rollout of SI, it was imperative that a number of USQ academic staff members be trained and accredited as SI supervisors as quickly as possible. This was a requirement of SI management at UMKC to remain affiliated. Together with another colleague, I therefore attended SI Supervisor training at the University of Technology Sydney in 1996. It was an exciting and exhilarating experience for me; there were so many people at the workshop who shared boundless enthusiasm for student development and peer learning.

The experience not only was informative but also again lit up the passion inside me for PAL and for a program that could be of benefit to all stakeholders: participating students; student leaders; academic staff members; and the university as an institution. I returned to USQ full of enthusiasm and motivation for PAL.

2.3.3 The continued effectiveness of SI

A report (Couchman & Bull, 1996) about SI in the Business Economics unit in Semester 1 1996 noted that the intervention had had a positive impact on the academic performance of attending students, with participants averaging 0.71 of a grade point higher than non-participants (p. 3). The report also stated that students who "attended SI four times or more obtained more than twice the percentage of HD, A and B grades compared with those who attended less frequently" (p. 7). The questionnaire responses indicated that the students who attended considered the SI program a success. They appreciated the opportunity for group learning, the friendliness of the sessions and the "effectiveness of SI in helping them learn difficult material" (p. 10).

2.4 PALS by any other name…

2.4.1 Changes afoot

SI was offered in 1996 in a handful of units that adhered strictly to the program's governance requirements, but, with an increasing number of students at USQ opting to study externally, PAL began to cater more for these "distance students", as they were then termed. In 1997, the SI team decided to build on the success of the on-campus SI program and develop a PAL program specifically for distance students. It was trialled in the unit called "Economics". To participate in this particular SI program, external students were required to attend in person on the Toowoomba campus or at the USQ Study Centre in Brisbane. At that point in USQ's history, it had a number of study centres dotted around the state of

Queensland. These centres were available to all USQ external students who resided in the region and could physically access them.

The coordinator of SI at the time called the trial program "Distance Peer Assisted Learning Strategy" or "Distance PALS". The trial was considered a success as it had a positive impact on the performance of participants. For example, the grade point average of the students who attended Distance PALS in the Economics unit was 3.95 compared with 3.66 for those distance students who did not attend (Couchman & Bull, 1997, p. 10). As a result of this success, Distance PALS was offered specifically for distance students in 1998 and in 1999 in a small number of other units; again it was found to have a positive impact on the performance of participating students (Couchman, 1999).

2.4.1.1 Breakaway

In 1999, the SI coordinator, in conjunction with other involved staff members, including me, made the pivotal decision to step out from the authority and management of SI affiliation and to allow the program to morph into a model that was more suitable for a small regional Australian university with growing numbers of mature aged students and units offered by distance study. While the basic tenets of SI – namely, peer-assisted, collaborative, informal social learning opportunities – continued to be adhered to, the move allowed us to give ourselves permission to morph the program in other directions as we saw appropriate for USQ's students without seeking permission from UMKC SI management. For example, no longer did the PAL team need to restrict PAL opportunities to units with high failure rates or large enrolments; the team believed that PAL was of benefit to all students and could therefore be included in any unit where the unit team was willing. This heralded an exciting time for those of us dedicated to PAL. Both the PAL programs for distance students and the models for "day" students were from then on called "PALS" (Peer Assisted Learning Strategy).

2.4.1.2 Where it was offered

The structure of the program was changed to adapt to the existing university climate, the perception of students' needs and preferences, and the requests of academic staff members. New units were brought into the PAL community under the PALS banner, generally on the request of the faculty academic staff members who had responsibility for the management of particular units, including examination settings and student results. These academics sought ways to encourage and guide students in their learning, embracing the concept of peer learning. In Semester 1 1999, PALS was offered in eight units, both on campus and externally, with a total of 26 student leaders delivering the PAL sessions.

2.4.1.3 Support at a distance

Beginning in 2000, new technologies utilised by USQ allowed PALS sessions to become more accessible to distance students. For example, distance students in Economics and Data Analysis were offered PALS via audiographics, a teleconferencing system that operated via existing telephone lines and that involved a combination of audio communication and the projection of visual images, such as graphs, transmitted onto a special whiteboard. The system linked USQ's main campus in the city of Toowoomba with its Queensland regional town centres as they existed at the time, including Maryborough, Bundaberg, Western Downs (Dalby), Gold Coast, Kingaroy, Mackay and the Sunshine Coast. PALS in other units followed suit and offered PAL via audiographics. While distance students still needed to travel to a study centre in a regional town, it did allow them to connect and communicate synchronously with their peers.

Further burgeoning and development of online technologies across Australia and the world, allowed USQ to consider providing study opportunities, including PAL sessions, for distance or external students (Huijser & Kimmins, 2005) via the particular electronic systems they chose to purchase and roll out. In 2006, MSN Messenger technology was in use at USQ, and external students who were interested in peer support were offered PALS sessions via MSN Messenger teleconferencing. Student response to the sessions was generally positive with feedback noting that students appreciated the opportunity to connect with other students while developing a deeper understanding of course content (Huijser & Kimmins, 2006).

This support continued through to 2008 when USQ's platform preference again heralded a change, this time to the use of Blackboard Collaborate, and after that to Wimba, which provided similar tools for interaction. These technologies allowed students to remain in their own home or place of their choice and communicate with their peers by using their own personal computer or laptop. The electronic platform supported by USQ at any given time was the one the PALS program was obliged to use. The platform made no difference to the aims of the program (as stated in Appendix 1) and its focus on peer-to-peer interaction. The student leaders in the PALS sessions utilised the technology on offer to facilitate collaboration and ensure participating students could communicate with one another and with the leader.

2.4.2 The effectiveness of PALS

As was explained in the Introductory chapter, this thesis is concerned with student leadership. While, I have chosen to explore this topic from the perspective of the student

leaders in a PAL program, the study is not a justification for or an endorsement of the employment of the PAL programs including Meet-Up at USQ. However, I have chosen to demonstrate common practice in PAL evaluation by including a brief explanation and example of what has been carried out at USQ. I have also included evidence of some recognition of its success.

2.4.2.1 Evaluation of PALS at USQ

Since the inception of SI in the mid-1970s, the program gradually spread throughout the world, and the many institutions offering PAL programs based on the SI model continued to focus on both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to demonstrate the success of the program for the participating students. Quantitative data analysis generally involved a comparison of grades between the students who attended and the grades of those who did not attend; qualitative data were collected from responses to questionnaires provided for students to complete.

This was also the practice followed at USQ from 1995-1996 in its SI days, and then from 1997 through to 2008 with PALS. For example, in 2013, a quantitative research study involving a data mining and analysis exercise of student records from enrolment data from two units, Data Analysis and Economics, from Semester 2 2000 and Semester 1 2001 yielded findings that demonstrated PALS' success. The study revealed that students who participated in PALS did show a statistically significant improvement in academic achievement and retention (Kimmins, Kek, & Padró, 2013), as noted below:

- An independent-samples t-test conducted to compare retention rate and academic attainment for students who participated in PALS and students who did not in the two units from 2000 and 2001 showed a significant difference in retention ($p=.007$ at a confidence level of 99%) in favour of students who participated in PALS.
- For one of the two units analysed (Data Analysis), an independent-samples t-test conducted to compare retention rate and academic attainment showed a statistically significant improvement ($p= .001$) in the academic achievement of Meet-Up participants along with improved retention, with Meet-Up participants demonstrating final grades results half-way between a C and a B in contrast to non-participants whose mean was at a C (a 0.55 grade increase in the scale used). This unit also demonstrated an 18% increase in retention.
- For the second unit (Economics), there was only a statistically significant increase ($p=.048$) in retention, which improved by 7.72%; however, a comparison of means

between Meet-Up participants and non-participants showed Meet-Up participants had a 0.10 increase in grades in the scale (1.83 to 1.73, with C=2 and F=1) (p. 2).

Qualitative data, such as the attending students' conceptions of the value of the program to their understanding of unit concepts and of the contribution of PALS participation to their success as learners, were also gathered from open-ended questions on questionnaires that were made available for student attendees to complete towards the end of semester. Commonly, these surveys demonstrated that attending students believed that they did better in examinations and assignments and had received better grades because of their participation in PALS.

2.4.2.2 Commendation for PALS

In 2002, as was outlined in the previous chapter, USQ changed its terminology for its study programs, and "units" became known as "courses", placing it in alignment with many other tertiary institutions across Australia and the world. In 2003, USQ was audited by the Australian Universities Quality Assurance (AUQA) in 2002. AUQA was the quality assurance association that preceded the current Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). The October 2003 report of the audit commented on PALS in Section 5 Students and Student Support Services in subheading 5.4 Learning Support:

> Many initiatives are particularly noteworthy, such as the Peer-Assisted Learning Support program (PALS) in which some students who have completed a course with High Distinction provide assistance to students in that course's current cohort. PALS was developed as a result of benchmarking similar initiatives overseas and has proven successful in improving student pass rates. (AUQA Report, 2003, n.p.)

The report continued by commending USQ on a number of strengths, including the PALS initiative, making it Commendation 10: "AUQA commends USQ for the Peer-Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) service, which is an example of innovative and good practice in supporting students with their academic endeavours" (AUQA, 2003, n.p.).
The PALS program was then placed on the AUQA Good Practice Database (AUQA Media Release, 2003).

The program's staff members and the university section from which it was managed, OPACS, were buoyed by the award, and they endeavoured to maintain good practice by continuing to offer peer-assisted support in innovative ways to guide students in their studies. For me personally, national recognition and endorsement of the program in which I enjoyed working so much were immensely gratifying and rewarding, and encouraged me to strive to develop the program as much as I was able.

2.4.3 The lynch pins

PALS continued to offer peer learning support to USQ students, whether they were studying on-campus or by distance, and my work in the program and my passion and dedication for it continued. Feedback from the staff members involved was conclusive: PAL worked, and the efforts of the student leaders were appreciated. For example, a lecturer in Accounting, when asked to comment on his perceptions of the PALS leader's competencies and abilities on the end-of-semester survey in Semester 2 1999 wrote: "I was happy with the PALS leader in all of my discussions with her. I was generally impressed with her attitude and knowledge" (Academic, 1999).

Students who attended PALS sessions either on campus or by distance were also appreciative of PAL. For example, a student who attended Distance PALS in the unit Economics in Semester 2 2000 was quite adamant about the usefulness of the support offered in PALS:

> I attended 75% of PALS sessions and found PALS was excellent. The
> additional help and information as well as Exam preparation. I feel that it
> without it I may have barely passed or possibly failed, however I received a
> B. All PALS [leaders] are very approachable and no question was too stupid.
> And as [student] stated in a previous posting it increased my understanding of the
> Unit (Student, 2000).

2.4.3.1 Support for the student leaders

The move to split from SI governance in 1999 had meant that PAL administration and operations materials all now needed to be provided by those of us involved in the PALS program at USQ. While initially the training we provided for student leaders followed the basic outline that we had embraced and adapted in SI, we further developed our own version of the manual or handbook for the new student leaders. My enjoyment of working with the student leaders had continued, and I was frequently amazed by their capacity to give to the students and the program regardless of how busy and complex their own lives were. Hence, for our in-house Student Leader Manual for 2004, I decided to include some advice from experienced student leaders. One leader provided the following:

> My experience as a PALS leader has been positive. In the beginning, I felt a
> little apprehensive about having to stand up in front of a group of people and facilitate
> a session but as time went on my confidence grew. The most important skill I have

developed is the ability to communicate with a group of people.… People learn in different ways. A challenging aspect of PALS is making sure that you cater for all learning types in the activities you prepare. I often found myself stopping to think about different ways that I could explain concepts that some people in the group did not understand. What works for some people may not work for others.…..

It is important for them to work out answers as a group. Competition is a great way to get everyone involved. When preparing activities make sure that they suit the group you are facilitating. The presentation of some activities may need to be altered for certain groups. My final piece of advice is have fun and be positive. (PALS leader, 2004)

Many student leaders were mature age students, with all the complications that family and job commitments on top of their own study could bring. It was their focused dedication to facilitating the learning of their peers that allowed them to function well as student leaders. My interest in and awareness of their emerging capacity in the role of student leader, and their growth and development as individuals, were further awakened.

2.4.3.2 Further change and opportunity

A university restructure in 2008 brought changes to the roles of academic support staff members and to the sections from which they served and assisted students through the various support programs. OPACS had been restructured and renamed; it was now the Learning and Teaching Support Unit (LTSU). Sustainable funding for student support initiatives, including PAL programs, was a problem for student support sections in many higher education institutions in Australia (Murray, 2006). Murray (2006) noted that "PASS schemes are usually continually under threat of being shut down by budget controllers who need convincing of the value of PASS" (p. 5).

At USQ, efforts to secure central institutional funding for PALS had not been successful, and PALS continued to be jointly funded – from the Faculties which were generally very supportive, and now LTSU. LTSU was not prepared to fund other staff to work in the program with me; hence, a further result of the restructure was that I became the coordinator and the sole staff member involved in the PALS program. I was heartened and encouraged by my colleagues who remained supportive of the program and promoted it in their work with faculty staff and students. Nevertheless, my passion for and resolute belief in PAL and in the PALS program were about to be tested.

2.5 And then there was Meet-Up

2.5.1 An historical overview

2.5.1.1 Time to Meet-Up

With the USQ restructure in 2008, it was felt that the name "PALS" had perhaps run its course. As noted in the previous chapter, with the advice and assistance of my supervisor, I decided to change the name of the program to a title that would hopefully appeal to students, and that would hint at the informal, friendly, peer-led structure of the program. "Meet-Up" was chosen. The program in Semester 2 2008 was revitalised under the new name, and changes to the PAL opportunities offered in the program were made.

2.5.1.2 The theoretical underpinnings of Meet-Up

The theoretical origins of SI, based as they were on the theories of Piaget (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958, as cited in Martin et al., 1993) and Vygotsky (1978, as cited in Martin et al., 1993), were still considered to be a sound model for a PAL program, and research continued to demonstrate the benefits of students learning from and with peers. Arendale's (2017) recent annotated bibliography of PAL devoted 290 pages to SI programs, mostly in the United States. While this indicated that much has been written about PAL, a closer investigation reveals that the majority of entries outlined evaluations of PAL programs in order to measure the benefits to participating students. More about this can be found in Chapter 3, the literature review, where further literature about PAL is discussed.

The Meet-Up program was therefore also based on the concepts or pedagogical discourses of peer learning and collaborative learning, which encouraged and facilitated students' development and construction of their own learning.

2.5.1.3 The rationale behind Meet-Up

Meet-Up, as with SI and PALS, remained true to the principles of peer learning and collaborative learning, as noted above. And, while various new models of PAL were developed under the Meet-Up banner, I did not lose sight of the solid foundation provided by these two theories.

As with most discipline-based PAL programs, the aim of Meet-Up was to assist participating students by offering them opportunities to increase their understandings of content-specific concepts and to receive study skill advice in an empathetic, peer-led environment (see Appendix 1: The aim and objectives of the Meet-Up Program). Yet, within these bounds, I strove to adapt, change and develop Meet-Up so that it would continue to serve more intentionally the existing specific USQ student cohort (Kimmins, 2013).

2.5.1.4 The structure of Meet-Up

The demographic nature of USQ students had continued to change: the majority of them worked part-time or even full-time, and many had families. As a result, they had needs based on their time restraints. Interest in attending on-campus classes was starting to decline. USQ began offering some courses in online study mode only, and that situation, coupled with the requirement that lectures be made available online, resulted in attendances at some on-campus classes dropping significantly. Some academics, concerned about this trend, searched for ways to encourage students who were enrolled in the on-campus mode to come on to campus for classes. They saw the Meet-Up on-campus program as one means of encouraging students' physical presence on USQ's campuses; other academics developed an interest in employing online Meet-Up models, recognising that PAL could help students by signposting areas that required extra time and effort.

As a result, the number of courses offering Meet-Up grew rapidly. The way the sessions operated changed; lecturers became more involved and online platforms were utilised more, but Meet-Up models continued to be founded on student peer guidance and student to student collaboration. Meet-Up sessions encouraged participating students to construct their own understandings of course and discipline concepts, and provided them with a means of engaging both academically and socially with their peers; this contributed to a sense of belonging and a community of learning, whether on-campus or online (Huijser et al., 2008). This sense of feeling part of a wider community in a non-threatening informal environment like Meet-Up built confidence in participating students, and with increased confidence came increased academic success.

In order to ensure that the PAL opportunities offered at USQ under the new name continued to meet students' needs and to respond to the requirements of diverse programs, disciplines and contexts, the structure of peer support sessions was modified or adapted, and a number of different formats were trialled. The Meet-Up program had the capacity to be flexible within its self-nominated boundaries. The structure of the Meet-Up sessions could therefore vary from course to course to meet the needs of the students, the teaching staff members and the discipline.

For example, in some courses where the academics chose to offer students a PAL opportunity, the best means of offering peer assistance seemed to be to have the student leader in the session with the tutor or lecturer. By allowing Meet-Up leaders to operate from peer learning principles but within a mainstream class such as a laboratory session, the program demonstrated both its flexibility and its commitment to student engagement.

2.5.1.5 Student leader selection

While Meet-Up was offered in more courses than before, and the total number of student leaders across a semester consequently increased, the numbers of students applying to be leaders for each course decreased. The method of selecting the student leaders therefore needed some adaptation. I developed an application form that asked the students to nominate their grades in the relevant course/s and their GPAs. A minimum requirement of a passing grade – that is, four out of a possible seven – was set for both course grades and GPAs. In addition, as coordinator, I increasingly sought, from both faculty academics and incumbent leaders, advice and recommendations about students whom they considered may make good Meet-Up leaders. I then contacted these potential leaders, talking with them in an interview-based conversation to determine if they seemed to me, too, to be suitable.

More than ever, I based my assessment not only on their course grades and their GPAs, but more particularly on their reasons for wanting to be student leaders and their level of enthusiasm to assist their peers to learn. To this end, I closely considered and duly pondered everything that they shared with me in support of their application. These included any learning experiences that they had encountered that had impacted on their results, any leadership or mentoring experiences that they had undertaken, and their degree of university involvement in clubs or societies.

While most applicants had good course grades and high GPAs, I did appoint a few students whose grades in the particular courses and/or GPAs were borderline passes, but whose enthusiasm and ability to persevere with their study programs and to overcome setbacks meant not only that I considered them eminently suitable, but also that I deemed it quite proper to engage them as Meet-Up leaders where their role would be to advise and guide their peers in their learning journeys. Sometimes students who have struggled initially with understanding course concepts have a clear grasp of how and why other students struggle and can offer sage advice from their own experiences.

On acceptance of the position on offer, all novice student leaders were expected to attend the student leader development workshop. In this workshop, a Meet-Up leader's obligations were explained and discussed in exercises led by the coordinator, the requirements of the position were described and modelled in activities conducted by incumbent Meet-Up leaders, any perceived issues or problems were explored with the whole workshop group and opportunities to practise the tasks demanded of the role were facilitated. I had confidence that this workshop would provide the novice Meet-Up leaders with the encouragement, advice, support and skills needed for them to become good student leaders.

2.5.2 Meet-Up models and innovations

2.5.2.1 Meet-Up models

A number of new PAL models were designed to suit specific contexts. All models were based on the principles of constructivism and student development. Leaders encouraged students to engage in activities or exercises that the leaders had designed and/or to find the answers to their questions themselves with guidance where needed.

There were three on-campus discipline-based models. Firstly, the original, stand-alone sessions, planned, prepared and conducted by student peer leaders, and generally one hour in length, were continued. Secondly, split workshops where faculty staff members and student leaders split the session time were offered, generally on the request of the academic. In these sessions, faculty staff members taught for part of the session (generally an hour), and student leaders facilitated learning for the other part, generally also an hour. The other model consisted of shared workshops where student leaders operated within a faculty-controlled learning environment. Student leaders offered advice and assistance from an experienced student perspective, deferring to faculty staff members who were present in the room when issues or questions went beyond this remit.

In Semester 1 2017, my penultimate semester as coordinator, Meet-Up was offered in 39 courses across these three models, according to what worked best for that course or discipline. It was offered online and on campus at all three USQ campuses. There was no one best model of offering Meet-Up, because it was context-driven, and different models suited different disciplines and courses.

2.5.2.2 Meet-Up in the Law discipline

A specific example of the flexibility of the Meet-Up Program's sessions can be demonstrated in the law discipline. In the course LAW1201 in Semester 1 2010, Meet-Up sessions were made available to students on both the Toowoomba and the Springfield campuses. Students studying the course externally could access Meet-Up support and advice via the course's online platform, known at USQ as "studydesk". The support involved one-hour, on-campus sessions held weekly on both campuses, and material and advice posted on a Meet-Up forum that was accessed online via the course studydesk. The four leaders who took these sessions used material designed in conjunction with the lecturer and the Meet-Up coordinator in weekly meetings or through contact with the lecturer. Leaders were asked to reflect on their sessions, and the meetings provided an opportunity to share reflections on previous sessions.

Law academics as well as students appreciated the model. For example, one law academic chose to make a video explaining and promoting Meet-Up, which was then located on her course studydesk. Her transcript ran as follows:

I have been teaching first year law students for seven years now and I know what works for law students in terms of successfully completing their first year at university.

Starting a law degree is rather like entering a new world. It has its own language. Its own way of writing. And its own way of thinking. Meet Up is the best chance for students to get to know about the world of law from students who fully understand what it's like to be a first year law student.

Meet Up has been part of my law course since the very beginning of the Law degree here at USQ. I see it as an essential part of learning about law in a comfortable, friendly environment.

The best thing about Meet Up is that it's run by my top students from previous years who can fully understand and help students in their studies. It's very relaxed and provides a chance for all students to chat and ask questions – any questions – about the materials we are studying.

My Meet Up leaders are trained and know how to run the sessions very effectively. If you have problems, you can tell them. Although I have regular meetings with my Meet Up leaders, we don't discuss individual students – so students know they can speak freely with leaders about any issues they have.

First year students love Meet Up because they gain confidence in understanding the law and they get to meet other law students and make great friendships. And of course, they have the opportunity to become a Meet Up leader themselves.

Without a doubt, I would say that Meet Up is THE best program run by USQ for supported learning! (Hart, 2014, n.p.)

2.5.2.3 *Meet-Up Student Community*

With only the USQ students who were enrolled in the courses offering Meet-Up having the opportunity to learn from an "expert" student peer, further innovations were instigated in PAL in Semester 2 2012 in order to open up the opportunities to a greater number of students. A generic model, called "Meet-Up Student Community", was set up on each USQ campus and online. This non-discipline-based initiative was created with the specific purpose of extending the support offered by student leaders in the course-based program to cater to a broader range of students who may enjoy and benefit from peer contact.

This model provided the opportunity for USQ students to discuss with a peer student leader any general concerns that they had about study that could assist them with their adjustment to university life and with the development of their learning skills. Online Meet-Up Student Community leaders also responded to students' questions and posted study tips and advice.

2.5.2.4 Murri Meet-Up

In Semester 1 2014, a further expansion of this generic support was extended to an on-campus drop-in opportunity for USQ Australian Indigenous or First Nations' students on each campus, and to an online forum space where they could ask any questions about their studies. These models were called "Murri Meet-Up", a name proffered by the Indigenous Meet-Up leaders who provided this support. The term "Murri" is a blanket term often used to cover all First Nations' peoples living in Queensland. However, the Indigenous student leaders did not feel it would be viewed unfavourably by other Aboriginal groups, and so I implemented it.

2.5.2.5 Leader Assistants in the Meet-Up Program (LAMPs)

In yet another innovation, in Semester 1 2013, I chose Meet-Up leaders who had been in the position for a number of semesters and offered them the opportunity to become senior Meet-Up leaders or LAMPs – Leader Assistants in the Meet-Up Program. This role fulfilled both a quality assurance measure and an extension of peer-to-peer support – in this case, peer student leader to peer student leader. The requirement of students in this LAMP role was to observe Meet-Up sessions, provide feedback to the leaders about their performance, offer encouragement and advice, and also keep me, as the coordinator of the program, informed of operational matters. As experienced Meet-Up leaders, these people were well qualified to fulfil the role of LAMP, and indeed did so with commitment and aplomb.

2.5.2.6 A shared opportunity

Semester 1 2013 also brought the welcome addition of an Administration Officer to the Meet-Up Program. The Director of LTSU decided to appoint a staff member to Meet-Up to assist with administrative tasks. The appointment was a thrill for me. Not only did I have some relief from the continual round of administrative and operational responsibilities, but also I had a colleague with whom to share the joys of working with student leaders, as well as the challenges of maintaining and developing PAL.

A restructure to the Academic Services Division in 2016 unfortunately rescinded this support. I became the Peer Learning Coordinator with the sole responsibility and the total workload for PAL at USQ.

2.5.2.7 Workshops run by student leaders for student leaders

Attendance at training sessions had always been a requirement of students who were offered positions as PAL leaders at USQ. To that end, attendance was mandatory for novice leaders, but was only encouraged for the experienced student leaders. Gradually, over time, I had, as coordinator, begun to include more and more in training sessions the incomparable resource that was the incumbent leaders. I invited them to come to training sessions to deliver activities, offer advice and encouragement, and share their experiences. The incumbent leaders told me that they really appreciated the opportunity to attend the training sessions. Not only did it allow them to reconnect with other leaders and reflect on their experiences, but furthermore, their feedback told me that they really enjoyed helping the novice leaders as well. As a result, I decided to make attendance at the workshops a requirement for all Meet-Up leaders, novice and continuing.

Feedback provided by the novice leaders indicated that they not only derived enjoyment and encouragement from the presence of all the experienced leaders, but also found that the advice and guidance offered by them as student leader peers and role models were invaluable. Thus, in 2014, I began to offer the LAMPs and other experienced leaders the opportunity of planning and conducting the majority of sessions during these workshops. While I had always included some activities led by experienced leaders, this set a precedent by explicitly making the workshops all about leaders, by leaders. This initiative was clearly constructed on the peer-led theoretical underpinning of the Meet-Up program; it was another example of peers guiding and advising peers, rather than a person in authority imposing her or his views and requirements. These changes described above that were brought in under the Meet-Up banner were made to the structure and operations of the program, rather than to its core philosophical and theoretical base, which remained unchanged.

2.5.3 The effectiveness of Meet-Up

2.5.3.1 The evaluation of Meet-Up

The qualitative path begun with SI and PALS evaluation was the one that I chose to follow to demonstrate the effectiveness of Meet-Up. McCarthy et al. (1997) suggested that a purely quantitative approach to analysing the effectiveness of SI has limitations, and that future research should consider employing "continuous qualitative feedback in the form of surveys, interviews, and informal discussion from SI students themselves on the benefits to them of the SI programme" (p. 225). They added: "The importance of such feedback in allowing students to reflect on their own learning cannot be overestimated" (p. 225).

In this vein, students participating in Meet-Up, as with SI and PALS before it, were offered the opportunity to complete questionnaires about their perceptions of the program in terms of its contribution to their success in the course and their persistence in their studies. The surveys developed for Meet-Up were greatly simplified from their predecessors, but, rather than being offered only once or twice during a semester, they were employed on a weekly basis to gauge the ongoing usefulness of Meet-Up. Participating students overwhelmingly, semester after semester, claimed that they found Meet-Up sessions useful.

2.5.3.2 Commendations for Meet-Up

The Meet-Up program has received two official commendations: one internal to USQ; and a second one from an accrediting body.

Firstly, in 2012, the program was successful in its nomination for a USQ Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning. The project title and description were as follows:

Project title: Meet-Up for Success

Meet-Up is a dynamic, sustained USQ-developed student-led program, based on peer learning theory. It inspires both participants and leaders, facilitating skill development and personal growth.

Secondly, in 2013, Ruth Terwijn, a lecturer from the Department of Nursing and Midwifery, reported that Meet-Up, as part of the undergraduate nursing program, had received a commendation from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC).

These awards recognised the value of the program, demonstrating that the support offered was acknowledged beyond the section and the university, and subsequently provided staff members involved, including me, with a sense of accomplishment and acknowledgement. As Coordinator of the Meet-Up program, I also keenly felt a sense of justification, almost relief, in particular because of the ongoing battle to have the program funded every year; the awards gave me further heart and encouragement.

2.5.4 Who paid

Meet-Up was financed jointly by LTSU and Faculties until Semester 1 2010, when the Learning and Teaching Committees were disbanded. With no sign of institutional funding looming on the horizon, I applied successfully for financing for Meet-Up from the Student Amenity Fee. This was a fee that all students at Australian universities were required to pay annually, and from it universities provide services to support students in their studies. At

USQ, the fee was managed by a board from the Students and Communities Office. The process firstly involves students who are members on the Student Representative Committee reviewing the applications for funding and then advising the board about which projects they believe could benefit all USQ students and should be funded. Next, their recommendations are duly considered by the board, which in turn advises the University Management Committee, which makes the final decision.

Regardless of the success of my initial application, I was required to reapply each year for this funding. Each year it was approved by the student body and endorsed by the university, and so the Meet-Up program continued to be financed in this way every year. My last re-application before my retirement at the end of 2017 was also successful, ensuring funding throughout 2018 after I had left USQ.

2.6 The Meet-Up leaders

Throughout all changes and modifications to the structure of USQ's PAL program from its inception as SI, through PALS, to Meet-Up, the student leaders astounded me with their enthusiasm, resilience and perseverance. Yet I realised that, while the student leaders were referred to as "the key people" in the SI program (SI Supervisor Manual, 1995, p. 10), in the PALS program and then in Meet-Up, their development as individuals and learners, and more particularly as leaders, was overlooked or at the very least underexplored. Evaluation of the effectiveness of peer-led programs commonly had participating students' academic success and persistence as the main focus. While student leaders' growth was sometimes addressed, the focus was generally on their growth in the role of student leader. This is explained in Chapter 3.

Surely these student leaders who gave so much to the program deserved a greater and more in-depth level of research into who they themselves were as the lynch pins of PAL. I had observed over many years the development of the student leaders' personal growth and maturity, their increasing confidence as student peer leaders and what seemed to me to be their demonstration of leadership skills. For me, the interest in their growth and development lay in this under-researched area: their observed emergence as leaders. What I wondered was whether what I thought were leadership skills were indeed that; I wondered whether they themselves believed that they were leaders in actuality and not just nominally, and, if so, what had contributed to that development. These musings resulted in the research goals and the research questions as stated in Chapter 1.

To achieve these goals and to ascertain answers to these questions, I purposively selected a number of Meet-Up leaders whom I invited to participate in my study. The participating student leaders are introduced in Chapter 6.

2.7 Summary of the chapter

The Meet-Up program was the context for my thesis, and, as such, a clear, though not exhaustive, understanding of the program is essential for the other chapters to make sense. While I have much more information about Meet-Up, only enough has been included in this chapter to substantiate my reasons for choosing it as my context; I have not written a justification of the program as such. To this end, this chapter began with an explanation and outline of SI, which was the theoretical and structural foundation from which Meet-Up was developed. From there, the PALS program was sketched, and the chapter culminated in an account of the Meet-Up program: its conception and history, its rationale and theoretical foundations, its models and innovations, and briefly its evaluation and commendations. The chapter demonstrated the longevity of PAL at USQ, and the Meet-Up program in particular. In addition, this chapter has woven through it the thread of my involvement, influence and impact on PAL; it hints at the seed of my interest in student leaders and my awakening awareness of what I perceived as their development, as individuals, learners and student leaders. These perceptions heralded my passion for the topic and ultimately for this research project. Next is an exploration of the literature.

3 THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses literature relevant to this thesis, with the exception of literature about the research methodologies that is discussed in Chapter 5. Because the context of the study, Meet-Up, was a PAL program, clearly, the first field of literature that I needed to investigate was PAL programs in higher education. Much of the literature that I found about PAL programs had the participating students as its focus rather than those who fulfilled the position of student leader; as a result, this section in the chapter is relatively small.

The student leaders in Meet-Up had the term "leader" in their title, and I had perceived that they exhibited traits and performed behaviours that, from my initially limited knowledge of the subject, seemed to be synonymous with leadership, but I now needed to find out if the literature would confirm my observations. My choice of research topic placed the phenomenon of student leadership firmly under scrutiny, yet it appeared that there was limited literature about student leadership in PAL programs. As a result, student leadership in higher education more generally was established as another area of literature that I needed to explore.

An examination of student leadership, however, would not be complete without undertaking a review of the literature about leadership in general, an area in which so much has been written. Reviewing the literature in this arena was a mammoth task, and one that could not be all-inclusive. I have included therefore a discussion of the leadership literature that influenced my thinking, and that formed a firm foundation for the study, including its conceptual framework; other theories, categories or practices of leadership, regardless of acclaim and respect in the field, have, by necessity, been excluded.

I begin the chapter with a discussion of student leadership in PAL literature, followed by research into student leadership in higher education, and finally leadership literature generally. I concluded the chapter with a section on power and authority as the literature proffers a connection among power, authority and leadership. In a general sense, leadership positions, including those of student leaders, are imbued with some degree of power and authority.

3.2 Student leadership in PAL programs

3.2.1 An overview

As Meet-Up was a PAL program, this was the main area in which my research nestled, and I needed to explore the literature closely and to review relevant works in some detail. My investigation

revealed that much of the literature about PAL tended to be experiential and practice-based. It described PAL programs, what was done and why, and whether participants who participated in them were successful. Thus, while I discovered ample literature about the benefits of PAL programs to participants, research about the student leaders was not extensive, and was consequently more difficult to find.

It is important to note that the PAL programs discussed in this section of this literature review were academic support programs, not mentoring programs; Topping (2005) claimed that confusion between the two was evident in the literature. Mentoring involves supporting, encouraging and positive role-modelling, and is often one-to-one. While PAL encompasses this form of support, it covers much more, which is discussed in the following subsections.

3.2.2 Definition of PAL

The definition of PAL used in this study was taken from a work on the subject that has stood the test of time. This definition of the term mirrors the accepted understanding of PAL around the time when Meet-Up was developed. Furthermore, it is an explanation that was still relevant at the time that this thesis was written.

PAL is:

The acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions. PAL is people from similar social groupings, who are not professional teachers, helping each other to learn and by so doing, learning themselves. (Topping & Ehly, 1998, p. 1)

PAL engages with the cognitive domain as well as the social. A PAL leader offers "support and scaffolding from a more competent other" who can also provide a "cognitive model of competent performance" (Topping, 2005, p. 637). In this thesis, this term was used as an inclusive one that covered a range of PAL programs, including SI and Meet-Up.

3.2.3 PAL as a Learning Assistance Program (LAP)

3.2.3.1 History of LAPs

In the 1960s in the United Sates, a need was seen for student development staff members in higher education institutions to have standards to guide their practice. The first body that was set up to develop such standards was dissolved in 1976 and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS] replaced it in 1979, with the first full CAS publication appearing in 1986 (CAS, 2012). CAS aimed to guide the practice of "student affairs, student development, and student service providers" (p. 7) in higher

education institutions by providing "a set of criteria by which practitioners could judge program quality and effectiveness" (p. 3). These programs were established and run by student development staff members, and were known as Learning Assistance Programs (LAPs). CAS (2016) explained LAPs as follows:

> Learning assistance programs facilitate student development and academic success by helping students develop appropriate strategies and behaviours to increase learning efficiency (Dansereau, 1985). Participation in learning assistance programs can also improve student retention (Beal & Noel, 1980; Ryan & Glenn, 2004) and provide the kinds of "rewarding interactions" that foster student intellectual and social growth (Tinto, 1987). (p. 3)

By virtue of their purpose and structure, PAL programs in the United States were and still are considered to be LAPs, and, as such, they are guided by CAS standards. These guidelines are helpful for coordinators of any LAP, including an Australian PAL program like Meet-Up, and for that reason they are discussed here. From 2009, CAS (2016) has provided a *Self-assessment Guide* that serves as a useful tool for student development practitioners. The guide offers advice and guidelines related to most areas involved in setting up and maintaining a sound LAP, including implementation, action planning, data compilation, and assessment and review.

3.2.3.2 The philosophy, mission and goals of LAPs

The CAS (2012) philosophy was grounded in beliefs about "excellence in higher education, collaboration between teacher and learner, ethics in educational practice, student development as a major goal in higher education, and student responsibility for learning" (p. 16). While Principle 6 states that "the primary responsibility for learning and development rests with the student" (p. 7), the first four of its initial principles, which were based on the 1938 and 1949 editions of the Student Personnel Point of View as expounded by Miller and Prince in 1976 (CAS, 2012), are clear in their emphasis that the institution must provide for the development of each individual student:

> …the student must be considered as a whole person; each student is a unique person and must be treated as such; the student's total environment is educational and must be used to achieve full development of the individual; and students seek higher education in responsible ways and will, when encouraged to do so, access appropriate educational resources when they are provided, made known to them, and are relevant to students' educational and developmental needs. (p. 7)

The remaining principles outline the institution's responsibility in facilitating this development. Its original eight principles make an interesting comparison with later changes.

The most recent CAS (2016) publication stated that the primary mission of a LAP must be "to provide students with resources and opportunities to improve their ability to learn and to achieve academic success" (p. 13). While being clear that students should be the focus of LAP programs, the goals emphasise the notion that the LAP can only "assist", "help" or "foster" (p. 13) students in their learning, placing the onus directly on to the student. In addition, the document stated that a goal of LAP's should be to "support the academic standards and requirements of the institution" (p. 13).

I was fascinated to note that the 1986 emphasis on the development of the student as an individual person (in particular, goals 1-4) had been largely lost with the new goals and replaced with an increased focus on institutional fit and academic learning. In fact, the goals have been largely flipped to return almost all responsibility for success in higher education back to the students. This is interesting to note in light of the literature about PAL programs which demonstrates that they have student development at their heart.

3.2.4 The PAL literature

The PAL literature reviewed here involved programs that met the definition of PAL and the explanation of what a PAL leader does, as was outlined previously. Such programs were typically provided by university faculties or student support sections. They were concerned with guiding and assisting students to understand concepts and content in specific courses; leadership development was not a primary focus. In these programs, student leaders were selected and trained by program staff members. The student leaders then planned, prepared and conducted collaborative activities designed to facilitate students' understanding of course concepts and to encourage the take-up of useful study strategies.

3.2.4.1 SI

SI is a PAL program that is well-known in higher education, particularly in the United States, and it has been initiated in colleges and universities in many countries throughout the world. It has been recognised as a sound means of providing peer advice to encourage students in their academic and personal development, and to contribute to success in their study (Dawson et al., 2014). A number of institutions in Australia also offer the SI model of PAL, often using the name "PASS" (Peer-assisted study sessions). For example, the University of Wollongong manages a large PAL program that they term "PASS" (https://www.uow.edu.au/student/support-services/pass/).

While Arendale's (2017) annotated bibliography of PAL devoted 290 pages to SI programs, mostly offered in the United States, implying that much had been written about PAL, my closer investigation revealed that many entries outlined evaluations of PAL programs designed to measure their impact on participating students. I have not pursued a review of the literature about these programs, as the impact of the leadership role on the student leaders was more often than not overlooked. Their role tended to be of interest only in light of their capacity to deliver sessions in which the attending students benefited academically. The benefits to the student leaders and to the development of their leadership skills, particularly from their perspectives, had been covered sparsely, and generally only as a footnote in reports and surveys, despite the fact that the student leaders played a pivotal role in contributing to the success of PAL (Couchman, 2009; Martin et al., 1993).

Of great interest to me, then, was Lockie and Van Lanen's (2008) study. It was one of the few that had investigated student leaders in PAL programs. They used phenomenology as their methodology in order to capture the "meaning and understanding of the SI experience" (p. 3) from SI leaders' perspectives as they experienced or lived it. Themes from the study included: leaders' recognition of the diversity of students' learning needs; leaders' increased understanding of course content and improved study and problem-solving skills; leaders' improved communication skills and self-confidence; and leaders' enriched relationships with academic staff members. The study's findings were that the SI experience had a major impact on the student leaders' approaches to learning in other courses, and that the student leaders valued the opportunity to enrich the learning experiences of other students academically and personally. It appeared that the student leaders' leadership development was not explored at all.

These findings were echoed by McPhail et al. (2012) in a study of student leaders in a PASS program at an Australian university. Their study looked specifically at the impact of being a PASS leader on self-efficacy. A total of 16 PASS leaders agreed to complete the qualitative survey, and all of them reported that the role increased their self-confidence, particularly in their relations with both students and staff. The study also revealed that the student leaders believed that being a PASS leader had improved their ability to set and achieve goals. Further, a number of respondents in the study claimed that their involvement as PASS leaders had encouraged them to consider academia as a future career path (McPhail et al., 2012).

3.2.4.2 A thesis about SI

A doctoral thesis about SI leaders that was undertaken at the University of Calgary, Canada in 2013 was therefore of great interest to me. The goal of this thesis was to investigate the impact of the role of SI leader on the individual (Mason-Innes, 2015). To achieve her goal, Mason-Innes undertook a qualitative study that explored the characteristics and experiences of six SI leaders in the same SI program in an anonymous university in western Canada. Her approach was to discover if the student leaders' experiences aligned with the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model as described by Komives et al. (2006). This model is explained more fully in Subsection 3.3.6.1.

Firstly, Mason-Innes (2015) noted, as I had, that there was little research to be found about the SI experience of the student leaders. She found that, while the university had not "formally adopted a leadership philosophy within the SI program, leadership development was occurring" (p. 149). In addition, in her summary, she noted that "the participants in this study not only indicated that they had developed leadership skills, but they had also developed an understanding of what leadership was to them *personally* from this experience" (p. 149; *emphasis in original*). She continued: "This study supported the assumption that the SI program is not only an effective academic and social support, but is also a program that can provide student leadership identity development" (p. 150). My research, focused as it was on student leadership from the leaders' perspectives, would contribute to this body of research.

3.2.4.3 SI and PASS in Australia

Earlier, in Australia, Couchman (2009) had gone some way to redressing the gap noted above by undertaking a study of SI leaders at the University of Canberra. Her qualitative research involved the leaders writing a narrative about a successful session that they had led, including in it the leadership skills that they considered that the PAL program had helped them to develop or reinforced. Couchman's (2009) findings were: i) that leaders focused on facilitating communities of practice, incorporating collaborative learning and shared ways of learning; ii) that there was a shared discourse between leaders and participants as peers together; and iii) that the leaders had an insider knowledge of and perspective on student life and success in learning. In a similar vein, Skalicky and Caney (2010) investigated the benefits of PASS for student leaders at the University of Tasmania. From survey data about PASS leaders, the conclusion they drew was that PAL programs are "underscrutinised in evidencing the skills and capabilities that they provide to the students who take on peer leader roles" (p. 35).

Again, I was excited to read these articles, but again disappointed that most studies essentially emphasised PAL programs' benefits to attendees, typically discussing student leadership only as a by-product of or an addendum to the benefits to student participants. Further research about PAL programs was needed in order to "measure student learning and student development outcomes of the study group leaders themselves that could contribute to the educational practice" (Arendale & Hane, 2014, p. 25).

3.2.5 Segue to student leadership literature

Thus, while I located a degree of literature that explored PAL programs, it was largely dedicated to the success of the participating students, and had their development as its emphasis. Hence the recognition, acquisition, development and sustainability of leadership as exhibited by student leaders were generally sought, discussed, explained, interrogated, analysed, defined, encouraged, taught and researched only in terms of ensuring successful outcomes for the participating students. The leadership development and growth of the student leaders in PAL programs, particularly from their perspective, generally appeared to be of secondary focus, and were notable largely for their absence.

I hoped therefore that an investigation of the broader student leadership literature in higher education would provide me with findings, models or theories that could be applied to the student leaders in PAL programs such as Meet-Up, and hence inform my study. To aid the reader, I have presented that relevant literature in Table 3.1 below. The narrative that resumes after the table explains and elaborates the information provided there. The narrative also articulates the connections and alignment of the theories and practices outlined in the table with the Meet-Up leaders and the study.

Table 3.1: Description of the significant student development and student leadership development theories, practices and models relevant to the study

Student development theories and practices		
• Historically, the role of universities was to facilitate the development of the individual through learning		
• Student development required students' engagement, involvement and integration		

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Astin	Astin (1984/1999) believed that the more involved that students became in their learning, the more that they would develop as individuals, and the better that their learning outcomes would be.	Astin (1984/1999) developed the theory of student involvement, which was demonstrated by his Input-Environment-Outcome model, known as the IEO.
Chickering and Gamson	Chickering and Gamson (1987) established seven principles of good practice in higher education that advised faculty members about ways that they could improve the quality of undergraduate education.	The seven principles were: • encourage contact between students and faculty members • develop reciprocity and cooperation among students • encourage active learning • give prompt feedback • emphasise time on task • communicate high expectations • respect diverse talents and ways of learning.
Chickering and Reisser	Chickering and Reisser (1993) posited that students in higher education grow and develop along a series of pathways that are not hierarchical. They determined what they called the seven developmental vectors for college students.	The seven vectors were: 1. Developing competence; 2. Managing emotions; 3. Moving through autonomy towards interdependence; 4. Developing mature interpersonal relationships; 5. Establishing identity; 6. Developing purpose; and 7. Developing integrity.

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Tinto	Tinto (1993) posited that students' progression at college was a direct result of their involvement, which included social as well as academic involvement. Rather than placing fault on students, Tinto claimed that the onus was on institutions to facilitate opportunities for students to integrate.	Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure held that students who did not integrate and form sound relationships with their peers, faculty members and the institution had a higher risk of leaving early.

Student leadership development theories and practices
- Leadership skills are expected of graduates from higher education institutions
- Students can develop leadership skills if they are encouraged to do so and if opportunities are provided

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Higher Education Research Institute (HERI)	The social change model of leadership development was developed by scholars at the Higher Education Research Institute [HERI] in 1996 (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996, as cited in Dugan & Komives, 2010, and Komives et al., 2013).	They determined that the capacity to lead could be developed across eight core values: consciousness of self; congruence; commitment; collaboration; common purpose; controversy with civility; citizenship; change.
Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella and Osteen	These researchers' intention was to understand the processes and experiences involved in creating leadership identity in students. From their research, they developed a model of LID that they believed could be used as a framework for leadership development programs in higher education institutions (Komives et al., 2006).	They discovered that the categories that influenced the development of leadership identity in students were: • a broadening view of leadership • the development of self (increasing self-awareness) • the influence of groups • developmental influences • a changing view of self (as they became more independent and interdependent).

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Kouzes and Posner	From studies of people in managerial positions in organisations, researcher colleagues Kouzes and Posner (1987, as cited in Posner, 2004) identified a pattern of behaviour used by managers when they were at their most effective as leaders. From this, they developed five fundamental practices of exemplary leadership. The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) (Posner, 2004) was the test that people could take to determine if they used these practices and to what extent they did so.	The 1987 practices of exemplary leadership were revised, and the new practices became: "modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, [and] encouraging the heart" (Posner, 2004, p. 444). The LPI was then given to students, with the result that effective student leaders were found to behave in ways that matched the same five practices of exemplary leadership, and thus the Student LPI was born (Posner, 2004).

3.3 The student leadership literature

3.3.1 An overview

As I began my search for student leadership literature, I realised that much of the research hailed from the United States. Many higher education institutions there had, for many years, provided students with opportunities to develop leadership competencies. While there have been studies of student leadership development in the Australian context, they are not so prolific; I have included in my review those that I found relevant.

The close association of student leadership development with student development generally steered my search firstly to the student development literature, which would serve as a strong foundation from which to explore student leadership. As I investigated further, I realised that I needed to begin with works by a number of well-recognised scholars. I considered these texts "timeless" as researchers today still refer to and adapt their works; this is made explicit in the literature in this section. Also, the content of these texts was relevant to and significant for the writing of this thesis, based as it is on student leadership in higher education. I have therefore reviewed the works of these scholars in depth.

3.3.2 Student development

One of the first books that I read as I began my doctoral journey was *The Modern American College*, edited by Arthur Chickering and his associates (1981). The book opened my eyes to an earlier approach to a higher education system where the development of a student as a "whole college-going human being" (Miller & Prince, 1976, p. 3) was paramount, and superseded all other aims. Sanford (1981), who wrote the Foreword to *The Modern American College*, noted that this lofty aim was central to the whole book, with all authors contributing to the development or extension of this idea in various ways. In the Foreword, Sanford (1981) quoted Chickering, who posited that "the overarching purpose of our colleges and universities should be to encourage and enable intentional developmental change throughout the life cycle" (p. xvii).

The text edited by Sanford (1962) that preceded this one was called simply *The American College*. This text was more sobering. In it, Sanford (1962) claimed that, at the time of his writings, colleges were frequently turning out students who had not developed to their full personal capacity. Sanford believed that this was attributable to a number of causes. One of them was that universities were products of the politics and economics of the society of the time, and were expected to serve the needs of "those who rule the general social order" (p. 1003). It seems that little has changed (see Subsection 3.3.5.). The impact of this was that

some higher education institutions chose to espouse goals that placed a disproportionate focus on vocational requirements, sometimes to the disregard of the development of students as individuals. While some students would still grow, change and develop as individuals through their academic curricula, other students would be stymied in their personal growth, remaining undeveloped as people, and growing only in the development of the specific skills and capabilities required of the vocations that they had studied (Sanford, 1962).

To counter this, Sanford (1962) posited that, in order for universities to facilitate and foster the development of their students as individuals, they needed firstly to develop and practise theories that contributed to the personal development of their students. This heralded a return to the earlier focus of colleges as far back as the late 1800s, which had been the development of students as individuals (Rentz, 1996). And indeed this did happen, as researchers interested in personal development such as Miller and Prince (1976), Kuh (1977, 1995, 2001), Tinto (1993, 2003, 2005), Astin (1984/1999, 1993), Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) and Chickering with colleagues (1981, 1987, 1993), among others, took up the baton. They were in general agreement that, in order for students to grow, develop and extend themselves as thinking, curious people as well as practitioners in particular vocations, they must be afforded opportunities to become involved and to engage wholeheartedly in their higher education studies.

Astin in particular has been considered a key figure in research concerning students' involvement in their institution and their learning. Astin (1993) wrote about the research conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) with which he had been involved since the mid-1960s. Under this program, longitudinal studies of 25,000 students across 200 institutions (p. 5) were undertaken over many years to determine the effects of student involvement on students' development. While Astin (1993) remarked that he could not do the extensive findings justice in a short paper, he could outline some important outcomes. The research found that student involvement generally had beneficial impacts on "a wide range of developmental outcomes" (p. 6). In addition, it identified the peer group as "the single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student's academic and personal development" (p. 5).

More recently, Lisa Wolf-Wendel and colleagues (2009) remarked that concern about graduation rates and the quality of undergraduate education had again prompted scholarly discussion about student success, and added intensity to conversations about student learning and development. These researchers posited that the rich history of research into student success and development should be revisited to inform and guide understanding of current

challenges. In so doing, they suggested that the key concepts of involvement, engagement and integration needed to be explored, and would benefit from clear and distinct definitions, as they were suffering from a blurring of use in both practice and research (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). This was exciting for me as these terms were key to my thesis.

3.3.2.1 Student involvement

As was noted above, involvement in higher education culture was claimed by researchers to relate positively not just to achievement and success at college, but also to positive developmental outcomes for the students who participate (Astin, 1993). It was appropriate, therefore, that, to discuss the evolution of student involvement research, Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) turned to Astin. Astin (1984/1999) defined involvement as the amount of energy that students commit to their academic journey, and he claimed in his theory of student involvement that the more involved that students are, the more successful they will be. For Astin (1984/1999), involvement provided a theoretical link between practice and outcomes. He proposed "one of the first and most durable and influential college impact models, the now familiar Input-Environment-Outcomes (IEO) model" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 53). It recognised the contribution of effective learning environments to both the encouragement of student involvement and the production of positive learning outcomes.

I was thrilled to see an influential scholar's work revisited – particularly one that had impacted so significantly on my thinking. I had drawn clear parallels between both Astin's (1984/1999) theory and his IEO model and my observations of the development of student leaders. Indeed, the model became instrumental to my conceptual framework thinking, and I consequently adapted it to form the basis of my conceptual framework diagram. The model and its earliest origins are investigated and explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

In essence, I saw Astin's (1984/1999) theory of student involvement as having two linked elements. One was the students' personal learning goals and what success meant to them, and this was where my main interest lay. The other was the students' learning outcomes desired by their lecturers. According to Astin (1984/1999), if academics at a higher education institution wished students to achieve certain outcomes, they must do more than just provide a curriculum and leave it up to the students. They needed to ensure that students contributed effort to the learning process. As this could not be enforced, students needed to be encouraged to participate actively in their learning. To stimulate the motivation required, Astin (1984/1999) suggested that institutions should devote resources to opportunities that

invited, encouraged and promoted student engagement. PAL programs are an obvious option in that regard.

3.3.2.2 Student engagement

Chickering and Gamson (1987) established seven principles of good practice in higher education that encouraged student engagement, and that allowed faculty members to improve the quality of undergraduate education. They were: encourage contact between students and faculty members; develop reciprocity and cooperation among students; encourage active learning; give prompt feedback; emphasise time on task; communicate high expectations; and respect diverse talents and ways of learning. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) chose to include this work, clearly demonstrating that it continued to exert influence on the thinking of scholars in the field.

Chickering continued research in the field of student development, and his scholarly work with Reisser (1993) resulted in the creation of the seven vectors of student development. These, rather than the seven principles of good practice, had a fundamental role in my conceptual framework, as I had observed student leaders developing along the pathways outlined by Chickering and Reisser (1993). As a result, they are presented and examined in detail in Chapter 4.

For further clarification of the concept of student engagement, Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) returned to Kuh (2001), who provided clear alignment with my interpretation of Astin (1984/1999) by positing that student engagement consists of two key elements: what the student does – that is, the amount of time and effort that the student is prepared to devote to her/his university journey; and what the institution does – that is, the commitment of the institution to allocating resources to opportunities and services that encourage student participation (Kuh, 2001). Kuh (2001) brought the concept of engagement to more prominent attention in higher education research when he developed the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). The aim of this survey was to gauge the degree to which students were engaged in good educational practices that were "strongly associated with high levels of learning and personal development" (Kuh, 2001, p. 413). The implementation of the NSSE in colleges in the United States demonstrated general acceptance of the notion that student engagement in their own learning was critical.

In Australia and neighbouring countries, it is also accepted that student engagement is important for effective learning (Wilson et al., 2018), and the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) was developed in 2006 (Coates, 2011). Based on the NSSE (Coates, 2011; Devlin et al., 2007), the AUSSE data are extracted from the Student Engagement

Questionnaire (SEQ) which is administered to a representative sample of students across each institution. The aim of AUSSE is to inform higher education institutions of the ways in which their students are engaged in their learning and the level of that engagement, in order for the institutions to use the data to inform their educational practices and enrich the quality of the education they offer (Devlin et al., 2007). Coates (2011) remarked that in order to maintain its integrity, an instrument such as the SEQ should not be static, but rather offer a robust platform for change – change that is "research-based, educationally informed, and practically responsive" (p. 11). Furthermore, scholarly research into the nature and level of students' engagement in their learning has the potential to enhance inter-institutional and intra-institutional conversations about student engagement and therefore also potentially improve the effectiveness of higher education (Devlin et al., 2007), encouraging both the transition and the retention of students (Kift, 2017).

3.3.2.3 Student integration

Another scholar interested in student growth and development in higher education was Tinto. Tinto (1993) explored the work of a Dutch anthropologist, Van Gennep. His work was of interest to Tinto because he discussed the journey of an individual through life from birth to death – a journey that, by necessity, involved leaving one group of people and stage in life in order to transition to another. As individuals progressed from children to adults, the transmission of relationships between successive groups of people compelled them to undergo phases of "separation, transition, and incorporation" (p. 92) until full adult membership in society had been achieved. Van Gennep (1960, as cited in Tinto, 1993) called this concept the "rites of passage" (p. 92), and he wrote what, in anthropological circles, was considered a classic book of the same name.

Van Gennep (1960, as cited in Tinto, 1993) was convinced that his concept could be applied to other situations, and indeed Tinto (1988) did just that. Tinto (1988) suggested that the journey of a student from school to higher education was analogous to a rite of passage. Students left behind, either by choice or by necessity, certain groups or communities that had played a formative role in their lives as children. Within other groups such as family, relationships remained, but in a changed or transitioned form as children grew and changed to become adults. Some individuals found this transition more difficult than others, or took a longer time to reach Van Gennep's "incorporation" (as cited in Tinto, 1988, p. 441) of the new group and all that it entailed. Or, to use Tinto's (1988) terminology, some students struggled to integrate, and thus made the decision to depart from college (or university) rather than to persist.

In 1993, Tinto developed the theory of student departure, in which he associated students' degree of integration into college with their decision to leave: students who had not integrated to some degree into college were often the ones who departed early. Tinto's (1993) theory posited that integration consisted of more than students' academic connection with the college; their social connection was crucial as well. Tinto has been challenged by some researchers on the grounds that he had traditional students straight from school as his focus, that he suggested higher education students must abandon their culture and family ties, and that he over-emphasised the sociological elements of integration (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009), but certainly his theory fitted with the anthropological viewpoint, as outlined above.

There were also explicit connections with other influential scholars, including Pascarella and Terenzini. These researchers had been investigating student development for many years, and in 2005 they published an updated version of their earlier significant research from 1990. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) claimed that knowledge could be considered a "socially based phenomenon" (p. 103), suggesting that its acquisition was dependent on the formation of sound relationships with peers, faculty members, and the institution and its norms. Perhaps even more notably, Tinto's (1993) theory was ground-breaking, because it explicitly took the onus of responsibility for the departure of students from college away from the individual student, and redirected it to the institution and to its role in nurturing opportunities for relationships between the students and the college to occur.

Interestingly, more recent research into student attrition in universities in both the United States and Australia corroborated the findings of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) and Tinto (1988). For example, Wilson et al. (2018) at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University, considered a sense of belonging vital not just for student success and progression but also to build an engaged alumni. O'Keeffe's (2013) research confirmed that developing a sense of belonging is a critical factor in reducing attrition. He also posited that, in order to help students' successful integration into the higher education environment, the onus is on the institution to "seek to create a welcoming environment, where care, warmth and acceptance are promoted" (p. 612).

3.3.2.4 Working together: students and staff

Baxter Magolda (2014b) held that higher education was a time of transition; individuals began to reconsider their place and their responsibilities in the world. Informational learning was insufficient to meet the needs essential to this transition; they needed to experience transformational learning (Mezirow, 1978, 2000), moving from the acceptance of old norms to developing the capacity to challenge, reflect and construct their

own meanings from knowledge. Faculty members expected students to think critically, respond to challenges and work interdependently. (Clear echoes here of Chickering and Reisser's [1993] developmental vectors.) In meeting these expectations, students developed to become self-authoring, self-transforming, interdependent adults (Baxter Magolda, 2012, 2014a, 2014b).

The focus of Baxter Magolda's (2012, 2014a, 2014b) writings was her insistence that, in order for students to develop and achieve self-authorship, they needed educators who had also taken up the challenge to question their previously-held assumptions and had achieved this transformation themselves. She considered it imperative that academics enriched their own learning, not just to contribute to their personal development, but also and more importantly to assist students with theirs. She posited that educators needed to "enable student transformation rather than just delivering a product" (Baxter Magolda, 2014a, p. 8). Baxter Magolda (2014a) advocated the Learning Partnerships Model to promote this transformation for both students and staff through collaboration, listening, and the development of mutually respectful relationships.

This resonates with other recent discourse on student involvement, engagement and integration which suggests that higher education is in the process of transitioning to the concept whereby students and staff commit to working together more formally in learning and teaching (Cook-Sather, 2018; Harrington et al., 2014; Matthews, 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). The discourse is generally known under the umbrella term "students as partners". Students as partners, sometimes called "SaP" (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017), is a "powerful idea" (Healey et al., 2016, p. 8) that "re-envisions students and staff as active collaborators in teaching and learning" (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017, p. 1). In a general sense, it is argued that, while student engagement focuses on what students do, students as partners emphasises what students and staff do together to realise educational goals (Matthews, 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Indeed, the dialogue of the notion of students as partners "focuses on student-academic partnerships as a process for engaging with rather than doing to or doing for students" (Matthews, 2016, p.2). Matthews (2016) suggested that these partnerships could potentially become the new "cultural norm" (p. 1) in higher education.

Baxter Magolda (2014a) had noted that such relationships would demand the "unlearning of [educators'] socialisation as authority figures" (p. 8). This resonated with Matthews' (2016) position that academics' approach to engaging students has to be "predicated on valuing students as capable, collaborative partners in their own learning" (p.

4), which involves moving beyond the concept of student engagement "to a mind-set of partnerships" (p. 4). It calls into play the notion of reciprocity as the foundation of a partnership, which could be difficult for some academics (Cook-Sather, 2018). Nevertheless, it is suggested that, if educators reflect on and then challenge their previously held beliefs and assumptions, commit to the establishment of a dialogue with student partners, and have the will to make it happen, the complexities of partnering with students can be met (Cook-Sather, 2018).

As I saw it, student leaders in PAL fulfilled the role of "educator" as discussed above. They were developing self-authorship – they moved along the seven vectors, while they concurrently guided the participants in PAL sessions in their personal learning and development journeys. They had respect and empathy for the students who attended their sessions and were committed to working with them on common goals – the PAL leaders and the students were essentially partners in learning. In addition, the student leaders were in partnership with the academics in their course. They established a dialogue with them, planning together the activities the student leaders would enact that would assist students to learn the course content, and subsequently sharing reflections on the sessions.

3.3.3 Student leadership development

If students developed as individuals through involvement, engagement, integration and partnering with staff and students in their higher education institution, they would logically develop student leadership in the same way. Indeed, I could clearly see that involvement, engagement and integration, along with self-authorship and strong partnerships, were important contributors to an explanation of the student leaders' relationships and experiences within the context of the Meet-Up environment. In fact, I could offer the following premise, linking Wolf-Wendel et al.'s (2009) definitions with my conceptions of what happened to the student leaders: engagement was the opportunity provided by the university to offer Meet-Up as a PAL program; involvement was the choice that the students made to agree to become student leaders and to carry out the tasks required by the position; and integration incorporated the relationships and partnerships that developed among the student leaders, participating students and academic staff members within the Meet-Up program environment. Chapter 4 explains and exemplifies this premise in more detail.

3.3.4 But what did the student leaders think?

Having explored literature about student development from influential, well-respected scholars, it seemed appropriate to ascertain what the students themselves thought. Available literature on the subject was limited. It appeared that the notion of seeking input from students regarding opportunities to develop student leadership was largely overlooked. However, I identified from the literature a number of conceptions of student leadership held by students. These aligned with my conversations with PAL leaders over many years, and I describe them briefly in the subsections below.

3.3.4.1 Mentors, not leaders

Buckner and Williams (1995) noted that student leadership programs existed in colleges to complement the educational mission of colleges by offering students opportunities to develop both intellectually and personally, and also in the understanding of others, the acceptance of responsibility and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is discussed in Subsection 3.3.6.2. Buckner and Williams (1995) surveyed student leaders in a number of these leadership programs to determine important information about the activities and dispositions of college leaders, and to discuss ways in which the leadership programs could be reconceptualised to teach leadership skills more effectively.

Interestingly, the results indicated that student leaders predominantly viewed themselves as mentors. In addition, they noted that student leaders had "expressed self-perceived leadership role deficiencies" (p. 31). Once these "deficiencies" had been identified, Buckner and Williams (1995) recommended that students should be offered workshops designed to build the specific skills that they had identified as lacking, which included interpersonal communication, team-building and conflict management. They also recommended that senior students could "peer-educate" novice student leaders and share their experiences.

Despite the clearly negative connotations of the term "deficiencies", I found these recommendations heartening, and they offered a feeling of validation. The changes that I had made to the Meet-Up student leader development workshops incorporated activities that were created and delivered by current or senior student leaders in which they advised new leaders from their perspective and shared their experiences. I had also instigated a plan whereby senior students or LAMPS reviewed other Meet-Up leaders' sessions, offering advice and encouragement to help them in the planning and delivery of their activities. Both these innovations were outlined in the previous chapter, Chapter 2.

3.3.4.2 The reluctant leader

Astin and Astin (2000) also undertook research on students regarding their notions of student leadership. They discovered that students could be reluctant to seek or accept leadership roles because of "limiting" or "constraining" beliefs (p. 25). These beliefs were often based on students' notions about the nature of leadership in general and its relevance to them, which also included the impression that to be a student leader required high grades or a formal student position with "Leader" in the title.

> Perhaps the most limiting beliefs, however, were those based on feelings of disempowerment where students assumed either that they lacked the requisite expertise and experience to effect meaningful change or that their institutions did not value student input or involvement in shared governance. (p. 24)

Sometimes students themselves were unaware that they even held such beliefs, but, regardless, this unconscious or tacit belief limited their participation in leadership activities (Astin & Astin, 2000).

Other research upheld this research. Shertzer and Schuh's (2004) study, for example, found that some students simply lacked the self-confidence to take on leadership roles. More recently, Kiersch and Peters (2017) posited that students tended to "focus on the formal power aspects of leadership (authority, influence, decision making) and underestimate the importance of the relational aspect (support, collaboration, development of followers, etc.)" (p. 153), which can contribute to a reluctance or a lack of interest in engaging in leadership programs. Ideally, leadership programs should focus on helping students to understand the broader role of the leader, not just seeing a leader "as a figure head or someone who exerts power and influence over others" (p. 153).

This notion of students' reluctance or perceived lack of interest in a leadership position is an interesting point and one to which I had not given much thought. But, in doing so, I recalled some students who were surprised to be nominated or recommended as Meet-Up leaders, and others who were reluctant to apply the nomenclature of "leader" to themselves despite accepting the position of Meet-Up *leader*, implying that they did not really believe that, as student leaders, they were leaders in the traditional sense of the word as they perceived it. Perhaps the relational role of guiding their peers brought out their leadership potential. Perhaps it was as Gardner (1990) posited: "[that the] task of explaining is so important that some who do it exceptionally well play a leadership role even though they are not leaders in the conventional sense" (p. 18).

3.3.4.3 Upholding the traditional view

Shertzer and Schuh (2004) suggested that ascertaining the definitions and perceptions of leadership held by the students themselves could play a significant role in providing them with relevant leadership opportunities. They interviewed 24 students who held office in formal student organisations in their institution. The study was qualitative and sought the participants' understandings and perceptions of student leadership. Shertzer and Schuh (2004) claimed that there were two distinct leadership paradigms about leadership that they classified as "industrial" and "post-industrial" (p. 113). The industrial perception was the traditional or conventional view of leadership that encompassed the contested view that leaders were born and not made; that leaders needed to have charisma (Weber 1921/1970-72); and that there was one right way to lead. It also contained the premises that only one person could provide leadership in a group; leadership belonged in formal groups or organisations; and "leadership" and "management" were interchangeable terms (p. 113). The post-industrial view articulated the supposition that leadership did not belong to particular individuals with particular traits who enacted certain behaviours in specific situations, but was instead based on relationships. It also posited that leadership should create change, and that anyone could be a leader.

Interestingly, the results of the study indicated that the industrial notion of leadership was dominant in the participating students. Shertzer and Schuh (2004) suggested that this was possibly the result of the context (higher education institutions) in which the student leaders practised, which was "highly industrialised in nature at the time of the study" (p. 127). The authors commented that institutions should reflect on how they were helping to shape students' perceptions of leadership, arguing that it was incumbent on them to provide opportunities for all students to be encouraged and empowered to try leadership roles. Their recommendations included the need to: provide staff development so that staff members have knowledge of the emerging post-industrial leadership paradigm; develop a leadership statement for the institution; assess further the attitudes and perceptions of leadership in the institution; and ensure that leadership programs accept a broad range of students and are not selective. (Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). These recommendations acknowledged Astin and Astin's (2000) point that some students who may be reluctant to identify themselves as leaders would benefit from opportunities to challenge themselves and to reflect on what leadership is. The article was not only rare in focusing on student leadership, but also studied the perceptions of student leadership from the students' perspectives.

