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## **Off the Mat, Into the Office: How a Regular Yoga Practice Transformed Eight Corporate Leaders and their Leadership**

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Off the Mat, Into the Office: How a Regular Yoga Practice Transformed Eight Corporate

Leaders and their Leadership

By

Pamela Smith

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership

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Research Advisor: Sharon Radd, Ed.D.

Research Reading Committee:

Laurie Anderson Sathe, Ed.D.

Moya Mathews

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## HOW YOGA INFLUENCES LEADERSHIP

### **Abstract**

We live in a time of constant change and challenging conditions for business leaders (Benson, 2005). Leaders must develop behaviors and skills to adapt and respond in healthy ways to stressful environments and ongoing change in order to lead others toward positive change effectively. This study examines how leaders in corporate America feel a regular Yoga practice has influenced their leadership, in essence taking Yoga "off the mat" and into the workplace. Heifetz's adaptive leadership theory was used to identify ways that leaders take Yoga off the mat and demonstrate adaptive leadership. The findings highlight that a regular Yoga practice led to the self-transformation of participants in the form of better relationships, increased intentionality, and improved skills to manage stress. This study argues that this transformation allowed them to become more effective and adaptive leaders with behaviors and skills to manage their stress, pause and observe, build accountability with others, and create space for transformative change to happen.

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The for-profit business environment is a strategically, operationally, and personally challenging context in which to lead. To stay competitive and relevant, organizations need to continually adapt and evolve (Allen et al., 2007). Business leaders face immense pressure to navigate complex problems of globalization, fast-changing technologies, and challenging workforces and must find ways to adapt to remain competitive (Zaccaro & Banks, 2003; Northouse, 2019). Leaders cannot rest on the status quo, and they understand the need to adapt and continually reexamine their organizations before a competitor disrupts their business (Tilson, 2020). Leaders must learn skills to adapt and respond in healthy ways to business stressors and today's challenges (Salmon, 2009).

The intense corporate American lifestyle can severely deteriorate a leader's effectiveness. Stress and mental exhaustion can lead to burnout and erode a leader's endurance and ability to be effective (Bakker & Costa, 2014). Long work hours, increased workloads, and increased demands combine to lead to eventual burnout (Kelloway and Day, 2005). When leaders feel the pressure to perform for extended periods, they do not recover during their shortened downtime and are at risk of physical and mental exhaustion (Bakker & Costa, 2014). If not managed, this stress can impact one's overall physical and psychological health (Spangler et al., 2012).

Successful leaders need to find ways to manage their emotions and stress to avoid mental exhaustion and burnout, and Yoga is becoming an increasingly popular choice. Yoga is a practice that can improve physical health, reduce stress, and build emotional intelligence while improving a leader's adaptability (Gruicic & Benton, 2015). Leaders must learn skills to adapt and respond in healthy ways to the stressors and challenges of business, and Yoga is one popular tool.

Yoga has increased in popularity in the United States sharply since the early 2000s. In 2002, 10 million Americans practiced Yoga for its health benefits (Birdee et al., 2008). By 2016,

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37 million Americans practiced Yoga (Statista Research Department, 2016; Yoga Alliance & Yoga Journal, 2016). Birdee et al. (2008) reported that most participants felt a regular Yoga practice was essential to maintaining good health and well-being. There is a general public consensus that Yoga is good for physical and mental health (Yoga Alliance & Yoga Journal, 2016). The National Center for Health Statistics reported that American adults now view Yoga as a complementary health approach and that Yoga's popularity increased every year in recent years (Clarke, 2018). By 2016, it was forecasted that some 55 million Americans were practicing Yoga (Statista Research Department, 2016).

This research study explored how American corporate leaders felt a regular Yoga practice has informed and impacted their leadership. This study took a holistic view of Yoga as outlined in the eight limbs of Yoga to include physical postures, breathwork, relaxation techniques, meditation, and Yoga philosophy. I interviewed eight leaders with a regular Yoga practice to see how Yoga impacted their leadership. This research adds to the literature by exploring how Yoga influenced leaders and found that Yoga transforms the leader to be resilient with skills to manage their stress, work with intention and build better relationships.

### **Positionality/Reflexivity Section**

This study sought to explore how leaders felt a regular Yoga practice influenced their leadership. My own Yoga experience and leadership career inspired this research question. This section summarizes my Yoga journey and curiosity on how Yoga could improve leadership in the workplace.

My Yoga story begins back in 2008 when I took my first Hatha Yoga class. As I finished the class, I felt an immediate shift. I did not know what had shifted and had no words to explain the change, but I was hooked. I felt immediately happier, and I wanted more.

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I immediately started dropping into every Yoga class style offered at my studio and signed up for master class workshops before I had even heard of the Yamas and Niyamas and the eight limbs of Yoga. I was spending Saturday afternoons attending Yoga workshops while my friends were out shopping. I completed a 200-hour Yoga teacher training at that same studio in 2010, and it changed my world perspective even further.

In 2010, I was promoted to my first supervisor role at a large finance company. I immediately used all my Yoga learnings of non-judgment and compassion in my new leadership career. My Yoga teacher would say the most challenging poses in Yoga are training your mind to be calm and flexible with the day-to-day challenges off the mat, and I felt prepared to be an authentic leader because of my Yoga learnings. I prided myself as a leader who listened to people, modeled the behavior I expected from others, and was known to be fair and understanding to my fellow team members. I employed a holistic and intuitive perspective to workplace problems and decisions.

Working in corporate finance, I often worked with competitive and data-minded individuals different from my collaborative approach to business. I have seen people intentionally undermine their colleagues or storm out of meetings when they did not get their way. I have seen leaders run their departments as individual fiefdoms and defend their turf to prevent additional work that would otherwise improve the whole process and enterprise outcomes.

I have wondered if more members of the leadership team practiced Yoga, could departmental leaders effectively work together to avoid internal organizational competition? I speculated that if leaders were less focused on personal goals and incentives and more reflective and self-aware, the entire organization's efficiency would improve. If each person in the organization held everyone else accountable for treating each other well, managing the stress of

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the group and not letting people burn out, would that make a difference in constantly hiring, training, and rehiring when people quit due to burnout?

These questions and experiences fueled my study, which asks how leaders with a regular Yoga practice feel Yoga has influenced their leadership styles. I wanted to know how other Yoga practitioners experience the impact of Yoga in their work and workplace, and specifically, in their leadership.

### **Central Concepts**

This study sought to explore how leaders felt a regular Yoga practice influenced their leadership. Four concepts are foundational for this study. In this section, I provide a brief definition of what I mean when I used the term "Yoga," a review of Patanjali's eight limbs of Yoga, a definition of leadership and leader development, and a review of several relevant leadership theories.

#### **Yoga: A Definition**

Yoga is an ancient practice that has sparked many different interpretations that go beyond physical postures. The ancient practice of Yoga was traditionally passed down from guru (teacher) to student and designed to connect the mind, body, and spirit through movement, breath, and meditation (Muktibodhananda, 2009). Many in the United States see Yoga as a purely physical practice, but the philosophy of Yoga extends far beyond the physical or āsana practice (Freeman et al., 2017). Yoga has been defined as a "complete system of therapy, which includes developing awareness and control of the physical body, emotions, mind, and interpersonal relations" (Rama et al., 1976, as cited in Lucia 2014, p. 3).

Most definitions of Yoga speak of uniting the mind and body. The Sanskrit word Yoga is often defined as to join or yoke (Iyengar, 2006). Yoga is an interconnected holistic process including physical postures, breathwork, relaxation, meditation, moral codes, and sensory

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withdrawal, leading to self-realization (Satyananda, 2006). There is no separation from the physical and internal practices in traditional yogic thought as both are interconnected in the whole practice. The physical postures are designed to prepare the mind for meditation at the end of class. Many Yoga teachers say the most challenging poses on your mat are training your mind for day-to-day challenges off the mat.

Many Yoga gurus define Yoga as a system to free the mind from negative thoughts and suffering and find personal freedom. Desikachar (1995) described Yoga as a series of internal and external practices that tie the strands of the mind together. One's thoughts, emotions, ego, and sense of self are all thought of as obstacles to be tamed to uncover one's true sense of self and reach a place of inner calmness (Desikachar, 1995). Yoga could be thought of as the practice of "breathing, meditation, and physical postures, which empowers practitioners to self-discovery, spiritual development, and inner peace" (Lucia, 2014, p.9).

Control of the mind is the main focus in the *Yoga Sutras*, and the ancient sage Patanjali defined Yoga as a system to still the fluctuations or ruminations in the mind to reach one's authentic self-identity (Adhia et al., 2010A). Swami Satyananda (2006) echoed this definition noting Yoga as "the control of the patterns of the consciousness" (p. 7).

In this study, I used a holistic view of Yoga as outlined in the eight limbs of Yoga by Patanjali. I refer to this as a holistic view because Yoga is more than just isolated physical or mental practices, and it would be short-sighted not to consider the impacts of all components of Yoga including breathwork, relaxation, meditation, moral codes, sensory withdrawal, and concentration. Unlike other types of exercise, which work the muscles, Iyengar (2005) indicated that Yoga works to soften and relax the body and, through meditation, strengthen the body and mind. I chose this approach to Yoga for my study because of the complex nature of Yoga and

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the relational aspect of leadership. Yoga works to build one's self-awareness (Desikachar, 1995).

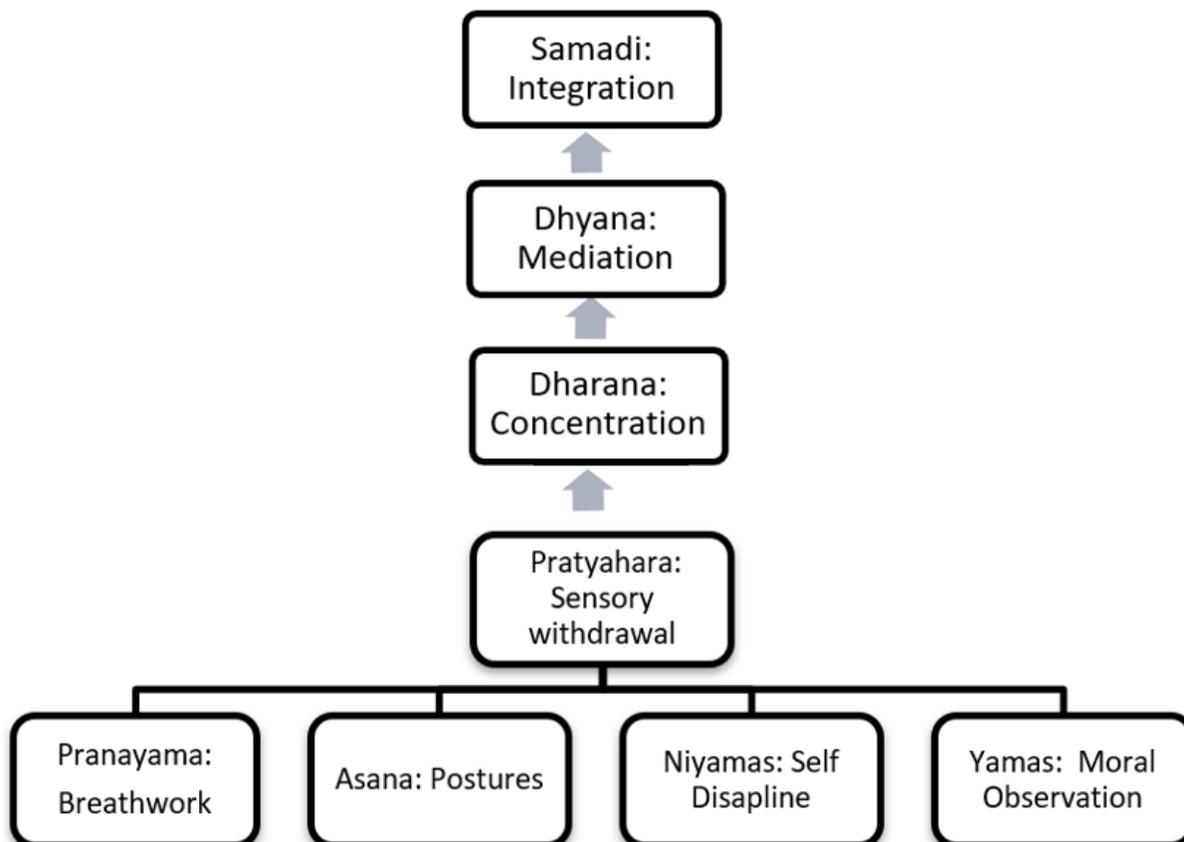
I use the following section to provide more explanation of the eight limbs of Yoga.

### **The Eight Limbs of Yoga**

The *Yoga-Sutras* outline eight comprehensive practices for advanced practitioners that include physical practices and moral codes that lead to a deepening meditative state that ends with bliss (Satyananda, 2006). Figure one provides a visual of the components of the Eight Limbs of Yoga and how they relate to each other, and how the first four limbs prepare the body for internal practices to calm and control the mind. The internal practices start with sensory withdraw, concentration, then meditation, and ultimately final integration and bliss. The eight limbs of Yoga begin with the Yamas or moral codes of actions for others. The second limb is the Niyamas or moral codes for self-reflection and self-awareness. The third limb is Asana, or the physical postures typically thought of when one thinks of Yoga. The fourth limb is Pranayama, or breath control. The fifth limb is Pratyahara or withdrawal of the senses. The sixth limb is Dharana or the concentration of the mind or mindfulness. The seventh limb is Dhyana or meditation, and the eighth limb is Samadhi, or bliss and self-transcendence (Corner, 2008). In this section, I describe these eight limbs in detail.

