

Week One Reflection (6/16)

The first week of my Leadership in Action project has been about setting the stage more than producing results. I spent this time clarifying scope, exploring the tools available to me, and beginning to understand the scale of the challenge. Six weeks is not nearly enough to fully evaluate or underwrite a business, and I knew from the start that my focus would need to be on learning, framing the problem, and building the beginnings of a roadmap rather than presenting a polished solution.

What went well this week was simply getting grounded. I was able to begin mapping out the community context, looking closely at demographic and economic data that highlight the pressures facing rural towns. The picture is not encouraging: limited access to resources, declining job growth, and a community where eldercare needs are growing without clear systems to meet them. Even this initial exploration underscored the urgency of the work and the importance of thinking about how investment and services could be aligned with people's needs.

What could have gone differently is the pace at which information flows. Because of the nature of private enterprises, there are limits on what can be shared, and that has already shaped how I approach the project. My instinct is to want full access right away, but I am realizing that sometimes leadership means working with partial information and resisting the urge to push past boundaries. Instead of feeling frustrated, I am trying to reframe these limitations as opportunities to be resourceful.

This week I learned something about myself when working with others: I often equate progress with output, but leadership can also be about patience and presence. Listening without rushing to fill the silence, and giving people space to engage at their own pace, is as important as producing a deliverable.

In terms of leadership growth, week one reminded me that leadership without authority depends on clarity and consistency. I cannot direct outcomes, but I can establish trust, show persistence, and bring structure to the process. That, in itself, can be enough to move things forward.

Looking ahead, I want to focus next week on expanding the community profile using data sources that are available to me. If I cannot access everything internally, I can still piece together a picture that is meaningful. My goal is to build a strong baseline that will both guide my work and open doors for deeper conversations in the weeks ahead.

Week Two Reflection (6/23)

This second week felt like the first real step into the substance of the project. I spent much of my time working with the data tools to build out a community profile, focusing on demographic and economic indicators. The numbers confirmed what I had sensed in week one: this is a community with significant need and very few safety nets. The poverty rate is high, broadband access is limited, and the local job market has been shrinking despite a low unemployment figure on paper. These conditions create a difficult environment for any business trying to grow, let alone one in the eldercare space where demand is rising year after year.

What went well this week was being able to connect the data to the lived reality of the community. Instead of staring at numbers on a screen, I started to see the outlines of a story about access, inequality, and resilience. It gave me something concrete to work with, and it also helped me frame conversations more clearly. Even without every piece of information, I could explain what the data showed and why it mattered.

What could have gone differently was the pace of gathering insights. Data has limits, especially when it comes to understanding the full picture of operations on the ground. I found myself frustrated at times, wishing I had direct access to everything. But that is part of the challenge: I am learning how to stitch together a narrative from incomplete inputs. That is a skill in itself, and one that requires patience.

This week I learned about myself that I often lean on certainty as a crutch. When I do not have it, my first instinct is to doubt my own footing. But there is strength in being able to speak confidently even when the picture is not complete. I am practicing that balance now, and it is uncomfortable but necessary.

In terms of leadership, I am beginning to see that it is not about solving everything in one sweep. Leadership can be about breaking things down into smaller parts, moving steadily even when the road is unclear, and keeping people focused on what can be done rather than what cannot. That shift in mindset has already made a difference in how I view this work.

Next week I want to build on the data by pairing it with voices from the community. Numbers tell one story, but lived experience tells another. My hope is that by talking to people directly, I can fill in some of the gaps and strengthen the foundation I am building.

Week Three Reflection (6/30)

This week I had the chance to visit Lincolnton in person, which changed the project from an abstract exercise into something much more real. My stepdad is actually from there, so even before I arrived I had a sense of what the town represented. Still, being on the ground gave me a perspective that no dataset or secondhand description could match. The streets are quiet, the businesses small, and the pace of life steady in a way that both comforts and underscores the lack of resources. It reminded me that behind every chart and statistic is a community of people whose daily lives are shaped by these conditions.

What went well this week was the chance to observe directly. I noticed how few healthcare facilities exist within easy reach, and how the lack of infrastructure like broadband makes everyday challenges heavier for residents. These impressions layered on top of the data I had already been working with and gave me a fuller sense of what access and opportunity mean in practice.

What could have gone differently is the depth of my engagement while there. Because this was a brief visit, I only had time for conversations on the margins and my observations. I did not get to hear from as many residents or local voices as I would have liked. I realize that true understanding takes more than one trip, and I left feeling like I had only scratched the surface.

This week I learned that my personal connection to the place complicated the way I processed what I saw. On one hand, it gave me empathy and a sense of responsibility. On the other, it made it harder to keep a researcher's distance. I found myself feeling protective, even defensive, which is not a mindset I had expected. It taught me that leadership sometimes means holding two truths at once: the need to care deeply and the need to stay objective enough to make sound judgments.

From a leadership perspective, I saw how important it is to bridge the gap between data and lived experience. Numbers can be persuasive, but people remember stories and impressions. Leadership means being able to move between those worlds and communicate in both languages.

Looking ahead, I want to use these impressions to guide the way I shape the rest of the project. My focus for the coming week is to bring in voices from the community more intentionally. The visit gave me an opening, and now I want to expand on it by capturing perspectives that can make the data come alive and point toward solutions that truly fit.