3.3.4.4 A positive experience

Logue et al. (2005), too, chose to explore student leaders' personal experiences of their roles from their own perspectives. The student participants in their study held an "elected or appointed office in a student organisation" (p. 396) that was formally registered in their higher education institution. Logue et al. (2005) noted that, while student leadership research had examined the positive impact on academic and personal development, very few studies had examined leadership as "personal experience" (p. 394). The aim of their phenomenological study was to explore the student leaders' personal experiences of their roles from their perspectives; the question asked was: "Please describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of being a student leader" (p. 397). The most prominent comments that emerged from the transcripts were that participants reported their experiences as having been "enjoyable, beneficial, and overall, a positive experience" (p. 398). Negative elements such as hard work, pressure, challenges and difficulties were noted, but leaders tended to gloss over them and to focus on more positive experiences. Participants' responses were then divided among three themes: people; action; and organisation.

Under the people theme, sub-themes emerged such as "leading people" (that is, motivating people and using different approaches to manage different personalities), "team" (which meant feeling part of something bigger and building relationships) and "helping people" (students enjoyed the benevolence of the experience) (pp. 399-401). One student leader in the study stated astutely, "One of the best ways you can be a leader is by serving others" (p. 401), an unmistakeable nod to servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977/1991), which is described in Subsection 3.4.6. The participants reflected that they found the role enjoyable and rewarding, noting future career benefits. They had learned to motivate people with different personalities, and to get along with people. They also perceived that they had developed their communication and leadership skills.

While the study involved only six participants, the fact that it looked at leadership from the student perspective was significant in its rarity. The study provided evidence that experiencing student leadership contributed to an enhanced college experience and to the personal development of the participants. Logue et al. (2005) recommended that more research be undertaken to examine student leadership from the perspective of students, noting that personal accounts provide the best forum in which to focus attention on student perceptions. This article delivered research findings that mirrored the perceptions and feedback that I had experienced from my time working with student leaders as noted earlier.

For this reason, I have described this research study in detail. Would my study bear out similar findings?

3.3.5 So was the leadership development of students actually happening?

Student leadership development is frequently considered a priority in higher education, and is often included in the mission statements of many colleges and universities (Kiersch & Peters, 2017). Cress et al. (2001) agreed, and yet noted also that, despite this, little attention was given to providing programs or opportunities for this actually to happen or to be encouraged. They suggested that, while this can be considered to be an important educational goal in many institutions, other priorities (often economic or financial in nature) combined to push this goal to the side, and it was often covered only by the offering of short student leadership development workshops.

Recently, Australian researchers Skalicky et al. (2018) investigated student leadership development programs in higher education. They, too, discovered that many universities across the world, including in Australia, claim the development of leadership in their students as a priority (Skalicky et al., 2018), or as part of their mission. While some of the student leadership programs that they offer to address this issue have the leadership development of students as a dedicated goal, with other programs the focus is on meeting strategic aims such as the retention of students, and student leadership development happens in an ad hoc way, almost as a "by-product" (p. 2) of participation in the programs. In short, leadership development was not happening to a significant degree. Indeed, Chow (2013), in her thesis about university mission statements, discovered that strategic declarations dominated mission statements in Australian universities as universities conformed to the government's directive:

> The directive required universities to enter into Mission-based Compacts with the Government, and to articulate how their missions would contribute to the Government's vision for higher education. The Compacts specifically required universities to provide clearly articulated mission statements defining their missions and strategic positions in the new higher education environment. (p. 2)

Universities were required to conform to the government's vision in order to receive funding. The government's vision included "improving access and equity; conducting world-class teaching and research; upholding academic freedom; contributing to economic and social needs of regional, state, national and international communities; and maintaining a sustainable higher-education sector" (p. 3). Student leadership development has to fit somehow within these parameters.

Compliance has meant that universities have sometimes been conflicted in attempting to align government goals with their own educative aims, especially in terms of student developmental aims. However, Skalicky et al. (2018) argued that enabling opportunities for students to engage in a range of student leadership programs would have a positive impact on student outcomes, including "ethical leadership, entrepreneurial skills, cross-cultural understanding and adaptability" (p. 13), suggesting that involvement in leadership opportunities would result, therefore, not only in benefits to the students, but also in the alignment of the university's educative goals with those of the government.

An earlier study by Cress et al. (2001) of leadership programs across the United States found that students who had participated in leadership opportunities reported that their confidence, their leadership skills and their willingness to participate further in leadership positions increased. While Cress et al. (2001) investigated programs that were set up with the specific aim and intention of developing leadership skills in college students, there were many clear and parallel links with the Meet-Up program's development of leadership skills. For example, leaders provided feedback at the conclusion of their time in the role as Meet-Up leader, in which they frequently expressed gratitude for the experience of being a Meet-Up leader and for the opportunities that it had given them to develop their confidence, their communication skills and their leadership skills for future tutoring and/or postgraduate study positions. They also indicated how much they had enjoyed it, and they commented that it gave them a point of difference in job application interviews. These outcomes were the unintended result of their commitment to a PAL role whose prime focus was on the learning development of the attending students, rather than of themselves, the student leaders.

3.3.6 The development of student leadership

If then, as was suggested above, leadership opportunities benefited students significantly, it could be argued that researchers and practitioners should devote time and energy to developing student leadership development opportunities.

3.3.6.1 Student leadership identity formation

Komives et al. (2006) conducted research in order to understand the processes and experiences involved in creating leadership identity. From this research, they proffered a model of LID that integrated student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and leadership development, and from this they advanced an accompanying theory. Their research demonstrated that the categories that influenced the development of leadership identity were a broadening view of leadership; the development of self; the influence of

groups with which students were involved; developmental influences (from adults and peers); and a changing view of self (as students became more independent and interdependent) (Komives et al., 2006). The researchers claimed that these categories could be used as a framework for the design of programs to foster leadership identity in students; this was the model that was used by Mason-Innes (2015) in her thesis. (Please refer to Subsection 3.2.4.2.)

3.3.6.2 Student leadership and self-efficacy

Komives et al.'s (2006) study, outlined above, demonstrated a clear alignment with student self-efficacy. Bandura is considered to be a central figure in research on self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000), and his writings are still quoted frequently; hence his work warrants a brief explanation. Bandura (1977) viewed perceived self-efficacy as a crucial determinant of people's choice of situation, activity and setting, based on their expectations. It also determined their performance, the length of time that they would remain engaged and the degree of effort that they expended. Bandura (1977), however, was not suggesting that expectation was the sole influence on people's self-efficacy and behaviours, as the appropriate skills and incentives were also essential, linking comfortably with Dugan and Komives' (2010) argument outlined in Subsection 3.3.6.3.

Bandura's (1977) model posited that expectations of personal efficacy were based on four major sources of information: "performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states" (p. 195). But what was crucial was that the impact of this information on people's self-efficacy depended on their cognitive appraisal of it, and that their appraisal was, in turn, affected by contextual factors such as the social aspects, or the situational and temporal elements of the event. "That is, people process, weigh, and integrate diverse information concerning their ability, and they regulate their choice behaviour and effort expenditure accordingly" (p. 212). Bandura (1977) also made what for my research was an important point: namely, that the different experiences that people have encountered are also key determinants of their self-efficacy level. Therefore, my exploration of the student leaders' varying experiences of PAL and notions of student leadership also revealed to me their perceived leadership self-efficacy.

3.3.6.3 The social change model

A social change model of leadership development was developed specifically for use with university students (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996, as cited in Dugan & Komives, 2010 and in Komives et al., 2013). It became known firstly as the "7Cs" model (Komives et al., 2013, p. 453). It was aimed at developing socially responsible

leadership that was congruent with definitions of leadership that focus on social responsibility. Komives et al. (2009, as cited in Dugan & Komives, 2010) endorsed the following definition of leadership: "a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that results in positive social change" (p. 526). The capacity to lead was developed across seven core values: consciousness of self; congruence; commitment; collaboration; common purpose; controversy with civility; and citizenship. Change for the common good was added subsequently as a collective eighth leadership value (Dugan & Komives, 2010).

Campbell et al.'s (2012) research on student mentorship found that, while the relationship of mentorship with academic success had been researched, the effect of mentorship on the development of the leadership skills of students had not. They used the social change model of leadership to ascertain whether mentorship for personal development and mentorship for leadership empowerment contributed to socially responsible leadership capacity. They also explored the significance of the type of mentor involved in developing socially responsible leadership. The study found that leadership development occurred through increasing the capacity of students across the eight values associated with the social change model, as was noted above.

Campbell et al.'s (2012) findings revealed that mentoring for personal development had a greater influence on socially responsible leadership capacity than did mentoring for leadership empowerment. They considered that this related to the students' developmental needs, and they drew a link from this finding with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) "cornerstones" (p. 616) of college student development – in particular, the development of autonomy, the management of emotions, developing interdependence and a sense of purpose. This was of great interest to me, because another study had chosen to draw parallels with an important lynch pin of my research and my conceptual framework. As was noted earlier, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of development in college students were a crucial element in my conceptual framework, and they are covered in more detail in the following chapter.

3.3.6.4 Predicting student leadership capacity

Dugan and Komives (2010) also chose to use the social change model of leadership development for their research in which they studied senior students at colleges across 50 higher education institutions in the United States. They noted up front a recurring theme: that there was a surprising lack of research into the development of student leadership at college (this was no longer a surprise to me), given that socially responsible leadership was claimed to be a core outcome of many colleges. They conceded that one of the reasons for this lack of

research into college leadership development could be attributed to the shift in theoretical definitions of the concept. For example, leadership had been viewed historically from the perspective of business management with its focus on power, authority and productivity (Rost, 1991, as cited in Dugan and Komives, 2010, p. 525). Definitions predicated on group involvement and shared processes did not appear until after 1978, when the definition of leadership was reconceptualised (Dugan & Komives, 2010).

Certainly, the level of self-efficacy in leadership and leadership capacity had been studied in students at college or university to a small degree, but it had not gone deeply enough to identify theoretical measures of student leadership capacity, and this situation mirrored a corresponding disconnect between student development and the impact of college more generally (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Hence Dugan and Komives (2010) chose to explore to what extent experiences at college predicted students' capacity for socially responsible leadership, and whether self-efficacy for leadership contributed in a significant way to an explanation of students' capabilities. They adapted Astin's (1991, as cited in Dugan & Komives, 2010) IEO model to serve as their conceptual framework. Their intention was to use it as a means to examine the effects of the college environment on the outcome of socially responsible leadership development in students, and, to that end, students were asked to "reflect retrospectively" (p. 529) on their past experiences.

Dugan and Komives (2010) attributed the small amount of research that had been conducted to link student leadership development with college attendance to the CIRP surveys. This research program was mentioned in Subsection 3.3.2. It undertook many studies investigating the link between higher education and student leadership development, and it found a significant correlation between the college experience and the development of leadership. However, Dugan and Komives (2010) asserted that there was still a gap regarding the parameters used to define student leadership. They noted that Astin's (1991, as cited in Dugan & Komives, 2010) early research relied on increases in variables such as social self-confidence. Despite the limitations of this research, Dugan and Komives (2010) claimed that it identified a number of clear predictors of student leadership development at college.

Most importantly for my study, students' pre-college leadership experiences and knowledge were stated as an important predictor (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Another positive predictor that they identified was students' participation in varied experiences offered at college such as general involvement, community service, internships, interaction with students from other cultures, leadership roles, faculty interaction/mentoring and formal leadership training programs (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Further to this, Dugan and Komives

(2010) suggested that there was a strong link between students' self-efficacy for leadership and their actual capacity, and they drew on Bandura's (1977) work, outlined above. In fact, Dugan and Komives (2010) found that the levels of students' self-efficacy for leadership explained the more substantive incidences of variance in the outcome measures in their study, making it a "powerful contributor to the leadership development process" (p. 540), and supporting Bandura's (1977) position that self-efficacy in a particular domain plays a significant role in how an individual functions in that domain.

My study of student leadership articulated a clear connection with the findings in this study, including the use of Astin's (1984/1999) IEO model. For this reason, the research was of great interest to me, and, while my research questions did not focus explicitly on the participants' self-efficacy for leadership, there was an obvious connection.

3.3.6.5 Can anyone be a leader?

Eich (2008) explored leadership development programs from a different angle, but there was nevertheless a connection. From his research into student leadership, Eich (2008) developed a grounded theory model for high quality leadership programs. Such programs were defined as those that had a significant positive impact on student learning, as well as on leadership development (Eich, 2012, p. 179). He determined firstly that such programs engaged in continuous improvement whereby participants were involved in building and sustaining a leadership community via experiential learning experiences that were integrated systemically. Secondly, the theory modelled quality leadership by practising what it preached – that is, it exhibited the values nominated above. And finally, in high quality leadership programs, students participated in activities where they learned about themselves (a nod to Bandura's [1977] self-efficacy and Dugan and Komives' [2010] research) while simultaneously developing their leadership skills.

Eich (2008) asserted that leadership programs that exhibited these attributes demonstrated that leadership skills can be not only taught but also accelerated by participation in quality leadership programs. Eich (2008) posited that his theory was foundational and broke new ground in the current student leadership literature. In addition, his grounded theory model, with its link between activities and outcomes, was easily applicable, and could both guide the design of new leadership programs and enhance existing ones.

Subsequently, Eich (2012) undertook a study to ascertain which attributes of student leadership programs contributed significantly to student leadership development. He began by reminding readers that previous research (such as Astin & Astin, 2000; Cress et al., 2001)

had claimed that all individuals have the capacity to develop leadership skills, and that these potentialities can be developed in university leadership programs. Eich (2012) referred to the effectiveness of practical learning in leadership education, positing that Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model (with its attention to how people's experiences and reflections impact on the construction of meaning) could serve as a practical pedagogy for teaching students how to engage in the leadership process.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory was based on an individual's progression through four elements of learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Kolb (1984) emphasised that each stage was crucial; without due contemplation of the experience, the construction of meaning and the determination of appropriate ways to enact it could not occur. (Although Kolb's theory stated that the four stages were consecutive, I was reminded of Chickering and Reisser's [1993] words about students moving along the seven spheres of development.)

Kolb (2014), in reflecting on the theory that was the "centrepiece of his 50 year academic career" (p. xiv), noted that his "intention was to describe a theoretical perspective on the individual learning process that applied in all situations and arenas of life" (p. xvii). And certainly I could see (once again) a clear alignment with the Meet-Up leaders and their actioning of their leadership role. Reflection followed each Meet-Up session, discussions with academics, other leaders, and/or the coordinator were had, and the next session was subsequently planned. They were, as Eich (2012) suggested above, utilising experiential learning theory to develop their leadership capacity (albeit unknowingly and unintentionally).

3.3.6.6 Measuring student leadership development

Few instruments or methods for measuring student leadership development exist (Posner, 2004). One of the few that has stood the test of time since its development in 1987 is the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), and it is discussed here for that very reason. From studies of people in managerial positions in organisations, Kouzes and Posner (1987, as cited in Posner, 2004) identified a pattern of behaviour used by managers when they were at their most effective as leaders. From this they developed the five fundamental practices of exemplary leadership, which were published in 1987 in a book entitled *The Leadership Challenge* (Posner, 2004). In conjunction with these practices, Kouzes and Posner (1987, as cited in Posner, 2004) developed a test or inventory that people could complete to determine if they were engaging in these desirable practices. This became the LPI (Posner, 2004). The intention of the inventory was to serve as a guide for any individual interested in developing or strengthening her/his leadership capabilities.

The practices were explored again and retained in the same order and format in a second edition of the text. The second edition was published first in hardcover in 1995 and subsequently in paperback in 1997 (Kouzes & Posner, 1997). Each practice had listed under it items called "commitments" (Kouzes & Posner, 1997, p. 18), which were essentially behaviours, and these also remained unchanged. A third revised edition of *The Leadership Challenge* was published in 2002 (Posner, 2004). The same five practices remained, but this time their order was changed, and the items (commitments) under them were added or replaced. The revised practices were: "modelling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, [and] encouraging the heart" (Posner, 2004, p. 444).

Posner (2004) claimed that the same five practices "correspond well to the developmental issues of importance for college students" (p. 444), and so the LPI was given to higher education students. The result was that effective student leaders were indeed found to behave in ways that matched the same five fundamental practices of exemplary leadership: the Student LPI was born (Posner, 2004). Further studies were undertaken, and, regardless of the cohort of students that was selected, the findings were the same (Posner, 2004). In some studies, students who continued in or returned to leadership positions engaged even more in the LPI behaviours. Similarly, students who participated in leadership education programs also performed the five leadership practices more frequently. In addition, students who completed leadership opportunities enhanced their levels of leadership self-efficacy. This made a clear connection with Dugan and Komives' (2010) research explained above.

This research allowed Posner (2004) to make two conclusions that I considered significant for my research. Firstly, student leadership efficacy was influenced by the level of engagement and experience that students had with leadership opportunities. In other words, the more involvement and experience that students had with leadership opportunities, the higher that their efficacy for leadership became. (Here was an unmistakable alignment with Dugan and Komives' [2010] research.) These findings also provided a tidy alignment with the student development theorists such as Astin, as explained in Subsection 3.3.2.1. Secondly, student leaders who engaged in the behaviours listed in the LPI regarded themselves as being more effective, and were considered by others as being more effective, than those leaders who did not use those practices. Posner (2004) noted too that the more effective the leader, the more that s/he tended to engage in such behaviours.

I did not use the LPI in my practice. It took an entirely different approach and was developed for individuals who considered themselves to be leaders or who were striving to

develop their leadership capabilities. The explicit aim and the main focus of PAL programs such as Meet-Up were to encourage, support and guide students in their learning. The emphasis on the leaders' development was implicitly secondary, and concentrated on assisting them to perform well in their role. Accordingly, the student leaders concentrated on developing their skills in order to assist the students better, and, as Shertzer and Schuh, (2004) had also found, they were generally reluctant to consider themselves as leaders beyond their role in the program. While I increasingly introduced leadership exercises into leader development days, as was discussed in Chapter 2, the student leaders tended to focus more on the skills that they considered necessary to fulfill their role as peer leader. My observations over time, however, told me that the student leaders did engage in the five leadership practices (Posner, 2004); my study would endorse or disclaim these observations.

3.3.7 Summary of the student leadership literature

It appears that efforts have certainly been made to engage students and to encourage their development, and there has been research about such efforts. But it can be seen from this review of relevant literature about student leadership in higher education that there was a lack of significant research into the topic from the leaders' perspective. For me, this cemented my intention to study the student leaders in Meet-Up by ascertaining from them what their conceptions of student leadership were. Most of the literature that I found concerned leadership programs in college or universities, generally in the United States, that were established with the primary goal of encouraging students to consider developing their leadership capacities by participating in the activities provided in such leadership programs. Little of the literature explored other leadership developing programs such as PAL programs, providing me with yet another impetus to continue with my aim of researching student leaders in Meet-Up, a PAL program.

3.3.8 Segue to the leadership literature

The review of the student leadership literature contributed to an increase in my understanding of student leadership, but to a limited extent, owing to the relatively small amount of relevant literature. While my study concerned student leadership, I considered that I needed to investigate the extensive and complex field of leadership literature in order to deepen my knowledge and understanding of leadership in a general sense, as this would strengthen my understanding of student leadership.

3.4 The leadership literature

3.4.1 An overview

Leadership is a truly universal phenomenon amongst the human species. It transcends both time and culture. Investigation of leadership literature explained the changes and developments in leadership theories that have occurred since the recording of human experience. In this literature (much of it relating to corporations), the recognition, acquisition, development and sustainability of leadership competencies in employees were considered to be front and centre in relation to the success of the company. Leadership is no elephant in the room; it is sought, discussed, explained, interrogated, analysed, defined, encouraged, taught and researched. Everyone wants a piece of leadership.

3.4.2 Leadership definitions

There is a myriad of definitions of leadership dating back to the earliest writings and continuing today. For example, in the 1990s, Rost (1993, as cited in McCleskey, 2014, p. 117) listed 221 different definitions and conceptions of leadership. Bass and Bass (2008) stated that attempting to provide a single definition of leadership was fruitless as the definition should depend on the specific aspect of leadership of interest or under study. Despite advancing this position, the authors contributed to the pool, defining leadership as the "interaction among members of a group that initiates and maintains improved expectations and the competence of the group to solve problems or to attain goals" (p. 26). This definition was included in the glossary of terms in Chapter 1. Another definition captured my attention because of its difference. Rost (1993) argued that leadership was "an influence relationship among leaders and their collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 99).

3.4.3 Relevant literature

As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, I had, by necessity, to be selective in the literature that I included. I therefore included only the literature that was relevant to my study: the theories and practices that informed my study and my conceptual framework. I anticipated great difficulty in the selection – there was so much that I read, but, in the end, it was simpler and less agonising than I had predicted. Some of the key works have been researched and written some time ago; however, I considered that they must be included in my review for it to be in any way sufficiently comprehensive, despite its necessary brevity. For example, Stogdill's (1948) work has been quoted by many important researchers in

leadership, organisational management (e.g., Khan et al., 2019; Rost, 1993; Uhl-Bien, 2006, amongst others), and psychology (e.g., Fiedler, 1976; Vroom & Jago, 2007, amongst others).

I have elected to present that relevant literature in a summary table. This table, Table 3.2, is presented below. The narrative that resumes after the table explains and elaborates the information provided there and articulates the connections and alignment between the theories and practices outlined in the table and the Meet-Up leaders and the study.

Table 3.2: Description of the significant leadership theories and practices relevant to the study

Great Man theories • Leaders were born, not made • Leadership capacity was inherited • Men, not women, were leaders		
Authors	**Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice**	**Characteristics and/or summary**
Carlyle	Carlyle wrote an essay in 1841 that advocated the concept that leaders are born, not made. He claimed that some men were born with attributes that enraptured people and inspired them to follow them.	Carlyle claimed that it was the decisions of great men that directed or altered the course of history significantly.
Galton	Galton (1869), in his essay, *Hereditary Genius,* claimed that leadership qualities were inherited, and they were believed to include such factors as height, weight, health and education.	The Great Man theories led to an interest in the qualities that distinguished the great men from others, resulting in the search for which traits best correlated with leadership up until the middle of the 20th century.
Trait-based theories • Certain attributes are required for a person to be a good leader • These traits can be learned or developed		
Authors	**Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice**	**Characteristics and/or summary**
Weber	Weber (1921/1970-72) discussed a trait that natural leaders were said to possess: charisma. He claimed that it flowed from an inner strength that certain individuals held.	Charismatic leaders have a strong personal conviction.
Gardner	John W. Gardner (1990) defined leadership as "the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers" (p. 1).	In order to encourage followers, a leader needed a set of 14 traits. These traits include personal qualities of the leader as well as leadership skills and consideration for followers. They are listed in the narrative following this table.

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Zaccaro	Zaccaro (2007) supported the resurgence of new, reconsidered trait theories that began with House (1977). Zaccaro argued that trait theories were abandoned initially in favour of situational theories with insufficient empirical evidence. He posited that certain traits are sound predictors of effective leadership, particularly when integrated meaningfully.	Leadership traits are "relatively stable and coherent integrations of personal characteristics that foster a consistent pattern of leadership performance across a variety of group and organisational situations. These characteristics reflect a range of stable individual differences, and include personality, temperament, motives, cognitive abilities, skills and expertise" (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004, p. 104).

Situational theories
- Leadership style and behaviours should take the situation into account
- Different leadership styles and behaviours are required for different situations
- Personal traits were still an important element of effective leadership

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Stogdill	After an emphasis on the importance of traits, Stogdill (1948) posited that good leadership traits really needed to match the situation.	The leadership research that began with Stogdill (1948) contended that a person does not become a leader simply because she/he possesses a set of particular traits. The situation, as well as the way that the leader responds to it, is also crucial.
McGregor	McGregor (1960) posited that leadership could be considered as the relationship between the leader and the situation, acknowledging that traits were still important.	McGregor (1960) identified four variables that he contended were known to be involved in leadership: the characteristics of the leader; the attitudes and needs of the followers; the nature of the tasks to be performed; and the situation (p. 182).
Hersey and Blanchard	The Situational leadership theory began in 1955 as the "life cycle theory of leadership" (Blanchard et al., 1993, p. 22); it was a forerunner of Fiedler's (1971) contingency theory.	Basically, the theory proposed that effective leadership requires understanding of the situation and the initiation of an appropriate response to that situation.

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Tannenbaum and Schmidt	Group dynamics and a focus on members, not just on leaders, were beginning to challenge directive decision-making and leadership. This research looked at the resultant dilemma faced by managers of whether they should be more "democratic" and less "authoritarian" in their behaviours (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1973, p. 163).	The researchers had developed a continuum to describe the range of leadership behaviours in 1958, and they revised it in this article in 1973. They concluded that a leader needs to be keenly aware of and to understand the forces at play in influencing her/himself as leader, the followers and the situation, and that she/he needs to be able to behave or respond appropriately.

Contingency theory
- A respected theory that brought attention to the importance of the situation to leadership effectiveness was developed from the psychology discipline
- Rather than the leader changing her/his style, the situation could be manipulated

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Fiedler	Fiedler (1971) believed that the determination of effective leadership must include consideration of the situation. Fiedler (1972, 1976) claimed that leadership was determined by the interaction between the leadership style used and the situation. Effective leadership depended on establishing an appropriate match between the leader's personality and the situation.	Fiedler (1976) suggested that, rather than the leader changing her/his style to suit the situation, leadership training should focus on helping leaders to recognise and create "situational favourableness" (p. 9).
Van der Ven, Ganco and Hinings; Yukl and Mahsud	Many of the original constructs of contingency theory can be extended to advise people about more relevant ways to design organisations (Van der Ven et al., 2013).	Over time, contingency theories came to imply that certain situational aspects moderate or determine the effects of a leader's behaviour (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). The performance of an organisation is a result of the fit between the organisation's context and its internal arrangements (Van der Ven et al., 2013).

Transformational and transactional leadership theories
- Transactional leadership is a "top-down" leadership model that involves social exchange such as reward for increased productivity
- Transformational leadership is trait, situation and behaviour based, and involves collaborating with employees to establish common goals that embrace an element of active engagement and commitment on the part of followers

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Burns: established a dichotomy of transactional or transformational leadership	Basically, Burns' (1978) idea was to extend the existing business leadership approach, which was generally transactional, to a model where leadership was transformed by considering the employee or the follower, and including her/him in the aim to achieve a shared vision. Burns (1978, as cited in Bass & Riggio, 2006) posited that leaders' behaviours were either transactional (trading performance for reward and non-performance for reward denial or punishment) or transformational (facilitating the skill development and leadership capacity of their staff members/followers).	Transactional leaders appeal to self-interest, offering rewards or incentives for compliance or desired contributions. Role modelling, mentoring, encouraging and inspiring others are part of the transformational approach. It was recognised that leaders and managers generally employ both types of leadership, as required by the purpose or situation.
Bass and Riggio	Bass and Riggio (2006) extended Burns' theory, listing and explaining what both transactional and transformational leadership incorporates.	Transactional leadership is typified by the management of employees through transaction specification and control. It is a top-down model with generally a one-way flow of communication exchange. Transformational leadership involves: • Idealised influence • Individualised consideration • Intellectual stimulation • Inspirational motivation.

Servant leadership
- This theory, like no other, is based solely on concern for and commitment to others
- The leader sacrifices her/his own self-interest for that of the followers

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Greenleaf	The analogy for this theory is Hermann Hesse's (1932/1956) tale *Journey to the east*, which described a mythical journey whereby a servant, Leo, was discovered, after years of separation from the group of men, to have become the head of an Order where he was considered to be a great and noble leader.	Greenleaf's (1977/1991) theory was that a person needed to be a servant first in order to become a good leader.
Spears	Spears (2004) was committed to Greenleaf's philosophy of servant leadership, claiming that: "True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others" (p. 8). Spears developed a list of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership from Greenleaf's works.	The 10 characteristics of servant leadership: Listening; Empathy; Healing*;* Awareness; Persuasion; Conceptualisation; Foresight; Stewardship; Commitment to the growth of people*;* and Building community.

Followership
- This is considered an emerging field in leadership research
- The focus is on how followers influence leader behaviour, rather than the other way round as is common in most leadership theories
- Followers can augment leadership processes and outcomes
- Researchers offer suggestions of ways in which followers can be encouraged to contribute to achieving the shared purposes of the group

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Khan, Abdullah, Busari, Mubushar and Khan	Interest in this field of research is influenced largely by Kelley's 1992 book *The power of followership*. This book explored: a) the engagement level (active or passive) of followers; and b) whether they followed leaders blindly or thought critically. These researchers posited that followership, like leadership, can be viewed from the perspective of behaviours involved in the role, rather than focusing on the characteristics of individual people.	Transformational leader behaviour can be influenced by critically thinking followers who participate actively to establish sound relationships with leaders. Followers identify problems and offer solutions to support the leader in achieving common goals (Khan, et al., 2019).

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Agho; Alegbeleye and Kaufman	People are often reluctant to identify as followers because of the negative or unflattering connotations of the language attached (e.g., passive, reliant, lacking imagination) (Agho, 2009). By contrast, from an early age, children are encouraged to aspire to be leaders.	- Followership should be studied as a role, not a position. - Leadership and followership should be examined together as a reciprocal relationship (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2019).
Schedlitzki, Edwards and Kempster	These researchers suggested that it is difficult to theorise about followership identity while the focus of leadership studies remains on leaders.	The focus of leadership study should be removed from the organisational function and workplace identities of leaders and placed on the ongoing dynamics of the relationships between followers and leaders (Schedlitzki et al., 2018).

Relational leadership
- While the idea of the significance of relationships in leadership has threads that can be traced back through leadership literature to Stogdill, a focus on relational leadership as an approach or model is comparatively recent
- Relational leadership can emphasise the importance of day to day workplace procedures
- Relational leadership focuses on relationships rather than on behaviours
- This focus enables leadership to develop
- Because of this, researchers posit suggestions about varying ways of thinking and acting that are relationally responsive

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Uhl-Bien	Uhl-Bien (2006) posited that relational leadership research covers two broad perspectives: the entity perspective, which focuses on individuals; and the relational perspective, which focuses on socially constructed processes. Drawing on both perspectives, Uhl-Bien (2006) developed a relational leadership theory (RLT) to explore the relational dynamics involved.	RLT recognises the processes and relationships that produce and enable leadership, noting that leadership can be found anywhere – it is not linked with a managerial position. These relational processes are considered to be leadership when they generate social influence and result in change in others' attitudes, approaches, goals, etc.

Authors	Brief description and historical context of the theory/practice	Characteristics and/or summary
Cunliffe and Erikson	Cunliffe and Erikson (2011) researched a group of Federal Security Directors to investigate relational leadership as a way of "drawing attention to the mundane" (p. 1443) judgements and decisions that leaders make on an everyday basis in the workplace.	Their study demonstrated that the participants drew from their previous personal experiences and knowledge in conjunction with the respectful relationships that they developed with co-workers to function in the present and to determine the practices and actions that were needed.
Komives, Lucas and McMahon	These scholars, well known for their research into student leadership practice, developed a model of relational leadership (Komives et al., 2013), which focused on the importance of relationships to leadership development.	They offered advice about ways to incorporate elements of this approach into personal philosophies. These ways involved five components: • Purposeful • Inclusive • Empowering • Ethical • Process-oriented.

3.4.4 Trait-based theories

3.4.4.1 Trait theory overview

Historically, the earliest writings about leadership were pieces that espoused the commonly held view, which was that leaders were born and not made (Dinh & Lord, 2012; Perreault et al., 2015; Zaccaro, 2007). As was noted in Table 3.1, this perspective can be traced back to the "Great Man Theories" (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 49), which advocated the notion that the decisions of great men directed or altered the course of history significantly. Thomas Carlyle's 1841 essay on "heroes" (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 49) emphasised this concept, suggesting that some men were born with attributes that enraptured people, and that inspired people to follow them. Adding to this line of thinking, Galton's (1869) treatise, *Hereditary genius* (Zaccaro, 2007, p. 6), suggested that these leadership qualities were inherited, and that they were believed to include such factors as height, weight, health and education – traits that were generally held by the wealthy who could afford to develop them (Bass & Bass, 2008).

The "Great Man Theory" led to an interest in and a search for the qualities that distinguished the great men from others; hence leadership studies up until the middle of the 20th century were dominated by the persistent search for which traits best correlated with leadership. According to Bass and Bass (2008), "a trait is a construct based on consistent individual differences between people. Personality is the organised pattern of the distinctive traits of a specific person" (p. 103). Traits are also consistent and enduring, unlike moods, which can change quickly. Traits that are factors in leadership are: cognitive traits; social competency traits; emotional competency traits; biophysical (fitness and stature) traits; and traits of character such as integrity and honesty (Bass & Bass, 2008).

A complete understanding of leadership required an examination of not only individual differences in competencies, but also the relevance of those competencies to the given situation. Personal characteristics contributed to task competence and leadership; situational differences could also affect who emerged as leader (Bass & Bass, 2008). There were many traits that were considered favourable to effective leadership, and the lists varied from researcher to researcher, but I have elected to include here a brief discussion of charisma as I saw an association between charisma and the individual traits that I observed repeatedly in the student leaders.

3.4.4.2 Charisma

While a deep investigation of charisma fell beyond the scope of this study, I was intrigued by an essay that distinguished sociologist Max Weber (1921/1970-72) wrote

entitled "The sociology of charismatic authority". Although Weber's renowned work on power is considered by some to be of great significance – even a "classic formulation of power, authority and legitimacy" (Emerson, 1962, p. 31) – of interest to me for my study was his explanation of charisma. His essay was first published in 1921 (1921/1970-72), and in it Weber (1921/1970-72) discussed a particular trait that "natural leaders" (Weber, 1921/1970-72, p. 245) were said to possess, that of charisma. He postulated charisma to be a gift, a "supernatural" (p. 245) gift that only certain individuals hold.

According to Weber (1921/1970-72), charisma flows from inner strength. It does not adhere to any bureaucratic structure or control, and "rejects all rational economic conduct" (p. 247). "Pure" charisma "is never a source of private gain for its holders" (p. 247); it is "not an institutional and permanent structure" (p. 248). Charisma is "value-neutral" (p. 245); in other words, charisma can be and has been used for both good and evil. Indeed, in part because it is a trait not necessarily connected with a positive human value, charisma has been much debated over time, and research into it has continued to ebb and flow.

As part of the resurgence of interest in trait theories in the 1980s and 1990s, charismatic leadership research also enjoyed an "energized" (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004, p. 108) return. According to Zaccaro, Kemp and Bader (2004), empirical research studies by a number of researchers, beginning with House (1977) and Burns (1978), highlighted certain leader qualities that "compelled strong followership" (p. 108). From here, a number of models were developed by various researchers that posited that certain leader qualities predicted charismatic influence; there were also studies of the contextual aspects of charismatic influence (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004). It appeared that interest in charisma was still strong.

As was noted above, I included mention of charisma, and of Weber (1921/1970-72) as its original exponent, because I could see shades of it not only in the personal traits that I observed frequently in the student leaders, but also in the stories that they told. The student leaders would sometimes mention that the role attracted students who mimicked the devout disciple or fervent follower behaviours. They would follow student leaders around the campus or contact them via electronic media, talking to them and asking questions. Some leaders found this amusing; others were embarrassed and a little uncomfortable with being admired. In the PAL sessions, students tended to delight in the stories of the student leaders' own study experiences, feed off their guidance and follow their learning advice. For example, academics have told me of their frustration at having their study counsel ignored, but the same advice being accepted when delivered by student leaders.

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Clear links could be seen with Weber (1921/1970-72), who described a charismatic leader as having a "mission" (p. 246) that the followers accepted and shared. Followers recognised and would continue to follow this person as their charismatic leader while the mission was believed, and while the leader continued to exhibit success in achieving the mission. Thus, it was the followers who delivered power to the leader; she/he cannot demand it, but only earn it. This "charismatic authority" (p. 248) was, therefore, inherently unstable and could easily be lost by the individual.

When this idea is applied to Meet-Up, it can be argued that, if the student leaders continued to fulfil the "mission" of assisting students in their understanding of course concepts, students would continue to recognise the student leader as their "charismatically qualified leader" (Weber, 1921/1970-72, p. 247). And this is what I had perceived had happened. To the students who attended Meet-Up classes, the student leaders were much admired; they were role models, even heroes (albeit unwittingly). This suggested that perhaps there existed within the student leaders' psyche a specific type of charisma authority that stemmed from the PAL leader position, and that, when accompanied by other positive traits such as the enthusiasm to help their peers, fostered a following among the student PAL participants.

3.4.4.3 Leadership trait research

A systematic review into leadership published by Stogdill in 1948 reviewed 128 published leadership studies (Bass & Bass, 2008), concluding that good leadership traits really needed to match the situation in which they were to be employed. Soon afterwards, the quest for a set of universal traits relevant to all situations was largely abandoned, and in the 1950s and 1960s an emphasis on the situational origins of leadership developed to replace it (Bass & Bass, 2008).

The influence of personal traits, however, was not abandoned but rather sidelined, with a resurgence in their importance occurring in the 1980s (Zaccaro et al., 2004). Competence was considered a matter of task completion and interpersonal relations, both being seen as fundamental to effective leadership. Task accomplishment involved employing traits like intelligence and knowledge; interpersonal competence incorporated communication, caring, insight and empathy (Bass & Bass, 2008).

John W. Gardner (1990) had refined his ideas into a definition of leadership and a set of traits that had relevance to student leadership. He defined leadership as "the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers" (p. 1). He

outlined what he considered to be the 14 traits of leadership: 1. Physical vitality and stamina; 2. Intelligence and judgement-in-action; 3.Willingness (eagerness) to accept responsibilities; 4. Task competence; 5. Understanding of followers and their needs; 6. Skill in dealing with people; 7. Need to achieve; 8. Capacity to motivate; 9. Courage, resolution, steadiness; 10. Capacity to win and hold trust; 11. Capacity to manage, decide, set priorities; 12. Confidence; 13. Ascendance, dominance, assertiveness; and 14. Adaptability, flexibility of approach (pp. 48-54). In addition, Gardner distilled the 10 tasks of leadership: envisioning goals; affirming values; regenerating values; motivating; managing; achieving workable unity; explaining; serving as a symbol; representing the group; and renewing. Straight away, I could see some links with my observations of the student leaders over time.

But group dynamics and a focus on members, not just on leaders, and on the influence of the situation, were more generally beginning to challenge directive decision-making and leadership. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) looked at the resultant dilemma faced by managers of just how much more "democratic" and less "authoritarian" (p. 163) they should become in their behaviours towards and their relationships with employees. The decision was often tied in with the "match or mismatch of leaders and followers" (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 155). In other words, some followers expected and desired to work under an authoritarian leadership style; others preferred a more egalitarian, participatory leadership style, and, for them, leaders who adapted a less authoritarian approach, were considered more effective (Bass & Bass, 2008).

In 1958, Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) developed a continuum to describe the range of leadership behaviours chosen by leaders. This continuum ranged from the situation where the manager made all the decisions and then announced them, to the "manager permits subordinates to function within limits defined by [the] superior" (p. 164). This continuum was revised in 1973. A welcome adaptation of the 1958 version was the change in terminology from "subordinates" to "non-managers" (p. 167). Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) concluded that a leader needs to be keenly aware of and to understand the forces at play on her/himself as leader, the followers and the situation, and that she/he needs to be able to behave or respond appropriately.

3.4.5 The importance of situation

The research that began with Stogdill in 1948, as was noted above, contended that a person does not become a leader simply because she/he possesses a set of particular traits (Bass & Bass, 2008; Zaccaro et al., 2004). Thus, this long-held belief that leaders are born

and not made was replaced in the 1970s by the argument that leadership skills can be developed by individuals. From that period of time, researchers began to dispute the "trait" view as they saw evidence that not only could an individual improve her/his leadership capacities, but also that the leadership skills required could vary from one situation to another, with some individuals better suited to some situations than to others. Thus, it became generally accepted that a thorough exploration of leadership required an examination of both individual traits and the situation in which the leader operated, as both are important to the leadership outcome (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 135).

McGregor (1960) certainly agreed, positing that leadership could be considered as the relationship between the leader and the situation. Successful leadership was not dependent on those individuals in possession of a universal set of traits; rather leadership potential was broadly distributed throughout the population. Most of the skills and attitudes necessary for successful leadership could be acquired – they were not innate, and they could be developed by people who had differing personal traits and abilities. McGregor (1960) identified four variables that he contended were known to be involved in leadership: the characteristics of the leader; the attitudes and needs of the followers; the nature of the tasks to be performed; and the situation (McGregor, 1960).

McGregor's (1960) interpretation of leadership clearly posited that personal traits were still important. The focus on situation did not condemn trait theory to the rubbish heap. While initial forays into the leadership literature seemed to place trait theory and situation theory on opposing ends of a continuum, further exploration of the leadership research revealed that on the contrary there was indeed a close connection between the two.

3.4.5.1 Situational leadership

Situational Leadership Theory was originally developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1969, 1979, 1996, as cited by McCleskey, 2014). It was known firstly as the "life cycle theory of leadership" in 1966 (Blanchard et al., 1993, p. 22). The theory proposed that effective leadership required an understanding of the situation and the initiation of an appropriate response (Graeff, 1997; Grint, 2011, as cited in McCleskey, 2014). The theory was developed in response to the flat, unidimensional continuum of leadership styles that was accepted prior to the 1950s, and built on the two-dimensional model of two distinct behaviours – "initiating structure" and "consideration" – as identified by Stogdill and his peers (1957, as cited by Blanchard et al., 1993, p. 23) in the 1950s. "Initiating structure" (p. 24) was used to categorise leaders who had a task-oriented focus, as opposed to "consideration" (p. 24), which involved leaders holding a people-oriented (or relational)

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focus in relation to their followers. Subsequent researchers changed these to "concern for production" (p. 23) and "concern for people" (p. 23) respectively.

At the same time, it was recognised that people in leadership positions were not going to fit into an either/or dichotomy based on attitudes; they were going to use behaviours with both a task-oriented focus and a relationship focus. A way of measuring and scoring leaders' effectiveness was developed in 1982 (Blanchard et al., 1993, p. 25). It was called the Leadership Behaviours Analysis (Blanchard et al., 1993) and was based on leaders' choice of style for any given situation. Studies conducted using this effectiveness scale demonstrated that, if leaders used what employees considered was an appropriate level of both direction and support, then employees' morale and satisfaction were high (Blanchard et al., 1993).

Here I could see an immediate connection with the Meet-Up leaders. Student leaders were committed to the participating students and eager to meet their requests and needs, but Meet-Up leaders were also obliged to ensure that their sessions ran according to the Meet-Up program's guidelines and requirements. This involved being accommodating and flexible in the activities that they offered, but at the same time ensuring that they did not overstep the boundary of peer leader behaviour to become tutors or teachers.

3.4.6 Contingency theory

Fiedler's (1971) contingency theory was an evolution and extrapolation of situational leadership theory. Fiedler (1971, 1972, 1976, 1996) argued that there was no single best style of leadership. He provided what was "perhaps the most conceptually sophisticated framework of leader situationism" (Zaccaro et al., 2004, p. 107), calling it "the contingency model". Fiedler (1971) claimed that leadership was determined by the interaction between the leadership style used and the situation involved: "effective leadership depend[ed] on maintaining the right match of personality and of situation" (p. 9). By leadership style, Fiedler (1971) essentially meant personality style – that is, the leaders' personal traits that influenced how they related to others. The effectiveness of a group, by further extrapolation, was a result of the relationships between the leader and the members of that group and the task, and the "situational favourableness" (p. 9) for the leader. "Favourableness" encompassed the extent to which the leader felt accepted by the group, the way that the task was structured, and the level of power and influence that the leader could exert.

There was a link here with PAL in general and therefore with Meet-Up in particular. The "situation" in PAL was that of proficient students using their personal traits and experiences to guide and encourage novice students. Each specific session within the

"situation" of Meet-Up was framed by the program structure in which the student leaders operated; all participants were there voluntarily and shared a common goal, that of increasing the understanding of course concepts and content by the participating students. Thus the "situation" lent itself favourably to the development of effective sessions.

In the interests of facilitating effective leadership, Fiedler (1976) flipped leadership training programs on their head by suggesting that leadership training should not involve trying to identify and teach ideal leadership behaviours. Rather, Fiedler (1976) was committed to the idea that leadership training should focus on helping leaders to recognise and create "situational favourableness" (p. 9). This, too, had an association with Meet-Up. The student leaders were assisted in realising the Meet-Up mission through the training that was provided at the start of each university semester, whereby they were encouraged to use their personal traits as well as their experience and knowledge to turn the "favourableness" of the situation to influence student learning effectively and positively in their PAL sessions, while remaining true to the guidelines of the program.

But, of course, matching one's personality with favourable leadership situations came with an intrinsic dependency. An individual firstly required possession of a significant degree of self-efficacy in order to be sufficiently aware of her/his traits and capabilities before they could be matched with appropriate situations. As noted, Bandura's (1977) position on self-efficacy was that it was a crucial determinant of people's choice of situation, activity and setting. In order for people to have the ability to assess a situation and its "favourableness" for them, a sufficient level of self-efficacy was required. And, again by extrapolation, Meet-Up leaders also needed to continue to develop their level of self-efficacy to guide their peers in PAL sessions effectively.

3.4.6.1 The evolution of contingency theories

Despite its being considered "conventional wisdom" (Yun et al., 2006, p. 376) that a particular form of leadership was likely to be effective only in certain situations, "widespread empirical support for contingency theories has generally been less than might be expected" (p. 376). Indeed, interest in contingency theories waned after the "burst of conceptual and empirical work in the 1960–1980s" (Van der Ven et al., 2013, p. 394), and research in organisational contingency theory declined or "tapered off dramatically" (Day & Antonakis, 2012, p. 9), with some leadership research steering towards broader contextual approaches including more integrative frameworks (Day & Antonakis, 2012) which are discussed below in Subsection 3.5.4. Put simply, contingency theories came to imply that certain situational aspects moderate or determine the effects of a leader's behaviour (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). By

extension, this also meant that some leadership behaviours were more relevant or meaningful in certain situations, and thus, leaders typically varied their behaviours from one situation to the next (Yun et al., 2006).

More recently, however, rapid changes in and the unpredictability of organisations and their environments have resulted in the creation of dynamic organisational situations. These situations cry out for flexibility and adaptability (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010), and also for innovation and creativity (Van der Ven et al., 2013), in leadership thinking and response. Van der Ven et al. (2013) argued that essentially "a contingency theory proposes that the performance outcomes of an organisational unit are a result of the fit between the unit's external context and internal arrangements" (p. 394). Thus, they claimed that contingency theory is highly relevant to the current environment, and that many of the original constructs of the theory can be extended to inform more relevant ways to design organisations.

In the field of psychology research, Yun et al. (2006) suggested that a "forgotten" (p. 376) contingency factor in leadership studies were followers and their characteristics. They claimed that leadership behaviours that empower followers are contingent on the follower being receptive to and having a need for, autonomy and self-leadership. Self-leadership involves individuals searching within themselves with the intention of influencing and controlling their own behaviours. Yun et al.'s (2006) empirical study supported the notion that "follower attributes can play a significant role in developing contingency views of leadership" (p. 383). I have explored the influence of followers further in Subsection 3.4.7.

3.4.7 Transformational and transactional leadership

Another field of leadership research that is still currently being explored involved the dichotomy between transactional and transformational leadership. Indeed, transformational leadership was considered "the single most studied and debated idea within the field of leadership" (Diaz-Saenz, 2011, p. 299, as cited by McCleskey, 2014, p. 120). This paradigm of leadership was conceptualised in the 1970s, when Burns (1978, as cited by Bass & Riggio, 2006) posited that leaders were either transactional or transformational. Transactional leaders trade performance for reward and non-performance for reward denial or punishment – that is, it is a relationship of exchange – whereas transformational leaders facilitate the skill development and the leadership capacity of their staff members/followers (p. 3). Indeed, transformational leaders "stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity" (p. 3). The components of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) are as follows:

- Idealised influence – leaders serve as role models; followers see leaders as having commitment, persistence and determination regarding the work collective

- Individualised consideration – leaders exhibit mentoring capacities, use two-way communication exchanges and practices, and exhibit a genuine concern for their followers

- Intellectual stimulation – leaders question assumptions, reframing problems using new approaches

- Inspirational motivation – leaders motivate and inspire by giving meaning and challenge to their employees' work (p. 3).

However, as with situational leadership, it was difficult to categorise leaders as being more inclined to employ behaviours that were oriented either one way or the other. Most transformational leaders employed transactional behaviours in certain situations. And, again applying this paradigm to Meet-Up leaders, while transformational behaviours were undoubtedly those that they employed the majority of the time, they needed to use some transactional behaviours in certain situations both to meet the needs of their students and to fulfil their positions as student leaders appropriately. The positive, encouraging behaviours of transformational leadership connected readily with those of servant leadership.

3.4.8 Servant leadership

Greenleaf's (1977/1991) theory was that a person needed to be a servant first in order to become a good leader. The analogy for this theory is Hermann Hesse's (1932/1956) tale *Journey to the east*, which described a mythical journey whereby a man, Leo, who was originally a servant, was discovered after years of separation from the group of men with whom he set out, to have become the "titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble leader" (p. 19). Greenleaf (1977/1991) argued that this was because this man's nature, his real self, was to be a servant first. A person who was a servant first made sure that other people's highest propriety needs were served. He quoted Camus (no date): "Great ideas, it has been said, come into the world as gently as doves" (p. 22). I remembered immediately one of the Meet-Up leaders telling me that the leadership style of being like a dove was one to which he aspired and that he tried to emulate.

Spears (2004) was committed to Greenleaf's (1977/1991) philosophy of servant leadership: "True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire

to help others" (p. 8). He outlined a set of 10 characteristics of a servant leader that he extracted from his readings of Greenleaf's original works that "serve to communicate the power and promise that this concept offers to those who are open to its invitation and challenge" (pp. 8-10). The qualities all had an unmistakable emphasis on consideration of the followers and their interests and well-being. They were: Listening; Empathy; Healing; Awareness; Persuasion; Conceptualisation; Foresight; Stewardship; Commitment to the growth of people; and Building community.

In further consideration of this theory, I could see the relevance of each of these 10 characteristics to the student leaders. Undoubtedly, the fact that they were peers guiding peers, yet doing so from the perspective of those who had already walked the same path, created an instantly empathetic bond between student leader and student. In addition, the mission of PAL in Meet-Up placed the participating students at the centre of the program, and the activities that were offered in the sessions were all designed from the student leaders' experienced perspective to guide the students in their understanding and learning of the course content and concepts. Consequently, I postulated that Meet-Up leaders could certainly be considered "servant leaders". The gentle behaviours and traits that characterise servant leadership emphasise the important role of emotions and relationships in leadership.

3.4.9 Followership theories

Another branch of leadership research that aligned with my knowledge and observations of the student leaders in Meet-Up was followership. As far back as 1942, Ackerson (1942, as cited in Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 96) made the "pertinent observation" (p. 96) that the traits of followers and leaders, while generally expected to be antithetical, were in actuality similar. Indeed, Ackerson (1942, as cited in Bass & Bass, 2008) suggested that the antithesis of leader was not follower, but rather "indifference" (p. 96) or unwillingness either to lead or to follow.

Bass and Bass (2008) tended to agree, noting that followers and leaders are "highly similar" (p. 409), that neither can exist without the other and that people can exchange roles and even be both leader and follower at the same time. Generally, however, the relationship of leader to follower has been portrayed as hierarchical. Terms such as the "upward influence" (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 436) of followers make this view clear. Managers and leaders controlled, allowed or encouraged the contributions of subordinates/employees/followers to decision-making processes as they saw fit, and this was reflected in much of the leadership literature. Nevertheless, there were exceptions.

For example, Rost (1993) linked relational leadership and followership with his explanation of what leadership was, without articulating either term. He described leadership as "an influence relationship among leaders and their collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 99). His premise was that leadership included four elements, all of which he considered essential. Firstly, the leadership relationship had to be based on non-coercive influence; secondly, collaborators as well as leaders must be active; thirdly, both leaders and collaborators must intend substantive and transformational change; and finally, the intended changes must reflect mutually agreed purposes. The accent on followers was explicit.

More recently, followership has developed into a school of leadership research where the significance of followers' influence is front and centre. Agho (2009) suggested that one reason that followership was coming to the fore only now was that people are often reluctant to identify as followers because of the negative or unflattering connotations of the language attached to the term "follower". The idea of being a follower conjures a person who is passive, reliant or dependent, and lacking imagination, drive and creativity (Agho, 2009). By contrast, from an early age, children are encouraged to aspire to be leaders. Leaders are presented as strong, important, influential people with attractive traits such as charisma, reliability and intelligence (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2019).

Interest in this field of research was influenced largely by Kelley's earlier 1992 book *The power of followership* (Khan et al., 2019). Kelley explored: a) the engagement level (active or passive) of followers; and b) whether they followed leaders blindly or thought independently and critically. Khan et al. (2019) chose to "reverse the lens" and applied these dimensions to transformational leadership. They found that trust in leadership on the part of followers encouraged the development of both active engagement and independent critical thinking, and was a strong determining factor in establishing positive relationships between leader and follower. Relationships based on trust in leadership allowed followers to support transformational leaders by offering new solutions and fresh ideas for the directions of projects and change instigation, and facilitated the partnering of leaders and followers to achieve common goals (Khan et al, 2019).

Carsten and Uhl-Bien (2013) also picked up on Kelley's dichotomy of actively engaged, critical thinking followers or passive, non-challenging followers. Their study revealed that, while some people held a view that followers can and should be involved in the co-production of leadership processes, others held a romanticised view of leaders and their importance. These followers were more likely to engage in what Carsten and Uhl-Bien

(2013) termed "the crime of obedience" (p. 2), whereby they followed their leader's directives regardless of whether or not they considered them right or ethical. They did this by displacing responsibility for actions from themselves to the leader.

Schedlitzki et al. (2018) claimed that leadership research still tends to be dominated by an emphasis on leaders. They suggested that many followers seek a stable workplace identity that they mistakenly believe will emanate from a "strong, heroic leader" (p. 29), which is a phantasmic construct. They argued that the focus of leadership study should be removed from the organisational function and workplace identities of leaders and placed not on followers either, but rather on the ongoing dynamics of the relationships between followers and leaders (Schedlitzki et al., 2018).

Alegbeleye and Kaufman (2019) argued that followership is a legitimate field of study, and recommended that it be studied from the perspective of its being a role, rather than a set of particular individual traits. They also recommended that followership be studied as part of leadership studies as a reciprocal relationship. This would potentially assist people to avoid "the crime of obedience" (p. 2) articulated by Carsten and Uhl-Bien (2013, p. 2). Agho (2009) had a similar notion, suggesting that there was an erroneous assumption that people knew instinctively how to follow. In addition, he suggested that, just as research examines what is involved in effective leadership, so too there are characteristics of effective followership. Having once studied both concepts, people would have the knowledge to switch roles from leader to follower and vice versa when appropriate (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2019).

I found this field of research fascinating, and, as with relational leadership, I could clearly see connections with student leadership and with the context of my study. But the followers in PAL are the students who attend the sessions, and the focus of research in PAL has traditionally been on the attendees or followers. So in fact my study flew in the face of the followership literature, and involved flipping the focus back from follower to leader.

3.4.10 The relational leadership model

Another emerging area of leadership study is that of relational leadership. As with followership, the idea of the significance of relationships in leadership is not new, of course, and has threads that wind throughout the leadership literature, and that can be traced back to Stogdill (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Indeed, Stogdill, (1957, as cited in Blanchard et al., 1993) asserted that leaders should focus on people and relationships rather than on tasks alone. Dabke (2016) pushed the earliest date of the relationship thread back even further, claiming that

Thorndike put forward his views on social intelligence and the importance of relationships in leadership in 1920.

To continue the thread, Fiedler's (1971) respected contingency model and Hersey and Blanchard's (1969, as cited in Blanchard et al., 1993, p. 23) situational leadership theory also emphasised the importance of relationships. Later, Rost (1993) challenged conventional leadership thinking, suggesting that the paradigm of leadership needed to be reconceptualised. He urged people to disregard the notion that leadership was only what had worked in the past, and what achieved goals, higher performance or profit. He prevailed on researchers to abandon the emphasis on leaders and their traits, and instead to hone in on leadership as an "episodic affair" (p. 103), bound by the time, the specific context and the particular situation. He defined leadership as involving influential relationships among leaders and followers, "a specific relationship of people planning a mutually agreeable real change" (p. 103).

And so, while the focus on relationships is not new, what is comparatively new in leadership research is the focus on relational leadership as an approach or a model. Crevani (2015) clarified this point, suggesting that "Relational leadership is not a different kind of leadership; rather it is a different lens over what counts as leadership. It takes our eye out further than simply individuals who are designated as leaders, and looks to the social processes involved in producing leadership" (p. 32). Uhl-Bien's (2006) earlier work posited that relational leadership research covers two broad perspectives: the entity perspective that focuses on individuals; and the relational perspective that focuses on socially constructed processes. Drawing on both perspectives, Uhl-Bien (2006) developed a relational leadership theory (RLT) to explore the relational dynamics involved. RLT recognises the processes and relationships that produce and enable leadership, noting that leadership can be found anywhere – it is not linked with a managerial position. These relational processes are considered to be leadership when they generate social influence and result in change in others' attitudes, approaches and goals.

Cunliffe and Eriksen's (2011) study of Federal Security Directors and relational leadership conceptualised leadership as being "embedded in the everyday relationally-responsive dialogical practices of leaders" (p. 1425). They picked up on Rost's (1993) claim that people experience leadership in the "reality of their daily lives" (p. 103), as the participants in their study focused on the importance of "conversations and everyday mundane occurrences" (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1425) in their responses to the interview questions regarding leadership. Their study demonstrated that the participants drew from their

personal experiences and their "knowing from within", the respectful relationships that they developed with others and their dialogic communications with colleagues to work out the actions that were needed. Ultimately, Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) concluded that "relational leadership is a way of being-in-the-world that embraces an intersubjective and relationally-responsive ways of thinking and acting" (p. 1445).

Komives teamed up with researchers Lucas and McMahon to develop a model of relational leadership (Komives et al., 2013) that focused on the importance of relationships to leadership development. In brief, they offered advice about ways that individuals could incorporate elements of this approach into their own personal philosophies. It involved five components that both leaders and participants should be: "purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical and process-oriented" (p. 34). This research about relational leadership struck a chord with me as the link with the Meet-Up program and its student leaders was obvious.

Meet-Up sessions were indeed "episodic" (Rost, 1993, p. 102), and leaders were flexible in their planning. They sat with students in their sessions, asking them questions such as how they were feeling, what was concerning them and which discipline concepts they had trouble understanding. The student leaders would then formulate their sessions around the responses. In this way, they presumably unknowingly followed the foundational logic of relational leadership: they engaged in honest and open dialogic communication; they included and empowered the students by developing shared, purposeful goals with mutually agreed outcomes; and they demonstrated care and concern for them.

This explanation of relational leadership and of its connection with Meet-Up brings to an end the narrative on the leadership literature that is linked with Table 3.2, as was presented at the beginning of this section. But my review of the literature about leadership is not yet complete. The following subsection serves almost as an addendum to the table. It briefly outlines the literature that impacted on my notions about student leadership and on the analysis of the data in my study.

3.4.11 The integration of leadership theories

A number of additional leadership theories can be located in the literature. However, as was declared in the introduction to this chapter, this review was not intended to be a comprehensive leadership review, and it discusses only theories that I could identify as having relevance to my study. An article that recently caught my attention discussed the integration of leadership theories (Avolio, 2007). In it, Avolio (2007) cited John W. Gardner (1990), whose research I noted in particular in Subsection 3.4.4.3, and his insightful remark

that leaders are part of the historical context, setting and system in which they function (Gardner, as cited in Avolio, 2007). Avolio (2007) was making his point that a more integrative approach to leadership research was vital to understanding what constitutes leadership and its development. He posited that this can be done by taking a more integrated approach across theories, recognising and considering "the dynamic interplay between leaders and followers" (p. 25). This had the potential to impact on my analysis and on my sensemaking of the data in my study.

Keirsch and Peters (2017) echoed Avolio's (2007) position that leadership theories need to develop and progress in order to be responsive to the emerging leadership context. They chose to examine servant leadership and authentic leadership together, partly in response to calls from leadership scholars such as Avolio (2007) for increased integration across theories, noting their awareness that there was a conceptual overlap (Kiersch & Peters, 2017). I found this also of immense interest as I had touted servant leadership as having clear alignment with Meet-Up. Keirsch and Peters (2017) posited that both these theories "represent more inclusive and humanized approaches to leadership and seem useful for guiding student leadership development" (p. 150). Moreover, they proposed an integrated view of these theories "in the spirit of building bridges not just between higher education and business but also within the field of leadership" (p. 150). The fact that this research integrated an established theory that I had long considered related well to Meet-Up with an emerging theory relevant to student leadership, confirmed my decision to include this section. An outline of servant leadership can be found in Subsection 3.4.8 and in Table 3.2; it therefore needs no further explanation here. I expound below on the other theory, authentic leadership – "one of the most popular topics in contemporary leadership" (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014, p. 451).

Firstly, to a definition: just as Burns (1978, as cited in Avolio & Gardner, 2005) considered that a positive moral perspective was an essential component of transforming leadership, so too Avolio and Gardner (2005) believed that a positive ethical stance was a vital element of authentic leadership. Walumbwa et al. (2008) agreed, and they posited that positive ethical thought and behaviour needed to be encapsulated in a sound, comprehensive definition of authentic leadership. Based therefore on the literature about authentic leadership, Walumbwa et al. (2008) defined authentic leadership as:

> a pattern of leader behaviour that draws upon and promotes both positive
> psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-
> awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and

relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering

positive self-development. (p. 94)

In concurrence with Kiersch and Peters (2017), this definition hinted that there may

be some overlap with other leadership theories, and indeed my review of literature confirmed

that there was certainly an overlap among leadership theories. Indeed, some of the qualities

considered to be constructs of authentic leadership have popped up in various other

leadership theories and practices that I have included in this chapter. I provide some

examples: honesty and integrity are elements of transformational leadership (Bass & Bass,

2008); earning trust is considered an important general leadership trait (Gardner, 1990), and

is also essential to effective followership (Khan et al., 2019); ethical values and behaviours

are characteristics of effective, active followership (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2013), and of

relational leadership (Komives et al., 2013); and empowerment is a desired attribute of

contingency theories (Yun, Cox, & Sims, 2006) and of relational leadership (Komives et al.,

2013). I had observed these qualities in the Meet-Up leaders.

Furthermore, a number of student leadership and leadership theories have shared

reference to the term "awareness". For example, Komives et al. (2006) posited that awareness

of self is a strength considered essential for the development of a student leadership identity.

In the discourse on servant leadership (Spears, 2004), awareness is noted as an important

trait. Additionally, Bandura (1977) noted that self-efficacy and awareness of self and

situation are not only congruent, but also essential for appropriate decision-making about

actions to be taken. And, recently, Crawford et al. (2020) in a reconceptualisation of authentic

leadership, made the point that authentic leaders demonstrate awareness on two dimensions:

self-awareness, which entails insight into their own self-knowledge and understanding of its

effects on their behaviours; and social awareness, which means insight into the behaviours of

others.

On another tack, a study undertaken by Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) found that,

for some managers, authentic leadership was an ideal, a "managerialistic dream" (p. 452).

The organisational climate can contradict authenticity ideals, and furthermore situations and

complexities within the organisation can serve to obstruct the managers' efforts to become

authentic leaders (Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014). Nyberg and Sveningsson (2014) raised

another concern with authentic leadership: namely, that it returns the focal point of leadership

to the managers, reassuring them of their "…traditional power positions" (p. 451), which can

preclude the possibility of the development of the shared leadership relationships that

underpin other contemporary, more participative leadership approaches. Regardless,

authentic leadership theory and the notion of the integration of leadership theories could both contribute to explanations of student leaders' behaviours in Meet-Up and to the conceptions of student leadership held by the participants in my study.

3.4.12 Emotion in leadership

3.4.12.1 Emotion in organisations

This seemed to me to be a field of research that I needed to include in my review. My observations of student leaders told me that the feelings of the students were an important consideration for them, and I was also aware that the emotions of the student leaders had the potential to impact on their interactions with the students.

Ashkanasy and Humphrey (2011) stated that the study of emotions had been "essentially off the organisational behaviour research agenda" (p. 214) in the post-World War Two period. Researchers hedged around emotions, alluding to them but rarely using the word, and, as a result, emotions manifested only tacitly in the discussion of various leadership and followership traits and behaviours. The resurgence of research into emotions began in the 1980s and continued beyond, particularly because of interest from some psychology fields, in addition to the recognition that individuals' emotions clearly influence their behaviour (Ashkanasy, 2003). In an attempt to understand and explain emotions and their impact better, Ashkanasy (2003) developed a model of emotion in organisations. The model has five levels, briefly outlined below. I could see an alignment between this model and the Meet-Up program, and I outline that connection in Subsection 3.4.11.5.

Level 1 is emotion "within-person" (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011, p. 215). Emotion is dynamic in nature and can change quickly within a person based on "moment-by-moment variations in the way they feel at work" (Ashkanasy, 2003, p. 18). Particular events and conditions called "affective events" can determine a person's emotions (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996, as cited in Ashkanasy, 2003). Because Level 1 is about individuals' emotions within themselves, it firstly determines their immediate behaviours, but then extends beyond that to impact on their work performance, affective commitment and job satisfaction, demonstrating the interrelatedness of each level.

Level 2 is emotion "between-persons" (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011, p. 216), and concerns individual differences. Affective commitment, for example, describes a person's emotional attachment to her or his organisation. Other features of this level are traits such as well-being, and trait affect, which is personal disposition. Another element of this level is emotional intelligence (EI), which Ashkanasy (2003) explained as "individual capacities to

deal with emotion in everyday life" (p. 24). This is discussed in more detail in the following subsections. Level 3, termed "interpersonal communication" (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011, p. 217), involves the outward display of emotion when people are in social contact with others, and includes facial expressions.

Level 4 incorporates emotions in teams and groups. Managers and leaders can influence the mood of their employees or followers through "emotional contagion" (p. 218). This occurs when people pick up on the emotions of others (Boyatsis, as cited in McKinsey, 2020), or mimic one another's expressions and body language (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011). The organisational perspective comprises the final level, Level 5. The organisational climate is an accumulative result of the emotions at play at the other levels. It is constructed by the "collective mood of the organisational members towards their jobs, their colleagues, the organisation, and management" (p. 220).

3.4.12.2 EI in psychology

Prior to researchers' applying EI in organisational behaviour studies, it had been investigated in the psychology discipline. In fact, Mayer et al. (2016) claimed that Mayer and Salovey "proposed the existence of a new intelligence called emotional intelligence" in 1990 (p. 2). A test to measure EI was developed subsequently by these researchers and their colleague Caruso. The test was therefore called the Mayer, Salovey, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) (Mayer et al., 2004). The MSCEIT was an ability test that had four branches: perceiving emotions; using emotions to facilitate thought; understanding emotions; and managing emotions. Since the development of the original test, Mayer et al. (2016) continued to update it, in order to "enhance its usefulness" (p. 2), and to examine its influences and implications for research and practice.

Mayer et al. (2004) developed their test partly in response to a number of criticisms of EI as a concept that they strongly refuted. They contended that criticisms of the concept of EI could not be supported, as the theory underpinning EI "is deeply rooted in the psychological literature" (p. 210). Additionally, they claimed that much of the criticism was directed at EI because of the "naïve popularisations of the concept" (p. 210). They argued that these "popularisations" were inaccurate as they associated many general character traits and competencies with EI. "These conceptualisations and associated measures often have little or nothing specifically to do with emotion or intelligence and, consequently, fail to map onto the term emotional intelligence" (p. 197). These comments were clearly aimed at the work of researchers such as Goleman et al. (2002), which is explained in the following subsection.