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Figure 1

*Eight Limbs of Yoga Components*

*Note. Eight Limbs of Yoga components as they relate to each other*

The Yamas and Niyamas are moral codes that promote self-awareness and positive social behaviors (Gard et al., 2014). They are the first and second limbs in Pantajali's approach to Yoga and are often paired together in teachings. The Yamas are rules of interacting with others that encourage duty, truthfulness, nonviolence, non-stealing, selfless service, restraint, and non-attachment (Satyananda, 2006). The Niyamas are personal conduct rules that promote self-awareness in purity, contentment, discipline, and surrender or devotion to something greater than oneself (Bremer, 2020). The Yamas are designed to bring harmony into one's social interactions. Simultaneously, the Niyamas are described in terms of each Yama's properties (Bindlish & Nandram, 2017). For example, if a leader were striving for non-attachment, they would need the

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self-restraints or Niyamas of contentment, discipline, and self-awareness to not attach to their thoughts, emotions, or physical property.

Similarly, if a leader were striving to achieve ahimsa or nonviolence, they would need the Niyamas of discipline and self-awareness to cross-check every word and action they take to ensure it does not harm someone else. Without the codes of the Niyamas, living up to the Yamas would be impossible. The Yamas and Niyamas are the theory's ethical pillars and build moral awareness and self-discipline (Chaukar, 2016; Woodyard, 2011).

The third through fifth limbs, Asana, Pranayama, and Pratyahara, include the typical elements of a typical Yoga class, including movement, controlled breathwork, and relaxation. Pranayama focuses on diaphragmatic breathing and controlling the inhales and exhales and is meant to bring awareness to otherwise unconscious shallow breathing (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). This is important because moving from unconscious to conscious breathing requires being in the present moment and builds self-awareness. Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal) is included in guided relaxation (for example, Yoga Nidra or Savasana, the final resting pose), where external distractions are minimized, and one turns their attention inward (Gard et al., 2014). This purposeful relaxation trains the mind to ignore the external senses and remain in a place of stillness. This calm mind builds greater emotional control and intentionality in everyday thoughts, words, and actions.

Dharana or mindfulness and Samadhi or bliss, the sixth and eighth limbs, are not practiced directly but are outcomes of the Yoga practice (Nandram, 2010). These two limbs describe the internal practice that happens only after the other stages have prepared the body and mind and removed any external distractions. Patanjali has said that to reach Samādhi, one must first have control over one's conscious thought patterns to then find their authentic self-identity (Iyengar, 2005).

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Each of the eight limbs is as important as the physical practice to reap the vast benefits of Yoga, but most yogic philosophers do not consider it a linear process. Muktibodhananda (2009) understood that most people start with an asana practice before they are ready for the philosophical nature of the Yamas and Niyamas. This is a slight variance from Patanjali's original writings about Raja Yoga or the royal path of meditation in which the Yamas and Niyama's must be learned first to prepare the mind for the physical practice (Satyananda, 2006). Iyengar (2006) wrote that Asanas prepare the body to control the mind, while Pratyahara and Pranayama teach conscious breathing to control the mind, and the first five limbs build the moral awareness and self-discipline needed for concentration and meditation. To meditate, one must have a strong, healthy, relaxed body and the discipline to sit for long periods. The last three limbs are the quest for inner harmony where the transformational effects of Yoga happen (Desikachar, 1995).

Understanding the eight limbs of Yoga is one way to take a holistic perspective of Yoga and its interconnectedness with its practitioners' mental, physical, and spiritual development. I use the following section to go into detail on leadership and how it relates to this study.

### **Leadership**

The leadership concept is central to this study and how Yoga influenced eight separate leaders and impacted their development and leadership. The scholarly study of leadership includes a lengthy debate on whether leaders are born with inherent traits or if successful leadership behaviors can be learned. Accordingly, in this section, I review a series of ways leadership is defined in the scholarly literature and how each may be relevant to this study.

Many might think leadership is just about overseeing people and providing guidance and direction as needed, but this study takes a broader definition to say leadership is not just a title but actions shared with group members to achieve a shared goal (Koehle et al., 2008). Leaders

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have authoritative power to influence followers, but it is not leadership without considering the context of how the followers respond to the leader's behaviors and strategies (Northouse, 2019). For this reason, leadership includes the motives and behaviors of the leader in the context of their followers. Due to this connection of the leader and group members, Northouse (2019) defines leadership as a process where someone in an authoritative role influences a group of people to achieve a goal or mission. Likewise, Kanungo and Mendonca (1998) argued that moral leadership is a set of behaviors and influence strategies to accomplish a task. Leaders influence the followers' "values, beliefs, and behavior towards attaining the organizational objectives" (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1998, p. 136).

Transformational leadership (Burns, 1978 as cited in Northouse, 2019) is particularly relevant for this study in that Yoga can transform the individual and those around them. Burns argues that transformational leadership aims to improve followers' and organizations' morality (Burns, 1978 as cited in Northouse, 2019). Transformational leaders are often charismatic and very motivational in their approach. Transformational leadership is an example where certain inherent traits are tied to the personality of the leader. In contrast, a transactional leader rewards or punishes followers based on their performance and is seen as transactional only in their approach to complete objectives (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Leadership is defined differently by different theorists, but adaptive leadership theory defines the act of leadership as a set of behaviors and actions to motivate a group to solve larger strategic problems (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). I use adaptive leadership as the theoretical framework for this study as Yoga builds key behaviors to manage one's stress and increase personal resilience and adaptability (Khan, 2017). Adaptive leaders are moral leaders concerned with their impact on followers and how followers adjust and react to changes (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). Unlike a transformational leader, an adaptive leader may not be known for their charisma,

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but adaptive leaders can influence their organization's morality and inspire followers to do more than they imagined with their learned skills and behaviors. Adaptive leadership theory was used as the theoretical framework because it offers behaviors that any leader can learn and practice, similar to how Yoga is a practice available to all personality types with no prerequisites to practice and experience the benefits. I explain adaptive leadership theory further in the upcoming section titled "Theoretical Framework."

### **Leader Development**

While the concept of leadership is central to this study, so is the aspect of individual leader development. A critical concept of leadership development is the self-development of leaders (Day, 2001). Again, leadership is a series of actions and not just a title (Koehle et al., 2008). Leader development refers to developing intrapersonal skills, character, and knowledge competency needed to be effective in any formal leadership role (Day, 2001). Kouzes and Posner (2012) describe leadership as being an "observable pattern of practices and behaviors" (p. 335). Adaptive leadership theory asserts that leaders at any level can learn a set of behaviors to be adaptive leaders (Heifetz et al., 2009). Likewise, successful leaders need to develop behaviors and skills to adapt to the stressful business environment. Some of the behaviors of the most successful leaders include reflection, continuous learning, and resiliency to keep a positive appraisal of any situation. Kouzes and Posner (2012) agree that self-development is central to leadership as the best leaders never stop learning and need to stay optimistic.

The intrapersonal skills associated with leader development typically include self-awareness, self-regulation, emotional regulation, and adaptability (Day, 2001). These same skills relate to this study's findings that Yoga develops self-awareness and emotional regulation (Gard et al., 2014). Yoga changes the leader as a person, and that transformation then leads to better

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leadership. This means that transforming individual leaders can indeed transform organizations (Day et al., 2009).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Again, the purpose of this study is to explore how Yoga influences leadership. To understand the impact of consistent Yoga practice on individuals' leadership practice, I drew on adaptive leadership theory as a framework for adaptive leaders. In this section, I summarize the overall theory and highlight the most relevant principles to this study.

Adaptability in business is the cornerstone of change management and requires the leader to have self-awareness and emotional intelligence to ensure followers adjust to changes (Gruicic & Benton, 2015). Thus, I used Heifetz's adaptive leadership theory to examine how a regular practice of Yoga influences leadership practice (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). This theory is appropriate to this study because it spoke to the outcomes of Yoga, including the discipline to observe without judgment and manage one's stress and emotions. The theory points to intentional behaviors to "get on the balcony," identify the type of challenge, regulate distress, maintain discipline in challenging times, and hold space for others to collaborate (Northouse, 2019). Heifetz observes: "Adaptive leadership is an iterative activity, an ongoing engagement between you and groups of people" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 8),

Adaptive leadership theory outlines a framework of behaviors that leaders can use in changing environments to find innovative solutions to adaptive challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009). To be successful, leaders must develop the personal resiliency to recover in high-pressure environments, or their companies could become obsolete (Petrie, 2014). The theory offers a set of guiding behaviors for a leader to navigate various roles to help others solve complex problems and implement new strategies that often require changes in values, processes, and norms

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throughout an organization (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). Adaptive leadership theory offers a series of practices to generate more effective solutions while allowing course corrections as needed.

### **Getting on the Balcony**

The adaptive leader's first role is to get on the balcony to observe and interpret a problem's severity. Heifetz used the metaphor of getting on the balcony to mean permitting oneself to step away from any turmoil generated in a problem and rising above it to examine the whole situation from above to gain perspective (Northouse, 2019). Giving oneself time to pause, reflect, and be present with all of the information are key behaviors of an adaptive leader. Getting on the balcony is the prerequisite for the rest of the behaviors to identify the challenge, regulate the distress of the group, maintain discipline, and delegate the work to those that need to change (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). Leaders must be able to take in the big picture of what is happening in different processes. One cannot fully observe and evaluate a situation from the playing field as one might miss what is happening just outside their limited view (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive challenges involve many dynamic groups, values, and processes that would be complex from the playing field without an aerial view of the landscape (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997).

### **Identify the Challenge**

In addition to observing from the balcony, the next hurdle is to correctly identify the problem (Heifetz et al., 2009). Problems can be labeled as either technical problems that can be solved quickly with expert knowledge and existing processes or adaptive problems that require collaboration from followers (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997).

Adaptive challenges are when the usual way of doing things no longer works, and the solution is not yet clear (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). An adaptive challenge is updating values, beliefs, and processes that might hold an organization back (Heifetz et al., m ). Such adaptive

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challenges often stem from internal contradictions between long-held values and realities of the business landscape (Heifetz et al., 2004). For example, employees might still value doing work the old way with paper or manual tools, but the reality is that computer technologies have improved so much that customers expect ease of use and quick turn times and will not tolerate a lengthy or manual process.

Leaders need to refrain from always providing solutions to make adaptive change successful. Assessing the situation and not letting the ego take over with an immediate fix is needed in adaptive challenges (Day & Gregory, 2017). An adaptive leader knows to slow down and get others involved to generate lasting change and innovation (Snowden & Boone, 2007).

An adaptive leader needs to observe and recognize the problem and adjust their behaviors and methods to navigate the challenge. Assessing the situation from the balcony is the first step and then adjusting methods to the challenge is the next step, and no two challenges require the exact same prescription of behaviors.

### **Adaptive Behaviors**

The adaptive leader must use their skills to link the problem-solving process to the organizational vision and strategy and mobilize the group to solve the problem with a disciplined process that builds trust and encourages crucial conversations (Raney, 2014). The theory's fundamental principles include intentional behaviors to regulate distress, maintaining discipline in challenging times, and holding space for others to collaborate and solve the problem (Northouse, 2019). I describe these behaviors further in the subsections that follow.

### ***Regulate Distress***

Regulating distress is one of a leader's most challenging roles in a time of uncertainty and change. Change is scary and challenging for people to give up old ways for something different (Khan, 2017). An adaptive leader always needs to manage the followers' stress levels, not

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overwhelm the group, avoid burnout, and ensure the change is sustainable (Salmon, 2009). In addition, the leader needs to regulate his/her own emotions to provide vision, direction, and consistency to followers in a time of uncertainty to help build trust (De Zulueta, 2016). The leader must remain confident in his/her communications and control his/her own emotions and reactions to obstacles along the way (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). Strong self-awareness and emotional intelligence are needed skills to regulate one's stress and the stress of their followers (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997).

To aid in the long-term adoption of the solution, a leader needs to occasionally take the group's pulse to determine if adjustments are needed to the pace of change (Khan, 2017). It is critical that a leader pauses to listen to others before moving forward (Raney, 2014). Pausing to pulse check the group's stress allows the group to provide valuable feedback on the process. Armed with this knowledge, an adaptive leader can adjust deadlines and priorities before followers reach confusion, frustration, or mental and physical exhaustion.

### ***Give the Work Back to the People***

Empowering others to stay engaged in problem-solving is a vital behavior of an adaptive leader (Udod et al., 2020). In challenging times, the leader may feel inclined to speed up the process and layout a solution, but it is crucial to engage in critical conversations, hold others accountable for their work, and actively participate in problem-solving (Heifetz et al., 2009). This is a critical skill of delegation that adaptive leaders know when to steer and observe the process and offer support. The skill here is in designing and communicating a transparent decision-making process for the challenge at hand. Each challenge may be different, and some may warrant more direction and authority from the leader, while other challenges require the leader to take a hands-off approach and insist the team come up with the best solution.

