

Leadership-in-Action Personal Reflection

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Purpose

I've borne in mind the goal I had when I first embarked on my journey as a Laidlaw Scholar — to create positive social transformation through research and dialogue. While envisioning and preparing for my LiA experience, I carefully reflected upon what leadership looks like for me, what I seek to learn more about, and which communities I aspire to serve. The combination of personal experience and intellectual curiosity led me to collaborate with the Mosaic Institute on a research project to advocate for immigrants/ migrants. Mosaic is a non-profit organization that aims at dismantling discrimination and making Canada an inclusive environment for all to thrive. I had the privilege of working alongside Rachel Mansell, Vice President of Programs & Operations to explore solutions to assist immigrants/ migrants as transnational flows across the globe continue to be exacerbated by globalization, regional and international armed conflicts, climate change, etc. I researched social entrepreneurship as a potential tool to promote social mobilization among immigrant/migrant communities.

Challenges & Breakthrough

I initially planned to create a report that combines the qualitative research methods of literature review and interviews with equity-deserving organizations and experienced social entrepreneurs. The literature review would synthesize and analyze existing research on this topic, forming the foundation for data-driven policy recommendations. The interviews, on the other hand, adds colour and nuances to what may seem like objective facts. It is through dialogue about personal experiences in assisting migrant communities in the front line, that profound levels of understanding and empathy can be established.

Unfortunately, the timeline I had planned did not deem itself most appropriate for myself, and Mosaic as an organization during this season, as summer is filled with events and collaboration with other advocacy organizations. My supervisor, Rachel granted me the liberty to choose between being more engaged with these events and narrowing down the scope of my research, or adhering to the initial plans I had set. I realized I was presented with an opportunity to be fully present with the Mosaic Team, to actively engage with the communities they had and

fully immerse myself into the daily operations of team that passionately works towards a united mission.

Amidst this dilemma, I made the choice to learn from the brilliant people I have direct access although the work may not be directly related to my research project. I viewed seemingly trivial tasks like sending out outreach emails and merely attending planning meetings as opportunities for active listening and learning. While my research paper is now primarily comprised of literature review, I managed to shift the interviews into post publication knowledge sharing sessions with the individuals and organizations. Carefully observing the nuanced and empathetic approaches to social issues, meticulous organizational skills, and burning passions for the marginalized of my team, I have learned a great deal about what leadership looks like in the equity space, and what kind of leader I want to be.

Another challenge I faced was capturing the cultural complexities and nuances within the immigrant/ migrant communities. There were many assumptions I had made based on my own experiences as an Asian immigrant living in Toronto about reality that simply does not exist in some others' lives. The language used by some scholars and writers to describe immigration in another time is also vastly different from what's deemed as acceptable now. Much of what I presumed to be objective facts based on my own positionality have been shown to exist on a spectrum. I only felt a greater sense of curiosity to engage directly with each of these community members, to listen to their stories on how they are coping with their particular sets of hardships. Addressing social issues require a dynamic and adaptable approach that is solution-oriented and interactive between policymakers and the public.

Lessons on Leadership

I had the privilege of working with many leaders throughout my time with Mosaic. Hours spent working with various community leaders and the very Mosaic team has shown me that despite the different titles, level of positions and roles held by different stakeholders in the equity-deserving space, the beauty lies how differences in experience and expertise all work together to create inspiration for change. Each member of the Mosaic team exemplified curiosity to learn about how we can become more knowledgeable about diverse perspectives and how to adapt to situations of discomfort — they were responsible for specific events and engagements based on the social issues they were passionate about. Despite working on different projects, all

of their work weave into a shared canvas rooted in the mission to create an inclusive society for all. I observed the gestures of resilience when a community engagement requires extra effort to ensure complexities are addressed, and humility to listen when another team member reminds them of their own biases.

Conclusion

It has been a wonderful experience to work with the Mosaic Institute. The opportunity to learn about the barriers experienced by communities I am deeply compassionate towards while exercising the skills I hone during my first summer of research as a Laidlaw Scholar has been transformative and irreplaceable. One thing is for certain — leadership is constantly evolving as one progresses through their journey as a lifelong learner. As I continue to reflect on how I can create impact through inclusive and effective leadership, I will keep in mind all the lessons learned from this summer and continue reshaping them as I continue to work with and serve different communities in need. Special thanks to the Laidlaw Foundation and the Mosaic Institute for making this journey such an incredible one.