More recently, Petrides and colleagues (2007) investigated trait EI, which they termed "trait emotional self-efficacy" (p. 273). Their research demonstrated that trait EI is a distinct construct in personality hierarchies, which then allowed them to connect trait emotional self-efficacy with established psychology literature and mainstream models of personality. From this, they suggested that individuals' appraisal of situations and reactions to events was filtered partly through their perceptions of their emotional abilities. They also concluded that trait emotional self-efficacy could improve a person's ability to predict her or his behaviours, attitudes and achievements, and that, because emotions are implicated in many aspects of everyday life, it is important to be aware of their impact and relevance (Petrides et al., 2007). Again, I could see an association with Meet-Up.

3.4.12.3 EI in organisational behaviour

Many years ago, Thorndike (1920, as cited in Dabke, 2016) had identified what he called "social intelligence" (p. 2). He described it as "an ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls, to act wisely in human relations" (p. 2). According to Dabke (2016), Thorndike's definition was clearly a reference to "an individual's ability to understand and manage their interpersonal relations, an essence of EI as understood today" (p. 2).

Goleman et al. (2002) began their well-known and popular text devoted to exploring the role of EI in leadership with the words "Great leaders move us" (p. 3). (I thought instantly of Weber [1921/1970-72] and charisma.) Because people look to their leaders for assurance and guidance, leaders play a primordial emotional role; they fulfil the role of a group's emotional guide. Understanding the powerful role of emotions makes people more effective, successful leaders, according to Goleman et al. (2002), and how well leaders manage and direct the feelings of a group to meet its goals depends on their levels of "emotional intelligence" (p. 20). According to Goleman et al. (2002), there are four domains of EI (p. 39): self-awareness; self-management; social awareness; and relationship management. The language used in this explanation offers a clear, common thread with the authentic leadership discourse (Crawford et al., 2020) outlined in Subsection 3.4.11.

Since the research of Goleman and colleagues (2002), EI has continued to be explored and debated in organisational behaviour. Smollan and Parry (2011) claimed that it was "one of the most controversial concepts in organisational behaviour" (p. 437). One of the reasons for this is that there has been continual disagreement about whether it is a trait or an ability or both. Some critics have claimed that EI made no contribution to work performance or leadership effectiveness (Smollan & Parry, 2011). Regardless, Smollan and Parry's (2011)

qualitative research determined that employees reacted better to change when they perceived that their leaders had demonstrated an understanding of their employees' emotions whilst also having the capacity to regulate the expression of their own emotions. An association can be seen here with Chickering and Reisser (1993) and the seven vectors of student development outlined earlier, one of which was the management of emotions. Smollan and Parry (2011) also established that leaders needed to have sufficiently high levels of EI to encourage their followers' engagement in change processes, and to help them to manage its challenges.

It seemed, however, that psychology and organisational behaviour and management were not the only disciplines interested in the link between EI and leadership. There was another discipline that was becoming increasingly interested in EI and leadership which I explore briefly.

3.4.12.4 EI in teaching

In the United States, Lumpkin et al. (2014) wrote about the characteristics of "teacher leaders" (p. 60): those teachers who were given specific leadership positions in their schools or in the district. These teachers not only were experienced, but also were respected, considered to be innovative, had good communication skills and had a "passion for student learning" (p. 60). The authors developed a diagram illustrating the four essential areas in which they argued that teacher leaders needed to demonstrate skill and commitment: a focus on "student learning, empowerment, relationships, and collaboration" (p. 60). In order to build optimal relationships with their teacher peers, Lumpkin et al. (2014) suggested that teacher leaders needed to possess EI in the four domains, as expounded by Goleman et al. (2002).

Lumpkin et al (2014) referred to a number of researchers, including Barth (2001), Gordon (2004), Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) and Lambert (2003), who were of the opinion that all teachers harboured leadership capabilities (p. 61) (shades of the student leadership literature explored earlier in this chapter that claimed that all students could develop leadership competencies). Indeed, Lambert (2003) extended this notion to identify as a major challenge the need to create contexts that evoked leadership from all teachers, rather than trying to identify individuals who could be teacher leaders (Lumpkin et al., 2014). This reminded me of the "Leaders are made and not born" maxim from the organisational behaviour literature, and also of Fiedler (1976) and his research into favourableness. It appeared that the conceptions in the literature that I had reviewed were connecting in sometimes surprising ways. From here, the same question could be asked of teacher leaders as my research asked of student leaders, viz., are they leaders in reality as well as nominally?

Berliner (as cited in French & Chopra, 2006) seems to have been the first researcher to see that the role of a teacher was analogous to that of a "midlevel executive" (French & Chopra, 2006, p. 230). Berliner (as cited in French & Chopra, 2006) equated the teaching responsibilities of directing students and managing support staff members in a classroom with those of organising and monitoring employees in a business. Further, he likened curriculum planning in a school to the visioning of executives, and the lesson plans of teachers to the strategies employed in a business to realise the broader mission. The tacit yet unmistakeable extrapolation that can be made from this comparison is that teachers, like executives (and potentially like student leaders), could all be considered leaders who needed to be encouraged and stimulated to continue to develop their effective leadership skills.

3.4.12.5 The connection of emotions with Meet-Up

Throughout this chapter, I have explained the links from the literature with the Meet-Up program and with its student leaders, and here is no exception. In a PAL program, the needs of the attending students were paramount. Sometimes, particularly at the commencement of a semester, students were embarrassed and reluctant to voice their concerns, misgivings or lack of understanding of discipline concepts or terms. The ability to perceive and possibly also to understand the emotions of the students in their sessions was, therefore, an ability that Meet-Up leaders could employ to assist them in their role of guiding, encouraging and advising the students. By being sensitive to perceived emotions in the students, leaders could be flexible and adapt their prepared activities as they saw fit, and also tailor their responses to the students' identified needs.

In addition, however, the Meet-Up leaders needed to be mindful of their own emotions. Their emotions within themselves such as confidence and positivity, as well as their mood, had the potential to play a crucial role in creating the atmosphere at each session and in the level of comfort that the students felt. The emotions within the student leaders could also influence their communications and interactions with each individual student, and with the group as a whole. In these ways, the emotional states of the Meet-Up leaders had a direct bearing on the effectiveness of the learning that occurred. In my experience as coordinator, Meet-Up leaders tended to be honest and open with their peers, and confided in them if they had assignments due, or other commitments such as sick children, that they were aware may have impacted on their emotions, moods or behaviours.

And, finally, the overall atmosphere within the faculty and the university as a whole (just as within an organisation or a school) had the capability to affect the emotions of both the Meet-Up leaders and the students. A feeling of general satisfaction and happiness with

staff members' behaviours towards one another, the Meet-Up leaders and the students, combined with a general feeling that the institution had an interest in their well-being, encouraged a feeling within both the Meet-Up leaders and the students that they were supported and valued. In addition, an awareness of the academics' support for and commitment to the Meet-Up program engendered a feeling of confidence and comfort within both leaders and students that pervaded each session and its outcomes.

3.4.13 Linking observation with the literature

My observations of student leaders from my very first involvement in PAL in the SI program at USQ in 1995 suggested that their behaviours and traits were indicative of individuals who were indeed leaders, both nominally and in actuality. My review of the literature about leadership as presented in this chapter affirmed that belief.

To be explicit:

- The Meet-Up student leaders exhibited traits generally considered to be desirable by leaders (trait theory).
- They showed initiative and were flexible and adaptable in relation to the needs and situations of the participating students (situational leadership).
- They used their personal traits and university experiences to relate and respond to the students in their PAL sessions, working collaboratively with them to achieve their learning goals (contingency theory).
- They stimulated and inspired students to do more than they sometimes thought that they could, and to achieve shared goals (transformational leadership).
- They understood and showed concern for the students who participated in their sessions because they had been there themselves and remembered how they had felt (servant leadership).
- They communicated with the students, and considered their needs and requirements in every session that they facilitated (followership).
- They focused on the development of sound relationships with the students based on mutual trust (relational leadership).
- They were admired as good role models, positively guiding and influencing their peers' learning and demonstrating empathy (emotional intelligence).

3.5 Power and authority

And I came to realise that, in doing all this, the Meet-Up student leaders increasingly exuded over time an impression of power – not an overt, domineering display of power, but rather an empathetic, gently persuasive intimation of power. Accordingly, my literature review, it seemed, was not yet complete.

3.5.1 Power

French and Raven (1959) determined that the phenomenon of power and its various types required definitions and explanations in order to account for the changes that they produced and for their social influences. They viewed power in terms of the changes brought about in a person's psychological field – that is, changes in her or his behaviours, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs, values and other facets. They posited that there were five "especially common and important" (p. 151) bases of power: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert. These seemed to me to have significant relevance to my research; they helped to explain the relationship of student leader to participant in the PAL context that underpinned both the changes in participating students and the development of the student leader.

Reward power was simply the power to reward. Meet-Up leaders had this power in a number of ways. They could offer alternative explanations of difficult discipline concepts, and they could encourage engagement in collaborative activities that would foster understanding; they could also offer the rewards of sweets, and of inspiring and reassuring verbal feedback. While such reward mechanisms could be considered trivial, they did, in fact, in tandem with the offering of relevant contextualised advice, have a positive and encouraging impact on participating students, who returned regularly to Meet-Up sessions. Students' behaviours could change, and their needs and goals could be met, through PAL participation.

Meet-Up leaders were bestowed with legitimate power by the student participants who voluntarily attended their sessions. It can be argued that, as students of a particular discipline, students attending Meet-Up sessions held in esteem an internalised value of the legitimacy of recognised knowledge in that field. By extension, therefore, discipline exponents whom they considered learned such as lecturers, tutors and Meet-Up leaders were also conferred with legitimacy. As far as Meet-Up was concerned, the students believed that the student leaders, as recognised and accepted experienced students who had already studied the course, had a legitimate right to influence their study of that course. Thus, the leaders were ascribed legitimate power, a term explored by a number of sociologists, including

Weber, and which French and Raven (1959) considered very similar to the idea of "legitimacy of authority" (p. 153).

3.5.2 Power, authority and dependency

Emerson's (1962) research linked nicely with this point. Remarking firstly that Weber's (1947) work presented "what is still a classic formulation of power, authority and legitimacy" (Emerson, 1962, p. 31), Emerson (1962) posited his own notable association among power, authority and legitimacy. He claimed that authority referred to the power invested in a position or office, but that that power was limited by the scope of the position, and that the scope denoted and delimited the position's legitimacy. Emerson (1962) therefore considered authority to be "directed power" (p. 38) that could be employed only in the areas delineated by the group. An important and interesting extension of this point, however, was that the person holding the commissioned authority was not just afforded the right to exercise power but actually obliged to do so; this process was called "legitimation" (p. 38).

Linked with legitimate power, certainly in the case of Meet-Up, is referent power. Students who participated in Meet-Up sessions identified with the student leaders, and sometimes they changed their attitudes to study and set higher goals as a result of the encouragement that they had received both from their peers and from the student leaders in Meet-Up. Participating students saw the student leaders as role models: they saw that the student leaders had progressed with their studies, and aspired to do the same. This was augmented when the leaders shared their own study stories of the concerns and misgivings that they themselves had sometimes held at the outset of their higher education studies.

Expert power was also a construct that related well to Meet-Up, and that had association with the power bases of legitimate and referent power. Students who attended Meet-Up considered the student leaders to have superior knowledge to theirs with regard to understanding a particular course's concepts and constructs, by virtue of the fact that the leaders had successfully studied the course – a clear example of expert power. French et al. (1959) also noted that expert power involved trust on the part of the people on whom the power was exerted. This was an integral feature of Meet-Up. Participating students believed that the leaders as peers were committed to offering them relevant and useful advice; they would not have continued to attend if they did not imbue the leaders with their trust.

Yet underlying these various power relationships that existed between student leader and participant was the notion of the reciprocity of dependence or mutual dependency. Emerson (1962) agreed. He posited that social relations commonly entailed mutual

dependency, and that therefore power resided implicitly in the dependency of others. In Meet-Up, the student participants had dependency on or motivational investment in the student leaders, and on and in the goals that they set mutually. But, covalently, the student leaders were dependent on the participating students, firstly for their attendance at Meet-Up, and then for their engagement in and endorsement of the leaders' activities and approaches through active participation and involvement in the sessions. There was a mutual need.

Emerson (1962) made the point that power was frequently treated as if it were an attribute of a person or group, when it should instead be considered as a property of the social relations among people. The outcome of the Meet-Up leaders' engagement and involvement in Meet-Up – that is, the development and the acquisition of leadership competence and capability – would not have happened if not for the mutual dependency of the relationships that they shared with the participating students.

While discussion of dependence lent itself to an easy transition to the exploration of the connection between mutual dependency and context or situation, I have opted to leave this for the following chapter. Instead, an article by Alsobaie (2015) in which he appraised the use of power and authority by teachers in adult education provoked my interest and my choice to outline it briefly here. He caught my eye firstly with a reference to Weber (year not acknowledged) and his view of power and authority, followed by an outline of four types of power that he attributed to Smith and Hains (2012, as cited in Alsobaie, 2015); they were four of the five bases of power that were identified originally by French et al. (1959).

3.5.3 The link with education

But Alsobaie (2015) did outline some interesting characteristics of the adult education classroom and its resultant relationship with power and authority. He pointed out that the voluntary nature of adult classes and adults' tendency towards self-directed learning meant that less interventionist methods were required, and that disciplinary behaviour and tightly managed structures were not appropriate. He did recognise, however, that some adults would require support and direction in their learning at university. He posited that teachers (academics) in the university context "largely derived their authority from rewards-based and expert-based power" (p. 158).

Thus Alsobaie's (2015) research connection with mine was quite overt. He studied adult learners and their teachers, and I explored adult learners and their student leaders, yet the nature of the power relationships in the classes was very similar. Attendance at Meet-Up, although strongly encouraged by academic staff members, was voluntary. Meet-Up leaders

were students with no formalised position of power or authority beyond their "Meet-Up student leader" status. I suggest, therefore, that, in the eyes of students, it was the legitimacy of Meet-Up as a PAL program and of Meet-Up leaders as peers and their acceptability by faculty academics that resulted in this equivalence.

3.6 A conclusion

After some contemplation of and reflection on my literature review, I found that I had settled on a clearer, more precise view of my notion that the student leaders were actually leaders. I had determined that, yes, they were indeed leaders, but a distinct, particular kind of leader. I therefore claim that, as student leaders in a PAL program, they exhibited a relational leadership bond (Cunliffe & Erikson, 2011; Komives et al., 2013) with the students who were their followers (Khan et al., 2019; Uhl-Bien, 2006) that had at its base the grounding element of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/1991). The student leaders' authority sprang from their position as "experienced peers" (French et al., 1959) – engaged and involved individuals who had already trodden the ground that the students in their sessions were in the process of traversing (Stogdill, 1948), and who understood how the students felt (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011). This grounding characteristic of PAL had imbued in the students a sense of respect, appreciation and admiration for the PAL leaders, and this was what gave the leaders their power base (French et al., 1959).

And thus, the students trusted their student leaders (Khan et al., 2019) and gave them permission (French & Raven, 1959) to share their own study experiences and to impart their knowledge to help guide, inspire and transform (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Khan et al., 2019) the students' study journeys. The leaders enacted their role with passion, empathy and concern (Posner, 2004), effected by mutual dependency (Emerson, 1962) and shared goals (Rost, 1993). The student leaders had engaged with and integrated into (Astin, 1984/1999; Tinto, 1993) the Meet-Up program and the university, and they utilised their personal traits (Gardner, 1990), their individual experiences and development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and their position of power (French et al., 1959) within the PAL program to encourage and advise, motivate and transform – indeed, to lead (Bass & Bass, 2008) – their peers.

3.7 Summary of the chapter

PAL program research, while interesting and essential for me given my choice of topic, was also frustrating. The majority of the studies emphasised the success of the students who attended the sessions in the programs; the development of the student leaders as

individuals was not as frequently investigated. I have, as a result, kept this section of this chapter small, and turned my focus to the broader area of student leadership.

While exploring the student leadership literature, I found that it was a topic that received much lip-service, but little in-depth attention, focus or commitment, either financially or institutionally through program initiatives. The majority of research studies was focused on programs dedicated to encouraging students to consider leadership as an area of study or as a commitment to the university or community clubs and societies. Little could be found about programs where students were encouraged to explore leadership via another means or motive, such as is found in PAL programs, although parallels could certainly be drawn. Thus, there is a significant research gap around student leadership generally, and student leadership in PAL programs more specifically, particularly from the student leaders' perspectives. I turned then to the broad field of leadership literature.

The leadership literature typically had businesses and corporations as its main focus; there was a preoccupation with ways to develop and cultivate leadership capabilities and skills in employees. The voluminous nature of the literature about the topic therefore limited my review to prominent researchers in the area. My review revealed to me that it was the development of leadership capacities in employees (with a tacit emphasis on success and profit) that appeared to drive the research about leadership, rather than an interest in the concept of leadership itself or in the personal development of employees.

I could not help but compare my own observations of PAL leaders with the literature. I noted that the traits and behaviours that the student leaders exhibited were undoubtedly analogous to those described as "leadership" by researchers in my literature review. The student leaders in PAL were therefore leaders; moreover, they were a distinct and specific kind of leader. The literature discussed in this chapter, and the gaps identified, substantiated my choice of student leadership as a topic worthy of exploration, verified the PAL program, Meet-Up, as a suitable context and demonstrated the alignment of the literature with my conceptual framework, the development of which forms the discussion in the next chapter.

4 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I explored literature about PAL, student leadership and leadership generally, which revealed that the characteristics and development the leaders exhibited were undoubtedly comparable to those described as "leadership" in those three areas of literature. While I was certain that the student leaders had developed these leadership qualities during their time in Meet-Up, I was also acutely aware that they had all brought with them to the program their own set of personal characteristics, stories and experiences which would have influenced their conceptions of student leadership. To explain how this happened, I created a conceptual framework.

The framework mapped the journeys of novice student leaders to their emergence as experienced student leaders who demonstrated leadership competencies through their engagement, involvement, integration, development and experiences in Meet-Up. My intention in creating this conceptual framework was to represent what happened in the Meet-Up environment as I saw it, thus making my thoughts clear and explicit, and linking my observations with scholarly research. I was mindful, however, that a conceptual framework is a construction of knowledge "bounded by the life-world experiences of the person developing it and should not be attributed a power that it does not have" (Smyth, 2004, p. 2). Additionally, I heeded Smyth's (2004) caution that the framework can influence the creator's thoughts during her research, causing her to focus attention on situations that fit with the framework, rather than those that do not. Hence, I needed to ensure that I was open to any unexpected occurrences that were revealed in the data.

My framework also served as a lens for addressing my research questions and analysing my data. How useful and appropriate my frame was for this would not be revealed until the analysis of data was undertaken and the discussion of it completed, at which time I acknowledged that my research may demand adaptations and changes to it. This chapter relates the groundwork behind the development of my original conceptual framework. It also includes a diagrammatic representation of the framework, Figure 4.3, which precedes the chapter summary.

4.2 An overview of the model

The basic framework that I advanced to explain what happened to the student leaders was grounded initially in my observations and then married with scholarly research,

represented, in particular, by Astin's (1984/1999) Theory of Student Involvement and his IEO model, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven major developmental vectors for college students, and Tinto's (1993) model of student departure. The work of these scholars was outlined briefly in the preceding chapter to demonstrate their integration and connections with other literature relevant to my research. Here in this chapter, because of their influence on the development of my conceptual framework, I expound further on their theories.

While the work of these researchers formed the foundation of my conceptual framework, my review of relevant literature, as was presented in Chapter 3, also yielded other research that allowed me to build on the basic skeleton of my conceptual framework, fleshing out details and intricacies essential to a more comprehensive understanding of what happened to the PAL student leaders. This research proved an invaluable source of reference, allowing me to make sense of what happened to the student leaders in Meet-Up, linking nicely with the theories on which my framework was constructed and with my observations of the student leaders and their role. I have incorporated this research into my explanation of each of the main sections of my framework.

4.3 The inspiration behind the framework: The Theory of Student Involvement

Astin's (1984/1999) Theory of Student Involvement stated that the more actively involved students were in their higher education environment, the more they would gain from the experience in terms of learning and personal development. For Astin (1984/1999), student involvement referred to "the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological energy that students invest in the college experience" (p. 528). The theory had its genesis in earlier studies by Astin (1984/1999) of the factors of the college environment that affected students' persistence. This research confirmed for him that "virtually every significant effect could be rationalized in terms of the involvement concept" (p. 523). In other words, the factors that contributed to students remaining in their programs of study were connected with involvement; those that were associated with departure implied an absence of such involvement. This has clear links with Tinto's (1993) work in student departure.

According to Astin (1984/1999), the advantage of his theory was the focus on the "motivation and behavior" (p. 529) of the student, rather than on the curriculum or resource allocation. Astin (1984/1999) had noted, from his previous career as a psychologist, a close connection between motivation and involvement. He chose to focus on involvement rather than on motivation because it was the "behavioral manifestation" (p. 522) of the psychological state of motivation. Based as it was on behaviours which could be both

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demonstrated and observed, Astin (1984/1999) claimed that his theory had relevance to educators, student support practitioners and researchers alike.

Student involvement was demonstrated by students' active participation in their learning, or by, as Astin (1984/1999) himself put it, "the how of student development" (p. 522). He contrasted his theory with the student developmental theories such as Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors, which placed an emphasis on developmental outcomes or "the what of student development" (p. 522). This, for me, provided a perfect link between student involvement and student development, and I wanted to depict this association in my conceptual framework.

4.3.1 My adaptation of Astin's (1984/1999) Theory of Student Involvement

While Astin (1984/1999) stated that he did not find it necessary "to draw a maze consisting of dozens of boxes interconnected by two-headed arrows in order to explain the basic elements of the theory to others" (p. 518), it has been represented that way by some researchers who have indeed constructed a model with boxes and arrows. The theory became known as the Input - Environment - Outcome (IEO) model (Astin, 1984/1999). The model had its genesis in 1970 when Astin worked for the American Council on Education and wrote about the different means of providing information about the impact of college on students. In particular, he wrote a treatise in two parts entitled *The Methodology of Research on College Impact* (1970). Astin's (1970) initial model, designed to illustrate impact, was elegant in its simplicity. It appeared in Part I, and is replicated in Figure 4.1. At this point in its development, "the college environment" represented such aspects of the college as administrative policies and practices, curriculum, facilities, teaching practices and peer associations.
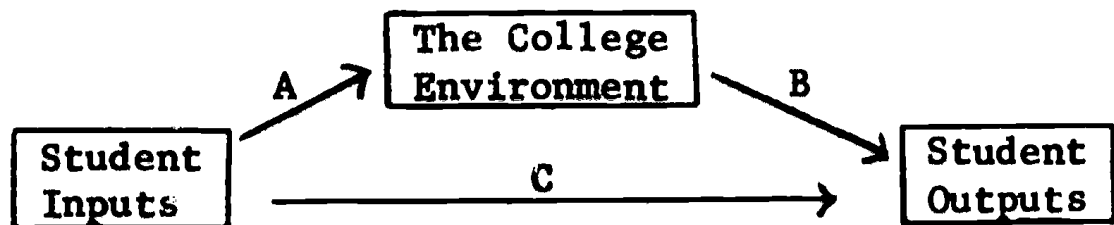
Figure 4.1: The impact of college (Astin, 1970, p. 3)

Later, Astin (1984/1999) fleshed out the boxes more. The input was the student's personal characteristics; the environment was the university, including co-curricular activities; and the outcome was the growth and development of the student. This was unmistakably analogous to what I had observed happening in Meet-Up. The model therefore offered a simple yet precise structure from which I could extrapolate and develop my own frame of reference to represent what happened to the leaders in Meet-Up. And so I, too, chose to ignore Astin's (1984/1999) words that a maze of boxes and arrows was unnecessary, and adapted his IEO model to construct my conceptual framework, using its three sections as my backdrop.

Astin's (1984/1999) research resided entirely in the realm of student growth and change in higher education through engagement and involvement. His interest was in how to guide and assist students in their development into successful students and responsible citizens. But my study was of student leaders and hence my conceptual framework had student leaders rather than students in general as its subject, and it demonstrated their growth and change beyond their development as successful students and into the sphere of leadership development, hence linking student development with leadership growth. Throughout my thesis, I have been explicit about the centrality of the student leaders. They were plainly all-important to my research and were represented in the framework at both the "I" entry point and the "O" exit; the Meet-Up program, as context, played the part of the environment and was represented by the "E".

To elaborate, novice student leaders with their own sets of personal characteristics (Input, "I") accepted engagement in the Meet-Up Program (Environment, "E") in the form of the position of student leader. Their role in this environment necessitated their involvement through the performance of designated tasks, and their integration into the environment was indicated by the ways that they enacted that role. They were rewarded for this engagement, involvement, and integration in the Meet-Up environment through their resultant personal development to become ultimately experienced student leaders who exhibited leadership competencies (Outcome, "O"). A detailed explanation of each of the sections of my conceptual framework in relation to the student leaders' time in Meet-Up is outlined below.

4.4 Input ("I"): Novice student leaders

4.4.1 In the beginning: who were the student leaders?

In my study, the participants were students who had chosen to engage and become involved in the environment of Meet-Up as student leaders and it was their understandings of

student leadership I was intent on discovering. Through our conversations in the interviews, I wanted to explore their reflections about their time in Meet-Up as leaders. I wanted to know how they became the experienced student leaders whom I had observed. As I began researching what happened to them, I needed firstly to accept that they were not "clean slates" when they embarked on Meet-Up leadership. As the "I" in my framework, they brought with them who they were as individuals, and their own sets of personal characteristics. I considered therefore that an appraisal of certain literature about traits was pertinent to conveying a rich picture of these important individuals so central to my study.

4.4.2 Trait theory

As explained in the literature review chapter, trait theory was a collective term for various theories that espoused the importance of certain personal traits. After reigning supreme for many years, it was deemed insufficient in determining effective leadership, and was largely discarded in favour of an emphasis on the role of the situation (Colbert et al., 2012; Zaccaro, 2007). One of the problems with trait-based theories was the preponderance of the traits that were considered essential, and different researchers argued in favour of different sets of traits or of the use of different terms to explain the same traits. The notion of trait theory did not, however, disappear entirely, and recently it has returned with more recent research providing "a substantial empirical foundation for the argument that traits do matter" (Zaccaro, 2007, p. 6). Because of the importance of traits or personal characteristics to my research and my conceptual framework, I considered it important in the interests of clarity and relevance, to cover the topic in more detail in this chapter.

Zaccaro (2007) argued, for example, that personal traits still deserved to be pondered when investigating leadership, and he asserted that there were four points that needed to be considered in researching variance in the predication of effective leadership. Firstly, leader attributes should be considered as an integrated set, rather than as just a long list of separate traits. In addition, the relationship between leader attributes and outcomes was often presented as linear, but rather it was, according to Zaccaro (2007), curvilinear and complex, and should be presented in that way in models and theories. Zaccaro (2007) also noted, with a nod to Fiedler's (1971) contingency theories, the important relationship of the situation with variance in leaders' approaches and behaviours. Zaccaro's (2007) final point related to the nature of traits, where some were stable and appropriate across multiple situations, while others were bound to a particular situation. Some personal traits, in fact, displayed a

sensitivity to situational factors – almost like an emotional intelligence for the situation (in contrast to the EI that relates to people).

In much of the (relatively) recent literature about leader personality, there emerged a consensus of sorts that personality traits can be broadly organised under five major headings called the "five-factor model of personality" or the "Big Five" personality traits (Colbert et al., 2012; Judge et al., 2009; Petrides et al., 2007; Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004). These traits were found in many studies to be related positively to leadership factors such as job performance, and were therefore duly considered by many researchers to be predictors of effective leadership (Colbert et al., 2012). The Big Five are: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Researchers have tended to use them as a base from which to explore or investigate traits further, but there was still a notable lack of consensus. In fact, Colbert et al. (2012) declared that: "Despite the abundance of research testing the trait theory of leadership and the promise offered by the five-factor model, questions still remain regarding the relationship between personality and leadership" (p. 671).

If indeed it is true, as many researchers (including Astin and Astin [2000]) have claimed, that anyone can be a leader, I am persuaded that perhaps the kind of leadership where leaders are not only considered to be effective but also held in high esteem and regarded as individuals should be the locus of leadership development, and that leadership traits such as the one included in my conceptual framework – the inclination and passion to encourage peers and share a learning vision (enthusiasm to join the program) – should be emphasised, particularly in programs involving student leadership such as PAL programs.

4.4.3 Their prior experiences

The student leaders also brought with them their own unique personal experiences, hence it seemed important that I also explore a little literature on the concept of experience. I investigated a researcher who was respected but who became slightly marginalised in his discipline (Niemoczynski, 2009) as research "fashion" took different paths. Justus Buchler (1951) was a philosopher who contemplated what it was about people that marked them as the individuals they were. As a philosophical theory, his ideas were very different from those in the literature I had reviewed in the preceding chapter, yet there were some associations.

Buchler's (1951) ontological work focused on delivering an explanation of why people are the way that they are. His claim was that all people are unique individuals (in the traditional definition of the word); they are the sum of their own reality. People's reality is

the accumulation and assimilation of all that they are and all that they do. It includes things both intangible and abstract, such as feelings and ideas, and their reactions to physical objects or situational elements. He was disinclined to talk about capacity, capability or skill. For him, it was about how individuals assimilated experiences, situations and ideas to be who they were, which in turn determined the directions that they took and the judgements that they made. There were no divisions between a reality and a person's related experience of it, according to Buchler (Niemoczynski, 2009).

Buchler (1951) considered the term "behaviour" too narrow, and the term "experience" too broad, to explain the interaction of an individual with an environment; thus he created a concept, "proception", and an associated language or dictionary of terms. He explained proception as "the process in which a person's whole self is summed up or represented" (p. 5). He defined procepts as any things that affected, characterised or happened to a person as an individual. They then made up the proceptive domain, and every person was, in turn, a "proceiver", an "identifiable and cumulative individual" (p. 8).

Applying this to student leadership, I thought immediately of the trait theorists and their idea that people have innate tendencies or proclivities for leadership. This inclination, when matched with a "favourable" (Fiedler, 1972, p. 114) situation, resulted in effective leadership, in line with the claims of situation theorists, thus linking both fields of thought. I thought of Meet-Up. It was a situation that was favourable to both attending students and the student leaders. In addition, the Meet-Up leaders were individuals (proceivers) who brought with them to the Meet-Up program their own proception – that is, who and what they were: their own personal set of traits, attributes and experiences of life and learning, and their own previous individual experiences (procepts). The conversations that I shared with the student leaders for this research allowed me to be privy to a glimpse of these personal realities.

But already there was one experience that I knew contributed to some of the students' proclivity to becoming student leaders. In conversations prior to their becoming PAL leaders, a number of students told me that they had enjoyed Meet-Up as participants. They had found the sessions useful, and had been in awe of the student leaders, and saw them as wonderful role models. The leaders had sometimes told the participants that they had been uncertain and lacking confidence themselves, which inspired and encouraged the students to persist and to try to achieve. They were not necessarily confident that they could perform as well as the leaders whom they had admired, but the experience fuelled in them a desire for reciprocity, a desire to take their turn to give back.

Buchler's (1951) research held a fascination for me, but ultimately I found the terms too clunky to persist with using throughout my research. In addition, the absence of take-up of the terms by other researchers convinced me to abandon them. However, despite my aversion to the terms, I thought that Buchler's (1951) ideas were a valuable way to explain people's individuality, and, after all, that was ultimately the aim of my research: to discover the student leaders' individual realities of student leadership. To be clear and explicit about Buchler's connection to my conceptual model, I offer the following conclusions.

I believed that my analysis and sensemaking of the interviews that I conducted would provide insights into the individual student leaders' proceptions or realities (that is, who they were and what they brought in terms of traits, attributes and experiences at the time of their initial engagement in Meet-Up as leaders), which comprised the Input or "I" in my conceptual model. Likewise, the proceptions or realities that formed during their involvement and integration as student leaders in the program (that is, the relationships between what they brought and what they did and how they did it) were the crucial elements in Meet-Up as Environment "E" that is discussed in the following section. Similarly, who the individual student leaders had become as they emerged from the program (that is, their development of new realities or proceptions as a consequence of the experiences that they had met during their involvement and integration in the environment of Meet-Up) sat in the final section in my framework, the Outcome "O", which is explained later in this chapter.

4.4.4 Their capability

But this idea of a person being an individual and having a set of personal traits, attributes and experiences had very strong resonance with another interesting line of research that I had discovered. This time the research was in the field of social justice. Harvard Professor, Amartya Sen, had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1998 for his work on welfare economics or the economics of poverty (https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/1998/10/amartya-k-sen-wins-1998-nobel-prize-in-economics/). Sen focused on people's human rights and a "not awfully attractive word", "capability" (Sen, 2009, p. 30). He argued that the use of the word "capability" served as a better explanation of what people could do and could be, than the term "human right". Citizens could be granted rights, but they could be thought of as "secured" to people only when the relevant capabilities to function were also present (Nussbaum, 2003). In other words, people needed to be "in a position of capability to function in that area" (p. 37). The

choices that people can make in life are limited by their functionings and their doings that frame their capabilities.

Sen (2009) chose the word "capability" to depict the different "combinations of things a person is able to do or be – the various functionings he or she can achieve" (p. 30). He posited: "The capability of a person depends on a variety of factors, including personal characteristics and social arrangements" (p. 33). To my mind, an immediate connection could then be seen with Buchler (1951). Sen (2009) divided capabilities into two general categories: well-being and agency. Broadly speaking, well-being related to simple basic needs such as nourishment (with a nod to Maslow [1954] as cited in Bass & Bass [2008, p. 619]), but included also other more complex goals such as achieving self-respect. Agency incorporated wider goals which went beyond self that an individual deemed important; these could be chosen if the capability were present. And once again, my thoughts went straight to the Meet-Up leaders and my memories of their desire, passion even, to guide and encourage their peers in their learning at university.

And again, just as I could see that Buchler's (1951) research, as outlined above, was analogous to each of the three main sections of my conceptual framework and the student leaders, as outlined above, so too could I see clear parallels between my conceptual framework and Sen's (2009) capability approach, despite its origins being in a completely different field of study. While Sen's work concentrated on human rights and social justice, his explanations of capability are relevant to people generally and to the choices that they can make. Sen was reluctant to construct a list of capabilities; not so Nussbaum (2003), herself a distinguished service professor in law and ethics. She endorsed a list of 10 "Central Human Capabilities" (p. 40) to serve as a focus for the measurement of the quality of life and for the formulation of political principles. These capabilities were as follows: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment (pp. 41-42).

While the list encompassed basic rights that people would generally acknowledge are fundamental to making life choices without fear of persecution, it was the seventh of these, affiliation, that has particular resonance and relevance to a PAL program such as Meet-Up. Affiliation A's meaning was:

Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that

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constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech) (p. 41).

The relevance and connection of this capability to a PAL program such as Meet-Up were unmistakable. Care, concern and empathy for participating students in Meet-Up were paramount considerations. In fact, they were more than that: they were expected; it was assumed that the student leaders would espouse such values and behave in ways that demonstrated them.

4.4.5 Their values and the assumptions inherent in the program

"Organisational behaviour" was a term with a history that had associations with my research. In the 1960s, the concept of "organisational psychology" was introduced by Hal Levitt, Bernard Bass and Edgar Schein (Schein, 1996, p. 229). This morphed into "organisation behaviour", and in the 1970s its bias was towards the individual. Organisations were considered to be "mean" (Schein, 1996, p. 230) to people, often exhibiting a negative view of human nature (McGregor, 1960). Gradually over time, and partly as a result of Lewin's research into the benefits of a democratic style of leadership (Schein, 1996, p. 230), "organisation behaviour" became synonymous with "more humane treatment" of employees (Schein, 1996, p. 231).

Schein (1996) considered culture to be the missing concept in organisational studies. He defined culture simply as: "shared norms, values and assumptions" (p. 229). What piqued my interest about Schein's research was the link he drew between understanding culture and the observation of behaviour. He claimed that the culture in an organisation could be understood only after observation of "real" behaviour (p. 229), a point that clearly resonated with my research into student leadership, based, as previously noted, on the behaviours I observed in the student leaders.

In an earlier work, Schein (1984) discussed assumptions and their link with values. He postulated that underlying assumptions determine how members of a group "perceive, think and feel" (p. 3). These largely tacit features were once explicit values, but have over time, become just "how things really are" (p. 4) and were no longer espoused as values. Schein (1984) asserted that the "taken-for-granted assumptions" (p. 4), were actually more powerful than the values that were explicitly stated and articulated. Because people have become largely unaware of them, they are no longer discussed and debated: they have in fact become the cultural paradigm of the organisation or group, and they have also become difficult to change.

Further to this, Schein (1996) cautioned against attempts to measure the "invisible yet very powerful force" (p. 239) that was culture. He suggested that those who did may have missed what was really there. He also proffered a reflection on his scholarly work that held great significance and guidance for me in the light of my research. He remarked that:

> My own insights have only come after I have spent hours and hours immersed in a given phenomenon, after I have identified and dealt with all my own prior expectations and stereotypes, and have gradually come to see what is really out there. (p. 239)

4.4.6 Relationship to Meet-Up

The "I" section of my conceptual framework stated the personal characteristics and experiences of those students who became Meet-Up leaders – that is, who they were and what they brought. I posit that the term "capability", as defined by Sen (2009), is a legitimate way to describe who the student leaders were and what they brought that enabled them to choose engagement and involvement, and indeed that allowed their "functionings" as leaders in Meet-Up.

In addition, Meet-Up as a PAL program also functioned in a way as an "organisation" as it exuded a particular culture (Schein, 1984, 1996), and that was of care and concern for students in their learning journeys. It had a set of requirements or characteristics that novice leaders were expected to bring with them – these encompassed a set of underlying values, including a passion to encourage their peers. Once operating in the program as student leaders, the student leaders were then expected to satisfy the requirements of the position; this involved upholding a tacit set of assumptions and values about how they would meet the requirements, including showing empathy and inspiring, encouraging and motivating their peers. The Meet-Up culture of care and concern for participating students was to be preserved.

I believe that it could also be argued that the student leaders' subsequent involvement in and integration into the Meet-Up program environment afforded them the capability to achieve the "functionings" represented by Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of development whereby students journey along the seven "major highways toward individuation" (p. 35). And, to stretch the analogous lens even a little further, the student leaders' experiences in Meet-Up and their consequent personal development delivered the outcome of firstly, who the student leaders had become in terms of the choices they made based on their capability, and secondly, what they could now do, in the form of leadership

competencies. These outcomes worked in tandem: capability from the affective domain and leadership competencies from the cognitive domain. This is discussed further in Section 4.7.

4.4.7 Their characteristics: What they brought (as presented in the conceptual framework diagram)

As stated in Chapter 2, potential Meet-Up leaders were selected by academic staff members, Meet-Up leaders and the Meet-Up Program Coordinator, based on their grade in the particular course in which they would lead, their grade point average or GPA, and their interest in and enthusiasm about being student leaders and engaging with their learning and the university more generally. On their acceptance of the position on offer, the students were required to attend a student leader development session. In this workshop, the Meet-Up leaders' obligations were explained and discussed in exercises led by the coordinator, and the requirements of the position were explored and modelled throughout the day in activities planned and conducted by incumbent Meet-Up leaders. Opportunities for the new leaders to practise the tasks demanded of the role were facilitated, with time allowed for feedback, reflection and self-reflection.

The students who chose to engage in the program as leaders were the input into the Meet-Up environment and they brought with them their personal traits, attributes and experiences. These personal characteristics gave them their authority as student leaders, and using these characteristics to guide them, they advised and assisted the students in their learning. I had identified broadly what these characteristics were and placed them in my conceptual framework diagram:

- course knowledge and competence (good course grade)
- cognitive competence in chosen discipline (high GPA)
- inclination and passion to encourage peers and share a learning vision (enthusiasm to join the program)
- knowledge and experiences of effective learning at university (generally 2nd, 3rd or 4th year undergraduate students).

With the characteristics of the novice leaders identified and clarified, I turned to an explanation of the significance of the "E", the Environment section.

4.5 Environment ("E"): The Meet-Up Program

4.5.1 An overview of the environment "E" in the IEO model

Astin's (1984/1999) theory of student involvement outlined a number of opportunities in the higher education institution environment at the time in which students could engage with peers and/or with staff members and therefore become involved. He included behaviours such as joining social and athletic societies or clubs, accepting positions on student governance boards or committees, and interacting with faculty members. His research revealed that whatever form that the involvement took, it had a clear association with the change and development of the student (Astin, 1970, 1984/1999). In particular, he claimed that "frequent interaction with faculty was more strongly related to satisfaction with college than any other student or institutional characteristic" (Astin, 1984/1999, p. 525).

This was of great interest to me because of its immediate application to Meet-Up. Meet-Up, as was explained in Chapter 2, was an academic program in which the student leaders were in frequent conversations with faculty academics. Meet-Up also gave participating students additional contact with faculty members via the student leaders. It demonstrated to the students that the institution did have concern for their learning journeys, and it encouraged the development of a greater sense of belonging.

4.5.2 Theories of environment, situation and context in the leadership literature

In my literature review, I identified literature that emphasised the development of sets of skills that were considered essential leadership attributes; I explored as well a number of theories and models in which the environment, context or situation was considered paramount to the development of effective leadership. But I had also found literature suggesting that, more importantly, the development of effective leadership placed emphasis on the centrality of the role of the relationship between leader and situation. I have outlined below some leadership research that demonstrated the significance of this relationship between context (or situation) and leader, and that drew connections with my study, thus helping to clarify the fundamental place of the environment in my conceptual framework.

4.5.3 The adaptation of the "E" in the IEO model to Meet-Up

While Astin's (1984/1999) theory identified a number of potential forms of engagement for students, his (1984/1999) IEO model, which listed characteristics of students at both Input and Outcome stages, did not tease out in detail what engagement in the

environment of the university looked like. In my adaptation of the model, I chose to expound much more on what happened in the environment of Meet-Up.

Who the leaders were and what they brought to the position of student leader – that is, their characteristics ("I") – were what encouraged them to engage in the program and to perform the tasks required of the position of student leader in the Meet-Up environment ("E"). I presented this in the model as "What they did: Involvement". In addition, the ways in which they carried out the requirements of the role I chose to represent as "How they did it: Integration". The diagram has as a result been drawn with two distinct yet intrinsically linked columns.

4.5.3.1 Involvement theory

As noted earlier, Astin (1984/1999) was of the firm belief, from his research about students who departed from their studies early, that students who involved themselves in their learning benefited in terms of both their learning and their personal development. He developed this belief into his theory of student involvement. Essentially, Astin's (1993) argument was that students needed to involve themselves in their learning, taking up opportunities that were available to them, including extra-curricular and co-curricular programs and clubs. Kuh's (1995) research into experiences that contribute to student learning and personal development concurred with that of Astin.

In fact, Kuh (1995) determined that what happened outside the classroom had a huge impact not just on student satisfaction and persistence, but also on students' levels of self-confidence, self-awareness, autonomy and social competence – findings that were comparable to Pascarella and Terenzini's work (1991). Kuh's (1995) study also found that participation in activities outside the classroom, including "conversations with faculty and peers" (p. 124), sparked the motivation necessary for students to achieve success in their learning goals. In short, the more involved that they were, the more that they could achieve. Meet-Up, as a non-compulsory learning assistance program, offered opportunities for participants to engage with experienced peers, and the student leaders conversed with faculty and their peers as part of their role. It can be posited that the tasks the Meet-Up leaders performed – that is, what they did in the program - were a clear demonstration of involvement.

4.5.3.2 What they did: Involvement (as presented in the conceptual framework diagram)

As leaders in the Meet-Up Program, the student leaders were expected to carry out certain requirements, as were specified in the program's guidelines. These tasks ensured that

the program was delivered in accordance with Meet-Up procedures, in tandem with the program's aim of guiding, encouraging and advising attending students to develop their understanding of course content. The tasks denoted more than just what was required of the leaders. Implicit in the role from the time of their initial training was the expectation that these individuals would demonstrate a degree of involvement in their tasks concomitant with the characteristics that they had brought to the position and that were the reason for their selection as PAL leaders.

I listed the basic tasks required of student leaders in Meet-Up as "What they did" in the diagrammatical representation of my conceptual framework. These tasks make clear the depth of the operational aspects that the student leader role involved. Student leaders:

- participated in ongoing training and development sessions
- planned, prepared and led PAL sessions for students
- shared personal learning experiences with student participants
- consulted with faculty academics
- shared PAL experiences with other leaders
- reflected on sessions held and responded to feedback from students and other leaders
- consulted with and reported to the Program Coordinator or other appropriate staff members
- completed administrative tasks such as compiling attendance lists and survey responses
- engaged with the wider university community.

4.5.3.3 Integration theory

Just as I had adapted Astin's IEO model for my study, I had also taken Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure and extrapolated it to reflect what happened in the environment of Meet-Up. Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure basically posited that students who persisted in their higher education studies, as opposed to those who departed, had developed a degree of comfortability with their institution – they had become integrated. Tinto's (1993) theory was outlined in the literature review chapter. Essentially, it associated students' lack of integration into college with their decision to leave. As Tinto's (1993) scholarly work was a principal part of the foundation of my conceptual framework, it merits further explanation in this chapter.

Tinto (1993) posited that integration consisted of students' social connection as well as their academic connection with the college. While academic integration encompassed students' connections with faculty members, social integration was of equal importance, and concerned students' relationships with peers and extra-curricular and co-curricular involvement. Wolf-Wendel et al. (2009) added to this notion by declaring that integration also encompassed students' knowledge of and connection with the cultural norms of their colleges. Integration was "about students forming relationships with peers, faculty and staff", and "about the sense of belonging [a critical concept in Tinto's works] that students develop" (p. 416).

4.5.3.4 How they did it: Integration (as presented in the conceptual framework diagram)

A clear association can be made here between the concept of integration and Meet-Up. The student leaders had developed strong connections with and a sense of belonging to their institution; they had become integrated. They had developed a level of experience and comfort with the culture of the university; they knew what it meant to be a student there and they could imbue this knowledge to their peers in PAL sessions. Having been where the participating students were now, the student leaders understood that sometimes, particularly in the first year of enrolment at a higher education institution, students' expectations did not match with the actualities of study (Nelson et al., 2008). Consequently, the Meet-Up leaders could guide and advise students from their position as experienced students, while also offering a friendly, informal peer support network. Thus, it was the ways in which the student leaders carried out their role as Meet-Up leaders that denoted and demonstrated further integration, this time into PAL and the Meet-Up program. The behaviours that they performed were the embodiment and manifestation of their involvement in Meet-Up. As stated in the conceptual framework diagram, student leaders:

- Activated their personal characteristics to relate and respond to their peers and guide them in learning
- Demonstrated initiative, adaptability and flexibility in meeting the learning needs of their peers
- Stimulated and inspired peers to achieve common learning goals
- Offered encouragement and guidance to influence peers positively in their learning
- Showed strong empathy, remembering how they had felt as new students
- Articulated and demonstrated commitment to the program and their role

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4.6 Student development

Astin's (1984/1999) IEO model provided me with a foundation on which to build my representation of what happened to the leaders in the program, and Astin's (1984/1999) Theory of Student Involvement delivered an understanding of the involvement that the leaders undertook. Tinto (1993) prompted an analogy for the leaders' behaviours in the environment with his theory of student departure and its association with integration, and Chickering and Reisser (1993) helped me to clarify how the leaders' involvement in Meet-Up contributed to who they became and the competencies that they exhibited.

The underpinning premise of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) treatise in *Education and identity* was that higher education should be about so much more than churning out students with qualifications. Throughout their time in higher education institutions, students were developing as individuals; they were engaged in forging new identities and determining new goals on the path to establishing their new selves, the persons whom they had now become. While some of this growth and development occurred easily and naturally through engagement in formal classroom learning processes associated with being in an educational institution, other changes for some students were difficult to achieve and hard won.

To encourage students along these developmental pathways, Chickering and Reisser (1993) claimed that institutions and their staff members should provide development advice and guidance, and a range of development opportunities in which students could engage to build their confidence, creativity, sense of social responsibility and self-direction. Chickering and Reisser (1993) argued that, without a philosophy of student development, higher education institutions could become merely "a dispensary of services" (p. 44). To avoid this occurring, and to strive to foster developmental outcomes in their students, institutions should be aware of student development and what it looks like. And thus, to help higher education institutions develop the whole individual student effectively, these authors constructed a model of building staff awareness of the developmental paths that students travelled.

4.6.1 The seven vectors of student development (as presented in Figure 4.3)

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model outlined seven major developmental vectors that students move along during their higher education experience: 1. Developing competence; 2. Managing emotions; 3. Moving through autonomy toward interdependence; 4. Developing mature interpersonal relationships; 5. Establishing identity; 6. Developing

purpose; and 7. Developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Because of their significance to my conceptions and observations, each is briefly outlined below.

4.6.1.1 The seven vectors explained

1. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), developing competence consisted of three elements: intellectual; physical and manual; and interpersonal competence. Intellectual competence involved students using their minds not just to acquire content knowledge, but also to build a repertoire of useful skills and strategies for their learning. Physical and manual competence related to developing self-discipline rather than just to acquiring physical strength and prowess. Interpersonal competence, as suggested by its name, concerned the growth of communication skills, including listening and being able to "tune in to another person and respond appropriately" (p. 46), an unmistakable association with emotional intelligence, delivering yet another link between the literature that I included in my thesis and my framework.

2. Studying in higher education was generally accompanied by the full gamut of emotions. The challenge for students was to recognise the signs that heralded the appearance of the negative or extreme ones, and to work on the development of appropriate strategies to regulate their force. This was clearly related to self-efficacy and students' increasing ability to understand themselves better.

3. Moving through autonomy towards interdependence related to students taking responsibility for the decisions they make. It included diminishing the need for support from people such as parents, and the growing of independent and critical thought, so that students could begin to take appropriate action and to problem-solve. Interdependence, according to Chickering and Reisser (1993), meant "respecting the autonomy of others" (p. 48).

4. Developing mature interpersonal relationships incorporated a respect for difference. It also included awareness of the inaccuracies associated with stereotyping, and the pitfalls of acting on first impressions. Students began to make commitments and relationships based on honesty and "interdependence between equals" (p. 48).

5. Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested that establishing identity was akin to assembling a jigsaw puzzle. Extending this analogy, Weick (1995) remarked that a person is "an ongoing puzzle undergoing continual redefinition" (p. 20) because identity formation was a product of interaction. Establishing identity involves individuals making sense of who they are and where they fit to achieve acceptance of and comfort with self. There are clear connections with self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and people's need to perceive themselves as competent and efficacious. There is also a reference point to the authentic leadership

discourse (Crawford, 2020) with its emphasis on developing self-awareness and social awareness.

6. Many students arrived at their higher education institutions with trepidation and excitement mixed with a degree of confusion and enthusiasm. They were often uncertain about the vocation that they wished to pursue. As they moved along this and the other vectors, they gradually developed a sense of purpose, and they began to clarify their goals and develop plans designed to meet those goals.

7. Developing integrity had close associations with the development of purpose and identity. Students entered higher education studies with many assumptions and beliefs left over from their childhood and their upbringing. Individuals began to question and interrogate the values on which these were based, finally settling on and affirming the personal values that they now chose to uphold. By then modifying or matching their behaviours with these values, they developed integrity.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) were adamant that the vectors were not sequential; they "describe major highways for journeying toward individuation" (p. 35) along which students move at different rates depending on their involvement and their experiences. While some educators and researchers are more familiar with the work of Chickering and Gamson (1987) and their (seven) principles for applying good practice in higher education, I considered Chickering and Reisser's (1993) work to be more relevant as the vectors aligned well with Astin's (1984/1999) Theory of Student Involvement, as was noted earlier. In addition, I observed keenly that the Meet-Up leaders had moved along some or all of the vectors.

4.6.1.2 The relationship of the seven vectors with Meet-Up

As noted above, I saw clear parallels between vector journeying and the Meet-Up leaders' growth within the environment of the Meet-Up program. For example, the tasks (listed as "involvement" in my conceptual framework diagram) that the leaders were required to perform and their interactions with their peers, faculty academics and Meet-Up program staff members contributed to their development across the vectors. Leaders were required to encourage conversation and collaboration amongst participants in their sessions, making them feel comfortable and responding to their concerns as individuals. This required the development of interpersonal and intellectual competence, the management of emotions and the development of mature relationships that involved increased awareness, tolerance, understanding, empathy and respect for difference.

Additionally, while student leaders had support from their lecturers and the Meet-Up program staff members, they needed to be self-sufficient in the delivery of their sessions, critically reflecting on and taking responsibility for what took place. These behaviours I noted as "integration" in my conceptual framework and this research connected well with my observations. But there was more to be said about the importance of the vectors than their link with my observations.

The journeying of Meet-Up leaders through the seven vectors operated as the bridge between Meet-Up as environment and operating space for the student leaders, and who they had become as they exited the space. As they advanced along the vector paths, they travelled from the folds of the program to the world beyond, as their time in the Meet-Up environment drew to a close. They emerged as individuals who had developed personal capacity and who exhibited leadership competencies. Thus, the rich association of the Meet-Up leaders as individuals and the environment in which they had operated (Meet-Up) were, I posit, demonstrated by the development that they attained. This is explained further in the discussion of the Outcome section of my conceptual framework below.

4.6.1.3 Further research into the relationship between individual development and the environment

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecology model was consonant with my claim outlined above. His work focused on the close relationship among individuals, the environment and their development. He contended that a person and the environment cannot be examined separately; "development is an evolving function of person-environment interaction" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 10, as cited in Renn & Arnold, 2003, p. 267), which takes place with the support of the entire ecological system, which consists of "nested structures…like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 39). I could see a clear alignment with Astin's (1984/1999) IEO model, Buchler's (1951) work on realities and experiences, and Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of student development and Meet-Up. Hence, I adapted Bronfenbrenner's structures to Meet-Up, as outlined below.

The chronosystem was the individual's work and life after Meet-Up, the macrosystem was the whole university environment, the exosystem (the school or faculty) and the mesosystem (the course or program offering Meet-Up). Finally, at the microsystem level, the "ecology theory resembled Astin's (1984/1999) involvement theory" (Renn & Arnold, 2003, p. 270), and indeed Meet-Up could be viewed as a microsystem where the leaders (with their individual traits, attributes and experiences) performed their role and interacted with others within the environment (Meet-Up). It was this interplay between the individual and the

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environment that resulted in the processes of development, as outlined by Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors.

But Darling (2007) cautioned against taking only a "simplistic" (p. 203) view of Bronfenbrenner by focusing purely on his ecological systems theory. She postulated that this missed the core of Bronfenbrenner's legacy. Bronfenbrenner's research into individual development was phenomenological in nature; that is, the central force was the actual person involved. The premise was that her/his realities were indeed what was real (Darling, 2007). The person needed to be active, becoming engaged and involved in the different environments, helping to shape them and responding to them. Different environments would be experienced in different ways by different individuals. Extending this, an important theme in Bronfenbrenner's work, according to Darling (2007), was "the impossibility of understanding individual developmental processes in isolation" (p. 205). The transparent connection of this research to that of Buchler (1951), and indeed to that of Sen (2009) was not lost on me.

This came as no surprise. After my review of literature in the preceding chapter, this theme had become quite familiar. In student development literature, scholars including Astin, Tinto, Chickering and Kuh (amongst others), and in situational leadership theories, researchers such as Fiedler, Hersey, Blanchard and Zaccaro (also amongst others), had espoused the concept that there existed inextricably linked relationships between individuals and the environment that enveloped them and in and into which they involved and integrated themselves; it was fruitless to study one without due consideration of the other. This theme married too with Emerson's (1962) theory on the relationship between power and dependency.

Emerson's (1962) theory was explored in the previous chapter. Basically, he argued that power incorporated a mutual dependency within a system or an environment and it was that relationship that bound actors together. And certainly, in the Meet-Up context or environment, the student participant and the student leader were tied in a relationship of mutual dependency as they both strove to achieve the mutually agreed goals of the PAL sessions. The Meet-Up environment had fostered mutual dependency, which in turn nurtured mutual development as both parties benefited from the power relationship and grew in confidence in their ability to learn and understand their discipline. The student leaders also additionally revealed that they had developed a heightened leadership capacity.

Thus, a number of researchers support my position of the unequivocal significance of environment to both individual development and effective leadership. I have related it to my

observations of PAL student leaders and expressed it in my conceptual framework. The outcome of these relationships between individuals and environment now needed to be identified more specifically. In other words, the ways in which the student leaders had developed and exactly what it was they had become warranted clarification.

4.7 Outcome ("O"): Experienced student leaders

4.7.1 Intention and outcome

In student development theories and practices, as noted, the intention or desired outcome was always student persistence and success; it was simply the means of achieving it and what it actually looked like that were interrogated, debated and discussed. Similarly, in the student leadership space, and indeed leadership research generally, the intended outcome of leadership programs, strategies and practices was commonly effective leadership; and, once again, the means of attaining it, and what behaviours and traits it should include, were the subject of contention and conjecture.

As noted throughout this thesis, my research interest was the student leaders in Meet-Up – individuals who were not the focus of the program or its outcomes, and whose development as leaders tended to happen ipso facto. Indeed, the intention of my research questions was to focus on the Meet-Up leaders' reflections on their conceptions of student leadership while in the program environment; what the leaders had become was beyond the scope of my research questions. Nevertheless, the opportunities or choices that had become available to them as a result of their engagement, involvement, integration and development through Meet-Up, was important to discern.

Unlike the theories, practices and programs designed purposively to cultivate student development in higher education, or the strategies and programs in fields such as business that were designed to develop leadership with models correspondingly constructed to explain, represent and evaluate findings, the outcome of my research and framework was very different. The student leaders were not assessed as they exited the program; they were not tested to see if their time in the program had resulted in skill or knowledge acquisition, or in developmental or behavioural competence. The outcome section in my framework, as a result, was, and needed to be, limited. It was populated solely with my retrospections about my observations over time of the student leaders' growth and development and of who they had become.

The intention of my research was to discover if these observations were indeed a true representation of the student leaders by inviting them to share with me their experiences as

Meet-Up leaders. Once again, the outcome of my research was limited or bound by reflections on past experiences and retrospective conceptions, this time on the part of the student leaders themselves, of what they considered to be the outcomes for them of the Meet-Up leadership role.

4.7.2 In the end: what the student leaders had become

Astin and Astin (2000) discussed the principles of transformative leadership in higher education and the values that guided its implementation. The emphasis within the whole book was the notion that leadership was concerned with change, and that, as leadership involved other people, it was a group process towards agreed change. The authors claimed that any form of education, including leadership development, was "inherently value-laden" (p. 9), and leadership values were reflected in the outcomes desired by the particular group. Effective leadership meant then that the group must function according to its values, with members exemplifying five "qualities and values that contribute[d] to the effective functioning of the group" (p. 11). These included: collaboration (each member was empowered), shared purpose (the changes or transformations were jointly agreed), disagreement with respect (differing viewpoints were discussed with respect), division of labour (each member contributed to the agreed goals), and a learning environment (members felt safe and learned from and with one another). These need no further explanation: a clear association can be seen here with the elements of effective leadership as outlined by other scholars and explored in the literature review chapter.

A clear line of connection could also be drawn to Meet-Up. Student leaders were required to address the above group qualities as part of their role, and they are reflected in my conceptual framework "E" section and outlined above. Astin and Astin (2000) posited five individual qualities that they believed contributed to effective leadership: self-knowledge, authenticity/integrity, commitment, empathy/understanding of others, and competence. Once again these qualities were mirrored explicitly in the seven vectors of development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) along which the student leaders moved as they spanned the space from Meet-Up as environment to who they became after the journey. The personal capability and the leadership competencies that the outgoing student leaders demonstrated are represented in the Outcome section of my conceptual framework, and are listed in a section below. They suggest that the Meet-Up leaders had indeed become leaders.

4.7.3 Learning and development outcomes

In the previous chapter, I outlined the history and purpose of the United States' Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). CAS (2016) provided a sound set of criteria as well as guidelines, advice, action plan forms, and self-assessment procedures for coordinators and practitioners in student support programs that they called "Learning Assistance Programs" or "LAP". This category includes PAL programs. With no equivalent body to CAS in Australia, the strategies and procedures that CAS suggested are welcomed and can serve as a useful self-assessment tool for staff in Australian universities who work to support students in their learning.

With regard to the outcomes of LAP, CAS (2012) insisted that staff must choose student learning and development outcomes that are consistent with the mission of their institution, but which must also be identified as coming from the six domains prescribed by CAS which are:

- Knowledge acquisition, construction, integration and application
- Cognitive complexity
- Intrapersonal development
- Interpersonal competence
- Humanitarianism and civic engagement
- Practical competence (p. 23)

With the focus on student leaders rather than on students generally, I have examined these domains with regard to the experienced student leader outcomes as I perceived them. The four outcomes that I presented in my framework and have stated in a section below, display clear resonance with these domains. While the aim of Meet-Up was not to comply with CAS standards, and the purpose of my research was not to justify the Meet-up program, the alignment of student leader outcomes with CAS's desired spheres of influence, again indicated overlap with acknowledged experts in the field – in this case, with a recognised and respected national educational body, which is reaffirming.

4.7.4 Further research into leadership outcomes

My conceptual framework illustrated development along the seven vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) as the bridge between the Environment "E" and the Outcome "O". Development in the first four vectors contributed to identity formation as the student leaders grew in self-efficacy, self-acceptance and self-esteem. In fact, Chickering and Reisser

(1993) note that, to generalise, all the vectors could be classified under identity formation. Coupled with the emergence of their identity was the development of a sense of purpose in their own learning journeys and a sense of integrity, both personally and in relation to their roles as Meet-Up leaders. This demonstrated that the development that the students underwent during their experiences as Meet-Up leaders was indeed the bridge from novice leader at the Input point to the outcome of experienced student leaders demonstrating leadership competencies.

4.7.5 Outcome as a product of leader/environment interaction

Zaccaro et al. (2004) developed a framework that they called "A model of Leader Attributes and Leader Performance" (p. 122). This model proposed that leaders' proximal skills and distal skills influenced both the way that leaders operated (processes) in the leaders' operating environment (situational influences) and the leadership outcomes. Situational influences function as the environment in which leadership developed, as the moderator of the impact of leaders' personal traits on the processes used and as the moderator of the impact of the processes on leader emergence and effectiveness. As Zaccaro et al. saw it, effective leadership was the end product of the interaction between the leaders and the environment.

Figure 4.2: A model of leader attributes and leader performance (Zaccaro et al., 2004, p. 122)
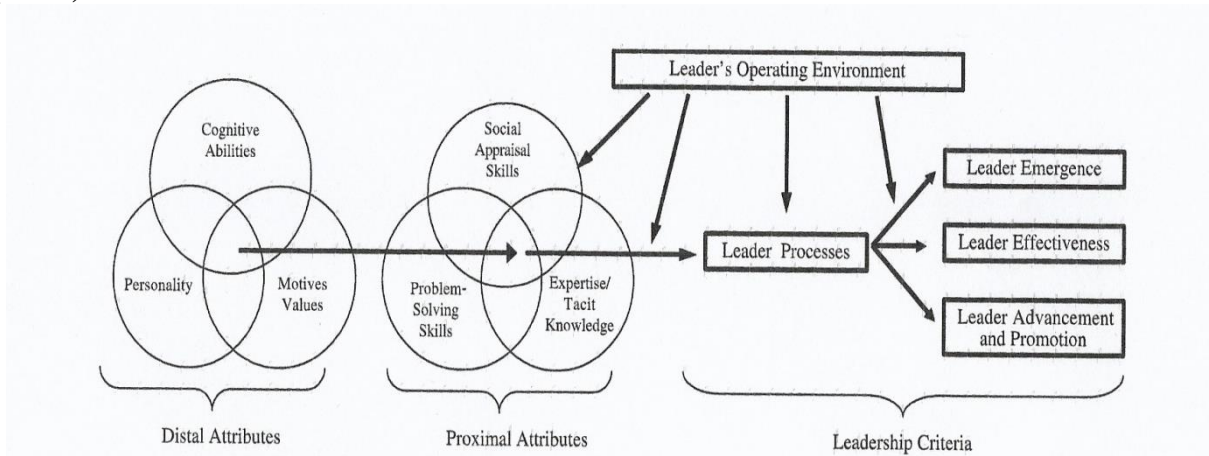
Basically, Zaccaro and colleagues had given me another way of describing and explaining the relationship between traits and the environment, and then ultimately the outcome of leadership. This model aligned well with Astin's (1984/1999), Bronfenbrenner's

(1994) and Chickering and Reisser's (1993) models in terms of explaining what leaders brought and how interactions led to the outcome of enacted leadership attributes. The diagram that Zaccaro et al. (2004) drew to represent their framework also mirrored, albeit in a more detailed manner, Astin's (1984/1999) IEO, and, as such, both influenced the development of my conceptual framework. Invoking Zaccaro et al. (2004) then, I claim that the novice leaders brought with them distal attributes (such as cognitive competence) and some proximal capabilities (such as knowledge and experiences of effective learning at university); Meet-Up was the leaders' operating environment in which the management of their tasks was the process; and experienced student leaders demonstrating effective leadership behaviours were the outcome.

4.7.6 Who they became and what they could do: leadership competencies (as presented in Figure 4.3)

In meeting the requirements of the role of Meet-Up leader, I observed that the student leaders had become more than just experienced student leaders; they demonstrated clearly that they had also developed leadership competencies. I have used this term and concept, "competency", based on my reading of leadership research for the literature review. According to Bass and Bass (2008), when a specific trait was a requirement for doing something, it became a "competency"; hence, they argued, leadership traits could also be considered as competencies (p. 103). Astin and Astin (2000), in concurrence, posited (as noted earlier) that competence was an individual quality of effective leadership. They remarked that the term encompassed the knowledge and skills required for the successful completion of the group's goals. Thus, to have emerged from the Meet-Up program as experienced student leaders – that is, student leaders who had guided students to completion of joint goals – these students had achieved the outcome of the development of certain leadership competencies.

For example, as presented in my conceptual framework diagram, I had observed the experienced student leaders exhibiting the following characteristics:
- heightened awareness and understanding of self
- increased understanding of discipline concepts shared with peers that contributed to their confidence and success
- empathetic relationships with peers that inspired, motivated, guided and encouraged them in their learning

- increased understanding of university systems and processes demonstrated by effective engagement with academics and other university groups/sections.

From this perspective, then, the novice student leaders had indeed become experienced student leaders. Yet, on re-examination of these characteristics, something grabbed my attention. Were these outcomes really all competencies, cognitive abilities that could be observed as behaviours? Or, rather, did some of them intimate affective qualities, characteristics involving emotions and feelings? Just as the initial personal traits the novice leaders brought on entry to the program ("I") included both required cognitive strengths and desirable emotional qualities, the personal traits observed in the experienced student leaders on exit from the program ("O") were also drawn from both the cognitive and the affective domains. And, as such, the term "competency" perfectly suited the traits that involved intellect, but those that were grounded in feelings needed a different term. While competency was essential, it needed to be applied in conjunction with the capability to employ affective traits, including the ability to empathise, inspire and encourage.

4.7.7 Capability

To Sen (2009), capability involved an individual employing her/his personality traits in tandem with the available or existing social conditions. A person did not have capability unless both factors were sufficiently favourable. Previously in the discussion of the Input or "I" section, I outlined Sen's (2009) theory of capability, aligning his concept with the student leaders at two points: the Input section; and the Outcome section. At the "I" point, individual students made choices that were available to them because of two favourable factors: their personal characteristics, including discipline competence and the passion to assist their peers in learning, and the existence of a PAL program called Meet-Up, which required experienced, dedicated student leaders. The presence and the product of these two connected factors provided the student leaders with their capability.

