

Experiences of *following* within senior leadership teams in Independent Schools

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Abstract

Following is an inescapable part of organisational life and, therefore, integral to the experiences of leaders in schools. Although *following* is experienced every day, its essence is often taken for granted, hidden, or dismissed. Arguably, leading is the polar opposite: it is the centre of attention for research about leadership and organisations. However, for senior leaders, both leading and *following* are meaningful and inextricably intertwined experiences—one cannot exist without the other. Consequently, this thesis contemplates the phenomenon of *following* in Independent Schools in Australia and seeks to uncover ontological meanings about “being in” senior leadership teams. In so doing, this thesis explores the question: What is the ontological nature of the phenomenon of *following* within the context of senior leadership teams in Independent Schools in Australia?

Delving into the experiential lifeworld of senior leaders requires an appropriate research approach that can uncover what it means to be in *following*. This research adopts a hermeneutic phenomenological approach which seeks to reveal the ontological nature of lived experiences of *following* for senior leaders. This inquiry’s phenomenological research is inspired by Heidegger’s ontological understandings and infused with the philosophical writings of Gadamer, Sartre, de Beauvoir and Arendt.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is comparatively underrepresented as a research approach to consider organisational life. This creates opportunities to meaningfully contribute ontological understandings about the phenomenon of *following* and to highlight the potential of this worthwhile research approach.

Through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the findings of this inquiry describe new understandings of the phenomenon of *following*. These perspectives illuminate how senior leaders find themselves attuned to the mood and atmosphere of being in *following*; the lived experiences of the diverse modes of authenticity; and the meanings that emerge from contemplating *following* as a way of “being in” the Principal’s team. These modes of “being in” *following* describe the very human, reciprocal and taken for granted ways we find ourselves in senior leadership teams.

Hence, this thesis underscores the importance of deepening our understandings of *following*: to be in *following* is a vital part of the human fabric of organisations. Through the adoption of a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach, this thesis has uncovered essential ontological understandings that resonate deeply with the lived experiences of senior leaders. These are essential for both theory and practice as they relate to understandings of organisational life in senior leadership teams.

Declaration of authorship

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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Signed

1 August 2022

Date

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Glossary

The following terms are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study.

Principal: The person responsible for the leadership and organisation of the whole school (R-12)

Sub-School: A sub-school is a division of the whole school. Independent Schools can be divided into three sub-schools: Junior (R-6), Middle (7-9), Senior (10-12). Different configurations are also present in the Independent Sector.

Head of Sub-School: The person responsible for the leadership and organisation of a sub-school.

Follower: a position that a person may take in their interactions with others.

Following: the lived experience of taking the position of follower. Written in italics in this inquiry.

Government Schools/Sector: In Australia, schools that are the responsibility of each state or territory are known as Government Schools.

Catholic Schools/Sector: In Australia, schools that are the responsibility of the Catholic Education Office are known as catholic schools.

Board: Independent Schools are governed by a Board of representatives who are often elected from the school community. While the Principal is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the School, the Board is accountable for ensuring the legal, financial, and social responsibilities of the corporate entity are met.

Senior leaders: Senior leaders are staff who are deemed by the school to have responsibility for a substantial portfolio. As examples, in Independent Schools, this may include the Principal, Heads of Sub-School, a Business Manager, a Deputy Principal (R-12), a Teaching and Learning Leader, and a Student Well-Being Leader.

Senior leadership team: A team comprised of the senior leaders of a school. This team is responsible for the overall leadership and organisation of a School on a day-to-day basis.

Middle leaders: Middle Leaders are staff who are employed at a middle leadership level. This might include deputy heads of sub-school, academic heads, heads of house, heads of boarding.

Primary School: The primary school is another term for Junior School.

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Chapter One: Introduction

And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling,
how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without
packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled 3 hours, 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the
Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't
come from a store? Maybe Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more? (Suess, 2013,
p. 45)

Like Dr Seuss' (2013) character, the Grinch, the process for this phenomenological inquiry encouraged puzzling and puzzling and puzzling some more. While the Grinch puzzled about Christmas, the contemplation for this inquiry was the phenomenological experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams in Independent Schools. This puzzling was fuelled by a personal history of grappling with practising leading, a personal and professional valuing of teams and teamwork, the stories of other senior leaders, and a continuing interest in evolving themes in leadership research. This chapter discloses how *following* emerged as the phenomenon of interest from my lived experiences. It also explores my initial encounters with phenomenology; a philosophy and research methodology that enables researchers to uncover new perspectives.

Initially, I pondered how I might find ways to contribute meaningfully to my areas of personal and professional interest. Leading, teams, and even leading teams are not new areas. Research, books, conferences, and post-graduate study make these areas accessible to many leaders in education. Thus, finding ways to make meaningful contributions to an area I care about—leading in schools—was the inceptive contemplation for this study. How might I find ways of considering experiences that matter to colleagues in Independent Schools? How might I get to the heart of what matters in leadership practices? Might there be ways of researching the topic of *following* that would bring different perspectives to well-worn issues on leadership?

The phenomenon of *following* is an idea that I uncovered as I began my research and contemplated these questions. As I turned towards this phenomenon, I began to appreciate its relevance to being in leading in Schools. In contemplative moments I found myself wondering about taken-for-granted thinking in Schools. The teacher–student relationship is inescapable and widely accepted as important (Thornberg et al., 2020); why then isn't the leader–follower relationship seen in a similar light? Might turning towards the phenomenon of *following* contribute to meaningful understandings about being in a leadership role in Independent Schools?

Contemplating teams, leading and following

The conundrum of teams

My interest in teams stems from a background in team sport, in particular cricket. Of special interest to my contemplations about leading is the nature of cricket. Cricket by its nature has a sedentary appeal. The game, to the uneducated eye, appears to be a relatively passive experience. This apparent passiveness is one of the challenges for the game and the reason many non-cricket lovers find the game tedious to watch and worse to play.

Anyone who has coached Junior Cricket will attest to the difficulty of making the seemingly passive act of fielding interesting even when the game only lasts for a few hours. Maintaining motivation, concentration and team spirit can be difficult when the weather is hot, the other team is doing well, and young cricketers are spending long periods of the game relatively uninvolved.

This is also challenging at a professional level. Even though professional cricket teams should be motivated towards a team goal of winning, maintaining enthusiasm and engagement is still a leadership challenge for captains. In response to this challenge, former New South Wales Cricket Captain, Geoff Lawson, promoted a philosophy of each team member engaging in captaincy. By this he meant that he wanted each player to care about the game, each and every ball, like a captain might. How might we get the batter out? Am I fielding in the right position? What might I suggest to the bowler? What was the team plan for the opposition player (Maxwell, N., personal communication, August 18, 2021)? While it might be argued that this shared sense of responsibility is easier to engender with highly motivated and successful sports people, I have pondered how this approach to leading might translate to education. As captain of the school teaching team, how might I encourage people to care beyond the walls of their classroom? How might I get them to care as if they were captain of the team? How might we see ourselves as a team, rather than a loose coupling of individuals?

These wonderings led me to further explore ideas that might create the space for this cricketing team approach to thrive: mentoring, quality teaching rounds, professional interest groups, self-determination approaches, professional growth conversation, and increased leadership opportunities are examples of some of the initiatives established to create a caring team environment. Some of these approaches have been successful and others less so. Some have thrived for a period and then have required re-imagining. As an experiential example, quality teaching rounds were initially successful in engendering a sense of team in my school but unsuccessful teacher pairings eventually lessened many of the positives. An issue that has remained is the gap between the reality

of the experience and the associated ideas. The cricketing team approach to leading a team still left me feeling dissatisfied.

Experiences of leading teams in practice

Through grappling with the practice of leading and the aforementioned leadership thinking, I began to notice the importance of the many teams that made up the whole school team. Rarely are there moments in leading schools when a team is not some part of the context for thinking and action. I have found that leading teams of people is complex, demanding, and difficult. Additionally, I have been a part of teams where the individual experiences for people are truly diverse.

Research indicates that the experiences of being in a team are not just problems for me or for schools. Teams and teamwork, while relatively easy to observe, are difficult to define and to create effectively (Avenell, 2012; Driskel et al., 2018). This caused me to wonder what is really going on in these teams. Is leading relevant in teams or is something else occurring in the lived experiences of team members?

I also noticed through my own firsthand experiences that the neat leadership package often presented in the literature, courses, conferences, webinars and programmes does not align consistently with the everyday experience of leading in a school. Like many leaders, I've engaged in these various formats for learning with the hope of improving my own practice. Certainly, there have been times when this learning has been useful but also times where it has been difficult to make practical use of these ideas. While I often had a clear vision, goals, purpose and a road map, numerous times I felt like I was muddling my way through as the reality of implementing and sustaining an idea went off-road and occasionally off the rails. These experiences of leading a team of teachers fuelled further pondering.

Beyond my own experiences—Senior Leaders in Independent Schools

I have been and remain a member of various professional associations that have allowed me to network with colleagues in similar roles across Australia. An integral part of these professional associations is a dialogic process grounded in sharing experiential stories and seeking further understandings: What is happening in your school? What is working? What is it like to lead in your School? What are your experiences of being a member of the senior leadership team?

The stories vary. Some stories speak of positives and feelings of affirmation, others of heartache, frustration, and disconnection. I noticed that the experiences of leading a Junior School (ELC–Yr6) while being challenging were generally positive. However, the experiences of being a Head of Junior School within the senior leadership team were often passive at best and destructive at worst. In

short, these stories suggested that when Heads of Junior School lead in their own setting the experience is positive but when the context is the senior leadership team, it is less so.

My own experiences and the narratives of others in similar roles suggested that this was an area that needed to be better understood. What is going on in these senior leadership teams? How might leaders lead in a team of leaders? What is the experience really like being in a team of leaders?

Additionally, the literature that resonates best with my personal experience invites curiosity about leadership and suggests that the reality of being in leading is more dynamic and complex than the many adjectives or concepts that strive to encapsulate its meaning. Aptly, Alvesson and Jonsson (2018), describe this messy space as a quagmire which invites images of being stuck in the mud, wading through the mire and things being as clear as mud. Thus, this spirit of contemplative inquiry (puzzling and puzzling) was a calling; my lived experience in leading and in engaging with this inquiry, an aspiration for conducting this research.

Commencing this study, several questions arose that created the initial direction and impetus for my interest: How might research be conducted that engages with contemplative inquiry? What had my own experiences revealed about leading in schools? What worthwhile meanings might this study uncover about already well-researched topics: leading and teams? And how might *following* help reveal more about leading?

Independent Schools and senior leadership teams—a context for this study

The school education environment in Australia has three sectors: Government, Independent and Catholic. In 2021, there were 1,127 Independent Schools in Australia—729 of these schools were combined primary and secondary schools. Independent Schools employed 103,225 teaching and non-teaching staff (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Independent Schools are located in all states and territories of Australia. These Schools are diverse in terms of the communities they serve, their religious affiliations or lack of, and their education philosophies. While 66% of Independent Schools are situated within major cities, they are also located in rural and remote regions (Independent Schools Australia, 2021).

Independent Schools, simplistically represented, are organised hierarchically. At the top of the organisational tree is the School Board which is responsible for governance. The Board often comprises parents, the Principal, the Business Manager, external experts, and representatives from the affiliated religion (for faith-based schools).

At the next level is the senior leadership team led by the Principal, whose position can be compared to a CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of an organisation. The senior leadership team is responsible for all

facets of school operation. This team might include Deputy Principals, Heads of Sub-School, Leaders of Student Welfare, Curriculum, Teaching, Finance and Administration.

Middle level leadership regularly incorporates deputy heads of sub-school, department leaders, heads of house (or an equivalent pastoral role), managers of facilities, and middle leaders of administration, finance, enrolments, and marketing. Many Independent Schools will also include minor leadership roles that support middle and senior leaders. At each of these organisational levels various teams are formed to lead and manage the relevant portfolios. Some members of staff will be members of numerous teams. This is especially true for senior leaders whose roles may include involvement in different organisational areas.

In my current role as Head of Junior School in a large ELC–12 Independent School in Adelaide, I am aware of the importance of both leadership and teams, as previously noted. As highlighted above, Independent Schools are environments that are rich with various forms of teams. These teams are constructed to meet the needs of the school as it attempts to satisfy the complex and occasionally competing interests of students, staff, parents, governance, and the wider community (Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Hubbard, 2019). Integral to these needs and this team-based environment is the senior leadership team. Although membership and structures of leadership teams vary, they are often the critical linchpins that help to align, resource, support, motivate, problem-solve, clarify, articulate visions, and innovate (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2016; Morgeson et al., 2009; Richard et al., 2019).

Given that senior leadership teams can fulfil these needs and act as agents for the creation of sustainable learning environments, it is perhaps surprising that they are not better understood or researched (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Benoliel, 2020; Benoliel & Berkovich, 2016; Burke et al., 2006; Hubbard, 2019). In addition, the literature states that senior leadership teams, the teams that are best placed to set an example for great teamwork, are often the worst examples of a team in many organisations (Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Sinha et al., 2021; Song et al., 2020; Wageman & Hackman, 2010). Einola and Alvesson (2021), Sinha et al. (2021), and Wang et al. (2014), suggest this is often due to experiences of authority dynamics. The team is the Principal's team in nature. Thus, the relational and functional synergies of the team are influenced by the vision, motives, values, and behaviours of the Principal. This quagmire becomes the space where the experiences of being a leader in a team of leaders is felt and known (Wellman et al., 2019).

In this study, the specific context that most senior leaders identified when narrating their lived experiences were senior leadership team meetings. These regular meetings often occurred at the same time and place. The format, content and ensuing discussions were guided by an agenda often

constructed by the Principal. While the lived experiences of being in a senior leadership team extend beyond the physical and relational confines of these meetings, the space created by all the players being in the same room at the same time brought to the fore the realities of the senior leadership team experience. Thus, senior leadership team meetings created a contextual nexus for contemplating further meanings of being a leader in a team of leaders.

Following—a lived perspective of being in a team

A relatively new idea that relates to experiences in senior leadership teams is *following*. The idea of followership, *following* and followers, has been absent in the literature relatively in comparison to research about leadership and leaders (Davis, 2017; Khan et al., 2018; Tsakeni & Jita, 2017). Why this is so is a matter of conjecture but potentially it is true because followers have been viewed as less important, mediators or recipients of leadership or, at worst, passive and problematic (Crossman & Crossman, 2011; Martin, 2015; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

However, recent research (Kempster et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2018; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2020; Malaykan, 2014; Martin, 2015; Rahaman & Read, 2020; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014) has highlighted the integral role of *following*. In addition, there is general acceptance that leadership is a relational and social process for all involved (Foti et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2018; Riggio, 2020). Therefore, it could be argued that an understanding of the nature of leadership in senior leadership teams will always be constrained unless there is a comparable understanding of the nature of *following*.

Relevant also to this inquiry is the notion that a stable and static understanding of leaders and leadership or followers and followership is an illusion experientially. The lived experiences within senior leadership teams, even those with a definite delineation of roles, is an interchange of leading and *following*, which is to say that leaders follow and followers lead and the lines between both are often blurred (Malakyan, 2015). Therefore, *following*, is a reflection of the way people find themselves being in various School Leadership Team contexts. The use of the term *following* in this study rather than followership or follower also indicates that *following* is a phenomenon that is actively experienced, an experience that occurs on a daily basis and is a part of the lived experiences.

What makes following a phenomenon?