Week Four Reflection (7/7)

By week four, the project began to feel like it had a rhythm. I pulled together my observations, the data I had analyzed, and the notes from conversations I was able to have in the community. The goal was to shape these fragments into a coherent internal summary of what I had learned so far. It was not a polished or final product, but rather a working draft that could frame the challenges and hint at opportunities.

What went well was the act of synthesis. Writing it down forced me to be clear about what I actually knew versus what I was assuming. It pushed me to organize the project into themes: economic strain, infrastructure gaps, and the rising need for eldercare. Even without access to every detail, the broad strokes were unmistakable. That clarity was satisfying, and it gave me confidence that the work had real direction.

What could have gone differently was my sense of timing. I had hoped to have a more robust set of interviews by now, and without them the summary felt thinner than I wanted. I caught myself worrying that it was not enough. But the reality is that progress in community-focused projects is uneven, and sometimes a partial draft is an important milestone in itself.

This week I learned that I can be my own toughest critic. I often want to present something complete and airtight, but leadership sometimes means sharing work that is still in progress. Doing so invites feedback, strengthens relationships, and reminds me that no one expects a scholar to have all the answers after a few weeks.

From a leadership perspective, I began to see the importance of iteration. Leadership is not about delivering one perfect plan, but about creating a space where ideas can be tested, refined, and made stronger through collaboration. That shift in perspective has been freeing, because it allows me to see the project not as a final judgment but as a contribution to an ongoing process.

Next week I want to expand the draft by weaving in ideas around workforce support and employee wellbeing. That will allow me to connect the community's needs with potential solutions that extend beyond data and into practical improvements in people's lives. It feels like the right bridge to build as I move into the later stages of this work.

Week Five Reflection (7/14)

This week I confronted the most difficult part of the project: trying to build financial models with almost no direct access to the information I needed. The company I was focused on is private, which meant its data was not available in the ways I had hoped. Without financial statements, operating reports, or even reliable local records, I was left piecing things together from scraps of public data and broad economic indicators. It was like trying to complete a puzzle when half of the pieces were missing.

What went well, if anything, was the discipline I built in the attempt. I pushed myself to structure frameworks even if I had to make assumptions, and in doing so I learned how to organize what limited data I had into something that at least pointed in the direction of the right questions. It was humbling work, but it reminded me that sometimes the act of trying is where the growth happens.

What could have gone differently is access. I underestimated just how hard it would be to get the kind of detail needed to do true underwriting. This was not about my effort but about the reality of working with a private enterprise in a rural community. They do not have layers of investor relations staff or an archive of reports to hand over, and they are not under any obligation to share what they do have. That wall was frustrating, and I wrestled with feeling like I was failing because I could not break through it.

This week I learned something uncomfortable about myself: I am not good at accepting limitations. I wanted to push past them, to find a way around, but sometimes the most honest form of leadership is admitting where the boundaries are. I had to learn that my role was not to produce a finished model in six weeks but to show the contours of what is possible and highlight the barriers that make it so hard.

From a leadership perspective, I began to see the value of honesty over polish. Drafting memos that laid out the challenges without pretending to solve them was harder than presenting numbers on a page, but it felt more authentic. Leadership can mean telling the truth about what is missing and why it matters.

Looking ahead, I know I will not be able to pitch this project at the end of six weeks. The best I can do is document the process and the obstacles, so that whoever comes after me does not start from zero. If my contribution is to name the difficulty and outline where the gaps are, then that is still a step forward.

Week Six Reflection (7/21)

The final week of this project has been a moment of reckoning. I did not get to pitch my work, and the financial models I spent time drafting never reached the level of completeness I imagined at the outset. That feels like a failure. I wanted to end with a polished product, something that could stand on its own. Instead, I am ending with pieces: community data, observations from my visit, partial models, and memos that acknowledge the gaps more than they close them.

But in that failure there has also been growth. I learned that leadership is not always about arriving at the finish line with answers. Sometimes it is about being honest when the road runs short. I had to accept that six weeks was never enough to underwrite a private company in a rural community with limited resources. The barriers were real, and naming them clearly is part of the work.

What went well was the resilience I found in myself. I kept showing up, even when the information was thin and the frustration heavy. I produced drafts, reflections, and frameworks that can guide whoever takes this project next. I learned to find value in process rather than product, in clarity rather than closure.

What could have gone differently is my own expectations. I came in thinking I could deliver a final package, but what I really delivered was an account of why that was not possible. That shift was humbling, but it taught me that leadership means adjusting your goals without letting go of your integrity.

This week I learned that growth and failure are not opposites. They are often bound together. I leave this project knowing more about myself, about the difficulty of working within constraints, and about the patience it takes to make progress in spaces where change moves slowly.

From a leadership perspective, I see now that the most important thing I gained was not a finished product but a deeper understanding of how to work with limited access, how to respect boundaries, and how to persist in the face of unfinished work. Those are lessons I will carry far beyond this project.

As I close out the six weeks, I feel both disappointed and grateful. Disappointed that I could not deliver everything I wanted, but grateful for the clarity and resilience I developed along the way. This was not the ending I envisioned, but it was the one I needed.