At the Outcome or "O" point, a different capability had appeared. Having worked as student leaders, these individuals had now emerged from the Meet-Up environment with increased knowledge, understanding and experience of both discipline concepts and university matters, and also of themselves and their peers. Not only that, but they had grown personally in the areas outlined in Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors. Their initial capability as novice student leaders in conjunction with the requirements and experiences involved in the role of Meet-Up leader, had spawned their development of what were considered to be leadership competencies. The emergence of individuals exhibiting

these new intrinsic knowledges and personal skills, abilities, and competencies heralded the beginnings of new sets of possibilities and choices that opened up to them; they now possessed capability as experienced student leaders.

Figure 4.3 Conceptual framework

Input:
Novice Student Leaders
(Who they were and what they brought: their personal characteristics and experiences)

Course knowledge and competence (good course grade)

Cognitive competence in chosen discipline (high grade point average)

Inclination and passion to encourage peers and share a learning vision (enthusiasm to join the program)

Knowledge and experience of effective learning at university (generally 2nd, 3rd or 4th year undergraduate students)

ENGAGEMENT

Environment: Meet-Up Program
(The role of the student leaders)

What they did: involvement

Participated in training and development sessions

Planned, prepared and led PAL sessions for students

Shared personal learning experiences with student participants

Consulted with academics

Shared PAL experiences with other student leaders

Reflected on sessions held and responded to feedback from students and other leaders

Consulted with and reported to Program staff members

Completed administrative tasks such as compiling attendance lists and surveys

Engaged with wider USQ community

How they did it: integration

Activated what they brought (input) to relate and respond to their peers and guide them in learning

Demonstrated initiative, adaptability and flexibility in meeting the learning needs of their peers

Stimulated and inspired peers to achieve common learning goals

Offered encouragement and guidance to positively influence peers in their learning

Showed strong empathy, remembering how they had felt as new students

Articulated and demonstrated commitment to the program and their role

DEVELOPMENT

What they developed

Competence

Emotion management

Interdependence

Identity

Interpersonal relationships

Purpose

Integrity

Outcome: Experienced Student Leaders
(What they could do now: leadership competencies and capability)

Heightened awareness and understanding of self

Increased understanding of discipline concepts shared with peers that contributed to their confidence and success

Empathetic relationships with peers that inspired, motivated, guided and encouraged them in their learning

Increased understanding of university systems and processes demonstrated by effective engagement with academics and other university groups/sections

Developed from my observations, Astin's (1984/1999) Theory of Student Involvement, Chickering & Reisser's (1993) Seven developmental vectors for college students, and Tinto's (1993) Theory of student departure.

4.8 Summary of the chapter

My conceptual framework is the culmination of my thoughts, ideas and observations about my work with student leaders in the PAL program Meet-Up, merged with the research of scholars whose works inspired and challenged me, ultimately equipping me with a foundation of respected theories, concepts and models on which to construct my explanatory framework of what happened to student leaders in Meet-Up. While the wording of the framework was tweaked in places as my doctoral journey progressed and I distilled and clarified my thoughts, its core integrity remained true and its basic structure was therefore not changed. The framework has a simplicity of design, while also conveying sufficient detail to demonstrate the students' journeys. In this chapter, I have deconstructed my conceptual framework in order to explain its origins and its construction.

Astin's (1984/1999) Theory of Student Involvement and his IEO model, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven major developmental vectors for college students, and Tinto's (1993) model of student departure, formed the basic yet solid frame for the development of my conceptual framework. They provided my initial thrill and inspiration, and their relevance to my conceptions did not dim over time despite the large volume of literature I read, much of which was reviewed in the previous chapter. Theories, concepts and models from other scholars, such as Bronfenbrenner (1994), Buchler (1951), Emerson (1962), Sen (2009) and Zaccaro (2007), helped to flesh out my framework sufficiently to illustrate my observations and their connections with literature.

While the sections in my conceptual framework were presented as being clearly distinct and separate from each other, they were nevertheless linked. Who the leaders were and what they brought to the position of student leader – that is, their characteristics and their capability ("I") – were what encouraged them to engage in the Meet-Up program and allowed them to perform the requirements of the student leader position (involvement) ("E"). In turn, who they were influenced the relationships and experiences that they had within the Meet-Up environment (integration), which ultimately determined their development as individuals and the final outcome of what they had become ("O") – experienced competent student leaders with new capabilities.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have presented my conceptual framework with the intention of linking my observations with the literature to make clear my interpretation of what happened to the student leaders in Meet-Up. I was determined to gain an understanding of what the leaders themselves thought, and hence I opted to ask them to share their understandings of student leadership and how they made sense of it. For this reason, I chose

phenomenography as my method of inquiry to ascertain the participants' conceptions of student leadership, and sensemaking as a process to help me to make sense of what they did in the role of student leader and how they did it. Phenomenography and sensemaking are explained in the following chapter.

5 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 Introduction

The aim of my research study was to explore the subject of university student leadership from the perspectives of the student leaders themselves. This research intention was at the heart of my study, and it steered the direction of each of the previous chapters. This chapter continues this alignment; it demonstrates how the research goals guided the study: the choice of research paradigm, research orientation, research inquiry method and the framework used as a lens to make sense of the findings.

I selected an interpretive viewpoint as the research paradigm, and this is explained before I move on to discuss my research orientation, a qualitative approach, and the reasons why that was appropriate. This is followed by a brief history and explanation of my chosen method of inquiry, phenomenography, and its suitability for realising my goals and its alignment with the research questions. In this chapter, I also outline sensemaking and its usefulness as a frame for me as researcher. Sensemaking was also the lens through which the participants viewed their experiences and their personal growth and development in their role as student leaders. The chapter relates the ethical considerations of the study, before moving on to describe the data collection processes in some detail. Lastly, the way the data were analysed is outlined in brief – a prelude to the following chapters in which the data are analysed in detail.

5.2 The link between the study's research goals and the research design

Before embarking on further explanation of the research design of the study, I considered it appropriate to make explicit the link between the research goals and the method of inquiry, and for clarity I have replicated below the table from the Introductory chapter.

Table 5.1: The research goals

I.	To provide contextual information about the Meet-Up program and the Meet-Up leaders
II.	To achieve an understanding of university student leadership by identifying the conceptions of student leadership held by the student leaders in USQ's PAL program known as "Meet-Up"
III.	To make sense of the ways that the Meet-Up leaders understood the impact of their student leadership experiences on their own development
IV.	To produce useful research findings about student leadership that can inform the instigation and practice of PAL programs in higher education institutions

Research Goal I clearly required an explanation of the Meet-Up program (Chapter 2) to explain clearly the context of the study. This goal linked immediately and explicitly with Research Goal II, which required a method of research inquiry that allowed me to identify the participating individual leaders' conceptions of student leadership. Phenomenography permitted me firstly to determine those conceptions, ultimately condensing them into categories that contained the collective conceptions of student leadership (Marton & Booth, 1997). Phenomenography is explained in Section 5.5.

Research Goal III was to make sense of the ways that the Meet-Up leaders understood the impact of their student leadership experiences on their own development. To achieve this goal, a different lens was required; I chose to engage in sensemaking (Weick, 1995). While sensemaking is about making sense, as the term suggests, it is also a process. It is explored in Section 5.9.

Research Goal IV was to produce useful research findings about student leadership that could inform the instigation and practice of PAL programs in higher education institutions. While this goal could be considered aspirational, as its realisation was beyond the scope of my study, the literature reviewed in Chapter 3 demonstrated the paucity of research into student leadership in the tertiary education sector, particularly in PAL programs and from the perspective of the student leaders themselves, indicating its pertinence as a goal. A benefit of a phenomenographic research study is that its outcomes provide "a rich source of data" (Johnston & Salaz, 2017, p. 7) that can be utilised to inform the design of scholarly practice. With my study demonstrating quality and trustworthiness (Collier-Reed, et al., 2009), as is outlined later in this chapter, its findings can guide university staff members who aim to encourage student leadership and to assist in developing PAL programs within their institutions.

5.2.1 The study's research questions

The research questions were developed in order to achieve the research goals presented above. The research questions were outlined and discussed in Chapter 1, but I have replicated them below to confirm their alignment with the study's research goals, the method of inquiry employed, and the research procedures and processes, as described later in this chapter. This alignment is crucial to demonstrate the integrity of my research, its quality and its trustworthiness. This is discussed in Section 5.6.

The research questions were:

1) What was the Meet-Up program and who were the Meet-Up student leaders?

2) What were the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership?

3) How did the Meet-Up leaders make sense of their development as people, students and leaders?

5.3 The research paradigm: Interpretivism and the interpretive research approach

5.3.1 A brief history of interpretivism

Interpretivism has a long history; it has ideas and traditions from philosophical phenomenology at its roots (Chowdhury, 2014; Sandberg, 2005), and Max Weber is generally credited with being its "central influence" (Chowdhury, 2014, p. 433). Dating back to Weber, interpretivism was founded on the German word "verstehen" (Chowdhury, 2014; Schwandt, 1997), which is about understanding. This understanding occurs on two levels. Firstly, there are the "self-understandings" (Chowdhury, 2014, p. 435), or the ways in which people know or perceive a phenomenon (Chowdhury, 2014; Schwandt, 1997). The second level of understanding is that of the researcher as she interprets, reconstructs and presents those self-understandings on the part of the "actors" (Chowdhury, 2014, p. 435) who are the subjects or people involved.

Chowdhury (2014) has made the point that, in order to achieve verstehen, the interpretation made by the researcher requires a degree of empathy with the actors in the study. Interpretive research approaches are therefore based on the "empathetic exploration" (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 300) of people's understandings of the world, and it is through the researcher's understandings and analysis of individuals' descriptions of these experiences that knowledge is created (Sandberg, 2005). Essentially, therefore, interpretivism is about interpreting the meanings that people hold of a particular phenomenon. Indeed, interpretivists typically have as the goal of their research the "understanding of the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 221). Interpretivism is "principally concerned with ways of knowing and being rather than method per se" (Schwandt, 1997, p. 222); hence the link with my research goals and research questions is clear and explicit.

5.3.1.1 The interpretive research tradition

The interpretive research tradition, while often traced back to Weber and his ideas (Sandberg, 2005) and to interpretivism generally, is typically not considered to be a unified tradition, but instead to have a number of approaches as its base. Particularly interesting for me was that Sandberg (2005) included Weick's (1995) sensemaking process in his list of

influential research approaches that have been at the root of the development of the interpretive research tradition. Sandberg (2005) claimed that what connects these varying approaches is the inextricable link between individuals and the world as they experience it. In other words, in the interpretive research tradition, the "primary research object" is "individuals' and groups' lived experience of their reality" (Sandberg, 2005, p. 47).

This belief that individuals and their understandings of their reality cannot be separated is essentially what is meant by non-dualism, and this offers a further fundamental and critical connection in my study – namely, with my chosen research inquiry method, phenomenography. Svensson (1997), one of the early advocates of phenomenography, was at pains to insist that phenomenography is a "research orientation" or a "research approach" (p. 162) rather than a research method. The most significant characteristics of phenomenography include its aim to arrive at categories of description of a phenomenon based on the data collected, and the "interpretive character of the analysis of the data" (Svensson, 1997, p. 162).

5.3.2 The interpretive researcher

The researcher in interpretive research has her own preconceptions and assumptions about both the phenomenon under investigation and the context (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Chowdhury, 2014; Sandberg, 2005; Schwandt, 1997). These direct the course of the study from its beginnings, and influence the way that the researcher relates to the participants in the research. It is intrinsic to the nature of interpretive research that researchers are involved on all levels, therefore denoting the interpretations made as subjective, and not value-free or objective; this has sparked criticism from some quantitative researchers.

In rebuttal of the criticism of the asserted lack of objectivity in interpretive research, advocates claim that methods of obtaining objective knowledge have limitations regarding the extension of our understanding of humans and their organisations (Sandberg, 2005). It makes sense that the most appropriate way to measure a subjective theme such as people's understandings of a phenomenon is through subjective research. Indeed, Chowdhury (2014) has claimed that the "tapestry of studying the social world through subjective thought and ideas confirms the significance of interpretivism which is to see the world through the eyes of the people being studied, allowing them multiple perspectives of reality" (p. 433). It is the subjectivity of the interpretive research tradition that yields its contextual richness and depth (Chowdhury, 2014).

Interpretive researchers strive to understand the actors' perspectives as described by them, the people involved, and to interpret and represent them accurately and honestly. Yet, as interpretive researchers celebrate this real world of first-person, subjective experience, the results are criticised by some researchers and commentators in terms of a possible lack of validity, reliability and generalisability, the measures commonly used in quantitative research (Chowdhury, 2014). And this then is the conundrum inherent in interpretivism for some researchers. While embracing and defending subjectivity, interpretive researchers sometimes attempt simultaneously to relieve the tension and fears of criticism by seeking to disengage from the criticism and to objectify it (Schwandt, 1997). To satisfy the critics' claims of a lack of objectivity, but without compromising the integrity of subjectivity, interpretive researchers can engage in interpretive awareness strategies (Sandberg, 2005). These strategies involve the researcher's acknowledgement of the elements of her subjectivity throughout the study.

5.3.2.1 Maintaining the integrity of interpretive research: Interpretive awareness

The basic assumption in interpretive research is that it yields knowledge or truth about people's experiences and perceptions of their realities (Chowdhury, 2014; Sandberg, 2005). Sandberg (2005) noted that the interest in interpretive research had been steadily growing, and its advocates claimed that it had "provided new means of investigating previously unexplored questions" (p. 42). While it is certainly possible to make "truth claims" about the conceptions and/or experiences of the participants in an interpretive study, truth is "always something unfinished within the interpretive tradition" (p. 62).

It is the researcher's interpretation of truth that is provided throughout an interpretive study, and researchers must therefore demonstrate that they have checked their interpretations throughout the entire research process to ensure their accuracy (Sandberg, 2005). One appropriate criterion through which to achieve this demonstration is interpretive awareness. "To maintain an interpretive awareness means to acknowledge and explicitly deal with our subjectivity throughout the research process instead of overlooking it" (Sandbergh, 1997, p. 209). By becoming aware of the influences on their interpretations, researchers ensure that their interpretations actually become strengths rather than threats to the truth of the results (Sandbergh, 1997).

There are a number of strategies that researchers can employ to achieve interpretive awareness. For example, during the collection of data via the interview, the researcher should be mindful of the phenomenon under study, orienting her thoughts about it, and being "attentive and open to possible variations and complexities" (Sandberg, 2005, p. 60) in relation to the participants' experiences. The researcher should also be "oriented towards

describing what constitutes the experience" (p. 60), and this aim is assisted by posing questions that ask "what" or "how", rather than "why" (Sandberg, 2005; Willis, 2018). This orientation towards description is indeed an important, even crucial, feature of interpretivism because it assures the integrity of the findings: it ensures that the researcher avoids generating any interpretations that go beyond the actual experiences of the participants.

5.3.3 The interpretive paradigm

And so, based on the aim of my study and its research goals, I chose to employ an interpretive paradigm. A paradigm is essentially an individual's worldview, and, for researchers, it is what guides their investigations in terms of method, ontology and epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Indeed, Guba and Lincoln (1994) considered that questions of paradigm should be primary in relation to those of the method/s chosen. Schwandt (1997) concurred, positing that focusing on method could mask an understanding of the relationship between the purpose of the inquiry and the method. He added that, "at base, all interpretive inquirers watch, listen, ask, record, and examine" (p. 222); the best way for the researcher to conduct the study – that is, the choice of method employed – depends on the researcher's purpose. I considered that the interpretive research approach as outlined above aligned well with my purpose.

5.4 Research orientation: Qualitative research
5.4.1 What is qualitative research?

Qualitative research generally explores a social or human issue (Creswell, 1998). And, certainly, Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued that qualitative data can provide contextualised information and a "rich insight into human behaviour" (p. 106). Qualitative research is characterised by aims that relate to understanding a particular subject, and its methods generally produce words as opposed to numbers for analysis (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). Put simply, qualitative research intends to understand the experiences of the participants, finding answers to the "'what', 'how' or 'why' of a topic or phenomenon rather than 'how many' or 'how much'" (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014, p. 1), which can be achieved using quantitative methods. In quantitative studies, researchers tend to try to disassociate themselves as much as possible from research processes, but by contrast qualitative researchers generally "have come to embrace their involvement and role within the research" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600).

5.4.2 Qualitative versus quantitative research

An age-old debate has been waged continually between proponents of qualitative research and those who advocate the quantitative research orientation. Patton (1999) noted that, in earlier literature about the evaluation of research, the debate was quite "strident" (p. 1189), but it has softened over time. This debate has been predicated on opposing views held by scientists and non-scientists about "how best to study and understand the world" (p. 1205), and it is rooted in a dispute about the nature of reality. More recently, a consensus has emerged where it is generally accepted that the decision about which research orientation to employ should be made after due consideration of the audience and the purpose of the study, and the most important challenge is to match these appropriately (Patton, 1999). And this is the most crucial, yet perhaps sometimes overlooked, point in the whole quantitative versus qualitative research orientation debate. Thus, when research is predicated on investigating personal perspectives or conceptions, it is subjective in nature, and qualitative research, which is also considered subjective, is therefore both relevant and appropriate. Furthermore, Patton (1999) argued that "qualitative methods are not weaker or softer than quantitative approaches; qualitative methods are different" (p. 1207).

Lincoln and Guba's (1981, 1985) works argued that rigour in qualitative research could not be determined by the same "traditional" methods as in quantitative research (Collier-Reed et al., 2009; Sandberg, 2005; Sin, 2010). And so, while quantitative researchers commonly employ numerical measures that test the reliability and validity of the generalisations and causal relationships explored in their research in order to emphasise the accuracy of the hypotheses they have constructed (Golafshani, 2003), in qualitative research, with its focus on words, alternatives are needed to reliability and validity – alternatives that can identify and confirm the value of the research and its effects, and demonstrate rigour in the research process (Collier-Reed et al., 2009).

5.4.3 Maintaining the quality of qualitative research: Trustworthiness, credibility and the researcher's role

In quantitative research, the findings of a study are typically tested for reliability and validity, and the accuracy of the results is determined by the quality of the measures or the instrument used (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability is often determined by the degree to which the findings of the research study are considered replicable (Sin, 2010). In qualitative research, data are frequently collected in interviews, and it is argued that the iterative process

of reading and rereading transcripts of the interviews, and of analysing and reconsidering the data, means that replicability is unnecessary (Sandbergh, 1997; Sin, 2010).

Additionally, in qualitative research, the researchers are commonly the data collectors, and it is impossible for them to separate themselves completely from the research. Denzin (2009) argued that this is in fact no different in quantitative research – all researchers have viewpoints, effects and influences on their research. The researcher in a qualitative study can be considered to be the "instrument" (Golafshani, 2003; Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004; McGrath et al., 2019) used to ensure the quality of the research, and hence the credibility of the whole study "depends on the ability and effort of the researcher" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600), who is often also the interviewer. Indeed, the interpretive paradigm underpinning qualitative research means that "data from and about humans inevitably represent some degree of perspective rather than absolute truth" (Patton, 1999, p. 1204).

Yet McGrath et al. (2019) issued a note of caution. Researchers in qualitative studies need to be mindful that their role, their knowledge and their previous experiences of the context may impact on the conversation with the interviewees; the researcher is not a "passive player" and needs to be aware of her "personal lens" (p. 1411). The more openly and honestly that qualitative researchers can recognise and acknowledge their personal views, the better they can interpret the reflections of the participants in their research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Furthermore, by being transparent in their discussion of their research processes and their interpretations of the data, qualitative researchers can engender trust both in their research and in themselves as researchers (Denzin, 2009).

5.4.4 The link between qualitative research and my study

As was noted above, research conducted into social issues or phenomena by qualitative means commonly involves interviewing. Indeed, "the research interview is a pivotal source of data in social research that is primarily understood from the point of view of the researcher and the objectives of the research project" (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004, p. 1). As my intention was to let the student leaders tell me themselves what their conceptions of student leadership were using their own words, conversation-like interviews stood out as the most appropriate means of collecting these data – and I was mindful of the cautions expressed by McGrath et al. (2019).

Like other qualitative researchers, I held a belief and an expectation that "the interviewed subjects' viewpoints were more likely to be expressed in an openly designed interview situation than in a standardised interview or a questionnaire" (Flick, 2009, p. 150). I

considered that the words spoken by the participants in our conversations would produce a wealth of data (words), complete with individual nuances, that would allow me to address the study's research questions.

While my study focused its attention on a phenomenon (student leadership) in a context (a PAL program called "Meet-Up") in a higher education institution, its emphasis was not on teaching and learning outcomes, but rather on the growth and development of the program's student leaders. This forged an immediate link with the social research field, allowing me to embrace the notions of social research, including the generally accepted approval to employ qualitative research. Indeed, qualitative research is considered "preferable" (McGrath et al., 2019, p. 1002), and particularly appropriate when a researcher is striving to "understand the interviewee's subjective perspective of a phenomenon" (p. 1002).

5.5 The method of inquiry: Phenomenography

5.5.1 The origin of phenomenography

Despite its earlier appearance in 1954 in psychologically-based qualitative research (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997, p. 192), the creation of phenomenography as a method of inquiry has generally been attributed to Ference Marton (1981), and his research and that of his collaborators are considered seminal. Marton's original ideas about this method first appeared in an article in the journal *Instructional Science* in 1981. Here Marton (1981) argued in favour of a research method whose aims were "description, analysis and understanding of experiences" (p. 177). "Such an approach points to a relatively distinct field of inquiry which we would like to call *phenomenography*" (Marton, 1981, p. 180; *emphasis in original*). A little later, Marton (1986, as cited in Richardson, 2015, p. 248) stated that phenomenography is about seeking "the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and various phenomena in, the world around them" (p. 31); this definition is frequently quoted.

From the beginning, Marton (1981) made it clear that this method of inquiry was based on a "second-order perspective" (p. 178), by which he meant that the orientation or focus of the research should be statements based on *people's ideas* about the world "or about their experience of it" (p. 178). In other words, Marton's (1981) insistence was that the views of the people involved should be the focus. This was in contrast to what is termed a "first-order perspective" (Marton, 1981, p. 178), which involves researchers making statements based predominantly on their observations from their own perspectives. Thus, from the birth

of this method of inquiry, its aim has always been to "find out the different ways in which people experience, interpret, understand, apprehend, perceive or conceptualise various aspects of reality" (Marton, 1981, p. 178) by asking the people involved.

Specifically, phenomenography was developed to aid in "identifying, formulating, and tackling" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111) issues or phenomena of interest in educational scenarios. Lennart Svensson (1997), one of Marton's original research collaborators, explained that in phenomenography the choice was made to describe knowledge not in terms of right or wrong, but rather in terms of a student's understanding of a subject or a phenomenon in a way that meant something to that individual person. Note the use of the word "student" in this explanation. It reaffirms that phenomenography was clearly intended to be applied to improve teaching practice, commonly in higher education.

However, the description of phenomenography can be generalised and explained as an inquiry method that is considered particularly relevant to research that seeks to identify the different ways in which people experience a particular phenomenon, or, put simply, phenomenography's role is to attach meaning to a phenomenon (Bowden, 2000). Thus, while originally it was indeed "particularly aimed at questions of relevance to learning and understanding in an educational setting" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111), and, while it has been utilised frequently in teaching and learning scenarios to ascertain how students conceive or learn a specific concept or phenomenon, it is important to recognise that it is not limited to this application. This is explored further later in Subsection 5.5.4. Phenomenography therefore developed from an empirical, practical foundation, and, for this reason, it is only recently that its ontological and epistemological assumptions and its methodological specifications have been more clearly developed (Åkerlind, 2005). They are explained below.

5.5.1.1 The ontology of phenomenography: Non-dualism

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Creswell, 1998). A person's reality is constructed by the ways through which she conceptualises and experiences something (Ireland et al., 2009). Experiences, therefore, are internal relationships or interactions between an individual and the world around her, and it is these experiences that form an individual's awareness of the world (Marton & Booth, 1997). By extension, then, "an experience is of its essence non-dualistic" (p. 122). Phenomenography "builds on [this] non-dualistic ontology, which means that ways of experiencing a phenomenon represent a relationship between the phenomenon and that which is being experienced" (Stenfors-Hayes et al., 2013, p. 263).

Phenomenography can therefore be considered "a relational approach to research because the object (the phenomenon under investigation) and the research subjects (the people experiencing the phenomenon) are not viewed or treated separately" (Yates et al., 2012, p. 98). In other words, a non-dualistic ontology is implied and assumed, as the object and the subject are considered to constitute an inseparable relation (Marton & Booth, 1997; Sandberg, 2005).

5.5.1.2 The epistemology of phenomenography: Non-dualistic, subjective and interpretive

While ontology is concerned with people's experience of reality, epistemology refers to how individuals come to know these realities (Ireland et al., 2009). In phenomenographic research, the description of knowledge was purposively moved from an objective view to a "more subjectivistic and relative view" (p. 163) that exists in and relates to a specific social or cultural context. Phenomenography therefore aligns with the interpretive research tradition as its data collection and analysis – indeed, its whole research process – are founded on the researcher's interpretation. The assumption made by advocates of interpretive approaches is that the object of study (the topic or the phenomenon) and the actors or participants (the people involved) constitute an inseparable relationship; that is, the approaches are based on non-dualism (Sandberg, 2005). Therefore, phenomenography, predicated as it is on non-dualism, constitutes interpretive research.

The alignment of phenomenographic research with the interpretive tradition means that phenomenography can be said also to have an interpretive epistemology; that is, a researcher aims to interpret and then to describe in a truthful manner the different ways that people know or experience particular realities. Yet what the researcher considers to be "truth" is of course dependent on her understanding of the research object or phenomenon (Sandberg, 2005), and indeed phenomenographers do not tend to argue that their results are the "ultimate truth" (Collier-Reed et al., 2009, p. 348). However, Sandberg (2005) was adamant that this does not imply that the researcher's interpretation of what is truth is purely subjective.

It does mean, however, that the researcher must ensure a sound knowledge of the phenomenon under examination. It also means that it is incumbent on the researcher to engage in an iterative process of considering and reconsidering the narratives or descriptions of the phenomenon as provided by the individuals involved in the research (Sandberg, 2005). While it is difficult to claim "one final and unambiguous truth" (p. 52) in interpretive research, the researcher can be clear, open and explicit in her processes to ensure quality and trustworthiness. This is explained further in Subsection 5.6.2.

5.5.2 Explaining key terms in phenomenography: Conception and description
5.5.2.1 The nature of the term "conception" in phenomenography

The basic unit of phenomenographic research, as noted, is "a way of experiencing something", known as a phenomenon, and it is an "internal relationship between the experiencer and the experienced" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 113). Indeed, "a 'way of experiencing something' is a way of discerning something from, and relating it to, a context" (p. 112). These realities that people construct of a phenomenon can variously be called "conceptions", "ways of understanding", "ways of comprehending" and "conceptualisations", which are all synonymous with the term "ways of experiencing" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 114). This can be somewhat confusing and problematic for some researchers.

For example, Bowden's (2000) concern was that some phenomenographers articulate their findings in such a way as to suggest that they "know" what an individual's conception of a phenomenon is, which Bowden implied was not only presumptuous but also incorrect. Bowden (2000), as a result, endorsed Sandbergh's (1997) definition of the term "conception" as referring to "people's ways of experiencing a specific aspect of reality" (p. 203), and furthermore he applauded and approved Sandbergh's (1997) explanation of the aim of phenomenographic research as being to identify and describe these conceptions "as faithfully as possible" (p. 204); it was the use of this phrase specifically that was, for Bowden (2000), the crux of the research. He claimed that all that a researcher can assert is that, "following a given interview context, analysis of the transcripts enables [the researcher] to differentiate between a number of different ways of seeing the phenomenon that are apparent in that kind of conversation" (Bowden, 2000, p. 16).

In other words, phenomenographic research yields descriptions whose content is drawn from the relationship between the participants and the phenomenon, as well as from the conversations between the researcher and each participant. For example, in my study, while Bowden (2000) claimed that the use of the word "conception" to describe the descriptions added an "unnecessary complication and ambiguity" (p. 17), I tend to disagree. For clarity, I considered that the use of the word "conception" saved continual repetition of a much more lengthy and wordy explanation. The phenomenographic element of my study focused on the ways that the Meet-Up leaders understood the phenomenon of university student leadership. These ways have been expressed by the word "conceptions".

5.5.2.2 The nature of the term "description" in phenomenography

Svensson (1997) clarified that the aim of phenomenography is "to describe people's conceptions" (p. 160). The phenomenographic researcher's role is therefore firstly to encourage participants to describe their ways of understanding the particular phenomenon under study. Subsequently, she analyses, interprets and collates those descriptions in order ultimately to construct a set of categories of description in which she describes the conceptions of the phenomenon held by the participants. In short, the emphasis on description is fundamental to phenomenography.

In phenomenographic studies, interviewing individuals is commonly employed (Cousin, 2009) because, while people's conceptions or ways of experiencing the phenomenon can be expressed in different forms, "they are most accessible through language" (Svensson, 1997, p. 166). Indeed, detailed oral descriptions of a phenomenon tend to be forthcoming in interviews where participants feel comfortable, for example:

> *A Meet-Up leader is a leader….They need to be willing to help everyone there because that is what they're there for; they're there to help everybody, which is the definition of a leader. The leader is there to get the best out of all the people that they're leading. The leader doesn't just do it for themselves. It's their responsibility to make sure that everyone does their best*. (Lance)

Data such as the description above are collected from the interviews, and then abstracted and condensed into groups of the categories of description that form the outcome of the phenomenographic study (Bowden, 2000; Cousin, 2009; Marton & Booth, 1997; Prosser, 2000; Svensson, 1997). These categories, together with the addition of an explanation of the relationships among the categories, form the outcome space (Åkerlind, 2005; Marton & Booth, 1997).

5.5.3 Categories of description and the outcome space

As noted, the outcomes of phenomenographic studies are represented as a number of qualitatively different ways of experiencing the particular phenomenon. These are called the "categories of description", and, as constituted by the phenomenographic researcher, they represent the different ways of experiencing the phenomenon (Svensson, 1997). The term "categories of description" is used to differentiate the category, as distilled by the researcher, from the actual experiences of the participants that it represents. This final set of categories and how the different ways of experiencing the phenomenon are related comprise the outcome space (Trigwell, 2000). Åkerlind (2005) clarified the outcome space as consisting of

all the possible ways of understanding or experiencing the particular phenomenon, at that particular time, and for the population represented by the participants in the study.

A useful and appealing analogy for the relationship between the described (the ways of experiencing something) and the description (the categories of description) is that of the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland* (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 128). When the cat has faded away, the smile lingers. Interestingly, Marton (1981) used the same analogy much earlier, but with slightly different terminology. In his 1981 article, he wrote that it is the "relationship between conception as an act of conceiving and conception as a category of description" (p. 196) that resembles the Cheshire cat's separation from its smile.

To put it differently for further clarity: the terms "description" and "category" are used firstly to refer to the participants' descriptions of their understandings and experiences of student leadership, which are called "conceptions"; and secondly, the researcher engages in a process of describing the participants' conceptions and refining them to a set of categories of description, which are the collective conceptions of the phenomenon being studied. To offer an example related to my study, Lance's description above would fit into a category such as "Student leadership as relational".

5.5.3.1 Deep and surface learning

The deep learning versus surface learning metaphor has been a foundation of learning theory and practice in higher education for many years (Webb, 1997). It underpins the hierarchical structure of traditional phenomenography. To offer a simple explanation of the approaches for the purposes of my research, surface learning, as the term suggests, is based on a rather superficial way of learning a concept, and indulges the use of memorising. Deep learning, by contrast, focuses on a more in-depth understanding of the concept, including its relationship with other concepts. The latter learning approach is clearly the more desired by teachers/instructors. Webb (1997) claimed that "the theory of knowledge and [the] methodology, which have produced the deep/surface metaphor (in higher education)[,] is called phenomenography" (p. 195). Indeed, phenomenographic research, as it has traditionally been applied in higher education, endorses the deep/surface learning dichotomy, and phenomenographic methodology and the deep/surface learning metaphor have developed contemporaneously.

Engagement in phenomenographic research into the varying ways that students understand a concept is commonly undertaken by researchers in the education field who are "informed by theory and prejudice" (Webb, 1997, p. 201), as a result of their knowledge and previous teaching experiences in that discipline. They therefore frequently consider that one

particular way of understanding that particular topic or concept demonstrates deeper or better learning (Tight, 2000); it is the "correct" (Webb, 1997, p. 200) way or the "authorised conception" (p. 201), according to the current standpoint in the discipline. Resultantly, phenomenographers generally arrange their findings – that is, the categories of description and ultimately the outcome space – in a hierarchical structure.

Over time, the education sector has moved away from the idea that students bring with them the learning approach that they will adopt in their studies, and has lent more towards the view that the learning environment provided by the institution plays a significant role in students' choices (Webb, 1997). As a result, growing numbers of educational developers in higher education, convinced that the learning environment was indeed what determined students' choice of approach, have encouraged practitioners to engage in strategies to promote deep learning. And thus, in phenomenographic studies involving the teaching and learning of specific disciplinary concepts, teachers or academics seek to apply the findings to encourage deep learning in their students, thereby improving the quality of their practice and their learning outcomes (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

5.6.3.2 Hierarchical construction of categories

This then is the heart of the matter of the hierarchy that is made explicit in many phenomenographic findings: the preference for what is deemed the best way of learning a concept (generally involving deep learning) over all other ways (often classified as surface learning strategies). In contrast to this position, the researcher who is exploring other phenomena than educational or discipline-based phenomena generally considers that all the conceptions of the phenomenon that she is investigating are of equal value and importance. During both the collection of data and the analysis of data, the researcher therefore ensures that all the descriptions are treated equally, and that no hierarchical structure is used (Sandbergh, 1997; Trigwell, 2000). And, certainly, this position can be seen in some of the more recent phenomenographic research.

When phenomenography has been applied in its original domain – that is, higher education – some scholars have been critical of the phenomenographers' (academics') capacity to have "pristine perception, make neutral observations, build objective categories, and give neutral interpretations" (Webb, 1997, p. 201). The academics' knowledge of teaching experiences within their chosen disciplines means that they have prior opinions, beliefs and perceptions related to what is the best way to learn a particular concept (Webb, 1997). This circumstance results in the construction of categories of description and an outcome space that are hierarchically structured.

When phenomenography is applied to research that sits outside the realm of higher education teaching and learning situations, the researcher may not be inclined to hold such clear predispositions and firm assumptions about the correct or best way to understand a phenomenon. In that case, the use of the hierarchical categorisation of descriptions is not so pertinent or relevant, and is therefore abandoned; conceptions are all of equal standing and value, and are treated that way.

The intention of my study was to determine the different conceptions that Meet-Up leaders held of student leadership. Certainly, there were no established criteria in the literature regarding how student leaders should best experience student leadership; there was no hierarchy or preferred way of understanding the phenomenon. This encouraged me to keep an open mind about all participants' descriptions, and to value them all to the same degree. I believed that it was incumbent on me as the researcher to honour and respect the participants by being as faithful as I could be to their responses and contributions, and as honest as I could be in my interpretations of what they said. It was also in the best interests of the integrity of my study.

5.5.4 Research using phenomenography

Phenomenography has been "quietly influential in research on higher education" (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 295) since its inception, with Marton and Booth (1997) reminding their readers that phenomenography "originate[d] from an educational interest and it aspire[s] to serve it as well" (p. 135). Indeed, Tight (2015) claimed at his time of writing that it was "arguably the only research design (so far) to have been developed substantially within higher education research by higher education researchers" (p. 1).

By 1997, Marton, in collaboration with Shirley Booth, claimed that phenomenography was not a research method per se but rather a "research specialisation" (p. 110). In elaborating the notion and purpose of phenomenography, they explained that, in order to make sense of how people handle specific situations, it is imperative firstly to understand how they experience them. These expansions of the definitions or explanations of phenomenography by its original developer, in conjunction with colleagues, suggested that phenomenography could have a wider benefit and application for researchers than learning and teaching situations only, and this has indeed proven to be the case (Bowden, 2000).

And thus phenomenography, with its more recent and more general focus on the ways that a phenomenon is understood or experienced (rather than necessarily learned), can be applied to any field (Åkerlind, 2015), and it is indeed being increasingly utilised by

researchers in settings other than education. For example, Stenfors-Hayes et al. (2013) concluded that phenomenography is well-suited to informing medical education research. They acknowledged that, while people can experience a phenomenon differently, "we often feel that our way is the only reasonable one" (p. 267). Phenomenography provides a way to explore difference and to compare, contrast and scrutinise a range of perspectives.

Johnston and Salaz (2017) argued for the consideration of phenomenography, not typically a "go-to" (p. 2) method of inquiry in library and information science, as the findings of this interpretive approach could assist in developing solutions to problems and concerns in library practice. Similarly, Cutler et al. (2017) employed phenomenography in their research into personal recovery in mental health nursing, noting that, despite its being a rarely utilised research method in their field, they considered it a "timely and ethical approach" (p. 10). They remarked that they found the phenomenographic approach appropriate as it sought to advance understandings about people's meanings based on their personal experiences, and then to use those new understandings to inform change in the area.

Indeed, the researcher's role in phenomenographic research is to make sense of the data provided – that is, the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon (Cutler et al., 2017). The researcher is in a "privileged position" (p. 8) where she gets to determine which data are included in the outcome space of the final set of categories of description, and which are excluded, based on her familiarity with the phenomenon and on her resultant interpretation of the participants' descriptions or narrative (Cutler et al., 2017).

5.5.5 The further development of phenomenography: Variation theory

Recently, phenomenography has been further developed within the education field. This recent development of the phenomenographic research approach is called the "variation theory of learning" (Åkerlind, 2015; Wright & Osman, 2018) or just "variation theory" (Tight, 2015). While phenomenography is based on ascertaining the varying ways that a phenomenon is understood or experienced, "research based on Variation Theory focuses on applying theoretically informed principles of instructional design in real world teaching and learning contexts" (Åkerlind, 2015, p. 6).

Variation theory is therefore most appropriate and relevant for specific teaching settings. Interestingly, this is where phenomenography began (Marton, 1981), and where it had "traditionally been most concerned with investigating variation in understandings of educational concepts, in particular disciplinary concepts" (Åkerlind, 2015, p. 8). Some

researchers choose to use a combination of the two approaches, calling it "phenomenography/variation theory (PVT)" (Durden, 2017).

Despite their common heritage, variation theory deviates from phenomenography in a few significant aspects. For example, phenomenography is non-dualistic and examines experience and context together, whereas variation theory, if desired, "allows for a crisp delimitation of a phenomenon from its context" (Durden, 2017, p. 1). In addition, while variation theory was derived from phenomenographic theory and shares the same epistemology (Åkerlind, 2015), or way of knowing, the focus in the new approach has shifted from the second-order perspective to the first-order perspective (Wright & Osman, 2018). Yet, because of their close theoretical origins, Åkerlind (2015) suggested that a good understanding of variation theory and its "pedagogical potential is predicated on a sound knowledge of phenomenography" (p. 3).

5.5.6 Why I chose phenomenography

Phenomenography initially caught my attention as an appropriate research approach because it set as its focus the understanding of experiences by those who were the experiencers, marrying seamlessly with my research aim. Indeed, this was endorsed in the literature about phenomenography: "a way of seeing, experiencing or understanding something is the basic unit of phenomenographic research" (Wright & Osman, 2018, p. 260); these ways, as was noted above, are commonly described as "conceptions".

Phenomenographic research sees these conceptions as "dynamic and as relations between individuals and context" (Prosser, 2000, p. 44). And this inextricable link between the context and the individual, known as non-dualism, was another central feature of phenomenography that made it appropriate for my study. According to one of the participants: "[Leadership and the role of Meet-Up leader] *are quite strongly linked,…because to be a Meet-Up leader you need those qualities, which are leadership qualities in any other setting. So I think being a Meet-Up leader is most definitely a leadership role where you exhibit traits of leadership*" (Caroline).

It is clearly apparent that my study was, in essence, non-dualistic, with its focus on participants in a specific program, Meet-Up, describing their ways of understanding the phenomenon of student leadership, and reaffirming that it was experienced in that particular program:

With Meet-Up, leadership comes from being able to plan and run a session, and I mean literally from day dot, you're starting to plan, you're working collaboratively

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with people. [You] *come up with this as a session, and then you're delivering that while maintaining the flexibility for still collaborating and working with the people you're there to help. So that's showing leadership skills in terms of your planning. You're talking in front of people, but you* [are] *also still collaborat*[ing]*, and consulting, which is your teamwork side. I think that's core leadership stuff; that's your baseline leadership stuff.* (Robert)

It was this non-dualistic feature that steered me towards phenomenography rather than variation theory.

Variation theory, as explained in the previous subsection, has the same theoretical foundation as phenomenography, but it has a number of points of difference in application. Variation theory is particularly appropriate in teaching studies, where the goal of the research is to uncover the different ways that students learn a subject or phenomenon; this information can then be applied directly to teaching contexts (Åkerlind, 2015). Research using variation theory removes the focus on the ways of understanding a phenomenon from the second-order perspective that I sought in my study, and returns it to the researcher, or the first-order perspective (Wright & Osman, 2018). In addition, variation theory can separate the phenomenon from the context (Durden, 2017), thereby providing a dualistic perspective, which I did not intend for my study.

By contrast, the literature about phenomenography suggested not only that its method of inquiry was about the relationships of the experiencers with what was being experienced, but also that it viewed the relationships between them as having an inseparable link. This non-dualistic approach provided perfect alignment with my research goals and Research Question 2. Further, the context (Meet-Up) was at the core of the study as much as the object or the phenomenon (student leadership) and the participants (the student leaders). It also linked directly with my perceptions of the student leaders as expressed in the conceptual framework in Chapter 4.

The ontological and epistemological foundations of phenomenography link with or relate closely to the literature that I read for my study and reviewed in Chapter 3. In particular, I was reminded of the philosopher Justus Buchler. Buchler's (1951) claim was that all people are unique individuals; they are the sum of their own reality. People's reality is the accumulation and assimilation of all that they are and all that they do. For him, it was about how individuals assimilated experiences, situations and ideas to be who they were, which in turn determined the directions they took and the judgements they made. By extrapolation, people are different from one another, and they therefore experience phenomena differently.

In light of these points, I considered my choice of inquiry method not only suitable but also useful, relevant and well-aligned: the phenomenographic method is considered appropriate for research that involves participants' conceptions of a phenomenon. It is also considered a suitable approach for research that explores social phenomena (Sin, 2010): student leadership in Meet-Up was certainly a social phenomenon. Phenomenography would allow the second goal of my study to be achieved by facilitating the discovery of the variations on the participants' collective conceptions of the phenomenon of student leadership. By using the phenomenographic method of inquiry to provide answers to the second research question, I believed that my research would, in addition, allow me to tell a story, the story of a particular PAL program called "Meet-Up".

5.6 Phenomenographic research: critiques, quality and ethical considerations
5.6.1 Critiques of phenomenography and phenomenographers

Phenomenography has reached "a surprising degree of popularity" (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 321) in recent years. In higher education research, this can be explained by its contribution to the student learning experience through its useful findings for teaching practice (Tight, 2015). In addition, the use of phenomenography has stimulated the ongoing development of its methodological and theoretical base. For this reason, Tight (2015) stated that phenomenography can be thought of as a "more rigorous form of qualitative research" (p. 14), arguing that, in addition, guidance can be found about how to carry out each stage of the process, thereby ensuring its rigour. The current amount of research utilising phenomenography confidently hints that these developments will continue (Tight, 2015). Yet phenomenography, has received its share of criticism and the role of the researcher across phenomenographic research processes has been contested.

Some commentators criticise the unavoidable subjectivity of the phenomenographic researcher; others embrace and even laud it, arguing that that is what makes phenomenographic research powerful and honest. Regardless, from the outset of the study – that is, in declaring the purpose of and the motivation for the research and in beginning the preparations for the study – the researcher needs to be aware of her role (Collier-Reed et al., 2009). This awareness results in commitment to the development of trustworthiness in the research that builds and maintains sound and transparent relationships among the various aspects of the study (Collier-Reed et al., 2009).

In addition, the researcher needs to maintain an openness throughout the study to variations in the way that the phenomenon could be understood (Sandberg, 2005). This

includes not only the object or phenomenon under examination and the research purpose; but also the collection and the analysis of the data, including the conduct of the interviews, the transcriptions and the establishment of the categories; the study's outcomes; and ultimately the presentation of the findings (Collier-Reed et al., 2009). This demonstration of trustworthiness is vital if the research is to be considered or utilised by others upon its completion (Sandberg, 2005).

Critiques of phenomenography suggest that phenomenographers undertake their research studies using a variety of different approaches to phenomenography. Ashworth and Lucas (2000) argue that, because phenomenography attempts to enter the lifeworld of the research participants and to see the phenomenon empathetically from their viewpoint, different research procedures are indeed warranted. Debates about and critiques of phenomenography "typically neglect to address the issue of accepted variance in phenomenographic practice" (pp. 321-322). The result of this variance is that there can be a lack of awareness of the variations, leading to confusion and misunderstandings about the nature of phenomenography itself (Åkerlind, 2005). Yet it is important that, in order to counteract misunderstandings, phenomenographers as qualitative researchers "resist the pressures for a single gold standard" (Denzin, 2009, p. 152) in the way the research is conducted.

In relation to phenomenography, Ashworth and Lucas (2000) argued emphatically that the "actual research practice…cannot – and must not – be seen as the application of a set of rules of procedure" (p. 307). They posited that it is important, however, that techniques are used whereby the phenomenographic researcher can ensure that her focus is on the participants' accounts of the phenomenon by justifying the research procedures that she adopted throughout the study (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). In addition, phenomenographers can make clear the interpretive steps they used in the phenomenographic process by detailing the steps and providing examples (Åkerlind, 2005). Generally, the processes that qualitative researchers follow to demonstrate the quality of their work which were outlined in Subsection 5.4.3, will also guarantee integrity in the research of phenomenographers, although there are further measures that phenomenographers consider important.

5.6.2 Demonstrating quality in phenomenographic research

Demonstrating the validity of a research study is considered to be essential by many researchers (Sin, 2010), regardless of the paradigm guiding it or the orientation employed. Sin (2010) offered a simple explanation of validity as the "internal consistency of the object

of study, data and findings" (p. 308). Åkerlind (2005) put it this way: "Validity is widely regarded as the extent to which a study is seen as investigating what it aimed to investigate, or the degree to which the research findings actually reflect the phenomenon being studied" (p. 330). Yet, in phenomenographic research, the researcher is not so much concerned about whether the research outcomes mirror how the phenomenon appears in reality, but rather about how well the outcomes represent "the human experience of the phenomenon" (Uljens, 1996, as cited in Åkerlind, 2005, p. 330). That is, a phenomenographic result describes individuals' understandings or experiences of the phenomenon and not the phenomenon itself (Collier-Reed et al., 2009).

Collier-Reed et al. (2009) were adamant that the qualitative research orientation of phenomenography, and its use of an interpretive paradigm that is "by definition not objective" (p. 343), make objective measures of reliability and validity inappropriate in phenomenographic studies. Instead, "in some research approaches (in particular those with an interpretative epistemology [such as phenomenography]) trustworthiness has developed to become an important alternative for measuring the value of research and its effects" (p. 341). A researcher can engage in a number of measures or processes to ensure the trustworthiness of her research. For example, it is crucial that there is a clear statement of the research aim of the phenomenographic study (Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018), and that it is reflected in the appropriate use of its research methods and processes (Åkerlind, 2005). Indeed, at each stage of the study, the researcher can and should justify the appropriateness and quality of the method (Sandberg, 2005; Sin, 2010).

For instance, consideration of the quality of the research should begin at the outset with the development of clear, relevant research questions (Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018) that are consistent with phenomenographic inquiry (that is, they concern a social phenomenon). In addition, questions should be open-ended to allow participants scope to describe how they experienced the phenomenon; the use of "how" and "what" wording encourages this. Reference to authoritative sources in the explanation of the phenomenographic steps undertaken in the study indicates trustworthiness (Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018). Other measures to demonstrate the quality of the research include the provision of a comprehensive and balanced literature review, noting any gaps in the literature. Such strategies when employed by phenomenographers demonstrate integrity throughout the research process as well as the accuracy of their conclusions (Collier-Reed et al., 2009; Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018).

5.6.3 Ethical considerations

The phenomenographic researcher clearly has ethical considerations to contemplate during the course of the research process of the study, and discussion of these has been dispersed throughout this chapter. The literature typically reinforced the difficulty, even the impossibility, of eliminating all researcher assumptions, influences and points of view in relation to the subject or phenomenon under study, which is generally considered by qualitative researchers to be the benefit of subjective inquiry and interpretation.

Yet, there are a number of ethical considerations that relate specifically to the collection of the data and their analysis. To address them, it is important that the researcher maintains trustworthiness, integrity and quality. Indeed, a researcher can adopt an ethical disposition throughout her research, and be as clear, explicit, open and transparent at every stage of the research process as she can, undertaking self-checks and balances such as self-awareness, review, reconsideration and re-examination at every stage of the research process. It is incumbent on the researcher to be mindful of the guidelines underpinning phenomenographic research that were outlined in Section 5.5, ensuring the data are collected, analysed and interpreted in accordance with that advice. Adherence will ensure that the study is researched ethically, and this was what I undertook to do. To guide me in this endeavour, I developed a table that is presented in Appendix 2.

5.6.3.1 Faithfulness and integrity

Phenomenographic research relies for rigour and integrity on the researcher initially recording as faithfully as possible in the interviews just what the interviewees meant (Prosser, 2000). In a phenomenographic interview, the phenomenon of interest is investigated through "joint exploration" (Sin, 2010, p. 313). To minimise the personal influence of the researcher in these interviews, and indeed to assist in ensuring that they remain a co-creation or a joint exploration, researchers can follow a number of simple steps (Sin, 2010).

Firstly, the researcher can ask follow-up questions for clarity in order to ensure that she does not make assumptions about the interviewees' meanings. The researcher should provide participants with time to consider and reflect throughout the conversation, and ensure that she listens attentively and empathetically to all responses. In addition, the interviewer should avoid asking leading questions by asking more general or open-ended questions, and also by asking interviewees to explain or describe what they mean in more detail. By following such procedures, the researcher can mitigate against revealing her "bias" and obtain "more elaborate descriptions and richer data" (Sin, 2010, p. 314).

5.6.3.2 Second-order perspective

There is, however, one simple means by which the researcher can ensure that her research accurately and faithfully represents the meanings of the participants. This approach harks back to one of the integral, underpinning features and strengths of phenomenography, and that is the focus on the second-order perspective (Marton & Booth, 1997). Taking the second-order perspective involves the researcher walking in the shoes of the participants, as it were – looking at the phenomenon through their eyes and living the experience "vicariously" (p. 121). If the researcher is mindful of this aim and conscientious in her determination to use this second-order lens, then she will deliberately, purposefully and continually focus only on the ways that the participants describe the phenomenon, intentionally stepping back from and suppressing her own notions of the phenomenon. If this perspective is "explicitly adopted" (p. 121) throughout the research process, the researcher's own potential biases are minimised and the phenomenographic approach is being conscientiously followed.

5.6.3.3 Bracketing

As noted above, it is important that the researcher maintains an open attitude throughout the study, "eschewing preconceived ideas" (Collier-Reed et al., 2009, p. 348), and being receptive to variance and difference in the participants' descriptions. Bracketing is one means through which the researcher can set aside her own assumptions (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Because it is the participants' views that are explored in phenomenography, anything that could detract from this focus should be bracketed (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). This includes presuppositions such as earlier research findings, the influence of ratings scales or a desire on the researcher's part to uncover the causes of some of the experiences described by participants (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). In particular, Ashworth and Lucas (2000) cautioned the researcher against moving too hastily from a consideration and review of the descriptions to the final determination of the structure within the set of categories of description. They warned that, in the interests of tidying up the outcome space, this haste could result in the disregard of certain descriptions that do not easily fit the categories, with the result that the participants' descriptions are not faithfully represented within the data.

Ashworth and Lucas (2000) also suggested that any attempt to bracket will be only "partially successful" (p. 299), as setting aside some assumptions will always be difficult. Thus, in lieu of an intense focus on bracketing, researchers could open themselves up to ways in which they can attain empathy with the participants. The achievement of empathy, by definition, requires detachment from one's own world in order to engage imaginatively with that of others. Another concern is that some behaviours enlisted in the pursuit of bracketing

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can have a negative impact on the rapport between the researcher and the participants. For example, in the interviews, some researchers are so mindful of the need to suppress their influence that they do not allow themselves to laugh at the participants' jokes or even to deliver many verbal prompts (Ireland et al., 2009).

5.6.4 My relationships with the phenomenon and with the participants

Marton and Booth (1997) posited that it is crucial that the researcher from the outset acquaints herself with the phenomenon under scrutiny. She should consider how it appears in the literature. She should also be aware of its features and of the ways that people may have experienced it but, at the same time, she should "still be open to further developments" (p. 129) in the ways that it is experienced. Indeed, according to Booth (1992, as cited in Collier-Reed et al., 2009), a sound knowledge of the phenomenon under study is essential. She claimed that a phenomenographic study could be likened to a journey of exploration; the researcher should prepare by being knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study, just as an explorer would be as informed as possible about the terrain to be traversed.

I had worked in PAL for many years when I embarked on my doctoral study; I therefore had considerable knowledge of the context and the phenomenon of student leadership. It can also be assumed that I had personal views about or perceptions of the phenomenon under study. However, Fusch and Ness (2015) reminded social researchers that their own personal worldviews, as well as those of each of the participants, are present in all their research, sometimes unintentionally, and sometimes not.

This is generally not considered to be a problem; in fact, some phenomenographers consider that it lends additional insights (Cousin, 2009; Jackson, 2013). For example, McGrath et al. (2019) argued that, in a qualitative interview:

> …the interviewer should not be viewed as someone contaminating or biasing the data, but rather as a co-creator of data together with the interviewee, where the interviewer's previous knowledge may play an important part in understanding of the context or the experiences of the interviewee. (p. 1004)

And, certainly, as my research was an interpretive, qualitative, phenomenographic study, the findings emerged from the interaction between me as the inquirer and the interviewees. My role was therefore an important, dynamic element in this research that I needed to recognise, disclose and make explicit as an integral component of the story, which I am doing here and have done throughout.

In addition to my familiarity with the context, I also knew all the participants whom I interviewed in their roles as student leaders. "Building rapport and establishing comfortable interactions" (McGrath et al., 2019, p. 1003) with interviewees are considered crucial to enable and encourage participants to "provide a rich and detailed account of the experiences at the heart of the study" (p. 1003). Knowing the participants prior to the study is considered to make the building of rapport easier. In my study, the participants appeared to talk freely; I was someone who knew them personally and who knew the program well and what their role entailed.

For example, Jo recalled when I had popped into her first Meet-Up session, observed her nervousness and reassured her afterwards that she had conducted it very well:

> *Meet-Up gave me a lot of confidence to be able to speak in front of people. I remember when you came to my first session, and to see even myself the progression from my first session, even to the end of my first semester, just being able to get up in front of those six or 10 students who came along, and be able to talk to everybody that came along.* (Jo)

From there, her confidence continued to grow, and sometime later during her time as leader, when I asked her to speak about Meet-Up to a group of academics and professional staff, she agreed immediately. She prepared an interesting and informative presentation, delivering it with confidence and enthusiasm.

5.7 Data collection: What I did and how I did it

5.7.1 What the phenomenographic research process involved: The interviews

The "methodological strategy" (Tight, 2015, p. 2) commonly adopted by phenomenographers to collect data is the interview; in particular, participants are interviewed individually (Jackson, 2013). The interview "should be regarded as a conversational partnership" (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 302) or a dialogue (Brown & Baker, 2007) that is generally audio recorded (Sin, 2010). In traditional phenomenographic interviews, questions are few and generally open-ended and comparatively unstructured (Bruce, 1994; Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018), allowing interviewees to decide on the aspects that they consider most relevant (Bowden, 2000) and to elaborate on them. This process seems to afford the participants a feeling of freedom through which to respond (Bruce, 1994). Subsequent questions encourage interviewees to expand on or to explain as fully as possible their understandings and experiences of the object of the research (Trigwell, 2000).

5.7.1.1 The purpose of the interviews in my study

The student leaders in the Meet-Up Program were interviewed specifically in order to find out their conceptions of the phenomenon of student leadership. Determining the different ways in which they understood or experienced student leadership would allow me to construct a response to Research Question 2. I accepted the assumption clearly outlined in the phenomenographic literature, as was noted above, that the Meet-Up leaders may well have had many different conceptions of student leadership.

5.7.2 What I did: The selection of participants

The phenomenon under study in my doctoral research was student leadership. As previously explained, Meet-Up was the PAL program that I coordinated for a number of years until my retirement from USQ, and it was still in operation when I left. Meet-Up was dynamic and had grown, changed and adapted to the requirements of the university and the needs of its students. I chose to select participants for my study from Meet-Up, and I was clearly provided with a large pool of student leaders from which to choose.

Fusch and Ness (2015) posited that qualitative researchers should avoid striving for quantity in data collection, and indeed, in a phenomenographic study, the researcher is not aiming for a representative sample (Cousin, 2009). Nevertheless, the researcher needs to interview a sufficient number of people to capture the range of diversity (Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018) and variation in understandings of the phenomenon (Bowden, 2005). A sample size of "at least 10 interviews seems to be a sensible minimum", according to Cousin (2009, p. 192). This was endorsed in Trigwell's (2000) interview with a phenomenographic researcher, where 10 to 15 was considered the minimum, with the researcher/participant stating that she normally interviewed 15-20 people (p. 66). Mindful of the "too few versus too many participants" argument, Bowden (2005, p. 17) posited that 20-30 participants are generally an ideal number, being enough to cater for variation and yet not so many that data management becomes difficult and onerous.

Certainly, more is not better; it is best to seek the optimum number as "rich data is many layered, intricate, detailed, nuanced, and more" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). Heeding both Trigwell's (2000) and Bowden's (2005) advice, I opted for the middle ground and settled on a number that I considered would be optimum for my study; I chose to interview 20 Meet-Up leaders. I believed that that number would meet Bowden's (2005) two criteria: it would cater adequately for the richness (Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018) and variation in the data that are sought in phenomenographic research, while at the same time being manageable. I

purposively selected the leaders whom I invited, and, in the interests of the transparency and "intentionality" (Sandberg, 2005, p. 208) that underlie the phenomenographic approach, I outline the process here.

I selected some from each of the four USQ campuses that had offered Meet-Up during my time as coordinator. I chose leaders who had been in the position for a number of semesters; this, however, was not possible with the most recently acquired campus, Ipswich. It had been a USQ campus only for a few years when I began my study, and hence Meet-Up had been running for only a few semesters there. All student leaders who were invited to participate agreed to do so willingly – I could tell this from their tone. Many told me that they were more than happy, even excited, to be asked.

The participants were contacted in the first instance by telephone. This was followed with an email message explaining my research and its purpose, and with a participant information sheet attached. There was no compulsion to participate, and current student leaders were assured that their decision about whether or not to participate and their responses would not impact on their future prospects of employment within Meet-Up. The body of the email message and the letter are replicated in Appendix 3. This procedure had the approval of the Ethics Committee at the university, as stated in the Introductory chapter.

5.7.3 How I did it: The structure of the interviews

Marton and Booth (1997) considered research to be a learning experience for the researcher. And, certainly, I wanted the interviews to be casual, informal conversations rather than regular "interviews" that hint at a power imbalance or a hierarchy of positions, with the interviewer controlling or leading the discussion. I therefore wrote very broad, open-ended questions (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000) with simple, uncomplicated vocabulary and a structure that I anticipated would encourage thoughts and words to flow from the student leaders without any concern or worry (Bowden, 2000). I wanted the student leaders to feel comfortable about addressing the questions in the manner they chose: in other words, being at liberty to focus as much as they wanted on the aspects they considered were the most important to them (Bowden, 2000).

I encouraged them to take as much time as they wanted, as I needed to be confident that the leaders had had sufficient time to describe fully their understandings and experiences (Trigwell, 2000). To assist them in their reflections in the interview, I also engaged in "empathetic listening" (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 302), and in the use of prompts to encourage the participants to elaborate and clarify their thoughts in order to assist me in

capturing their understandings accurately. Yet it needs to be said that, while the researcher has been at pains to set aside her assumptions to ensure that she reveals no personal bias and is not distracted from her focus on the participants (as was noted above), she needs to reinsert herself back into the process here, and to apply her knowledge of the phenomenon or the context to some degree, in order to detect the descriptions that may benefit from further probing and elucidation (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

I was also mindful of advice from McGrath et al. (2019), who reminded medical researchers that, "Interviews should not be conceived as informal chats with interviewees; instead, they are data-collection instruments which can be used to penetrate a number of research questions" (p. 1002). I ensured that I kept focus and direction, and I did not become totally immersed in the conversation to the extent that I lost sight of the purpose, by glancing at my questions when appropriate and checking that I asked them all.

5.7.4 How I did it: On the day of each interview
5.7.4.1 The preliminary part

Each participant and I had a brief chat before we began the interview proper. Then, after having firstly confirmed that the participant was happy for it to be recorded, I set up the recording device and recorded our interview. I began with some preliminary questions, largely demographic in nature. The intention was to ease into the main questions by helping the participants to feel relaxed and comfortable. Certainly, Ireland et al. (2009) considered it crucial to set the interviewee at ease, and they used such statements in their interviews as "There are no wrong answers here" (p. 6), and "I want you to feel I am the learner here" (p. 7). I incorporated similar statements in my information to the participants, as noted below.

McGrath et al. (2019) concurred, suggesting that: "It is usually a good idea to open the interview with a few 'easy' questions to make the interviewee comfortable and to familiarize him/her with the subject of the interview" (p. 1002). Thus, my preliminary questions were aimed at encouraging the participants to begin to focus their thoughts on Meet-Up and the experiences that they had had in the program.

Preliminary questions
1. What year of study are you in? And what degree are you studying?
   Or: How long is it since you graduated? What qualification did you graduate with?
2. Are you happy with your choice of career/discipline area?
3. What are your goals in life?

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4. Did you go to university straight from school? If not, how long was it before you went to university? What are some of the things that you did in that time?

5. How old are you? (You do not have to answer if you would rather not.)

6. How long were you/have you been a Meet-Up leader? How many semesters?

7. What campus/es? What courses were you/have you been leader in?

8. Were you involved in online Meet-Up? Were you/Have you been involved in the Meet-Up Student Community or any other Meet-Up iteration or program?

5.7.4.2 The main part

For the main part of the interview, as remarked above, I had developed some broad, open-ended yet in-depth questions (Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018). My intention was to encourage the participants to dig deeply into their memories of their time as Meet-Up leaders, and to share with me their reflections. I believed that, by doing so, they would provide me with a wealth of data from which I could extract answers to my three research questions.

Despite the good relationship that I believed that I had with the student leaders, I acknowledged that, as I had been the Meet-Up Program Coordinator and their supervisor, there was the potential for a perceived power imbalance to result in some participants feeling constrained (Jackson, 2013). I therefore decided to precede the main questions of the interview with an explanation that the conversation was all about them, using the statement below as a basis for my wording.

Introductory statement to the in-depth questions

I am now going to ask you very broad questions. They will ask you to think about and reflect on student leadership at university. The main questions will be semi-structured or quite broad. Take as much time as you like to respond. There are no right or wrong, good or bad responses in this study.

Please don't assume or acknowledge any prior knowledge on my part. I may ask you to explain further or clarify something you said in more detail so your meaning is clear for the purposes of the study. I want you to be happy that you have said everything you want to say about the topic of the questions.

The main questions

The questions that I asked the student leaders to prompt conversation were as follows:

Question 1: Tell me about yourself.

Prompts to encourage thoughts if needed:

- What did you do before coming to university?

- What is important to you as a person?

- What kind of student were/are you?

Question 2: Tell me about any roles that you had at university where you helped students.

Question 3: What did/do you enjoy about these roles?

Question 4: What did/do you do to contribute to students' motivation and learning?

Question 5: Do you think that you made a difference?

Question 6: What was it about these roles that involved leadership?

Question 7: Describe your picture of an effective student leader.

Question 8: Do you think you were an effective leader?

Question 9: Do you think that you would be the same person you are today if you had not become a Meet-up leader?

Additional probing questions

In a phenomenographic interview, participants are asked to "express their qualitative understanding of the phenomenon under investigation" (Bowden, 2000, p. 10). And, in order to encourage them to reflect a little more on what they said and to reveal more fully their understandings, Bowden (2000) suggested that sometimes additional questions can be asked to encourage the participants to describe their thoughts in greater detail. I developed the questions below and used them for this purpose.

Can you give me an example of that?

What did that involve?

Can you tell me more about that?

What do you mean by that?

When did you become aware of that?

So tell me more about Meet-Up.

The conversations that we shared took between 40 and 60 minutes.

5.8 Data analysis: What I did and how I did it

According to Åkerlind (2005), the variance in phenomenographic practice is particularly apparent in the data analysis stage, and more specifically in the development of the categories of description and the outcome space. In response to this and to the need for

integrity in my research, I explain and make explicit my approach to and my behaviours in all stages of the analysis of the data.

The interviews provided me with a wealth of data in the form of descriptions that were offered in words or dialogue. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and then analysed. In alignment with phenomenographic inquiry, the ultimate aim of the analysis of the dialogue data was to identify a parsimonious yet differentiated number of categories of description of the student leaders' collected conceptions of the phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997; Tight, 2015), which in this study was student leadership. To achieve this aim, data processing or analysis in phenomenography is extremely iterative (Tight, 2015). The subsections below outline the rationale behind the processes of data analysis that I followed in order to be faithful and true not only to the participants' conceptions but also to the phenomenographic approach.

5.8.1 Transcription

Transcription is the process of changing the spoken word to written text. In my study, the audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim; this is in accordance with common practice in phenomenographic research (Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018; Sin, 2010). As Sin (2010) noted, "transcription is the interface between oral and written data. It is also a juncture of the research process where the reliability and validity of the data may be questioned" (p. 314). Verbatim transcription provides the best available means of assisting with this reliability and validity as it includes "anything that is likely to affect the interpretation of meaning" (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 304). In addition, as another measure that sits in accordance with phenomenographic research and that contributes to the research being conducted in an ethical manner by preserving the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants (Sin, 2010), pseudonyms were used.

5.8.2 Initial analysis

It is accepted widely in the literature that the phenomenographic process is "strongly iterative and comparative" (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 324). The transcription data are continually read and reread, sorted and resorted, grouped and regrouped (Åkerlind, 2005; Bowden, 2000; Jackson, 2013; Prosser, 2000). While the researcher is naturally going to see (perhaps anticipated) patterns emerge right from her first hearings of the audios and from her first readings of the transcripts, she needs to keep her mind open to new and different ways the

participants may have of conceiving and describing the phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2005: Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

Indeed, transcription, according to Ashworth and Lucas (2000), is not a "neutral process" (p. 304), and the audio recordings should be listened to several times during the initial analysis rather than the analysis always being undertaken directly from the transcripts (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). In addition, Ashworth and Lucas posited that the researcher should engage initially in a "sensitisation" process, immersing herself in the experience of each participant and "dwelling with" (Wertz, 1983, as cited in Ashworth & Lucas, 2000, p. 304) her train of thought in order to develop empathetic understanding. This seemed to make sense to me, and so I engaged in doing just that, as did Ireland et al. (2009), who claimed to have listened to the audio recordings up to 10 times in some cases (p. 8).