### ***Creating and Holding Space***

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The adaptive leadership theory emphasizes that an adaptive leader's greatest skill is to create and hold an environment of trust and openness where the followers engage with each other with a clear set of conduct rules (Northouse, 2019). The idea of holding space takes the form of physical space, virtual space, or just shared language where people can relate to one another in structured and positive ways (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Lencioni (2002) argued that trust is the foundation for any high-performing team, and trust is built through open communication and positive team member experiences. Thompson and Gregory (2012) stated that trust builds solid relationships and impacts how employees might accept and give feedback. Only once the team has built trust can it move to engage in constructive discussion or conflict to generate new learnings (Lencioni, 2002).

### **Summary**

Adaptive leadership theory helps us understand how leaders can manage complex change in their organizations successfully. Adaptive leadership theory stresses that for organizations to continue to thrive, they must change and adapt, and the leader must lead the whole organization through such a transformation. An adaptive leader needs to go beyond just converting a clear vision into action to frame the problem so the group will understand the steps they need to take. Likewise, leaders need to develop themselves through reflection and self-awareness, and healthy stress management practices. It is key for the leader to evolve and develop their interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence. Adaptive challenges may be tough to tackle, but the behaviors needed are some of the key outcomes of Yoga, including intentionality, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence.

### **Literature Review**

This study sought to explore how leaders felt a regular Yoga practice influenced their leadership. The literature on Yoga is vast because Yoga influences physiology, psychology, and

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social behaviors. It is essential to understand Yoga's existing literature to see how this study fits within the existing research. In this section, I provide a brief review of the literature on how Yoga impacts physical, mental, and overall well-being and uses mind-body connections to build self-mastery. I also describe the issues and challenges in Yoga research.

### **Yoga on Physical, Mental, and Overall Well-Being**

Yoga has been reported to have vast impacts on overall physical and mental health and wellbeing. Health aspects are relevant to this study as sick and unhappy leaders are less effective (Ross, 2012). Yoga is a tool and even a lifestyle that can improve health and life satisfaction by building mind-body connections (Lucia 2014). In this sub-section, I provide a brief review of the literature on how Yoga impacts physical, mental, and overall well-being and connects the mind and body and its relevance to leadership.

### ***Yoga and Physical Wellness***

It is in a leader's best interest to stay healthy and strong to thrive (Jiménez et al., 2017), and Yoga is commonly linked to positive physical health outcomes. The study of Yoga has grown significantly with its popularity in overall physical health and outcomes related to preexisting diseases (Lucia, 2014). There is a fair amount of research on Yoga as an intervention for medical conditions like cancer, high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes (Innes & Vincent, 2007). Ross and Thomas (2010) concluded that "Yoga was equal or better than other types of exercise at relieving certain symptoms associated with diabetes, multiple sclerosis, menopause, and kidney disease" (p 5). Likewise, Yoga is widely acknowledged as an effective therapy with no adverse side effects for physical conditions such as pain (Büssing et al., 2012). Ramadoss and Bose (2010) studied the aspect of breathwork and found that controlled yogic breathing can calm the mind and help manage various diseases. Yoga seems to be effective at improving various health-related outcomes.

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In addition to Yoga as an intervention for illness or disease-related outcomes, Yoga can also increase its practitioners' overall physical wellness. Yoga was designed to transform the whole person and not just treat disease (Herrick & Ainsworth, 2000). Many who practice Yoga report better sleep, increased flexibility, strength, and balance. Ross et al. (2013) conducted a nationwide anonymous online survey of Yoga practitioners and found Yoga improved sleep and overall energy levels. Holst (2007) found that women Yoga participants felt stronger and more flexible and balanced due to a daily Yoga routine over ten weeks. Likewise, Tran et al. (2001) conducted an eight-week study where participants practiced Hatha Yoga daily and reported increased muscle strength, endurance, and flexibility. Cowen and Adams (2005) reported that a six-week movement-based Yoga asana practice improved upper and trunk body strength, increased flexibility, and lowered blood pressure compared to the participants' pre-survey baseline assessments.

### *Yoga and Mental Wellness*

Yoga is linked to mental health outcomes primarily around stress reduction and interventions for anxiety and depression. Numerous mind-body researchers have connected Yoga to reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and improved sleep. Ross and Thomas (2010) reported that Yoga regulates the sympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, promoting relaxation and calmness and an instant release of anxiety.

**Stress Reduction.** The practice of Yoga has been well studied and found to reduce stress which builds resilience. The effects of stress, or even the perception of stress, can increase the chance of illness (Varvogli & Darviri, 2011). Unmanaged stress can be harmful to one's physical and mental health. Opposite to the flight-or-fight stress response, the practice of Yoga connects the mind and body to create a sense of calmness that can improve the stress response (Woodyard, 2011). Wolever et al. (2012) studied stressed workers over 12 weeks who participated in a daily

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lunch hour Yoga class and found statistically measurable reductions in perceived stress and improved sleep in the participants. In a more comprehensive 18-week study involving daily asana and breathwork, researchers Ramadoss and Bose (2010) reported decreased stress and improved self-awareness and self-control in participants. This self-awareness builds self-control of the subconscious mind that regulates stress reactivity in the nervous system. (Khanna, n.d). Park et al. (2021) studied forty-two participants in a 12-week study of weekly hour-long Yoga sessions filled with breathwork, meditation, Yoga movements, relaxation, and Yoga theory/philosophy and found stress reactivity decreased in the Yoga group compared to the control group.

When the body relaxes, it connects to the subconscious mind to signal the parasympathetic nervous system to relax the muscles and slow the heart rate to create a calming sense (Ruth, 2001). The Yoga practices of Yoga Nidra, Savasana, and mantra all aid in the relaxation of muscles and the nervous system to stop the chain reaction of stress in the body (Gruicic & Benton, 2015). Ruth (2001) found that relaxation led to decreased heart rates, decreased breathing rates, and decreased blood pressure as one's brain slows down.

**Reduction in Anxiety and Depression.** The practice of Yoga has been well studied to reduce anxiety and depression, which builds resilience in leaders and leads to greater life satisfaction. Telles et al. (2009) concluded that participants with anxiety reported a significant decrease after a two-hour Yoga session. Similarly, Ganpat and Nagendra (2011) conducted a study on corporate executives subject to Yoga and meditation for five days and found a significant reduction in anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction, and depression.

### *Yoga and Overall Life Satisfaction*

Yoga's impact on mental health aspects extends even further into well-being and overall life satisfaction. Yoga works to focus the mind on the positive aspects of the present moment

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instead of focusing on negative thoughts (Blackwell et al., 2013). This change of thinking leads to greater psychological well-being. Cramer et al. (2019) conducted a cross-sectional anonymous online survey of Yoga practitioners and reported that 96.1% of respondents rated their health as good to excellent, and a large majority said their health improved since starting a Yoga practice. This is supported by Ross et al. (2013), who also conducted a nationwide anonymous online survey of Yoga practitioners and reported that people who practice Yoga saw improved energy, happiness, and better social relationships. Ross (2012) found that the frequency of practice mattered as well, and a Yoga practice three or more times a week correlated to greater well-being. Likewise, researchers Hartfiel et al. (2010) found that workers reported increased feelings of life purpose and greater self-confidence during stressful situations after six weeks of Yoga over a lunch hour. Lucia (2014) agreed that Yoga participants reported higher mental and physical wellness levels and overall well-being.

Yoga can improve one's world perspective and happiness levels. Woodyard (2011) reported that a regular Yoga practice changes one's life perspective, self-awareness, and improved life enjoyment. This was also supported by Gobec and Travis (2018), who reported that daily Yoga practice left participants happier throughout the day.

### *Mind-Body Connections*

Yoga connects the mind and body through the breath to build intentionality. Yoga involves the practice of Pranayama (breath control including conscious inhalation, retention, and exhalation), meditation, asanas (physical posture), and relaxation, which, when combined, lead to physical changes in the body. Woodyard (2011) wrote that this connection of physical body movements, breath, and concentration clears the body's energy channels to optimize participants' health. Austad and Gendron (2018) argue that Yoga can help leaders self-regulate to connect their bodies, mind, and nervous system. Gard et al. (2014) conducted a review of the literature

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on Yoga to propose a framework of potential benefits that Yoga increases self-regulation of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive functions. With this unity of mind, body, and spirit, Yoga produces a greater sense of calmness and wholeness in people's lives.

**Conscious Breathing.** The practice of Yoga includes breathwork, but conscious breathing could also be one way to take Yoga off the mat. With a regular Yoga practice, the body develops long-term muscle memory for deep breathing, internalizing the practice, so it requires little to no conscious effort. Advanced Yoga practitioners have built muscle memory that easily keeps the breathing slow and relaxed despite external stressors (Sovik, 2000). This conscious breath signals the sympathetic nervous system to slow down and release a calming signal to the body (Ross & Thomas, 2010). In a review of different Yoga breathing styles, Brown and Gerbarg (2009) found Yoga breathing as both a form of meditation in itself and preparation for meditation in that it can quickly bring the mind to the present moment and create a calming sensation.

Pranayama could be a safe alternative tool to enhance well-being, mood, attention, and stress resiliency (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005). Carter and Carter (2016) conducted a literature review of yogic breathing and breath-based meditation and reported that controlled breathwork reduced stress and mental strain. Perciavalle et al. (2017) studied 38 adults over ten weeks with weekly 90-minute guided deep breathing sessions and saw improvements in the participants' reported daily life stress. Brown et al. (2013) agreed in their review of 27 breath-related studies that Pranayama can aid in reducing symptoms of stress, insomnia, anxiety, and depression. Aideyan et al. (2020) suggested that breathwork is a practical intervention to increase self-awareness of physical and emotional senses and strengthen the mind-body connections with the body.

### *Health and Well-being Relevance to Leadership*

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Yoga is a tool that strengthens the body, calms the mind, helps build stress resistance in challenging times, and builds compassion for others. The evidence that Yoga effectively improves physical and mental health and life satisfaction is encouraging for leaders under enormous job pressure. Adhia et al. (2010C) conducted a study of managers over six weeks and found that Yoga classes with Yoga philosophy did improve managers' stress levels and reduce their likelihood of job burnout. Successful leaders need to find ways to manage their emotions and stress to avoid mental exhaustion and burnout and stay physically and mentally healthy., Leaders could benefit from regular Yoga practice to maintain their health and effectively meet job demands with a positive attitude.

### **Yoga and Self-Mastery**

Again, this study's focus was on how Yoga influences leadership, and it was clear from the literature that Yoga impacts the quest for self-mastery. Self-mastery encompasses self-awareness that builds intentionality in one's thoughts, words, actions, and emotional control. The Niyamas directly speak of self-awareness and reflection, self-control, self-regulation, and non-attachment against our impulses and desires (Iyengar, 2006). Yoga is a tool and even lifestyle that can improve self-awareness and self-control (Lucia 2014). Next, I provide a brief review of the literature on how Yoga increases self-awareness and intentionality, emotional control, emotional intelligence, and its relevance to leadership.

### ***Self-awareness and Intentionality***

Yoga was found to build self-awareness and intentionality. For this study's purpose, self-awareness is defined as being aware of our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, strengths, weaknesses, and impacts on others (Eurich, 2018). Self-awareness might often be described as character virtues like honesty, non-stealing, and trustworthiness. Likewise, intentionality is defined as the skill to direct the mind to pause and choose one's reaction or decision. Merriam Webster (n.d)

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defines intentionality as “done by intention or design” (para.1). It is this awareness and ability to control the wandering mind that builds intentionality and self-regulation. Gard et al. (2014) wrote that a Yoga practice reinforces this self-awareness and intentionality with the teachings of the Yamas and Niyamas' moral codes. This self-awareness and intentionality developed by a Yoga practice were seen to influence social behavior "off the Yoga mat" (Schneider et al. (2010

### *Emotional Control*

Along with self-awareness, Yoga was found to improve the regulation of one's emotions (Garland et al., 2011). Emotional regulation refers to how one pays attention to their emotions and does not let them influence one's thoughts and actions at the moment (Neff, 2003). Ganpat and Nagendra (2011) reported a significant increase in participants' self-regulation of emotions in a five-day study with pre and post-surveys. This awareness of emotions leads to self-regulation of behaviors throughout daily life and increases resiliency to distressing situations (Gard et al., 2014). Maharana et al. (2014) conducted a study where leaders practiced Yoga for five days and showed improved emotional stability and emotional intelligence at the end of the study.

### *Emotional Intelligence*

Emotional intelligence is typically described as encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1995 as cited in Batool, 2013, p.88). Emotional intelligence comprises of the following attributes: "self-monitoring and self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management" (Yarnell & Grunberg, 2017, p. 38). Emotional intelligence could best be described as a leader's ability to effectively respond to others' emotions (Palmer et al., 2001). Emotional intelligence is a critical leadership skill to connect with followers and be sensitive to their feelings (Batool, 2013). In this subsection, I go over some of the studies that highlight Yoga's ability to build emotional intelligence.

