



University of  
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# Laidlaw: Leadership Reflection

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I am a great enjoyer of all kinds of personality classification systems — from quizzes of “Which Character Are You?”, to Myers Briggs, to, somewhat shamefully, astrology, I have always enjoyed reading about myself from an external perspective. I feel giddy when it feels true to myself and find myself frowning when it feels incorrect. However, what I have learned in Laidlaw is these I find these systems of classification can be really rigid, not offering room for changes over time and assuming a permanent character to a person. While the DISC personality types we were given at the start of Laidlaw helped me understand where I was starting from, I also think my time in Laidlaw showed that these traits are not temporally permanent, nor are they spatially — over time, within different groups, and in different situations, different characteristics of ourselves take precedent.

When we were asked to take DISC personality tests, I was found to be a CD — CDs are described as “[removing] emotions from decision-making as much as possible, valuing efficiency and logic over intuition or social proof.” They are said to be detail-oriented and greatly organized. Similarly, the Belbin team roles delegated me was the Implementer described as people with great amounts of discipline, efficient and organized. That said, however, they are viewed as “inflexible” and “slow to respond to new possibilities” wwhich resonated very strongly with me.

Over the last six or so years of my life, I have considered a huge range of careers — from neuroscientist to lawyer, I have bounced around just about every discipline. However, I find I was often solely considering the external prestige of these job titles — the supposed difficulty of neuroscience or the standing of a legal career resounding far more than the day-to-day activities of a life working in the lab or courtroom.

From the get-go, my Laidlaw experience was starkly contrasted from these areas of my life — I started my application without much thought about its undeniable prestige or generous stipend but rather a burning desire to pursue my research topic. My research, titled “Recovering Lesbianism in Pre-Colonial Andean Peru”, came from a deeply personal question. Sparked by conversations about LGBTQ+ people with family members in Peru, I became curious about why so often we centre gay men’s identities in discussions of queer identities. My research aimed to explore the pre-Colombian positive view of female homosexuality in Andean culture, exploring how their diverse understandings of gender influenced these views on sexuality. It was practically the child of all of my academic and personal interests meshing together.

I greatly questioned this choice at first — it went against several of the decisions I have made in my life, often choosing the less enjoyable, but more serious options when picking classes. However, after the struggle of university modules during distance learning, I knew I wanted to spend my summer doing something I truly was passionate about. The very fact I put aside the logical choices and chose a research topic that spoke to me emotionally shows the fluidity of these traits.

That summer, I spent the first week of my research trying to find sources beyond the few which had inspired my project. I searched every scholarly database I had access to and found next to nothing. The articles I read which highlighted topics of “Andean sexuality”, “Incan Queerness” or “Moche Sexuality” focused entirely on men, neglecting to reference women’s sexuality at all. I was incredibly persistent, digging desperately, probing for any sources I could find on the topic. I

checked out my limit of library books, submitted a handful of interlibrary loan requests. As I put it in last summer's blog post, "Not even patient enough to get home, I would open the book on my walk back to my flat, flipping straight to the index of each, desperately trying to find the coveted words, "female homosexuality." In most books, the words were there, followed by about two pages numbers, which I eagerly flicked to, only to find a sentence along the lines of, "Though female homosexuality was practiced, the phenomenon was only sparsely documented."

This was incredibly frustrating and it took me a long call with my supervisor to finally consider changing the direction of my topic. As my Dr Gentry, my wonderful supervisor said, this gap of sources in and of itself was important and was a research direction to go in — the emphasis of my research should not be the very little knowledge I could find on the Andean gendered understandings of the female sex and homosexuality, but the very fact that there was so little on the topic. While I was pleased with this new direction for my research, I was very much a DiSC CD or a Belbin "Implementer" — inflexible and slow to respond to new possibilities.