When German philosopher Martin Heidegger described a phenomenon as that which becomes manifest for us, he was suggesting that phenomena are brought into being through our living in the world. Phenomena to phenomenologists, then, are not constructed, designed, or defined in the autonomously-encased human mind separated

from the world. Neither is it the case that they are unexplainable occurrences produced by outside forces. Rather, phenomena are the ways in which we find ourselves being in relation to the world through our day-to-day living. (Vagle, 2014, p. 21)

What makes *following* a phenomenon? As Vagle (2014) states, phenomena are the ways we find ourselves in relation to others (people, things, and ideas). *Following* is such an experience. It constantly manifests itself in our being in relation with others in our day-to-day living. Like a teacher with a student or a nurse with a patient, in relation to the lived experiences of senior leaders in schools, *following* is how we find ourselves being in relation with other leaders and followers in teams.

The lived experience of *following* is often not considered and therefore not recognised or only partially reflected in thinking about the nature of leading and teams (Uhl-bien et al., 2014). However, when this taken-for-granted phenomenon is contemplated, it might be argued that it is more present in our day-to-day experiences than is leading. After all, I can follow an idea, a feeling, a path, a process, a person, a story, a team, my heart, my intuition, or my passion. There is a suggestion of exploration, inquiry and excitement inherent within the ideas above, especially when they are matched with *following*. As Sartre stated, “To know is to burst toward, to tear oneself out of the most gastric intimacy” (Sartre, 1970, p.4).

The Phenomenological Nature of this Inquiry

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the ontological nature of the phenomenon of *following* in senior leadership teams. It was my aspiration that this phenomenological inquiry would open ontological meanings that show the essential nature of the phenomenon of *following* and its place in developing deeper understandings about organisational life.

Accordingly, this inquiry utilised an interpretive hermeneutic approach to understand *following* from senior leaders’ perspectives—investigating concrete experiences as they were lived. The inquiry’s research approach and focus are novel. *Following* is a phenomenon that is not well understood or researched, especially in schools (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022). Yet this phenomenon is typically taken for granted and has a significant impact on being a senior leader in senior leadership teams.

Arguably, *following* is also fundamental to being in a team. Without *following*, there is no leading, and without leaders and followers there is no team (Leung et al., 2018). Therefore, developing further understandings of *following* within senior leadership teams is a worthwhile inquiry, making important contributions to theory and practice within educational leadership.

Phenomenology is an under-represented approach to conducting research (Neubauer et al., 2019). Therefore, the nature of this phenomenological inquiry, conducted to explore *following*, embellishes opportunities to deepen understandings about experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams in Independent Schools in Australia.

Use of pronouns

In this study, first person pronouns are used to show how the researcher was entwined with the phenomenological research process. In hermeneutic phenomenology, “I” am engaged dialectically with the literature, participants’ stories and the interpretive process. My experiences, pre-understandings and on-going interpretations were fundamental to the phenomenological nature of this study and are explicated throughout my thesis.

Researcher’s Experiences

As I undertook this research I did so in concert with my own career experiences. These historical school-based experiences have shaped who I am as a teacher, a leader and a researcher. I have been a primary school teacher in Government and Independent Schools in South Australia and New South Wales. I have held various leadership roles in these schools including being a Head of Sub-School (The Junior School) since 2004. I have been a member of various school teams including the senior leadership team. I have also actively involved myself in professional networks including the Independent Primary School Heads Association and the Australian Primary Principals Association. I have served at a State and National level on Executive Committees for these association, which has broadened my understanding of different school contexts. In these varied teams, I have led and followed. In turning towards the phenomenon of *following* in senior leadership teams, I was cognisant of these experiences in schools.

Through engaging with the philosophy and practice of phenomenological research, I was and am aware of the need to tussle with the phenomenon in an open and contemplative manner. This philosophical and methodological approach allows the researcher to uncover the distinctive and intuitive ways the phenomenon is revealed in the everydayness of senior leadership teams (Fried & Polt, 2014; Vagle, 2014). In engaging in this phenomenological process, I am aware of how I find myself in relation to the phenomenon of *following* and how my historical experiences, understandings and feelings continue to shape this relationship.

I also acknowledge that these same historical experiences that allow me to relate to the phenomenon are also limited by various assumptions. Potentially, these assumptions, if left hidden and undisclosed, could have affected this study. Rather than bridle, bracket or ignore, I acknowledge

these assumptions, at this point, so their possible influence can be considered. Maintaining a contemplative, reflexive and open manner during this inquiry was important for uncovering my assumptions. Many of these assumptions came to the fore as I recorded ideas in a journal; while other assumptions were revealed as I grappled with thinking, interpreting, and writing about *following* in this inquiry. In addition, an interview with a supervisor about my own experiences in senior leadership teams helped to explicate ideas and feelings that I might have taken for granted. These are captured in the subsequent discussion.

Pre-Understandings

Leadership is an influence relationship

Early in my leadership journey, I aligned with the view that the role of the leader is to influence those things that matter in Schools. For me this was very much about influencing the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. I viewed the staff as my students and felt that it was my role to bring out the best in them. The shepherd tending the flock or the blue heeler corralling the cows were metaphors for how I approached leading in the Junior School. This was infused with a belief in servant leadership—the leader being in service and trusting that staff would make the right choices given the appropriate opportunities. The nature of these approaches resonates with my valuing of team. I can see that this belief in team still shapes how I view what's right in leading.

What's a follower?

Given this strong valuing of team, it is perhaps surprising that I gave very little thought to the concept of *following* in my everydayness. Without followers there are no leaders is a very simple idea and one that is obvious once it is noted. However, as a leader I really had not given serious consideration to the notion that followers and *following* could be an essential part of the experiences of leading and teams. As suggested by the metaphors I've used above, my views of followers were that they needed to be guided, nudged, motivated and led. This suggests that staff were viewed as being passive unless given the right kind of leadership which could transform them into the best version of themselves!

Implicitly this notion also suggests a separation between leaders and followers. Upon reflection, I can see that I made assumptions about the way people were connected. My assumption was that people “act as autonomous meaning-making agents oriented to the world with purpose and intent” (Vagle, 2014, p.26). As a leader, I believed my understanding sprang from my interpretations of followers' behaviours. I was bumping into and creating meaning as I travelled around the school. Staff were also constructing meaning from their interpretations of my interactions with them and

my actions in general. Even though I acknowledged that leading is a dynamic process created between people, in my mind I still perceived a separation between leaders and followers. This separation highlights my failure to recognise that meanings already existed prior to my interactions with staff. It also suggests that my understandings of dynamic relational processes were constrained and linear.

As I continue to contemplate the dynamic relationship of being in *following*, I am aware of my own prejudice towards leading as a process that is of more value to an organisation. This also highlights my bias for seeing leading as the fundamental way of being a senior leader.

The mask of leaders—keeping your guard up

I have always believed that leaders need to keep their guards up. They should not reveal too much of their thinking or feelings for fear that they could be misunderstood or misrepresented. Keeping a professional distance is a translation of the approach that I valued as a teacher. Teachers need to keep a professional distance from students. I am not a student's friend or parent, I am their teacher. Although there are relational similarities between friend, parent and teacher, it is not the same relationship. There is a professional distance that is a sacred and trusted boundary.

This professional distance is something that I see in colleagues whom I respect. They maintain a professional approach. I know keeping up my guard is also an approach I take into meetings. I have surmised that this approach is also what most senior leaders do as well. They keep something of themselves hidden. I've considered that this is taken for granted in most meetings where leaders are present. Like classical Indian dance forms, the masks remain in place for the whole story (or meeting). The dancers' masks reveal but also hide elements of what is occurring.

The poor cousins—being a Head of Junior School

Junior by name has often felt junior by nature in an ELC–Year 12 setting. In my experience, most of the discussion and focus in this environment is often about Middle and Senior School issues. Whole School Meetings, senior leadership team meetings, Teaching and Learning Meetings, and priorities for capital expenditure are often dominated by the Secondary School.

This means, as a Junior School, you often feel like you are under-valued and forgotten. The real work happens in Secondary School, especially in Years 11 and 12. Serious teaching and learning happen in the Senior School space, not in a Junior School. This experience is one that I share with other Junior School colleagues who report that they often feel the same. Occasionally, this is exacerbated by senior leadership teams whose membership is dominated by secondary colleagues.

In addition, I have not worked in a School where the Principal has come from a primary education background. They have all had a secondary background. Unsurprisingly, their expertise and interests also lie within the boundaries of the Secondary School. Therefore, not unexpectedly, senior leadership meetings can have a distinctly Secondary flavour.

I know through conversations with Heads of Junior Schools that my experiences are not unique in ELC–Year 12 settings in Independent Schools. However, I have felt that the Junior School is more innovative and in-line with current educational trends, not only in relation to teaching and learning but also in relation to leading. I have a sense of pride in feeling that this is the reality in many schools.

In addition, I know that Heads of Junior School may not always be well treated in ELC–Year 12 environments. Colleagues at other schools have been micro-managed, made redundant by organisational reshuffles, and generally under-valued. These experiences have led me to have a strong affiliation for the experiences of Heads of Junior Schools, feelings of protection for colleagues, and a general cynicism towards Secondary Heads (often unfairly).

As I have continued to contemplate this inquiry, the aforementioned pre-understandings have become clearer. Below is a condensing of my pre-understandings that resonate with this inquiry.

- Being a senior leader is fundamentally about being in leading.
- Teams, leading and *following* are inextricably linked and fundamental to organisational life. An absence of one means the absence of the others.
- Teams, leading and *following* are all phenomena. While *following* is the particular phenomenon of this inquiry, in school life these and other phenomena make up the quagmire of the senior leadership experience.
- Principals undervalue Primary Schools and Heads of Junior School.
- Leaders are always guarded to a degree about their thinking, feelings, and values.
- Teams are essential to a School. Teamwork is a valued attribute.
- The relationship between leaders and followers is rich, dynamic, and taken for granted.

Encountering the phenomenological research approach

I commenced a second Master of Education degree with the aim of using it as a pathway to a PhD. Having completed my first Master of Education mainly through course work, I was much more interested in pursuing a research approach the second time around. My special interest at the point of commencing the second post-graduate degree was self-determination theory and its relationship to leading. I knew at this point that I was less interested in quantitative research and more aligned

with qualitative research. This had more to do with an affinity for words over numbers than with any particular world view.

Although my main supervisor for my second post-graduate degree, Professor David Giles, alluded to phenomenology on more than one occasion, I engaged only superficially with this philosophy. My focus was on completion and moving towards my goal—a PhD.

After successfully completing my Master of Education and gaining admission into a PhD, I was required to engage more fully with the question of how I might approach my emerging topic. Professor Giles again encouraged consideration of phenomenology as a possibility.

My first encounter with phenomenology was confusing. The being of beings, intentionality, intersubjectivity, Dasein and the lifeworld were terms and ideas that seemed profoundly foreign. I struggled with the idea that I did not construct meaning because this suggested that I was an autonomous meaning making agent. Education is littered with commemorations to constructivism (social and individual). Seeing the world differently took time. Comfortingly, I found that these initial and continuing struggles with the theory and practice of phenomenology were not uncommon. Heidegger (1972) called attention to this struggle: “My perplexity decreased slowly, my confusion dissolved laboriously, only after I met Husserl personally in his workshop” (p. 78).

In forming an appreciation for phenomenology there was not a conference I attended or a book I read. I don’t have favourite phenomenologists—ones whose writing inspires me. Developing an appreciation for phenomenology for me was like learning a jazz standard. I’ve had two guitar teachers and they have both told me the best way to learn a piece is to immerse yourself in only one tune; digest small parts that you can manage; link these parts to other parts; listen to the same line repeated until it makes sense in the overall context; and keep relating the parts back to the whole piece of music. Through using this method, your understanding gradually comes together. Not smoothly at first but the more times you play with it, the more naturally it comes. Eventually, parts of the music become parts of your music. You have developed your understanding, but you have also assimilated a way of seeing, feeling, and playing music.

For me this was a similar experience to developing an appreciation for the philosophy of phenomenology. As the pieces fell into place, I began to see. One metaphor in particular resonated like a jazz standard—the experience of learning to swim (Quay, 2016). Quay’s description of Heidegger’s (1968) example of learning to swim helped ground phenomenology for me. Simplistically, Heidegger (1968) stated that you do not learn to swim by reading a book about swimming and, more importantly, you do not know what it means to swim by observing from the

riverbank. You need to leap into the water yourself to understand what it is really like. This is true for really experiencing swimming but also true for experiencing phenomenology.

This focus on moving from what is written to what is experienced proved foundational in my move towards phenomenology. The more I contemplated this idea, the more I realised that this is what I wanted to focus on. I wanted to understand what was experienced by leaders. What did it mean to lead? What is it like being in leading in a team or being in a team of leaders? And what might *following* mean in a senior leadership team? Perhaps we should not learn leading, teams or *following* from a book. Perhaps this was something that needed to be experienced to be known. Phenomenology, as I discovered, is more complex than simply focusing on what is experienced. However, this idea of uncovering the experiences of leaders felt right as a starting point for this inquiry.

Another phenomenological concept also added to this initial interest—what is being taken for granted, especially what is being taking for granted in the average everyday way of being? This made me wonder about what I was taking for granted every day in my experiences as a leader. What else was being taken for granted in the experiences of leading? What was fundamental to the everyday experience of being in a team? What was being taken for granted about *following*? How might *following* be understood in teams and in leading?

Perhaps the greatest leap and the concept that I wrestled with most is thing experiencing as opposed to environmental experiencing (Quay, 2016). Thing experiencing is listening to my favourite guitar player and noticing the guitar he is playing, the clothes he is wearing, the amplifier he is playing through, the songs he is choosing, and possibly the musical choices he is making. These are all things that I am experiencing and these things occur in parts. I am able to notice them because I separate them into meaningful parts. The way I view the concert starts with the individual segments I notice (Quay, 2016).

Environmental experiencing starts from a different place. The environment that the guitarist is embedded in is already rich with meaning: the smell of the concert hall, the aesthetic of the stage, the memory of past performances, the way the music feels, and the way the audience relates to the playing. Rather than being separate individual parts of the experience; they are the experience as a whole (Quay, 2016).

The parts and whole are intertwined in a way that is rich with meaning. Heidegger (1996) stated that this is how we experience life pre-reflectively: as a whole experience, not as separated parts. This also becomes one of the challenges of doing phenomenological research. How might I surface pre-

reflective meanings of living and ways of being in the world? In relation to this inquiry, how might I contemplate the being of being in *following* in senior leadership teams?

Importantly, environmental experiencing encourages reflection on the being of being a senior leader. This reading of the lived text of being a leader sees the whole and the parts as inextricably and meaningfully connected. Thus, this hermeneutic view encourages a contemplation of *following* and leading as interwoven ways of being human in senior leadership teams (van Manen, 1990, 2014).

While my appreciation for the facets of phenomenology has grown, the aforementioned ideas acted as both impetus and influence for the research approach and process. While the philosophy of phenomenology, in its modern form, was established by Husserl (1859-1938), the philosophical and methodological approach taken in this study aligns more closely with the thinking of Heidegger. This approach was further informed by the pedagogical phenomenology of van Manen (1990, 2014), and the post-intentional phenomenology of Vagle (2014, 2018). As a result, this inquiry was grounded in a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective. Further discussion of these ideas occurs in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

Research question

In keeping with a phenomenological approach, the primary research question should attempt to direct the inquiry towards opening shared ontological meanings of a phenomenon. In this inquiry, ontological understandings of *following* were hermeneutically explored within participants' lived experiences of *following*. This required a phenomenological question that focused on what it is like, or what it means, to experience *following* within the context of senior leadership teams (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 1990).

Vagle (2014, 2018) also considers the use of secondary questions or sub-questions as important for providing greater focus for the potential of future iterations of the research design. While this is a worthwhile consideration, in this inquiry, the identified secondary questions will be the initial questions for gathering experiential stories (Appendix 4). Of importance, the carefully constructed questions afford the opportunity for a rich inquiry into *following* allowing new understandings about the essence of *following* in the context of senior leadership teams.