5.8.3 Detailed analysis

The transcribed responses then need to be gone over multiple times (Durden, 2017; Sandberg, 2005), and from them a set of categories of description of the phenomenon is derived. The idea of phenomenographic research is to treat all interviews or their transcripts as a single text (Cousin, 2009) or, in other words, as a whole (Prosser, 2000, p. 45). Looking at the transcripts as a whole can be time consuming and difficult, particularly for individual researchers who are researching alone (Åkerlind, 2005), but they can nevertheless "make a substantial contribution to our understanding of a phenomenon" (p. 328). Some researchers therefore embrace a "decontextualized" (p. 327) approach to the data analysis process (Åkerlind, 2005).

This involves the selection of excerpts or quotations from the transcripts that represent particular meanings of the phenomenon or that address the phenomenon more directly, and these are combined into the "pool of meaning" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 133) where they are analysed further. The idea of phenomenography is not to focus on individual descriptions or conceptions, but to put them into the collective pool where they can be arranged into categories and where the variation can be determined (Trigwell, 2000). Phenomenographic research reaches "a description of variation, a description on a collective level, and[,] in that sense, individual voices are not heard" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 114). The outcome of a phenomenographic study is therefore a set of the "collective variations of participants' conceptions of the phenomenon of interest" (Sin, 2010, p. 312).

To clarify: the Meet-Up leaders' descriptions of the ways in which they understood and experienced the phenomenon of student leadership were termed "conceptions". After

reviewing and collating these conceptions, I distilled them into a parsimonious set of the "qualitatively different meanings or ways of experiencing this phenomenon" (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 322), or, in other words, a set of the collective conceptions of university student leadership. This final set is called the "categories of description", and I opted to use the term "conception" when referring to each category.

My analysis and interpretation of the data (the interview audios and transcripts) firstly yielded a number of descriptions of the "ways of understanding and experiencing" student leadership that I defined as conceptions. In the interest of interpretive awareness, the transcripts should be revisited as many times as needed (Durden, 2017; Sandberg, 2005), and the categories adjusted to ensure that they are "stable" (Prosser, 2000, p. 37) – that is, that the researcher is convinced that her interpretation is accurate. I therefore reread and reconsidered the data and my interpretations multiple times until I settled on the final set of the categories of description that I defined as the conceptions of university student leadership held by the Meet-Up leaders.

5.8.4 The process that I used

Outlined below are the steps that I used in the process of analysing the data in my study. The process was based on the literature quoted and acknowledged previously in this chapter.

1) Familiarisation with and immersion in both the audio recordings and the transcripts; listening and reading multiple times. I listened to the recordings five or six times, and read the transcripts more times than I could count or recall.

2) Identification of statements that significantly described ways of understanding the phenomenon. These quotations formed the "pool of meaning" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 133); statements were checked and reconsidered multiple times.

3) Consideration of each quotation in relation to the other quotations; the researcher's perspective shifting from that of individuals to the collective. Each quotation now had two contexts: the individual interview; and the pool of meaning. Individual quotations were checked against the others in the pool of meaning.

4) Comparison of significant statements of description from the pool of meaning; grouping of those that held similarities into one category; categories differentiated from one another by variance in descriptions, often slight. Categories were reconsidered and regrouped where necessary.

5) Review of transcripts that did not align; a decision made about whether they did fit a category or alternatively needed to be treated alone as a separate category.

6) Capture of the essence of each statement of description in each category and development of a "label" that expressed that essence for each category. These were checked and rechecked multiple times.

7) Review and comparison of each category of description and consideration of the relationships between them and with the phenomenon.

8) Confirmation of the final set of categories and their relation to one another to become the outcome space of my study.

5.9 Making sense of the study: Sensemaking as process

5.9.1 From phenomenography to sensemaking

My third research question was about making sense of the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership. While I was content that phenomenography would realise the aim of my study and would yield appropriate and comprehensive answers to Research Question 2, I considered that the framework of sensemaking would contribute an additional element to my research findings – one that linked the phenomenographic outcomes with a little more nuanced or detailed explanation of the personal development I had observed in the Meet-Up leaders, and how to make sense of it. I believed that, once the final set of categories had been established through the phenomenographic process, I could legitimately employ another research process – namely, sensemaking – in order not only to address Research Question 3, but also to contribute a further richness and depth in meeting Research Goal IV.

My hunch was sanctioned in some of the literature. For example, Bowden (2000) made the point that, once the final categories of description have been determined, "the phenomenographic process per se has ended" (p. 14). Bowden's (2000) intention was to warn researchers against taking the categories of description out of "the interpretive paradigm in which phenomenography sits" and into another without taking due account of the practices of the second paradigm. Tight (2015) touched briefly, too, on this notion that once phenomenographic findings have been established and dispersed they are subject to change and development, which can lead to "an increasing diversity of interpretations and understandings of the idea/s" (p. 14), and new ideas can then "spin off" (p. 14) from them. I considered that these comments endorsed my intention of extending the phenomenographic outcomes of my study and of linking them with sensemaking. (In doing so, I would heed

Bowden's [2000] warning above, and be diligent about taking account of the practices of the sensemaking process.)

5.9.2 Interpretation and sensemaking

In Section 5.3, I provided an explanation of interpretivism as the paradigm underpinning the way of addressing my first two research questions. Weick (1995) claimed that interpretation is "a component of sensemaking" (p. 7), but he specified that the terms are not synonymous. He clarified the elemental differences between interpretation and sensemaking. These revolve around interpretation as being to do with text or words. That is, a person translates or renders another's words into an explanation that uses different words (Weick, 1995), and this requires a degree of knowledge or understanding of the topic on the part of the interpreter. It is all about making a discovery and describing it. Sensemaking, as applied in this study, is more concerned with authorship; it is about invention rather than discovery. This makes interpretation and sensemaking complementary ideas (Weick, 1995), and it offers a fitting link with my study.

5.9.3 What is sensemaking?
5.9.3.1 The origins of sensemaking

While sensemaking is commonly associated with Weick (Snowdon, 2005), its origins can be traced back to Dervin (Naumer et al., 2008) who introduced a methodology she called "Sense-Making" into the field of communications. Dervin (1999) shifted the focus of research in information seeking and use from the system to the user. In other words, her emphasis was on the individual and the way that s/he understood a message rather than the message itself, whilst at the same time recognising that an individual's personal traits and experiences would influence this understanding (Naumer et al., 2008). Dervin (1999) was clear that the Sense-Making Methodology mandated that the researcher, as an information seeker and user, also needed to apply the sense-making process to herself. In addition, attention in Sense-Making should focus on the past, the present and the future (Dervin, 1999), and it should be mindful of "time, space, movement, gap, power, force, constraint, constancy and change" (p.746).

Since Dervin's earlier writings, others have contributed to the research and literature, and the spelling in general became sensemaking (Pirolli & Russell, 2011). Pirolli and Russell (2011) identified three "substantially different" (p. 2) perspectives to the concept of sensemaking: (1) representation construction, the restructuring and re-presentation of

information, which is based on process flow (effort and structure of the analysis) and representational schema used to understand data; (2) a data/frame perspective, based on how psychological and social phenomena are useful in summarising "context" (p. 4), using a backward-looking process of prior events and a forward-looking mental simulation to predict the future; and (3)] collaborative sensemaking, when "teams of people work together to create a collaborative sense of the information they hold" (p. 5). Pirolli and Russell (2011) considered that both Dervin's (1999) and Weick's (1995) perspectives belonged under the second category, with Weick's additionally fitting the third grouping.

According to Weick (1995), sensemaking is "best described as a developing set of ideas with explanatory possibilities" (p. xi). As such, events or phenomena that are a surprise, an interruption or a breakdown, or a discrepancy from expectations and predictions, or that just do not fit the existing flow of events, would benefit from the instigation of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). While Weick (1995) focused on sensemaking in organisations, there are many parallels with other contexts, such as that of my study. Weick (1995) stated uncompromisingly that the concept of sensemaking literally means "the making of sense" (p. 4); it is therefore "to be understood literally, not metaphorically" (p. 16). His framework appealed to me immediately because of this literal definition and intention. In addition, his framework was appropriate for my study as it applies readily to the ways that individuals seek meaning within an organisational setting such as a university. In this section, I have referred constantly to Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework.

5.9.3.2 Sensemaking according to Weick (1995)

According to Weick's (1995) framework, there are seven distinguishing properties or steps in sensemaking: "grounded in identity construction; retrospective; enactive of sensible environments; social; ongoing; focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy" (p. 17). The sensemaker moves through each of these elements as she makes sense of the situation that she is facing.

Weick (1995) offered what he considered to be examples of instances of sensemaking such as the "battered child syndrome" (p. 1), which took until 1961 (p. 1) to be acknowledged in the literature, although diagnosis and treatment were begun in the 1950s through an organised team approach that included social workers (Weick, 2006). Initially, there was reluctance, even refusal, on the part of paediatricians and physicians to believe that parents could engage in such behaviour. With social workers (who were very well aware of such abuse) on their interdisciplinary teams, the paediatricians and physicians could finally recognise the behaviour for what it really was – and they finally had people on their teams

who could advise on ways to respond to it. Consequently, they became more alert to the signs or cues that such incidents were occurring. Social workers "spoke differently" (p. 1724) from physicians, and the vocabularies in use changed from "brittle bones" to "child abuse" (p. 1723), and from "multiple unsuspected trauma syndrome" to "battered child syndrome" (p. 1724), which facilitated more appropriate diagnoses, treatment and management. This story emphasised Weick's (2006) insistence that ways of speaking, vocabularies and labels are important not as tools of representation but rather as tools to help people to cope with, organise and manage situations.

A wildfire in August 1949 that occurred at Mann Gulch along the Upper Missouri River in the Helena National Forest in Montana in the United States, in which three firefighters survived and 13 died (Weick, 1993), offered a very different example. Initially, the forest fire was labelled a "10 o'clock fire" (p. 635), meaning that it would take until 10.00 am the next day to be contained, and, by this label being assigned to it, particular expectations about the kind of fire that it was, and certain procedures regarding how to respond to it, were initiated. The fire, however, resisted its framing, and intensified. The foreman, Dodge, urged his team to drop their tools so that they could move more quickly away from the raging fire, but they did not. Weick (1993) claimed the reason was that the members of the team were unable to extricate themselves from the frame of habits and routines according to which they had always worked as firefighters. But Dodge, by rejecting accepted firefighting procedures that were clearly not working in that extreme, life-threatening situation, and instead by thinking outside those limitations and reacting swiftly, saved his own life.

Sensemaking is about people determining what is happening or has happened, and then deciding how to act or respond. Another way of explaining it is that sensemaking responds to the question, "What's the story here?" (Weick, 1999, p. 140). And "the second equally important question is, 'What do I do next?'" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). Once a routine has been disrupted, past experiences and existing frames no longer serve as useful or relevant guides to the actions that are needed, and the situation requires the actors to think differently. Like the paediatricians in the child abuse story and the firefighters at Mann Gulch, actors need to discard or drop previous beliefs in order to enlarge their capacity to take appropriate action (Weick, 2006).

Responding to a situation involves the actor considering knowledge already learnt from past experiences, and, based on that, becoming open and flexible in order to improvise an appropriate course: indeed, "a union of Ad Hockery with some know-how" (Ryle, 1979,

as cited in Weick, 2006, p. 1729). Sensemaking therefore involves stepping out from previous assumptions or learnt frames and set role systems to determine new ways of responding to current and future situations. In addition, sensemaking is made easier when the actors in the situation have trust in one another and communicate with honesty in "respectful interaction" (Weick, 1993, p. 642). Here I could see clear links with the Meet-Up leaders' manner of enacting their role.

5.9.4 How sensemaking related to my study

In my study, the third research question was: How did the Meet-Up leaders make sense of their development as people, students and leaders? From my review of the literature, I was aware that a number of researchers included sensemaking (Weick, 1995) in their analysis of various leadership studies, and I determined that the application of Weick's (1995) characteristics of sensemaking may also assist me to address this question. As I explored Weick's seven elements, I could see that they all applied to my study to varying degrees.

For instance, the participants in the study were obliged to engage in the second element, retrospection, when I asked them about their experiences as Meet-Up leaders. In addition, as part of their role as Meet-Up leaders, the participants had been required to reflect continually on what had occurred in the sessions. Sometimes they revealed that the sessions did not go to plan; their past experiences as students or student leaders were not always enough to prepare them for what the students wanted or needed in the session, and quick thinking and improvisation had been required (Colville et al., 2016). This exemplified the seemingly paradoxical element in relation to hindsight or retrospection in sensemaking – forward-thinking (Weick, 1995). Like Dervin (1999), Weick (1995) posited that sensemaking can extend beyond the past and the present into the future, yet with mindfulness (Weick, 2006). Sensemaking is indeed "a mixture of retrospect and prospect" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413).

Continual reflection on the sessions they conducted which was required of the Meet-Up leaders contributed implicitly to the fifth characteristic, the ongoing nature of the sensemaking. Meet-Up was a peer-led platform for learning, based on interaction and collaboration with others; the social element of sensemaking was therefore inherent in the basic philosophy and framework of Meet-Up. The association with the third component, enactment of sensible environments, was not immediately intuitive to me and required more thought on my part, but it quickly became apparent that it did indeed align with Meet-Up. To

express it as simply as I could, the Meet-Up leaders assisted with the "enactment" (Weick, 1995, p. 30) of the environment or context that was the Meet-Up program by fulfilling their role, thereby contributing to the development of the program; at the same time, their engagement in the program – indeed, their enactments – contributed to their development as student leaders.

The sixth element is all about cues, extracted cues, which are "simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (Weick, 1995, p. 51). An observation – that is, something that is noticed and is specific – is then associated with a more general idea, and the two inform each other. Sensemaking, as opposed to noticing, is the interpretation of what the noticed cue means. The context comes into play, as it affects not only what is extracted as a cue, but also how the cue is interpreted. I offer an example to clarify. In the Meet-Up context, student leaders sometimes behaved in their sessions with confidence, even if they did not feel confident; this typically occurred at the start of their first semester as leader. And because they delivered their prepared activities and interacted with the students with (assumed) confidence, the students responded favourably. The Meet-Up leaders noticed the students' appreciation, and interpreted that as indicating that their activities and advice were useful to the students, which resulted in the student leader growing in confidence for subsequent sessions.

But, of all the characteristics of sensemaking, the first aspect, grounded in identity construction, was clearly particularly relevant. Indeed, formation of identity was implicit in the Meet-Up leaders' growth and development as they moved from being novice student leaders to experienced student leaders. This progression was part of the foundation of my study, and it was mapped and presented in Chapter 4.

Just as interpretation operated on two planes in my research, as outlined earlier in this chapter, sensemaking too existed on two levels. Firstly, the Meet-Up leaders tried to make sense of their student leadership practice by reflecting on their experiences in order to respond to my interview questions, which in turn would provide me with answers to the unasked yet implicit question: "What's the story here?" While the student leaders were not faced with an extreme, life-threatening event such as the wildfire at Mann Gulch, nor did they need to coordinate and manage a group of people to respond to a serious social issue like child abuse, they nevertheless worked through the phases of sensemaking to explain their experiences in Meet-Up.

For example, in the conversation that we shared in her interview, participant Anna described her experience as a novice student leader and what she initially regarded as its

impact on her grades. She had been a solid high distinction grade student, but, on becoming a Meet-Up leader, her grades dropped to distinction and credit levels. She wondered: "…*what's happening to me? I thought I was broken. I thought something had gone wrong*". With contemplation, she realised that it was a "*change for the better*" – that her life was more balanced and she preferred it that way. She also realised that she needed to become more self-aware, and that the issue of slightly lower grades was one of time management. Her sensemaking process resulted in her taking the action of moving to part-time study: "*and now I'm a better leader for it, and I'm better at my studies for it, and everything's better*". Thus Anna had unknowingly employed the sensemaking process as a result of her enthusiasm for both the role of student leader and her chosen discipline.

I, in turn, strove to make sense of the participants' responses in order to further my understanding of their experiences in the student leadership role, and also their personal development. And this is where the seventh and final element, driven by plausibility rather than by accuracy, came into play. Put briefly, sensemaking is not about accuracy, which is difficult to achieve given the ease with which cues can be distorted by interpersonal competencies and the vagaries of memory and reflection, in addition to the influence of the context. Rather it involves arriving at plausible, coherent and reasonable conclusions. What is important in sensemaking, according to Weick (1995), is attention to two properties: that is, stories must explain; and they must energise.

As noted, I had developed a conceptual framework to explain what I believed happened to the leaders, but I needed to discover if it were accurate. My intention behind the use of phenomenography was to allow the leaders to describe and explain their understandings – that is, their conceptions of the phenomenon. The next step for me then as sensemaker, as well as researcher, was my intention to make sense of their descriptions or conceptions, which were the phenomenological outcomes. But, in addition, I needed to examine the transcripts again for clues to any personal development in the leaders. As an example, I turn again to Anna's transcript. In our conversation, in response to the question, "Do you think that you are an effective leader?", Anna had said:

> *I do think I am an effective leader. I definitely think I'm better than what I was one year ago, and two years ago. I've improved over those years. From feedback from my students as well, I have grown a lot over the past few years….I'm still doing a lot of emotional growing, so I think I've definitely become more effective in terms of I have a better idea of what students actually want from me, want from the sessions….For*

me, having three years [as Meet-Up leader] *has really helped me grow into what I think is the best leader I can be at this stage*.

Listening to these words and then reading and rereading them, these two snippets demonstrated to me, firstly, that Anna had made sense of her position as Meet-Up leader and had a clear picture of what effective student leadership looked like. She had determined what was needed to fulfil the role effectively, and she had acted on it. And, secondly, she had developed or grown as a student leader, as a student and as a person: "*Meet-Up changed my life. It really did....I feel much more confident in my own shoes doing day to day stuff now that I've had the experience of being a Meet-Up leader*". Thus, I had the answer to the question "What's the story here?" in relation to Anna. Further application of the process of sensemaking to my study is described in Chapter 8.

5.10 Summary of the chapter

In this chapter, I firstly reviewed my study, confirming that the research goals and research questions aligned with one another and with the aim of the study. This allowed me then to progress to explain the study's interpretive research paradigm and its qualitative research orientation, and how they were an appropriate choice to facilitate the achievement of Research Goal II and to answer Research Question 2.

As a research method of inquiry, phenomenography, with its focus on the individual experiences of people, was what initially captured my interest, and then the phenomenographic notion that there can be degrees of variation in the ways that individuals understand or experience the same phenomenon sealed my decision. I ensured that my study demonstrated and maintained integrity, credibility and trustworthiness by using strategies that included vigilance about the quality of all procedures followed throughout the research, and by ensuring that I followed phenomenographic processes.

I outlined my procedure for selecting the participants to be interviewed and for conducting the interviews, and the questions I introduced into the conversations with the student leaders were provided. The process I undertook to analyse the data presented by the dialogue in the interviews was subsequently explained and outlined, and some examples were provided.

The chapter then moved to an explanation of sensemaking, its origins, characteristics and its relevance to my study. Sensemaking is about people making sense of what has happened and making decisions about how they can move forward, using both retrospection and improvisation as needed. Sensemaking was the key to meeting Research Goal III and to

addressing Research Question 3. Again some examples were provided to demonstrate the appropriateness of this process to my study. The next chapter begins the analysis of the interviews that I conducted with the participants.

6 THE PARTICIPANTS: WHO THEY WERE

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, I addressed the first part of Research Question 1: "What was the Meet-Up program…?" by describing and explaining the program that provided the context for the study. In Chapter 2, as I described the Meet-Up program, I also outlined in general terms the role of the student leaders. But the student leaders are the subject of this thesis – they are the important people around whom the whole study has been centred. For that reason, the participants in the study, as a selection of Meet-Up leaders, demand a chapter in their own right. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to address the second part of that research question, "…and who were the Meet-Up leaders?" It builds on the broad, initial account by presenting a more detailed picture of the student leaders who participated in the study. In addition to addressing the second part of Research Question 1, a second purpose of this chapter is to introduce each of the study's participants, and to discuss some of the characteristics they shared.

This chapter draws on the participants' responses to both the preliminary questions and the first four in-depth questions. While rereading and reviewing the participants' responses to the preliminary questions in the interview transcripts in order to explain accurately who the student leaders were and to introduce each participant in the study, I became acutely aware that the words of the participants were offering a clear association with both the Input and Environment sections of my conceptual framework, which is outlined in Chapter 4. Therefore, a further purpose of this chapter is to confirm the integrity of the conceptual framework by offering examples from the participants in the study that demonstrated this alignment. In meeting these three purposes, this chapter builds a bridge from Chapters 2 to 6. And, to continue the analogy, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are the pylons that provide the support, strength and integrity on which the bridge can sit solidly and firmly.

6.2 Acknowledgement of the participants

Without the contribution of the student leader participants, this study would not have been possible. Significantly, their responses have enabled me to present a study rich in data because the people interviewed appeared to be relaxed in the conversations that we shared, and seemed to give their thoughts and feelings with little reservation. As was noted in the previous chapter, the interviewer's knowledge of the context and of the participants' experiences plays a significant role in qualitative interviews (McGrath et al., 2019), and,

certainly in my case, with this study undertaken after many years of working in the field, and in particular as program coordinator, I had a wealth of knowledge of both the context and the student leader role, and indeed a fondness for the program that was also addressed in the previous chapter. In addition, the participants were all individuals who had been Meet-Up leaders for a number of semesters, and accordingly I knew them well. These factors may have contributed to their sense of ease in the interviews.

6.2.1 Introducing the participants: Their preliminary responses

The information provided in the following section was volunteered by the participants during the initial part of the interview, either in response to the preliminary questions or as part of a discussion that extended from their responses to those questions. The personal insights that the participants shared gifted me a fascinating and insightful glimpse into the lives of these people; some aspects of their characters shone through right from the start of our conversations, helping me to make sense of their self-identities. From these initial responses and discussions, I have written a brief introduction to each of the participants, under pseudonyms, that paints a picture of these individuals who agreed so readily to tell their student leadership stories. The pictures were a preview of further revelations that came later in the interviews in response to the first four in-depth questions.

6.3 Now…meet the participants

These are the stories that they told me. They are presented here in chronological order of the date of our interview. The date of each of the interviews was based solely on the participant's availability as well as mine.

6.3.1 Anna

Anna was the first person whom I interviewed, and she was quite excited to be a part of my research. She was part way through an Honours degree in statistics, having completed a Bachelor of Science degree, majoring in mathematics, statistics and physics. Anna went straight to university after finishing high school, and she was happy with her choice of discipline. She was 21 years old. Meet-Up was her first job: "*I've been a student pretty much my whole life*". She remembered being offered the position of student leader and being both scared and excited. She told her parents: "*Oh my gosh, I have a job*".

Anna had been a student leader for six semesters across five courses in total, some of them concurrently. She noted that she had developed an interest in teaching after becoming a

Meet-Up leader. Anna had been involved in the generic model called "the Meet-Up Student Community" as well as the mainstream course-based model of Meet-Up, both on campus and online. She was based at the Toowoomba campus.

6.3.2 Carmel

Carmel was 21 years old, went straight to university after school and was in the fourth year of a Bachelor of Business and Bachelor of Laws double degree. She was happy with her choice of qualification. Her goal was to become a solicitor, but additionally, on having become a Meet-Up leader, she stated that she was now considering further study and perhaps becoming an academic. Interestingly, this desire mirrored the responses of some of the participants in the McPhail et al. (2012) study outlined in Subsection 3.2.4.1. She wanted to work for a while first, though, because the academics with whom she connected most were the ones who made learning "*practical*" from their own personal experiences. Carmel was based at the Toowoomba campus. She was in her fifth semester as Meet-Up leader in a number of Law courses, offering both on-campus and online support, and she had been a leader in the generic Meet-Up Student Community.

6.3.3 Malcolm

Malcolm was 21 years old. He had just completed a Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) degree, and he was very happy with his choice of discipline. He explained that he had six different hobbies for which, at the start of each year, he planned six goals, one goal for every two months. He then would make a weekly planner to reach those goals. Such planning kept him "*on track*". His "*dream*" goal was to work at somewhere like NASA in robotics. Malcolm had gone straight to university from school and did not have any significant jobs while at school; his father had encouraged and supported him to commit fully to his school work.

Malcolm remembered receiving the call that invited him to become a Meet-Up leader because he was "*so excited*". Malcolm was based at the Toowoomba campus. He was a student leader in mainstream Meet-Up for six semesters in a number of courses and programs, both on campus and online. He was also a leader in the Meet-Up Student Community. At the time of the interview, Malcolm had an academic position as he was tutoring in faculty.

6.3.4 Dawn

Dawn had recently entered the workforce when we had our interview; she was 26 years old, and had graduated with a Bachelor of Nursing degree. She was happy in her current job, but she was unsure where her goals in life lay. She thought that nursing would be part of her future, but she commented that she would like "…*to use her skills for unpaid work as well*". Dawn had finished school after Year 10; she stated that she lacked "personal confidence", and was "just keen to start working". She found, however, that the jobs that she took had little "*mental stimulation*", and were not "*rewarding*" or "*challenging in any way*". Subsequently, Dawn elected to study a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) course. Australian TAFE centres are government-run, and offer vocational courses that teach skills in a variety of occupations. Completion provides the student with a certificate or a diploma, and the hope of a better chance of attaining a position in that field of work.

Some of the teachers at TAFE with whom Dawn had contact encouraged her to consider university. Her aim was to study occupational therapy, but her results did not allow her entry to that program. She opted instead to study nursing, and found, on completion of her first year of studying it, that she was really happy with her choice. Dawn was a course-based, on-campus Toowoomba and online Meet-Up leader for four semesters, and she had also been a leader in the generic Meet-Up Student Community for one semester.

6.3.5 Lance

Lance was another student leader who went to university directly after finishing school; he was 21 years old. He had nearly completed his Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree, majoring in applied mathematics and statistics, and he was very happy with his choice, but his original intention had been to study education and become a high school teacher. His goal in life was broad: to be "*really happy in what*[ever] *career I do*".

He was employed at the time of the interview, and he was enjoying it because it involved "the type of nerdy stuff that I like with maths and stats and numbers", and also because it was health-related, and Lance enjoyed knowing that the work was helping people. He also stated that he enjoyed discovering new things, and that what he wanted out of life was to be "…*always learning, always interested and always helping people*". Lance was a course-based Meet-Up leader for six semesters running sessions on campus in Toowoomba and online; he was also a leader in the Meet-Up Student Community.

6.3.6 Wanda

This participant was employed, having graduated with a Bachelor of Education secondary teaching degree, majoring in physics and the study of religion, and she was enjoying teaching. She was 21 years old, and she had enrolled at university straight after completing school. She stated that her religion was an important part of her life: that it was "*still a big part of me*" and a "*massive influence*". Her goals in life were quite specific: to work in the field of theology, possibly in the curriculum area of religion, or by studying a Masters degree. Wanda was a mainstream Meet-Up leader for four semesters on campus at Springfield, and a Meet-Up Student Community leader also at Springfield for one semester.

6.3.7 Theresa

Theresa had graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce degree, majoring in accounting, the previous year, and she was working in that field. But a few months of work in a corporate environment had told her that, while she was enjoying the work, she was missing an element that had made her happy, and that was helping people. Having been a Meet-Up leader, she realised that teaching had become a "*passion*" for her. She chose therefore to study for a teaching qualification in order to bring together her existing strengths, knowledge and skills in accounting and her desire to help others to learn. Theresa's goals involved "*being there for her kids*" and being a good role model for them. She declared that this meant "having a good career and a stable environment for them".

Theresa was 31 years old. She had left school before completing Year 11, initially to work for her parents and family, returning to school twice a few years after having her own children, each time without successfully completing it. To gain access to university, Theresa completed a tertiary preparation program. She had been a Meet-Up leader for six semesters, firstly delivering on-campus sessions at the Fraser Coast campus. After USQ sold that campus, Theresa moved her family to be closer to the Springfield campus where she resumed both her study and her Meet-Up leadership, offering on-campus Meet-Up sessions at Springfield. She was also a leader in the Meet-Up Student Community.

6.3.8 Lynette

This participant had completed a Bachelor of Nursing degree two years before we had our conversation, and she was very much enjoying nursing. She was 38 years old. Lynette had finished high school after Year 9. She returned several times to try to complete her schooling, but without success. She stated: "*I did not find the environment conducive to the*

way that I learned". She had studied a number of courses from TAFE and other providers, largely in the field of education, where people had encouraged her to undertake a Bachelor of Education degree.

But, ultimately, nursing was her choice of field. Lynette was a program-based Meet-Up leader for four semesters at the Fraser Coast campus. She was also offered the position of senior Meet-Up leader or LAMP at the Fraser Coast campus, and, in this role, she encouraged and advised Meet-Up leaders there.

6.3.9 Caroline

Caroline had completed a Bachelor of Laws (Honours) degree five years prior to the interview. She was happy with her career choice, stating that it was "*a good foundation*" for any future studies, and that it had given her "*a lot of options*". Since then, Caroline had completed a Graduate Certificate of Art and Design, and she was enrolled in a Doctor of Philosophy program in Law. She had taken a career path in academia, having worked as a lecturer since the completion of her degree. Her goal at the time of the interview was to work in the administrative and management area to experience the "broad spectrum of the university".

Basically, Caroline acknowledged that her goals in life were closely tied with her career or academic goals. Caroline had moved to university study straight from school, and she was 26 years old. She had been a Meet-Up leader in the mainstream model for four semesters.

6.3.10 Jo

Jo was two years out from having completed a Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree, majoring in biology, which she studied straight after graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree, majoring in environmental sustainability. She had known from quite a young age that she wanted to do something involving the environment. Jo had taken a gap year before beginning tertiary studies. She had been ill after completing school, and the gap year allowed her to get her health back on track. She was 24 years old.

Jo was happy with where she was working at the time, as it was for her an "*intermediary job*" before jumping back into further study. Jo had been a Meet-Up leader in the mainstream program in both on-campus and online sessions for eight semesters, and she had also been a leader in the Meet-Up Student Community.

6.3.11 Grace

Grace had just completed a Bachelor of Education primary (Honours) degree, and she had been teaching during the last year of her study. Her goals were to study a Doctor of Philosophy program in her area of interest, which was students with mental illness, to "*educate other teachers*", and to help students to achieve their goals and their potential. Her personal goals were to be the best mother that she could be for her two children, providing for them "*…so that they can fulfill their own potential and be happy more than anything else*". She looked forward to being "*an old, happy grandmother*", but to "*still be working for years*". Grace was 45 years old.

After completing high school, Grace took a gap year, doing a variety of jobs. Because she did not get into the university of her choice to study nursing, she deferred her studies and completed hospital training as a registered psychiatric nurse, and she worked in an inpatient adolescent unit. After suffering an injury, she was no longer able to perform clinical work, hence she accepted a position as a pharmaceutical representative. While working as a psychiatric nurse, Grace had seen the impact of appropriate support in schools on students with mental illness, particularly anxiety disorders, and she had decided then that she would like to study education.

Grace married, had a family and worked as a teacher aide in a special education unit before starting her education degree. Grace had been a Meet-Up leader at the Springfield campus for six semesters. She was involved in mostly on-campus sessions, but she had offered some online support as well. She had also been involved in the Meet-Up Student Community as a leader for about four semesters.

6.3.12 Florence

Florence had been a graduate for four years at the time of our conversation. She had completed a Bachelor of Nursing degree, and she was at the time of the interview enrolled in a Bachelor of Midwifery degree. She was very happy with her career choices. Florence's ultimate goal was for everyone in her family to be happy and healthy, and, she said to achieve that: "*I believe I need to have a good foundation of knowledge and skills that give me a good career. Something I'm happy in so that I'm happy in myself. If I'm happy, it rubs off on everyone else*". Coming "*from a background of under-privilege*", she noted: "*I have achieved a lot more than I ever thought I would in one lifetime already*". She added that she loved studying and learning new things. Florence had completed her schooling in the United

Kingdom, but her family could not afford to support her through tertiary studies, which had been her hope.

Florence married, studied successfully to complete diplomas at a number of colleges, worked in retail and community health, and had children, before migrating to Australia, where she began nursing studies. Florence was 36 years old. She had been a Meet-Up leader for three semesters at the Fraser Coast campus, offering mainly on-campus, course-based sessions.

6.3.13 Charles

Charles was 45 years old when we conversed. He had just completed the second year of a Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) degree, and he was very happy with his choice. He had had many and varied experiences before he chose to undertake tertiary study. He had left school after Year 11, thinking that school was too difficult, only to discover that "*the workforce was a lot harder*". Charles shared with me a very personal journey of being caught up in a religious "*cult*" that he was "*pulled into*" by his mother. He was involved with this church for 20 years before he began seriously to question the church's beliefs and his own, finally choosing to leave, which was very difficult and was a decision that was not undertaken lightly.

This experience led to his interest in studying "*people's mindsets*", how they think, "*why they do things the way they do*" and why they "*hold on to ideas that may not necessarily be true or accurate*". Charles was a student at the Ipswich campus, offering course-based, on-campus sessions. He had been a student leader for two semesters, and he was also a Meet-up Student Community leader.

6.3.14 Miranda

This participant had just completed a Bachelor of Laws degree and a Bachelor of Commerce degree, majoring in accounting, and she was "*definitely*" happy with her career choice. She was 22 years old. Miranda stated that her goals in life had always focused on study and her career: "*so obviously I want to get somewhere with my career. I don't really know what that is yet, and I'm hoping that will become clearer*". As well as wanting to be a lawyer, she wanted to do further study and to have a family.

While Miranda had gone straight to university from school, she had worked in a number of jobs. She had been a dance teacher for a number of years while at school, and also in her first few years at university. She then accepted a position in a law firm, where she

worked for the last few years of her tertiary study. Now, after her recent graduation, she had begun a position in a law firm in another Australian city, where she was very happy. Miranda had been a mainstream, course-based Meet-Up leader for about nine semesters, delivering sessions both on-campus and online.

6.3.15 Mack

Mack was about half-way through a Bachelor of Business and Commerce degree, majoring in economics and finance. He was 29 years old. Mack had left school at the start of Year 12 to do a trade in meat retailing or butchering, but after eight years he decided he had had enough; he found he did not like many of the people with whom he had to work. His mother had completed a Masters degree in psychology while raising Mack and his two siblings, and he decided that he could probably study too. He completed a high school equivalent course at TAFE and began his tertiary studies. He had originally enrolled in a Bachelor of Laws degree, but he had not enjoyed it at all. He transferred to Business after a study break and found his "*passion*" in economics, and "has stuck with that since".

Mack stated that he wanted "…*a career I can be proud of, and my children can be proud of*". He did not want to be "*a parent who just did their job because you get paid money. I want to come home from a job I enjoy*". Mack had been a Meet-Up leader in a number of courses for two semesters, delivering on-campus and online support from the Toowoomba campus.

6.3.16 Robert

Robert had completed a Bachelor of Business and Commerce degree, majoring in accounting and information technology, two years prior to the interview. He was "*absolutely*" happy with his choice. His goals were "*marriage, children, work*". He wanted to finish his Certified Practising Accountant (CPA) qualification, and to work with young people. He was 24 years old. Robert had gone straight into tertiary study from high school, but he had worked in his parents' accounting firm in a small country town in the school holidays.

Robert had been a Meet-Up leader for five semesters in the course-based iteration of the program, offering on-campus Toowoomba sessions; he was also a leader in the broader Meet-Up Student Community. In addition, Robert had been a leader in Murri Meet-Up, which offered peer support to Indigenous students from Indigenous student leaders.

6.3.17 Phyllis

Phyllis was in her last semester of a Bachelor of Business and a Bachelor of Laws double degree. Phyllis was 23 years old. She was now happy with her choice of discipline, but she had previously experienced periods of regret. She had been under pressure from her school and her parents regarding which study path she should take, and she stated that if she had taken a gap year, she would probably have studied teaching, which was what she had really wanted to do. Now she was reconciled with her choice, but she mentioned that she may consider a teaching degree in the future.

Phyllis shared a personal story about her family, who were Zimbabwean. When Phyllis was young, her parents lost everything, settling in Australia and "*having to start again at the age of 40 in a new country with nothing*". As a result, Phyllis noted: "*I think my goals* [in life] *are slightly warped by wanting to make sure that my parents are okay in their old age*". This experience had made financial security a prominent goal for her. Another goal was to have a career that she loves. "*I'm always chasing something new and exciting, or something that satisfies me in a challenging and interesting way*". Phyllis was a Toowoomba Meet-Up leader for five semesters in the mainstream program, running on-campus sessions and offering online support; she was also a leader in the Meet-Up Student Community.

6.3.18 Nina

Nina had just completed a Master of Engineering Science degree. She was very happy with her choice of mechanical engineering as she was "*into machines*". Nina was 24 years old. Nina's home and family were in India, where she had completed a Bachelor of Technology degree straight from school. She then wanted to study abroad for her Masters degree, and she thought that Australia was a good option as she had some family here. As a child, Nina had wanted to be a pilot; then her goal was to become an aerospace engineer. Her brother had encouraged her to study mechanical engineering as a good foundation for aeronautical studies. She anticipated that her goal would take about 10 years to achieve.

Her other goal was to help people, which was something that she had always done. Nina had been a volunteer at her school and her church in activities and festivals. Lack of funding at government colleges meant that any extracurricular clubs or seminars were run by volunteers. She had volunteered in a number of club activities and in the coordination of various seminars, and she had also been a class representative in her undergraduate studies. While still in India, she also chose to go to institutions where people with mental disabilities and homeless people "*were kept*", and she just talked to them. Nina was a Toowoomba Meet-

Up leader for two semesters in the course-based model, delivering on-campus and online sessions; she was also a leader in the Meet-Up Student Community.

6.3.19 Lena

This participant was in the third and final year of a Bachelor of Nursing degree. She was 46 years old, and she was happy with her study choice. Lena's childhood in South Africa was "*very troubled*". Her stepfather wanted her to leave school to go out and earn money, and so she did. She married young, and then moved to the United States of America with her husband. They lived there for only a few years before electing to emigrate to Australia. Her number one goal in life was to be happy. She had had other goals, including ensuring that her children completed school successfully, and that they were in good relationships and were happy, which they were. After working full-time in Australia for about 10 years, Lena was made redundant.

She decided to apply for tertiary study, because: "*It's time that I do something that I always wanted to do*". She also applied for jobs, telling herself that she would do whatever came up first. That turned out to be studying nursing at USQ. Lena was a Meet-Up leader at the Ipswich campus, delivering on-campus sessions for four semesters. She was also a leader in the Meet-Up Student Community at the Ipswich campus, and she was a senior leader or LAMP for the Ipswich and Springfield campuses. She could see a link between the guidance and advice that she gave to student leaders in her role as a LAMP and her career goal of nursing management.

6.3.20 Phoebe

Phoebe was in her second year of a Bachelor of Laws degree, and she was planning to continue through to her Honours year. She was happy with her choice, having already tried tertiary study twice. She had initially gone to a particular university straight from school, but personal issues prevented her from completing that program. She had subsequently enrolled in a different discipline area at another university, but she decided that she did not "*mesh with her peers*", reconsidered her choice and joined the workforce for 10 years.

Her work taught her that there is a lot of injustice in society, and she subsequently developed a desire to study law to help these people: "*If I can help others to understand what options they have available and that sort of thing, I would find that more fulfilling, I think*". She then chose to study law at USQ. Phoebe was 32 years old. She had been an on-campus

Springfield Meet-Up leader for three semesters, and a leader in the Meet-Up Student Community also at the Springfield campus.

6.4 The pictures emerging from the stories

My intention was to allow the participants to introduce themselves; thus, I used their words and their responses to my preliminary questions. I was rewarded by introductions that revealed brief yet fascinating pictures of just who each of the participants was. And it is clear from these overviews that these people had diverse lived experiences prior to becoming Meet-Up leaders. But, before I engage in the phenomenographic stage of my thesis in Chapter 7 where I conduct the search for difference and variation in their thoughts about student leadership, I considered it important firstly to continue establishing just who these people were by discussing in this chapter the things that they told me were important to them, including any similarities.

To seek these similarities, I merged the participants' responses to the preliminary questions that formed the introductions provided above with the data from their responses to the first four in-depth questions. These questions can be located in Subsection 5.7.4.1. They were formed to encourage the participants to direct their thoughts inwardly to themselves as individuals: to think about what was important to them and the choices that they had consequently made with regard to study and learning. By exploring their responses to these questions, I looked for any shared intentions that would be revealed. And indeed, despite their varied life experiences to this point, there was one particular imperative that they did all share, and that was care for other people and the desire to help them. It was this particular element of who they were that resulted in their engagement in the program as student leaders. The following subsection explores this imperative.

6.4.1 The desire to help others: Some examples

The theme that ran constantly throughout the interviews was the inclination to help others. With some of the participants, this can be seen clearly in the responses to the preliminary questions as presented in the introductions above. Lance, for example, explained that what he wanted out of life was to be "*always learning, always interested and always helping people*". Theresa, despite enjoying the position she acquired on graduation, found that she was missing what had made her happy, and that was helping people. She chose therefore to return to study to complete a teaching qualification to align her knowledge and skills in accounting with her desire to help others to learn.

For some participants, the desire to help other people emerged at the start of the more in-depth questions when they were telling me about themselves and what was important to them (Question 1). Carmel, for example, was quite clear that what was important to her was "*to make sure you are doing what you can to help people….I realised that part of the reason why law appealed to me was that it was helping people – it was fixing problems*". Anna put the same aspiration in her own way as she laughed and said, "*I probably overly care for people. I always find myself wanting to do stuff for other people*". Dawn told me that she had initially begun helping her peers at university with technology issues and timetabling concerns in an unofficial capacity before becoming a Meet-Up leader. As a leader, what she liked about the role (Question 3) was "*helping other people to succeed.…Not that I'm saying they wouldn't have succeeded without me, but it was nice just to be there to help support more. Just to be someone they could turn to, if they wanted*".

For Wanda, the passion to help people "*just sort of grew in her*" from secondary school experiences, including a trip to East Timor. While there, she briefly taught mathematics to children and found that seeing their joy in learning "*was a lot of fun and life-changing*". Both Phoebe and Theresa had volunteered to help students in their disciplines prior to becoming Meet-Up leaders. Nina had given so much of her time to helping students to learn in a voluntary capacity in her school days; at university she continued to help. "*I like helping people, so it's like* [a] *Meet-Up leader is doing everything: helping students, kind of teaching, and it's all maths. I love maths*", she laughed. She also chose to become a Meet-Up Student Community leader because, as an international student, she had been shy and worried about making mistakes. She believed that other international students felt the same way, and she wanted to help them. "*A lot of international students came to me* [at the Meet-Up Student Community desk]. *Maybe asking silly questions, but still they came to me. I was happy about that*".

6.4.2 The links with the conceptual framework

Most Meet-Up leaders were placed in courses that they had enjoyed studying, as was clear in the above examples. For Jo, however, this was not the case. Not only was she aware that the course offered to her as Meet-Up leader was "*such a hated subject*", but she herself had not enjoyed it. So, by consenting to take on the role, she was "*able to help people through a course that I didn't necessarily want to do,* [which] *was great, and it was a fantastic opportunity to be able to help other students who were in exactly the same situation that I* [had been] *in*". This decision aligned directly with her earlier comment, "*If you are in a*

position to be able to take on a role, such as a leadership position, and be able to use your own skills and knowledge to help others, I think that's really important [to do] *because we need more of that*".

And suddenly, on rereading this transcript, I realised that Jo had just described in her own words her "inclination and passion to encourage peers and share a learning vision", by becoming engaged in a program that helped students to learn by utilising her "course knowledge and competence" and her "cognitive competence in her chosen discipline", combined with her "knowledge and experience of effective learning at university". In other words, Jo had directly aligned her reason for becoming a Meet-Up leader with each of the four characteristics that I had identified in the Input stage of my conceptual framework. This alignment is explained in the next section of this chapter.

6.5 The conceptual framework: The Input section

And so, as I read and reread these and other transcripts, I realised that the participants were offering me in their own words a fleshing out of what they had brought to the program – their own personal traits or characteristics – and that these closely matched with the four traits or attributes that I had included in the Input section of my conceptual framework. The first, course knowledge and competence, could be measured quantitatively by the students' results in the course that they intended to lead. On the seven-point grade scale used at USQ, a minimum of four was deemed suitable and appropriate for the aims of the Meet-Up program, as was noted in Chapter 2. Similarly the second requirement, cognitive competence in their chosen discipline, was a set requirement of the students entering the program that could be measured quantitatively – namely, the students' grade point averages (GPA's). Again, a GPA of four out of a possible seven was considered an appropriate minimum.

And, while most Meet-Up leaders had GPAs of six or seven in addition to high course results, there were some whose GPA and/or course grade were scraping the requisite four. These people were accepted into the program based on their responses to questions from the coordinator regarding their lower than desired grade; this too was noted in Chapter 2. In conversations with the potential student leaders, the coordinator sought to elicit if these individuals had determined the reasons for their marginal grades and if they indicated a persistence to overcome any future setbacks in their study plans. If these imperatives were apparent, the other criteria were met, and the applicant had been endorsed or recommended by the course lecturer and/or by past or current Meet-Up leaders, then the coordinator was content to welcome them as Meet-Up leaders.

This approach hinted at an association drawn within the literature on "teacher leaders" (Lumpkin et al., 2014), where it was found that the teachers who were offered leadership positions within schools espoused a "passion for student learning" (p. 60). It was also suggested that they displayed high levels of emotional intelligence (EI) that equipped them well for the role of building sound relationships with their peers and encouraging their growth and development as teachers (Lumpkin et al., 2014); EI is also considered important in other leadership types, as was noted in Chapter 3.

The other two characteristics in the Input section were personal traits or attributes that could not be easily quantified: inclination and passion to encourage peers and share a learning vision; and knowledge and experience of effective learning at university. Nevertheless, with another nod to the "teacher leader" (Lumpkin et al., 2014) literature, and to other literature outlined in Chapter 3 such as servant leadership and transformational leadership, these characteristics were considered by the coordinator to be equally important. It seemed now, on reflection, that the approaches, measures and procedures that I had undertaken in coordinating the program for a number of years, many of which were based purely on instinct, a deep consideration for the program and its exponents, and a determination to manage it in the best way I could, were, in fact, supported in the literature.

And, again, it was through conversation that I uncovered the evidence that I, as coordinator, sought. In conversations, the applicants for the Meet-Up leader positions were asked to divulge the reasons that they were interested in becoming student leaders. I was looking for demonstrated enthusiasm to assist peers, as well as an articulation of the applicants' commitment to learning and an interest in engagement with the university. For example, one of the participants in the study stated that "*It* [Meet-Up] *was another opportunity to get involved*". Indeed, in the coordinator's experience, the most reliable means of ascertaining whether or not applicants satisfactorily met the selection criteria and demonstrated suitability for the position of Meet-Up leaders was through the revelations from conversations with them. I gathered further examples from the participants to establish that the student leaders did indeed demonstrate these four attributes or personal characteristics.

6.5.1 Course knowledge and competence

Students who applied or were selected to be Meet-Up leaders in a particular course generally had achieved a high grade in that course. A four out of seven was the minimum requirement, as was noted above, but most had received a higher grade than that. Many of the

study's participants bore this out. Theresa, for example, disclosed in her interview that she had always set high standards for herself as a student.

> *I don't like failure, so I was not a "Just try to pass everything and get through* [student]". *I really wanted to learn everything I could. Even not just for the sake of getting the marks, but just to learn it. I really wanted to learn everything.*

Once at university, Theresa's motivation did not change; she still wanted to make sure that she was achieving marks that were the highest that she could attain.

This interest in and enthusiasm for learning generally extended to the particular courses that the Meet-Up leaders completed as part of their chosen program of study. It contributed to their exhibiting a solid understanding of basic course concepts and a surety in knowing that they had employed learning strategies that worked well, and that they could share this knowledge. This was apparent in the responses of many participants in my study. For example, Malcolm explained it like this:

> *As a student, I'd probably class myself as a passionate learner; I learn things* [be]*cause I'd love to know and I'd love to apply it and create things with it. I'm quite meticulous in how I learn because every little detail adds to the big picture, and when I've got the big picture I can then use it to create a robot or some type of control system, or things like that that I really love doing. So I'm very thorough in how I learn as a student, and I think that helps me teach others because the questions that they generally have, I've already thought* [about] *myself and found a solution.*

6.5.2 Cognitive competence in the chosen discipline

Most Meet-Up leaders had high GPAs, as was explained above; they also had a resolve to do well in their studies and to achieve high grades. Carmel stated, "*I work hard to achieve pretty high grades.*" She noted that she had seen students whom she knew did really well at school get accepted into university, but then they "*sort of dropped off*", whereas she was determined to "*stick with it*". While she found university study daunting at first, she continued to work hard and to achieve good marks, which gave her "*a lot of confidence*". Her self-talk included encouragement such as, "*You know, you can go even further with this.*"

By contrast, Lynette disclosed that she was "*a terrible procrastinator*" in her studies – a "*shocking last-minute person*". "*I could write an amazing assignment the night before. I used to love researching, but I would get off topic so often. I'd find something that interested me, so I'd spend hours reading about something that was fascinating, rather than actually what I was meant to be putting in an assignment*", she laughed. She revealed that her habits

were transformed when she changed from business studies to nursing, where there was a greater emphasis on sharing information with peers. Lynette divulged that, although she knew that Meet-Up leaders were appointed because they had done well in discipline-specific courses, she had learnt so much more in the role of Meet-Up leader. It helped to "*enhance my learning and reinforce everything that I had. I found that, by telling other people what I'd learnt, I found I retained the information.*"

6.5.3 Inclination and passion to encourage peers and to share a learning vision

With regard to the characteristic "Inclination and passion to encourage peers and share a learning vision (enthusiasm to join the program)", I had seen first-hand the students' delight despite trepidation in being invited to become Meet-Up leaders, a position whose brief was to help students with their learning. Interviewing the participants for my study confirmed that they did indeed experience this delight. "*I remember when I first got offered the position of Meet-Up leader for physics, I was like so scared, but I was so excited*" (Anna). A number of them were also quite humble. Phoebe, for example, remarked,

> *I was surprised and flattered to be asked if I would take on the role. And I thought, "Wow, that's pretty special to get the opportunity to be there to guide students"….And so, yeah, I guess I felt quite honoured, and that was the main reason why I jumped at the chance.*

In a similar vein, Phyllis said that she "*never really thought she would be considered a Meet-Up leader*". She added that in her "*first year subjects, Meet-Up was so valuable*". She continued:

> *And I remember thinking: "Those students are literally the cream of the crop. They've got the best marks, and they were so helpful". So when* [the academic] *approached me and asked if I wanted to do it, I sort of thought: "Really? Couldn't you find a better option"?* [She laughed.] *So I was very surprised that he had chosen me and quite flattered.*

Phyllis had been asked to lead a Meet-Up class targeted at international students that aimed to encourage and assist them with writing in English.

> *I remember thinking at the beginning of the semester: "I don't know how I'm going to do this. I don't know how these students are going to pass". Not because they don't have any knowledge of the course, but because they can't write it all down to answer a question.*

So I think that possibly the most satisfying [thing] *was getting to the point at the end of the semester where it wasn't just an introductory sentence* [that they could write], *but it was a full paragraph, and I found that really satisfying.*

But she added that the most enjoyment that she had as a leader was "*just the interaction*"; she enjoyed "*seeing the same people come in every week and having that laugh with them*". She also explained that she "*enjoyed a lot about it* [Meet-Up]. *I loved being able to see on somebody's face when they knew that (a) someone else had struggled with that, but also (b) that there was an end and they could understand that*". Similarly, "*They felt comfortable enough asking you because you weren't afraid to tell them, 'I also had trouble with that or things like that'*".

6.5.4 Knowledge and experience of effective learning at university

Some participants stated explicitly that their aim and motivation as Meet-Up leaders were to utilise their learning experiences to help the students coming after them "*to have an improved university experience*" (Lynette). Lynette stated, "*I wanted their learning to be easier. I wanted them to have better direction* [that we could provide] *from our perspective. We knew where things could be improved, from our own experience*".

Similarly, Lena revealed that she had felt quite lost when she began university, and so she had decided to find all the resources that she could to help herself to manage in such a new environment. As a Meet-Up leader, she took the opportunity to pass that knowledge on. She advised students: "*This is where you find that information, or this is who you go to for help*". She claimed that:

a lot of times, students won't ask for help. So it's identifying that they need help and then saying: "This is where you go to get it". Because I can't help everybody, but I can point then in the right direction.

Theresa enjoyed "*everything, everything, everything*" about Meet-Up. She commented that she made many friends through Meet-Up, which contributed to her developing a broad and diverse friendship network. She added:

Sharing in people's success is something that is very enjoyable for me. Particularly because you have the advantage of seeing people when they come to you. They think they're probably not going to get through the semester, or get through what they're working on. And, for you to just give them enough to hang in there,…when they succeed you feel like you succeed. And they'll come back and say: "Thank you so much"…

Theresa noted that she also enjoyed just being with people who faced the same challenges as she had, or being able to share her experiences with people who were having challenges, just to let them know that they will get there.

6.5.5 Links with the literature: The student leaders and who they were

And so, while I could find examples demonstrating that the participants brought with them to the Meet-Up program the four personal characteristics that I had outlined in my conceptual framework, I was drawn back to re-examine Jo's explanation of the reason behind her acceptance of the Meet-Up leader position. While it demonstrated a link between her reasons for becoming a Meet-Up leader and the Input section of my conceptual framework, it did more than that. It interwove each of the characteristics of novice student leaders together; it suggested that, while I had presented and discussed the personal traits in my conceptual framework as four separate qualities, they were actually manifested together in the novice leaders. And so, unknowingly, Jo had evoked Buchler's (1951) notion that people's realities are a blending of all their experiences and their personal traits.

Buchler (1951), whose work was discussed in Chapter 4, resonated with me because I accepted his premise that who people actually were, what made people individuals, was a weaving together of all their experiences and their personal characteristics. Buchler (1951) called these intertwinings "proceptions". Thus, Buchler claimed that individuals assimilated the experiences that they underwent with the ideas that they already held to become who they were at that moment in time.

6.5.6 The student leaders: Who they were linked with their ways of doing

Buchler (1951) had given me a mirror into the proceptual make-up of the participants that the Input section of the conceptual framework represented. And who the Meet-Up leaders were then, in turn, determined the next direction that they took and the resultant judgements that they made. By extrapolating Buchler's (1951) theory and applying it to the Meet-Up leaders, I argue that the people who chose to involve themselves in Meet-Up as student leaders had brought with them their own personal sets of traits, attributes and experiences of life and learning, as well as their own previous individual experiences. Indeed, the individuals who engaged with the program as novice leaders were a group of people with a set of commonalities, but who also all had their own sets of differing realities. The individual characteristics (procepts) of each of the novice leaders – in other words, who they were – impacted on and influenced how they behaved in the position of Meet-Up leader –

that is, what they did and how they did it. And this then formed the relationship that tied the Input section with the Environment section of the conceptual framework.

Thus, Buchler's (1951) theory aligned with, indeed reinforced, or even extended Astin's (1984/1999) Theory of Student Involvement, which I had used as the basic skeletal structure for my conceptual framework and which was outlined in considerable detail in Chapter 4. This relationship between Input and Environment is also a nod to other literature on which the conceptual framework was built. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) premise was that a person becomes engaged and involved in different environments, helping both to shape them and to respond to them. An extension of this, and an important theme in Bronfenbrenner's work, was the impossibility of understanding individuals and their processes in isolation from the context (Darling, 2007). And indeed it was Jo's words again that demonstrated this bond. Jo had described to me not only how the person she was had determined why she had become a Meet-Up leader, but also that who she was resulted in the "how she did what she did" in the environment that was the Meet-Up program.

6.6 The conceptual framework: The Environment section

The Environment section of my conceptual framework was the Meet-Up program, the context for the study. The Environment section detailed what happened once the novice leaders engaged with the program as student leaders. It has two subsections. It profiles the tasks that the Meet-Up leaders were required to complete upon their engagement in the program as leaders ("What they did: Involvement"), and the ways that they performed those tasks by utilising their personal characteristics ("How they did it: Integration").

6.6.1 What they did: Involvement

The desire to help people that the participants shared was not a surprise. The aim of Meet-Up was to help the students who participated in Meet-Up sessions to learn course content and concepts, and the leaders endorsed this aim by accepting the position. They planned, prepared and delivered activities that they believed were useful – that was their commitment as Meet-Up leaders – and those tasks were listed in the conceptual framework in the first Environment subsection, "What they did: Involvement".

But there was more to what they did than simply being involved in the program and fulfilling the role of student leader. As coordinator of the program, I had been informed by many of the Meet-Up leaders, many times and with much enthusiasm, of the pleasure that they felt in realising that their sessions were indeed helping students to learn: hence my lack

of surprise at this revelation in my study. My interest, however, extended further than this. I was keen to discover just how the leaders had helped the students with their learning. Did their actions and behaviours endorse the other subsection of the Environment section, "How they did it: Integration"?

6.6.2 How they did it: Integration

Again I reviewed the transcripts. I realised that what the participating leaders told me they did in order to help students to learn course content and concepts in their sessions, aligned precisely with the second Environment subsection of my conceptual framework, "How they did it: Integration". Indeed, as the participants explained in the interviews what they had done in their sessions, it became explicitly clear that on engagement in the program as Meet-Up leaders, they had employed the traits that they had brought to the program (Input) to help the students with their learning; that is, they integrated who they were into the role to perform it as well as they could.

For example, Dawn explained how she used her empathy and her course knowledge and competence to help students learn:

> *You might* [as Meet-Up leader] *be able to share some of your own struggles….I guess empathise with them or even maybe sympathise a little bit* [be]*cause you've actually been there, done that. And then show them the pathways to how you managed to get out of that situation.*

She continued with the advice that she used to give to the students: "*Maybe if you're struggling with a question, well this is what I did. You know, I went to see my lecturer. Or, you know, I looked up this resource.*" She summed up what she did by adding: "*I guess giving them the tools which might help them get out of a situation which they think is hopeless*".

Nina clearly used her cognitive competence and knowledge in her discipline and in the courses she led, combined with her past experiences of helping her friends learn, in combination with her enthusiasm to help Meet-Up attendees learn, to prepare her Meet-Up sessions. "*My sessions were useful to them. I just gave them tips to save time in the exam….I gave them tips* [on] *how to check the answer easily to make sure the answer is right*". She also prepared worksheets for the attending Meet-Up students, based on the questions that they received in their tutorials in the courses, and showed them the relationships between the study modules. In addition, Nina tried to "*build their interest towards maths*". She advised the students: "*If you just learn from the text, it's not good. You should relate it to something*

outside the textbook". She believed that if the questions she provided in her sessions were about real life, that is: "if they could relate it to something real, they can study better".

6.6.3 How they helped

The help that the leaders provided sometimes varied a little according to the discipline areas in which the leaders operated. For example, nursing studies are experientially based, and the students sought help with real world examples and opportunities to practise their skills. By contrast, law is very theoretical, and students wanted to see where theory and future practice would meet. These variations were frequently made explicit in the ways that the participants described their modus operandi as student leaders.

Despite such practical differences, however, the student leaders' Meet-Up sessions and activities were founded on the same aim: the provision of opportunities for attending students to develop their academic learning skills and their understandings of discipline-based concepts. For this aim to be realised, student leaders needed to plan, introduce and manage their activities in ways that they, as peers who had previously completed the course, believed would assist the students with their learning.

But it was the behaviour of the student leaders, and the manner and the attitude with which they conducted their role and carried out the requirements of being Meet-Up leaders, that were the crucial points of significance. Indeed, it was the caring manner and thoughtful ways of helping and responding to the students that provided a clear image of who the Meet-Up leaders were. They were, in simple fact, defined by the ways in which they carried out their role. In other words, with a nod again to Buchler (1951), who they were was how they did what they did.

Thus, a number of participants confirmed both Buchler's (1951) notion that individuals are a holistic blend of their traits and experiences and Bronfenbrenner's (1994) determination that people's actions and the contexts in which those actions take place are inseparable. As a result of this further endorsement of my conceptual framework, I decided to use the behaviours listed in the Environment subsection, "How they did it: Integration", as subheadings under which to proffer comments by the Meet-Up leaders as to how they had conducted their sessions in order to help the students who attended. Each subsection offers examples from the conversations that I shared with the participants in the interviews.

6.6.3.1. Activated what they brought (Input) to guide peers in their learning

The Meet-Up leaders demonstrated that they employed the Input trait of knowledge and competence in their chosen discipline, and the Input trait of knowledge and experience of

effective learning at university, in the ways that they managed their sessions. Caroline put it simply: "*It's nice being able to sort of share your own experience*". Lance agreed, stating that "Meet-Up was enjoyable just because you can see that you're helping students". He remembered that he used to say to students, "Let's see if we can find ways to help you understand it from a student's perspective". He explained: "A student's perspective looking into the course can be really helpful, just in explaining how the course is going to go".

Phyllis concurred. "*I think that having that student experience, and [with the advice] having come from someone who's been there*", helped to motivate students. "*I also found myself telling my own personal stories. So I'd say something like, 'Don't start this particular assignment the night before; it's not possible'*". She laughed and continued, "*You know things like that, because you've been there, you've done it. You've worked out what strategies work for you*". As another peer leader who had been there and done that, Grace worded her Meet-Up procedures more specifically. She assured students: "*I can break this apart bit by bit and this is something that I can do....You know it's all about finding the right strategy. No matter what your problem is, there'll be some solution*".

6.6.3.2 Demonstrated initiative, adaptability and flexibility in meeting the learning needs of their peers

While Meet-Up leaders were expected to conform to the requirements of the role, they were also encouraged to use their initiative to help students to develop their understanding of course content. "*We kept looking at different ways that we could make the revision for the exam fun. So we actually devised like a board game with the students – a bit like snakes and ladders*", but with "*syringes and bottles of pills*" and cards that were nursing calculations (Florence).

Lynette contributed to the students' learning in her sessions by passing on the decisions about which course topics and concepts would be discussed to them. She was convinced that they would engage in the sessions more and benefit from them more if they had a voice in what was covered. "*I handed the learning back to the students....Once it* [the agenda of each session] *was very focused on their learning and what their needs were, those sessions ran really, really well*".

6.6.3.3 Stimulated and inspired peers to achieve their common learning goals

According to Miranda, for some students attending Meet-Up sessions, stimulation and inspiration came simply from seeing the Meet-Up leaders as role models, and this served to motivate them in their learning. Explicitly, she claimed that: "*Sometimes just being there was a lot of motivation for them* [the attending students] *because they've seen you do it before,*

and they know you're also juggling all these other things, and I think for some people that's sort of motivation in itself – just to see someone who's successfully going through university…". She added that the way that the attending students were spoken to and treated was also important: "*Just treat them like any other student….Ask them, 'How's study going?'*".

Another way that the Meet-Up leader participants stimulated students in their learning was through reassurance, according to Lena. "*I think the biggest thing is to say, 'I'm with you; I know how you feel'. So it's that reassurance that they're not alone*", she added. Florence also commented that often students knew the work, but seemed to go to Meet-Up sessions for reassurance. As leaders: "*You're living proof that you can do this. You know, I'm a mum with kids and a husband and a mother-in-law….We're all in the same boat really*".

6.6.3.4 Offered encouragement and guidance to influence peers positively in their learning

A number of leaders noted the importance of offering leaning assistance through encouragement. For example, for Theresa, encouragement involved a positive mindset. She ensured that she greeted each student at every PAL session in a positive mood, and she encouraged the students to see things in a positive way too.

Encouragement came also through empathetic understanding. When there was a difficult concept to be learned, Lance would say: "*Yes, this part of the course is hard going, but you can get through it; we all did.…I think that a lot of students have found it good to hear you say, 'Yes, we all found this difficult'.…I think they found it useful hearing it from someone who's actually done the course*".

Help also came in the form of the Meet-Up leaders' activities demonstrating relevance: relevance within the course or discipline of study, or relevance to the positions that could be pursued after graduation. Phoebe mentioned that as a Meet-Up leader she was "*able to connect the dots between the theory and case law in the books*", and to "*show them the practical side of law, especially when students got a bit disillusioned*". She added that students can do all the work required, "*but, if they don't understand the reason why these things are important or useful for this degree,* [they] *lose motivation*". To encourage the students in his sessions, Malcolm used "*a real life situation when I could, or* [I] *just show*[ed] *them that it will be a step to somewhere where then they can use it*".

6.6.3.5 Showed strong empathy, remembering how they had felt as new students

Robert commented that he remembered his Meet-Up leaders from the time when he studied the course:

... and they helped me a lot. Like they made it seem simple....To have a student there to say, "We've done this; we've made it through; this is actually a lot easier than you think" – it just removed barriers essentially....So, when the opportunity [to be a Meet-Up leader] *came up, that was an opportunity to give back essentially. Try to emulate what they'd done with us.*

By contrast, Lynette's experience was different. She remarked that being a Meet-Up leader had developed her empathy for the students, but, while this was helpful in relation to their learning, she confided that her empathy for their situations could also sometimes create a problem. Some students shared their personal issues and "*emotional struggles*" with the leaders, and, while the leaders could show concern and sympathise and empathise, their training as Meet-Up leaders had instilled in their thoughts that they were not pseudo-counsellors. It was important, therefore, that they made sure that they directed students to other appropriate support sections at the university in order to find assistance with personal scenarios, and to try not to take on board the students' struggles emotionally or personally.

6.6.3.6 Articulated and demonstrated commitment to the program and to their role

Meet-Up leaders demonstrated that they were committed to the student, their role and the program; I had seen that dedication as co-ordinator before I engaged in my doctoral studies. In our conversational interviews, this commitment emerged explicitly. Charles offered an example: "*I don't mind putting in the extra effort. I've had one person come to me right when I was finishing* [my shift on the Meet-Up Student Community desk], *and I ended up spending, I think, over an hour with them.*" He laughed and added: "*after I was supposed to be finished, but again, see, I don't mind doing that sort of stuff because it is helpful for him*".

A number of participants alluded to the "lightbulb" or "aha" moment of the role when an activity in a Meet-Up session delivered clarity about a particularly difficult or confusing piece of course content for the students. These moments gave the leaders the reward of seeing the fruits of their efforts, as it were – the knowledge that they were indeed helping the students to learn. "*I think the best part is when you see that lightbulb moment when someone's just been frustrated at trying to learn something, but then the lightbulb comes on and it's just all too easy....It's very rewarding and satisfying*" (Mack).

The participants' words – that is, the data that I have provided above – did indeed seem to fit well under the subheadings that I extracted from the "How they did it: Integration" part of the Environment section of my conceptual framework. In addition, these illustrations of the participants' behaviours hinted at a close connection with the Input section; their

behaviours aligned closely with "What they brought" to the program as "novice leaders". In fact, they did more than hint. The participants' words offered links with both the Input and the Environment sections of the conceptual framework and with the literature that underlaid its construction. Thus, I posit that who the leaders were was evidenced by how they did what they did. But, in addition to that and equally importantly, their words now also allowed me to contend that these "novice leaders" demonstrated leadership traits and behaviours.

6.7 The link with leadership and the leadership literature

The literature review in Chapter 3 explored PAL research, student leadership theories and practices, and leadership literature in general as a foundation for my study. A thread running through the theories, despite their varying differences, was the acceptance that personal traits, learned behaviours and the specific context all contributed to the ways that leadership could be applied and made effective. As noted, I used the term "novice leaders" in the conceptual framework (Input) to describe the students who chose to engage with the Meet-Up program as leaders. It was appropriate because it signified their newness to the program in a leading capacity, and it captured the traits and attributes that they brought with them on admittance into the role.

It appeared now, however, from the extracts quoted above, that these "novice leaders", on choosing to accept the position of Meet-Up student leader, were already demonstrating characteristics considered in the literature to be leadership traits. These traits were further developed and utilised as they involved themselves in their role as leaders and undertook the tasks required of them that were represented in the conceptual framework in the Environment section under the subheading: "What they did: Involvement".