Now on to this summer: I spent my six-weeks of my Leadership-in-Action project in summer in Jinja, Uganda working at Women Rights Initiative (WORI) working on helping set-up the first women's history museum in East Africa. Of course, the environmental and cultural differences of Uganda were an adjustment but, aside from the typical ups-and-downs of travel, I would not have described any of these differences as a real challenge — I saw them more as an exciting adventure.

My real challenge came when I faced a very similar struggle to that which I faced in my first Laidlaw summer — a need to change directions in my project. My project involved crowdfunding for the museum, something I have never done before, which involved researching and reaching out to donors. In the latter five week, I would research the content for the museum and then making it accessible for a museum audience. This involved using many of the research skills I picked up in the first summer but learning the new skill of making the information accessible and easily understandable. In my first week at WORL, I set myself a roadmap for my plan for the six weeks: what I hoped to have done at the end of each week, when I would translate the text to small tidbits, and how I would handle my handover in the last week.

However, I quickly found I had greatly miscalculated my scheduling. The first task, which I had delegated a week to complete was taking far longer than I had hoped. The CD, Implementor Sophia should have, would have, completely frozen — rigid and stressed, I would have been unsure of how to continue with this new time allocated, refusing to go off schedule. Somehow, however, I surprised myself by not responding like this at all.

I quickly adapted to this change, accepting that I might not be able to complete the vast amount of research I had set for myself. While I didn't scrap a schedule entirely (that would have strayed way too far from my DISC and Belbin type), I rearranged mine, adapting the new development, refusing to let myself stubbornly freeze up.

When asked to choose my leadership goal this summer, I stated that I would like to work on learning to look at the bigger picture of my projects when evaluating my success. As a CD, an Implementor, an ISTJ, or whatever other term you would use to describe an immensely

detail-driven person, I often get caught up in the little details of what has gone wrong in a project. I find it difficult to let go of these and focus on what major changes need to be made or, at the end of the project, celebrate the good of it.

Because this, often, looking back at leadership moments, even those which, from an outside perspective, have been objectively successful, I find it hard to think of them as triumphs. This has contributed to a great feeling of dissatisfaction and lack of enjoyment when reflecting on my past leadership projects. I knew, however, this did not need to be the case. I knew, as I wrote in a reflection, “I am greatly capable of success and I deserve to recognize this within myself and celebrate the successes I have and for this reason, I [decided] to take concrete steps to change this.”

The leadership logs were very helpful with this. At the end of each week I took the time to write what I did successfully that week — they were generally minor but they allowed me recognize all I’m doing right. Rather than allowing myself to dwell, spiral, and invariably produce more of these negative results, I acknowledged where I was succeeding, why it was successful, and how I could continue to reproduce these successes.

Once again, I find myself going against my allocated leadership types — this view of failure is not necessarily about the practical results, but far more about my own emotional growth and wellbeing. Rather than focus solely on efficiency, minor details, and effective completion, I zoomed out. By focusing on my small successes, I could think of my broader successes.

Now, allow me to speak broadly — Laidlaw has been, without exaggeration, a lifechanging experience. Though of course I can hardly expand on all the ways it has impacted my life in any great detail, I will briefly touch on these ways. It solidified my choice of career by not just allowing, but encouraging me, to explore what I love, not solely what I think looks impressive on a resume. It gave me real world work experience in academic research, a field I definitely hope to pursue. It allowed me to understand myself as a leader at a deeper level.

Lastly, I would like to thank Dr Caron Gentry for her unwavering support throughout my research process in the summer of 2021. I also owe gratitude to the Women Rights Initiative Uganda team in Jinja for their unwavering support this summer in my leadership-in-action project. I would specifically like to thank Rose for all of her support over the course of the summer. Lastly, I would also like to extend my gratitude to the University of St Andrews Laidlaw Team and my fellow Laidlaw scholars for being a constant source of assurance and care when I have found myself struggling. Most of all, I would like to thank Lord Laidlaw and the Laidlaw Foundation for granting me this wonderful and fulfilling opportunity. I will truly carry all that I have learned with me for the rest of my life.