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Yoga can lead to higher levels of emotional intelligence, including deeper connections with others and self-awareness. Adhia et al. (2010B) found that managers who practice Yoga showed higher emotional intelligence, exhibited self-awareness, increased social skills, altruistic behavior, compassion, and empathy. Wolever et al. (2012) agreed that Yoga improved emotional intelligence over a twelve-week study. Likewise, Khemka et al. (2011) had 108 participants attend daily Yoga instructor classes for one month and found participants reported better focus and higher emotional intelligence levels. Corner (2008) conducted an extensive review of the literature by Yoga masters to explore the relationship between the Yamas and business ethics and identified that those who followed the Yamas experience greater connectedness in their relationships and increased self-awareness. Likewise, Ganpat and Nagendra (2011) studied 72 corporate executives over five days of daily practices, including Yoga-asanas, breathwork, meditation, and Yogic philosophy, to report increases in compassion for others. Romano (2014) concluded that a Yoga practice improved the connections with others.

### *Self-Mastery Relevance to Leadership*

Self-awareness and intentionality are essential for effective leadership. Remember that intentionality was defined as the skill to direct the mind and choose one's reaction, while self-awareness was defined as being aware of one's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses. Yoga increased self-awareness and prompts leaders to act with more focus and intention in their lives. Naderi (2019) determined that leaders who regularly practice Yoga have significantly higher self-reported levels of self-awareness and transparency in their actions. Nandram (2010) described Yoga as a tool to help develop managers on their inward spiritual journey toward balancing the materialistic business demands with self-awareness and intentionality. Adhia et al. (2010B) found that managers who practice Yoga showed higher self-awareness, and this led to better organizational performance.

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The Yamas and Niyamas and their teachings of self-awareness, self-control, and social rules of conduct have lasting impacts on a leader's effectiveness. Schneider et al. (2010) found that Hatha Yoga training could influence more socially responsible behavior in leaders by influencing personal values and lessons from the Yamas. Ross et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative anonymous online survey of 171 Yoga practitioners and found that survey participants reported better interpersonal skills because their attitudes and perspective changed to be more patient, kind, mindful, and self-aware. This social awareness means that leaders consider more stakeholder groups when making decisions. Self-regulation and emotional intelligence developed from Yoga support a leader throughout their daily life to be more flexible and adaptive (Gard et al., 2014).

Emotional intelligence is one of the most valuable skills that leaders have to connect with people to regulate stress (Batool, 2013). Emotional intelligence was found to correlate to higher team performance (Douglas et al., 2003). Emotional intelligence can come naturally to some but can also be developed with the aid of Yoga (Grunberg et al., 2017).

### *Yoga and Leadership*

As Yoga has grown in popularity (Clarke et al., 2018), more leaders practice Yoga. Holst (2007) found parallels to the concepts of strength, balance, flexibility, and resiliency in both Yoga and leadership. Yoga is proven to increase strength, endurance, and flexibility (Tran et al., 2001; Cowen & Adams, 2005). These same concepts relate to how effective leaders need to appear confident and strong, with the endurance and flexibility to navigate today's complex business landscape. Leaders must learn skills to adapt and respond in healthy ways to the stressors and challenges of business.

### **Challenges and Gaps in Yoga Research**

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Looking over the vast amount of research conducted on Yoga, it was clear that Yoga has many positive impacts and is a tool to improve health, life satisfaction, and life mastery. In this sub-section, I provide a short review of some of the challenges in the literature, including a narrow focus, blurring Yoga with mindfulness, length of studies, challenges to conduct studies, and cultural distinctions in Yoga research. I end with gaps in the literature and how this influenced my study's design.

Most of the research on Yoga only looked at one component like physical practice or meditation, or breathwork and failed to recognize the whole system of Yoga (Watts, 2000). In addition, Yoga was often skewed towards single-focused health outcomes (Moliver et al., 2013).

As Yoga encompasses many practices, it was often blurred with other popular interventions like meditation, mindfulness, and mindfulness-based stress reduction programs. The definition of mindfulness varies from study to study, making the results conclusions hard to compare to each other. Mindfulness is a leadership buzzword often correlated to self-awareness and stress reduction (Sethi, 2009). There is an extensive collection of research on mindfulness and leadership, but mindfulness is one component of Yoga. I have chosen to focus solely on Yoga's holistic definition as mindfulness is not as encompassing as Yoga.

Researchers will need to do longer-term studies to see the real effects on positive mental health, well-being, and self-awareness. Studies looking at mental health typically focused on depression, anxiety, stress reduction, and the results reported after just one or a few Yoga classes. Likewise, most Yoga intervention studies started with individuals with no prior Yoga experience and subjected them to a short six, eight, or twelve-week period of daily Yoga classes. A one-hour class or even 12 weeks of regular Yoga practice would still not be long enough to truly see the transformative Yoga results that happen over years of process.

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The other challenge with Yoga research is in the comparison of a control group to prove the results. The standard randomized, double-blind placebo control study does not work well with Yoga as there is no placebo to Yoga. Studies have used exercise and stretching as the control group, but the participants benefit from physical practice even then.

There is also a cultural distinction between Yoga research done in India and America. Yoga in India may be seen as a spiritual intervention by participants, whereas Americans see it as exercise (Cramer et al., 2014). Yoga studies from India were often more time-intensive, both in terms of the class length and frequently as in every day of the week or several classes in a day. American studies typically did not use the same duration in either the practice time or the weeks of practice (Cramer et al., 2014). This speaks to the differences in cultural norms and how many Americans would not slow down for a month-long immersion at an ashram or hours of Yoga philosophy. When comparing studies done in India and the United States, it is important to pay attention to class times and frequency as they influence the results.

### **Gaps in Literature**

Several gaps in the literature were identified despite the vast amount of research conducted on Yoga. The most noticeable shortcoming was the focus on short-term interventions. The long-term effects of Yoga cannot be determined after short-term interventions; there is a need for long-term studies of a Yoga practitioner's life and life perspectives. My study is warranted because it takes a holistic view of Yoga and the leader's life experiences after practicing Yoga for some time.

Another area not addressed by the literature is how corporate America could benefit from leaders who practice Yoga. Most Indian studies of Yoga and leadership heavily referenced Indian cultural values. Values of duty and selflessness are not reinforced in American individualistic culture (Varghese et al., 2017). American culture tends to be based on the ideals

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of freedom and emphasizes individual goals over duty and obligation to others (Suyawen, 2015).

The Yamas and Niyamas promote selfless service and obligations to others and go against American individualism and capitalism.

Due to all these gaps, I needed to develop a study that would add to the literature using a holistic view of the eight limbs of Yoga approach and participants with a long-standing Yoga practice. Likewise, I was interested in how leaders in corporate America felt it influenced or hindered their leadership. I explain the methodology of this study further in the next section.

### **Method**

The purpose of this study was to explore how leaders in corporate America with a regular Yoga practice felt Yoga has informed and impacted their leadership. To address that purpose, I conducted a qualitative research study with in-depth, semi-scripted interviews of leaders with regular Yoga practice. I gathered data from leaders in corporate America about their experiences and how they felt Yoga had influenced their leadership. I conducted a pre-interview questionnaire to find participants who fully met the criteria for the study and interviewed only corporate leaders with a regular Yoga practice defined by three or more times a week.

This section describes the steps I followed in my study. First, I describe the data collection procedures, focusing on the semi-scripted interviews. The following section explains how I analyzed the data and determined the findings. Lastly, I describe the research participants and how the participants were recruited and introduce the participant profiles.

### **Data Collection**

I interviewed eight leaders from private for-profit businesses with a regular Yoga practice to see how Yoga impacted their leadership. I wanted to know how these leaders felt Yoga influenced them and their leadership. One-on-one interviews were the best platform for participants to speak in-depth about their Yoga and leadership journey (Creswell, 2016). Mann

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(2016) supported that interviews were necessary to capture the interviewee's voices and perceptions of their experiences. I wanted to explore how Yoga has changed the participant and their leadership. Consent forms were sent in advance of the meeting and reviewed at the start of each interview to ensure informed consent was obtained. Interviews lasted anywhere from 35 min to approximately one hour. The video interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using an app named Rev Recorder. No incentive was offered or given to the interviewees beyond contributing to the research body of knowledge regarding Yoga's influence on leadership.

I conducted interviews via the Zoom video conferencing platform. Following the semi-scripted interview approach (Mann, 2016), I asked all participants the same basic interview questions and asked follow-up questions specific to their responses. Please see appendix A for the initial interview questions. Basic demographic information was already obtained in the recruitment survey, so the interviews began by asking about career history and the interviewee's Yoga journey, and that led into open-ended questions about Yoga's influence on their leadership and decision making. Participants were asked for specific examples and if they had other suggestions on what other leaders should know about the practice of Yoga.

### **Data Analysis**

My next step was to identify the themes in the interview text. Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed using the Rev Recorder site. I started my data analysis by identifying my biases and general impressions of each interview to develop an overall picture of the data. I read through the transcripts multiple times and used open inductive coding to label all the codes and subcodes in the data. The transcripts were in Microsoft Word, where I was able to apply comments and codes line-by-line in the margins to identify the codes and subcodes (Creswell, 2016). I then transferred the highlighted codes into tables in Microsoft Excel and sorted them by codes and subcodes. I grouped the data into themes using the most common

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codes. Through this process, I generated 57 codes that were later organized around sixteen common categories. I looked for patterns and relationships between the codes to create the relevant themes. I then presented 11 primary themes to my thesis advisor, and we discussed the themes in the process of further analysis.

Preliminary findings of this study suggested that better relationships and personal transformation were outcomes of intentionality, conscious breathing, and being present. Further into the writing process, based on feedback from my advisor and committee, I consolidated the conscious breathing and being present sub-themes into the stress management theme as most interviewees indicated deep breathing helped them stay calm and present and effectively manage their stress. I reworked the original five findings into four to create a consistent line of argument with the original research question, the theoretical framework, and the existing literature. To verify the themes' accuracy, I reread each interview transcript to accurately capture what was being conveyed by the interviewee. I describe and support these themes in the findings section.

As a novice researcher, I found I might have asked leading probing questions that might have generated "researcher reactivity," where interviewees might respond with the answer they thought I expected based on the question was framed. I mitigated this possible bias by scanning all interviews for reactivity, and responses were scrutinized further against the interviewer's experiences and other answers to ensure they could still be used.

Only the data around the research topic of Yoga's impact on leadership was included for analysis. Many interviewees described how they also taught Yoga and share their Yoga at work, but this data did not contribute to this study. Similarly, I heard much about each interviewee's Yoga style preferences, meditation, and mantra practices: This information is included in the participant profiles following this section but is not included in the study's findings.

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During the study design phase, I researched moral leadership theories as I found similarities between moral leadership and the teachings of the Yamas and Niyamas. I had hoped to hear examples of participants' virtues and how they approach tough decisions. Through my data analysis, it became clear that my data was not connected to, nor informed by, traditional ethical decision-making theories related to moral leadership. Specifically, when interviewees were asked about their ethical decision-making process, their answers tended to revert to their self-awareness and transparency, not about their ethical philosophy or ethical considerations. Thus, in consultation with my thesis advisor, I pivoted to adaptive leadership theory, which is far more useful in explaining the themes and phenomena I heard in the interviews.

### **Participants**

The participants in my study were all leaders in corporate America who practice Yoga. I defined "practice Yoga" as engaging in physical postures, breathwork, relaxation, meditation, and Yoga philosophy, at least three times per week. I defined engaging in Yoga philosophy as either reading the Yoga-Sutras or attending/watching dharma talks. For the sake of this study, a leader was defined as anyone in a supervisor, manager, or executive role with more than one direct report.

### ***Participant Identification and Recruitment***

I used a pre-interview questionnaire survey to recruit participants and determine whether prospective participants met the desired qualifications. The pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix B) consisted of questions about the participant's leadership and Yoga background. Survey logic was built into the survey tool, so only pre-interview survey respondents who met all the desired qualifications were asked if they wished to participate in an interview. Only those interested in an interview were asked to provide their name and contact information and answered additional demographic survey questions. I only used data in the study collected from

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the participants and excluded data from those who completed the questionnaire but did not participate in the interviews.

I shared my recruitment materials on my personal LinkedIn profile, in Facebook Yoga communities to which I belong, and with various Yoga teachers in the Twin Cities. I also used my personal networks and asked family and friends to post the pre-interview survey on their social media sites. The pre-interview questionnaire included a drawing for a 108 dollar gift card at a local Yoga studio to encourage participation. No interviewee was compensated for participating in the interview, the drawing was open to all survey respondents regardless if they were invited to an interview.

I had 36 respondents to the pre-interview questionnaire survey. Thirteen respondents indicated an initial interest in a formal interview. Of the interested respondents, several declined after hearing about the time commitment. In total, I interviewed eight leaders.

### *Participant Profiles*

In this section, I reviewed the leadership role and Yoga origin stories of the eight interview participants. This is important to the study to understand how each interviewee developed his/her Yoga practice and how it influenced their current leadership behaviors. Seven participants were women, and one was male. All names of the participants are pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Likewise, any identifiable data has been changed to preserve confidentiality in the profile below.