The Research Question

What is the ontological nature of the phenomenon of *following* within the context of senior leadership teams in Independent Schools in Australia?

Concluding Comments

My interest in the phenomenon of being in *following* in senior leadership teams has emerged from my reflections about leadership experiences in schools. I believe that *following* creates opportunities to understanding leading and senior leadership teams from a contemporary perspective.

Additionally, I envisaged that senior leaders will benefit from appreciating the significance and meanings of *following*; an under-represented area of general thinking and research about organisational life.

Therefore, this inquiry seeks meanings about the experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams that surface taken-for-granted ways of being in leading. By revealing these meanings of being in *following*, this inquiry aims to deepen the ontological understandings of the nature of being in senior leadership teams.

My introduction to and growing understanding of hermeneutic phenomenology has revealed a philosophy and method that resonates with the intent of my research question: to discover the ontological nature of the phenomenon of *following* within the context of senior leadership teams in Independent Schools in Australia. This ontological approach does not seek a single fixed truth and theory. It recognises and reverberates with the complex, dynamic, contextual and temporal nature of experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams.

Structure of the Thesis

This Thesis contains 8 chapters:

Chapter 1—Introduction: The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the phenomenon of concern, show the impetus for the study, disclose pre-understandings, and describe the researcher's situatedness with the phenomenon and the philosophy.

Chapter 2—Review of the Literature: A literature review of Teams, Leading in Teams and *Following*. This literature review reveals current understandings that relate to the phenomenon of *following* by examining the place of teams and leading in teams. This inquiry posits that teams are ubiquitous and are the context for *following* in the organizational life of senior leaders. It also highlights the need for fresh perspectives about teams and *following*. These perspectives relate to enriched meanings and diverse research approaches.

Chapter 3—Philosophical foundations: This chapter explores the philosophy of phenomenology, its historical beginnings and the key ideas of prominent phenomenologists that underpin this inquiry. Of particular interest is the thinking of Heidegger whose philosophical ideas are fundamental to hermeneutic phenomenology. The intertwining of philosophy and methodology is considered,

especially in relation to phenomenological practitioners. Additionally, a unique contribution of this inquiry is the inclusion of thinking from multiple phenomenological perspectives; these include Sartre, Gadamer, de Beauvoir and Arendt.

Chapter 4—Method: This chapter articulates the translation of philosophy and methodology into the research process. The chapter discloses the considerations of the researcher for the contemplation of readers. Importantly, it demonstrates the centrality of language to the lived experience of this research process. It also presents a scaffold for understanding the trustworthiness of the research.

Chapter 5—Being in the Mood: The inquiry considers how mood makes intelligible the experiences of being in *following*. Heidegger's concept of mood uncovers not only being in the mood of *following* but explores the atmospheres of *following* in senior leadership teams.

Chapter 6—Being in Authenticity: Chapter 6 describes the centrality of authenticity to experiences of *following*. It draws upon "*Hamlet*", notions of fair play and meanings of home to contemplate this essential mode of being in *following*.

Chapter 7—Being in the Principal's Team: In this chapter, meanings unfold of experiences in a team based around a single identity—the Principal. It considers possibilities of collective experiences of *following* in the context of being with others relationally in a senior leadership team. It also unearths how compulsion is felt, known, and enacted in senior leadership teams. This discussion includes the potentiality for leaders being in *not-following*.

Chapter 8—Conclusions: The final chapter reflects on the meanings that have emerged from Chapters 5, 6, and 7 and situates them in relation to the researcher, the research, and the phenomenon. It looks at the way these meanings have fused with my own preunderstandings, current research, and other thinking. The discussion then turns to the limitations of this research, possible future directions, and the personal experience of conducting phenomenological inquiries before offering my final thoughts.

Reflections

It is envisaged that this inquiry will engage readers in an ongoing dialogue with the phenomenon of *following*. The chapters provide further understandings, opportunities to ponder on interpreted meanings, and experiences that resonate with the reader's own stories. It is my belief that we all know, understand and affiliate deeply with being in *following*. It is an embedded part of our everyday life and one that is hidden, taken for granted and underplayed. Therefore, it is hoped that at the end of this thesis, readers will feel a strong affection for being in *following* and this will result in pondering, exploration and enriched practice.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The review of the literature in this inquiry reflects the philosophical and methodological approaches inherent in phenomenological studies (Errasti-Irbarrondo et al., 2018; Smythe & Spence, 2012). A phenomenological review aims to provoke thinking through interpretation and narration. It also explores salient research but at the same time avoids a priori explanations of what the phenomenon is or should be according to scientific, positivist understandings (Crowther et al., 2017; Fry et al., 2017; Gergen & Hersted, 2016). This approach can be challenging for readers and researchers who have to put aside taken-for-granted assumptions about what a literature review should be (Smythe & Spence, 2012). Therefore, this review introduces the phenomenon to the reader in a way that opens a dialogue but, like small talk, is aimed at whetting the appetite before the main course. The intention of this approach is to orient the researcher, the research and reader towards the phenomenon of *following* in senior leadership teams in a way that encourages open and reflective contemplation of the research question (Crowther et al., 2017; Fry et al., 2017; Smythe & Spence, 2012).

Introduction

The demands of leadership almost invariably exceed the capacity of a single person to meet the needs at hand (Reeves, 2006, p. 32).

As Reeves highlights, leading is, by necessity, always in relation to being with others. In Schools and in organisations, this being with others involves being in a team. Not only are teams important in understanding leading, but they are also important to our daily experiences of *following*. The dynamic interplay between teams, leading and *following* discloses meanings that make organisational life intelligible (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2020). Thus, contemplating the embeddedness of teams in our lived experiences, especially organisational life, is the starting point for turning towards ontological meanings of the phenomenon of *following* in senior leadership teams in Independent Schools.

As people move through life, teams become increasingly part of the lived experiences. Our first forays into this space are often sporting teams and music teams (bands, choirs, ensembles). However, as children burst forth into adulthood, a plethora of teams manifests. This might begin with the first part-time job or the first job post school or university. People commence these jobs thinking that they have signed up for this or that role. However, they soon discover that they are part of a workplace team. A person might start in the secretarial or administrative team. Equally a starting point might be the sales team, delivery team, front-of-house team or after-hours team. The company that employs a staff member is the corporate team. What is important here is not which

team is joined but recognising that teams are not only commonplace but are an essential part of what makes these work experiences comprehensible.

In a school context, teachers first join a teaching team. This might be a subject specific department or, for primary school teachers, a sub-school (The Junior School). Within these contexts, teachers will also experience other forms of teams, for example, collaborative year/subject teams, professional learning teams, and task-oriented teams. Senior leaders will have responsibility for a team relating to their portfolio but there may also be an expectation that they will be part of the senior leadership team. The experiences of this senior leadership team matter for senior leaders (DeRue et al., 2010; Sinha et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, the experiences of being a leader in a senior leadership team are less well-researched and understood (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2016; Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Kezar et al., 2019). This also means that other phenomena that occur in this unique leadership space are under-represented in research. This is especially true of experiences of *following* in teams and senior leadership teams (Leung et al., 2018). This gap in the research creates opportunities for this inquiry to contribute meaningfully to practice and theory as it relates to experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams in schools.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore relevant research that provides meaningful understandings about the phenomenon of *following*. As discussed above, research relating to teams, leading and senior leadership teams creates a pathway to deeper understandings about experiences of being-in *following*. In order to begin deepening understandings about these experiences, this chapter turns towards the place of teams and leadership teams in organisational life before investigating current research about *following*.

Teams

Meanings of teams

Teams provides the organisational context for the experiences of *following*, but what is a team? Feldman (2017) noted that what is essential for a team is more than just its name, individuals, and processes. These explain the facets of a team but fail to capture something about being in a team. Therefore, how might we contemplate the essentials of team? Is it a loose coupling of people who meet occasionally? Does it have a greater degree of formality? What makes a team a team?

Research on teams has ebbed and flowed for the last century, often as a reflection of world events or significant changes to organisations. As an example, the needs of resourcing and manufacturing during World War II created a focus on workplace groups (Driskell et al., 2018). However, as organisations and organisational foci have changed in the last 25 years, teams in workplaces and in research have become more prolific (Debray & Spencer-Oatey, 2019; Driskell et al., 2018; Gorris-

Hunter & White, 2021; Salas et al., 2015). This has resulted in a corresponding and gradual creep in research from understanding aspects pertaining to individuals in organisations (leaders) to a focus on describing and understanding teams within organisations (Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Mathieu et al., 2017).

As underscored by Feldman (2017), the attention of the literature has often turned towards describing what makes a team a team. In their efforts to delineate teams, researchers have considered work groups, leadership teams, self-organising teams and other collectives (Gorris-Hunter & White, 2021; Mathieu et al., 2019; O'Neill & Salas, 2018). The teams studied range from longstanding formal teams with stagnant membership to teams that rapidly form in response to needs and just as quickly disband (Mathieu et al., 2019). Studies have also focused on teams from most career fields such as business teams, sporting teams, medical teams, educational teams, and teams from the Arts (Driskell et al., 2018; Pitsoe & Isingoma, 2014). The varying contexts, forms, and the affective and temporal nature of these teams has meant that describing the essence of teams is difficult.

Mathieu et al. (2008) described teams as collectives that exist to perform tasks, share goals, and work interdependently. These teams are characterised as being embedded within an organisational context. The themes of task interdependence, common or shared goals, and organisational context are included in many characterisations and are often viewed as being central to describing a team (Bush et al., 2012; Day et al., 2006; Feldman, 2017; Gorris-Hunter & White, 2021; Ilgen & Kozlowski, 2006; Mathieu et al., 2008; Mathieu et al., 2017; Mathieu et al., 2019; Salas et al., 2018;).

Ilgen and Kozlowski (2006) postulated that the organisational context of a team is multilevel and evolves over time through the influence of situational demands or needs. This multilevel system comprises individuals within the team, the team itself and the wider organisation. They also brought to light the social and affective processes that underpin interactions between team members. In line with this people-centred conception, Morgeson et al. (2009) viewed teams as structures that satisfy individual, team and organisational needs. Gorris-Hunter and White (2021) highlighted interdependence and embeddedness in their study of Higher Education, while Kozlowski and Chao (2018) accentuated the temporal nature of teams: the reality of fluid boundaries and membership in the experience of organisational teams. Thus, given the diverse and wide-ranging thinking about teams it is difficult to succinctly articulate what it means to be in a team: a single interpretation of *team* is elusive (Mathieu et al., 2019).

Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges in clearly describing the essence of a team, for the purposes of this study a school team, fundamentally, can be understood as a group of staff members who work interdependently to achieve shared organisational goals (Driskell et al., 2018; Gorris-Hunter & White, 2021). Beyond meanings, contemporary research about teams has focused

on what a team does. This can be viewed as a focus on two main areas: team outputs and influences on members (Mathieu et al., 2017). Team output research has mainly considered efficiency, productivity and quality. Influences on members research has examined issues such as attitudes, intentions, behaviours, and developing capacity (Mathieu et al., 2019). Additionally, Mathieu et al. (2019), seeking further understanding about the twin focus of teams' research, suggested that team inputs, mediating mechanisms, and structural features could all be visualised as overlapping co-evolving facets that collectively generate effectiveness.

While agreed elements of descriptions and examinations of what a team does bring us closer to understanding how the literature illustrates what a team is, arguably they still fail to capture the essential experiences of being in a team. What might it mean to experience the essentials of being in a team? In order to contemplate further this question and surface meanings of being in *following*, it is valuable to reflect on research about teamwork.

Teamwork as an experience of being in relation

Finding good players is easy. Getting them to play as a team is the hard part—Casey Stengel (Mollet, n.d.).

Is the experience of being in a team explicated by teamwork: playing as a team? Perhaps even more elusive than a clarification of a team is an adequate elucidation of teamwork (Driskell et al., 2018; Feldman, 2017; Salas et al., 2015). Driskell et al. offer this broad description: “teamwork is the process through which team members collaborate to achieve task goals.” (2018, p. 334) The word “process” in this description suggests that teamwork is active. It is an experience that is understood through doing. As discussed above, the literature on teamwork has often tried to explicate this doing in terms of the definite actions or processes that a team undertakes (Kezar et al., 2019; Mathieu et al., 2017). This includes, but is not limited to: cooperating, debating, communicating, coordinating, coaching, trusting, and supporting (Benoliel & Schechter, 2018; Bushe & Nagaishi, 2018; Pitsoe & Isingoma, 2014; Somech & Ohayon, 2019;). Thus, teamwork might be described as the active doing together of tasks that relate to a shared goal (Driskell et al., 2018; Ryu et al., 2021).

However, the literature also highlights that the experience of teamwork is not fully captured through the articulation of attributes of teamwork (Driskell et al., 2018; Feldman, 2017; Mathieu et al., 2019; Ryu et al., 2020). Something further is required to get to the heart of what a *true* team is. A comprehensive characterisation, and one that resonates with the phenomenological position of this study, is offered by Salas et al. (2015): “In sum, teamwork is an adaptive, dynamic, and episodic process that encompasses the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors among team members while they interact toward a common goal. It is something that is felt and understood but difficult to articulate.” (p. 2) This depiction highlights that teamwork is really understood through our

relationship with others. The word “among” in the description captures the essence of teamwork. Our thoughts, feelings, behaviours and understandings emerge from our being among others in a relational network. In subsequent chapters, further discussion explicates the phenomenological perspective of being-in-the-world with others (Vagle, 2018). The point here is that the literature about teamwork also supports the view that the essence of teamwork is the relational entanglement of being together.

In relation to teams and teamwork, what the literature clearly highlights is the fundamental nature of relationships to any description or understanding. This relational perspective is also important for further understandings about *following*. Just as being in relation to others is fundamental to teams, *following* is grounded in this relationship of being among others. It is this inquiry’s position that a phenomenological interpretation of the meanings of *following* in senior leadership teams offers the possibility of disclosing these relational experiences.

The Importance of Teams

Why is a focus on teams important for schools, senior leaders and *following*? As Driskell et al. (2018) note, the history of being human is based around the collective benefits of grouping (economic, political, social, health and welfare). From a phenomenological perspective, this historical preference for grouping can be viewed as the being of being-with-others (Flood, 2017; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). This is the experience of being. It is fundamentally a relational and dynamic being with others (Heidegger, 1996). This is also the lived experience of inter-professional practice in Independent Schools (Flood, 2017; Neubauer et al., 2019).

As noted, teams form a part of our lives in our relevant communities from an early age. Teams contribute to our sense of well-being individually and collectively (Somech & Ohayon, 2019), foster creativity and collaboration (Wang & Yin, 2019), and allow organisations to achieve aspirations (Bushe & Nagaisha, 2018; Solberg et al., 2021). Furthermore, Lindberg et al. (2013) found that participation in team meetings made older hospital patients feel human, underlining the fundamental way teams contribute to our humanness.

Experientially and unsurprisingly given that teams are often reflections of human relational dynamics, they are also the circumstantial hub for experiences that are less positive. Alvesson and Einola (2019) remarked that the portrayal of organisational life as generally positive is seductive, overstated, and false. Teams can contribute to negative emotional states for individuals as well as to organisational failure (Aghaei et al., 2021; Alvesson & Blom, 2015; Benoliel & Schechter, 2018). Therefore, experiences of being in a team can encompass the good, the bad and the ugly of our everyday life (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Einola & Alvesson, 2021).