Furthermore, as the participants in the interviews explained the ways in which they had helped students to learn – that is, "How they did it: Integration" – they frequently provided examples not only of the personal leadership traits that they had utilised, but additionally of the leadership behaviours. However, they did this in many cases with what appeared to be no awareness that it was in fact leadership that they were describing. Their thoughts seemed to be focused simply on helping the students and on fulfilling their commitment to the role of Meet-Up leader.

6.7.1 Leadership examples from the study

To demonstrate the leadership qualities that the participants revealed that aligned with the leadership literature précis above, Sections 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 all offered a number of

examples. For instance, many of the participants showed empathy, a basic component of EI (Goleman et al., 2002) and a well-recognised trait of leadership, including servant leadership (Spears, 2004), where empathy is considered a particularly key element. From Caroline's "*It's nice being able to sort of share your own experience*" and Lena's "*I'm with you; I know how you feel*" to Lance's "*We all found this difficult*", participants mentioned ways in which they helped students by empathising with where the students were in their learning journeys from their own prior experiences.

Lynette, too, had offered examples of both servant leadership (Spears, 2004) and the relationship management element of EI (Goleman et al., 2002), noting that she wanted to help students to grow and develop – "*to have an improved university experience*". Servant leadership, EI and transformational leadership all incorporate a commitment to helping others (Charles and Robert provided examples of this). Leadership exponents also commit to explaining the "bigger picture" and demonstrating how pieces fit together. Both Phoebe and Malcom offered examples of what they believed were important ways in which they helped students to learn in their Meet-Up sessions.

In addition, the "aha moments" that a number of participants mentioned, including Mack, were examples of the intellectual stimulation effected by transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), where the participants demonstrated a different way or ways of exploring a difficult concept or of working through a challenging problem. Another feature of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) notes that leaders serve as role models, whereby "followers" can clearly observe the commitment, efforts and achievements of their leaders; Miranda and Rachael had both remarked above that they felt that they were role models for the students.

And so it appeared to me from initial forays into the transcripts of the interviews that took me to the four in-depth questions, and to where the word "leadership" had not to that point even been articulated, that the participants were nevertheless describing leadership traits and behaviours, albeit generally in a tacit manner. It can be argued, therefore, that the participants did actually hold a tacit knowledge of what leadership was. Polanyi (1966), who was influential in the early exploration and explanation of the concept of "tacit knowledge", posited that tacit knowledge is knowledge that is difficult to articulate. And, in relation to my study's participants, they certainly tended to display a reluctance to call themselves "leaders", preferring to describe what they did and how they did it in Meet-Up. But, after using words that hedged around the notion of leadership and what it looks like, their ideas gradually seemed to form more clearly in their minds; they began to articulate terms consistent with

leadership, thus formalising their tacit knowledge into explicit language and knowledge (Grant, 2007). The following chapter continues this exploration of the participants' conceptions of what leadership looks like.

6.8 The link with personal growth and development

As the participants told me about themselves and responded to the first four questions in the interviews, they exposed more than an association with leadership traits. Glimpses into who they were and what they brought to the Meet-Up "table" confirmed a desire to help others, as was explained above, but it also revealed a desire to help themselves. In other words, they were not oblivious to the subtle, even tacit, implication that being a Meet-Up leader would facilitate their own growth and development not only as students and learners, but also as individuals. This drew a straight bow to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of development outlined in Chapter 3.

While these researchers had referred to the development that occurs in all students who choose to engage with their learning institutions and to become involved in their learning, it is clear that it applied in the same way to Meet-Up leaders, just on a different plane. As the participants described what they had done to help students and how, it was apparent that they were endorsing another section of my conceptual framework, this time the "What they developed" element: competence, emotion management, interdependence, identity, interpersonal relationships, purpose and integrity, which I had adapted from the seven vectors of student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In fulfilling their role as Meet-Up leaders, these individuals embraced the purpose and aim of the program, and accepted the responsibility of the position of PAL leader. They utilised their competence and their new identity as experienced students to guide and encourage their peers. Concurrently, they developed autonomy and self-efficacy, and they grew emotionally as individuals and learners.

Again this was borne out in the participants' words quoted already in the chapter. For example, Dawn stated that as a Meet-Up leader she had shared some of her own learning struggles with students, and she showed them the pathways that she had used to get out of tricky learning situations. She could empathise with them because she had "*actually been there, done that*", and she provided them with "*the tools which might help them get out of a situation which they think is hopeless*". Phyllis found that telling her own personal stories to the students was useful. She enjoyed building relationships with participating students "*and having that laugh with them*". Phoebe wanted their learning journeys to be easier. She was

aware that, as experienced peers, the Meet-Up leaders could provide sound advice and direction to help in that aim.

Lena enjoyed the opportunity as a Meet-Up leader to pass on the knowledge that she had acquired. She claimed that students can be reluctant to ask for help, "*so it's identifying that they need help and then saying, "This is where you go to get it"*". Florence used her experience, competence and creativity to look at different ways that she could make the revision for the exam fun for the attending students. For Lynette, one of the benefits to herself as a student leader was that, by telling other people what she had learnt, she realised that she was enhancing and reinforcing her own learning.

And thus the Meet-Up experience appears to have been a transformative one for attending student and student leader alike. In the following chapter, the participants' responses to the remaining questions posed in the interviews are explored. They reveal more about the growth and development of the participants in the Meet-Up environment, in addition to their conceptions of student leadership.

6.9 Summary of the chapter

This chapter began the data analysis part of this thesis. My intention in this chapter was threefold: to address the second part of Research Question 1 ("…and who were the Meet-Up leaders?"); to introduce each person who was a participant in my study; and to demonstrate the integrity of the Input and Environment sections of my conceptual framework. To address these intentions, it made sense to assemble firstly a brief story about each participant by way of an introduction. These stories were developed from the participants' responses to the preliminary questions asked in the initial phase of the interview, and afforded a brief but fascinating picture of each participant.

While these overviews went part-way to addressing Research Question 1 and to revealing who the Meet-Up leaders were, I needed more detail. I elected to analyse these data that were the participants' responses to the first four in-depth questions. On combining this data with the stories, I came to understand that, while these individuals had to this point followed quite diverse paths, they shared a commonality. This mutual element was their concern for others and their desire to help them, which had been included as a characteristic in the Input section of my conceptual framework, as the "inclination and passion to encourage peers and share a learning vision".

However, this further analysis of the first four in-depth questions that I undertook to unveil who the Meet-Up leaders were clarified that the participants brought to the program as

novice leaders, not just this personal trait, but also, all four of the personal characteristics that I had included in the Input section. Further, in order both to help students to learn and to complete the tasks demanded of them as Meet-Up leaders, as was described in the Environment section of the framework ("What they did: Involvement"), the participants described unambiguously that they had employed their personal traits to fulfil these responsibilities ("How they did it: Integration"). And so, interestingly, through my efforts to determine who the Meet-Up leaders were, I had in fact confirmed the integrity of both the Input and the Environment sections of the study's conceptual framework.

In order to shed further light on who the Meet-Up leaders were, I reviewed the transcripts and married the participants' words in response to the first four in-depth questions with the literature that I had explored for the study (Chapter 3). My efforts revealed that the personal characteristics (Input) of the participants and the behaviours that they described (Environment) were recognised in the literature as leadership traits. Hence I determined that the "novice leaders" were "novice" only in terms of their newness to the Meet-Up program – they were in fact demonstrating leadership already. In addition, the participant data that I had analysed not only drew the participants' characteristics together, but also linked them as one with the environment, endorsing the research by Buchler (1951) and Bronfenbrenner (1994). Thus I argued that who the Meet-Up leaders were could be explained by the ways that they carried out the role - that is, who they were was, in fact, how they did what they did. I had determined my response to the second part of Research Question 1.

7 STUDENT LEADERSHIP: A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a response to Research Question 2, which asked: "What were the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership?" To identify the participants' notions of the phenomenon of student leadership, Question 6 in the interviews asked directly, "What was it about these roles [that is, the roles where you helped students] that involved leadership?", which gently yet explicitly encouraged the participants to focus their thoughts specifically on the phenomenon under study. And to stimulate further, even to reinforce, this emphasis, I followed it with a request: "Describe your picture of an effective student leader". The participants' responses to these two queries form the basis of this chapter.

I collated my analysis of the participants' words into a series of informal, sketchy tables, each more refined or specific than the previous one (this was basically my collective pool) (Marton & Booth, 1997), until I determined I had reached a final set of categories of description or conceptions of the phenomenon of student leadership that covered the participants' ways of understanding, but that still had points of differentiation (Marton & Booth, 1997). This set of categories of description is as follows:

- **Category A: Student leadership as personal: it involves utilising and developing personal characteristics.**
- **Category B: Student leadership as contextual: it is defined by the operating environment or context.**
- **Category C: Student leadership as relational: it is about the relationships that develop.**

This chapter explains the analysis that directed me to the formation of these categories. Firstly, I discuss my preliminary interpretations; this is followed by the discussion of the conceptions of the phenomenon that comprise the categories of description. I include excerpts from the interviews to illustrate the conceptions in each category. These have been reproduced verbatim as recommended by phenomenographers (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Sin, 2010). I also provide quotations from the participants that demonstrated their varying ways of expressing the same understanding or conception. In my analysis of the participants' words, I further align and demonstrate the connections that I found among the voices of the participants with the literature that I reviewed in Chapter 3. In addition, I found clear links with the participant voice and the conceptual framework that was explained in Chapter 4.

7.2 Student leadership in Meet-Up

7.2.1 Reluctant leaders

In their responses to Question 6, the first point that struck me was the reluctance of some of the participants to use the words "leader" or "leadership" in relation to their role, and they also hedged around the notion that the position could have incorporated leadership. For instance, Jo reflected that, at the time of being a Meet-Up leader, she did not think of herself as a leader because, as she said with a laugh: "[Y]*ou're just doing your job.*" Lance described the tasks and behaviours required in the Meet-Up leader role, such as preparing activities for the sessions, and then added: "*I don't know if you'd call that leadership, but it requires a bit of organisational skill.*" Theresa, too, was reluctant: "*In specific* [Meet-Up] *sessions, I don't know that that really required leadership. I suppose it does because they all look to you to be the leader. But I guess it's just something that we adapted to in the role, I guess*".

Astin and Astin (2000) had addressed in their research this issue of the hesitance of students to attribute the term "leadership" to their roles, discovering that many students upheld the conventional attitude to or the "heroic conception" (Vroom & Jago, 2007, p. 18) of leadership, which was that only some people were born to be leaders. Wanda provided another excellent example of the reluctant leader: she told me that the Meet-Up leaders "*had the responsibility of supporting students* [in their learning in a particular course], *so I suppose in that way we were definitely leaders*". Carmel believed that leadership was certainly a part of the Meet-Up leader role, but "*maybe not traditional leadership*". Mack agreed, saying that "[I]*t's a bit more of a nurturing leadership role within Meet-Up*".

Shertzer and Schuh's (2004) qualitative study of student leadership affirmed this same belief: that the traditional view of leadership, or the "industrial concept of leadership" (Rost, 1993) – that is, the contested view that leaders are born and not made – was dominant in the participating students. This conviction had influenced the students' ideas of leadership sufficiently for some of the students to consider that they lacked adequate leadership knowledge and experience to accept a conventional leadership role. The responses of the participants who were clearly hesitant about using the term "leadership" indicated that perhaps they, too, held this traditional view. Indeed, Charles believed that there was leadership in Meet-Up, but "*just in the sense that you're a little bit ahead – you're a few steps ahead of the people that you're leading, so you have that bit more experience to be able to guide them*".

This reluctance of the student leaders to claim leadership, and their clear consideration for their followers, made Burns' (1978) definition of leadership one of the most

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appropriate: "I define leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers" (p. 19). He added: "And the genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own and their followers' values and motivation" (p. 19). The participants' voices gifted me this "genius" to analyse.

7.2.2 The link with power, authority and legitimacy

Leadership as a concept is distinct from other related concepts such as power, authority and legitimacy, and in leadership discussions this needs to be clearly detailed and differentiated; this was explained in some detail in Chapter 3. However, the concepts can, of course, be viewed as complementary (Day & Antonakis, 2012). In Meet-Up, there was certainly a close connection, and the participants tended to blur the lines among the concepts in their responses to the interview questions. For them, the Meet-Up leader position came with its accompanying level of authority in tandem with its requirements – they did not view them as separate. Indeed, the student leaders experienced a specific, contextualised form of leadership that was bestowed on them by the program requirements; that is, they were imbued with power and authority simply through their appointment to the student leader position. On the other hand, expert power and legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959) were conferred by the Meet-Up attendees who saw qualities and actions in their student leaders that they believed made them worthy recipients of the students' attention and respect.

A few participants in the study commented that, in Meet-Up, they felt that they had exercised leadership because the students saw them as leaders. In fact, Anna claimed that the reason that she became a leader was via the students' expectations: "*In Meet-Up, you become the leader because you become the person they* [the students] *look to for guidance*". Anna recognised and acknowledged that it was the students who endorsed her leadership as a Meet-Up leader because she helped them in their learning. Students generally hold in esteem an internalised value of expertise (French & Raven, 1959) that acknowledges those formally recognised to teach the subject content like lecturers, tutors and, in the courses in which they were utilised, Meet-Up leaders. Indeed, the Meet-Up leader position could be said to have held legitimacy of authority because they were selected to enhance the learning of the students attending their sessions.

Jo confirmed this thought, stating that she considered that the students looked up to a Meet-Up leader as "*somebody they could approach or who*[m] *they could talk to*" – someone "*that they thought knew a lot more than they* [the students] *did*". In other words, the students

believed that the student leaders, as recognised and accepted experienced students who had already completed the course, had a legitimate right to influence their (the students') study of that course, suggesting a clear alignment with both the expert and the legitimate forms of power (French & Raven, 1959). Emerson's (1962) argument was that the person holding the commissioned authority not only was afforded the right to exercise power, but also was actually obliged to do so; this process was called "legitimation" (p. 38). Interestingly, Caroline exemplified this position when she voiced the view that the Meet-Up leader position involved leadership because: "*You're the one that has to run the sessions. You're the one that people turn to when they have questions…You have to take charge.*" Emerson (1962) also claimed that the power invested in a position or office was limited by the scope of that position, and that the scope denoted and delimited the position's legitimacy. "Directed power" (p. 38), which can be said to have applied also to Meet-Up leaders, could be employed only in the areas delineated by the group. Wanda clearly defined the parameters of the leadership role of a Meet-Up leader; she considered that it was leadership just in that specific course: "*We had the knowledge and know-how of how to get through that course,* so *we were leaders of that particular course*".

7.2.3 So what did leadership in Meet-Up look like?

With the noted reluctance of some participants to commit to the use of the word "leader" in relation to themselves, my analysis to this point suggested that discussion of the term "leadership' had been far more congenial for the participants than discussion that involved the use of the term "leader", which seemed to make some of them uncomfortable and cautious, particularly with reference to themselves. This was basically a light bulb moment for me. It seemed to explain the participants' hesitance to apply the nomenclature "leader" to themselves. They were generally more content and comfortable if the qualifier "student" were placed in front of it, as in "student leader", or if the suffix "ship" were added to become "leadership"; they were less happy with the term "leader".

Interestingly, if slightly tangentially, I was reminded of Day (2000), who drew a distinction between leader development and leadership development. He posited that, in leader development, the emphasis is typically placed on "individual-based knowledge, skills and abilities associated with formal leadership roles" (p. 584). It entails the development of intrapersonal competence in the form of self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation that allows the individual to perform effectively in the organisation in any number of roles (Day, 2000). Leadership development, on the other hand, has as its focus the building of

relationships that are developed through interpersonal exchange and that are typically based on trust, respect and commitment. Interpersonal competence is primarily about the ability to understand people, and includes social awareness and social development. Day (2000) made the point that the two approaches are reciprocal, and that it is preferable that organisations invest in both.

After reading Day's (2000) paper, I instinctively began to reflect on the leader/leadership development and training that I had instigated in Meet-Up to consider where the emphasis had been placed. The predominant purpose of the workshops was to prepare the student leaders for the tasks and requirements involved in achieving the aim of the program, which was to assist students in their learning and understanding of course content. That aside, the small degree of focused attention that was given to the personal leader/leadership development of the student leaders seemed to offer advice and strategies to cover both of Day's (2000) distinct approaches. For instance, Meet-Up leaders were advised to revise their course knowledge, consider concepts in the course that they thought may cause students difficulty and reflect on helpful study strategies that they themselves had used. They were expected to be approachable and friendly in order to communicate with the students and to encourage them to engage with the course content. (This approach exhibited leader development.) Meet-Up leaders were also asked to remember how they had felt as first year students, and to share their personal stories and experiences with the students when appropriate. They were required to build rapport with the students, and to discover where the students' learning concerns lay in order to advise and guide them. (This approach exhibited leadership development.)

Perhaps the most significant leader/leadership development strategy that I employed in the training workshops was the engagement of senior leaders and other incumbent Meet-Up leaders to take the majority of the sessions. While this was a committed and focused peer-led strategy to advise and demonstrate to the new leaders how to perform their role, just having the experienced leaders present and continuously role modelling throughout the workshop contributed much more. It provided an additional, ad hoc, unintended, generally implicit, positive influence on both the novice leaders' and the existing leaders' emerging leader/leadership notions. For example, Jo remarked that she had not considered herself a leader at the time, but on reflection she thought that she was: "*I helped out with training, and I think, when I got to helping out with the training, you do start to realise that you are a leader within the program*". Theresa had a similar notion, divulging that she thought she had developed into a leader after offering to speak about Meet-Up at orientation sessions for first

year students and other similar events "*because that's when the other students really start to identify you as a* [pause] *leader*".

One of the senior leaders, who were called "LAMPs" in the Meet-Up program (see Chapter 2), offered this reflection:

> *We also had an amazing opportunity to be able to deliver the teaching for one of the sessions* [training workshops]. *You couldn't make it - you were away delivering your* [conference] *paper, and being able to deliver the information to the new Meet-Up leaders was an absolute highlight of my time…and working together with the other guys to put together that whole session and orientate those guys was amazing.*

This participant had offered an unmistakable example of her development as a leader through enactment, demonstrating Day's (2000) position that: "Leadership is developed through the enactment of leadership" (p. 605). And my analysis of the participants' words, as noted in the above excerpts, revealed that a number of them echoed that same notion, believing that it was through the enactment of their role as Meet-Up leaders that they became leaders.

Lance offered this explanation:

> *They* [Meet-Up leaders] *need to be willing to help everyone there because that's what they're there for; they're there to help everybody, which is the definition of a leader. The leader is there to get the best out of all the people that they're leading. The leader doesn't do it for themselves. It's their responsibility to make sure everyone does their best.*

7.2.4 The categories of description

As I reread and reconsidered the transcripts, I realised that, while their responses sometimes tended to lack (or avoid) the use of leadership terminology, it became increasingly clear that the participants had affirmed, albeit in their own ways and using layperson's terms, that they had engaged in leadership. And further analysis of their responses demonstrated an alignment between their voicings and the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, suggesting that they actually were leaders in their own eyes as well as in mine, despite a hesitance on the part of some of them to apply the term emphatically.

In addition, I could now discern those points of difference in the participants' notions of student leadership that they considered were involved in Meet-Up as they described them to me. The points of distinction were in the particular emphasis that the participants placed on their ways of understanding student leadership. The aspects of student leadership that some

participants considered to be paramount were, in essence, personal characteristics such as cognitive course knowledge. Some participants discussed leadership as an integral part of the context in which the role resided. For example, student leadership in Meet-Up was bound to the context or operating environment that was the Meet-Up program. For others, the greater emphasis in student leadership was on the students and their relationships with them, in addition to their relationships with other leaders and academics.

During the interviews, they typically noted the significance of all three descriptions: the personal traits, the context and the relationships – the points of differentiation were in their predominating emphasis. I now moved to combine the participants' individual articulations of their understandings or conceptions of leadership into a collective voice, grouped into three categories of description. I replicate it here:

- Category A: Student leadership as personal: it involves utilising and developing personal characteristics
- Category B: Student leadership as contextual: it is defined by the operating environment or context
- Category C: Student leadership as relational: it is about the relationships that develop.

Table 7.1 presents the categories, the main features of each category as expressed by the participants and the alignment with the literature.

Table 7.1: The categories of description of student leadership, their salient features and their alignment with the literature

Category Student leadership as:	Salient features It is about:	Relevant literature
A. Personal - involves utilising and developing personal characteristics	• accepting responsibility • building confidence • showing empathy • having course and discipline knowledge and competence • having an inclination and passion to help peers • having university knowledge	• Ashkanasy & Humphrey (2011) • Bass & Bass (2008) • Gardner (1990) • Greenleaf (1977/1991) • Kouzes & Posner (1997) • Posner (2004) • Spears (2004)
B. Contextual - defined by the operating environment or context	• just doing the job • planning and preparing sessions • the authority of the position • endorsement by the students • communicating with other leaders, academics and students	• Bass & Bass (2008) • Emerson (1962) • Zaccaro, Kemp & Bader (2004)
C. Relational - about the relationships that develop	• empowering • communicating • earning trust • being a role model • caring • being positive • listening	• Ashkanasy & Humphrey (2011) • Bass & Bass (2008) • Bass & Riggio (2006) • Cunliffe & Eriksen (2011) • Goleman et al. (2002) • Greenleaf (1977/1991) • Khan et al. (2019) • Komives et al. (2013) • Spears (2004) • Uhl-Bien (2006)

The following sections present a selection of the participants' descriptions of their conceptions of the phenomenon of student leadership under each category. In addition, I offer

examples of the connections between my analysis of the participants' words and the literature, and the associations between the participant voices and the conceptual framework.

7.3 Category A: Student leadership as personal

My picture of the grand Meet-Up leader would definitely be someone who is good at time management. Someone who is friendly and approachable no matter what they're talking about, no matter what concept they're talking about in their subject of study. Um, someone who appears to be confident. I think that's important...

But, yeah, definitely those key things, time management, good study habits and good communication skills to be able to help students with what they actually need help with as well. (Anna)

Certain personal traits such as charisma were once considered the essential, if not the only, indicator of good leadership, and many of these traits were those that people inherited. This perspective harked back to what were typically called "the Great Man theories" (Bass & Bass, 2008). Over time, it has generally become accepted that, while personal characteristics are important, there is much more to leadership. This is apparent in theories of leadership such as the behavioural and contingency theories, transformational leadership, emerging theories such as relational leadership and followership, and the integration of theories as discussed in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, traits are still considered important to the development of people as leaders (Day, 2000; Zaccaro et al., 2004). Bass and Bass (2008) noted that these included: cognitive traits; social competency traits; emotional competency traits; biophysical (fitness and stature) traits; and traits of character such as integrity and honesty. These traits were evident in the participants as they responded to the interview questions, as can be seen in Subsections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2.

Gardner (1990) identified a set of 14 personal traits that he considered typified leadership (see Chapter 3). They are still clearly relevant to current leadership discussions, as a number of them were brought up by the participants in the interviews, and some were raised in previous sections. Spears (2004) distilled a set of 10 personal characteristics of Greenleaf's well-known servant leadership theory that were also discussed in Chapter 3. I have included both Gardner's leadership traits and Spears' servant leadership attributes in Table 7.2, not only because a number of participants unintentionally alluded to them directly as they expressed their understandings of student leadership, but also because some of the

participants' descriptions of student leadership revealed a tacit yet clear articulation that they considered many of these personal characteristics to be important aspects of student leadership.

Table 7.2: Comparison of the attributes of leadership

Gardner (1990): Attributes of leadership	Spears (2004): Major attributes of servant leadership based on Greenleaf (1977/1991)
1. Physical vitality and stamina 2. Intelligence and judgement-in-action 3. Willingness (eagerness) to accept responsibilities 4. Task competence 5. Understanding of followers and their needs 6. Skill in dealing with people 7. Need to achieve 8. Capacity to motivate 9. Courage, resolution, steadiness 10. Capacity to win and hold trust 11. Capacity to manage, decide, set priorities 12. Confidence 13. Ascendance, dominance, assertiveness 14. Adaptability, flexibility of approach	1. Listening 2. Empathy 3. Healing 4. Awareness 5. Persuasion 6. Conceptualisation 7. Foresight 8. Stewardship 9. Commitment to the growth of people 10. Building community

Some of the traits listed in Table 7.2 have obvious associations with leadership behaviours and with relationship building – the capacity to win and hold trust (Gardner, 1990), for example. Indeed, the way they were expressed by Gardner (1990) – that is, as behaviours and competencies as well as personal traits – muddied efforts at clear distinctions among the three categories of description, while demonstrating the close connections of all components of leadership. Nevertheless, the ways in which the participants explained their notions or conceptions of student leadership gifted me the pathway to distinguish salient points of differentiation among the categories.

7.3.1 The personal characteristics that the participants considered important

In this category, the focus is on the responses in which the participants suggested that the personal characteristics that they had brought to the program and that they continued to develop, were the core of what student leadership was. Their descriptions of the phenomenon emphasised the significance of the particular traits they believed were critical to their

understandings and experiences of what comprised student leadership and of what made for effective student leadership.

7.3.1.1 Acceptance of responsibility

Caroline brought to the table the notion of responsibility: "*To be a Meet-Up leader, you need those qualities* [responsibility and autonomy] *which are leadership qualities in any other setting*", and indeed they are characteristic of the socially responsible leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2010) that was discussed in the student leadership literature in Chapter 3, in addition to Gardner's (1990) third trait, willingness (eagerness) to accept responsibilities. Theresa, too, was adamant that the acceptance of responsibility was crucial to student leadership: "*Leadership is about knowing when to take responsibility and making sure, if you're going to take responsibility, that you own that responsibility*."

For Phoebe, it was quite clear that Meet-Up leaders were leaders and shouldered the responsibility involved: "[T]*here is an automatic assumption of leadership*" when one takes on the role. She believed that "[L]*eaders take responsibility, not just for their own behaviour, but to support and encourage those they are leading*". Phoebe added that she believed that student leadership involved firstly "*a willingness to take* [on this] *responsibility*", and she followed this comment with the claim that student leadership also required commitment to behaving in a responsible manner. These excerpts are clear examples of Gardner's (1990) third trait, and Greenleaf's (1977/1991) ninth attribute, commitment to the growth of people.

7.3.1.2 Confidence

Some participants indicated that they thought confidence (Gardner's [1990] 12th trait) was an important personal characteristic of leadership. Lena had an interesting take on the importance of confidence. She was studying nursing, and she remarked that she knew that, on graduation, in the position of a nurse: "*I would need to have to talk to people, and would have to show them that I was confident and assertive*". (Assertiveness was part of Gardner's [1990] 13th trait.) As a result, she attended a lot of workshops to ensure that she had these traits and was capable of being a leader. The skills developed in the workshops then helped her in student leadership positions, including in Meet-Up. Reversing that notion, Carmel suggested that her position as a Meet-Up leader was what gave her the confidence to take on other student leadership positions such as membership of the Law Society in which she facilitated events.

Caroline viewed confidence in a different light again, harking back to Day's (2000) comment quoted above that it is through enacting leadership that leadership develops. She commented that since childhood she had gravitated towards leadership roles:

But I think Meet-Up was a nice sort of vehicle to help me build those skills, and also provide sort of almost professional parameters where there was sort of distinct accountability. There was a distinct role you had to play, and certain things you had to do, so I think it helped develop my confidence as a leader along the way.

By contrast, Theresa said that she did not really feel that she was a leader while in the Meet-Up leader role: "*but that's probably – like I think it's more about myself having the confidence to say, 'I am a leader'*". This hesitance was discussed in Subsection 7.2.1.

7.3.2 The link with the conceptual framework

In Chapter 6, I outlined the ways that the participants' responses to the preliminary questions and the first four in-depth questions that I asked in the interviews aligned with the conceptual framework as presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter, Chapter 7, as I analysed the responses to Questions 6 and 7, I realised that the participants had again demonstrated alignment with the conceptual framework. I therefore refer the reader to the criteria that the student leaders brought with them to the program (the Input section):

- course knowledge and competence (good course grade)
- cognitive competence in chosen discipline (high grade point average)
- inclination and passion to encourage peers and share learning goals (enthusiasm to join the program)
- knowledge and experiences of effective learning at university (generally 2nd, 3rd or 4th year undergraduate students).

For some participants, course knowledge and competence and/or cognitive competence in their chosen discipline were important elements in their conception of student leadership. For others, it was about the passion to help and encourage their peers, and, for some, sharing their learning experiences was crucial. Some considered all of these criteria essential to either their understanding of what leadership entailed or their picture of an effective leader. I have provided in the following subsections the participants' voicings where they married their experiences with these criteria. In doing so, I combined the first two criteria, as the participants did not always make a clear distinction between the two.

7.3.2.1 Course knowledge and competence; cognitive competence in the chosen discipline

In their descriptions of student leadership, some participants were insistent about the significance of cognitive knowledge. This was not really a surprise as Meet-Up leaders were

selected, in part, based on their course results, as outlined in Chapter 2, and their role as student leaders was to advise and guide students in their learning in a particular course. Anna explained that in her weekly sessions she focused on the content that she believed that they needed to cover and the questions that they needed to practise in order to understand course concepts: "*I led the group into particular discussions that were going to be useful for that week.*" Lynette, too, was adamant that Meet-Up leaders should "*know their course content well and be able to provide support with that information*", referencing Bass and Bass (2008) and the importance of cognitive skills.

Other participants echoed this conception. "*You have to know what you're talking about*" was how Theresa put it, and have knowledge that goes "*beyond discipline knowledge to study skills knowledge*". Dawn agreed: "*You help them with their content, at the same time as actually helping them* [to] *learn how to learn*". Grace took this thought a step further by claiming that leadership involved "*showing that you had knowledge and confidence*". She added: "*You need to be capable, and you need to be seen to be capable.*" With their words, these participants had basically endorsed themselves as transformational leaders (Bass & Riggio, 2006), in addition to demonstrating their use of the fundamental practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 1997; Posner, 2004), such as modelling the way and inspiring a shared vision.

Florence made it clear that, in Meet-Up, student leaders were "*leading from experience*"; the knowledge that the Meet-Up leaders held came from their own personal learning experiences in the course and more broadly in university study. Her advice to students hinted at challenging the process (Kouzes & Posner, 1997; Posner, 2004): "*Don't look at everything like a one-way street*." She said that Meet-Up leaders could offer alternative explanations of course concepts that caused some students problems and offer different strategies that might work for them, demonstrating adaptability and flexibility of approach (Gardner, 1990). Dawn agreed, claiming that being an effective leader was about "*giving them enough tools, and the right kind of tools, that they can then feel empowered to progress from that stage*". Through such actions or behaviours, the Meet-Up leaders were enabling others to act (Kouzes & Posner, 1997; Posner, 2004), in addition to offering new approaches to understanding course concepts, and motivating and inspiring the students in their learning (transformational leadership qualities).

7.3.2.2 Inclination and passion

Some participants were convinced that Meet-Up leadership was about more than knowledge. Anna made this resolutely clear; inclination and passion were fundamental. She

confided in a response to a question later in the interview that she had lacked confidence in herself as a novice leader, and that she did not consider that she had all the skills required:

> *When I became a Meet-Up leader, I wanted it to be the best thing I've ever done. I put all my energy into it. I stayed up for hours making resources for my* [online] *forum, and stuff like that….It was the enthusiasm and the dedication that were able to bridge the gap of the skill set I was lacking. So, if you've got that, you're fine.*

Robert was also adamant that, to be an effective student leader: "*You have to have a motivation or a drive or a passion to help others – that is, your peers; or drive, passion, motivation for the university, which then draws in your peers*". Florence endorsed this notion of drive, enthusiasm or passion, stating that she personally had a desire "*to want to achieve and do well*", adding, importantly, that she thought that this trait gave her "*the direction to give other students the same boost, the same motivation as well*". She was clearly alluding to leadership behaviours identified by Kouzes and Posner (1997): "enabling others to act" and "encouraging the heart" (p. 18).

7.3.2.3 University knowledge and experience

Meet-Up leaders also needed insider knowledge of the university. This knowledge included "taken-for-granted values" (Schein, 1984, p. 4) that, while generally accepted and understood, could nevertheless be hidden or confusing, particularly for beginning students. Put simply, in an organisation, tacit values or knowledge were once made explicit, but they have over time become just "how things really are" (p. 4). Schein (1984) advanced that such "assumptions" (p. 4) were actually more powerful than the values that were explicitly stated and articulated. This concept was explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

For some students, particularly first year students, tacit assumptions were difficult to grasp and understand, and they benefited from the leaders' peer-level, insider clarifications and explanations. Meet-Up leaders could assist students with engaging in and adjusting to the culture that was university. As students in their third or fourth year of undergraduate study or engaged in postgraduate studies, Meet-Up leaders had been involved and engaged in the university for some time. In particular, they had become knowledgeable, comfortable and familiar with the processes and procedures of USQ, and with the tacit elements of its climate as an organisation (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Schein, 1984). Robert considered this important: "*You* [also] *need to have a good sound knowledge of the university, I think, to carry out* [Meet-Up leadership] *effectively.*" Mack agreed. He observed that the Meet-Up role involved more than course knowledge and competence. He believed that a Meet-Up leader was "*someone who's likely been at uni*[versity] *a bit longer, so probably a bit more familiar*

with some of the procedures – with extensions or how to structure assignments, and referencing, and pretty much the whole bag of tools".

The climate of an organisation is the accumulation of that organisation's members' attitudes towards their jobs, their colleagues, the organisation and the management (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011). The climate influences the feelings and behaviours of all employees. Wanda commented that the "*particular style of leadership* [in Meet-Up], *being open to discussion and approachable, that's very typical of the uni*[versity] *as well. And I think we as student leaders emulated that too*".

Meet-Up leaders were also cognisant of the lack of confidence, insecurities and concerns that some students experienced when new to higher education. A few of the participants had themselves changed study programs or contemplated abandoning their higher education studies altogether. Yet they had become successful, effective learners with much to share with their peers, and with sound experiential advice to give. As Dawn put it, as a Meet-Up leader, "[you can] *lead them through your own footsteps of how you're able to make sense of university, as opposed to you telling them*". This was an example of social competency in addition to cognitive competency that Bass and Bass (2008) considered important. In addition, as was previously mentioned, Meet-Up leaders were encouraged in their training and development workshops each semester to remember their first year of tertiary study, to reflect on how they had felt and not to lose sight of those novice students who had once been them; it seemed that the participants had embraced this recommendation. Table 7.3 presents, for clarity, a summary demonstrating the alignment of the participants' words as presented above with the Input section of the conceptual framework.

Table 7.3 The alignment of the participant voice with the Input section of the conceptual framework

Participants	From the conceptual framework Input: Novice student leaders
Anna, Dawn, Grace, Theresa	Course knowledge and competence (good course grade); cognitive competence in chosen discipline (high grade point average)
Anna, Florence, Robert	Inclination and passion to encourage peers and to share learning goals (enthusiasm to join the program)
Robert, Wanda	Knowledge and experiences of effective learning at university (generally 2nd, 3rd or 4th year undergraduate students)

7.4 Category B: Student leadership as contextual

Facilitator: So, if a student had asked you at the time if you were a leader, what would you have said?

Interviewee: *I would have said that I'm a Meet-Up leader, but that means that I help you with course things.* [Laughs.]

From the time of the abandonment of the Great Man theories (Bass & Bass, 2008), situation and context were considered to have an influence on leadership behaviours, development and effectiveness to varying degrees. Context is the broader environment in which situations occur. The Meet-Up program, as context, comprised all the people involved, their interactions and the relationships among them; the procedures and processes that were followed; the influence of the broader university; and the situations that arose in the functioning of the program. And, of course, leadership, because as Day and Antonakis (2012) noted, leadership does not occur in a vacuum; it is interwoven with context.

Miranda, who had been a Meet-Up leader in two different courses, was explicit: "[L]*eadership depends on the context and the situation*". She "*usually would just gauge the group and see what they actually needed from me…*". She reflected that the elements of leadership involved in the two courses were "*probably similar....I feel like what I'm trying to do is quite similar in both situations. It's just sort of how I approach it*". Miranda had deliberately yet inadvertently invoked Fiedler (1971) and his notion of aligning situation and leadership style.

It was clear that, for some participants, leadership, as enacted in the Meet-Up leader position, was intrinsic to the Meet-Up context. Basically, the competencies and behaviours involved in planning and delivering Meet-Up sessions, as well as in meeting the requirements and fulfilling the expectations asked of them as Meet-Up leaders, were all components of the Meet-Up context, and they all involved leadership. The ways that student leadership was described in this category showed that the participants believed that leadership was involved in being a Meet-Up leader, but that it was a particular kind of leadership that was intrinsic to the specific context of Meet-Up leader. I was reminded again of Day and Antonakis's (2012) words – the line that "leadership is rooted in context" (p. 5). For example, Caroline noted that the role of Meet-Up leader was a "*special role; it's not something that everyone does*". She believed that leadership and the Meet-Up leader role were "*quite strongly linked*".

In this category, I discuss other excerpts from the interviews with the participants that tied student leadership to the Meet-Up context. I have presented the participants' views that guided me to the realisation that this particular way of understanding student leadership could be differentiated from other ways. I have also continued to link my analysis of the participants' voices with the literature explored in Chapter 3 and with the conceptual framework.

7.4.1 Student leadership in the context of Meet-Up

By accepting the position of Meet-Up leader, the students agreed to fulfil the requirements of the position that were established in order to achieve that aim. It was clear in the interviews that a number of participants believed that it was the enactment of these requirements that not only demonstrated leadership, but also comprised the core of their conception of student leadership. The basic tasks and behaviours required of Meet-Up leaders were explained in some detail in Chapter 2 and additionally in Chapter 4. They were intrinsic to the Meet-Up context and the aim of the program, which was to provide learning advice, encouragement and guidance to students to help them to develop their academic learning skills and their understanding of course-specific and discipline concepts.

Moreover, it was interesting in the interviews to listen to the student leaders' descriptions of these same requirements, rather than the more formal wording that I as coordinator had provided for them during their time as Meet-Up leaders. For instance, Carmel said that she thought that leadership in Meet-Up entailed "*even things like being organised, being there on time and not being late. You know, making sure you do have your bag of lollies and all of your questions and answers for* [the other Meet-Up leader] *and then coordinating with* [the other leader] – *you know, 'Do you want me to take the lead on this, or do you want to* [do so]*'?*" She added that leadership in Meet-Up also included "*liaising with the coordinator*", and "*talking with lecturers*". She summated that, "*while Meet-Up wasn't a huge, full-time, complicated role, there's a lot of things that you do need to be keeping together*".

Lance contributed the following:

I think Meet-Up does involve leadership, in that's what it is. I think a lot of the skills that's required as Meet-Up leader can be leadership skills, and can be other skills. Time management, discipline, communication skills – they're leadership skills definitely, but they're also skills you need no matter what, to work well in any workplace.

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Anna directly linked leadership in Meet-Up with the role of assisting students to understand course content: "*I usually just focus on 'Okay, this is the content we need to cover. We need to practise these questions'*". She added: "*I suppose I led the group into particular discussions that are going to be useful for that week*". Robert, too, was convinced that "*Leadership comes from being able to plan and run a session*", which "*is showing leadership skills in terms of planning*". And, to be sure, in the leadership literature, competence in the form of task completion is indeed classified as a leadership attribute (Bass & Bass, 2008; Gardner, 1990; Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004).

Other participants also linked leadership in the Meet-Up context with the behaviours involved. Lynette stated:

> *There was lots of organisation behind getting those Meet-Up groups together. I think you had to be able to work with your lecturers. You had to know boundaries and things which are important to a leader. You had to be able to establish boundaries with your students.*

Lynette went on:

> *I also sat in on* [lecturer's] *classes and assisted in that class. Part of the reason I did that was because I could hear what the questioning was from the students in those classes, and we* [the lecturer and I] *could then work together to develop strategies to then help them in my Meet-Up sessions to enhance their learning from the classroom.*

Many elements of leadership can be glimpsed in this excerpt: transformational leadership, which exemplified concern for others and two-way communication (Bass & Riggio, 2006); interpersonal competence traits, which incorporated communication, caring, insight and empathy (Bass & Bass, 2008); and relational leadership, where respectful relationships were developed with others, and communications were made with colleagues to work out the actions that were needed (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

Nina was clearly focused on assisting students to understand and learn course content. As a student who had done well in the course, she believed that she could show them how to approach the content. "*So motivating them to do that course, complete that course, is the main thing a student leader can do*". She added that it was important to talk to the students, "*interacting with them all the time*". While her conception of leadership was contextual, she also connected the Meet-Up context and followership, with the latter's focus on active engagement and positive relationships (Khan et al., 2019), as well as with transformational leadership (Bass & Bass, 2008) via inspirational motivation, which involves leaders

motivating and inspiring followers by giving meaning and challenge to their work or, in this case, their study.

7.4.2 The link with the conceptual framework

The conceptual framework provided an explanation and a graphical representation of the student leaders' journey through the Meet-Up program. Again it may be helpful to refer to the conceptual framework diagram, Figure 4.1. As was represented there, the Meet-Up context was the environment in the framework, and it was divided into two sections: What the student leaders did; and How they did it. In this category of description of the phenomenon of student leadership, the participants' emphasis was on the behaviours that they enacted in the Meet-Up context, and there were clear, explicit associations with the "what" section of the framework. For example, Carmel's "run sheet" of the requirements that she fulfilled as a Meet-Up leader (see Subsection 7.4.1) was almost a duplication of parts of the Environment section of the conceptual framework. Table 7.4 demonstrates the links between the participants' words as quoted in the excerpts above and this element in the conceptual framework.

Table 7.4 The alignment of the participant voice with the Environment section of the conceptual framework: What they did: involvement

Participants	From the conceptual framework What they did: involvement
Implicit: all Meet-Up leaders engaged in training and development	Participated in training and development sessions
Anna, Carmel, Nina, Robert	Planned, prepared and led PAL sessions for students
Carmel	Shared experiences with other student leaders
Carmel	Consulted with academics
Implicit: all Meet-Up leaders were required to respond to feedback from students and the senior leaders	Reflected on sessions led and responded to feedback
Implicit: all Meet-Up leaders completed these tasks	Completed administrative tasks such as compiling attendance lists and surveys
Carmel	Consulted with and reported to program staff members
Robert, Wanda	Engaged with the wider USQ community

7.4.3 Student leadership in other contexts

In their responses to Question/Request 2 in the interview, "Tell me about any roles you had at university where you helped students", participants focused predominantly on Meet-Up. However, a number of them mentioned that they had held student leadership positions in other sections across the university. These included: Phoenix Leaders, who assisted novice students in the Orientation period; Student Ambassadors, who facilitated events that encouraged engagement with the university; positions in clubs like the Law Society; various support and advisory positions in the Residential Colleges; representative positions on the various School or Faculty committees; and representatives on the USQ Student Representative Council that advised senior management of the students' positions on varying issues. In response therefore to Question 6, some of them talked, generally briefly, about their conceptions of the student leadership that was involved in these other contexts.

Lance, for example, had been a Phoenix leader, a student representative for his School Committee and president of the Science Club – all after he had accepted the Meet-Up leader position. I included his depiction of leadership in Meet-Up in an excerpt in Subsection 7.2.3. He then described the Phoenix leader position:

> [Y]*ou can be the first point of interaction that a student might have with the university, so you have to be exemplary. You have to be fun and welcoming and know a lot of stuff....You have to be organised, you have to be willing to work as a team and sort through problems and all that kind of thing*.

Next he explained the student representative position that he believed "*does take leadership because you know that you are representing a lot of your own* [faculty's] *students. So you're actively asking students their opinions on things to make sure it's not just your opinion you're taking to meetings*".

Robert followed a different path. He had been a student leader in the residential colleges, and he stated unequivocally that there was a "*core set*" of leadership skills needed in all student leadership positions. In fact, he extrapolated it to other leadership roles, and indeed to all roles in society in general: "*You show leadership in how you execute your day-to-day jobs or tasks*". Robert had provided a referential link to Rost's (1993) claim that people experience leadership in the "reality of their daily lives" (p. 103), as they focus on the importance of "conversations and everyday mundane occurrences" (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1425). Indeed, Robert's conception of a leader mirrored Bass and Riggio's (2006) claim that the transforming leader, the notion introduced by Burns (1978) and limited at that

time to organisations and political movements, had evolved and developed to include any active member of society.

7.4.4 Comparison of contexts

The participants who mentioned other contexts in their responses to the two questions that formed the basis of this chapter generally compared the contexts. Lance, for instance, proffered in his response to Question 6 that, as he saw it, "*Meet-Up and perhaps the other roles I've been involved with are leadership and are leader roles because they're working for other people*". He added later, in response to Question 7, that his picture of an effective student leader was that it "*depends on the context and the setting that the leader is acting in*". But, "w*hether you're an orientation leader or a student ambassador or a student rep*[resentative] *or something like that, again you are setting an example, and you're seeing what stuff needs to get done and doing the best way to get all that stuff done*".

Miranda had been a member of the committee of the Law Society as well as a Meet-Up leader. She initially struggled to articulate the differences between student leadership in the two contexts. However, after describing some differences in the roles, she emphasised that leadership in one context was not more important than the other. Eventually, she decided that "*There's something you want to achieve as a leader, and that's always what you're working towards. And I think that, no matter what else is around it, whatever context there is, you're always trying to work towards that specific goal or obligation*". Thus, Miranda's summation was similar to Lance's above, but her articulation – her pathway to this conclusion – was very different. Miranda had focused on learning goals that represented the students' needs and expectations in the Meet-Up sessions; thus these goals were also her goals, echoing Burns' (1978) emphasis on the importance of leaders' efforts to encourage, influence and motivate followers to achieve shared goals.

Wanda, who had held a position on USQ's Student Representative Council as a Springfield campus representative, considered that the leadership involved in that position was "*more prominent*" than in Meet-Up. She held this belief because the context of this position involved the responsibility of taking ideas, opinions and feedback from students to other forums where they were discussed, and, in some cases, to meetings where decisions were made about where student fee moneys were going to be dispensed. The Meet-Up context, on the other hand, assisted students in learning a particular course.

Dawn, too, considered that context was important. But, in marked contrast to Wanda, she thought that leadership in the Meet-Up context was "*direct leadership*" because it was

helping people to learn and "*leading through example*", an explicit reference to modelling the way (Kouzes & Posner, 1997; Posner, 2004). She explained that she thought that the student ambassador role that she had held was basically a "*gateway to the university*", and involved hosting social events that were on "*more of a surface level*" than "*being a true leader*" as in Meet-Up. She followed this description with a simple yet astute summation: "*Leadership comes in many different forms, I guess*".

For some participants, the student leadership skills required were typically the same regardless of the context; for others, the context influenced the way that leadership was manifest. Either way, these participants believed that consideration needed to be paid to the context or operating environment of the position before decisions were made on the ways that they would enact leadership. Thus, they considered that the context was crucial even if the style of leadership required were sometimes the same.

7.5 Category C: Student leadership as relational

I remember when I first started, of course I was 18 when I started, and my first class [had] *a lot of mature aged students in it, and I was very intimidated by them because I didn't think I could be a good leader to someone who was older than me. I'm now more mature, and I realise that leadership doesn't, you know, necessarily mean age.*
Um, but yeah, it was interesting because they would lead me in a way and they'd say, "*Yeah,* [Anna], *you're doing a good job; keep going". And then I would continue with whatever I was doing.* (Anna)

Relational leadership is concerned with the relationships among people in an organisation or a context (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Rather than focusing on attributes, behaviours or context, it has relationships as its emphasis. These relationships are respectful and are based on care and concern for followers, with the aim of including and empowering them and communicating with them to work towards the actions that are needed (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Komives et al. (2013) considered that relational leadership involved five components: being purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical and process oriented. And certainly, the participants in this study demonstrated that they had engaged in relational leadership in their role as Meet-Up leaders. They not only had clear purpose in their role, but also exhibited care and concern for the students in their sessions by being inclusive and empowering, honest and responsible.

But the participants' ways of understanding student leadership as relational encompassed more leadership theories or practices than relational leadership alone. Florence told me that an effective leader was:

> *Someone who has a dream, and someone who can see the students' dreams and what they want to achieve from it; being able to take a step back and look at the different ways of how you can help them get there or what they might need to do to get themselves there.*

The connection with the leadership literature here was indeed relational leadership (Komives et al., 2013; Uhl-Bien, 2006), but Florence's clear invocation of empathy, understanding of others and helping them to change and to achieve their goals also implied servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/1991; Spears, 2004), transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978) and followership, which explores the notion of followers being active and taking the initiative (Khan et al., 2019). In addition, her awareness of the student's dreams was a nod to authentic leadership (Crawford et al., 2020; Kiersch & Peters, 2017).

My analysis indicated that the participants' views of student leadership were diverse enough for me to include subsections under this category. The subsections were constructed from the varying vocalisations that the participants used as they reflected on their relational experiences as Meet-Up leaders, and how that had explained their thoughts in response to the interview questions.

7.5.1 Empowering

The participants' notion of helping students to learn typically involved more than passing on knowledge. The training that had been provided for the student leaders in Meet-Up was focused on suggesting and demonstrating strategies that student leaders could use to encourage and guide students in their learning endeavours, rather than on providing straight answers; in other words, it was about enabling and empowering students. And the participants certainly indicated that that had occurred. Lena, for example, put it simply and succinctly: "*Leadership for me is about teaching people to recognise their own qualities.*"

Dawn's conception of leadership based on her position as a Meet-Up leader also involved empowering and motivating the students. She spoke of "*supporting other people to succeed and find*[ing] *ways that they can take more initiative*", "*advising them of resources out there to support them in their learning*" and "*leading them in activities to help them* [to] *interact*". With this simple explanation, Dawn, like Florence above, had unknowingly provided evidence that she had employed behaviours across a range of leadership theories,

including transformational leadership. Indeed, Bass and Riggio (2006) posited that "Transformational leaders are individually considerate, but they intellectually stimulate and challenge followers" (p. 225).

Dawn's words also referenced followership. Her focus was clearly on the students who attended Meet-Up, the followers, and on her efforts to build positive relationships through which she could encourage and guide them in their learning. She extended and simplified this thought: "[You] *help them learn how to learn*". Malcolm's thoughts were on the same plane. He explained that he thought that leadership in Meet-Up involved "*motivating them* [the students] *or just explicitly helping them enough to get through that problem to then go ahead and learn themselves*". This capacity to motivate people was one of Gardner's (1990) 14 traits of leadership, but Malcolm applied it relationally, seeing its significance as being an element in relationship-building with the students.

7.5.2 Communicating

Another important element of the cultivation and flourishing of these relationships was communication. While communication can be considered a personal characteristic, it is also an important component of sound relationships (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011). I have included it in this category as my analysis indicated that it was expressed by the participants in a relational context. For example, Malcolm claimed that "*a lot of leadership is to do with communicatio*n". And he added: "*Communication is everything in Meet-Up. You can't help people* [to] *learn if you can't communicate.*" Communication to Malcolm included inspiring, motivating and helping the students – all elements of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Anna concurred, stating that Meet-Up leaders needed "*good study habits and good communication skills to be able to help students with what they actually need help with*". Bass and Bass (2008) would have agreed, as they considered interpersonal competence, which incorporated communication, to be an element of leadership. Again a participant had nominated a personal characteristic but had described and applied it to her relationships with the students, and so I consider that it belonged in this category.

7.5.3 Earning trust

Khan et al.'s (2019) research into followership found that trust in leadership on the part of followers encouraged the development of both active engagement and independent critical thinking. It was also a strong determining factor in establishing positive relationships between leader and follower. Relationships based on trust in leadership facilitated the

partnering of leaders and followers to achieve common goals (Khan et al, 2019). A few participants made specific mention of trust in their interviews.

For instance, Mack compared Meet-Up with his previous work experiences before he became a student. He suggested that, in Meet-Up, there was "*probably a lot of trust because of the relationship*" between leader and student. As Meet-Up leaders were not the student's employer, there was the "*lack of power divide*" that he had found in the workplace. Theresa also mentioned trust, but she was making a different point. She argued that students would not be able to "*build that trust with you, or that rapport with you, if you never have any answers, if you're always saying, 'I don't have all the answers right now,* [but] *I can go away and find them'.*" Theresa was making it clear that Meet-Up leaders needed to have sufficient knowledge of the course and the discipline, but the predominant reason for this was in order to build sound relationships with the students. She, too, had taken a personal characteristic but expressed it relationally, as a means of building relationships with the students.

7.5.4 Being a role model

The term "role modelling" is prominent in the leadership literature, particularly in theories where there is concern for and interest in the development of the follower, such as transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The concept hints at a hierarchy of positions, and indeed managers and others in leadership positions, aware of their influence on the employees or followers, strive to model the behaviours and values that they would like to see emulated and developed. The significance of this behaviour for leadership development was evidenced when Kouzes and Posner's (1987, as cited in Posner, 2004) practices of exemplary leadership were revised in 2002, and "modelling the way" (p. 444) was placed at the top of the list. The research was carried out with students, and it returned the same result: that effective student leaders exhibited the same practices (Posner, 2004). The participants' words in a number of excerpts supported this finding. Lynette was explicit: "[A]*n effective student leader should be able to be a good role model*". By contrast, Jo's explanation was tacit: she mentioned that she had "*shown students how to do things*", thereby echoing Posner (2004) in her own words.

In the PAL literature, student leaders are seen as peers of the students whom they assist, but peers with more experience at learning in higher education and at navigating the processes and procedures peculiar to that environment (Topping, 2005), and so, in this way, the position of student leader to student was hierarchical. As Caroline put it: "*An effective*

leader has to first understand their cohort….It's very important that a student leader is approachable, and the student can talk to them on their level. They don't feel that it's someone who is all these steps above them". This notion of the experienced student guiding the novice student is the philosophical foundation on which the concept of PAL rests. The notion that experienced student leaders are role models for other students is implicit.

In my study, the need to be a role model of "good student" behaviours was considered by some student leader participants to be of critical importance. Lynette, for example, noted that "*It became apparent very quickly that they looked up to you*". She explicitly used the term: "*Leadership in Meet-Up is about being a role model*". She added that she chose to change aspects of her behaviours and of the way she spoke in sessions in recognition of the fact that students looked to her as a student role model. "*I knew that, if I did something, they were going to do it that way as well.*"

Theresa made a clear connection between accepting the position of Meet-Up leader and acknowledging responsibility for and ownership of all that the position implied, including being "*a good role model*". Other participants spoke about being a role model, but tacitly, using other terms. Lance, for example, claimed that Meet-Up leaders "*show leadership in terms of setting an example*". He noted ways in which the Meet-Up leaders could set that example, which included explaining to students that they (the Meet-Up leaders) really liked the subjects that they were studying, and that they were engaged with their learning, in this way encouraging the students to do the same. He added that Meet-Up leaders also advised students about appropriate ways to study and what they could be aiming to achieve.

Grace agreed, claiming that "*Leadership is always about being able to model what is effective. So modelling how to be an effective student was a way that I could be a leader to them*". Jo's idea was similar, but she expressed it in a simple analogy. She had seen a cartoon sketch where the leader was "*the person at the front of the train pulling the train along, rather than the person at the back, just telling everyone what to do*". She added that she would like to think that she "*was the one at the front of the train pulling everybody along, showing them how to do it*".

7.5.5 The role of emotions

Bass and Bass (2008) considered emotional competency to be an important attribute of leadership, as did Ashkanasy and Humphrey (2011). Ashkanasy and Humphrey (2011) considered the role of emotions in organisations to be so crucial that, in an attempt to explain

emotions and their impact, they developed a model of emotions from their detailed research that was divided into five levels. Level 3 was termed "interpersonal communication" (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011, p. 217). It encompassed the outward display of emotion that happens when people are in contact with others, and it included facial expressions. I was fascinated on one of my multiple re-readings of the transcripts to discover something that I had missed previously, and that was Nina's description of this element of interpersonal competence, articulated in her own way, and finished with a laugh:

> *The leaders should know what the student is expecting….Like, from the student's face, you'll be knowing, "Okay, he didn't get it. I should explain it". So, yeah, that's effective Meet-Up leadership. If you can read the face, the student's face, you're a good Meet-Up leader.*

7.5.5.1 Caring

A number of participants placed an emphasis on the gentle, guiding and togetherness nature of the Meet-Up leader role. Miranda, for example, said that being a Meet-Up leader involved sitting with people and talking with them. Dawn concurred: "[you are] *sitting with them*" rather than "*standing up in front of them*". Greenleaf (1977/1991) stressed the importance of care and concern for others and an awareness of their needs, indeed metaphorically sitting with them. From sitting to walking, Phyllis believed that "[Y]*ou're a leader because you're willing to walk with everyone*", as did Nina, who explained that leadership involved "*walking with them* [the students] *towards the goal*", and "*just guiding them*".

Transformational leadership shares this concern for others, challenging and inspiring them, whilst also offering encouragement and guidance (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Charles called it the "*alongside*" nature of leadership in Meet-Up; Bass and Bass (2008) and Ashkanasy and Humphrey (2011), amongst others, called it "interpersonal competence", noting that it incorporated communication, caring, insight and empathy.

7.5.5.2 Having empathy

Empathy, put simply, is a "supportive emotional connection" (Goleman et al., 2002, p. 5). It is considered a leadership trait in a number of leadership theories and practices, typically where interpersonal competence is considered important such as in relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Gardner's (1990) fifth trait, understanding of followers and their needs, is essentially a way of expressing empathy. In addition, emotions such as empathy comprise the factors in emotional intelligence (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011) that some researchers consider an essential quality for effective leadership (Goleman et al., 2002).

Sometimes, however, the term is used tacitly, such as in accounts of transformational leadership where it is expressed as care and concern for followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Similarly, some of the participants hinted at empathy being an important trait of student leadership without actually using the word. Phyllis, for example, talked about having "*a level of experience that you can share and hopefully make somebody else's experience in the course better*". She added, "*You want to prevent them from stumbling on the same things you stumbled on.*" She clearly had the interests of the students at heart and understood how they felt.

A number of participants did explicitly use the term, however, stating that they considered empathy to be an important trait of an effective student leader. For instance, Grace told me that she thought that an effective student leader was "*Someone who is friendly, confident, empathetic, and who has a good understanding of what it is that they need to be doing to help the student. So someone who can identify what is needed by each cohort and be able to tailor their session to that…*". This excerpt, while mentioning empathy contextually and as a specific trait (amongst others), emphasised its importance relationally.

Phoebe was clear: "*If you're given opportunities to develop as a person,* [you need to] *learn skills like empathy and understanding, and patience*". Leadership literature confirmed this understanding. Bass and Bass (2008) in their comprehensive text on leadership listed empathy as a trait that was fundamental to effective leadership. The 10 components of servant leadership also include empathy (Spears, 2004), as noted above.

7.5.5.3 Being positive

Interestingly, Grace acknowledged that "*studying is an emotional thing*". Ashkanasy (2003) had written at length about the influence of emotions on everyday life. Grace continued that sometimes, when students received assessment results that were not as good as they had hoped, they could become despondent and critical of the lecturer. "*Being a leader meant that I had to turn that around to something positive*", and to show them "*characteristics that make up more of a positive approach*".

Theresa, in her response to an earlier question in the interview, said that she chose to begin each Meet-Up session with a positive attitude, and she ensured that she maintained that positive mindset throughout the sessions. Thus, both Grace and Theresa, through their activities in Meet-Up, tacitly acknowledged the importance, as they saw it, of the power of emotions, undisputedly aligning their actions with leadership behaviours (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Goleman, Boyatsis, & McKee, 2002).

Rost's (1993) definition of leadership stated: "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and their collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 99). This too made a lot of sense to me, given the participants' general tendency to refer constantly to the close connections among themselves, the role and the students. In fact, Dawn explicitly used the term, saying that, in Meet-Up, there was "*the influence side of leadership as well*", and she went on to discuss how Meet-Up leaders could influence students in a positive way.

Dawn, it seemed, had placed emphasis on the positive influence that Meet-Up leaders could bring, claiming that they could "*add a bit more perspective to people's lives and change their attitudes, I think, without them maybe necessarily realising*". Meet-Up leaders were "*able to put a positive slant on whatever* [the students were] *experiencing, and hopefully change their attitude*". Changing attitudes is a characteristic of transformational leadership (Bass & Bass, 2008), and of relational leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006). In addition, Dawn, possibly without realising it, had just described an attribute of leadership that is considered by many scholars in the field to be important; it is known as mood management (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011), or resonance (Goleman et al., 2002).

The literature also suggests that, if leaders model positive emotions through actions and words, followers can pick up on the "vibe" and feel the same emotion. This is known as "emotional contagion" (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011, p. 218). Leaders can in that way influence their followers by inspiring, motivating and encouraging them through the demonstration of positive emotions.

Boyatzis (as cited in McKinsey & Co., 2020) tied positivity, listening and emotional contagion together: "Leaders need to listen, but they are also responsible for adding positivity" (p. 4). He added: "We can't be positively infectious with others – and excite and engage them – unless we're feeling inspired and sustained ourselves first" (p. 5). It seems from the participants' words above that they enacted each of these leadership attributes as part of the Meet-Up leader position.

7.5.5.4 Listening

Theresa viewed her positive approach as aligning closely with listening to the students. In describing her picture of an effective student leader, she reiterated the importance of listening. An effective leader is "*someone who listens, because, a lot of the time, people who come to you just have things that they need heard....If you listen to the question properly, then you have more of a chance of at least helping them*". Kouzes and Posner

(2009) endorsed this approach, claiming that it is crucial that leaders learn to listen carefully to all their colleagues, "appreciating their hopes and attending to their needs" (p. 21).

Other participants also focused on the importance of the listening aspect of leadership; indeed, Phoebe posited that one of the most important characteristics of an effective leader was to listen: "*listening and* [a] *willingness to adapt to the needs of the people that you are trying to lead*". Charles echoed the words of Kouzes and Posner (2009) when he stated, "*An effective student leader is a leader who is able to listen well to what the other student is saying, can relate well to the students, and doesn't act like a guru*" [laughs].

7.5.6 Non-hierarchical structure

Some participants were clear that they felt that it was an important part of leadership in Meet-Up that the student leaders did not place themselves in a position above the students, as was explicitly pointed out above by Charles. Phyllis explained what leadership looked like to her in a narrative that clearly had consideration of the students (followers) at its core:

> *I think a lot of what we talked about at school was this idea of servant leadership. You serve others by – I guess the prime example being Jesus washing people's feet and things like that. That was always something that they taught us at school. But I sort of approached it a bit differently here, where it wasn't necessarily serving others, but it was, "You're not a leader because you stand above everyone. You're a leader because you're willing to, I guess, walk with everyone".*
>
> *So some of the things that I feel were leadership qualities were perhaps being able to sit at a round table discussion and encourage people to air their views. And then, if things got quiet, make a comment that got the conversation started again, or encourage someone who perhaps had got the question a little bit wrong to say what the right answer might be by giving them a pointer in the right direction. So they're not necessarily feeling like they've got it wrong, but they can come up with the right answer on their own as well.*

Miranda expressed her notion of an effective leader very differently, but the conception was clearly similar. For her, an effective leader's session is:

> *Definitely one where you go into a classroom or into a room where you're doing Meet-Up, and everyone is engaged and involved. So having the ability to do that is, for me, a good leader, a good student leader – where questions are being asked both ways, so students are open to asking questions and then, I guess, the leader is showing a little bit of vulnerability, in that they are open to being asked questions and*

maybe not knowing the answer. Because I think that's important in a student leader –
that you don't pitch yourself as being some high and mighty person who knows and
can do everything.

Her premise was that leadership included four elements, all of which she considered
essential. Firstly, the leadership relationship had to be based on non-coercive influence;
secondly, collaborators as well as leaders must be active; thirdly, both leaders and
collaborators must intend substantive and transformational change; and finally, the intended
changes must reflect mutually agreed purposes. The accent on followers was unambiguous.

Apart from the obvious link in these excerpts with servant leadership (Greenleaf,
1977/1991), there was a close association with relational leadership (Komives et al., 2013),
with its focus on the importance of relationships and involving being purposeful, inclusive,
empowering, ethical and process-oriented.

7.5.7 Other relationships

The Meet-Up leader role involved forging relationships with academics and
professional staff members across the university, as well as with other Meet-Up leaders and
the coordinator of the program. And, while the emphasis in this category has been on the
relationships established with the students, some participants remarked that, as Meet-Up
leaders, they had developed relationships with people across the university.

For example, Carmel noted the change from her secondary school days where the
staff room was largely off limits to students. By contrast, as a Meet-Up leader, she developed
a relationship with the lecturers whereby she could "*just march in and say 'Hi, [lecturer's
name], do you have 10 minutes?'*" She added, "*It mightn't seem like leadership, but to me it
was.*" She continued that she considered this "*a growth area for me*". Thus, in this simple
excerpt, Carmel had aligned her Meet-Up experiences with leadership development; growth,
change, self-confidence and self-efficacy are all important elements of leadership
development.

7.5.8 The link with the conceptual framework

Excerpts from the participants were included in Categories A and B, which
demonstrated the alignment of the participants' descriptions of their understandings of
student leadership with the conceptual framework; this category follows the trend. The
responses of the participants to Questions 6 and 7 that guided me to place them in Category C
also confirmed a clear association with the explanations of the Meet-Up leaders' manner of

enacting their role that I had included in the conceptual framework. Once again, reviewing the conceptual framework diagram, Figure 4.1, may make the alignment clearer.

In the Meet-Up environment, the relationships that the participants described had clear associations with the section in the conceptual framework that described not so much what the Meet-Up leaders did, but rather the "manner" (Burns, 1978, p. 19) in which it was carried out. Table 7.5 provides the names of the participants whose articulations of student leadership, as described and discussed above, aligned with the words that I placed in the conceptual framework to explain the manner or ways in which the Meet-Up leaders enacted their role.

Table 7.5: The alignment of the participant voice with the Environment section of the conceptual framework: How they did it: integration

Participants	From the conceptual framework How they did it: integration
Theresa	Activated what they brought to relate and responded to their peers and guided them in learning
Phoebe	Demonstrated initiative, adaptability and flexibility in meeting the learning needs of their peers
Nina	Stimulated and inspired peers to achieve common learning goals
Dawn, Grace, Theresa	Offered encouragement and guidance to influence peers positively in their learning
Grace, Phoebe	Showed strong empathy, remembering how they had felt as new students
Implicit throughout participants' responses	Articulated and demonstrated commitment to the program and their role

The manner in which leaders encouraged followers to strive to achieve shared goals was the foundation of Burns' (1978) development of what he termed "transforming leadership" (p. 20). Transforming leadership occurs when leaders engage with followers, raising both to "higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Morality in Burns' (1978) eyes meant the level of both behaviour and "ethical aspiration" (p. 20), and such engagement had a transforming effect on both leader and follower. The participants' voices, as evidenced in the excerpts above, demonstrated that their commitment to and enactment of their role as

Meet-Up leader contributed to the students raising their expectations of themselves in their learning.

7.6 The outcome space

In phenomenographic research, the outcome space comprises the final set of categories in addition to a graphical representation that demonstrates the structure of the set, and the links and the relationships among the different ways of experiencing the phenomenon. Akerlind (2005) offered what could be considered a definition when she clarified that the outcome space in phenomenographic studies consists of all the possible ways of understanding or experiencing the particular phenomenon, at that particular time, and for the population represented by the participants in the study. While it may be presumptuous to assume that all possible ways of understanding a phenomenon such as student leadership could be unearthed in interviews, I do claim to have interpreted the participants' voicings as well as I could based on the trustworthiness of the study, as outlined in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 5, it was noted that, in phenomenographic research about specific learning concepts, researchers typically have a preference for what is deemed the correct way of learning a concept (generally involving deep learning) over other ways (often classified as surface learning strategies), which tend to result in a hierarchy in their findings. By contrast, researchers such as myself who explored phenomena other than educational issues generally consider that all the conceptions of the phenomenon that they are investigating are of equal value and importance. To this end, during all phases of the research, including the analysis of data, the researcher ensures that all the descriptions are treated equally, and that no hierarchical structure is used (Sandbergh, 1997; Trigwell, 2000).