All eight participants had been practicing Yoga for many years and had a working knowledge of the Yamas and Niyamas. In addition, six of the participants had completed a Yoga teacher training program. The other interviewees would be considered advanced students with their years of experience and knowledge of the Yamas and Niyamas. This is important as the

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study took a holistic eight limbs perspective of Yoga and was interested in how the Yamas and Niyamas influenced their leadership.

The interviewees' averaged nine years of leadership, but it ranged from new managers in their first 1-6 years to 25 years of leadership experience in a VP director role. Two leaders worked in a fitness or Yoga studio. The interviewee's direct span of control ranged from having three direct reports to 300+ direct reports. While role level and responsibilities varied drastically, their Yoga mindset and ability to manage stress, develop relationships and be intentional in their roles were notably similar among the interviewees.

**Lola.** Lola is a technology manager in a large finance company managing the process engineering group and managing project managers. Her team is focused on rolling out an agile transformation across the enterprise. When she was 17 years old, she joined a friend for a Yoga class at the local YWCA. She immediately fell in love with the movements. She remembered attending a Swami-led master meditation class and had an "amazing experience connecting with the breath" in that master class. She developed a self-care practice and used Yoga as "a tool to help center and calm herself after a busy day and help her sleep." After many years she found a local studio where she completed a 200-teacher training program. Once she completed the first program, she continued her education to earn her 500-hour teacher training class. She was then drawn into the specialty training of trauma-informed Yoga and took classes on biology and physiology on the nervous system. She has been practicing regularly for some twenty years. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, she was teaching yin-style classes a couple of times a week.

**Kayla.** Kayla does qualitative research to drive new product platform growth at a multinational conglomerate corporation. She oversees a small team of two people and guides other project management teams for new product development. She had always

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been a long-distance runner but started taking Yoga classes in college after injuring herself running. After her kids were born, she started practicing Yoga more regularly to help heal past core injuries. She prefers to do Hatha and Vinyasa-style Yoga classes to remain active. Kayla has been practicing Yoga regularly for twelve years and now has a daily meditation practice.

**Bob.** Bob was a Yoga studio manager. As studio manager, he focused on providing a safe space and opportunity for people to be challenged mentally and physically while creating a sense of community. He took his first Yoga class with a friend as he wanted to work on his weight. He immediately signed up for the free week of classes for new students at that studio and started practicing five days a week. He fell in love with how he felt after class, and it was the first time as an adult that he found a physical activity he enjoyed. He signed up for a workshare to clean the studio in exchange for more free classes. He later attended a 200-hour Yoga teacher training and started as the studio assistant and later was promoted to studio manager. He had been practicing Yoga regularly since his first-class many years ago.

**Ida.** Ida is a scrum master/project manager in a healthcare company. She oversaw six different projects simultaneously, with each project having its team of developers assigned to the task. She started doing Yoga to help with some back pain. While at a wedding complaining of back pain, a relative showed her a few Yoga poses that provided her immediate relief. Her routine was occasional to start, but she found herself practicing more and more in her free time when there was a break in her career. She then started teaching Yoga to her friends when they asked. She has been teaching regularly for ten years to various people and groups that ask.

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**Jill.** Jill was asked to take on a manager role at a small cycling studio when a destructive leader left. She was a hands-on manager and liaison between the owners and the instructors. She has been practicing and teaching Yoga and cycling classes for close to 20 years, but this was her first formal leadership role. She started practicing Yoga by attending a master Yoga conference with a friend where she met her Yoga teacher. After her first class taken with the master teacher, she knew that she wanted to study with him and learn more about the teaching concepts. She asked him to be her teacher at the end of that conference. She has since completed some 200+ hours of Yoga teacher training and working toward finishing her level two certification in that program. As a Yoga teacher, she follows a one-on-one prescription with her Yoga students to personalize a Yoga routine for their needs.

**Barb.** Barb runs a 300-person law firm. She went to law school, but instead of practicing law, she got involved in the business operations side. Today she is focused on strategies to build the business and stay competitive in today's changing world. Barb started Yoga in her teenage years living near a Sikh community. She then had kids and stopped practicing for a while. As a teenager, she loved to run but suffered from a bad running injury and had to stop running. After her injury, she returned to Yoga by taking a beginning Yoga class and practicing regularly. She found that her favorite studio teachers incorporated theory from the eight limbs in their classes. Before she started a regular Yoga practice, she was "very stressed and anxious," and Yoga helps her focus and remain calm. Barb has been practicing Yoga regularly for fifteen years.

**Holly.** Holly works as a VP of HR in charge of the learning and development curriculum at a multinational conglomerate corporation. She manages a team of HR professionals in the United States and Canada. As a teenager, a friend of hers pulled her into a

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community ed Yoga class. It was the first time that her brain shut off for even just a second so she could fully process the world around her. She went through teacher training in 2018, and it completely changed her practice throughout a three-year cycle. Holly has been practicing Yoga regularly for six years.

**Carly.** Carly is a chemical engineer by training and now in an internal consulting program with a multinational conglomerate corporation and manages one other person plus the summer interns. She found Yoga in her 20s in the winter when it was cold and went to hot Yoga classes. She felt amazing afterward. When she started a new job working from home, Yoga class was her social escape. Then she obtained her MBA and started focusing on her mindfulness and being a reflective leader. At that point, she decided to start practicing regularly and developed a daily meditation practice. She just finished a 200 hour of Yoga teacher training within the last year but is waiting to teach classes till Yoga studios open for in-person instruction. Carly has been practicing Yoga regularly for a few years.

### *Study Limitations*

The study attempts to advance understanding of Yoga's influence on adaptive leader development and leader effectiveness. This qualitative study draws from a limited but targeted sample size on interviews to outline four main themes. There may be limitations around participant backgrounds and researcher bias. Therefore, the study findings are limited to the eight participants and are not generalizable.

The backgrounds of the participants are limited in scope and included white-collar managerial roles in for-profit organizational settings. The conclusions of this study are confined to these participants and their experiences with Yoga. Six of the eight interviewees previously completed Yoga teacher training programs and tended in their responses to talk about

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mindfulness and the great benefits of Yoga. The participants did not provide many concrete leadership examples of how Yoga impacted their leadership but instead talked about how they are different from Yoga. The literature on leadership supported that a leader's personal development is a crucial aspect of effective leadership. The transferability of the results to others outside of this scope poses limitations.

As the researcher, I also completed a 200-hour Yoga teacher training. I was careful to avoid researcher bias in the study. Through the data collection and analysis, I needed to remain receptive to how the data would show up and set my personal opinions about Yoga aside. The findings of this study were in line with my personal experience with Yoga. I heard from eight different perspectives on the topic and feel the findings represent the data as it was presented.

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how leaders with a regular Yoga practice felt it had influenced their leadership. From the interviews, four major themes emerged regarding the effects of Yoga on the participants' leadership, which I describe further in the findings below. The findings highlight that a regular Yoga practice led to the self-transformation of participants in the form of better relationships, increased intentionality, and improved skills to manage stress. In other words, a regular Yoga practice helped participants develop skills and behaviors to manage their stress, cultivate intentionality and improve relationships, and ultimately led to self-transformation. This section describes the four findings using data from the interviews to substantiate and illustrate each theme. In the discussion section, I further explain each finding and describe the sequential relationship between them.

### **Transformation**

The first finding found in the interviews was transformation. Many interviewees talked about how Yoga had changed them to be kinder, calmer, and more patient. This notion of

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transformation offers new insight into how Yoga transfers off the mat and leads to personal leader development that impacts leadership. Recall that leadership development is “ultimately personal development” (Clemmer, 2005, cited in Koehle et al., 2008, p.173). For the purpose of this study, I define personal development as the process of developing awareness to improve one’s well-being and life mastery. Participants described how they felt they have changed after committing to a regular Yoga practice. Next, I showcase the themes of individual transformation, including increased honesty and resiliency, from the interview data. Lastly, I review the theme of creating space and how that contributes to overall organizational transformation.

Many interviewees gave examples of how they have personally changed from Yoga. Before beginning a regular Yoga practice, they felt very stressed and rushed and powerless to navigate life's storms. Ida said Yoga "changed my life and that before I started a regular Yoga practice, I was very stressed. I always felt stressed. I did not feel like I was remotely in control of my life...worrying about what I had to do next." Because of her regular Yoga practice, Ida indicated she does not get flustered or angry anymore but can calmly prioritize what needs to get done. This was the biggest impact on Ida’s leadership. Likewise, Barb indicated, "Yoga changed my life, and before I started a regular practice of Yoga, I was very stressed and not in control." Barb said people that know her would say that as her Yoga practice developed, she changed as a leader to be more grounded and receptive to what is happening versus feeling like she had to fix things immediately. Holly indicated she could tell when she has not practiced in a while and starts to feel things swirl around her. Likewise, Bob said, if a week goes by and I have not “gotten my Yoga practice in, it starts to mentally and physically take a toll on my body.” Bob called Yoga “a positive factor in the world” and a link to one’s divine spirituality.

### *Honesty and Authenticity*

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The themes of honesty and acting authentically were examples of how Yoga influenced the participants' leadership. Authenticity means being true to one's personality and goals to live one's values. It could be described as the virtues of honesty and transparency to speak up when actions do not align with one's values. Participants described authenticity as embracing one's flaws and being honest with oneself and others.

Holly said, "I try to come as who I am and show up in as authentic of a way as possible." Holly said because of her Yoga practice, her direct reports would say, she "shows up with a stronger level of transparency, authenticity, and flexibility." Kayla agreed that Yoga has helped her be transparent with her team, and when "you are honest and transparent, your followers and peers will show up to help and work together as a team." Kayla proclaimed that Yoga has "changed everything. It's changed how I'm in relationship with other people and relationship with myself. It's changed how I interact with my children, parents, partner, co-workers, and... my self-compassion... It's changed everything. It's a huge gift."

Similarly, interviewees emphasized that Yoga has made them more effective leaders because of their abilities to be transparent, give honest feedback, and model the way for their followers. Barb indicated that the best way to be transparent is to model the way by telling people what you expect and demonstrate it with your actions. Carly added that Yoga had improved her ability to give honest and authentic feedback and not hide how uncomfortable she might be at times.

### ***Resiliency***

Recall from the literature that Yoga reduces stress and builds resilience (Wolever et al., 2012). Resiliency was a prevalent theme in the interview data. By resilient, I mean a leader who can recover quickly from stressful situations and challenging conditions (Spangler et al., 2012). This can be seen in the ability to keep a positive, forward-thinking approach to challenges and

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the ability to recharge after any setback. Many interviewees described how Yoga helped them build skills to adapt and keep a positive appraisal despite any setback.

Barb saw a personal difference in her leadership after starting a regular Yoga practice as she has learned to slow down and listen to her body. For example, in a stressful meeting or a situation where Barb feels anxious or out of control, “I pause, and then I start my breathwork again and come back to that breath.” Barb's mantra is that whenever “you come back to the breath, good things start to happen.” Holly talked about her new ability to manage life's pressures because of her regular Yoga practice. She is now able to let life’s pressures slip off her back versus pounding down on her. When Holly is really stressed, she will “focus on a mantra to help me be ready for whatever it is I'm facing.” Lola also talked about the constant pressures of change in business and having to adjust to her teams being restructured often. Lola said, “Yoga helped her go with the flow and stay positive despite very challenging times.” Bob said, “If anything, my Yoga practice has ever taught me, it is how resilient I am as a human. That is probably the number one takeaway from my Yoga practice.”

### *Creating Space*

Lastly, the metaphor of creating space came up on several occasions in the data. The practice of Yoga creates space and flexibility in the physical body and mind but could also apply to leadership. For this study, creating space applies to the workplace and creating either physical space or virtual space, with a shared language of trust and openness where followers can safely engage with each other (Northouse, 2019). Creating space includes establishing a set of rules and group norms where deep listening, openness, and nonjudgment are expected, and group members feel safe to engage in ideas and collaboration.

Many interviewees spoke of how their leadership shifted after starting a regular practice to create safe spaces at work. Holly said that she was more intentional in creating an open,

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trusting space for the group to show up and talk about hard things because of her Yoga practice. Ida sees it as her job as a leader to guide the process steps and hold the space to collaborate. Ida said she feels more patient with her team and intentionally gives everyone a chance to voice their opinion in any group meeting. Lola sees her primary responsibility as a leader to ensure “the success of their team, to be able to support them, to be able to mentor them, to give them challenges, new things that they have never done before.” Lola said that Yoga has helped her regulate her team's stress and see the bigger picture with compassion and support for the individuals.

Several interviewees spoke of how because of the teachings of Yoga, they are less attached to a single outcome and thus focus on collaboration and team building. Barb used the metaphor of coming back to the mat to describe how she leads. When things do not go well, she asks what they learned, and then they all meet to start over. Barb indicated that she is at a stage where she is less worried about what should happen and is more concerned about “creating the environment for it to unfold with the group because of her regular Yoga practice.” Barb is less focused on fixing things now and much more interested in helping create the right environment for the group to work together. As a leader, Bob felt confident he did not need to know it all, as he created a team dynamic that brought people together, created community, and made those team members feel valued through the learning process. Carly summed up this commitment to community and collaboration vs. simply solving problems to say if you “are not worried about the outcomes, you can think a little more about the situation as a whole.”