Regardless of the outcome of being in a team, teams—workplace, social and recreational—are a significant contributor to the context that percolates our lived experiences. Teams are pervasive and universal ways of being in the world (Gorris-Hunter & White, 2021). Therefore, teams in their various forms are often the contextual nexus for experiencing and understanding our lifeworld. This is especially true of organisational life which is the general context for experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams (Barnett & Weidenfeller, 2016; Benoliel & Schechter, 2018; Driskell et al., 2018; Kezar et al., 2019; Pitsoe & Insingma, 2014).

The ensuing ideas summarise the key themes discussed above in relation to teams, teamwork and the importance of teams to organisational experiences:

- The essence of teams is difficult to capture. It is easier to state and observe what a team does than what makes a team, a team (Salas et al., 2018).
- Teams are part of our everyday lived experiences. This is especially true of organisational life where teams have proliferated and are now ubiquitous. Although the essence of teams and teamwork is difficult to illuminate, teams can be viewed as complex microcosms of organisational and cultural beliefs, functions, values, and leadership (Benishek & Lazzara, 2019; Salas et al., 2018).
- An old axiom states there is no “I” in team; as discussed above and in subsequent chapters, this may not always capture the lived experiences. However, this axiom speaks to an ideal of teams and teamwork. A team is not a team if there is only an “I”. Teams must be composed of more than a single entity. Being with others in a team creates the relational space for teamwork. This is equally true of *following* and leading in teams. One cannot exist without the other and both occur in the everydayness of teams in organisational life (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022).

Leadership (and *following*) in teams is an interesting paradox as discussed in the next section of this chapter. In organisations with flatter hierarchical structures, where the role of leader and follower may be especially fluid, arguably “I” really doesn’t exist, and “we” is the predominant understanding, though not all organisations have flat hierarchies, including schools that often have traditional interpretations of leader and follower or Principal and senior leader.

School Based Teams

Schools are rich with various forms of teams (van der Want & Meirick, 2020). Research on teams, teamwork, team effectiveness, team processes and team characteristics is well-represented in Business, the Military and Healthcare. However, research on school-based teams is comparatively

scarce, especially phenomenological research (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2016; Gaumer Erickson et al., 2015; Kezar et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2017).

More widely researched is the practice of professional learning in teacher teams (van der Want & Meirink, 2020). These professional learning teacher teams have been referred to as communities of practice, professional learning communities, collaborative workgroups, data teams, subject specific teams, and year/grade teams (Doos et al., 2017; van der Want & Meirink, 2020). In general, these teacher teams bring together groups of teachers with the aim of working collaboratively to improve professional practice.

As examples, Bills and Howard (2019) found that interdisciplinary teams were invaluable in creating a rich, interdisciplinary curriculum. Van der Voort and Wood (2014) identified the positive impact of circuit teams (teams formed by the district office) and school management teams working together to improve teaching and learning. Cederlund (2018), in a study of Swedish Schools, highlighted the benefits of cross-school teams in introducing new perspectives, encouraging critical reflection, and improving pedagogy. Additionally, Somech and Ohayon (2019) reported the positive impact of teams on organisational behaviours in 82 schools. Such research highlights that teams and teamwork are integral to schools meeting the needs of stakeholders and are an important part of school life.

In Independent Schools, these teams are embedded within a larger organisational construct (the School) that gives meaning to the experiences of team members. These teams are often constructed to meet the needs of the school as it attempts to satisfy the complex and occasionally competing interests of students, staff, parents, governance, and the wider community (Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; Kezar et al., 2019; Solberg et al., 2021). As identified above, these teams often have a teaching and learning focus. However, teams can also relate to strategic directions, curriculum initiatives, student and staff well-being, external accountability, or event organisation (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2016; Burke et al., 2006; Solberg et al., 2021; van der Want & Meirink, 2020)

Frequently these school-based teams will have clear roles that may be understood in relation to the hierarchy of the schools (Doos et al., 2017; Greer et al., 2018). The senior leadership team is an example that typifies this hierarchical structure. The senior leadership team is also integral to the aforementioned needs and the team-based environment in Schools. Although membership and structures of leadership teams vary, they are often the linchpins that help to align, resource, support, motivate, problem-solve, clarify, articulate visions, and innovate (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2016; Kezar et al., 2019; Morgeson et al., 2009; Solberg et al., 2021). Given that senior leadership teams can fulfil this need and act as agents for the creation of sustainable learning environments, it is perhaps surprising that they are not better understood or researched (Avenell, 2011, 2012; Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Benoliel, 2020; Burke et al., 2006; Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; Kezar et al., 2019).

Teams, leading and *following* are foundational to the experiences of senior leaders in senior leadership teams. The literature on *following* posits that an understanding of leading is incomplete without a consideration of followers and *following* (Jiang et al., 2021; Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022; Rahaman & Read, 2020). Although research often emphasises the goal of understanding leading, logically it must also be true that an understanding of *following* is incomplete without contemplation of leading, especially in teams.

Leadership in Teams

Leadership in teams is important to and has an impact on the success and nature of a team (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Burke et al., 2006; Curry, 2014; Koeslag-Kreunen et al., 2018; Koeslag-Kreunen et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2014). Barnett and McCormick (2016) underscored the importance of this team experience by describing it as the most salient factor of effective team functioning.

However, while acknowledging that leadership is important to teams, researchers also recognise the limitations of current and traditional research approaches. As examples, Burak (2018), Einola and Alvesson (2021), Lord et al. (2017) and Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al. (2022), have noted that research needs to continue to move beyond leader-centric approaches, universal traits, and behavioural styles not only because of a failure to find universality but also because of the recognition that leadership does not occur in a vacuum—most often it occurs in a team context and is co-created in relation to others (followers). In relation to leading in school teams Daniëls et al. (2019) stated that most research has used a narrow perspective (instructional, distributed, situational, transformational), or has considered leading from the point of view of the Principal only. These authors encouraged future research which seeks perspectives beyond the Principal and takes into consideration the context leading occurs in. This point is advocated for strongly in the literature about *following* (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022).

The research on leading in teams often characterises leading as vertical/functional or horizontal/shared (Burke, et al., 2006; Daniëls et al., 2019; Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Gil, et al., 2011; Nicolaidis et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014). Vertical/functional leadership of a team describes leadership tasks, is often leader-centric, and may be considered as being more traditional (Koeslag-Kreunen, 2017). In the leadership literature, vertical/functional leadership more closely aligns with theories relating to the role of the leader: traits, behaviours, instructional leadership, transactional and transformational leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014; Daniels et al., 2019; Eva et al., 2021; Hernandez et al., 2011). The leader's role may include setting agendas, describing the vision or purpose, managing tasks and timelines, selecting personnel, coordinating operations and enabling resourcing (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Burke et al., 2006; Kezar, et al., 2019; Koeslag-Kreunen, et al., 2017; Wang, et al., 2014).

The literature suggests that this style of leadership is required for the effective functioning of teams. Wang et al. (2014) found that the coordinating effect of vertical leadership was important for effective teams, while in a study of university teaching teams' perceptions of leadership, Koeslag-Kreunen et al. (2017) identified vertical leadership as being important for risk-taking, monitoring and coordinating. Additionally, vertical/functional leadership has been shown to be beneficial for teams especially when they are new. At this point, the leader's role in coordinating, allocating personnel, setting the direction, and articulating the purpose is of significant value (Burke, et al., 2006; Kezar et al., 2019; Lord et al., 2017; Morgeson et al., 2009).

Corresponding to this vertical/functional perspective, Barnett and McCormick (2016) stated that leading and teams research can be distinguished by three broad leadership functions: direction setting, managing team operations, and developing team self-management capacity, all considered critical for team effectiveness. A key focus is how leaders foster synergy among team members and facilitate the emergence of different phases of team development (D'Innocenzo et al., 2021). This functional leadership perspective posits that leaders should act in ways that provide teams with what they need, when it is needed, for successful collective action (Eva et al., 2019).

Horizontal/shared leadership is a newer approach to understanding how leadership might function in a team. It aligns with an increased appreciation and use of distributed/shared leadership and greater autonomy for teams (Bush et al., 2012; Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; D'Innocenzo et al., 2021; Eva et al. 2021; Gil et al., 2011). In relation to leadership research, it also mirrors the shift to viewing leadership as co-constructed relational and social processes (Daniels et al., 2019; McCauley & Palus, 2020; Uhl-Bien & Carsten, 2018). Proponents of this view advocate for a move away from single theories to describe leadership and acknowledge the value of multi-modal views (Eva et al., 2021). Therefore, horizontal/shared leadership encompasses ideas attributed to distributed, contingent, relational, collective, and authentic leadership (Einola & Alvesson, 2021). Where vertical/functional leadership, is more closely aligned with task factors, horizontal/shared leadership is associated more with people factors, especially its relationship to interdependence or teamwork (McCauley & Palus, 2021; Nicolaidis et al., 2014;). Consistent with vertical/functional leadership, horizontal/shared leadership is important for the effective functioning of teams (D'Innocenzo et al., 2021). Shared leadership has been shown to be associated with improved team attitudes, behaviour, and the development of emergent states (Wang et al., 2014). Likewise, collaboration, team synergy and alignment are positively influenced by a shared leadership approach (Avenell, 2011; Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; D'Innocenzo et al., 2021; Eva et al., 2021). D'Innocenzo et al., (2021), Gil et al. (2011), Morgeson et al. (2009), and Robert and You (2017), showed that shared leadership led to need satisfaction, increased motivation, the development of trust and improved perceptions of autonomy.

The horizontal/shared leadership and vertical/functional perspectives both illuminate possible experiences of *following* for senior leaders. In senior leadership teams where direction setting and managing team operations (vertical/functional) are dominant flavours, what might it be like to be in *following*? Alternatively, in senior leadership teams, where leading is shared, how might *following* be experienced? What commonalities might emerge? How might these team environments disclose further meanings of *following*?

In line with a horizontal/shared view of team leadership and of particular importance for this inquiry, is the position espoused by Burak (2018). In a systematic review of the literature relating to context and leadership, Burak highlighted the rich and dynamic interplay that occurs between leading, *following* and teams (context). That review also underscored again the comparative lack of research about *following*:

However, with the exception of research exploring the effects of national culture (the where dimension of the omnibus context), organizational change (the when dimension of the omnibus context), and task and job characteristics of the discrete context, the role that followers play is generally overlooked. Yet opportunities for followership-related questions abound. (Burak, 2018, p. 231)

Aghaei et al. (2021), D’Innocenzo et al. (2021), Jiang et al. (2021) and Lord et al. (2017), also recognised the importance of further research that would extend understandings of leading through consideration of *following* and context. In line with earlier discussion in this chapter, they emphasised the idea that leading is always co-created in relation to others. Following on from Burak (2018), leading and *following* can therefore be seen as experiences that are co-created in the context of a team. Lord et al. (2017) suggest that this idea transcends most leadership research. As previously discussed, this view also aligns with Heidegger’s (1996) view that being is understood through being with others. This is considered in greater detail in the next chapter.

Summarising this research, several key themes that relate to the experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams emerge:

- There is a rich interplay between teams (context), *following* and leading (Burak, 2018; Bush et al., 2012; D’Innocenzo et al., 2021; Gil et al., 2011; Morgeson et al., 2009; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014)
- Leading a team is always leading in relation to others. The interactions between team members create the experience of leading and *following* (Jiang et al., 2021; Lord et al., 2017)
- There is a lack of research into leadership teams in educational settings, especially schools (Barnett & McCormick, 2012; Benoliel, 2020; Benoliel & Berkovich, 2016; Bush et al., 2012;

Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; Kezar et al., 2019; Koeslag-Kruenen et al., 2017)

- There is a need for research that extends understandings about leading, *following* and teams (Burak, 2018; Lord et al., 2017). Additionally, there is a dearth of contextual studies that capture at a deeper level the dynamic nature of teams (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Day et al., 2006; Hubbarb, 2019; Mathieu et al., 2008; Morgeson et al., 2009)
- Research should uncover the ontological nature of leadership experiences in leadership teams (Balan & Vreja, 2019; Sinha et al., 2021; Wageman & Hackman, 2010)

Mirroring the research on leadership, team leadership literature focused initially on single formal leaders and the way their behaviours influenced team outcomes (Balan & Vreja, 2019; Daniels et al., 2019; Mathieu et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2014). This understanding of functional/vertical leadership in teams has shifted to view the role of leadership as one that is co-created in a social and relational context (McCauley & Palus, 2021). In the team-leadership literature this is often referred to as horizontal or shared leadership. Both approaches to leadership have been shown to be valuable to the effective functioning of teams (Koeslag-Kreunen et al., 2018). Additionally, teams have been shown to be important for the effective functioning of organisations (Solberg et al., 2021).

Therefore, given their value to organisations and the importance of leadership to teams, it can be argued that a rich understanding of both areas is vital to schools. Given that schools are already rich in teams, perhaps it is past time that a focus on teams in schools was more evident in the literature.

So far, this chapter has discussed research showing that leading and teams create a contextual nexus where senior leadership experiences of *following* manifest. Of particular interest to this inquiry is the senior leadership team. Unlike many teams in schools, the leadership team comprises staff who are employed as leaders. According to some of the related literature, the experience of being a senior leader in a team of leaders can be problematic (Alvesson & Johnson, 2018; Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Raelin, 2017; Richard et al., 2019). What might this experience be like? Is it a case of too many cooks spoil the broth?

The experiences of senior leadership teams: historical and current perspectives

In this review of relevant literature, it is important to consider the team that is the particular focus of this inquiry: the senior leadership team. Interestingly, research focusing on experiences of senior leaders in a team of leaders, especially in educational settings, is comparatively sparse (Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Kezar et al., 2019).

Over the last 10 years, research has focused more closely on related topics: coaching in senior leadership teams (Kezar et al., 2019; Riddle, 2015), distributed leadership in teams (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016), collective leadership in teams (D'Innocenzo et al., 2021; Eva et al., 2021;

McCauley & Palus, 2021) and the effectiveness of senior leadership teams in leading initiatives (Solberg et al., 2021; Weiler & Hinnant-Crawford, 2021). Equally, researchers have also utilised the findings from research about teams and extrapolated this to senior leadership team (Bang & Midelfart, 2017). The lack of research focusing on the ontological experience of senior leaders in leadership teams (especially in schools) creates a gap in our understanding about this unique team (Aghaei et al., 2021; Kezar et al., 2019;).

Historical and present studies have noted that conflict, dysfunction, unhealthy relational dynamics and tension can be experienced by senior leaders in the senior leadership team (Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Giannini, 2021; Nadler, 2021). Over 20 years ago, Eisenhardt et al. (1997) and Katzenback (1998) highlighted the difficulties executive teams have in working as a “real team”. For Eisenhardt et al. (1997), the complexities of the working environment created natural tensions and conflict that were difficult to resolve. Executive teams, according to Katzenback (1998), fluctuated between being a CEO’s team, a team of individuals, and a real team.

More recently, Wageman et al (2009), and Wageman and Hackman (2010) have stated that the nature of leadership teams is characterised by dysfunctional irony: leadership teams, despite having everything they need to be effective, have issues with satisfying those functions that are most critical to the effectiveness of their organizations. Wageman and Hackman (2010) proposed that the team that acts least like a real team is the senior leadership team.

Wageman and Hackman (2010) identified five particular ironies that they felt captured the nature of leadership in leadership teams:

- Irony I: Leader(ship) teams are composed of powerful people—yet they tend to be underdesigned, underled, and underresourced
- Irony II: Membership is important and coveted—but members often don’t know who is on the team, and they do not really want to come to team meetings
- Irony III: Members are overloaded—but they tend to waste enormous amounts of time in team meetings
- Irony IV: Authority dynamics pervade leadership teams and complicate team processes—but members won’t talk about them.
- Irony V: Shared leadership may be especially unlikely in teams composed of leaders.