And so, having discussed the participants' ways of understanding student leadership – that is, having revealed their conceptions of the phenomenon – my analysis turns now to a discussion of the relationships among the three categories. Not only is this consistent with the phenomenographic approach as noted above (Akerlind, 2005), but it is also a sound way to bring the findings of the research together, and to offer a concise explanation of the alignment of the categories, which are repeated below for the reader's ease.

7.6.1 The associations among the categories

For some participants, student leadership was all about utilising the personal characteristics, both dispositional and learned, that they had brought with them to the program, and that they had continued to develop while within its environment. These notions

were expressed and described in Category A (Student leadership as personal: it involves utilising and developing personal characteristics). Some participants considered that student leadership was inextricably tied to the context in which the position of student leader operated: Category B (Student leadership as contextual: it is defined by the operating environment or context). In other words, their way of understanding student leadership was wedded to the operating environment: it was contextual.

It was clear in the participants' voices in Category C (Student leadership as relational: it is about the relationships that develop) that student leadership was about the relationships that were formed. In this category, student leadership was considered by the participants to be about the relationships that developed during the execution of the student leader role. In particular, the participants were cognisant of the relationships that were established with the students attending their Meet-Up sessions. They were also aware that they were developing relationships with others in the broader university. The fostering and nurturing of these relationships involved the engagement of the personal characteristics that the student leaders brought with them in order to fulfil the role that was student leader. The behaviours of the student leaders also contributed to the formation of the relationships that developed. However, this study does not propose that there was any hierarchy in the participants' conceptions, but rather that there was simply a difference in emphasis: all conceptions were equally important.

7.6.2 Shifts between categories

The reader may be aware that, in some cases, different excerpts from the same participant have been included in more than one category. For example, I have chosen excerpts from Anna's interview to demonstrate both Categories A and C. When a participant shifted from one understanding of the phenomenon to another in the course of the interview, it was termed an "inter-contextual shift" (Marton & Pong, 2005, p. 344). However, in this study, my interpretation of the participants' voicings was that, rather than changing their understandings of student leadership, the participants had, during their reflections in the course of the interview, augmented and complemented their first thoughts. In doing so, they proffered another of the three conceptions of the phenomenon of student leadership. It was clear, therefore, that one individual could have more than one single conception of student leadership. And this did not detract from the delineation of the three categories. Table 7.6 identifies the range of conceptions that the participants expressed in this study.

Table 7.6: The alignment of the participants' descriptions and the categories

Participants	Category A personal	Category B contextual	Category C relational
Anna	√	√	√
Carmel		√	√
Caroline	√	√	√
Charles			√
Dawn	√		√
Florence	√		√
Grace	√		√
Jo			√
Lance		√	√
Lena	√		√
Lynette	√	√	√
Mack			√
Malcolm			√
Miranda		√	√
Nina		√	
Phoebe	√		√
Phyllis			√
Robert	√	√	
Theresa	√		√
Wanda		√	

Table 7.5 clearly indicates that the conceptions of student leadership as voiced by the majority of participants belonged in more than one category of description. Some of the participants' ways of understanding the phenomenon fitted under Categories A and B, some belonged in both A and C categories, others were appropriate in B and C and still others fitted all three categories. Thus, while each category of the conceptions of student leadership had a place of equivalence, the strong overlap of the categories indicated that the most appropriate way to represent the outcome space diagrammatically or visually was with a simple Venn diagram: Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: The outcome space: The categories of description of student leadership
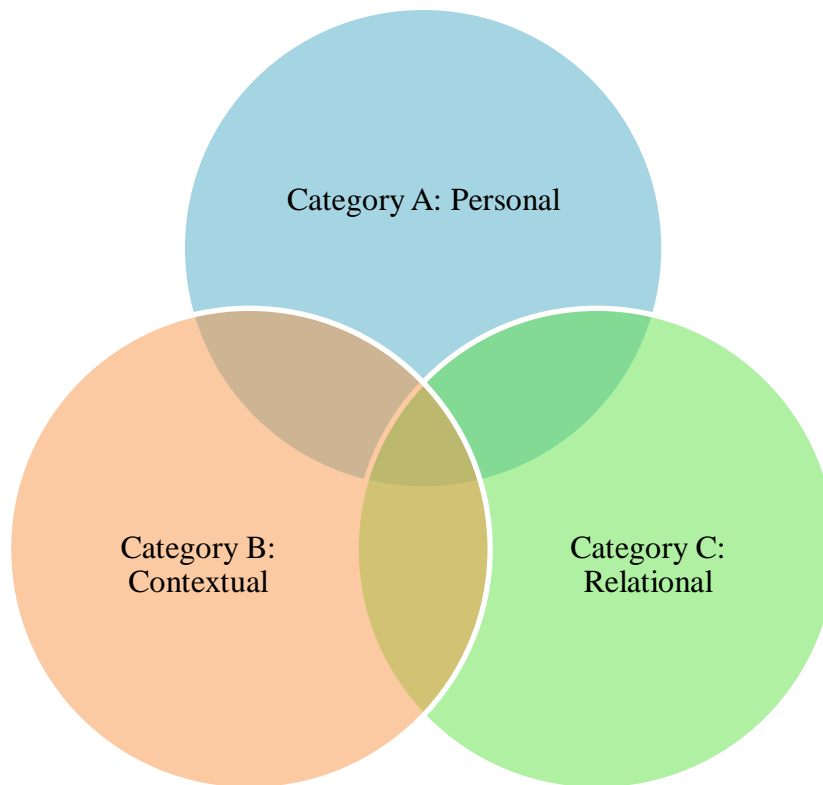
7.6.3 The association between the outcome space and the conceptual framework

In this chapter, alignment with the conceptual framework has been noted throughout the analysis of the participants' descriptions of their varying understandings of student leadership, as I searched for their often-elusive conceptions of the phenomenon hidden within their voicings. While the framework was developed at the beginning of my doctoral journey to represent my notion of what I observed and believed happened to the leaders in and through their engagement in the program, my investigation of the participants' conceptions as indicated throughout the above explanation of the categories of description ultimately revealed that they mirrored the first sections of the framework.

To be explicit, Category A matched the Input section – it expressed the personal characteristics that the students brought to the program that were considered of paramount importance in their conception of student leadership for some participants. Category B reflected the "What they did" section of the framework – the behaviours enacted in the role of Meet-Up leader that were particular to the context of the Meet-Up program and that, for some participants, were dominant in their understanding and description of student leadership. And

Category C described the relationships that were developed in the Meet-Up program environment and that constituted the most significant, overarching description of what student leadership was for some of the participants. The relationships as described by the participants aligned with the "How they did it" part of the environment section.

Additionally, and arguably most importantly, the participants' words, as placed in each of the three categories and discussed above, demonstrated not only alignment with the Input and Environment sections of the framework, but their voices also demonstrated achievement of the Outcome section of the framework, that is they had become experienced student leaders. By explaining that they had employed the personal characteristics they bought to the program to involve and integrate themselves in and into the program, they also demonstrated that they had developed as experienced student leaders. They had met the criteria I had placed in the Outcome section of the framework:

- Heightened awareness and understanding of self
- Increased understanding of discipline concepts shared with peers that contributed to their confidence and success
- Empathetic relationships with peers that inspired, motivated, guided and encouraged them in their learning
- Increased understanding of university systems and processes demonstrated by effective engagement with academics and other university groups/sections

And so my search for the conceptions of student leadership held by the student leaders themselves uncovered an alignment of the fundamental elements of the study as depicted in the conceptual framework that I had developed at the start of my doctoral journey. Thus, it seemed that the conceptual framework actually held the clue to the connections linking the Meet-Up program, the literature, the framework, the research approach and the analysis of the participants' articulations, and I gradually established those associations.

These connections were in some ways a surprise to me; while I had expected the framework to have associations with the participants' notions, I was uncertain how accurately it would mirror their conceptions and experiences of student leadership. I was also unsure how well the literature would support my perceptions as explained in the framework, and if the findings facilitated by my chosen method of inquiry would allow me to realise my research goals and to address my research questions. But it seems that the sections of the conceptual framework did align well with the participants' voices: that is, the student leaders engaged with the Meet-Up environment, bringing their characteristics (Input) that then

influenced and impacted upon the environment (the Meet-Up program: What they did and How they did it), ultimately resulting in their development and other outcomes.

7.7 Summary of the chapter

This chapter continued the analysis of the participants' words commenced in Chapter 6. It has provided a response to Research Question 2, which asked: "What were the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership?" The phenomenographic approach, which was outlined in considerable detail in Chapter 5, was engaged to ascertain those conceptions. It was an appropriate approach for a study seeking to uncover the ways of understanding a phenomenon as described by the people involved – that is, from a second-order perspective (Marton & Booth, 1997).

The chapter revealed that, while there were similarities in the ways that the participants conceived the phenomenon of student leadership, there were also variations. The conceptions of student leadership as voiced by the majority of the participants belonged in more than one category of description, and thus the variations were found in the prominence that the participants attached to particular elements of the phenomenon in their descriptions. The study has not proposed that there was any hierarchy in the participants' conceptions, but rather that there was simply a difference in emphasis: all conceptions were equally important.

The descriptions were placed in three categories:

- Category A: Student leadership as personal: it involves utilising and developing personal characteristics
- Category B: Student leadership as contextual: it is defined by the operating environment or context
- Category C: Student leadership as relational: it is about the relationships that develop.

Further thought and analysis to determine the relationships among the categories unearthed the link with the conceptual framework, which had all along offered a clue not only to the ways that the participants described their conceptions, but also to the whole study. Chapter 8 continues the analysis of the participants' words.

8 STUDENT LEADERSHIP: MAKING SENSE OF IT

8.1 Introduction

While the phenomenographic approach yielded the participants' ways of understanding student leadership, I was also keen to learn how the participants interpreted and made sense of their student leadership experiences. This chapter addresses Research Questions 3: "How did the Meet-Up leaders make sense of their development as people, students and leaders?", and in doing so, completes the pictures of the student leaders who participated in the study. In this chapter, I explain firstly the sensemaking process as espoused by Weick (1995). After briefly describing each of the characteristics of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), I analyse the participants' voices and sensemaking processes encapsulated in their responses to Questions 5, 8 and 9, using the questions as headings.

Question 5: Do you think you made a difference [to the students' motivation and learning]?

Question 8: Do you think you were an effective leader?

Question 9: Do you think you would be the same person you are today if you had not become a Meet-Up leader?

From there, I present my interpretations and my sensemaking, as the researcher, of the participants' sensemaking processing and my own. Sensemaking provided the key to determining the impact of Meet-Up leadership on the development of the Meet-Up leaders as people, students and leaders, and how the participants in this study made sense of that development, allowing me to address Research Question 3.

8.2 Sensemaking: a further explanation

As discussed in Chapter 5, sense making as a research methodology had its roots in the communication field in the 1970's when Brenda Dervin sought to develop a better way of understanding how people make sense of the information they seek and use (Naumer et al., 2008). As Dervin (1999) put it, the Sense-Making Methodology that she developed transferred attention from "nouns" to "verbs" (p. 732). In other words, the focus became processes and practices rather than structures. It assumed that "humans are involved in a constant journey through sense-makings and sense-unmakings" (p. 731). Dervin's (1999) framework has been applied across a number of fields, but it sits particularly well in contexts that deal specifically with research into people's information needs. For example, librarians, health care practitioners and information systems designers can utilise Sense-Making

Methodology to investigate how and why individuals access information and if the systems that have been put in place meet their needs (Naumer et al., 2008).

In the field of organisational management and behaviour, Karl Weick (1993, 1995, 1999, 2006) also wrote about making sense. He proposed a sensemaking paradigm in order to advise people about how they could determine what it was that was happening and how they could act or respond. In Weick's (1995) theory, sensemaking involves stepping out from previous assumptions or learnt frames to determine new ways of responding to current and possible future situations. Once the time of the incident or event has passed, sensemaking involves reflection on what happened, and why the person responded as she did.

In addition to making sense of the past, Weick (1995) made the point that sensemaking "can be extended beyond the present" (p. 29) – a term that he called "future perfect thinking" (p. 29), whereby the past can be used to inform the future as well as the present, and to serve as a means by which individuals can predict and prepare themselves for future events in their lives. It is important to draw a distinction between reflecting on or examining an event or experience in retrospect in order to inform the future, and the nostalgic or sentimental notion of reflecting, even dwelling, on the past to generate feelings of pleasurable melancholia. It is the former explanation of reflection or retrospect that is part of the sensemaking process.

As noted, while Weick's (1993, 1995, 1999, 2006) work, like Dervin's (1999), is recognised as one of the founding paradigms of sensemaking as a concept (Snowden, 2005), there are other contributors to the literature. For instance, Colville et al. (2016) wrote about situations that may arise when the past does not adequately inform sensemaking for the future, and it may appear that "sensemaking has outlived its usefulness" (p. 5). But, rather than rejecting it entirely, Colville et al. (2016) suggested that sensemaking could be amended or rebalanced, and engaging in simplexity could assist. The term "simplexity" (Colville et al., 2012, p. 5) was contributed to the conversation about sensemaking to help people make sense of novel situations – those that did not have direct links with past events. Colville et al. (2012) argued that "Sensemaking is a balance of making sense through thinking and acting in which there is always an element of both" (p. 7) – simplexity simply conveys that notion. Simplexity therefore is basically "a fusion of sufficient complexity of thought with necessary simplicity of action" (Colville et al., 2016, p. 5).

Another way of explaining sensemaking is that it responds to the question "What's the story [here]?" (Weick, 1999, p. 140; Weick et al., 2005, p. 413). Colville et al. (2012) noted that making sense of experiences and endowing them with meaning stray into the

domain of the storyteller, thereby linking sensemaking with storytelling. These descriptions particularly resonated with me as I had always thought of my study as telling the stories of the Meet-Up leaders. As noted in Chapter 5, Weick's sensemaking framework aligned well with the Meet-Up leaders' efforts to make sense of their actions and experiences as student leaders in a PAL program in a higher education institution. Additionally, I deemed Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework appropriate for my study as its elements offered associations not only with my observations of the Meet-Up leaders' behaviours and development, but also with the participants' responses in the interviews.

8.3 The application of sensemaking to my study

Weick (1995) nominated "seven distinguishing characteristics" through which the sensemaker moves to make sense of the situation that she is facing:

i)   grounded in identity construction

ii)   retrospective

iii)   enactive of sensible environments

iv)   social

v)   ongoing

vi)   focused on and by extracted cues, and

vii)   driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. (p. 17)

The participants' articulations of their experiences as Meet-Up leaders demonstrated close connections with the characteristics of sensemaking as listed above. While the context of my study – student leadership in a peer-learning program in a higher education institution – certainly had similarities to sensemaking in the organisational management and behaviour that was Weick's (1995) realm, the focus on assisting students to understand course-based and discipline-focused concepts warranted a slightly different perspective of how sense was made of what happened in the environment of the program. Indeed, I viewed Weick's (1995) sensemaking elements as they applied to the student leaders' processes as being a little like Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors, which were explained in Subsection 4.6.1.1. Students move along the highways of the vectors at different rates and in different orders, and I viewed the Meet-Up leaders' sensemaking journeys similarly.

I have chosen to discuss the sensemaking characteristics articulated by Weick (1995) as I identified them in the participants' responses to Questions 5, 8 and 9. Questions 5, 8 and 9 required the participants to engage in sensemaking, and their use of each characteristic of Weick's (1995) sensemaking framework can be evidenced throughout their responses. I have

chosen to use the three questions as headings; for subheadings, I have used the pseudonyms of the participants whose interview transcripts provided the excerpts that I selected to demonstrate the alignment between the participants' voicings and the elements of sensemaking. Some of the excerpts are quite lengthy. I considered that, in order to capture accurately the perceptions and conceptions of the participants and to demonstrate their sensemaking processes clearly, I needed to include an excerpt that had sufficient detail. But firstly, I outline each of Weick's (1995) sensemaking characteristics.

8.3.1 Characteristic 1: Grounded in identity construction

"Identities are constituted out of the process of interaction" (Weick, 1995, p. 20). People project themselves into their environment and experience the consequences, learning about their identities as they do so. In short, people take their cues for their identity construction from the behaviour of others in that environment. Thus, "people simultaneously try to shape and react to the environments they face" (p. 23). And, as they engage and communicate with others, and notice and interpret the conduct of these others, people begin to make sense of who they are and what is important to them – that is, they construct their identity/identities. Indeed, "making life sensible is as much about who we are as about narrating events and experiences" (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012, p. 69).

Carmel offered a good example of this point: "…*I'm a different person when I go into that Meet-Up room because I know, when I enter that Meet-Up room, I'm the one with the information, and I need to effectively get that to the students and I need to help them…*". Theresa expressed the same thought: "*Once you get into that room and you know what you're talking about, and the students are looking at you, then you become a different person*".

Chapter 6 described the stories of the participants in the study. It showed their individual differences as well as what they had in common, which included, in particular, a clear intention and passion to help their peers to learn. Chapter 7 explained the participants' understandings of student leadership. Their descriptions of this phenomenon revealed that they had engaged their personal traits in the role of student leader, adapted their actions to suit the students' needs, and developed trusting relationships. In doing so, they had actively constructed identities as individuals, students and leaders, with a strong sense of purpose. This identity development aligns not only with Weick (1995), but also with Chickering and Reisser (1993), who posited that identity construction involves individuals making sense of who they have become, and developing a sense of purpose and a sense of integrity. Carmel's and Theresa's comments demonstrated clearly their awareness that they were developing a

new identity as a Meet-Up leader, and that it held an inherent purpose and responsibility to help the students to learn. This awareness gave rise to a sense of integrity that influenced the choices and decisions they made and that shaped their actions in their Meet-Up sessions.

8.3.2 Characteristic 2: Retrospective

Weick (1995) considered retrospect to be "the most distinguishing characteristic of the present conceptualisation of sensemaking" (p. 24). Certainly, in my study, all the participants engaged in the retrospective process of sensemaking in the course of the interviews – ostensibly, they were obliged to make meaning of their Meet-Up experiences in order to address my questions. Making meaning of something, according to Weick (1995), is "an attentional process, but it is attention to that which has already occurred" (pp. 25-26), and it is "directed backward from a specific point in time" (p. 26). So, at a specific point in time – the time of the interviews – I had asked the participants to direct their attention to their time as Meet-Up leaders. Their articulations of their experiences of this time, and the sense that they made of those experiences, were, therefore, based on their memories, complete with all the influences on personal memory that the passage of time brings. In sum, all excerpts from the participants offered examples of retrospection as they focused their attention on addressing my questions.

Brown et al. (2015) claimed that sensemaking studies that focus on the "small-scale, local, sometimes individualised processes by which people make sense" (p. 9) can ultimately have "profound consequences" (p. 9). The retrospective sensemaking required of the participants in the interviews allowed them the opportunity to reflect on the impact of Meet-Up both on themselves and on the students, and sometimes this revealed that there could be or had been "profound consequences". For example, Grace noted:

> *Meet-Up was just great; I loved it. I got a lot out of it, and I felt I was really giving. You know that I would see students* [for whom] *it was life-changing really. It seems dramatic, but for some students it was. It was the thing that enabled them to be successful.*

And indeed retrospective thinking is not, as the term suggests, all about the past. Engagement in retrospective attention to past events or experiences can also contribute to forward thinking or "future perfect thinking" (Weick, 1995, p. 29). Brown et al. (2015), however, cautioned that this means more than just unpacking retrospective events, which can lead to "misguided" (p. 16) notions of or predictions for the future. "An expanded aperture of

the sensemaking lens" (p. 16), as well as research into strategies and processes for change management, are required to extrapolate sensemaking sensibly into the future.

Some criticisms of sensemaking have focused on the charge that the retrospective element has dominated sensemaking to the neglect of prospective sensemaking (Colville et al., 2016). Yet, prospectively looking towards the future is considered important (Brown et al., 2015), and some researchers contend that there are ample ways and opportunities for sensemaking to contribute to understanding how sense is made of the future. Brown et al. (2015), for example, contended that sensemaking can be pursued to determine "more fine-grained analyses" (p. 16) of the sensemaking of individuals or groups. There is also scope for exploring and researching sensemaking in different or "novel" (p. 17) contexts, such as the Meet-Up program. Opportunities further exist for extending the "comprehension of sensemaking in mundane rather than crisis-led sensemaking" (p. 17).

Not surprisingly, a number of participants in the study demonstrated not only retrospective sensemaking but also engagement in future thinking or forward-thinking sensemaking. Some related it to their own future. Florence, for instance, claimed: "[Meet-Up leadership] *was a massive opportunity, massive…In some ways, it's made me realise that a teaching role in my life is where I'd like to be at some point*". Other participants, such as Lynette, thought about it in relation to students in the future:

> *I've expressed many times how important I think Meet-Up is, particularly for the nursing faculty. I was disappointed…that we couldn't incorporate it into the teaching faculty as well, despite my trying many times to get it in there, because I think it would have translated beautifully into a teaching faculty as well and into their* [the students' future] *workplaces.*

Prospective sensemaking is discussed in greater detail in Section 8.7.

8.3.3 Characteristic 3: Enactive of sensible environments

Arguably, retrospection is a means through which individuals use their experiences to adapt to their environment (Dewey, 1938). This leads to enactment and "when people act, they bring events and structures into existence and set them in motion" (Weick, 1988, p. 306). Weick (1995) argued that people's actions help to create their environment just as much as the environment helps to create them. Environments, as a result, are dynamic, not static. Weick (1995) pointed out that, because people participate in the creation of their own environments, in doing so, they also contribute to the development of the challenges, restraints and opportunities that that environment provides.

Another criticism of sensemaking studies has been that they "are nothing more than studies of interpretation" (Sandberg & Tsoukas, as cited in Colville et al., 2016, p. 4). And yet enactment has been at the heart of sensemaking since its inception, reinforced by researchers such as Colville and colleagues (2012) with their work on simplexity, as noted in this chapter and explained in Section 8.2. Weick (1995) stated explicitly that action or enactment is crucial for sensemaking, yet interestingly he cautioned that the process of sensemaking does not yield results, but rather moments in the process, which should be considered more as "relatings" (p. 33) – that is, people relate to others in the environment and to the environment. In their responses to Questions 5, 8 and 9, a number of participants talked about "relatings" or the development of sound, and in some cases lasting, relationships with both students and academic staff members. For instance, Jo commented:

> *Yeah, I think Meet-Up was a great experience. I think university would have been very different* [for me] *without Meet-Up and all the relationships and friendships that I made through Meet-Up. And it was a great opportunity, and I'm really pleased that I took it on.*

Lena took a different tack:

> *In terms of the* [Meet-Up] *program, I think it is very valuable. I think it's one of the things that have certainty. Having attended Meet-Up* [as a student] *and run Meet-Up sessions, you know* [that] *it's a way of connecting students with each other, and I took that really seriously. I think, I hope, it's a program that* [is] *going to keep continuing, and I'm hoping people read research and find that there is a need* [and] *that they* [will] *have more programs like that* [Meet-Up].

Perhaps critics of sensemaking need to be reminded that the sensemaking process, as typified by Lena's vocalisation, includes a number of elements that encompass attention, perception, interpretation, action and awareness of self and others, in the past and the present and with projections into the future, which interact to provide a sensemaking perspective.

8.3.4 Characteristic 4: Social

While the term "sensemaking" can tempt people into considering it an individual process, Weick (1995) warned against that notion: "Conduct is contingent on the conduct of others, whether those others are imagined or physically present" (p. 39). In other words, Weick (1995) made it clear that people make decisions with other people in mind even if they are not with them at the time, aware that the implications of the decisions will affect or impact others in some way. Enactment, therefore, is a social process (Weick, 1988).

In Meet-Up, even in the planning and preparing of sessions, the social element was at play, regardless of whether or not the preparation was conducted by the leaders on their own, or with other leaders and the academic, as was often the case. The leaders always imagined or considered how the students would understand the explanations they intended to offer, or how useful they would find the activities they had planned. The preparation of sessions was typically influenced by, and sometimes contingent on, the leader's recollection of the students' behaviours in and reactions to previous sessions, as well as any feedback provided by the students.

In addition to preparing sessions with the students in mind, some of the participants spoke of collaborations and conversations with other leaders. Carmel, for instance, talked about the usefulness of the Meet-Up Leader Training and Development Days each semester. She also spoke about sitting in on some of the other leaders' sessions, as well as conversations with more experienced leaders in her discipline that were of great assistance to her. She commented that this was particularly helpful to her in determining what type of leader she was. She decided that she was a "*sit down at a round table*" kind of leader, trying to get a feel for the students' opinions and "*drawing out from them what they want to know and need to know*".

This demonstrated yet another social element of the sensemaking processes undertaken in Meet-Up. In addition, the nature of the Meet-Up program with its goals and aims, based as they were on collaborative learning, as was outlined in Chapter 2, indicated that the social element was inherent in the program. Hence, the social aspect of sensemaking was transparent and explicit throughout the interview discussions with the participants, in the same way as the retrospective element was.

8.3.5 Characteristic 5: Ongoing

According to Weick (1995), sensemaking is ongoing: "it neither starts fresh nor stops cleanly" (p. 49). He explained: "People are always in the middle of things, which become things only when those same people focus on the past from some point beyond it" (p. 43); a clear link with the retrospective element can be noted. Life flows: it is dynamic and continuous, which becomes most clear when that flow suffers an interruption that then induces an emotional response, either positive or negative (Weick, 1995, p. 46).

My interviews could perhaps be considered a gentle interruption: I was asking the participants to direct their attention to the time when they were Meet-Up leaders, and to recall their Meet-Up experiences from a point beyond – that is, wherever they were at the time of

the interview. According to Weick (1995), recall or retrospect in sensemaking tends to be congruent with current emotions, and so my sensemaking process proposed the following assumption or interpretation. The participants had agreed to the interviews – most said that they were very happy to be invited to participate, as was noted in the Introductory chapter. This suggested that the feeling with which they approached the interviews was one of anticipated enjoyment – and certainly the verbatim transcription revealed that there was much laughter in the interviews – and their attitude to the questions was correspondingly positive.

On point, to my question asking if there were anything else that she would like to add, Phoebe demonstrated positive, grateful, emotions: "*Just thank you for all the hard work you've done to make these opportunities possible for us*". To which I replied that it was the leaders, like herself, who had done all the hard work. She then responded: "*I know. But somebody laid the foundations and I think the foundations you've laid have led to me becoming a person I'm happier with in myself, so thank you for that. I really appreciate that*".

Phoebe demonstrated that the effects of her Meet-Up leader experience had continued on into her present life, influencing who she was now, and that the interview was an interruption, albeit a pleasant one, requiring thought and consideration – sensemaking, in effect.

8.3.6 Characteristic 6: Focused on and by extracted cues

"Extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (Weick, 1995, p. 50). What is extracted as a cue, and the interpretation of it, are both dependent on and affected by the context. In addition, a cue must be noticed for sensemaking to occur. And so"…people engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409).

Colville et al. (2016) argued that, because contemporary life is lived increasingly "on the run" (p. 9), attention needs to be placed on perceiving cues of actions happening currently rather than on the frames and actions of yesteryear. But, because the Meet-Up leaders' role was to assist students in their learning and understanding of course content, they were required to remember cues from the past and their own experiences of learning particular courses, when it was useful to do so, in order to enhance opportunities for the students to learn. Dawn explained:

…I think it's helpful if you have someone to turn to who's been there before….You have to learn to prioritise what you learn. So, I think that was probably the most helpful [thing we could do]…*we could guide students on where to focus. Because it's easy to lose track in all the different directions and be totally overwhelmed. But when they become overwhelmed and come to you, you can go, "Okay. This is what the course is about".*

In addition, however, the Meet-Up leaders needed to be flexible and focused on the present. It was important for the students that they were quick to perceive, interpret and then act on cues happening in front of them in their Meet-Up sessions. This was the nature of the role for which they were prepared in their training and development sessions. The participants in the study, as Meet-Up leaders, were, as a result, generally well-attuned to the students' cues regarding their understanding of leaders' explanations or activities involving important concepts in a course. Many of the stories of the participants in the interviews featured examples of their responding to cues, particularly in responses to Questions 5 and 8.

8.3.7 Characteristic 7: Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

According to Weick (1995), "The criterion of accuracy is secondary in any analysis of sensemaking for a variety of reasons" (p. 57). These reasons revolve around the point that sensemaking requires firstly perceiving cues, and then extracting and interpreting those cues. When this happens, it is difficult to tell if the perceptions and their interpretations will be accurate over the passage of time. For Meet-Up leaders, this meant that they could conduct their sessions only as well as they could at the time, using plausible interpretations of the students' cues from their perspective as experienced students and empathetic individuals, to guide them to choose reasonable actions aimed at helping students to succeed in that particular course and to progress through their degree.

Weick (1995) claimed that "sensemaking is about plausibility, coherence and reasonableness" (p. 61). Acceptable accounts, or stories based on these three factors rather than on accuracy, demonstrate patterns or templates that explain and energise, and this is the foundation of good sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Events and incidents are dynamic and require action. Indeed, Colville and Pye (2010) claimed that the momentum to act is important, and that, if people were to wait for accuracy rather than for plausibility, they would wait for ever. "Sensemaking involves the ongoing, retrospective development of plausible images that rationalise what people are doing" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409);

sensemakers, "as interdependent people, search for meaning, settle for plausibility and move on" (p. 419).

Meet-Up leaders, as an example, would advise and encourage the students in their sessions based on their knowledge and experience of studying the particular course. They were on the spot at that moment in time, and they did not always have the answers to the students' questions. As Grace noted: "…[W]*hen students came to me with questions that I didn't know the answer to, well, I learned it in helping them to learn, helping them to find out*". The leaders' own personal experience, their empathy, their desire and motivation to help students to learn and their positivity were more important than being right, and allowed them to act in the immediacy of the Meet-Up sessions to lead the students in their learning of the course.

Dawn made this same point about the experience of Meet-Up leadership helping her to focus on plausibility rather than on accuracy, of being able to move on and not be anxious about knowing all the answers. But her focus was in relation to her current workplace:

> *At this stage in my career…I'm still developing my knowledge and skills base. But often we have students who are shadowing us on the ward. And they'll ask questions and they're like really good questions, and I often ask myself, "Why haven't I asked that question?"* [Laughs] *Which means I don't actually know the answer to that question. But then, you can point them* [to] *how to find out, or do the same thing that I would need to do when I ask that question.…You know, I may not know all the answers, but that's okay as well.*

A little further on in the interview, she extended this notion: "*Like the ward I'm on at the moment is like really crazy busy. So often I don't have time to look up things on the job. Often you just have to go with what you know*". Dawn's explanations were clear examples of a plausible sensemaking enactment. They were also examples of quick, automatic, intuitive thinking (Kahneman, 2012).

8.4 Automatic thinking and effortful thinking

Daniel Kahneman (2012) wrote a text entitled *Thinking, fast and slow*. In it, he outlined two "fictitious characters" (p. 415) that were basically two levels of thinking that he termed "System 1" and "System 2" (pp. 20-21). "System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort…" (p. 20); it is basically intuitive. "System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it…" (p. 21); it requires consciously purposeful action. On reading this text, I could instantly see a connection with Weick's

(1995) sensemaking elements. For example, Kahneman's (2012) System 1 thinking aligned well with Weick's (1995) use of cues, especially with the notions of "enactive of sensible environments" and "focused on and by extracted cues" (p. 17). This also helps to explain how plausibility rather than accuracy becomes part of the enactment of decisions related to student engagement and the facilitation of learning.

The focus of this chapter is on how the participants in the study made sense of their time as Meet-Up leaders, and sensemaking theory provided an appropriate and germane frame or lens through which to examine their voicings about it. However, because I could see a clear and interesting alignment with Kahneman (2012) that also contributed to my efforts to make sense of the participants' Meet-Up stories, I have included his work referentially. In his text, Kahneman (2012) explored much more than these two thinking systems, but I have chosen to reference only the two systems because of their clear connection with sensemaking.

As I interpreted it, System 1 thinking involves perceiving or recognising simple cues – actions or activities, sounds or images (for example, facial expressions) – that provoke an automatic reaction or automatic processing: a "mental event" (Kahneman, 2012, p. 21) that is typically involuntary. Other more complex tasks, including further interpretation of a System 1 stimulus or cue, mobilise attention and effort that involve conscious, deeper thought before resulting in an action. This is System 2 thinking, which Kahneman (2012) described as involving "highly diverse operations" (p. 22). System 2 thinking aligns with the sensemaking elements described by Weick (1995) in each of his stages; Weick (1995) was clear that sensemaking required attentive focus and action, as noted above.

Kahneman (2012) made it clear that neither thinking system was infallible. He posited that System 1 thinking is the origin of "much that we do wrong, but it is also the origin of most of what we do right" (p. 416). Skills are best acquired in an environment that offers opportunities to practise the developing skills and to receive quick, clear, useful feedback. (Of course, I thought that Meet-Up was one such environment.) And, once this has happened, the intuitive autonomous choices made by System 1 thinking will typically be accurate. System 2 thinking has the benefit of being slower and offering time for greater contemplation, but it too can err. It is limited by its abilities and the knowledge to which it has access: "We do not always think straight when we reason" (Kahneman, 2012, p. 416).

The Meet-Up leaders' role required them to utilise both thinking systems. Some of their behaviours and responses to happenings in their sessions were largely automatic or intuitive; others required them to exert deeper consideration before action was taken. The

alignment of the sensemaking elements with fast and slow thinking is explored throughout the remainder of the chapter.

8.5 Participants' responses to Question 5: Do you think you made a difference [to the students' motivation and learning]?

In Question 4, I had asked the participants what they had done that contributed to students' motivation and learning; Question 5 then asked if they had made a difference. The participants had therefore to move quite quickly from simply explaining what they had done, which they seemed quite comfortable doing, to a question with more of a challenge: Did they think that they had made a difference? This required them to put themselves in the frame and to apply sensemaking.

The participants basically believed that they had made a difference. The typical response was, "*Yes, I think so*" or similar wording. Some provided an emphatic "*Yes*", and no participant responded in the negative. Robert claimed that knowing that he was making a difference gave him "*warm and fuzzies*". He argued that that was important because "…*that's your passion; that's your drive. If you're not getting warm and fuzzies out of it, like, are you doing your job? Are you making that difference?*". Robert's "*warm and fuzzies*" were an indication of an automatic event occurring (Kahneman, 2012).

Rather interestingly, Caroline said, "*I think you can make a difference through being a facilitator primarily*". She attributed this both to the role and to a leader's personal characteristics, providing a link or alignment with the categories established in Chapter 7: "…[T]*he role gives you almost like the power to go forward, and maybe bring out certain characteristics that you already have, perhaps*".

Most participants stated that they believed that they had made a difference because the students, by and large, told them that they had done so - via surveys, oral feedback, and small gifts and cards, or by continuing to attend sessions. The cue in these cases was obvious, even blatant. But the participants also picked up on other cues that told them that they had made a difference. For example, Lena told me: "*I think innately you know* [that you have made a *difference] because you see them* [the Meet-Up attendees] *come back on campus every semester, and you see them refer new students to the* [Meet-Up] *program*". Lena's "innate" perception was clearly an instance of System I thinking (Kahneman, 2012).

As I reread the transcripts in order to select suitable excerpts, I was reminded of Weick et al.'s (2005) explanation that "to work with the idea of sensemaking is to appreciate that smallness does not equate to insignificance. Small structures and short moments can have

large consequences" (p. 410). Below I provide excerpts of the participants' voices that demonstrated clear sensemaking processing. While many of the responses related to times when they had been focused on and by extracted cues, other sensemaking elements, such as being enactive of sensible environments, were also offered.

8.5.1 Lynette

Lynette expanded on this point more than most of the participants. She said that she had received many "thank you" messages: a "*huge box of them, in fact*". A number of them were "*really touching*", where students stated that they had been going to quit and to give up university but for Meet-Up. She did, however, receive a really funny one once that she recalled with a laugh: "*Did you know that Siri can answer some of the same questions as you, only she doesn't smile as nicely?*". She also remembered an international student who used to leave "*really beautiful, grateful notes*". For instance, Lynette explained that the student would write messages like: "*I now know that I don't need sugar in my coffee because I have learnt how to blah blah*". Lynette noted that this international student "*was not only developing her learning skills, but she was* [also] *developing* [an understanding of] *culture here in Australia….So she used to add something that she'd learnt about Australia from our Meet-Up groups as well*".

On first consideration of this story, the sensemaking seemed simple, and on one level it was: the students appreciated the support and guidance that they received in Meet-Up. But that was only part of the story. By being aware of her influence on the students in Meet-Up, Lynette "*developed empathy*" for the students' situations, but this empathy also "*developed probably a bit of a barrier for me as well, to know when to cut that off and to be able to support them, or redirect them to someone else when that needed to be done*". Meet-Up leaders were required to assist students with their academic learning and not with personal issues (as explained in Chapter 2), but the lines between the two were sometimes quite blurred, as Lynette indicated, creating situations in which the Meet-Up leaders had to make choices about how to act appropriately to support the students while being true to their Meet-Up position.

Lynette had both created and been created by the Meet-Up environment. She exhibited an enactment of sensible environments within a social context (the Meet-Up sessions). In this excerpt, she had also demonstrated both automatic System 1 thinking and effortful System 2 thinking (Kahneman, 2012). It appeared that empathy had become largely

intuitive or automatic for her, but knowing when to "cut it off" required deeper contemplation.

8.5.2 Caroline

Caroline certainly related to others in the environment of Meet-Up in her time there. In her response to Question 5, rather than talking about academic guidance, she noted that Meet-Up made a difference because:

> *It sets a positive sort of tone for the students. Like, everyone by the end of the semester – you can always tell – they were sort of happier, friendlier, they'd made new friendships themselves. So I think you make a difference by facilitating that process for them.*

She continued in that vein: "*In my third year, we had a whole lot of second years or new first years, and I'm still friends with some of those students who came through that way*". Our interview discussion was seven years after her time as a Meet-Up leader, yet Caroline remembered and attributed these lasting friendships to Meet-Up:

> *It's funny* [be]*cause that's the thing. I thought it* [Meet-Up] *would be good, you know, at the time – you meet more students, then it's sort of friendlier around the Law School. And then, when you go to events, say put on by the Law Society, you see familiar faces. But to actually meet a couple of people who*[m] *I'm still friends with today was an unexpected benefit.*

Hence it appeared that the behaviours or actions undertaken by Caroline as leader and the resultant interactions that she had with the students, and that the students had with one another, contributed to lasting relationships – a demonstration of the enactment of sensible environments.

8.5.3 Wanda

In her response to Question 5, Wanda made a clear and specific point that involved sensemaking in a different way. Her story was that she had found Meet-Up useful as an attendee – it had made a difference for her by increasing her confidence in the course content. Subsequently, along with a small group of her peers, she had decided to become a Meet-Up leader:

> *And it wasn't because some academic person came up and said, "Oh, we think you're a good leader; can you come and do this?" It was because we wanted other people to*

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succeed in a course that we enjoyed, or that we did well in, and [that] *we received some help from as well.*

From her subsequent experience as a Meet-Up leader, Wanda firmly believed that, in the environment that was Meet-Up, a difference was made for "*a lot of students*" – particularly students who were struggling, upset, angry or on the verge of a breakdown. For this reason, Wanda's plans for the sessions were changed when necessary to accommodate the students' needs:

> *…We took the time to sort of work through whatever it was that they needed to* [discuss]*....We changed our plans based on whatever the students needed - that happened a lot. So, yeah, taking that time to address that problem as best we could, I think that did make a difference to them, because they would come back the next week, and they'd be able to cope a bit better.*

By simply changing plans to accommodate the students' needs, Wanda had exercised sensemaking: she had focused on extracted cues. And, by determining how to respond to those cues, she had engaged in both quick, automatic thinking and deliberate, effortful thinking (Kahneman, 2012) to establish a positive learning environment for the students. Some further excerpts from the interviews, featuring the participants' responses to cues, follow.

8.5.4 Lance

Lance, too, discovered that he needed to be active in Meet-Up sessions. In his response to Question 5, he explained that he frequently picked up on the cue of negative feelings in the group (an automatic reaction), and turned them into more positive ones through words of explanation, advice and guidance, his actions and behaviour generally (effortful operations) and his own positive, encouraging attitude:

> *Meet-Up has been a positive thing* [for students]*.…I think* [that as leader] *just being positive about the courses* [made a difference]*….So they could often be quite unhappy with the course because they were finding it difficult, or they couldn't quite see where it was going. Because in a lot of math courses it's hard to see where it's going, because most of the course is just building skills to be used later on. So being a positive force in that room,…trying to switch the attitude back…that's often really important….And it can just be a way of encouraging them to go forward.*

8.5.5 Malcolm

Some participants alluded to the lightbulb moments they saw in students; Malcolm mentioned them explicitly, adding that he had seen them "*quite frequently*". Light bulb moments in Meet-Up meant the look that passed across students' faces when they began to understand the Meet-Up leader's explanation of a concept or a procedure that they had previously found unclear or had struggled to understand. The look was a cue; it could also be called a System 1 event (Kahneman, 2012) – awareness of it was intuitive, involuntary, automatic. The observer, in this case Malcolm, had to notice it to extract the meaning, and then he could engage in additional actions in the form of explanation or guidance – System 2 thinking (Kahneman, 2012) – as he saw fit.

Like Caroline, Malcolm told me that he was "*quite good friends*" with some of the student Meet-Up attendees after the semester. What was particularly interesting, however, and where his story differed significantly from Caroline's, was his way of making sense of that experience. He noted, "*I'm assuming it was because I helped them enough for them to like me*". Malcolm had taken the cue of friendship, and his way of making sense of it was to consider that it was because of the guidance and advice that he had provided; he made no mention of personal attributes. When a number of students thanked him almost every session, Malcolm would just say, "*This is my job – this is what I have to do, so you don't have to thank me so much*". In addition, Malcolm made the following sensemaking explanation of the cue of attendance at his Meet-Up sessions:

> [With] *a lot of students, I think you can get the vibe that you're helping them if they come back every week, because they're so busy they wouldn't waste an hour in class - maybe half an hour getting there, half an hour back, so potentially two hours a day just to see you for an hour. So I feel like if they are coming back you must be helping them, or giving them something they can't get anywhere else quicker.*

These reflections emphasised the observation described and discussed in some detail in Chapter 7 – i.e. the reluctance on the part of some of the participants to claim leadership readily. Despite his having acknowledged in this response to Question 6 that leadership was involved in being a Meet-Up leader, there was still a note of hesitation in Malcolm – it appeared that he was not necessarily convinced of the part that he himself played. It was almost as if the position and its requirements did the work – he was just a vehicle, a catalyst, a facilitator. Malcolm reflected more on student leadership and articulated his thoughts about this further in his comments at the conclusion to the interview after Question 9. I have included these comments in Section 8.6.

8.5.6 Grace

Grace told me an interesting story in response to Question 5 that involved her picking up on a cue from an unhappy student who had been talking to her during her shifts on the Meet-Up Student Community (MUSC) desk (this model of Meet-Up was explained in Chapter 2):

Probably one of the biggest differences I made to someone was when they had been coming to see me all the time on the MUSC desk, really, really, really struggling with education. And I [had] been able to sort of work out what some of their strengths were, and [I] had a chat to them about their strengths and asked them why they were doing education, and is it really what they wanted, and [that] there are other courses that they could explore, and then, you know, [I] sent them off to do that. And they came back and said they're actually changing from that faculty, and went off and did a different course, did accounting, and loved it.

Grace's sense of empathy for the student, and her ability to pick up on cues that suggested the student was perhaps in the wrong discipline, rather than just assuming that she/he was having trouble grasping education concepts, contributed to a significant, positive, life-changing decision for that particular person. The excerpt was also a clear demonstration of effortful thinking (Kahneman, 2012). Grace had devoted time to considering the student's dilemma and arrived at a solution that resolved the issue.

8.6 Participants' responses to Question 8: Do you think you were an effective leader?

In Question 7, I asked the participants to paint me their picture of an effective leader, which they did quite easily. But, in Question 8, when I asked them if they thought that they had been effective leaders, they were typically much more reticent. While some agreed quickly, others offered, "*I think so, yes*" (Dawn and others), or "*I hope I was*" (Caroline and others). Then there were non-committal responses such as: "*I play my role well, but I'm always improving*" from Mack; and "*I think I can be an effective leader*, [but] *there are times where perhaps I've not been*" from Lance.

This reluctance to assume the mantle of leadership was analysed in the previous chapter, and it became clear that this hesitance continued when the participants were asked about their effectiveness, and was indeed present throughout the interview for some participants. While the participants' full responses to Question 8 were many and varied, they shared a commonality. Many participants expressed the belief that, while they believed that

they had been effective, as Carmel put it, it was really about "*continually just trying to keep improving*". In responding to this question, the participants again engaged in sensemaking involving being enactive of sensible environments, and focusing on and by extracted cues. They also engaged in the process of constructing their own identities. The following excerpts offer examples.

8.6.1 Anna

Anna was without doubt constructing her identity as a Meet-Up leader and as an individual:

> *I do think I am an effective leader. I definitely think I'm better than what I was one year ago, and two years ago. I've improved over those years. From feedback from my students as well, I have grown a lot over the past few years. Like I'm 21. I'm still doing a lot of emotional growing, so I think, yeah, I've definitely become more effective in terms of I have a better idea of what students actually want from me, want from the sessions, that sort of thing. So I've been able to take that into consideration and make it more useful for people.*
>
> *Um, yeah, at this stage, I would say based on the feedback that I get, and based on how I feel about what I do in the sessions, I feel like I am an effective leader. But there's always stuff you can do better, and I can actually think of some now that I could definitely improve on.*
>
> *…Having three years* [as Meet-Up leader] *has really helped me grow into what I think is the best leader I can be at this stage.*
>
> *…So, um, it was all about self-awareness, I think, over the three years. So, in 2014, I was a little kid. I didn't really know what I was doing, though. I felt like I was bluffing my way through every session. I wasn't. In hindsight, I was spending like a solid hour every week with my teacher relearning all the concepts so I'd be able to deliver them in Meet-Up, and I really gave it my best shot.*

Anna had clearly engaged in System 2 intense effortful thinking. She had taken cues from the students, acted on them and endeavoured to be a more effective student leader. She co-constructed with the students (social sensemaking) the environment that was her Meet-Up sessions, and she was in turn constructed by it. She engaged in sensemaking in an ongoing manner as she constructed a new identity for herself.

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8.6.2 Lynette

In her response to Question 8, Lynette described her reaction to her situation in the final semester of her nursing studies. She had become aware that she was devoting insufficient time both to her own studies and to being an effective Meet-up leader. The excerpt below described her sensemaking story:

I found that, you know, at times I probably took on a little bit too much to be as effective [a Meet-Up leader] *as I could have been. Maybe if I'd cut back my own workload – either put more time into my studies, or put more time into my* [Meet-Up] *teaching.* [In] *my last semester, I did actually drop a subject to keep my Meet-Up because I actually found the Meet-Up was more important to me than my own learning. I got more out of it personally; I got more out of it professionally. I found that the skills I was developing and the confidence that I was building* [were] *more important than* [acquiring more] *information – I could take that* [course] *over third semester when there was no Meet-Up.*

You know, it wasn't a big deal, and I had the flexibility to be able to do that because, with my specific job [Meet-Up leader in nursing], *we have specific intake periods, so I was able to actually drop a subject and spend that time with my* [Meet-Up] *students, and that was beyond worthwhile.*

This was a fascinating story and one that, again, demonstrated deep, effortful thought, even if it were perhaps initially triggered by intuition.

8.6.3 Wanda

Wanda experienced this same issue of insufficient time to be both an effective Meet-Up leader and a successful student towards the end of her student journey, but she extracted the cues differently from Lynette, and her sensemaking process fashioned a different response to Question 8:

So at the end of third year I was very stressed – like even to the point where I was very anxious, and I was seeing a psychologist and stuff for a short amount of time too. Most of that anxiety wasn't coming from being a leader; it was coming from external sources, but it was impacting on me being a leader on some days. Because there were some days where I was just like – I can't cope with other people's issues because I'm not coping with my own. So when I was able to recognise that and go, "Next year is going to be different, especially with the fact that I'm barely going to be at uni[versity]*". Yeah, I think I made the right decision at that time to go, "Actually, I*

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don't need to be a leader for this year. I need to step down and just finish being a
student and then go and be a teacher". I think being able to determine when you've
taken on enough responsibility, or when you've taken on enough leadership, that's a
big thing...

In answering this question about effective leadership, Wanda and Lynette each chose to tell a story about a similar situation, which they addressed and resolved in different ways. They used cues extracted from their growing self-awareness and from the development and construction of new self-identities to engage in sensemaking and effortful thinking to choose an appropriate approach to the situation in which they found themselves.

8.6.4 Robert

Robert's response to Question 8 provided an example of this endeavour to improve and to be better in the role of Meet-Up leader. In this undertaking, he utilised System 2 thinking in conjunction with his sensemaking capacity to be enactive of sensible environments:

We were always getting feedback – it's how we grow; it's how we develop....We'd
always grow, and meld next week's session based on the previous week's feedback,
which is probably actually a [good] *point for an effective student leader – to be able*
to self-reflect, or at least reflect on feedback.

Other participants, too, evidenced the dynamic nature of the environment that was Meet-Up and of the relationships with students that grew and developed in that environment.

8.6.5 Miranda

Miranda revealed in her response to Question 8 that she was both "enactive of sensible environments" in her Meet-Up sessions and "focused on and by extracted cues":

I constantly felt like, [when] *I was leaving* [Meet-Up sessions], *I was happier. I felt*
very light, like I'd really done something productive because, you know, you sort of
get in a cycle of just doing things for yourself, especially when you're studying. You
just sort of are always focusing on your study and your assignments, that sort of
thing. So, um, I think it was nice to be able to go and, you know, engage with other
people and then see that they were learning, and that they'd always leave and say,
"Thank you" and that sort of thing, and you'd just sort of think, "Oh, that's nice" –
like, "That was a really productive session", or, you know, "We've got everything
done, but it wasn't like rushed or stressed". So I think that was those times when I felt

like, yeah, I was effective because I not only achieved what I'd set out to [achieve],
but [also] *everyone seemed happy and that they were learning and engaging.*

8.7 Participants' responses to Question 9: Do you think you would be the same person you are today if you had not become a Meet-Up leader?

This question does not actually meet the requirements of a true phenomenographic question (Bruce, 1994; Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018): it is not open-ended – it is basically a "Yes/No" question. However, as the final question in the interview, it worked well. While some participants did include the words "yes" or "no" in their answer, they all provided a thoughtful, reflective, often quite lengthy response, that demonstrated that they felt at ease to respond as they chose (Bowden, 2000).

The participants' responses almost certainly demonstrated identity construction. The wording of the question directly steered their thoughts towards themselves and any changes, growth or development that they had perceived in themselves as individuals since becoming Meet-Up leaders. To respond to this question, participants needed to balance reflections from their Meet-Up experiences and the person they were then with their self-awareness of who they were at the time of the interview. Sensemaking was clearly implicit.

I have included more excerpts from the participants in this section than the others. Some of the participants shared more of their thoughts in their responses to this question – their responses became quite lengthy. Indeed, a few of them commented that the questions had made them think: "*A lot of thinking today*" was Lance's comment; "*It's a lot of sharing*" was the contribution from Mack. With no mention in my question of either the word "leader" or the word "leadership", perhaps the participants felt comfortable to talk about their feelings; they could discuss their reflections more easily.

For example, the following comment was offered by Nina at the concluding stage of the interview, basically as an addendum to her response to Question 9. I was fascinated to hear that she had not really devoted a lot of time to thinking about herself:

You made me think a lot. That's good. That's good. Like, I never thought what's important to me. [Laughs] *Like, yeah, I never thought like that. Maybe I thought of my personal goals. But not about – not on the important things in my life.*

It seemed that Nina was so intent on her studies, and so focused on doing a good job as a Meet-Up leader, that analysis of what was important to her had not previously been considered. What was occurring in that specific moment in time – that is, my questions to her

in the interview – directed her attention not only to her memories and recollections of Meet-Up, but also to a new way of reflecting on them and making sense of them.

The majority of participants were convinced that they would not be the same person if they had not involved themselves in Meet-Up leadership. There were a few who thought that they may have been the same person, continuing along the same path, as it were. Their responses are discussed in Subsection 8.7.11.

8.7.1 Lynette

Lynette was convinced of the importance of Meet-Up leadership to the person she had become:

> *I definitely attribute the person that I am now a lot to* [Meet-Up]. *You know, it was a big decision to go to uni*[versity] *in the first place, and I was a very meek, mild person, lacking in confidence. I felt that I was a failure when I first started, and that I wouldn't succeed. Um, I didn't know that I'd ever be able to learn at that sort of level. I'm the first person in my family* [of] *six siblings to have graduated in university. Um, and I suppose I went in with that stigma as well when I first started, that none of us have ever succeeded, and we're not smart enough maybe, or just we didn't deserve it perhaps.*
>
> *So I think, going through and then being offered the opportunity to help other students, I felt that that was a big lift to my confidence - that I was doing something right, that I had something to offer other people. So that boosted my confidence; it helped with my self-esteem. I loved being in a role where I had other people come and ask me questions and want to be helped, because I definitely have that personality. I love to help other people.*
>
> *And I think that gave me strength the whole way through. Even when I was having a really rough time at uni*[versity], *I had to get up and I had to go because there were other students who relied on me on a daily basis. And that has come out the other side with me too. I think of that some days and think, "Oh, do you remember when you couldn't do that assignment, but you were still telling your students that they could do theirs? And you were crying over your computer and then telling them, 'Don't cry, it's okay, everything's going to be fine'". Um, but yeah, I definitely think coming out the end of that, that strength and change in self-esteem and confidence has certainly helped me when I graduated.*

For me, stories such as Lynette's were quite moving; I had known Lynette as a willing, enthusiastic novice leader and then as a competent Meet-Up leader whom I appointed as a senior leader or LAMP, but I did not know the person that she was before she grabbed the opportunity to become engaged and involved as a student leader, nor did I really know the person she was behind that outgoing persona as a leader and a LAMP.

8.7.2 Miranda

Having shared that, through Meet-Up, she had learnt "*so much about engaging with different people*" and about "*explaining things in different ways*", Miranda added in her response to Question 9 that, in her current position, on many occasions, she stopped to think, "*Am I communicating this effectively?*", and she turned back to what she did in Meet-Up and used those same skills. Meet-Up had also helped her socially because her current position was in "*a completely different state, different city, where I didn't know anyone*", but the confidence that she had developed through Meet-Up "*helped her break the ice and have a conversation*". For Miranda, it seemed that completing university was not the end of her Meet-Up experience – it was ongoing; it was part of her journey through life.

At the conclusion of the interview questions, I asked the participants if there were anything more that they would like to add. While some had nothing more to offer, for others, like Nina, it seemed to stimulate further thought, and they regaled me with some interesting notions. Miranda was one of those:

> *I just think it's really hard to talk about how valuable it* [Meet-Up] *is. Like – I don't know – there's probably so many things where I've learnt something, or done it and not realised that, you know – you could do that because it was attributable to Meet-Up, or things in combination with Meet-Up.*

Miranda was clearly still in sensemaking mode as the questions drew to a close, and she wanted to talk it through a little more, establishing and settling her thoughts about her Meet-Up experience until they make sense in her mind. Miranda was also indicating that many of the Meet-Up behaviours or ways of thinking had become automatic – she had been employing them without even realising or acknowledging that that was what she was doing.

8.7.3 Wanda

In her response to Question 9, Wanda raised this capacity again. It seemed that, by this point in the interview, Wanda's sensemaking processes had been active and had enabled her to give this element a name: she called it "*flexibility*". She talked about how Meet-Up

leaders could approach their role in different ways. For example, she explained that some leaders were very thorough in their planning and preparation, while others chose to work through the students' concerns as they arose in the sessions, or to address the issues that the students brought with them, hoping to have them discussed. This was what she herself had done, as was noted above. Wanda thought that this capacity to be flexible was important, and was an indicator of good leadership:

> *Like being able to analyse the situation in a very short time and be*[ing] *able to determine what the best course of action for that specific group or for an individual person* [is] *– that is something that a leader really should be able to do.*

This excerpt was a definitive explanation of sensemaking as expressed by Weick (1995), but it was also an example of Kahneman's (2012) automatic thinking. Indeed, it was almost as if, having employed effortful thinking many times in different but similar situations in Meet-Up sessions, the Meet-Up leaders had become so adept at being "*flexible*", as Wanda put it, that the appropriate ways to act had become intuitive, even perhaps automatic.

Like Lynette, this participant's experiences both created and were created by the Meet-Up environment. It was interesting, however, that Wanda's emphasis in the sessions was undoubtedly dominated by her understanding of course content – she did not refer specifically to recollections of emotions or feelings.

8.7.4 Malcolm

Malcolm reflected more on student leadership and articulated his thoughts about this further in his comments at the conclusion to the interview after Question 9. Like Nina and Miranda, Malcolm was still engaging in sensemaking of his Meet-Up experience as the interview drew to a close, and it seemed that he did not want the opportunity to be lost. To clarify, he added:

> *Meet-Up's really cool* [be]*cause it gives you the ability to affect so many students in a lot of different ways. And, even though you don't see it, I have a feeling that your impact on them makes a massive difference in their lives. For example, if you're able to help them get through even just one course in one semester. If you help them learn faster, they've got more time in their own life which then they can spend it either with family, friends or developing relationships, or learning other things.*
> *So I think, even if you help a group of six to cut down three hours because you're teaching them quite well or specifically, I think it makes a big difference. So, yeah, I'd say Meet-Up in that sense has a massive impact compared to other things.*

He added: "*They're very interesting questions. Yeah, oh definitely* [it made me think]. *You don't really think until someone asks you those things, but you've selected a good range of questions, I think*".

He concluded:

If you can generally make other people's lives better, I'd say, yeah, in a sense it is leadership. You're doing something that not everyone can do, and that's, I think, part of leadership, that you have the ability or the patience or the skills to help people in a way that a lot of other people can't or they don't. So, yeah, I think that's kind of a special quality that leaders do, that they can do something like that.

And so, remarkably, right at the conclusion of the interview, at the eleventh hour, as it were, Malcolm had used the words "*leader*" and "*leadership*" in direct relation to himself as a student leader in Meet-Up, and without any hesitation or a diminishing phrase, as he had done previously.

8.7.5 Theresa

A number of times during the interview, Theresa referred to what she called "*people skills*". I asked her what they were, and she responded in Question 9:

I think it is just listening. You really have to listen to people - and listen to what they say, but also what they don't say, so that you can know or understand what they're really trying to ask you, or, again, what they're not asking you. That's always my problem - what people don't ask you is their real problem….People who are struggling the most don't tell you that they're struggling. So it's really [about] *identifying - it's attitudes, behaviours* [people have]…*and you won't always get it right, but it can't hurt to ask somebody, "Are you okay; do you need something?"….So it really is just about picking up on things.*

Theresa's emphasis on picking up on cues was unmistakable. Not only was she aware of the importance of visible cues, but she was also abreast of the importance of the spaces between – the words that were not said, the expressions not made. Again, her intuitive automatic thinking system told her that the quiet students could sometimes be struggling and she reacted quickly with simple questions about their well-being.

This excerpt reminded me, too, of Dervin's (1999) Sense-Making Methodology in which she posited that the human condition assumes a "pervasive discontinuity" (p. 733) that manifests in many ways:

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…with its gaps between external worlds and internals, time, and space; in the gaps between human mind, tongue, heart, body; in gaps between people at the same time; in gaps in a person across time; in gaps between structure and person, structure and structure. (p. 733)

A planned strategy is not always a good fit to assist with the gap that has been detected, and so the next move required Meet-Up leaders to be flexible in their communication with students, encouraging them to articulate their feelings. Sense-Making (Dervin, 1999) posits that individuals "can and will talk about their confusions and stumblings if the dialogic interface is conducive to trust" (p. 734), which was the case in Meet-Up sessions. Once a dialogue was established, leaders could then offer the advice and guidance that they considered appropriate for the student.

8.7.6 Jo

Jo's responses throughout the interview were typically not extensive – she expounded on her ideas, to be sure, but not at great length. My sensemaking of the cues in the conversation suggested that she was holding back her deeper thoughts and feelings. In her response to Question 9, however, she eventually opened up, particularly after I posed my additional probing questions: "What about you personally – like within yourself I mean, what's it [Meet-Up] done for you?", and the feelings that she had experienced during her time as Meet-Up leader poured out. After telling me at the beginning that she was not able to vocalise her thoughts, she talked and talked and made her way back through her feelings, to make sense of that period in her life:

> [Pause]. *It's a good question, Lindy* [laughs]. *Um* [pause], *I mean, I know it's done something for me, but I just can't quite verbalise it. I think Meet-Up in a way has made me reconsider certain things and realise that not everybody comes from the same background that I do; that everyone has got their own story, and I suppose* [it] *comes back to that empathy. You know, I would like to think I was always quite empathetic, but when you're faced with people in front of you who are telling you* [that they] *can't come next week because* [they] *have to go to court, you know, it's a pretty big deal.*
>
> *…The Meet-Up program exposed me to people that I would never have met before –* [people whom I] *would never have even considered that they'd be at uni*[versity]*, or*

that they'd have that sort of thing going on in their life, because I've never had that going on in my life.

So, I suppose, you know, for me, I suppose it's made me realise that sometimes everything is not as it seems.

...Um, I suppose, oh, like, just being able to put your foot in their shoes for a couple of minutes and realise that, you know, for them to be at uni[versity] *is not as straightforward* [as it is for me]. *You know, like I was a high school graduate; I followed the standard path, in inverted commas, and I was just doing my own thing, whereas to be able to hear from other people that they had struggled to get to this point in their life and they'd only, you know, at 50, only just decided what they wanted to do, and all that.* [Stories like] *"Well, you know, I had a baby when I was 20 and I had to drop out of uni*[versity]*", or, like I had students who had to go to court to get their kids and that sort of thing.*

And so I suppose it exposes you to things that I suppose sometimes that your parents tried to keep you away from. You know, I went to a private school, so I had friends who had both parents, had siblings and life was pretty standard. And so to hear from people that, you know, they weren't just, I suppose, on the straight path of life, it makes you realise that it doesn't matter what your path is, I suppose. You know, that it's okay to deviate...

Um, and so I suppose that [it] *started with Meet-Up, because I watched people come every week and not only blossom with stats* [the statistics course] *but* [also] *within their degree, because you could tell they were really enjoying it. They might have been stressed out as anything, but they were coming and they were enjoying the content, and they were there because they decided that this is what they wanted to do. It wasn't that they were there because that's what society told them they had to be doing.*

Yeah, so I suppose, yeah, Meet-Up opened my eyes to a lot of things.

Jo had delivered a sensemaking outpouring, as it were, and some deep, effortful thinking. She had voiced her way to an understanding of the changes that had happened to herself as a person; she had made sense of her memories through a retrospective interrogation of her experience as a Meet-Up leader. She saw the world and who she was in it a little differently now.

8.7.7 Lance

Lance contributed a different perspective. He attributed the offer made to him to be the Valedictorian at his graduation ceremony to Meet-Up leadership, "*because they wanted someone who was good with grades but also already involved with the university*". Additionally, he attributed being a Meet-Up leader to his success in acquiring the other student leadership positions that he held at university:

> *Meet-Up was that thing that got me more involved with the university. It showed my capabilities to different lecturers, so lecturers could see that, yes, I'm a capable student, as well as doing all this other stuff. So, after being involved with Meet-Up and then more Meet-Up, I think* [the lecturer] *could see that I was quite a good student and I was capable of doing other things, which then led me on to doing other things and other things and kept building, getting the confidence to apply for things like student rep*[resentative]. *And lecturers got to know me through different things, and they could see that I was quite a capable student. And I met lots of different people throughout the university - getting more connections, more points of view on things. Even talking to people from different areas is always good to get more perspective on things.*
>
> *So I think, because Meet-Up was that first thing that got me involved, I wouldn't be the same without it….I may not have got the Phoenix leader position* [a role whereby current students assisted novice students in the Orientation period each semester] *if I hadn't been a Meet-Up leader as well, because I'm sure a lot of people applied for that. So I think being a Meet-Up leader has given a lot of things to me and given me a lot of opportunities.*

So it appeared that Lance had become engaged as a Meet-Up leader and subsequently involved himself even more in the university. This allowed him to develop his identity as an individual, confirming Astin's (1984/1999) research about the importance of involvement, and also Chickering and Reisser's (1993) research about student development, both of which served as the foundation of my conceptual framework and were discussed in Chapter 4.

8.7.8 Anna

Anna's response to Question 9 held a similar sensemaking process to Lance's:

> *Absolutely. Yeah, without a doubt Meet-Up changed my life. It really did. Thank you* [laughs], *thank you for giving me this role. Like I can imagine, if I never became a Meet-Up leader and just kept my straight HDs* [high distinction grades], *and I just*

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went into a job and just did that the rest of my life and never interacted with people.
[Laughs] I would definitely be much less emotionally mature, I think, if I'd never
become a Meet-Up leader.

I feel much more confident walking around campus. I feel much more confident in my
own shoes doing day to day stuff now that I've had the experience of being a Meet-Up
leader. Not to mention that being a Meet-Up leader also came with networking, so I
was able to network with a lot of different teachers. They got to know me by name and
they would say, "Yes, this person is reliable. She teaches well - doesn't teach, but she
delivers course content in her Meet-Up well". That's actually how I got the job [as a
tutor] *this semester when* [the academic] *went on leave. He said, "You've been my*
Meet-Up leader for two years. I believe you're very good. You've also been in my
courses before so I've taught you, and I think you're fit for this role". So it basically
came from Meet-Up that I was able to do that.

Again, as with Lance, Anna had involved herself in the university as a Meet-Up
leader, and she had reaped rewards that were important to her. The retrospection prompted by
the questions in the interview had indicated to her that Meet-Up leadership and the
relationships developed in that environment had served as a catalyst for further opportunities
that she had relished.

8.7.9 Phyllis

Phyllis' story demonstrated that Meet-Up had helped her to make sense of who she
was and who she was becoming. She offered more detail:

I think, not only did Meet-Up help me get through my degree, it [also] *gave me an*
incredible level of confidence, and I suppose it goes towards my personality traits and
that…

I absolutely think it changed me. I was barely attending uni[versity] *before Meet-Up.*
I was attending it for the degree, not for all the social aspects. Not for, you know, the
student life. Anything like that. So, yeah, [Meet-Up] *had a huge impact on my*
university experience. I think it's certainly not only built rapport with fellow students,
but also with lecturers and with people in the university that you don't necessarily
come into contact with if you are simply a student who checks in and checks out every
day.

Um, and I also feel like it's identified some really key areas of interest for me as well. So politics being one of them. Teaching possibly being another one of them. I think, yeah, it's had a very big impact.

Once again, a participant had reflected through sensemaking that Meet-Up had brought about a change in her/his identity construction or a redirection in the path on which her/his life was headed. In Phyllis's case, this was particularly interesting, as she had, at the start of the interview, explained that she felt it important "*to get to know who you are as a person*", and "*to understand yourself*". It appeared to me that, to this point, she was on target with this aim.

8.7.10 Contributions from other participants: short excerpts

For a number of the participants, the Meet-Up experience helped them to determine who they were now. For example, Florence said: "*It* [Meet-Up] *made me really look into myself. It made me really identify who I can be*". Robert confirmed that for him becoming a Meet-Up leader changed him, and he would not be the same person today: "[W]hen *I first started at the university, I was your book nerd – your go to the class, come home,* [go] *to class, go home, study. Like - that was life. I would hypothesise that, if I continued with that, I'd be in the back cave of an accounting firm, not seeing clients and doing anything that I do right now.* [It would] *be pure book work*".