### **Stress Management**

One of the main ways interviewees felt they had changed was their ability to stay calm, present, and centered even in stressful situations. By managing their stress, I mean participants had the skills and behaviors to keep their mind and body relaxed, calm, and focused despite

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stressful external circumstances. For this study, stress is defined as the “physical and emotional reaction people experience as they encounter changes in life” (NCCIH, 2020, paras.1). Every interviewee talked about how Yogic breathing was a portable skill used to bring them back to the present moment and let go of stress. Many interviewees describe how stressed they were before starting a regular Yoga practice and how Yoga helped them develop better behaviors and skills to remain calm, centered, and focused on the here and now regardless of the external circumstances. This study reveals several ways in which Yoga helped the participants manage their stress, including conscious breathing, being centered and present, and the restorative practices

Many interviewees indicated they felt less stressed and calmer after Yoga. Holly said that Yoga gave her "the ability to shut off the outside and allow her to focus." Holly described her racing thoughts as "the chaos, the frenzy, the frustration, the negativity, the swirl." She is more in control and centered when practicing Yoga regularly. Ida explained her stress levels before Yoga as her mind going “in ten different directions” and feeling like you needed to answer all the questions at once.

Similarly, interviewees emphasized that their Yoga practice led to better focus and ability to let go. Ida indicated that after starting a regular Yoga practice, she could better prioritize her work and direct her team on what is most important and let go of other less critical items. For example, Ida shared that she often asks her team, "what is the most urgent thing that needs to be done and let us focus on that and forget the other items for right now." Bob said Yoga helps him to be present in the moment. When life gets intense, Yoga helps him take a step back, breathe, process it, and let it go without a big reaction. Carly used the connection to her breath to maintain a calm and focused mind to discern what tasks are essential and possible versus out of her control.

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### *Conscious Breathing*

Many interviewees talked about the skill of deep breathing and its ability to bring them back to the present moment to let go of stress and tension. By connecting to the breath, I mean the ability to notice the quality of the breath and control the inhales and exhales. Breathwork is a part of the practice of Yoga, but conscious breathing was found to be one skill that interviewees were able to use anywhere and especially in a stressful workplace.

Lola said deep breathing is very calming and is the most important skill to learn in Yoga. In today's busy, fast-paced world, as Lola said, "you can choose to take a moment and take a breath" versus letting external forces drive your reactions. Lola said that "breathing in with awareness, and connecting, and feeling the breath moving through your body, just for one minute, you can get an instant sense of wellbeing and calming much faster than taking a Valium." Lola described the feeling of the breath moving through her body as an instant sense of well-being and calmness.

Holly also shared that Yoga helps calm her nerves and helps her focus, and regulates her stress. Holly said, "I think the breathwork is a big piece for me. I have learned how to leverage that for times when I am stressed. " When Holly is stressed, she will do a fast Yoga sequence connected to breath to calm and focus her mind. The connection to the breath gives her the "ability to shut off the outside and did wonders for my ability to manage challenges and stress." Holly went on to say deep breathing is one of her favorite skills from to Yoga that works quickly to center herself and " just evens me out personally"

Ida also said that Yoga and its breathwork calm her down, and she feels better after just one minute of deep breathing with awareness. Ida went on to say that the breath helps reduce her stress as when she is consciously breathing, "you're not able to think of other things. You're just

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focusing on your breath.” Ida found that all the “breathing and the Yoga poses calm me down, and I was able to have more patience.”

Barb found that just three breaths were enough to reconnect to herself and feel her mind clear so she can focus and let go of things out of her control. Barb said the “breathwork for me had been really a big deal when I am in a stressful meeting or a situation where I feel anxious, or I am out of control, I pause, and then I start my breathwork again and come back to that breath.”

### *Centered Presence*

Many interviewees described a renewed ability to be in the present moment after a Yoga class and how that helped calm their minds to ease the grip of stress and worry. For this study, being present means being fully engaged in what is happening in the present moment vs. letting the mind daydream or wander to past events. Being present is the act of stopping the mind from distractions from the past or the future. Being present is a capacity to be calm, centered, and focused on the here and now to let go of perceived stress. When one feels centered, they experience inner peace regardless of the external circumstances. Interview participants described the experience of being present in feelings of calmness, focus, being centered, and thriving even in stressful situations.

Yoga helped interviewees clear their thoughts and slow an often-racing mind. Barb described the practice of Yoga as a “windshield wiper for my brain.” Kayla put it best, saying Yoga helps her get out of her brain and stop “overthinking.” Carly admitted she was often distracted by a “million different things in her head,” but after a Yoga class found calmness and the ability to slow the racing mind down. Carly added that she struggled with anxiety and a racing mind, but after taking a Yoga class felt calmer, centered, and present. Ida saw an immediate difference in her thoughts before beginning to practice Yoga regularly. Ida was “Always thinking about the future ... I was never in the present moment, always in the future.”

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A Yoga class can bring clarity in the feeling of being calm, centered, and grounded. Lola admitted that if she has 15 minutes between conference calls, she intentionally does some Yoga movements and spinal twists to help clear her mind. Carly agreed that a Yoga class helped her think more clearly and gave an example when she skipped a morning practice; by 11 o'clock, she felt more anxious and reactive because she was not grounded. Kayla said a daily Yoga class helped regulate her nerves to feel a "little more grounded, calm, and more able to ride whatever wave."

Others had similar experiences with their Yoga practice helping to quiet the mind, stay grounded and breathe through uncomfortable situations. Jill used a short sequence of Yoga postures connected with breath to stop her mind from wandering. Likewise, Carly found that she connects to her breath when she is in an uncomfortable situation. Carly challenges herself to stay in uncomfortable Yoga poses for a few more breaths than her mind wants and then tries to apply that same mindset to uncomfortable situations at work, like giving critical feedback to her direct reports.

### **Intentionality**

Intentionality was another theme that emerged from the interviews. For this study, intentionality is defined as the skill to direct the mind to pause and choose one's reaction and decision. Merriam Webster (n.d) defines intentionality as something "done by intention or design" (para.1). To live with intention is to say that one chooses one's words, actions, and emotional responses. Being intentional with every action and aware of all impacts is impossible to live by, but intentionality can be as simple as pausing to gut-check a response. Many interviewees described being less reactive and able to regulate their emotions due to their practice of Yoga.

### ***Intentionally Pause Before Reacting***

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A common behavior that the interviewees learned from Yoga and applied to their leadership was to pause before responding. By intentionally pausing, I mean that as situations arise, one will pause to process the current situation and absorb what is going on before responding. Participants described that they have the self-awareness to take a deep breath to connect to their body before reacting because of their regular Yoga practice.

Several interviewees described pausing before responding to a situation. Ida said she pauses to step back, process the situation, and choose her reaction. Barb used this pause to stop for a second before reacting to validate her decision and feel "more secure in what I was already thinking." Kayla described this pause as critical to drop out of the cognitive mind and connect with the heart or gut. Likewise, Jill said that in a stressful situation, she frequently pauses to ask, "How does the Divine Mother want me to show up here?" This pause and reflection often bring a more compassionate, patient, and honest self.

### *Emotional Regulation*

Recall from the literature that Yoga improves emotional stability and self-awareness (Garland et al., 2011). For this study, emotional regulation refers to how one pays attention to their emotions and does not let them influence one's thoughts and actions at the moment (Neff, 2003). Emotional self-control could also be described as the ability to manage high emotions while remaining calm and centered. The practice of Yoga can calm the mind, and participants describe the ability to separate themselves from their emotions to remain centered and in control.

Participants described observing their own emotions and choosing their desired reaction. Carly said her regular practice of Yoga has "made me much better at understanding responsiveness. I used to be much more emotionally reactive...I would immediately get very defensive" Because of her learnings from Yoga, Carly can recognize emotions coming up and pause to observe them, say to herself, "Okay, interesting," and then choose how to respond. Barb

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used to be very frenetic and convey how easily stressed she would get about everything. Barb used to feel like it was always her job to fix things, and her Yoga practice has helped her not worry so much. Likewise, Bob would get angry at times and “very passionate about certain specific things.” The teachings of Yoga taught Bob to slow down and walk in other people's shoes to curb his response. Bob said he found that the more frequently he practiced Yoga, the easier he was on himself and kinder to others.

### **Relationships**

Many interviewees described how being intentional with compassion, openness and nonjudgment led to deeper relationships. Relationships are strengthened by strong interpersonal skills and one’s ability to interact with others. For this study, the term relationships are defined as interacting and communicating effectively with others in the work unit. Participants described their ability to act with fierce compassion and deep listening, and nonjudgmental attitudes to have a lasting impact on creating healthy, long-lasting workplace relationships.

### ***Fierce Compassion***

Compassion and patience came up in the interviews as critical to building relationships. Compassion is often thought of as nurturing and comforting another's pain, but genuine compassion is not pity or sympathy but loving actions to alleviate one's suffering (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). Makransk (2016) defined fierce compassion as "the power to confront-- forcefully if necessary someone who thinks and acts harmfully " (p.95). Participants described fierce compassion as embracing one's flaws and loving another enough to act despite being uncomfortable.

Compassion may involve telling someone what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. Carly said giving critical feedback is the most important thing a leader does, but it was not always easy for her. Yoga has helped her learn to be “comfortable with discomfort.” She

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indicated that she is much more comfortable with feedback after developing her Yoga practice. In another example, Jill had clients that were challenging and temperamental. She was able to control her response and respond with kindness and compassion. There were moments where she had to be “very honest and straightforward and say exactly what needed to be said with fierce compassion.” Jill defined her fierce compassion as the courage to say what is needed while knowing it may not be appreciated or received well. Likewise, Kayla indicated that increased compassion and empathy were the biggest impacts Yoga had on her leadership. Kayla said the teachings of Yoga reminded her to work on holding her judgments and show empathy for her team.

### *Deep Listening with Nonjudgment*

The interviewees emphasized that their Yoga practice improved their ability to listen deeply to others and with openness and nonjudgment. For this study's purpose, deep listening is defined as active listening to receive new information without being preoccupied with thoughts. Deep listening could be described as being present with nonjudgmental awareness to see and understand the other person. Truly listening “entails being present to the other, that is, responding to the other as a whole person and creating a space in which the other can speak his or her own words and meaning” (Buber, 1998 as cited in Gordon, 2011, p. 207). Participants described being better listeners, being open to others, and suspending judgment when listening deeply to someone. Suspending judgment is defined here as withholding an opinion in order to listen deeply. Several interviewees mentioned the continuous need to practice deep and nonjudgmental listening in their leadership.

Carly said that if one is distracted by emails and prior conversations, "you are not having a useful conversation with someone, which just creates them feeling like they are not valued". Carly went on to say that because of her regular Yoga practice, she stops "thinking of people as

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difficult and thinks about...what could be done to make the environment more positive." She recognizes the other person as a human being needing her full attention and nonjudgment. Kayla said that she seeks to understand their underlying motivation if someone is aggressive or reactive.

These behaviors of deep listening with nonjudgment often lead to lifelong connections, as Lola indicated she keeps in touch with people she has worked with 30 years ago. Ida felt a regular Yoga practice helped her relationships grow with her ability to be compassionate, suspend judgment, and understand each person's perspective. Kayla said a daily Yoga class helped her "be more present for the people that need me." Because of her Yoga, Ida found she was more patient with her colleagues at work which helped to strengthen their relationship.

### **Summary**

In summary, four themes were identified from the data: a regular Yoga practice leads to personal transformation, teaches stress management mechanisms, builds intentionality, and increases interpersonal skills leading to better relationships; participants developed the behaviors and skills from their regular Yoga practice to manage stress, cultivate better relationships and intentionality. I explore the findings further and their relationship to leadership in the subsequent discussion section.

### **Discussion**

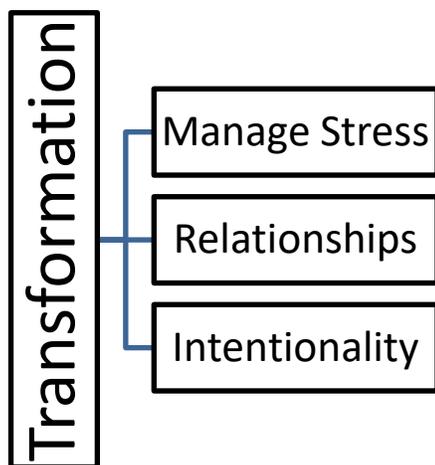
This section discusses the study's findings drawn from this research through the lens of the adaptive leadership theory by Heifetz (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). I chose this theory to connect the behaviors and skills developed from a regular Yoga practice to adaptive leadership. It speaks to how interviewees applied their changes realized through Yoga to their leadership. As discussed earlier in this study, adaptive leadership theory includes creating behaviors of intentional observation, regulating distress, holding group accountability, and creating space for

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collaboration. This theory applies to this study because it spoke to the outcomes of Yoga, including the discipline to observe without judgment, manage one's stress and emotions, delegate work, and create space for collaboration. I also considered the eight limbs of Yoga and how they might help me understand the findings. I discuss further the findings in Figure 2 and how adaptive leadership theory behaviors were found in the study participants. This study argues that leaders' transformation can be seen in their adaptive leadership behaviors to manage stress, build better relationships, and act with intentionality.