(Wageman & Hackman, 2010, pp. 7-27)

Alvesson and Blom (2015) highlighted the fraught nature of relationships within senior leadership teams. They suggested that the assumption that followers always want to be in *following* was a falsehood. Greer et al. (2018) identified how team harmony can be negatively affected through the influence of hierarchy and power. The role of power and hierarchy in the leader–follower relationship was also emphasised by Einola and Alvesson (2021); while Sinha et al. (2021) posited that shared leadership can create fractured relationships as team members jostle to share the leading of the team.

Echoing this narrative, Nadler (2021) suggested senior leadership team experiences are plagued by six main characteristics:

1. Bloated Membership: the increased size of the senior leadership teams creates unhealthy outcomes
2. Blind Ambition: manoeuvring, competition and positioning create issues with team dynamics
3. Undiscussable Issues: those issues that need to be discussed for the health of the team but are avoided
4. Centrifugal Forces: the importance of individual roles pulls people away from the work of the senior leadership team
5. Ambiguous Roles: uncertainty about team roles, expectations and the nature of the tasks that need completion
6. Dancing Bears: the acting that occurs, often during meetings, in order to impress the Chief Executive Officer. (Nadler, 2021, pp. 8-12)

In contrast, Bush and Glover (2014) stated that unity was a signature feature of high performing senior leadership teams. In these teams, a shared vision, good personal relationships, and trust were significant features (Eva et al., 2021; Kezar et al., 2019). Additionally, the length of time a senior leadership team had been together was important for the experiences within the team, reinforcing the importance of temporal factors to the development of teamwork (D’Innocenzo, 2021).

Wu et al. (2021), identified that a dynamic environment was essential to positive experiences within teams. A team environment that was dynamic helped lessen the intensity of team lines fractured by interest, age and gender.

Kezar et al. (2019) noted that senior leadership teams in Higher Education were often constrained by under-developed leadership and leadership practices. However, senior leadership teams with well-considered compositions, shared visions and a focus on developing teamwork were more likely to be professionally satisfying, successful and effective.

Barnett and Weidenfeller (2016) offered a different possibility. They stated that at different times in a team's cycle a more vertical style of leadership assists the team to function effectively. Therefore, in relation to leadership in schools, Principals may be drawing on their experiences to choose the right moments to exercise control. This aligns with Giles' (2019) notion of relational sensibilities where leaders draw upon their practical wisdom to attune to the lived experience of the team, in this case, deciding when they need to be resolute.

In most contexts the senior leadership team is led by a Chief Executive Officer or equivalent. In a school setting, the leadership team is led by the Principal. This creates an interesting dynamic in a team. The Principal is both a team player and a team leader. Avenell (2011) highlighted this tension by describing senior leadership teams as the Principal's team. If we accept this suggestion, senior leadership teams in schools might be typified by vertical/functional leadership. If this is the case, what might it mean for experiences of *following* in these senior leadership teams? How do these experiences surface for senior leaders? What might the idea of the Principal's team illuminate about the realities of being in *following*?

The aforementioned views about the experiences of being in senior leadership teams create questions for Independent Schools: What is the nature of being in a senior leadership team? Do senior leadership teams reflect a vertical/functional approach or a horizontal/shared approach to leadership? Alternatively, are there new ways of understanding the character of a senior leadership team? To pursue these questions further, this inquiry restates its position that understandings of the experiences of leading and leadership teams is incomplete without phenomenological meanings of *following*. *Following* is a relative new area of research interest but one that is emerging from the shadows of leading (Davis, 2017; Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Khan et al., 2018; Malakyan, 2014; Martin, 2015). It offers an opportunity to provide fresh perspectives to this study and meanings of being in our organisational lifeworld.

Following

The function of leadership is to engage followers, not merely activate them, to commingle needs and aspirations and goals in a common enterprise, and in the process to make better citizens of both leaders and followers. (Burns, 1978, p. 461)

Following is as important to organisational life as leading. If Burns (1978) is right, its contribution extends beyond organisational boundaries and relates to our way of being human. When combined, leading, *following* and work teams create the organisation milieu that is the everyday experience for all employees (Khan et al., 2018; Jiang et al., 2021; Malaykan, 2014; Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022; Riggio, 2020). As discussed, when teams are viewed as the context of organisational life, arguably the experiences of being in senior leadership teams will always be incomplete without meanings associated with the inextricably linked nature of leading and *following*.

While teams and leading are often present in organisational thinking, research, and the social narrative, *following* has until recently remained relatively hidden (Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022). Therefore, this review shifts its focus to research about *following* as it relates to the experiences of senior leaders in senior leadership teams.

Following—hidden and always present

Historically, *following* is a human response to social contexts. It is often understood in relation to the military, sports, religion, and politics (Cunningham, 2019). As the observation from Burns (1978) suggests, being in *following* is always present in our everydayness whether we recognise it or not (Cox et al., 2010; Rahaman & Read, 2020). Friedman (2003) underscored the historical hiddenness of *following* by representing followers as material things. Using Buber's thinking, Friedman (2003) suggested that our historical conception of *following* was an "I–it" relationship. This relationship reduces followers to objects that are instruments that can be used to obtain our desires, as opposed to an "I–thou" relationship which suggests a relationship built on seeing each other's humanness. Not only have followers and *following* not been seen (hidden) in our lived experiences but until recently *following* has been frequently absent from contemplations about organisational life (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022).

The idea of *following*, followership, and followers, while not completely unrecognised in the literature especially in research relating to leadership, has been relatively hidden in comparison to research about leading, leadership and leaders (Aghaei et al., 2021; Davis, 2017; Khan et al., 2018; Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022; Riggio, 2020; Tsakeni & Jita, 2017). As an example, in a review of *following* in medical research, Leung et al. (2018) identified that for every 60 articles on leading there was 1 article written on *following*.

Kelley (1988) is often credited as being the first researcher to shine a spotlight on *following* through his conceptualisation of *following* as an idea separate from leading. Since the 1950s, research had often noted *following* as a footnote to leading (Aghaei et al., 2021; Crossman & Crossman, 2011;). While always present in experiences in organisations, Kelley's article, *In Praise of Followers*, encouraged researchers to push *following* out of the shadows and on to the stage (Riggio, 2020).

Why this historical hiddenness was so is a matter of conjecture but potentially it is because followers and *following* have continued to be viewed as less important, mediators or recipients of leadership or, at worst, passive and problematic (Crossman & Crossman, 2011; Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Martin, 2015; Matshoba-Rameudzisi et al., 2022; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Malaykan (2015) even suggested that the appeal of leading is the way it resonates mythically with people, thus making it popular for research and thinking and, at the same time, a probable cause for the hiddenness of *following*. Like unfashionable news, *following* often fails to make the paper.

In the last 10 years, however, *following* has emerged as a topic of increasing interest in many fields, including education, medicine and business. Highlighting the emergence of *following* from the research shadows, Riggio (2020) noted that, in the preceding decade, while still lagging substantially behind leading, over 1000 articles, books, and book chapters mentioned *following*. This increased interest in *following* has resulted from a general acceptance that leadership is a relational and social process (D'Innocenzo et al., 2021; McCauley & Palus, 2021; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Much of the contemporary research has highlighted the integral role of *following* to understandings of teams, leading and organisational life. Simply stated, this research emphasises that there is no leading without *following* and no teams without leading and *following* (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2020; Rahaman & Read, 2020; Riggio, 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that an understanding of the experiences of senior leaders in leadership teams in Independent Schools will always be incomplete (or hidden) unless there is a richer understanding of the meanings of *following*.

The phenomenon of following

What is *following*? Shamir (2007) described approaches that started with *following* as reversing the lens in leadership research (Uhl-Bien & Carsten, 2018). As noted above, traditionally the idea of *following* had negative connotations. Followers were defined as subordinates or employees in both research and workplaces (Davis, 2017). The role of the follower was viewed as unfavourable or was forgotten. The leader's role, in comparison, was characterised as being active, effective, and influential (Aghaei et al., 2021; Carsten et al., 2014). Initial attempts at characterising a follower and *following* paralleled similar approaches to describing a leader and leading. They focused on the role or behaviour traits of followers (Einola & Alvesson, 2021). Zaleznik (1965) provided an early example of this approach by categorising followers as combinations of active or passive and dominate or

submissive, while Chaleff (1995), Kelley (1988, 1992) and Kellerman (2007) extended this thinking by creating sets and occasionally sub-sets of follower typologies.

In the last 20 years there has been a shift from focusing on leadership traits and behaviours to an understanding that leadership is co-constructed (Eva et al., 2021). This shift in the understanding of the nature of leadership has also brought into focus questions about *following*. Burak and Bashshur (2013) and Crossman and Crossman (2011) characterised *following* as an active role that facilitated the co-construction of leadership and the achievement of organisational goals. For the purposes of this study, Uhl-Bien et al.'s (2014) description is the most appropriate and aligns best with current thinking about *following*. Followership theory is the “study of the nature and impact of followers and *following*” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 84). The authors also highlight that *following* and followership theory can be understood as two equal parts: role-based theory and constructionist approaches. Role-based theories seek to describe the traits and behaviours of followers in relation to leaders and context while constructionist approaches seek to understand *following* as a dynamic social and relational process that occurs in context (Khan et al., 2018; Matshoba-Rameudzisi et al., 2022; Murji, 2015; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Role-based theories

Role-based theories describe *following* as a function performed by people formally and informally (Khan et al., 2018). These formal and informal functions are often studied in hierarchical structures where, organisationally, there are clearly delineated roles between followers and leaders. Additionally, role-based theories investigate the behaviours, characteristics, and orientations of followers and how they shape leaders' attitudes, behaviours, and outcomes (Davis, 2017; Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022; Murji, 2015; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). In relation to the previous discussion about leading in teams, role-based *following* theories align with vertical/functional leadership understandings.

Follower typologies

As noted by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) and Crossman and Crossman (2011), Abraham Zaleznik provided one of the earliest descriptions of follower typologies in 1965. He placed active and passive at either ends of one axis and dominate and submissive at either end of another axis. Using this construct, followers could fit in one of four quadrants: active–dominate; active–submissive; passive–dominate; passive–submissive. The resulting typology included impulsive subordinates, compulsive subordinates, masochistic subordinates, and withdrawn subordinates. In general, this follower typology characterised people as passive and/or problematic. In contrast, Kelley (1998, 1992) shifted the narrative away from negative connotations of *following* to focus more on an ideal state. According to Kelley, followers could be effective, alienated, conformists, sheep, or survivors. He

advocated for moving followers towards an ideal state where they actively contributed to the success of an organisation's goals, vision, and leadership (Khan et al., 2019). Challeff (1995) built on this work by categorising *following* into four types with corresponding behaviours. According to Challeff (1995), followers could be:

- Partner (supportive and challenging)
- Implementer (supportive but not challenging)
- Individualist (Not supportive but challenging)
- Resource (Not supportive and not challenging)

Both Challeff and Kelley clearly described effective *following* as the key to effective leadership and encouraged the view that effective *following* led to sustainable and worthwhile outcomes.

Kellerman (2007) created a similar set of typologies for *following* but made the distinction that these types did not always have to relate to the leader but were more closely aligned with a goal/value/ideal. She placed, feeling and doing nothing at one end of a continuum. At the other end, she placed, passionate and involved (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022). For Kellerman, engagement was the delineating factor. She described five types of followers who might fit on this continuum: isolate, bystander, participants, activists, and diehards. The isolate was disengaged, the bystander passive, participants go through the motions, activists are supportive of the organisation, and diehards are passionate about a cause.

Sy (2010) mirrored the research on Implicit Leadership Traits when describing Implicit Followership Traits. These are the assumptions held by both leaders and followers that characterise followers. Sy divided these six traits into two categories: negative and positive. Industry, enthusiasm, and good citizenship were perceived as positive traits (Aghaei et al., 2021), while conformity, insubordination and incompetence were negative traits. Sy's research suggested that beliefs about these traits affected the relationship between *following* and leading and as a result affected organisational experiences (Einola & Alvesson, 2021).

Carsten et al.'s (2010, 2014) and Uhl Bien et al.'s (2014) research described how followers viewed their roles. Those orientations which were influenced by context, including leader and leadership, impacted on how followers performed and their level of well-being. As an example, followers who viewed their roles as passive but worked in an organisation whose culture was empowering were likely to feel stressed and be seen in a negative light by leaders (Bastardo & Van Vugt, 2019).

In summary, role-based theories have followed similar lines to traditional leadership theories by describing the traits, behaviours, and orientations of followers. However, instead of the view that leaders are agents of influence, followers are viewed as causal agents. Later variations of these theories have also included considerations of context, relationships and informal or formal *following* (Khan et al., 2019)

Constructionist views

Constructionist theories describe how people engage with each other, socially and relationally, to co-create leading and *following* (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Jiang et al., 2021; McCauley & Palus, 2021; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). These theories are concerned with the reciprocal processes that occur within an organisational context. They align conceptually with leadership theories such as relational, servant, distributed, shared and authentic leadership. In contrast to role-based theories, they view leading and *following* as interchangeable processes. A person may lead or follow depending on contextual factors. DeRue and Ashford (2010) described this process as granting and claiming. One person may claim leadership but equally another person must grant them followership. Through this process of granting and claiming during interactions, identities of leaders and followers are constructed (Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Sidani & Rowe, 2018). These roles are not fixed but determined by the context in which they are created (Haslam et al., 2022). If there is a mismatch between granting and claiming, leading, and *following* will not be created.

Shamir (2014, 2012) described this co-created process as a leader–member exchange. Through relational exchanges, leaders and members co-construct leading and *following* (Wu et al., 2021). This approach views leaders and followers as equally important in the creation of leadership. It encourages researchers to view both sides of the coin to gain a greater understanding of the leadership process.

Carston and Uhl-Bien (2014) and Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) described a relational approach to leading and *following* which was apparent in the discourse between leaders and followers (McCauley & Palus, 2021). Their research portrayed followers as actors who worked together with leaders to construct organisational outcomes, knowledge, and understandings. This relational view, while not strictly from a followership perspective, elevated the role of follower to co-constructor rather than mediator or recipient (Carston & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Jiang et al., 2021; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Alvesson and Blom (2015) challenged the assumption that followers found the co-construction of a leadership–followership relationship to be positive (Alvesson & Einola, 2019). When we assume the role of follower, they argued, we lose both our own identity and our autonomy in this relationship (Haslam et al., 2022). This potentially results in a perception that *following* is something less desirable. As a result, people may be less interested in engaging in leading–*following* relationships.

Additionally, Alvesson and Einola (2019) and Einola and Alvesson (2021) argued that overly positive interpretations of leading and *following* fail to capture reality. Accordingly, leading and *following* research should explore rather than ignore experiences of power, hierarchy, and dysfunctional relational dynamics. Furthermore, simplistic understandings of leading and *following* that suggest a cause-and-effect relationship (good leading creates good *following*) should be questioned (Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Sidani & Rowe, 2018).

Finally, Ford and Harding (2018) and Kempster et al. (2021) drew attention to issues with the axiomatic assumptions of the leader–follower relationship. Arguably, for leaders to exist, another group must identify as followers. However, according to Kempster et al., staff do not typically identify as followers and often reject the follower identity. Thus, if no one identifies as a follower how can there be leaders? Furthermore, if the leader–follower identity is fundamentally flawed, this brings into question research that focuses on leader–follower attributes, skills and behaviours. While Kempster et al. questioned whether followership research should be continued, Ford and Harding argued that this highlights the need for research to focus on how *following* and leading emerge as socially embedded practices within organisations (Ford & Harding, 2018; Kempster et al., 2021).