For other participants, their way of voicing the influence of Meet-Up involved the opening up of previously unconsidered pathways to a new identity. Mack told me that:

[N]*ot too long ago, I never would have thought – the thought would never have crossed my mind – to do postgraduate* [studies] *and then consider the idea of doing a PhD. But now it's kind of as if my path's already been laid for me. So from that aspect I've got confidence in my ability, but just also in myself –* [I'm] *confident to talk to people.*

8.7.11 Participants who thought they would be the same without the experience of Meet-Up leadership

While most participants considered that they would not have developed into the same person if they had not become Meet-up leaders, a few of them indicated that they thought they would still have become the same person without that engagement. For example, Wanda responded "*Yes and no*" to my question, noting that Meet-Up leadership and the other student leadership positions that she had accepted at university had helped in her interview for a teaching position, and had shaped who she had become and where she was at the time of the

interview. For Charles, "*Meet-Up leadership added to the experience – but it hasn't radically changed anything about me in the sense that I was already going down a path*".

Similarly, Caroline did not agree or disagree with the proposition, but rather told me that Meet-Up leadership was "*definitely a positive experience*" that had helped her as a student and in job applications, and that it had cemented lasting friendships. And, while she had always intended to study a doctorate, Caroline stated that Meet-Up leadership had given her the confidence to take on a lecturing position and to become a full-time academic while studying, so it "*shaped my career to a certain extent*".

Grace explained in more detail:

I don't know about if I'd be a different person, but I would not have had as much confidence as a teacher, and I would have been a different student.

I probably would have struggled more as a student if I hadn't been a Meet-Up leader, I think.

I think it helped with my own confidence and capacity. And, you know, when students came to me with questions that I didn't know the answer to, well, I learnt it in helping them learn it. You know, helping them find out how to find out. So, um, yeah, I think it certainly enriched me greatly as a student and professionally, so my capacity to teach adults now, you know, and part of my role now involves working with other teachers and, um, mentoring them in some ways to help their capacity for managing students with mental illness. And those skills were enhanced because of Meet-Up.

So it seemed that, while some participants considered that they would "*absolutely not*" have been the same person if it were not for their Meet-Up leadership experiences, and others believed that they would have, their sensemaking processes brought them together in agreement that their experiences had helped them in a positive way to be who they had become. It could be argued that some had responded at first using System 1 thinking; then they had decided that the question warranted System 2, or an "investment of attention" (Kahneman, 2012, p. 415), because they continued to speak their thoughts on the matter. Others, having been told that it was the last question, appeared to call on System 2 thinking straight away, as they endeavoured to ensure that they had divulged all that they wanted to share about their Meet-Up experiences.

8.8 Participant voices: Making sense

Weick's (1993, 1995, 1999, 2006) writings about sensemaking held the message that sensemaking was not intended to be complicated: that is, it is literal; it is about making sense

of challenging experiences (sometimes catastrophic or traumatic events) that occurred in the past. By making sense of such experiences or incidents, people develop a heightened awareness of themselves and of their environments, enabling them to enact appropriate behaviours when challenging incidents occur in the future. Weick (1995) posited that the "feeling of order, clarity, and rationality is an important goal of sensemaking" (p. 29), and that, once it is achieved, retrospective processing ceases.

And that seemed to be exactly what the participants were striving to achieve in the interviews as they responded to my questions – that sense of "order, clarity and rationality" (Weick, 1995, p. 29). It made them continue to share notions and memories of Meet-Up until they felt satisfied that their thoughts were clear and sensible. For some, this did not finish when my questions concluded – they chose to say more. On reaching that state of clarity, the participants' final musings often seemed to project into where the individual was at the time of the interview, or even into the future, aligning with Weick's (1995) claim that sensemaking can extend into the present and the future.

While the answers to the question, "What's the story here?" emerge from a retrospective view, the posing of the question, "Now what?" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413) explicitly prompts sensemaking projections and actions into the future. This was discussed in Section 8.2. I suggest that this is a natural, even sensible, progression. The excerpts in Subsection 8.8.1, taken from the participants' responses at the end of Question 9, offer examples.

8.8.1 Participant voices: Sensemaking into the present and the future

Grace said that she used skills that she had acquired in Meet-Up "*every day*" in her current work with adolescents with mental illnesses. In addition, she found herself employing the skills with her own children as she watched them doing their homework: "*I sit back there and I think, 'I just did a Meet-Up session right there'*, *you know*", and she laughed.

The memory of her experiences in Meet-Up sessions and of the skills that she had developed as a Meet-Up leader, combined with an increased level of confidence in herself, allowed Theresa to engage in sensemaking, enacting empathetic, almost automatic, behaviours to assist her colleague in her new workplace:

> *Yes. So I'm part of a graduate program at the moment, and once a month we run a session – a whole day – just for graduates, and it's so hard for our facilitator because nobody will speak. He'll be asking questions and everyone will sit there quietly and it's very hard. So I'm quite aware of his predicament and I'm sympathetic to that, so*

I'll always try to engage the other students and give him some things to get the sessions going, and that's where I've fallen into that leader role amongst them, because I can do those things too.

Caroline also found Meet-Up leadership helpful after graduation. She attributed her acceptance of a position as lecturer to her Meet-Up experiences. She had discussed the role of an academic with her lecturer while a Meet-Up leader:

… towards the end of my degree, we did start talking more about what it's like being an academic full-time. So I think it [Meet-Up] *has shaped my career to an extent. Yeah, and had I not done it, perhaps there wouldn't have been that confidence to sort of seize the lecturing. I might have been a bit more wary of it….So that's quite a specific example – the fact that I have gone into lecturing. I'm not sure how many other Meet-Up leaders have followed an academic path, but it definitely helped with that. So, if I talked to any students who wanted to be a lecturer, without a doubt I would recommend that they do Meet-Up first.*

Interestingly, Jo shared Caroline's thoughts: "*Well, I think to a degree, you know, Meet-Up introduced me to the academic teaching side of things….Now I'm sort of thinking* [that] *I'd actually like to be an academic at university…*". Carmel expressed similar thoughts:

Meet-Up sort of made me realise that I could go into lecturing or some form of teaching, because I never thought that I had the skills or the ability to think on my feet, but doing Meet-Up has sort of made me realise that I do enjoy talking to people and teaching people – um – and getting their responses as well, and learning from them.

Carmel's comment that she could "*think on my feet*" clearly referenced Kahneman's (2012) automatic thinking.

The final excerpt is from Robert. To my final question in the interview: "Do you have anything else that you want to add?", Robert offered this:

Probably a general side note comment for future student leaders – um, I think student leadership needs to start looking at resilience in young people. I think that that's something that we're losing or seeing a lot less of, and that they're having to gain more of when they come to university. Er – I think that's a challenge for student leaders, because theoretically a student leader has resilience, or at least if they're self-reflecting, like they have the resilience to be able to do that. Um, but helping the incoming students to build that to the point that they're happy with who they are, I think that's a future challenge.

...I think that that's something that is coming up across society. Um, and I don't know what the cause is exactly, like what the difference is between 20 years ago and now – whether that's schools or parents cotton-woolling too much or something. Could be a combination of everything. I don't know what the cause is, but it is something I would identify as a future challenge. A challenge – something that's becoming more challenging.

I contend that the process of sensemaking had encouraged the participants to think – to reflect, consider, project into the future and act.

8.8.2 Participant voices: two levels of sensemaking

As noted throughout this chapter, the participants' responses revealed that they were indeed sensemakers at the time they were Meet-Up leaders, and that they were sensemakers still – they could, for example, project suggestions for the future from their past and current sensemaking processing. While sensemaking is an ongoing process, as explained in Subsection 8.3.5, it requires focused attention, even if that attention has not been named as sensemaking. The participants may have been engaging in sensemaking processing between the time they were Meet-Up leaders and the time of the interview, and certainly some of them in their responses revealed that they had been so engaged, but my questions were not about the interim.

There were two particular time frames of sensemaking that were emphasised in this thesis: the time when the participants had been student leaders, and the moment in time of the interview when they engaged in retrospective processing of that earlier time, additionally sharing their notions of the impact of that time on who they were now. Sensemaking, therefore, needed to be considered on two levels, levels that were time-specific – temporal even, because they were moments in time that had passed or would pass: that is, the extended moment in time when they were Meet-Up leaders, and the moment of time that was the interview.

8.9 The researcher as sensemaker

But it was not only the participants who were engaged in sensemaking – it was also conducted by me as the researcher. As I engaged in the sensemaking required in this chapter of my doctoral journey, I experienced an epiphany. Not only did I have to account for the sensemaking of the Meet-Up leaders across two timeframes, but also I realised that I had to do the same as well: firstly, during my time in Meet-Up as coordinator; and secondly, as I

researched and wrote my thesis. Throughout my involvement in Meet-Up, I strove to make sense of the engagement and involvement, and the growth and development, of the individuals who chose to be Meet-Up leaders and whom I had represented in a conceptual framework. In doing so, I was in effect applying implicitly the process of sensemaking. This engagement in sensemaking has run as a thread through this doctoral study. My actions as coordinator to develop the program, and my observations and perceptions of the Meet-Up leaders that were detailed through this thesis, were part of a sensemaking process that I had tacitly undertaken.

Now, retrospectively, as I undertook my doctorate, I visited the time when I was coordinator of the Meet-Up program, recounting my observations of the Meet-Up leaders at the time – who they were and what they did. More importantly, I also endeavoured to discover, make sense of, and then represent faithfully the participants' views, not only about student leadership, but also about how their experiences had influenced their own growth and development as people, students and leaders.

The decision to undertake a doctorate had changed who I was – it had altered my identity; it reconstructed me from academic to doctoral researcher. This identity re/construction was clear and explicit. Not so the construction and awareness of myself as sensemaker. I realised that my endeavours to make sense of the leaders' words meant that I, too, like the student leaders, was tacitly engaging in the accepted, recognised sensemaking process described by Weick (1995). In particular, I became aware that I had changed: my involvement as sensemaker in my study meant that I had constructed a new awareness of sensemaking in relation to myself.

I had, in my working life, established the operating environment that was Meet-Up, but only now, upon reflection and with the deliberate intention of sensemaking, could I see that it had also formed me. The decisions that I had made in the Meet-Up program were always enacted with others in mind – in particular, the student attendees and the student leaders. I had continually reflected on what had happened in the program, picking up on cues from all the people involved in the program, and making plausible decisions about redirections and changes when appropriate. Tacit sensemaking had contributed to making me the person who I was at the time, and it was still contributing to making me the person who I was now – a doctoral researcher and a sensemaker. I, too, like the study's participants, had engaged in sensemaking on two time-specific levels: the time when I had coordinated the program; and the moment in time that was now, undertaking doctoral research.

In doctoral mode, the enactment of tacit sensemaking processes, begun as an academic, had not stopped. But now I was engaged in conscious sensemaking and deliberate thinking in order to determine what mattered in my study, and what was important to the journey and its outcomes. My doctoral journey demonstrated that other sensemaking indications were present. For instance, while I may have been researching and writing alone, I was nevertheless still working with others. The interviews with the participants, and the transcripts subsequently produced, meant that the participants were always metaphorically present. It was my involvement with, my interest in and my curiosity about the Meet-Up leaders that had been the catalyst for my research to begin, and it was my engagement with the participants as a selection of Meet-Up leaders in the interviews that facilitated my research study and resulted in my findings.

And so now the time had come – the time to write up what I had discovered – to write up about how the participants had made sense of their Meet-Up days. Thus, this chapter portrays my sensemaking of the participants' sensemaking. This was the crucial sensemaking exercise; this was the sensemaking process that the thesis was all about – this was the sensemaking that mattered.

8.9.1 Making sense of the participants' sensemaking

While the participants were typically direct in their responses throughout the interviews, the questions seemed to make them think about the role of Meet-Up leader in ways that they had perhaps not considered before, or certainly not very much. This was a surprise to me. A number of them used phrases such as, "*That's a really good question*" or "*Yeah, I don't know*" before then seemingly to think out loud and to elaborate on or construct a response. They also seemed to warm-up to sharing their deeper notions of Meet-Up only towards the end of the interviews, as noted in the previous section. The participants had possibly thought about Meet-Up only in terms of the emphasis on the attending students, with the role of themselves as leaders striving to provide positive experiences for the participants as secondary. This slant or view of PAL was discussed at some length in Chapter 3.

As a result, the impact of the role on them as individuals had not perhaps been given much thought beyond the fact that it provided a modest additional income, some helpful revision for their own studies, pleasant relationships with other students and the development of emerging relationships with the academic staff members involved, and it also earned them the gratitude of thankful participants. But then, in the interview, in order to address my questions, they had needed to concentrate with deliberation and to focus on the impact of

their Meet-Up experiences on both the students and themselves. This expressly required them to exercise sensemaking, despite the absence of the term in my questions.

Their responses to Question 5 (about making a difference) and Question 8 (about being effective as a leader) made it clear that the participants had engaged in sensemaking at the time that they were Meet-Up leaders. I could see Weick's (1995) characteristics emerging through their voices: they had focused their attention on cues from the students in their sessions and regularly reviewed and amended their actions, continually striving to construct a helpful, friendly learning environment, and to do what they thought was best for the students' learning. In the process, they themselves were developed or moulded by the environment as they created it, and grew as individuals, forging a new or changed identity for themselves. They had indeed been sensemakers in keeping with the Weick (1995) model.

To respond to Question 9 (about being the same person if they had not been a Meet-Up leader), the participants could change tack and talk about themselves and what they were doing at the moment of the interview. And their responses (see Section 8.6) indicated that they relished the opportunity. But they also needed to make the link between the person they were in their Meet-Up days and the person they were now. This required them to engage in reflection on themselves as they were then and to extrapolate to the present – this was a sensemaking process, and the excerpts demonstrated their tacit sensemaking.

8.9.2 The link with the conceptual framework

As I moved through the process of sensemaking in my doctoral journey, a quiet undertone or gentle prodding entered my awareness from the literature that I had read – namely, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) explanation of the ways that students in tertiary learning institutions developed and grew, which they termed "the seven vectors" (p. 34). The vectors described "major highways for journeying toward individuation – the discovery and refinement of one's unique way of being – and also toward communion with other individuals and groups" (p. 35). They were included in my conceptual framework as "Development: what they developed", as they mirrored my perceptions of the Meet-Up leaders' growth and development during my working life.

Section 8.6 is full of excerpts that indicate that the participants themselves felt they had grown and developed through Meet-Up leadership. From Jo's insight: it "*made me reconsider certain things and realise that not everybody comes from the same background that I do; that everyone has got their own story*"; and Florence's clarity: "*it made me really identify who I can be*"; to Robert's simplicity: "*We were always getting feedback – it's how*

we grow; it's how we develop"; and Lynette's honesty: "*being offered the opportunity to help other students, I felt that that was a big lift to my confidence - that I was doing something right, that I had something to offer other people*", the participants articulated their journey through Meet-Up to the individuals they became, and their voicings clearly aligned with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors.

I was delighted to see this clear resonance among my pre-doctorate perceptions, my doctoral findings and the reputable, inspirational scholars whose works informed my research and served as the base for the conceptual framework. I could see in this explanation of growth, development and change an unmistakable association with the sensemaking processes undertaken by both the participants and myself; the articulation and analogies were undoubtedly different – but the notions of establishing identities, and of making sense of environments and relationships with others, clearly aligned.

The alignment of sensemaking with my conceptual framework was further encouraged by some of the sensemaking literature. And it was not just the choice of words in these articles that piqued my interest, but also the notions behind them. For instance, Taylor and Van Every (2000, as cited in Colville & Pye, 2010) "describe moments of sensemaking as way stations along the road to action" (p. 379). And, to extend the analogy, Colville and Pye (2010) claimed that "moving on, and moving on along the road of changing, is integral to sensemaking" (p. 379). In addition, I was intrigued to read that Colville et al. (2016) considered that sensemaking required the sensemaker's attention not just to the content or the what of their experience, but also to the process of the experience or the how – that is, the ways that sensemaking was achieved. This aligned particularly well with my conceptual framework, especially the operating environment that was Meet-Up.

8.10 Summary of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter was to address Research Questions 3: "How did the Meet-Up leaders make sense of their development as people, students and leaders?". In order to do so, I explored the participants' responses to Questions 5, 8 and 9 and the sensemaking processes involved in forming those responses. My analysis revealed that the participants, as Meet-Up leaders, had engaged in sensemaking on two time-based levels pertinent to the study: the time when they had been student leaders and had been required to make sense of and respond to things that happened in order to fulfil the role of Meet-Up leader; and the time of the interview when they responded to my questions. For the participants, both sensemaking episodes were tacit – sensemaking as a deliberate process was not discussed.

Their responses demonstrated that they had exercised sensemaking as Meet-Up leaders, and they had relied on sensemaking at the time of the interviews to provide appropriate responses. These responses demonstrated that they had made a difference to the students who attended Meet-Up, that they had been effective student leaders and that the experiences they had encountered as Meet-Up leaders had contributed to their developing into the individuals they had become.

My analysis of the participants' responses made it apparent that I, too, as a doctoral researcher, had engaged implicitly in sensemaking on two levels. Firstly, I became aware, that I had engaged tacitly in sensemaking during the extended moment of time when I had coordinated the Meet-Up program. As coordinator, I had strived to improve and develop the program, seeking better outcomes for the attending students and also for the student leaders, and thereby engaging in both the retrospective and the prospective aspects of sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

But, more crucially for this thesis, I intentionally and explicitly strove to make sense of the participants' responses to my questions in the interviews – in particular, their responses to Questions 5, 8 and 9 that focused on their influence and their effectiveness as Meet-Up leaders, and the people they had become. Additionally, as I endeavoured to determine if my prior observations and perceptions of the student leaders' growth and development were accurate, what I was really doing was engaging in sensemaking processes. My perceptions were represented in a conceptual framework that was discussed at length in Chapter 4. The analysis undertaken in this chapter and the preceding one has demonstrated that the perceptions described in the conceptual framework were indeed accurate. The voices of the participants, as they engaged in sensemaking, aligned with my sensemaking processes.

Sensemaking is about considering and processing things that have happened or that were happening: it is about working out, "What [was or] is going on here?" (Colville & Pye, 2010, p. 373), and about developing plausible actions in response to determine, "What will I do next?" As Colville and Pye (2010) claimed: "Sensemaking is concerned with the micro interactions of these processes and their possible macro consequences: it is about moments of sensemaking and the moment of the outcome" (p. 373). This seems a good explanation with which to conclude this chapter. The following, final chapter pulls the whole thesis together and draws conclusions from the study.

9 CONCLUDING CHAPTER: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

9.1 Introduction

The Introductory chapter of this thesis began with a description of my story in which I outlined my personal interest in finding out more about the student leaders with whom I had worked for many years. It was the reason that I embarked on a doctoral journey on the subject of student leadership, and the thesis is sprinkled throughout with my voicings. This chapter draws to a conclusion the story of my personal relationship with this research, outlining where I am now at the end of the thesis. I have since retired, and this doctorate is in some ways the culmination of my work. But of course this final chapter does much more than complete the story of my personal journey.

It synthesises the core elements of the preceding chapters into an explanation of the study and how it achieved its aim. My purpose in this chapter, therefore, is to join the key pieces, like a jigsaw puzzle, so that they fit together snugly and make a cohesive picture. To that end, I briefly explain the pieces: the integral components of the study, and how they connect. I review the fundamental aspects of the context, Meet-Up; I outline the essence of the review of literature; I discuss the significance of the conceptual framework; I explain the benefits of phenomenography as the method of inquiry for my study, and the use of sensemaking as a lens to assist in realising the research aim.

Furthermore, in this chapter, I summarise the study's findings and responses to the research questions before discussing the study's contributions to knowledge in the field of student leadership, its contributions to theoretical and methodological knowledge, and its implications for the practice of PAL programs and other programs that emphasise the development of student leadership. I also explore my role as researcher in the study. These puzzle pieces link together to reveal what I learned from the study and why the study matters – its significance.

9.2 The findings: A summary

Based on what I learned, the findings of my study were as follows:

- As determined by a comparison with the leadership literature, the Meet-Up leaders were student leaders in actuality as well as nominally (Chapters 2 and 3).

- While they had had diverse prior experiences and backgrounds, the participants' stories demonstrated that they had in common a concern for others, a desire to help and an enthusiasm to encourage others in their learning (Chapters 2 and 6).

- The participants themselves believed that they had, as Meet-Up leaders, developed an identity as student leaders in actuality as well as nominally (Chapter 7).

- Phenomenographic analysis revealed that the participants' conceptions of student leadership could be placed in three categories of description: personal; contextual; and relational (Chapter 7).

- The participants revealed that, as Meet-Up leaders, their behaviours and actions had been influenced by their efforts to make sense of the role, and, again in the interviews, they had endeavoured to make sense of the role and its influence on them (Chapter 8).

- The participants believed that the experience of being a Meet-Up leader had influenced their development into the persons they had become (Chapter 8).

These findings are discussed and explained below, but firstly, I recap my role as researcher in the study.

9.3 The researcher: A personal story revisited

My work at USQ had involved working with the people who were the student leaders in PAL programs, and in particular Meet-Up. I wanted to find out more about them as people; I wanted to find out what made them the amazing people whom I remembered. The decision to undertake my doctoral journey allowed me to look back, not just with fond memories of the student leaders or of the passion that I had for my work, but also with the power and additional insight that reflection over time affords. This has significance because, without my continued interest in these students' development, this study would not have happened. These people would have exited university with few people (other than the students who were assisted by them) knowing how influential their role was. But, perhaps more importantly, the growth and development of these student leaders as leaders may have largely gone unnoticed.

9.3.1 The journey

My aim in this chapter is not to repeat what I have already written or just to bring together my findings, but to explain the journey that I undertook and the things that I learned. A journey can have a significance of its own, not just a bearing on the outcome. Indeed, as I began my thesis, I contributed a chapter (Kimmins, 2019) to a volume of doctoral stories

whose aim was to assist current and future doctoral students on their own personal research journeys. In my chapter, I compared my doctoral journey with the stories of the adventures of Alice in Lewis Carroll's (1959, 2000) famous books, and, in this final chapter of my thesis, I, perhaps indulgently, include references to the books. For instance, many times I felt nervous that I may have been venturing along a daunting path that could confuse me, or slipping down a twisting rabbit hole that could mislead me.

> "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"
> "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.
> "I don't much care where – " said Alice.
> "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.
> " – so long as I get *somewhere*," Alice added as an explanation.
> "Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."
> (Carroll, 2000, p. 67; *emphasis in original*)

Yet, just as Kahneman (2012) claimed that decision-makers should expect a decision "to be judged by how it was made, not only by how it turned out" (p. 418), I have the same expectation about my thesis. My doctoral journey was in part an exercise in travelling back though the Meet-Up days for myself and the participants. I hoped that "this backwards method [would] reward me with insight into the personal growth and development of both the student leaders and myself" (Kimmins, 2019, p. 388). But there were times that I was unsure.

> "That's the effect of living backwards," the Queen said kindly: "it always makes one a little giddy at first."
> "Living backwards!" Alice repeated in great astonishment. "I never heard of such a thing!"
> "– but there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways."
> "I'm sure *mine* only works one way," Alice remarked. "I can't remember things before they happen."
> "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," the Queen remarked.
> (Carroll, 1959, pp. 46-47; *emphasis in original*)

Despite setbacks and confusing and challenging encounters, Alice was determined to continue her adventures.

> "It's no use talking about it", Alice said, looking up at the house and pretending it was arguing with her. "I'm *not* going in again yet. I know I should have to get through the Looking-glass again – back into the old room – and there'd be an end of all my adventures!"
> (Carroll, 1959, p. 15; *emphasis in original*)

So, like Alice, my fascination with what I was finding, coupled with a drive to persevere, ensured that my doctoral journey would continue and reach completion. And this perseverance and persistence meant that I continued to find my journey analogous and referential to Alice's. The following subsections trace the stages of my doctoral journey.

9.3.2 The purpose of the study

While Alice's journey was purely inquisitive, mine had a clear aim. As noted, I wanted to contribute to an understanding of university student leadership: I wanted to ascertain what the participants' notions of student leadership were, and how they made sense of their Meet-Up experiences. Additionally, I wanted to find out about the people who had been student leaders in the Meet-Up program – who they were as individuals, and if they considered that they had indeed been leaders. These intentions were represented by the research goals coupled with the research questions, and they were outlined in the Introductory chapter. These goals and research questions ensured that, while I may wander down daunting paths and twisting rabbit holes, I would soon enough determine if they were where I needed to be headed, and, if they were not, I would retrace my steps.

9.4 The context (Chapter 2)

"Begin at the beginning", the king said, gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop".
(Carroll, 2000, p. 132)

The first thing that I had to do to begin my thesis was to explain the context of my study, the PAL program at USQ called "Meet-Up", and to acknowledge my role in this program. It was important to be clear that I had worked in student support and PAL programs throughout my time at USQ; it was work that I had loved. I outlined the main features of the Meet-Up program in Chapter 2. The chapter was not a defence of the program or of PAL *per sé*. It did not cite the benefits or advantages of the program any more than was necessary to offer a basic explanation of why it existed and what its aims and intentions were. Put simply, those aims focused on assisting students in their learning of course content and in their understanding of discipline concepts. (See Appendix 1.)

This assistance took place in PAL sessions that were delivered by experienced students who chose to engage in the program by accepting the position of Meet-Up leader. In brief, these Meet-Up Leaders engaged in the program by utilising their personal characteristics to involve themselves in the Meet-Up environment by planning and preparing

activities, and by developing relationships with the students, other student leaders and academics. They were the lynch pins of the program.

From my observations, they appeared to grow and develop as individuals as well as students, and it seemed to me that they could be considered leaders. This is what I had perceived in my role, firstly as an academic working in student support, including PAL programs, and later as coordinator of the PAL program Meet-Up. It was this perception that had piqued my curiosity and started my doctoral journey ball rolling. I wanted to discover from the student leaders themselves if my perceptions were correct.

"Curiouser and curiouser" (Carroll, 2000, p. 10).

9.5 Do I have to read all that? (Chapter 3)

Having decided to embark on my doctoral journey, and having outlined the context of the study, I began in earnest by undertaking a literature search.

> Of course the first thing to do was to make a grand survey of the country she was going to travel through. "It's something very like learning geography," thought Alice, as she stood on tiptoe in hopes of being able to see a little further.
> (Carroll, 1959, p. 23)

My observations and perceptions during my working life at USQ had indicated that the student leaders in the PAL programs in which I had been involved – in particular, Meet-Up – had demonstrated leadership characteristics, behaviours and attitudes. I wanted to see if this were true. I determined that I needed to investigate literature about PAL, student development and leadership, and leadership literature in general.

The first rabbit hole that I whooshed down landed me in what appeared to be a never-ending pile of books and texts. By-paths appeared everywhere along the trail, and I ventured along some of them. While they held my interest, I realised that they were not going to help me to achieve my research goals, and so I returned to the main path. This was daunting enough in itself, because, while there was a relatively small amount of literature about PAL, and a manageable amount of literature about student development and leadership, there was a veritable plethora of studies of and texts about leadership. For this reason, Chapter 3 was the largest in my thesis.

"What do you know about this business?" the King said to Alice.

> "Nothing," said Alice.
>
> "Nothing whatever?" persisted the King.
>
> "Nothing whatever," said Alice.
>
> "That's very important," the King said, turning to the jury. They were just beginning to write this down on their slates, when the White Rabbit interrupted: "Unimportant, your Majesty means, of course," he said in a very respectful tone, but frowning and making faces at him as he spoke.
>
> "Unimportant, of course, I meant," the King hastily said, and went on to himself in an undertone, "important—unimportant—unimportant— important——" as if he were trying which word sounded best.
>
> (Carroll, 2000, p. 179)

By contrast, my review of the literature delivered some outcomes that were clearly important. Firstly, it revealed that most of the research about PAL emphasised the benefits to the attending students; studies of student leaders, particularly from their perspective, were not so numerous, suggesting that my study may have significance for the field. Studies undertaken of student development and leadership in colleges and universities, on the other hand, drew many parallels with the perceptions that I had made, indicating that my observations of the Meet-Up leaders may indeed have been accurate. For instance, characteristics of student leaders included listening and empathy (Spears, 2004); being empowering and inclusive (Komives et al., 2013); and enabling others to act and modelling the way (Kouzes & Posner, 1997). It appeared that the Meet-Up leaders had been student leaders in more than just name.

Leadership literature unearthed an overwhelming abundance of research: I found studies involving what leadership looked like, how to define it and how to develop it; its impact on organisations; its influence on other people; and its impact on the individual personally. But I also found numerous studies where I could see a clear alignment with the Meet-Up leaders' characteristics, behaviours and manner of carrying out their role. In particular, their enactment of their role aligned their style of leadership with relational leadership (Cunliffe & Erikson, 2011; Komives et al., 2013), followership (Khan et al., 2019; Uhl-Bien, 2006), transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/1991).

The voyage into the literature had been momentous. Not only had I gained a lot of knowledge of my research topic, but I had also learned more about myself. I learned that I had sufficient interest in my research topic to pursue diverse avenues of thought that may be important for my study; I learned that I could persevere and focus when I needed to do so. But, most particularly, I learned from the comparison of the three literature strands with my

perceptions of the student leaders' behaviours that the Meet-Up leaders had indeed been leaders. I concluded that my perceptions had been correct – the participants, as Meet-Up leaders, were indeed student leaders, in actuality and not just in name.

Finding 1

As determined by a comparison with the leadership literature, the Meet-Up leaders were student leaders in actuality as well as nominally (Chapters 2 and 3).

This was a major finding. It indicated that, in a PAL program in which little attention had been given to encouraging the student leaders to develop as leaders, they had nevertheless done just that. This had implications for the higher education sector. It reinforced that, if a more intentional emphasis could be placed on the development of the student leaders in PAL programs, the reward would be a cohort of experienced, capable students, enabled and encouraged to cultivate their leadership skills and to nurture their personal development as leaders, all the while continuing to attend to the goals of the PAL program and the needs of the students. This would benefit the institution as well as the PAL program, as the student leaders could be offered other positions in which they guided, assisted and encouraged students in their learning, as the institution saw fit.

9.6 A conceptual framework (Chapter 4)

Towards the beginning of my doctorate, I developed a conceptual framework that mapped the journey of initially novice student leaders to their emergence as individuals with leadership competencies through their involvement in Meet-Up. It was based on my observations of the Meet-Up leaders over the years. It offered a representation of what my perceptions told me occurred in the Meet-Up program, and as such it was an explanation of the student leaders' journey through Meet-Up. I considered it provisional, as I anticipated that I may have needed to make changes to it as the study progressed. The framework was described and explained in detail in Chapter 4.

The framework charted the student leaders' entry into the Meet-Up environment as novice leaders with the characteristics that they brought with them; traced their behaviours in their role as student leaders in the Meet-Up context, stating what they did and how they did it;

explained their development as individuals, indicating that they moved along developmental pathways; and finally described their emergence as confident, experienced student leaders.

I based the framework on Astin's (1984/1999) theory of student involvement, which provided two important points. Firstly, he argued that students brought with them prior perspectives and values based on their pre-university experiences, and secondly, he contended that students who became involved in their learning environments had a better chance of doing well and developing and growing as students than those who did not. Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure extended this argument, as he posited that students who engaged in their learning and developed relationships in the college environment would be more likely to be retained and progress than those who did not. Further influence on my framework came from Chickering and Reisser (1993), who claimed that students grow and develop along a set of "highways" (p. 35) that they termed the "Seven developmental vectors for college students" (p. 35).

These scholars in the field of student development provided me with a sound and solid frame on which to construct my representation of a parallel journey – that of the student leaders in a PAL program. Just as students who became engaged and involved in their learning grew and developed as students and as individuals, according to these authorities in the field, so, too, I had observed the student leaders grow and develop as student leaders and individuals. I depicted this in my conceptual framework. The question was: would the participants' responses confirm my perceptions and the framework that I had developed from them? As the study took its course and findings were made and research questions answered, the congruence with my perceptions and the framework was explicitly established.

9.7 All those "ology" and "ography" words (Chapter 5)

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory'," Alice said.
Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"
"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument'," Alice objected.
"When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."
"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."
(Carroll, 1959, p. 60; *emphasis in original*)

A researcher needs to determine at an early stage in a study the methodology or method of inquiry that she will employ to generate the findings or outcomes that she requires. Again there exists a multiplicity of paths – I strayed a little way along some of them. And

again I was learning so much on my doctoral journey; I had little knowledge of many of the research methodologies. I decided to learn more about a number of them before cementing my choice.

I investigated autoethnography, case study and phenomenology, for example, before deciding that phenomenography was appropriate for my purposes. Phenomenography offered me the opportunity to explore the participants' conceptions of the phenomenon under study from their perspective, which had always been my intention.

> "It seems very pretty," she said when she had finished it [the Jabberwocky poem], "but it's rather hard to understand!" (You see she didn't like to confess, even to herself, that she couldn't make it out at all.) "Somehow it seemed to fill my head with ideas – only I don't exactly know what they are!..."
> (Carroll, 1959, p. 14)

Choice of paradigm presented another challenge. After much reading, I chose an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative orientation, and I settled on phenomenography (Marton, 1981) as the method of inquiry and the framework of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) as the interpretive lens that I would use. Phenomenography and sensemaking and the reasons that I selected them were outlined and explained in Chapter 5. Put simply, I considered that these methods offered the most appropriate means by which I could achieve my research goals and secure answers to the research questions. The study was clearly qualitative; I would be employing interpretivism to record and analyse the participants' words; phenomenography would allow me to determine the students' varying understandings or conceptions of the phenomenon under study, student leadership; and sensemaking would provide a means of discovering how the student leaders made sense of their experiences in the role of Meet-Up leader, and how I, as researcher, made sense of their sensemaking.

9.7.1: Phenomenography: Why it was chosen

As was noted, to determine the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership (Research goal II and Research Question 2), I chose to embark on a phenomenographic study. Basically, phenomenography focuses on the understandings of a phenomenon from a "second order perspective" (Marton, 1981, p. 178); that is, it involves determining the conceptions of the phenomenon from the point of view of those who engaged directly with it, rather than from the first order perspective of an observer or a researcher. This was important to my study, which had intended from the beginning to focus on the perceptions and conceptions of

the people at the centre of Meet-Up – that is, the students who were the Meet-Up leaders, and this was one of the main reasons why I selected phenomenography. In addition, phenomenography had non-dualism at its heart – that is, the notion that the individual and their understandings of the reality of the situation are not separable (Marton & Booth, 1997). As the literature review had revealed that the studies of PAL programs were not typically viewed from the student leaders' perspectives, my choice of inquiry method with its second order perspective and its non-dualistic approach contributed to the significance of the study.

The development of phenomenography has been attributed to Ference Marton (1981). His intention was to focus on the description and the understanding of people's experiences. This method of inquiry was initially used in the education discipline (Marton & Booth, 1997; Svensson, 1997) as researchers sought to understand the varying ways that students learned a specific concept. Marton (1981) recognised that individuals have differing understandings of a particular concept, and that each understanding is important to that person and should not be seen in the absolute terms of being either right or wrong. This aspect of phenomenography was another reason that it appealed to me as a suitable inquiry method. These varying understandings as described by the individuals are termed "conceptions". From the interviews with participants, a phenomenographic study produces a number of varying descriptions of the phenomenon that are placed in a set of conceptions called "the categories of description". The iterative nature of analysing and reconsidering the data to determine the categories, in conjunction with a clear statement of the purpose of the research, the development of appropriate research questions, and the disclosure by the researcher of her relationship to the context and the participants, ensures the trustworthiness and credibility of the phenomenographic study (Collier-Reed et al., 2009).

9.7.2 Sensemaking: Why it was considered to be useful

The main intention of my research was to discover the Meet-Up leaders' understandings of student leadership, but I realised that I also wanted to know much more than that about these people. Because I had observed them over time giving so much to the Meet-Up program, I was curious to know more about them. Why had they chosen to be leaders? What was important to them? Had Meet-Up influenced them as individuals? I wanted to make sense in my mind of their time as Meet-Up leaders – who they were at the start, how they developed in the role and who they were at the end of their time as student leaders. While I believed that phenomenography would allow me to determine the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership, yielding appropriate and comprehensive answers

to Research Question 2, I chose to apply an interpretive lens to my study to add richness and nuance.

The origin of sensemaking is generally attributed to Karl Weick (1995) and Brenda Dervin (1999). Dervin (1999) developed a Sense-Making Methodology in the 1970's- 1980's in the field of communication, where she sought a better method of understanding people's information seeking and use (Naumer et al., 2008). On encountering and reading about Weick's (1995) notions of sensemaking in organisations, it seemed to me that it would be an eminently suitable way of ascertaining some answers to my questioning thoughts. The concept of sensemaking as conceived by Weick (1995) literally means "the making of sense" (p. 4), and this was exactly what I wanted to do. Weick (1995) posited that the "sensemaking perspective is a frame of mind" (p. xii), and he explained it in the form of "guides" to allow people "considerable latitude in their application" (p. xii) of sensemaking as an interpretive perspective. I considered that this sensemaking approach would contribute an additional element to my research findings – one that linked the phenomenographic outcomes with a more detailed explanation of the experiences of the Meet-Up leaders.

Weick (1995) described sensemaking as a process of making sense of events; it is about people determining what it is that is happening or has happened, and then deciding how to act or respond. As explained in Chapter 5, Weick (1993) wrote about sensemaking in disastrous events such as the Mann Gulch wildfire in 1949 where 13 men lost their lives. He maintained that sensemaking can be applied even under stressful circumstances through improvisation and by being creative in even chaotic situations. When people find themselves in situations that fall outside the parameters of the established frame or the standard role, they can "run a credible version of that role" (p. 640) to manage the situation by improvising new, but appropriate, activities associated with that role.

Weick (2006) also referenced problems of sensemaking coming from serious social issues such as child abuse. By speaking differently about incidents that arise and developing alertness to their indications, actors can better identify and treat the problem. Weick's (2006) view was based on "mindfulness" (p. 1727) and being aware of the big picture, because this helps to understand context and events better. It allows for redoing (learning from new experiences); labelling (identifying and examining situation, events, organisational structures, roles); discarding (acquiring new knowledge while also learning when to drop what does not work); enacting (shaping the world to generate answers); believing (the mental act of having faith yet simultaneously allowing doubt); and substantiating (confirming by examining the emergent with already held propositions).

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Moreover, sensemaking has helpful application in situations that are not life-threatening – everyday, ordinary situations, like Meet-Up sessions, for example, where things do not always go to plan. When past experiences do not adequately inform or assist with plans, a combination of thinking and acting (Colville et al, 2016) or improvising (Weick, 2006) are required. In the interviews, I encouraged the participants to make sense of their experiences as student leaders: to think about what they did in the role of Meet-Up leader and how they did it. I also asked them if they believed that their experiences in their role as student leader in the Meet-Up program had an influence on their development as individuals. I intended to discover how the student leaders made sense of the experiences that they had in the role of Meet-Up leader, and then, as researcher, I made sense of their sensemaking. This facilitated a response to Research Goal III and to Research Question 3.

9.8 The research questions: Some answers

9.8.1 Research Question 1: What was the Meet-Up program and who were the Meet-Up leaders? (Chapters 2 and 6)

The first part of this question was explained in Chapter 2; the second part was investigated in Chapter 6. The latter chapter produced something that I had long wanted to do. It presented an in-depth insight into who the participants were as individuals, not just as Meet-Up leaders. I had been aware for some time that I was more interested in finding out what the students thought about themselves and their learning journeys than what others thought. After all, they were the individuals enacting the role of student leader. In the interviews, I asked questions of the participants that encouraged them to talk about what was important to them, and what it was that they enjoyed about helping other students.

The interviews revealed that the participants were complex and, in many ways, very different characters. They brought with them their personal traits, and their varying and contrasting experiences and knowledge from their lives to that point. Some had begun study at USQ directly after completing secondary school; others had begun courses at other universities first; still others had not completed school. Many had been employed in a wide range of jobs. Some had happy childhoods; some had experienced difficulty and trauma that they chose to share with me in their interviews. Yet, despite such differences, they all had an important personal trait in common – they shared a concern for others and an inclination to help them – in particular, they felt a desire to help others learn.

This characteristic was what had determined their acceptance of the position of Meet-Up leader – it was what got them engaged and involved in the program. In this environment, they thrived. They used the personal characteristics that they had brought with them to the program – in particular, this desire to help others to learn – to engage themselves in the Meet-Up leader role and to involve themselves enthusiastically in helping students to learn. Without this characteristic as a catalyst, these students simply would not have become student leaders. It was this characteristic that enabled them to draw on their varying experiences of higher education to help the students in their sessions. And, without such students willing to help others to learn, the Meet-Up program would not have been able to continue.

9.8.2 Research Question 2: What were the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership? (Chapter 7)

The purpose of undertaking the phenomenographic analysis was to determine the participants' conceptions of student leadership. In particular, I chose this method of inquiry because phenomenography embraces the notion that there can be varying descriptions of a phenomenon, and I anticipated that the participants may indeed have had different notions of student leadership. In responding to the questions that I asked about leadership and being leaders, there was a notable reluctance initially on the part of many of them to acknowledge leadership actions and to apply the word "leader" to themselves. Apart from a sense of modesty and humility, the reason behind this appeared to come from their attitude to the position of student leader, which they seemed to cast below formal positions of leadership in business or society in general. It could be argued that this may have been the result of the apparent lack of value placed on the benefits of the program and consequently on its student leaders by the upper management of the university.

As the interviews unfolded, the participants decided (albeit some still with hesitation) that they had engaged in leadership thoughts and deeds in their position as Meet-Up leaders, and that they had, therefore, been leaders. This was clearly of great significance for my study.

Finding 3

The participants themselves believed that they had, as Meet-Up leaders, developed an identity as student leaders in actuality as well as nominally (Chapter 7).

In addition, their words had gifted me their understandings of what student leadership meant to them. Examination of these voicings revealed that, while there were similarities in the ways that the participants conceived student leadership, there were also variations. These variations were found in the emphasis that the participants placed on particular elements of the phenomenon and on the Meet-Up context in their explanations of their understandings. Thus, my analysis, following the phenomenographic method, found that the participants' conceptions of the phenomenon of student leadership, as expressed by them, could be placed in three categories of description (Marton & Booth, 1997):

- Category A: Student leadership as personal: it involves utilising and developing personal characteristics.
- Category B: Student leadership as contextual: it is defined by the operating environment or context.
- Category C: Student leadership as relational: it is about the relationships that develop.

This was particularly critical for two reasons: it represented the outcome of the phenomenographic inquiry that I had undertaken into the participants' understandings of the phenomenon of student leadership; and it contributed an answer to Research Question 2.

Finding 4

Phenomenographic analysis revealed that the participants' conceptions of student leadership could be placed in three categories of description: personal; contextual; and relational (Chapter 7).

9.8.3 Research Question 3: How did the Meet-Up leaders make sense of their development as people, students and leaders? (Chapter 8)

During the interviews, as the participants talked through their Meet-Up experiences and what they had enacted in the role, it was clear that they were trying to make sense of it all. They spoke of what they had done and how they remembered they had felt at the time when they were Meet-Up leaders, and they also spoke about how they felt now through the perspective of retrospection after a passage of time. Some memories flowed easily; but, in order to address my questions, some responses required deeper thought and effort. The participants were engaging in sensemaking – in particular, from a retrospective outlook (Weick, 1995).

Further interrogation of Weick's (1995) sensemaking perspective and a comparison with the participants' articulations of their experiences as Meet-Up leaders revealed not only that the participants were engaging in sensemaking in the interview, but also that they had been engaging in each of seven elements of sensemaking (p. 17) while they were Meet-Up leaders. Furthermore, they had engaged in enactments that were a blend of planned, prepared, organised activities and improvisations (considered so crucial by Weick [2006]) based on the students' needs. In addition, as Meet-Up leaders, their notions, actions and reactions to the students in their sessions demonstrated that the thinking behind them was sometimes intuitive or automatic and quick (suited to improvisation), and at other times was deep, well-considered and effortful (suited to knowledge and wisdom as experienced students) (Kahneman, 2012).

For example, their sessions were prepared with due consideration for the needs of the students who would attend, and they were planned in consultation with other student leaders or with the academics who lectured in the course. As they delivered their sessions, they had constantly needed to assess what was happening. For example, they needed to make a decision about whether or not the students understood what was being explained, by interpreting cues from the students and deciding quickly how best to respond to them. In other words, they needed to decide if they should continue with the current activity, or if it would be better to change tack, improvise and offer the students a different activity or to move to a different topic or concept.

This was what the role of Meet-Up leader required, and the leaders responded to the demands of this new identity. It seems that what the role required was not only leadership (Finding 3), but also a capacity for sensemaking. Their actions, thoughts, behaviours and

attitudes at the time that they were student leaders had been the result of sensemaking as they strove to do the best job they could in their desire to help students learn. Thus, the participants demonstrated that they were not only leaders, but agile sensemakers as well – both capabilities were required in order to enact and fulfil the duties and responsibilities of the role of Meet-Up leader. This was an important contribution to the understanding of student leadership.

Finding 5

The participants' responses to the interview questions revealed that they had been sensemakers in their role as Meet-Up leaders (Chapter 8).

The participants' sensemaking in the interviews continued to the last question when they were asked if they considered that they would be the same person at the time of the interview if they had not been Meet-Up leaders. As well as being a binary 'yes/no' question, rather than an open-ended phenomenographic question, this inquiry could be thought of as a "Dorothy Dixer". Dorothy Dix was the pseudonym of a United States journalist who ran an extremely popular column offering advice on emotional matters and relationships from the 1890s until her death in 1951. It was believed that she invented some of the questions in order to provide a platform to articulate her beliefs. In Australia, the term "Dorothy Dixer" has become widely used, particularly in parliament, to apply to a favourable question, typically asked by a friend or a colleague, which enables that person/government minister to deliver a prepared response.

But the reactions from the participants in the interviews in my study revealed that they took the question very seriously, and that they had not considered a response in advance. It was not treated as if a simple yes/no response was all that was required. Indeed, as they strove to make sense of and articulate their thoughts about their Meet-Up experiences and the impact on them as people, the use of retrospection in their sensemaking process (Weick, 1995) was palpable. While some participants such as Phoebe appeared to have been aware of how it had influenced them while they were students – she noted that she would not have been so involved in university life if she had not become a Meet-Up leader – they had typically not considered it very much in relation to where they were in their lives currently.

Others, such as Phyllis and Jo, commented that being a Meet-Up leader had opened their eyes to possible career paths that they had not previously considered. Miranda remarked insightfully that she believed that she employed Meet-Up techniques in various aspects of her life without realising that that was what she was doing – referentially signifying that automatic thinking as explained by Kahneman (2012) and sensemaking (Weick, 1995) were still at play. Grace, who stated that she did not think that Meet-Up had made her a different person, nevertheless revealed that every day in her workplace she used skills that she had developed through Meet-Up.

So perhaps I was the only one who had thought of this question as a Dorothy Dixer. I had offered it almost as a throw-away question that offered the participants the opportunity to add more or to extrapolate their thoughts further if they wished to do so. As a result, I was surprised by the depth of thought about Meet-Up that was indicated by their responses, and by the extent of the level of influence that they believed that it had had. For these reasons, the responses to this question were very important: they contributed to an answer to Research Question 3, affirming that the participants had engaged in sensemaking, resulting in my final finding.

> Finding 6
> The participants believed that the experience of being a Meet-Up leader had influenced their development into the persons they had become (Chapter 8).

In addition, however, I argue a further point of importance: the responses to this question, which asked about the influence of Meet-Up on the person they had become at the time of the interview, not only provided part of an answer to Research Question 3, but also offered a link with Research Question 2. The participants' thought processes in answering this question demonstrated both sensemaking and leadership; the participants described how their relationships with others in the context of the Meet-Up program had enabled their personal growth, which the literature confirmed is a leadership quality. It appears that the participants used sensemaking in enacting leadership.

9.9 Contributions to knowledge

A study is significant because of its findings, but the findings are the result of the research journey undertaken, and it is, therefore, the research journey and the choices made

by the researcher that determine the study's contributions to furthering existing knowledge. The research journey can include the researcher's development of a conceptual or theoretical framework that can be used as a lens to view or explain the research. The findings of a research study are determined by the application of the nominated methods or frameworks of inquiry to the selected context and to the participants involved. These findings are compared with the body of literature reviewed for the study and the researcher's conceptual framework. The synthesised result is the contribution that the study has made to furthering knowledge in that particular field.

In my study, I utilised phenomenography and sensemaking to explore and investigate, analyse and identify the participants' conceptions of student leadership and how they made sense of their role as student leader. The application of these two diverse perspectives to the Meet-Up context and to the participants' responses to the interview questions, produced findings that were compared with the literature reviewed for the study and with the conceptual framework. The result provided not only a contribution to knowledge in the field of student leadership, as evidenced in the findings and the answers to the research questions, but also a methodological contribution, which is explained in Subsection 9.9.1. Furthermore, the conceptual framework developed to demonstrate the journey of the Meet-Up leaders from their engagement with the program to the time when they ceased to be leaders yielded a theoretical contribution that is outlined in Subsection 9.9.2.

9.9.1 Methodological contribution
9.9.1.1 Phenomenography

Phenomenography was specifically developed by Ference Marton (1981) to be applied as a method of inquiry in educational situations. The ways of learning a concept in an educative situation in schools, while not thought of as either right or wrong, are nevertheless generally considered by teachers to be hierarchical. Some ways involve deeper learning as opposed to surface learning, and deeper learning is usually considered by educators to be better as it generally results in a more in-depth rather than a superficial understanding of the concept. As a result, a phenomenographic analysis in education has typically yielded hierarchical outcomes.

But phenomenography's applicability is not limited to learning in schools, and my study of student leadership in higher education adds to a growing number of fields to which phenomenographic research is eminently suited. This is a methodological contribution. In addition, because my study did not involve the learning of a specific concept, the final set of

categories of description did not have a hierarchical order: all the participants' conceptions of student leadership were treated as equal.

9.9.1.2 Sensemaking

The sensemaking framework as developed by Weick (1995) has typically been applied in business settings or in community-based situations. Therefore engaging sensemaking as an interpretive lens in a study of student leadership in higher education was a contribution to methodological knowledge.

The participants' responses in the interviews demonstrated that they were using retrospective sensemaking to help them understand and explain their thoughts about the position of Meet-Up leader, including what they did in the role and how they did it. Making sense of their enactments also helped them understand and explain the influence of Meet-Up leadership on their own development as individuals, students, and leaders. While sensemaking is ongoing within a person's life, the study honed in on two specific timeframes relevant to the research questions. These timeframes were the time when the participants were Meet-Up leaders, and the moment in time of the interview. The focus of sensemaking on these two specific timeframes and the outcome in the form of the participants' voicings, offered a contribution to methodological knowledge.

9.9.1.3 Methodologies in tandem

Extrapolation of the participants' voicings indicated that the leadership behaviours they had enacted in their role as Meet-Up leaders were based on their sensemaking. Accordingly, while the analytical frameworks appeared initially to be quite diverse, on closer inspection they offered considerable complementariness to each other, allowing the construction of a smooth, comprehensive synthesis of what the thesis achieved. Phenomenography aims at the "description, analysis and understanding of experiences" (Marton, 1981, p. 177); sensemaking is "best described as a developing set of ideas with explanatory possibilities" (Weick, 1995, p. xi). Thus, one method describes individuals' understandings of the phenomenon; the other creates sensible explanations of those understandings.

The application of phenomenography and sensemaking together in one study has made a further contribution to methodological knowledge. Chapter 7 revealed that the participants' phenomenographic descriptions of student leadership ultimately resulted in the development of three categories: personal, contextual, and relational. The participants' sensemaking explanations of their Meet-Up leadership experiences included their articulations of what they brought with them to the role (personal characteristics), what they

had done in the role (enactments within the Meet-Up context), the manner in which they had behaved (how they had managed the relationships that they had formed) and who they had now become. Thus, the participants' sensemaking outcomes interfaced with the phenomenographic findings. Indeed, sensemaking had established that the participants were leaders who engaged in leadership behaviours. "A leader does not tell it 'as it is'; he tells it as it *might* be, giving what '*is*' thereby a different '*face*,'….The leader is a sense-*giver*" (Thayer, 1988, as cited in Weick, 1995, p. 10; *emphasis in original*). This application of phenomenography and sensemaking provided an additional methodological contribution.

9.9.2 *Theoretical contribution*

As I analysed the participants' voicings to answer Research Question 2: What were the Meet-Up leaders' conceptions of student leadership? using the phenomenographic approach, a clear alignment emerged with the conceptual framework. The participants' explanations of their experiences as Meet-Up leaders mirrored the way that I had expressed the role in the conceptual framework. For example, they expressed their notions of student leadership as personal – that is, it was linked with the personal characteristics that they had brought with them and that I had stated in the framework. They also explained their notions of leadership as contextual: their conceptions of leadership were closely linked with their involvement and with the behaviours that they activated in the Meet-Up program as student leaders, which were also included in the framework. Furthermore, their understandings of the phenomenon of student leadership involved the relationships that they built with others in the program, both students and staff members. These relationships aligned with the section in the framework entitled "How they did it".

In addition, their explanations aligned with the characteristics of the Outcome section of the framework, indicating they had developed as experienced student leaders. Indeed, as they responded to my final question, asking them if they thought that they would be the same person today if they had not become Meet-Up leaders, their answers indicated that they had become individuals with a developed sense of self; an appreciation of other people and their varying needs and how to guide them; an increased knowledge of their discipline area; increased confidence; and a greater understanding of the institution and its systems and processes.

The alignment of the participant voices with my conceptual framework was critical as it demonstrated that my perceptions of the Meet-Up leaders were generally true, and, by extrapolation, the findings also confirmed that my conceptual framework was essentially

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accurate; I did not need to change it. Additionally, the alignment of the conceptual framework with the findings confirmed that the theories of Astin (1984/1999), Tinto (1993) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) were a legitimate base for my framework. The foundational premises on which Astin (1984/1999), Tinto (1993) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) built their theories in the 1980's and 1990's, retained a legitimacy, relevance and truth that applied to the student leaders in my study. That is to say, the engagement, involvement and integration of the student leaders in and into the Meet-Up community were instrumental to their development as people, students and leaders. The conceptual framework therefore offers a contribution to theoretical knowledge, demonstrating and explaining how student leaders in a PAL program develop.

9.9.3 *Contributions to knowledge: In summary*

Derived from the explanations of the study's contributions to knowledge as outlined above, this subsection provides a summary: firstly in the field of student leadership, followed by the study's methodological and theoretical contributions.

- The study contributes broadly to the general understanding of the concept of student leadership in higher education.
- The study contributes more specifically to an understanding of student leadership in higher education, determining the conceptions of student leadership in a PAL program from the perspectives of the student leaders, an under-researched area.
- The study contributes to filling a gap in the knowledge of student leaders in PAL by generating pictures of who the student leaders were as individuals.
- The study contributes to the growing number of studies that engage the use of phenomenography in a less traditional but well-suited field of research – namely, student leadership in higher education.
- The study contributes to methodological knowledge because it applied a sensemaking framework (Weick, 1995) as a lens in a less traditional setting – that is, student leadership in higher education – to make sense of the ways that student leadership was experienced and developed in the student leaders in a PAL program.
- The study contributes to methodological knowledge through the application of two rarely paired analytical frameworks, phenomenography and sensemaking, working in tandem to ascertain not only the student leaders' understandings and experiences of student leadership, but also how they made sense of them.

- The study generated a conceptual framework that aligned the research of scholars in the student development field – Astin (1984/1999), Tinto (1993) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) – to explain and demonstrate the journey of the student leaders in a PAL program and their development as people, students and leaders; the framework could be used to inform the practice of PAL in higher education.

9.9.4   *Implications for practice*

My research study and its findings have clear implications for PAL programs. The knowledge that I gained through the research, and that I articulated in its findings, potentially has the power to influence both the design and the practice of PAL programs at higher education institutions. In particular, the discovery that student leaders in a PAL program developed attributes and enacted behaviours that, in mainstream leadership literature as well as in student leadership research, are considered to be leadership has undoubted significance for people involved in implementing PAL in higher education. An awareness that leadership skills can be actualised in the student leaders in a typical PAL program, despite its central focus being on the attending students' learning, could guide and activate further development of the student leaders through thoughtful design of the program. For example, staff members could include in their training sessions specific activities designed to increase the emphasis placed on the development of leadership in the student leaders in the program.

My study also revealed that some student leaders held a reluctance to acknowledge that they had demonstrated the characteristics of a leader and had enacted leadership behaviours in their role as student leaders in the PAL program, Meet-Up. The contextualised character of student leadership in PAL had perhaps shaped a tendency to play down the leadership aspects of their role. A further implication of the study, therefore, is the need for the design and implementation of leadership awareness activities. These could also be included in the training workshops for the student leaders. Additionally, open and clear acknowledgement and recognition by the institution's management of the potential benefits of PAL not only to the student attendees but also to the student leaders could contribute to the student leaders' feelings of being valued and appreciated in their role. This in turn could stimulate within these individuals a deliberate, focused effort to develop their leadership attributes and behaviours.

In addition, practitioners in student learning and development in higher education could employ my conceptual framework as a lens to explain the benefit of investing in a similar PAL program that would not only assist participating students in their learning of a

course or discipline, but also activate the development of students who could actualise a cohort of student leaders within the institution. Beyond that, the framework could be extended to inform staff members about student leadership more generally, and perhaps inspire and influence the development of other programs aimed at encouraging student leadership in higher education.

9.10 The researcher: A personal story concluded

Working through the concluding phases of my doctoral journey provided feelings of satisfaction and contentment, mixed with trepidation and nervousness as I await feedback and responses from peers and colleagues in the field. The effort of completing the thesis has been rewarding, both personally and professionally. I feel that I have grown, changed and developed. As a doctoral candidate, I learned so much about my topic. I now have answers to the questions that I had been asking myself for so long: questions with respect to the student leaders' leadership and personal qualities, and also to their growth and development as people, students and leaders.

In addition, writing my thesis has enabled me to hone and refine my skills as a researcher. I have learned that I need no longer feel a little like a fraud, doubting my research skills. I have realised that knowledge and research skills can be acquired through the application of appropriate research methodologies and a degree of time and effort. Like Alice, as my journey progressed I became bolder. I could now make statements based on my research with confidence.

> "No, no!" said the Queen. "Sentence first – verdict afterwards."
> "Stuff and nonsense!" said Alice loudly. "The idea of having the sentence first!"
> "Hold your tongue!" said the Queen, turning purple.
> "I won't!" said Alice.
> "Off with her head!" the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved. "Who cares for you?" said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). "You're nothing but a pack of cards!"
> (Carroll, 2000, p. 187)

I also learned that methods of inquiry can be applied to areas other than the traditional or typical fields, and indeed, by doing just that, my research study uncovered new knowledge and made a number of findings. Furthermore, I realised that I could control and direct my use of the method rather than feeling like its procedures and parameters were constricting or constraining the ways that I chose to proceed in the study.

In addition, I developed and established a new identity as a sensemaker during my doctoral journey. My prior unfamiliarity with sensemaking as a perspective lens through which to view situations did not mean that I had not made efforts to make sense of situations, but it did mean that I did not have the awareness of how and why I made sense of things. Now, having applied sensemaking to my thesis, I recognised the value of the approach and its design in understanding how to make sense of situations and to determine appropriate actions to respond to them. I believe that I could apply the sensemaking lens again to understand other situations as needed or desired by utilising its characteristics with which I have now become familiar.

9.11 Closing remarks

9.11.1 Limitations of the study

My study of student leadership was limited to participants selected from one particular PAL program, Meet-Up, at one Australian regional university, USQ, at one snapshot in time; other studies at other institutions at other times may produce different findings. In addition, I had many years of experience in the Meet-Up program and working at USQ. Rather than this constituting a problem, phenomenographers believe that comprehensive knowledge of the context on the part of the researcher can lend additional insights. My interpretation of the findings using both the phenomenographic method of inquiry and the interpretive lens of sensemaking was informed not only by my years of experience, but also by the literature.

For the study to have nuance and richness, it needed to have an appropriate number of participants. Too many could compromise the depth and detail of the analysis; too few may not deliver sufficient variation that is the crux of the phenomenographic approach. After an exploration of the literature about phenomenography and the contemplation of a number of phenomenographic studies, and viewed in the light of my research goals, I determined 20 to be an appropriate number of participants. The result was that the variations in the descriptions of the participants' understandings and experiences of the phenomenon of student leadership were clearly limited to those expressed by those 20 individuals; other people may have offered differing descriptions.

The phenomenographic approach that I chose to apply to my research allowed me to investigate student leadership from the perspective of the student leaders, and to establish a set of categories of description of the phenomenon that encompassed the variations in their understandings. However, in keeping with the phenomenographic method, causation was not

determined nor did I propose that the findings could be directly generalised to other PAL programs.

9.11.2 What next: Building on the study

The development of leadership skills in students has long been an educative aim of higher education (Kiersch & Peters, 2017), and, because it continues to hold interest today (Rosch & Collins, 2020), a further aim of my research was to inform the practice of PAL programs. While the findings of my study should not be generalised, they are arguably of most immediate interest and relevance to practitioners and researchers in PAL in higher education institutions, as they have clear implications for the practice of PAL programs. Building on the implications for practice outlined in Section 9.9.4, the findings and the conceptual framework can be extrapolated to offer suggestions that can inform the design, implementation and practice not only of PAL programs, but potentially of student clubs, organisations and other activities such as organised sports that promote the development of leadership opportunities in students. Indeed, *development* of student leadership can be considered the 'elephant in the room'; it is frequently stated but rarely with any mention of deliberation or intentionality. Applications of the findings of this study are really only limited, therefore, by the time, determination, and inclination of staff to design and implement appropriate programs that deliberately and intentionally emphasise and *develop* student leadership.

Furthermore, the findings could serve as a platform from which further studies of student leadership by researchers and practitioners in the PAL field could emerge. Indeed students themselves could utilise the study to assist in the development of their own leadership identity and skills. Moreover, with the emphasis on the development of leadership skills not only in higher education, but also in education generally, the business sector and the wider community more broadly, my study may have wider importance and interest for teachers, other professionals including business managers, and leaders of community initiatives and programs. After all, student leadership and leadership more broadly are closely aligned as my study revealed. And finally, my thesis, which was written partly as a personal journey in a narrative style that is not typical of doctoral writing, could encourage others to consider embarking on doctoral journeys of their own, employing research methods and writing styles that suit their particular research intention.

9.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have put together the pieces of my thesis like a jigsaw puzzle. I offered a synthesis of the context, the review of literature, the conceptual framework, phenomenography as the method of inquiry and the use of a sensemaking lens. I explained my findings, summarised the answers to the research questions and discussed the study's contributions to knowledge in the field of my topic, as well as its contributions to methodological and theoretical knowledge. I also explored my roles as researcher and sensemaker in the study and my personal growth and development. These were the crucial elements of my thesis: they explained why the study mattered, and I have distilled them below into a synthesis of my doctorate.

The aim of my research was to contribute to understanding what student leadership in higher education looks like and the ways that the student leaders made sense of it. I have met my aim. I have determined that the Meet-Up leaders were indeed leaders; that they saw student leadership as personal, contextual and relational; and that they made sense of their development as student leaders by determining that it was shaped by their efforts to engage their personal characteristics to enact the behaviours required in the role of Meet-Up leader to help students to learn.

> *So I think…when you think of leadership skills, you often think of – you know – presidents, who get up and do big speeches and make ground-breaking decisions, or if you're in the boardroom and you have to rally the board or persuade people. But I think Meet-Up is more about helping people – what do they need to know; how can I help them? Drawing out from them what they want to know and need to know.*
> (Carmel)

And, while they strove to help the students, the student leaders believed that their own lives were enriched: "*It was a great experience. I'm pleased I took it on; it really contributed a lot to my life and my university experience, and it helped [to] shape me into the person I am today*" (Jo). Thus, they made sense of student leadership in Meet-Up by linking the role and its responsibilities with the ways they enacted them. In other words, student leadership in Meet-Up was "*alongside leadership*" (Nina); it was about "*walking with the students towards the goal*" (Charles). They were leaders because they were "*leading from experience*", and not because they had "*been given a title or a role*" (Florence).

This then is the end of my doctoral journey. Like Alice, my journey took me along pathways I had not considered before and it had made me think about things I had not

thought about before; my thesis developed me as a researcher and shaped me as the person I have become. And so… like Alice, to end the journey where I began:

"*You're not a leader because you stand above everyone. You're a leader because you're willing to, I guess, walk with everyone*" (Phyllis).

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Appendix 1: Meet-Up Program Aims and Objectives: Course-based model

Aim:

The program aims to provide opportunities for students to develop their academic learning skills and their understandings of discipline concepts. This assistance is provided in on-campus sessions and/or online environments by student or peer leaders who facilitate activities, exercises, problems or practice opportunities.

The program also aims to contribute to the establishment of a body of student leaders at the University and to assist with the development of student leadership skills.

Objectives:

The Meet-Up program's objectives are to:

- enhance students' knowledge and understanding of course or program concepts and topics
- provide students with useful learning strategies and techniques
- provide feedback to academic staff members on students' needs and expectations
- develop leadership skills in student leaders.

Appendix 2: Phenomenographic research process for my study

(Adapted from Bowden, 2000, p. 7)

PLAN	
Purpose	To contribute to a greater understanding of university student leadership; to inform the practice of PAL programs that emphasise student leadership by offering insights into addressing some of the challenges of integrating leadership development in the university student learning journey and thereby providing a positive contribution to rethinking practices in PAL programs
Strategies	To undertake a phenomenographic study of student leaders' experiences of student leadership in a peer-assisted learning program at an Australian university
DATA COLLECTION	
From whom	20 current and previous student leaders in the Meet-Up program
Why	To determine student leaders' different understandings and experiences of student leadership (Research Questions 2 and 3) from their perspectives, because this is a gap in the literature
How	Interviews in which open-ended questions were asked and transcribed
Relation to purpose	Phenomenographic interviews deliver reliability as interpretive awareness (p. 6)
ANALYSIS	
How was it carried out?	A set of categories were developed from the transcriptions in an iterative process until a final set was determined
Who did it?	The researcher
Relation to purpose	The study allowed me to present a story of Meet-Up and the student leaders (Research Question 1) and inform the design and practice of Meet-Up and other PAL programs (Research Question 4)
INTERPRETATION	
Context of study	Meet-Up program
Context of application	PAL programs
When no longer phenomenography	When the final set of categories was determined

Appendix 3: Invitation email to potential participants

Dear

As you know, Meet-Up is USQ's peer-assisted learning (PAL) program, and the focus of the program is to provide participating students with opportunities to increase their understandings of discipline-specific concepts and receive study skill advice. My observations over a number of years, however, have indicated that there is another almost hidden benefit of the program, and that is the development of leadership skills in the student leaders; this is what I want to research in my Doctorate.

The Title of the Doctorate is: *Towards a greater theoretical understanding of student leadership in higher education: A phenomenographic study of student leaders' conceptions and experiences of student leadership in a peer-assisted learning program at an Australian university*.

I invite you to participate in this project. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you are not obliged to do so. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any stage.

If you do choose to assist in this research, you will be asked to participate in either a face-to-face or a phone interview that will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. I will be conducting the interviews. The questions will be about your understandings and experiences of student leadership. There are no right or wrong answers; I am seeking to know your understandings from your perspective.

Please find attached two documents: an Information Sheet with further information and a Consent Form. The Consent Form needs to be signed and returned to me.

Thank you for giving participation in this research due consideration.

Kind regards