Figure 2

*How Yoga Influences Leaders*



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### **Transformation**

As Yoga changes a person, that transformation then leads to better leadership. This study looked at the impacts of Yoga on leadership and found that a regular Yoga practice changed the interviewees' perspectives and behaviors toward themselves and others. Next, I discuss how interview participants experienced transformation in increased honesty and resiliency and how adaptive leadership theory relates to behaviors of observation and delegation and creating space for overall organizational transformation.

This study finds that a regular Yoga practice transformed the interviewees to embrace their authentic selves, be transparent, give honest feedback, and lead by example. The literature supports that Yoga builds self-awareness and reflection (Gard et al., 2014). Self-awareness and self-reflection are parts of the Niyama's moral codes of conduct, so it is not surprising that interviewees with a regular Yoga practice indicated they acted more authentically. For example, recall that interviewee Kayla said that Yoga has helped her be honest and transparent with her team, and her followers respect her more because of her candor. Likewise, interviewee Carly added that she finds herself now able to give honest and authentic feedback even if uncomfortable. The data from the study reveal that Yoga works to bring out the true inner self of its practitioners and is seen to cultivate a more reflective leader. Interview participants could be described as reflective leaders that are honest and transparent with their followers because of their regular Yoga practice. This aspect of personal reflection and self-awareness is critical for leader development to improve leadership (Day, 2001). In order to improve one's leadership, one must be able to look critically at the past to continuously learn and adapt (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Another outcome of a regular Yoga practice was the type of increased resiliency described in adaptive leadership theory. Recall that many interviewees described how Yoga

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helped them build the capacity to adapt and overcome stressful situations. This result is consistent with previous literature that Yoga is proven to build resiliency (Wolever et al., 2012). Resiliency is vital to leadership in that in order for leaders to adapt and be successful, they need to quickly recover from setbacks, stay positive, and let go of things outside their control. The ability to stay positive, adjust to the situation at hand, and let go of preconceived notions are embedded in adaptive leadership theory and how leaders can successfully lead change internal practices (Nelson & Squires, 2017). The outcome of being more resilient is one reason some people thrive in stressful environments while others freeze and falter. Individual resilience is different for each person, but the good news is that it can be improved with a person's mindset and how they react to distressing events (Spangler et al., 2012). Intentionality and nonjudgmental awareness developed from a regular Yoga practice may be why some people thrive amidst unrelenting demands. Increased resiliency is important to this study as healthy and emotionally balanced leaders are more effective and successful in their roles.

Further, and as discussed earlier, adaptive leadership theory includes observation and giving the work back to the people or delegation. The skills learned from a Yoga practice helped the interviewees develop the critical leadership behavior to delegate the work rather than trying to do it all themselves. Interviewees talked about their self-awareness to let go of their egos and not jump to immediate conclusions and fixes. With self-awareness, interviewees were able to observe and delegate the work, which is a sign of effective leadership and better group outcomes. This was demonstrated by interviewee Barb in that she is now less focused on fixing things and more focused on the environment for the collaboration as she more self and socially aware because of her regular Yoga practice. The literature supports that Yoga can increase self-awareness and improve leadership (Adhia et al., 2010B; Batool, 2013; Douglas et al., 2003). Self-awareness and concern for the other are aspects of the Yamas and Niyama's moral codes of

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conduct (Smith et al., 2011), so it is not surprising that interviewees became less ego-driven and more concerned with group environments.

The metaphor of creating space, as described in adaptive leadership theory, was also seen in the interview data. Adaptive leadership behaviors require self-awareness and emotional intelligence to create the setting and environment for group collaboration to resolve complex adaptive problems (Heifetz et al., 2004). The practice of Yoga creates space and synergy in the workplace when leaders make deep listening, openness, and nonjudgment part of the group norms and group members feel safe to engage in ideas and collaboration. The adaptive leadership theory emphasizes the adaptive leader's need to create and hold an environment of trust and openness where the followers engage with each other with a clear set of conduct rules (Raney, 2014). This was seen in the data as interviewee Barb is now focused on “creating the environment” for group collaboration to unfold. Likewise, interviewee Bob indicated that he is now more confident in his abilities to bring people together and create a community to learn collectively. When leaders have emotional intelligence and self-awareness skills, they can build trust amongst a team, which is the foundation for collaboration and high-performing teams (Lencioni, 2002; Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

Leaders that wish to thrive in today's challenging business environment must build the skills and behaviors to create space for crucial conversations to occur while remaining flexible and resilient to changing environments. Heifetz (year) argues that adaptive leaders require self-awareness, transparency, honesty, and social skills to overcome unseen obstacles and create meaningful change. Again, a critical component of leading change is encouraging others to do the work by creating an environment for collaboration.

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### **Managing Stress**

The ability to manage stress levels and remain calm and relaxed is one way that Yoga transfers off the mat and into the workplace. Participants overwhelmingly described the effects of Yoga to stop the racing mind from worrying and ruminating on things they cannot control. If not managed, this stress can impact one's overall physical and psychological health (Spangler et al., 2012). All eight interviewees raved about Yoga's ability to help them stay focused and calm and, therefore, more effective in their roles. The existing literature is clear that Yoga participants report lower stress levels (Adhia et al., 2010C; Ramadoss & Bose, 2010; Park et al., 2021). This was supported by Interviewee Holly's statements that Yoga "did wonders for my ability to manage challenges and stress." This study outlined several ways in which Yoga helped the participants manage their stress, including connecting to the breath, being centered and present, and conscious relaxation. Next, I discuss how interview participants experienced transformations in their ability to manage their stress and how adaptive leadership theory relates to behaviors to regulate the distress of a group.

Many interviewees mentioned connecting to the breath to regulate their stress, calm themselves, and breathe through uncomfortable situations. When one focuses their mind on a Yoga posture and the breath, it pulls the mind to the present moment, creating a calming sensation (Ross & Thomas, 2010). This data finding is consistent with the previous literature that conscious breathing helped clear one's mind and reduced stress and anxiety by connecting the mind and body (Ramadoss & Bose, 2010; Carter & Carter, 2016). Leaders that wish to stay healthy and not burn out in today's challenging business environment could use the skill of deep breathing to manage their stress and nerves. Breathing is the portal to deep relaxation and one fundamental way to manage stress.

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Another takeaway from Yoga is the skill to clear the mind and focus on the present moment rather than worrying about things outside one's control. Patanjali (in Satyananda, 2006) defined Yoga as a system to stop the fluctuations of thoughts in the mind, so it was not surprising that being present with a calm and focused mind was supported by the interview data. Yoga helped interviewees clear their thoughts and slow an often-racing mind. Respondent Barb described the practice of Yoga as a "windshield wiper for my brain." Interviewee Kayla exclaimed that Yoga helps her get out of her brain and stop "overthinking." The ability to be present and not overthink a situation are behaviors that improve leadership. When people feel centered, they are present and feel in control of their thoughts and reactions regardless of the external circumstances. As outlined in adaptive leadership theory, that same skill to remain calm and centered is critical to managing the group's distress. This aspect of centeredness is critical to leadership and adaptability when business leaders face constant change.

Another way Yoga can help manage stress is to employ practices that replenish and restore one's energy. Although conscious relaxation and restorative practices were not direct findings in this study, I see strong connections to the interviewees' examples of self-care and resiliency to help with stress reduction. Many interviewees described how Yoga helped them build skills to relax and let go after a stressful day. The Yoga practices of Yoga Nidra, Savasana, and mantra all aid in the relaxation of the mind, muscles, and nervous system. Conscious breath and relaxation signal the sympathetic nervous system to slow down and create a calming sense and feeling of rest (Ross & Thomas, 2010). Leaders need the ability to recharge after a stressful period, and the practice of Yoga teaches behaviors that promote conscious relaxation to restore and replenish one's energy. For example, interviewee Kayla said self-care and permission to relax were vital to remaining effective as a leader. Pratyahara (sensory withdrawal) is the fifth limb of Yoga and includes guided relaxation practices where one turns their attention inward and

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slows or stops the often-racing mind for a moment. This conscious relaxation trains the mind to observe and let go of stress and tension in the body and helps a person avoid mental and physical exhaustion by building personal resiliency. Leaders are more effective if they have developed good behaviors and skills to relax, recharge, and stay positive in all situations. Conversely, highly stressed leaders face increased health risks, burnout, and the risk of losing an organization's competitive advantage to adapt to change.

As discussed earlier in this study, adaptive leadership theory includes managing distress in the group. The skills developed from a Yoga practice helped the interviewees regulate their own stress and the stress of the group, and the simple act of slowing down to do a quick Yoga practice and breathe deeply is an effective way to stay grounded in the present moment. Change is scary, and the unknown is uncomfortable, but a leader must remain calm, grounded, and focused in those moments. If leaders manage their stress better, they can calm the group as a whole. The leader has to be the anchor of change, and if the leader is calm and focused, this helps the group adjust to change. From the interview data, I heard how Carly applied the lesson of challenging Yoga poses to uncomfortable work situations and staying centered and grounded, and connected to the breath. This same aspect of being ok in an uncomfortable situation is another way Yoga fits with the behaviors of adaptive leadership theory.

### **Intentionality**

The practice of Yoga builds intentionality and emotional regulation. This study found that a regular Yoga practice helped leaders increase the self-awareness and emotional control to observe and pause before reacting to a situation. This finding is consistent with the previous literature on Yoga's ability to improve emotional regulation with self-awareness of behaviors and emotions (Garland et al., 2011). Participants described observing their own emotions and choosing their desired reaction. Next, I discuss how interview participants experienced

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transformations in increased intentionality and emotional control and how adaptive leadership theory relates to behaviors of observation and pausing before reacting.

The interviewees spoke of increased self-awareness and intentionality. This result is consistent with the previous literature that Yoga increased self-awareness and intentionality due to the teachings of the Yamas and Niyamas' moral codes (Naderi, 2019; Smith et al., 2011). The Niyamas encourage various aspects of self-awareness, and the Yamas promote intentionality in terms of one's social behaviors (Corner, 2008; Bindlish & Nandram, 2017, Schneider et al., 2010). This is important because effective leaders in today's challenging business environment must be self-aware to adjust course as needed. Leaders must evolve and be intentional with their actions and communications. Adaptive leadership requires self-awareness and social skills to design and communicate a transparent decision-making process for the challenge at hand. Self-awareness and intentionality help the leader identify what is essential rather than treating everything as significant, resulting in internal confusion for the group and not creating synergy.

This study found that the interviewees also spoke of increased emotional control. Emotional self-control is the ability to manage one's emotions while remaining calm and centered. The participants describe the ability to separate themselves from their emotions and remain centered. Recall that interviewee Carly said her regular Yoga practice has helped her understand and manage her responsiveness, whereas she previously would immediately get very defensive. This finding is consistent with the previous literature on emotional regulation and the interviewees' ability to use the teachings of Yoga to regulate their behaviors and emotions (Garland et al., 2011).

The adaptive leadership theory starts with intentional behavior to "get on the balcony" to observe the situation and not let the ego take over with an immediate fix (Day & Gregory, 2017). This study found that the practice of Yoga helped leaders develop behaviors to be self-aware and

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observe the situation. Remember that interviewee Barb used this pause before reacting to validate her decision. Interviewee Kayla described this pause as critical to drop out of the cognitive mind and connect with the heart or gut. This ability to be present is a crucial leadership skill and a cornerstone of adaptive leadership theory. An adaptive leader knows to slow down and not react but works to involve the group in problem-solving. This self-awareness has been linked to better organizational performance (Adhia et al., 2010B).

### **Relationships**

This study also found that Yoga helped leaders develop their interpersonal skills to build better relationships. A regular Yoga practice promotes self-awareness and intentionality that work together to build lasting relationships based on trust, honesty, nonjudgment, and compassion. For example, interviewee Bob said the teachings of Yoga taught him to slow down, and he is now kinder and more compassionate to others. This study outlined how Yoga helped the participants improve their relationships, including fierce compassion and non-judgmental listening. Next, I discuss how interview participants experienced better relationships and increased emotional intelligence and how adaptive leadership theory relates to relationships and behaviors to build group accountability.

Relationships are the foundation of a leader's ability to interact and communicate effectively with their followers. A successful relationship needs to be based on trust and openness to thrive. Without good relationships, a leader quickly loses the ability to motivate and influence followers to achieve objectives. Interviewee Holly shared her opinion that the introspection of looking internally to generate awareness could solve one of the biggest manager frustrations of dealing with difficult people. Interviewees felt that their interpersonal relationships improved because their attitudes and perspectives had changed, making them more patient, kind, and self-aware.