The literature has shown that there has been an increased focus on *following* over the past twenty years (Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022). It is now recognised that an understanding of *following* is essential for a complete understanding of experiences in organisational life. Initial descriptions in the literature on *following* related directly to leaders. This hierarchical perspective focused research on the traits, behaviours, and orientations of followers. More recent literature has placed *following* at the heart of the leadership process. These theories align with a constructionist philosophy and represent leadership and followership as being a dynamic process. This review was unable to find any studies that explored the experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams using phenomenological inquiry. This creates an opportunity to contemplate new meanings that relate to the experiences of senior leaders in Independent Schools in Australia.

Concluding Comments

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore ontological meanings of *following* in senior leadership teams in Independent Schools. As discussed above, research relating to teams, leading and senior leadership teams is relevant to further phenomenological meanings about *following*.

This chapter has presented a view that teams (teamwork), leading and *following* are inextricably linked, always matter, and manifest in the intentional relationships of organisational life. Teams and *following* are often taken for granted as we take care of the busy-ness of being in our organisational life. *Following*, especially, has been hidden in formal and informal narratives that disclose meanings

of leaders' lifeworlds. Leading, on the other hand, has often been placed on a pedestal and institutionalised as the main concern for academics and practitioners.

Teams are inescapable in our lifeworlds. This is especially true of organisational life. Even though they may be difficult to clearly define, the literature shows that teams matter (Kezar et al., 2019). They facilitate the achievement of organisational goals and aspirations. Beyond this outcomes-based focus, they are the context that makes our feelings, behaviours, learning and failures comprehensible. This is true of school environments, where teams are constructed to meet organisational and stakeholder needs. This ubiquitous context is also the space where the phenomenon of *following* is felt and understood.

The literature on teams highlights the need to understand how senior leadership teams can function effectively and also draws attention to the requirement to understand the influence of context, including social, political, relational, affective and temporal factors. The interplay between leading and *following* and these contextual factors unveils meanings that are vital for senior leaders. The literature also describes a team of leaders rather than a leadership team. Even in studies that provide a positive picture, the nature of leadership appears less dynamic than may have been expected. What might this mean for experiences of *following* in these teams? There is, unfortunately, a limited amount of research about experiences in senior leadership teams, especially in school settings. This gap in the literature creates opportunities.

Of particular interest to this study is the lived experiences in school leadership teams. Due to their experiences, capabilities, knowledge and resources, senior leadership teams have the capacity to create sustainable learning environments for students and teachers (Abbott & Bush, 2013; Weiler & Hinnant-Crawford, 2021). Therefore, developing greater understandings of their character is important for schools. Exploring the phenomenon of *following* in these senior leadership teams creates possibilities to address this worthwhile focus.

The literature investigating *following* provides an opportunity to consider the nature of senior leadership teams from a new perspective. Research relating to *following* is relatively new and only a few studies have sought to understand it in school settings. Arguably, a majority of the research still has a very leader-centric view. Even studies that highlight the value of *following* for understanding organisational life, relate this value to furthering understandings about leading in organisations (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022). Malakyan (2014, 2015) has argued strongly that this approach continues to shackle our understanding of the rich partnership that occurs between people in teams.

Finally, there is a lack of research representing different paradigms and methodological perspectives, despite numerous articles stating that these were important directions for future research. Much of the literature about teams, leading and *following* is found in business and psychology journals. The

methodologies chosen are often quantitative and philosophically aligned with an objectivist epistemology using a positivist perspective (Eva et al., 2021; Holmes & Gary, 2020; Kezar et al., 2019; Scotland, 2012). Many contemporary authors have recognised the limitations of this approach and suggested that future research needs to utilise different philosophical and methodological approaches that uncover new and subtle meanings. Ontology, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology, offers the opportunity to meet this need.

Therefore, in Chapters 3 and 4, this inquiry discusses the philosophical and methodological foundations, and methods of hermeneutic phenomenology. This approach is grounded in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1996) and aligned methodologically with practitioners including Friesen et al. (2012), Quay (2020), Vagle (2014, 2018) and van Manen (1990, 2014).

Chapter 3: Philosophical and Methodological Foundations

Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the importance of teams, teamwork and leading as pathways for revealing further meanings about *following* in senior leadership teams. The related literature also articulated the need to deepen understandings through the adoption of a wider variety of research methodologies. This chapter, therefore, seeks to show how a move towards phenomenological philosophy provides possibilities for new perspectives which utilise an underrepresented research methodology in educational leadership studies, namely phenomenology (Adame et al., 2021). To distinguish “being” —a human being’s mode of existence—from “being” the noun, the literature often hyphenates being (be-ing). This is the ontological difference between beings and our being (the experience of experiences) (Quay, 2016). However, “being” is not hyphenated in this inquiry because this researcher maintains that readers can discern the difference between a verb and a noun.

It is not the intention of this chapter to discuss every aspect of phenomenology. It is a complex philosophy with many interlocking ideas. This researcher acknowledges that greater emphasis could have been placed on different philosophical positions, ideas, or methodologies. However, a counter-position taken by this inquiry is that phenomenology is not a fixed process with fixed rules and expectations but a field of inquiry with interwoven understandings (van Manen, 1990, 2014). The role of the researcher in applying phenomenology is to uncover new perspectives that are meaningful to our being-in-the-world. This inquiry also takes the position that the aim of phenomenology is not to have the final word but to open up new ways of contemplating the phenomenon of concern.

Phenomenologically informed qualitative research has different aims than phenomenological philosophy, but it is questionable whether the former can qualify as phenomenological if it either ignores or misinterprets the latter. Anybody who claims to be endorsing a phenomenological method, procedure, or approach should have some familiarity with phenomenological theory. (...) When applying phenomenology, we shouldn’t ‘hyper-philosophize’. (Zahavi & Martiny, 2019, p. 17)

This statement from Zahavi and Martiny (2019) aligns with the approach taken in this inquiry. Therefore, the ensuing discussion explicates the balance of the philosophy of phenomenology with

its application to research for the purpose of disclosing new ways of understanding *following* in senior leadership teams. Specifically, what follows is a description of key philosophical foundations of applied hermeneutic phenomenology. This involves highlighting key philosophical tenets which resonate best with the phenomenon of concern, *following*, and relating these to the application of phenomenology. This approach is intent on not hyper-philosophising but showing how the philosophy has guided appropriate methodological choices.

A philosophy and a methodology

Phenomenology can be understood as both a philosophy and a methodology. At each stage in phenomenological research, this entwining of methodology and philosophy helps guide decisions and create meaning (Sloan & Bowe, 2013; van Manen, 1990, 2017a). This entwining can cause considerable challenges for phenomenological researchers. Husserl (1999, 2001), Heidegger (1968, 1972, 1995, 1996, 2014), Gadamer (1976, 2004), Merleau-Ponty (2012), Sartre (1966), de Beauvoir (1962) and Arendt (1973) were philosophers, first and foremost. The focus of their thinking was not explicitly on methodology; however, their philosophical thinking has been used in Health, Psychology, Education, and the Sciences to suggest or guide the researcher's methodology (Frechette & Carnevale, 2019; Neubauer et al., 2019; Rietmeijer & Veen, 2021).

van Manen attested that phenomenology is a philosophical approach with no fixed methodology (van Manen, 2017b). However, as Zahavi (2019a, 2020) pointed out, the idea of no fixed methodology shouldn't suggest that the nature of phenomenology is without bounds. Philosophically important and of concern for methodology, phenomenology is not identical to other qualitative approaches that use first-hand experiences and mention phenomena (Grant, 2019; Zahavi, 2019b):

When thinkers like Husserl, Scheler, Sartre, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty engaged in phenomenological philosophizing, they most definitely were not simply seeking to offer fine-grained descriptions of the qualitative character of different experiences; they were not simply seeking to attend to hitherto unreflected and unnoticed aspects and details of lived experience. (Zahavi, 2019b, p. 6)

In adopting phenomenological research it is important to recognise that each phenomenological inquiry needs to find its own pathway in relation to a philosophical position and the phenomenon of concern. This pathway must also be consistent with phenomenology as a philosophy. The second challenge for the researcher is the number of branches that spring from the bough of the

phenomenological tree: there are almost as many different interpretations of phenomenology as there are philosophers (Dowling, 2007).

Accordingly, situating the research in a particular philosophy is both challenging and requires a rich understanding of phenomenology and its branches. Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020), Vagle (2018), Zahavi (2020) and van Manen (1990, 2014) all highlight the importance of first comprehending the philosophy that underpins a particular methodological approach. Their claim is that this approach guides the hand of the researcher when selecting methodology and choosing methods.

The fluidity and the growth of phenomenology as a philosophy and methodology has created fertile ground for thinking and practice. This has allowed both philosophers and researchers the freedom to experiment with, to embellish, and to intertwine other ideas (Fernandez, 2016; Zahavi & Martiny, 2019). Certainly, van Manen (2014), Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020), Giorgi (2010), Smith et al. (2009) and Vagle (2018) have all suggested specific methodological approaches for phenomenology. This open, creative and intuitive approach is the essence of phenomenology, i.e. no set of prescribed rules about how things must be done (Vagle, 2018).

Complicating matters further for phenomenological researchers, there is contention about the rigour and trustworthiness of various approaches. As examples, van Manen (2017b) suggested that Smith's Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is not really phenomenology at all. Zahavi (2019b) contended that both Smith and van Manen had been "getting it quite wrong" (pp. 1-3), while, according to Sohn (2017), Paley's book, *"Phenomenology as Qualitative Research"*, states that van Manen's interpretative phenomenology is self-serving, ambiguous and not really a reflection of a phenomenology at all. It follows that making appropriate choices about philosophical ideas and methodologies is problematic.

The difficulty of a philosophy that is a methodology which has no set approach is the potential vacuum of contestability that is created. This vacuum has arisen for two main reasons. Firstly, there is a perception that a clear dichotomy exists between phenomenological philosophies, most notably Husserl and Heidegger. Highlighting this point, Ricoeur (1987) observed that Husserl's legacy is characterised by phenomenological heresies (Davidson, 2013; Zahavi, 2020). Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2019), Vagle (2018) and Zahavi and Martiny (2019) have all suggested this distinction is unhelpful and potentially inaccurate.

As highlighted above, finding a phenomenological pathway that speaks to the researcher and allows the unique ontological thumbprint of the phenomenon of concern to emerge is challenging (Vagle, 2018). While my philosophical interests resonate with the philosophy of Heidegger (1968, 1972, 1995, 1996, 2014), Gadamer (1976, 2004) and Sartre (1966), the reduction of complexity offered by

Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2019, 2020), the pedagogical practicality of van Manen (1990, 2014) and the spirit of experimentation encouraged by Vagle (2018) align with my philosophical and personal positions as well.

Dahlberg and Dahlberg's (2019) discussion of a third approach to phenomenology, relates to the intellectual life created by not separating phenomenology down traditional lines: descriptive versus interpretative or Husserlian versus Heideggerian. Instead of two opposing positions, the third approach encourages the researcher and the research to remain open to possibilities that can enlighten the phenomenon under consideration. An approach imbued with this spirit of openness maintains the essence of phenomenology without the potentially prohibitive structure of adhering to a particular philosophy or method. This open and reflective approach is essential to many applications of phenomenology.

While it is possible to commit to a particular methodology, it is also appropriate to infuse parts to create a unique approach. Vagle (2018) warned that doing so requires a thorough understanding of both the selected parts and their relationship to the whole phenomenon or philosophy.

Alternatively, van Manen's pedagogical phenomenology emphasises the importance of actively doing phenomenology through a commitment to interpreting phenomena as they are lived; this involves the uncovering of essential meanings through attentive thoughtfulness that makes intelligible what it means to be human (Vagle, 2018, van Manen, 1990, 2008, 2014). A methodology that leans on van Manen's work keeps these commitments central.

Common to Vagle's (2018), van Manen's (1990, 2014), Finlay's (2012) and Dahlberg and Dahlberg's (2019, 2020) approaches is an open and reflective attitude that grounds research in the essences of phenomenology. Finlay (2012), in particular, highlighted this position through an exploration of "What counts as Phenomenology?" (p. 17), stating that regardless of philosophical position, researchers should be clear about what philosophy aligns with their methodological choices and how it relates to the phenomenon of interest. Finlay contended that research that fails to align to a particular phenomenological position with appropriate methodological choices appears "both naïve and confused" (Finlay, 2012, p. 19).

This inquiry has contemplated these philosophical and methodological considerations within the research. Given the complexity of phenomenology and a desire to avoid a vacuum of methodological contestability, this chapter turns first to grounding phenomenological thinking in its historical context before exploring key philosophical thinking that has helped guide the consideration of the phenomenon of concern: *following*.

Through this study, hermeneutic phenomenology, imbued especially with the philosophical thinking of Heidegger (1968, 1972, 1995, 1996, 2014) and Gadamer (1976, 2004), emerges as the preferred approach that informs further methodological considerations. van Manen's, Vagle's, and Dahlberg and Dahlberg's approaches to phenomenology have also guided methodology. The subsequent contemplation of these philosophical foundations and key ideas, explicates the robustness of the research approach by making intelligible the embeddedness of the philosophical position in the methodological process (Giles, 2008).

Furthermore, to provide greater clarity about the ensuing philosophical discussion and the phenomenological methodology, the phenomenological commitments of this inquiry are articulated here. In general, these commitments are captured by Grant (2019) as follows: "They deal with the relationships of humans to their worlds; they move towards fundamental explanations; and they attempt to reveal taken-for-granted underlying presuppositions. These are the fundamental tenets of phenomenology" (p. 28).

Furthermore, utilising the thinking of the Vagle (2018), van Manen (2014) and Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020), this inquiry makes further commitments to the ensuing methodological choices. These choices include the following:

- Opening the researcher up to experiences of the phenomenon of concern through thoughtfulness.
- Turning towards experiences as they are lived rather than articulated in theory.
- Gathering contextualised stories of the lived-experiences using an open, reflexive and flexible approach.
- Considering interpretation as the approach that reveals the essential essence of the phenomenon through and with language.
- Crafting interpretative stories that capture tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts.
- Disclosing new perspectives of meanings relating the being of beings in *following*.

Phenomenological foundations

It is impossible for anything not to be. — Parmenides(n.d.)

Phenomenology, as a philosophy, has roots stretching back to the pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle. However, the essence of what is now considered phenomenology was originally described by Husserl (1859–1938) and later extended by Heidegger (1968, 1972, 1995, 1996, 2014), Gadamer (1976, 2004), Sartre (1966), Levinas et al. (1996), Merleau-Ponty (2012) and many others (Dowling, 2007; Sloan & Bowe, 2013; Tuohy et al., 2013; Vagle, 2018; Zahavi, 2008). Building upon Husserl's

(1999, 2001) thinking, Heidegger (1996) and later Gadamer (2004) infused hermeneutics with phenomenological philosophy to create what is often described in the literature as hermeneutic phenomenology (Grant, 2019).

What is hermeneutic phenomenology? In pondering this question, it is important to understand what is meant by the term phenomenology and how Heidegger (1996) and Gadamer (2004) extended the original thinking of Husserl (1999, 2001).

Parmenides (c.515/540 B.C.E.), sometimes described as the father of ontology, provided a pathway for considering the philosophical foundations of modern phenomenology. For Parmenides, meaning and being were inextricably linked (Parmenides, n.d.). This idea is also a foundational ontological consideration for phenomenologists. While its roots stretch back to early philosophical thinking about being, phenomenology as it is currently understood developed in the early 20th century. While there are many definitions, in simple terms, phenomenology, especially hermeneutic phenomenology, is the study of the meanings of phenomena from the perspective of the beings who have experienced them (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020; Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018).

Experience in this context refers to something that we live through, rather than a bank of knowledge. Phenomenologists are therefore interested in “how human beings find themselves being in relation to the world” (Vagle, 2014, p. 1). The idea of finding ourselves in relation to people, ideas or objects is, therefore, fundamental to phenomenological philosophy and methodology.

Husserl – The beginnings

If Parmenides (c.515/540 B.C.E.) is arguably the founding father of ontological thinking, then Husserl (1970, 1999, 2001, 2013) is the founder of phenomenology (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019; Grant, 2019; Jacobs, 2018; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2016; Zahavi, 2008). Husserl’s aspiration was to radically shake the scientific ground on which much western philosophical thinking stood. “Logical Investigations” (1970) originally published in 1900, announced the idea of phenomenology but it was not until “Ideas 1”, published in 1913, that Husserl’s conception fully emerged (Grant, 2019).

Husserl’s (1970, 1999, 2001, 2013) interpretation of phenomenology can be viewed as a direct condemnation of the pervasive scientific, positivist philosophy which drove thinking about natural and human science at the time. He believed that this prevailing approach reduced the understanding of the world (Husserl, 1999; Jacobs, 2018; Vagle, 2018). Additionally, Husserl thought that this thinking was flawed, especially its application to human science.

He believed that our understanding of the world comes before any scientific reduction, articulation and theory of that world. Thus, Husserl (2001) posited that logical principles could not be reduced to psychological regularities (Zahavi, 2019a, 2019b). We could not treat moments in the same way that we treated things.

Furthermore, all scientific knowledge was grounded in this same first-person experience of the world. Therefore, if we want to fully understand the world, especially the world of humans, more was required than scientific rationalism. Husserl called for a return “to the things themselves” (Husserl, 2001, p. 168; van Manen, 2014, p. 50; Zahavi, 2020, p. 3). This was a challenge to move beyond what he saw as the pervasive scientific, objectivist perception of the world and move towards investigating the “things themselves”, our experiences as they are experienced pre-reflectively, in which the scientific approach is merely a theoretical elucidation (Grant, 2019; Jacobs, 2018; Vagle, 2018; Zahavi, 2008). This move towards the things themselves is fundamental to the method of phenomenology.

Our experiences manifest intentionally

For Husserl (2001, 2013), our experience, our consciousness of things, determined the objectivity so valued by the pervasive scientific way of viewing the world (Vagle, 2018). Our consciousness classifies, rationalises, and orders the world of objects and phenomena; without this activity, our world would be unintelligible to us. What this articulates is that subjectivity and objective knowledge are thoroughly intermeshed. To understand the reality of a phenomenon is to understand the phenomenon as it is lived (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020; Moran, 2002; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2016).

For a phenomenologist, the world is not experienced by disembodied subjects (people) bringing meaning to objects, people, and ideas they encounter. Therefore, for Husserl (1970, 2001) and the other phenomenologists who followed, human beings are not separate from the world but are born from or into (indeed thrown into) the world, live in the world and are moving through the world. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty (2012) described phenomenology as “a philosophy for which the world is always ‘already there’ prior to reflection . . . and whose entire effort is to rediscover this naïve contact with the world in order to finally raise it to a philosophical status” (p. lxx).

To base understandings of the world in the reality of our consciousness of that world was foundational for Husserl. Husserl (2001) believed that phenomena were constructed in our consciousness and were made intelligible by living in the world (Husserl, 2001). He illustrated this understanding by noting that our consciousness was always of the world and therefore directed at or about something. The phenomena of this world appear to us as we live. They do not exist inside

of us (Vagle, 2018). Thus, meaning is not disclosed by turning inwards—consciousness doesn't exist within us, it exists beyond us and with us and through us.

This is an important point for phenomenological researchers. It points towards an understanding of the world that is not objective or subjective. The world is co-constituted or intersubjective. Meaning is given through our very embeddedness in the world (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2016). This shift from a third-person, objectivist view of the world was more than a move towards first-person experiences (subjective view). As Dahlberg and Dahlberg stated:

Human experience is born from the world, directed to the world, and must be understood with the world as a background. In speaking of co-constitution, Husserl explains that experience neither springs from the subject as a single creator nor does it arise out of an objective world. It results from a subjective involvement in a world that is already meaningful. (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019, p. 3)

Thus, the phenomenological researcher uncovers understandings of the phenomenon as they are experienced prior to any reflection. These phenomena exist in the lifeworld of all human beings.

Lifeworld was a term coined by Husserl (1970, 2013) to describe this phenomenological space but also to separate it from the scientific world (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014). To discover a phenomenon in this lifeworld, therefore, one must peel back the layers to describe the relational intentions that manifest and emerge (Vagle, 2018). Phenomenologists use the term *intentionality* to indicate the inseparable connectedness of humans with the phenomena that exist in their lifeworlds (Vagle, 2018). Merleau-Ponty (2012) portrayed this as an invisible thread that meaningfully bonds humans to their world whether they are aware of that joining or not (van Manen, 2014).

To peel this onion and discover intentional manifestations of phenomena, researchers cannot fall back into their natural attitude (Husserl, 2001). Historically, this natural taken-for-granted attitude was the scientific-objectivist view of the world. Thus, in explaining that our consciousness was of the world, a world of objects and phenomena, a world of experiences as we lived them, Husserl (2001) was suggesting that we could not rely on our normal way of doing things. We had to develop a different attitude to understanding the lifeworld—the world as it is lived (Zahavi & Martiny, 2019).

Since Husserl (2001) first posited the idea of intentionality, it has morphed, grown and been embellished. Heidegger (1968, 1972, 1995, 1996), Gadamer (2004), Sartre (1966), Levinas et al. (1996), van Manen (1990), Giorgi (2010), and Dahlberg et al. (2008) are but a few of the practitioners and philosophers who have furthered a rich tapestry of intentional meanings.

Salient ideas

Husserl's (2001) phenomenology championed a fundamental shift in how the world was made intelligible to us. The return to the things themselves (Zahavi, 2019a, 2019b) re-directed understandings back to phenomena and how they emerged through our experiences. Husserl's philosophy was a propeller for phenomenological philosophers like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. Husserl's (1970, 1999, 2001, 2013) fundamental philosophy also informed phenomenological methodologies (van Manen, 2014). While it is not the intent of this inquiry to fully examine his work, the following interconnected ideas are important foundations for both the philosophy and methodology of this study.

Lifeworld: Lifeworld signifies the world of lived experiences. The lifeworld is, therefore, where our living and experiencing of phenomena take place. It is this lifeworld that interests the phenomenological researcher because this is where meanings of the phenomena are disclosed.

The phenomenological attitude: In order to truly discover the essential meanings of a phenomenon in this lifeworld, it is important not to fall into our natural, scientific attitude. An open and reflexive attitude is the pathway to understanding phenomena. This open and reflexive attitude should turn towards the way in which phenomena are given to us in experience. This attitude underpins all phenomenological inquiries.

Co-constituted: Pondering phenomena in our lifeworld with an open and reflexive attitude is more than moving from third to first person perspectives or object–subject orientations. The meanings in the lifeworld are co-constituted through intersubjectivity. An intersubjective understanding allows researchers to view phenomena from a different vantage point. This perspective reveals the different modes of givenness and allows reflective investigation of those substantial meanings that allow different types of being to manifest as they are.

Intentionality: The co-constituted lifeworld is made meaningful by the interconnectedness between humans and all objects (animate, inanimate, and ideas). This understanding encourages researchers to uncover the taken-for-granted threads that people in their everydayness bring into being. Thus, phenomenological research recognises that philosophical foundations of phenomenology lead us away from a study of the interiority of humans and towards considering how intentionality manifests meaningfully in lifeworlds.

Heidegger: Hermeneutics and the being of beings

As stated by Vagle (2018), Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020), Grant (2019) and Zahavi (2019a) the actual distinction between Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology may be more grey than black and

white. Rather than delving into the different points of view that exist in the literature, for the purposes of this inquiry, Heidegger's work, exemplified by "*Being and Time*" (1996), is viewed as an extension of Husserl's philosophy rather than a fundamental shift in philosophical foundations. Similarly, it can be argued that Husserl's (2001) thinking was an extension of Brentano's, Kant's and Hegel's ideas (Dowling, 2007). Heidegger's (1996) extensions challenged, reworked, and contributed to new ways of understanding reality but, like the thinking of Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Levinas, and Derrida, it still maintained an orientation towards Husserl's philosophical foundations (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019, 2020; Jacobs; 2018; Zahavi, 2019a, 2020). However, to clearly show that this inquiry is grounded in hermeneutic philosophy and methodology, this chapter now moves beyond Husserl and considers Heidegger's philosophy and its role in understanding hermeneutic phenomenological methodology.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology: A move away and a move towards

How might Heidegger's (1968, 1972, 1995, 1996, 2014) philosophy be understood in relation to this inquiry? Historically, Heidegger was both a student and colleague of Husserl at the University of Freiburg from 1909–1923 (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). His move away from Husserl was a move towards an exploration of the essential nature of being (Neubauer et al., 2019; Quay et al., 2020). This movement away from Husserl was spurred by Heidegger's feeling that the question of the being of consciousness or being-in-the-world was insufficiently addressed by Husserlian phenomenology (Jacobs, 2018). He proposed a new analytic for responding: *Dasein* (discussed in the following section), which is understood as his fundamental ontology. Heidegger (1996) depicted this fundamental ontology as one of interpretation of experience and discernment of being.

Heidegger illustrated how fundamental interpretation is to both hermeneutic philosophy and methodology:

"The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation," says Heidegger (1996, p. 37). Interpretation is not an additional procedure: It constitutes an inevitable and basic structure of our "being-in-the-world." We experience a thing as something that has already been interpreted. (Finlay, 2012, p. 22)

Therefore, Heidegger's (1996) use of interpretation as method was aimed at disclosing our primordial ways of being—not as a final product but as a part of a movement towards understanding the phenomenon of concern. For Heidegger, we are embedded in our lifeworlds; we cannot rid ourselves of their embrace. Hermeneutic phenomenological researchers, therefore, explore the layers of experience that are hidden beneath our superficial awareness to enlighten our

understanding of being (Neubauer et al., 2019). For Heidegger (1996) the pathway to disclosing the taken-for-granted meanings of being was through his analytic of Dasein.

In summary, Heidegger's phenomenology was not based on consciousness. This was the focus of Husserl (2001). While Heidegger aligned with Husserl's view that the world cannot be unveiled through scientific explanations, his view was that analysis of consciousness does not lead to this end. Instead, Heidegger (1996) proposed that the pathway to our pre-reflective world can only be understood through being. His ontological method to access being was through the analysis of Dasein (Grant, 2019; Jacobs, 2018; Quay, 2013, 2016).

Dasein: The being of beings

What did Heidegger (1996) mean when using the term, Dasein? Dasein, while etymologically German, is Heideggerian in its interpretation. " 'Dasein'" means the self as the there (Da) of being (Sein), the place where an understanding of being erupts into being" (Davis, 2014, p. 44). Interpreted in this way, Heidegger's analytic of Dasein becomes the very mode of human existence in the world: the being of beings.

In this conception of Dasein, there are clear echoes of Kierkegaard's elucidation of self; for Kierkegaard, "the self is defined by concrete expressions through which one manifests oneself in the world and thereby constitutes one's identity over time" (Varga & Guignon, 2020, Conception of Authenticity section, para. 1). Concrete expressions or experiences of Dasein that manifest in the lifeworld are important philosophical and methodological considerations for phenomenological research.

In Heidegger's (1996) explication of Dasein there is an ambition to make interpretation central in uncovering our being. In order to achieve this fundamental shift in understanding, Heidegger employed the hermeneutic method. The word hermeneutic is thought to be derived from the Greek, *hermeneuein*, which means to interpret (Farrell, 2020). Hermeneutics is often aligned with the interpretation of religious texts. When hermeneutics is conceived of in this way, understanding is the result of interpretation: I interpret parts of the Bible to understand more about God's word. However, Heidegger's (1996) hermeneutics had a different aspiration. Our being-in-the-world is understanding that presupposes interpretation. When viewed in this way our interpretations are only possible because I already understand intuitively my own being and my own possibilities (Farrell, 2020; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Martinkova & Parry, 2016; Quay, 2016).

Consider the example of finding a crab on the beach when you turn over a rock. What makes this experience intelligible? For hermeneutic phenomenological researchers, the response is all the possible meanings and associated experiences that I already understand. My initial reaction to

finding the crab might be shock or excitement but if I stop and reflect, I understand that many experiences have contributed to this moment. In reality, it is not shocking to find a crab on the beach under a rock. I had understood this was a possibility even before I turned over the rock. The crab was hidden from my view but, in some sense, I knew that a crab could be there, and if not this rock then very likely the next. And even if a crab wasn't there, I would acknowledge that it may have been there before or will be there at some point in the future. My interpretation of this experience comes from my pre-understandings. Without the beach, myself, the crabs and my understandings, the experience is unintelligible.

Regarding my existence, this means that I always already understand, perhaps partially or even mistakenly, my own situation in my own context. If we consider this in light of the phenomenon of *following*, and methodologically in choices appropriate to disclosing new meanings, senior leaders already know and understand being in *following* in the leadership team. Even though *following* might be taken for granted and hidden from their everyday understandings, like the crab it always already exists in their lifeworld. The role of the researcher is to peel back the layers of these pre-reflective understandings so that essence of the phenomenon of concern is brought forth through interpretation.

Situating the phenomenon in the lifeworld of Dasein is important for researchers (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020). Here, we can see hermeneutic phenomenology building upon the Husserlian tradition. The lifeworld and associated meanings do not refer to the world at large. It should be understood as the world of Dasein, in the same way we talk about the world of the musician or the football world for footballers. Those phenomena that are of concern to Dasein show up in his/her world. Therefore, this being's specific context is the starting point for experiencing the phenomena that are meaningful to us. As an example, I am a leader in a school and therefore the phenomenon of *following* is meaningful in my organisational lifeworld.

In this lifeworld and in research, people often begin by experiencing the phenomenon of concern as a thing. I can understand experiencing a walk on the crab's beach as a thing: sand, surf, the tide, animal life, and the mechanics of walking. In the preceding chapter, we saw how *following* was presented as a thing experience, broken down into its concrete attributes. As an individual I can always understand my own situation concretely. Heidegger (1996) described this as factual or ontic Dasein (Martinkova & Parry, 2016). Ontological Dasein, however, understands the experience of the beach as a whole. This is environmental experiencing (Quay, 2016). The experience of a beach is situated in a world that is meaningful to me and my understanding is directed towards, percolates and emerges from this world, before any reflection or interpretation. People experience this world as a whole, pre-reflectively, and it is where sense is made (Quay, 2016).

For researchers, an open and reflexive attitude to interpreting the manifestations of these pre-reflective understandings is necessary to avoid falling back into thing-experiencing. To get to the essence of a phenomenon, in environmental experiencing, the phenomenological researcher needs to peel back the layers of ontological Dasein. Even though Dasein experiences only what is in his/her lifeworld, researchers are chasing broader meanings of the being of beings: those foundational structures of existence that are essential for all being. Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiries, therefore, are interested in essential qualities of existence that speak to the average everyday way of being-in-the-world. For Heidegger (1996), it was in this essential averageness that the being of beings is disclosed (van Manen, 1990, 2016).

As previously stated, Heidegger's phenomenological aspiration was to reveal essential essences of being. In creating the analytic of Dasein, Heidegger (1995, 1996) proposed essential structures for Dasein's being-in-the-world. For the researcher, these Heideggerian essential structures encourage further contemplation of being as it is experienced in the lifeworld of participants (Martinkova & Parry, 2018). Even though the essential structures are an interwoven whole, Heidegger (1995, 1996) described particular modes of these essential structures to show how they appear in our everyday lives. The foci for phenomenological researchers are these modes of being (Køster & Fernandez, 2021). As examples, Heidegger used boredom (1995), anxiety (1996), and joy (1996) to depict modes of being that relate to the essential structure of mood. In Nursing studies, examples of caring and support can be considered as modes of Heideggerian Care (Frechette & Carnevale, 2019; Zahavi & Martiny, 2019).