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This study found the theme of fierce compassion as one example where leaders let followers know they care by embracing candor and crucial conversations. Compassion is often thought of as nurturing and sympathy, but the interviewees talked about fierce compassion as an active process to give critical feedback to help others improve and grow. Interviewee Carly said that she stops "thinking of people as difficult" and now considers what they need to be successful because of how she changed due to her regular Yoga practice. Compassion and crucial conversations are critical to effective leadership because a leader must be willing to engage in difficult conversations with openness and honesty to help their followers learn and grow.

The adaptive leadership theory includes individual leader behaviors to motivate and influence followers and build accountability (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). Empowering others to stay engaged in problem-solving and building accountability is a vital behavior of an adaptive leader (Udod et al., 2020). The interviewees shared examples where they engaged in crucial conversations, held others accountable for their work, and actively promoted group problem-solving efforts. Adaptive leadership is a dynamic social process that requires good relationships to increase engagement and adapt to every situation at hand. Emotional intelligence is one of the most valuable skills that leaders have to connect with people.

Even though emotional intelligence was not a direct finding in this study, I see strong connections to the interviewee's examples of self-awareness, self-regulation, and compassion. The interviewees talked about their stronger relationships built on openness and trust, and therefore I speculate that the interviewees had increased their emotional intelligence to respond compassionately to the other person. This conclusion is also supported by the literature that Yoga improved emotional intelligence in participants (Wolever et al., 2012; Khemka et al., 2011). Emotional intelligence is a critical leadership skill to connect with followers and be sensitive to their feelings (Batool, 2013). The literature has shown a positive relationship between emotional

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intelligence and individual effectiveness (Tischler et al., 2002). The Yamas teach extensively how to treat and consider the other person's experience. Awareness and reflection on Yoga and the Yamas and Niyamas will lead to increased self-awareness, compassion, emotional intelligence, and, therefore, better relationships.

The Yamas and Niyamas speak of virtues like honesty, non-stealing, trustworthiness, compassion, and care for others (Satyananda, 2006). Recall from the study design phase, I had found similarities between moral leadership and the teachings of the Yamas and Niyamas. Though the interviews did not provide examples of a formal ethical decision-making philosophy, Yoga and ethics could still be linked via virtue ethics and feminist ethics of care. Ganpat and Nagendra (2011) reported that the practice of Yoga could increase compassion for others, and an aspect of fierce compassion was found in the interview data.

Teaching Yoga to new managers could be transformational in developing emotional intelligence and building relationships. From the literature, self-aware and emotionally intelligent leaders correlated to higher team performance (Douglas et al., 2003). This transformation is supported by the literature as Yoga practitioners reported improved interpersonal skills because their attitudes and perspective changed to be more patient, kind, mindful, and self-aware (Ross et al., 2014). Adaptive leaders create the setting and environment with their self-awareness and emotional intelligence skills to build group collaboration (Heifetz et al., 2004). As leaders develop better tools and emotional intelligence, they demonstrate more adaptive leadership behaviors.

### **Summary**

I framed this study using the eight limbs of Yoga and the theory of adaptive leadership to help understand the data generated. Through semi-scripted interviews with corporate leaders who regularly practice Yoga, I found that Yoga transforms the leader and has a much-needed place in

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corporate America as part of leadership development. I encourage organizations to seek ways to teach Yoga and incorporate the philosophy from the Yamas and Niyamas in their value statements. Likewise, this study's participants thoroughly recommended that leaders develop Yoga practices for the overall life transformations they have experienced that make them better leaders.

Teaching Yoga to new managers could be transformational in managing emotions and making better decisions. This is supported by Nandram (2010), who described Yoga as a tool to help develop managers and balance the materialistic business demands with self-awareness and intentionality. Leader development typically includes self-awareness, self-regulation, emotional regulation, and adaptability, and this study found that Yoga supports leaders in learning these skills and behaviors typically wanted in a leader development program. This study finds that a Yoga practice transformed the interviewees and thereby influenced and improved their adaptive leadership behaviors.

### **Implications**

This research adds to the overall literature on leadership development and Yoga as a holistic eight-limb system and not just a physical practice. Yoga was defined as an ancient complete system rooted in Indian philosophy, which develops awareness and control of the physical body, emotions, and mind. This qualitative study of leaders with an established regular practice shows how Yoga builds self-awareness, intentionality, and better relationships. The effects of Yoga are vast because Yoga influences physical health, psychology, and social behaviors. Due to the limitations of a thesis study, I only touch on some of the most interesting themes from the data. Despite the limitations, clear themes emerged suggesting that Yoga provides a toolbox for weathering stressful times and developing intentionality and ultimately better relationships.

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In the interviews, several of the participants worked for a large multinational conglomerate corporation in the science and engineering field that encouraged a team member network on Yoga and mindfulness by promoting the various scientific studies that show the vast benefits of Yoga. Company meetings now incorporate a moment of intention setting and reflection at the start. It is encouraging to learn that large corporations see the value Yoga brings to their employees and promote Yoga to their workforce. As more executive-level leaders practice Yoga, I expect this trend to continue as this study shows that Yoga does have a place in creating more adaptive and successful leaders.

Yoga is a health and wellness tool that could be used for stress reduction and as a way to build self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and better relationships. I believe that the practice of Yoga encourages the behaviors and skills needed to be adaptive and effective leaders. These findings hold promise for future studies relating to informal Yoga training in organizational settings.

I added to the literature using the adaptive leadership theory framework to determine that a regular Yoga practice can influence and improve one's leadership behaviors. The research suggests that Yoga led to personal changes in the participants to embody the behaviors of adaptive leadership theory, and thus they are more suited to navigate change successfully.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In this section, I present recommendations for future research. Several gaps in the literature were identified despite the vast amount of research conducted on Yoga. Further studies could investigate various topics, including the impacts of breathwork and length of practice on leaders' effectiveness. The frequency and length of practice may also warrant additional research on long-term individual and group effects.

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I found a lack of research involving Yoga practices in organizational settings over a more extended period warranted additional studies with a larger sample size. It would be interesting to compare leaders with and without a Yoga practice using an adaptive leadership questionnaire to see if Yoga impacts a leader's adaptability style. Understanding how long it takes a Yoga participant to feel increased perceived wellness levels may help design intervention studies. Likewise, teaching Yoga to new managers was suggested to improve leadership development and be studied further.

### **Conclusions**

The study examines how leaders in corporate America feel a regular Yoga practice has influenced their leadership, in essence taking Yoga “off the mat” and into the workplace. Heifetz's adaptive leadership theory was used to identify how leaders take Yoga off the mat and demonstrate adaptive leadership (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). The regular practice of Yoga influenced the leaders in this study by improving their leadership behaviors to lead and adjust to change. Many of Heifetz's adaptive leadership theory behaviors were found in the outcomes from a regular Yoga practice.

The ways Yoga directly impacted leaders and their corresponding leadership were explored in this study. The findings highlight that a regular Yoga practice led to the self-transformation of participants to have better skills to manage stress, act with intention, and build relationships. This study argues that as participants changed after starting a regular Yoga practice, they became more effective and adaptive leaders with behaviors and skills to manage their stress, pause, observe a situation, build accountability with others, and create space for transformative change to happen. In this study, I also reflected on my experiences as a current leader that regularly practices Yoga. I offered consideration for future research with extended time spans to see how much a Yoga practice changes participants year over year. I suggested

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comparison studies for leaders with and without a Yoga practice to measure their adaptability. Lastly, I shared implications that this study might have on future research on the expansion of Yoga as a leadership development tool.

This research found that the practice of Yoga transforms a leader with skills to manage stress, build self-awareness and emotional intelligence that may increase one's adaptability and leader effectiveness. Participants overwhelmingly described the effects of Yoga to help them stay focused and calm and manage their stress. Interviewee Holly said that Yoga "did wonders for my ability to manage challenges and stress."

Today's leaders need the skills and behaviors taught in Yoga to cultivate calmness, manage stress, and build better relationships. All eight interviewees described a renewed ability to be in the present moment after a Yoga class with feelings of calmness, centeredness, and focus. Yoga helped the interviewees clear their thoughts and slow a racing mind. Participants also described that they have the self-awareness to breathe and connect to their bodies before reacting because of their regular Yoga practice. In addition, Yoga led to better relationships due to strong interpersonal skills and higher levels of emotional intelligence. Many interviewees described how being intentional with compassion, openness, and nonjudgment led to deeper relationships.

This study holds promise in developing holistic leader development approaches that include personal growth, and personal development is leader development. Yoga offers a set of skills for practitioners to navigate today's busy and demanding workplace. Yoga builds intentionality, which leads to better collaboration skills and more robust relationships based on openness and trust. In today's challenging times, leaders need to develop resilience to stress and pay attention to their health and well-being and their followers' stress to lead adaptive change successfully.

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In today's ever-changing and fast-paced business environment, a Yoga practice could be a powerful tool used to lead adaptive challenges. Business leaders face immense pressure to navigate complex problems while managing their health and stress levels. The American corporate lifestyle can be intense and severely deteriorate a leader's effectiveness if a leader is exhausted and burned out. This research suggests that Yoga can help leaders build skills to replenish the mind and body and remain resilient. The behaviors learned from the practice of Yoga embody the behaviors of adaptive leadership theory of observation, regulating distress, holding the group accountable, and creating and holding space for collaboration. Leaders need to develop themselves through reflection and self-awareness. The behaviors needed are some of the key outcomes of Yoga, including intentionality, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence.

The greatest application of Yoga off the mat is to bring the teaching of Yoga into the world. The eight interview participants were in various leadership level roles, and all indicated that their Yoga practice is a continuous journey of self-awareness and self-development. Yoga cultivates self-awareness, ethical behaviors, and intentionality while improving overall wellbeing and relationships. This study suggests a regular Yoga practice creates meaningful change, and those personal changes to a leader can lead to larger organizational changes. As one participant noted, Yoga has "changed everything. It has changed how I am in relationship with other people and relationship with myself. It has changed how I interact with my children, parents, partner, and co-workers. It's changed everything. It's a huge gift."

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### Appendix A

#### Interview Questions

After review of consent form and consent has been granted, participants will be asked to respond to the following questions.

1. Tell me about your career path?
2. Tell me how and when you got started practicing Yoga?
3. Have you noticed any differences in your life after practicing Yoga? Could you share any examples?
  - Probing questions on any of the following: social interactions, work life, relationships, stress, anxiety
4. Have you seen a difference in your leadership since you began practicing Yoga? If so, can you explain?
  - Probing questions: Are you more or less effective in your role?
2. Have you found Yoga has influenced your values and how you make decisions and could you share examples?
3. What motivates you at work?
4. After reflecting on your experiences, is there something else you would like to add?

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### **Appendix B**

#### Data Collection Instruments Survey Questions

You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a leader that practices Yoga. This project is being conducted by Pamela Smith, a Masters' candidate student at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN and Sharon Radd, Ed.D., Associate Professor of Organizational Leadership at St. Catherine University. The purpose of this survey is to describe how leaders in corporate America feel a regular Yoga practice has informed and impacted their leadership. We want to take a more holistic view of Yoga as outlined in the eight limbs of Yoga to include physical postures, breathwork, relaxation techniques, meditation, and Yoga philosophy or moral codes. The survey includes questions about your Yoga practice and your leadership identity. The data that we collect from this survey will be used to determine best candidates for an interview to talk further. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

If you wish to be included in a drawing to win a \$108 dollar gift card at a local Yoga studio of your choice, you will be asked to provide your email address. The winner will be drawn at random around February 1<sup>st</sup> 2021.

Your responses to this survey will be confidential and results will be presented in a way that no one will be identifiable. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the survey technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

Your participation is voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationships with the researcher, professor or St. Catherine University. If you decided to stop at any time you may do so. You may also skip any item that you do not want to answer. If you have any questions about this project, please contact Pamela Smith at [pksmith@stkate.edu](mailto:pksmith@stkate.edu) or the Institutional Reviewer Board Chair: John Schmitt, PT, PhD,

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651.690.7739; jsschmitt@stkate.edu. By responding to items on this survey you are giving us your consent to allow us to use your responses for research and educational purposes.

Please read the consent carefully. To confirm your understanding and provide consent, click "I Agree."

I agree / I do not agree

2. Are you a manager, supervisor, or leader with at least one direct report in a private for-profit business? Y/N
3. How many combined years have you been in a leadership role? \_\_\_\_\_
4. On average, do you practice Yoga three or more times a week? Y/ N
5. Does your practice include physical postures (asana), breathwork, relaxation and some meditation? Y/N
6. Does your practice include Yoga philosophy (dharma talks by the teacher or reflections on the Yoga Sutras or have you completed a Yoga teacher training)Y/N?
7. If you would like to be entered in a drawing to win a \$108 gift credit at your favorite Yoga studio, please enter your email address. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Would you agree to an interview to explore your experiences with Yoga and leadership further? Y/N

If you agree to participate in an interview, please answer following questions:

9. What is your age?
  - 18-29 years old
  - 30--45 years old
  - 46-60 years old
  - 61 or older

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10. What is your gender ? \_\_\_\_\_
11. How do you identify racially? (check all that apply)
- American Indian or Alaska Native
  - Asian American
  - Black or African American
  - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - White
  - Other
12. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin? Y/N
13. Do you have a disability? If yes, please provide further information?
14. What is the best way to contact you to schedule an interview?