For this inquiry, the hermeneutic method focuses on the ways of being in *following*: a mode of being in organisational lifeworlds. This mode, arguably, is intermeshed with fundamental structures of being (existentialia) including, being-in-the-world with others, mood, authenticity, and care (solicitude) (Køster & Fernandez, 2021). These Heideggerian existentialia, therefore, are relevant, philosophically and methodologically, to this inquiry.

Being in Authenticity—Heidegger, Sartre, Gadamer and de Beauvoir

In a philosophical sense, the word authenticity is often associated with Heidegger (1996), especially with his discussions in *“Being and Time”* (Anowai & Chukwujekwu, 2019; Varga & Guignon, 2020). Heidegger's (1996) work on authenticity was a philosophical summons towards revealing what was hidden within everyday life. His philosophy sought to remind us that the choice of being in authenticity was a correction to falling into our natural attitude, which he saw as relating to a lived superficiality. For Heidegger, ignoring this summons, being inauthentic, meant becoming one of the

herd, reducing our humanness and understanding of our possibilities (Regan, 2012). What might this mean for *following* authentically?

Before discussing Heidegger in greater detail, it is important to make a distinction between Heidegger's phenomenological authenticity (1996) and what might be described as a classical view of authenticity. Heidegger's authenticity does relate to the idea of being true to oneself but not in the sense that this relates to an introspection of pre-given inner feelings. Phenomenological authenticity alludes to the on-going composition of one's auto-biographical life, a storytelling that relates to our way of being-in-the-world over the journey of our life. Being in authenticity acts as a conduit for feelings, values, and desires as we connect wholly with our own self (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; McManus, 2019; Varga & Guignon, 2020; Wheeler, 2020).

Heidegger (1996) used the German word *eigentlichkeit* to refer to authenticity. The literal translation, however, is closer to ownness or ownedness, which means being one's own. This suggests that when we are being authentic, we are owning what we are and do (McManus, 2019). Varga and Guignon (2020, section 3.1) described this primary way of being in the world as our undisputedly original self (what one is) in true authorship (what one does). It is important to this inquiry and subsequent discussions about authenticity to acknowledge that while these two ideas (what one is and what one does) are separated at this point for understanding, in our everyday experiences they are inextricably intertwined. As a senior leader is busy doing, he/she is creating what one is and at the same time the doing is always in relation to what one is.

Heidegger's thinking clarifies this intertwined authenticity—the duality of what one is and what one does. Heidegger suggested that we are a being who is being in relation to what one is (evolved from our past) and what one will become through what one does (Heidegger, 1996; McManus, 2019). Thus, being in relation means that every day, as we navigate living, we are caring about who we are and what we will become (Heidegger, 1996; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016).

Heidegger (1996) presented three modes of being in authenticity: authentic, average(ness) and inauthentic (Blattner, 2007; Heidegger, 1996; McManus, 2019). All three modes are of interest to authenticity in *following*. Drawing on the idea of ownedness, it is possible to understand authenticity in *following* as: authentic *following* that is owned; inauthentic that is disowned; and average everyday authenticity that is unowned. The verb owning is used because it encourages consideration that the process of authenticity is both active and in relation to something. I own this bike speaks to an active process: I cherish it, I protect it, I am committed to caring for it. If we combine this active and relational notion with the idea of being in kinship with what one is (self) and what one does (authorship), it is possible to see that owning creates an active pathway toward *eigentlichkeit*—ownedness.

Gadamer's (2004) notion of play is also fruitful for highlighting the duality of being in authenticity. Play describes how our lived experiences are at play with the fusion between our historical and cultural horizons and the emergence of new meanings. Gadamer (2004) used the example of standing in front of a profound piece of art to reveal the nature of this play. In this moment, we are deeply involved with the experience of experiencing. We are playing along with the moment. At the same time, we are oscillating between what we are (our historical and cultural background) and new meanings unfolding as we interpret the piece of art—a merging of what is and what one is becoming. In *following in authenticity*, this might be experienced when we are absorbed in a challenging conversation—one that challenges our understandings. Our playing along with the conversation is in energetic relation to what one is and, as the discussion unfolds, what one is becoming (Barak, 2020; Hamlin, 2016; Regan, 2012).

Sartre's philosophical thinking provides additional ways of considering authenticity in *following*. There are echoes of Heidegger's thinking on authenticity woven into Sartre's (1966) thinking about existential freedom. As an example, Sartre, like Heidegger, suggested that freedom is experienced through the constraints of context and our social and cultural histories (Eshleman, 2011). Sartre described these constraints as our facticity. For Sartre, I am always thrown into situations that are constrained by my facticity. Facticity is everything about me that has shaped me. This includes all my cultural, historical, social, geographical, and political experiences (Daigle, 2011; Jones, 2015; Poellner, 2012). However, unlike a table that cannot escape its facticity (it has no choice but to act like and be a table), humans have no fixed way that they should be. A human has the freedom to transcend, to move beyond, their facticity.

Therefore, possibilities of freedom are our inescapable way of being-in-the-world. I am always already free to choose how I might act and interpret my lifeworld. I can transcend my average everyday facticity through this freedom. Restating this from a Heideggerian perspective, I am free to own my ownedness. This thinking about transcendence and essences (facticity) is integral to understandings that relate to authenticity.

Sartre's freedom is paradoxical and ambiguous. I can and cannot choose how I want to be. I cannot escape my facticity but at the same time I have the freedom not to be defined only by my facticity (Poellner, 2012; van Manen, 2014). This is the lived experience for Sartre. I am caught between who I am and who I might be. From this ambiguous perspective, being in authenticity can be viewed as experiences that disclose the fundamental doubtfulness of being (Daigle, 2011). The concreteness and resonance of this experience is helpful for opening up meanings about being in *following*. When are experiences of *following* like being stuck as who I am? When might *following* be like freedom?

The tension in the lived experience of doubtfulness is explored through Sartre's notion of bad faith. If I choose to act as if I have no freedom to move beyond my facticity, I am acting in bad faith. Furthermore, when I choose to act in bad faith, I choose to act and be in ways that deny the ontological nature of my being (Daigle, 2011). Accordingly, being in inauthenticity is experienced as acting in bad faith (van Manen, 2014). Particularly relevant to concrete experiences of being in *following* in authenticity, are several vignettes that Sartre used to show how we might experience acting in bad faith. These are explored with reference to participants' stories of being in authenticity in Chapter 6.

Sartre's (1966) philosophy built upon Heidegger's thinking about authenticity. Experiencing the paradox of Sartre's freedom resonated with Heidegger's interpretations of a being who is and who is becoming. In phenomenological terms, Sartre's freedom can be thought of as essential (and authentic) ways of being-in-the-world. Furthermore, his interpretation of bad faith and freedom provide concrete examples of lived experiences that resonate with being in *following* in senior leadership teams.

Finally, Simone de Beauvoir (1962), author and belatedly-accepted philosopher, conceived of authenticity as ontologically different from Sartre (Zebadúa Yáñez, 2018). Sartre's discussion on freedom and bad faith mainly centred around the self (Dasein). From de Beauvoir's perspective, finding oneself in experiences of ontological authenticity is to be porously and dynamically shifting in one's own being. To be porous ontologically, is to be open to our being-in-the-world with others. Being in authenticity in *following* is, therefore, always becoming and always in relation to others (Zebadúa Yáñez, 2018).

She also challenged the notion of authenticity as simply a mode of being-in-the-world as described by Heidegger. For de Beauvoir (1962), in authenticity "one affirms oneself as an unveiling being" and this is only possible through a declaration of being free (Daigle, 2011, p.10). Thus, being authentic, being free, and unveiling are one in the same and the movements of existence for us. They are the unified pathway to the naïve, nakedness of our being.

Importantly, because it relates to *following* in senior leadership teams, de Beauvoir states that being free is only possible in the freedom of others. I can only know of my being if others are free to recognise my being (Bergoffen & Burke, 2021; Daigle, 2011; Zebadúa Yáñez, 2018). These others are the people I have created ties with, in my lifeworld: friends, family, peers, colleagues, teammates. de Beauvoir extends this thinking by underscoring the relational complexities of this freedom. There is reciprocity in being authentic with others (Zebadúa Yáñez, 2018). In senior leadership teams, if I fall into alienating, mistreating, or dismissing others there is no mutual recognition of freedom. Equally, if I am manipulated, treated as subservient or am obsequious there is no mutually recognised freedom. What is required is for senior leaders to retain their freedoms while

recognising the freedoms of others. These moments might be experienced as a nod of acknowledgement in moments of conversation. In meetings, they could be enacted through sharing the stage during discussions—recognising that opportunities to voice ideas are important. Additionally, they could be felt in moments of silence, when someone listens attentively to your discussion (Bergoffen & Burke, 2021; Daigle, 2011;).

In summary, the essential structure of being in authenticity mirrored in the thinking of Heidegger (1996), Gadamer (2004), Sartre (1966) and de Beauvoir (1962), provides opportunities for on-going reflection about the essences of *following*. In Chapter 5, 6, and 7, this is revealed through the lived experiences of participants. Additionally, for phenomenological research, being in authenticity encourages pondering on our own authentic relationship to the phenomenon of concern. How can we be at play with the research and the phenomenon? How might this lead to a greater understanding of what it is and what it might be becoming?

Being in a Mood

As Heidegger (1996) argued, we always find ourselves attuned to the world through some mood or other; our moods disclose the world (and ourselves) and allow things to matter to us.

Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus. From the mountain you see the mountain. We animate what we can, and we see only what we animate. Nature and books belong to the eyes that see them. It depends on the mood of the man[sic], whether he shall see the sunset or the fine poem. (Emerson, 2009, p. 45)

What is a mood? What does it mean to be in a mood? In Emerson's statement from his philosophical essay titled "Experience" (2015), he portrayed life as an ever-changing landscape of moods; we find ourselves moving from situation to situation, passing through these moods which disclose something of the world to us. Furthermore, each human interprets the world through the mood he finds himself/herself in, shaping experiences, seeing the "sunset or the fine poem" (Emerson, 2009, p. 45). Philosophically, Emerson is often aligned with Kant's and Nietzsche's views of the world (Goodman, 2020; Mariotti, 2015). However, this particular observation resonates clearly with hermeneutic phenomenological perspectives on moods.

The German word for mood, *Stimmung*, also means the tuning of a musical instrument.

In English, we can play a bit with the word "tuning" in the sense that mood attunes us to

what is meaningful in our lives. Stated differently, a mood tunes us into what is relevant. The there of Dasein is only a there (as a particular place wherein something meaningful can arise) because of mood. (Lewis, 2017; p. 997)

For Heidegger (1996) moods were fundamental to our way of being in the world. Moods do not exist as internal and external human states.

We do not say 'I have a mood' the way we might say that we have a feeling, a thought or an impression; instead we say 'I am in a certain mood', implying that we find ourselves in the mood rather than finding the mood in us. (Ringmar, 2018, p. 455)

Moods are directly connected to our being there in the world and disclose the world to us through our senses (Heidegger, 1996). They are tangible but elusive. Intuitively, we understand the mood of the crowd, the classroom and the meeting through our being there with the crowd, the class and the participants of the meeting. These situations all have a special character. Our understanding of these experiences is revealed through feeling and sensing, being there with others in these moments. Phenomenologically, it is often viewed as our primary way of being-in-the-world (Lewis, 2017). Without moods nothing would be routine, familiar, comprehensible, and important to us. Thus, we are always already in some mood, embedded in a mooded world that reveals and makes experiences intelligible (Crowther et al., 2017; Elpidorou & Freeman, 2015; Lewis, 2017; Ringmar, 2018).

As described above, Heidegger's interpretation of moods refers to "being in a mood" but also encompasses thinking that is closer to the common usage of the word atmosphere (Elpidorou & Freeman, 2015; Trcka, 2017). The customary usage of the word atmosphere describes the felt and sensed background of life. As Emerson (2009) stated: "(moods) paint the world". Consider a meeting that has a tense atmosphere, a footy grand final which is electric, and serenely listening to a music concert. These atmospheres are the background for understanding the certain things that exist within that atmosphere—"showing us what lies in focus"(Emerson, 2015).

As discussed above, our way of being in *following* is always mooded but this moodedness is also shaped by our situatedness in the world. This situatedness is the particular context that we find ourselves in. Heidegger (1996) referred to this situatedness as *thrownness*. By this he meant that we are thrown into situations that are already rich with historical, social, cultural, and geographical meanings. Hence, to find oneself in a certain mood is frequently experienced as finding oneself thrown into a certain situation, a situation that has a particular character, a mood (Elpidorou & Freeman, 2015; Lewis, 2017).

For example, a group discussion can be characterized as having its own situated mood that we fall into. This mood might feel upbeat, energized, worn out or tired. Leaders and followers come to these discussions in some mood. This mood might reflect the type of day they are having, the group of people they are conversing with, the timing of the discussion and the environment the discussion is held in. Harking back to Emerson (2009), this is the contextual train that many senior leaders live through. The mood of the meeting often only comes to attention when senior leaders reflect on what was experienced. I couldn't get into that discussion, we are stuck in a rut and that meeting really worked, might be common experiences. In these examples, moods are the lived experiences of the ways leaders feel, harmonising with the feeling of the situation they find themselves thrown into. Ontologically, what is important to understand is that in *following* (and leading) these experiences are always in relation to our mood and the mood of our lifeworld (Ringmar, 2018). They are the fabric and flavours of *following* within the senior leadership team.

For the researcher, we find ourselves thrown into a mood in relation to the research: energetic, interested, lost-in, bored with. These moods help shape how the researcher experiences the research and the phenomenon. An understanding of moods also creates open questions for pondering the phenomenon: What might be the moods of *following*? How might senior leaders experience the moods of *following*? How might moods disclose new perspectives on the being of beings in *following*?

Being with others (solicitude)

Being-in-the-world with others designates Dasein's openness to and care for its lifeworld world, and its inhabiting of the world with others (Davis, 2014). Heidegger (1996) used the terms *mitsein* (being with) and *mitseinandersein* (being with another) to capture this essential way of being in the world. Whilst it is acknowledged that there are several criticisms of Heidegger's view of the collective, and that these criticisms are not without basis, the position of this study aligns with the views espoused by contemporary phenomenologists: *being with* and *being with another* create pathways for understanding that are an essential way of being and belonging to particular groups (Koo, 2015; Pacherie, 2017; Sánchez Guerro, 2015; Zahavi, 2021). As previously noted, groups (teams) are ubiquitous. We all belong to and are thrown into families, friends, groups, teams, and workplaces. As Australian singer John Farnham (1986) noted: "We're all someone's daughter. We're all someone's son". These lyrics highlight this essential and inescapable way of being-in-the- world together.

For Heidegger (1996), care brought with it two ways of relating to the world. We have concern for things (*besorgen*) and care for other beings who being matters for. This second type of care Heidegger called solicitude (*fuersorge*) (Karban, 2017; Tomkins & Simpson, 2015).

Heidegger (1996) proposed two distinctive modes of solicitude which manifest in our everyday encounters with others, involving different qualities of intervention. The first kind of care intervention is substitutive, leaping-in solicitude. In this mode, one takes over from another. This might involve leaping-in and taking responsibility for a situation or issue that is usually the province of another until it is resolved. In this circumstance, the other's care for their being-in-the-world is mitigated or ameliorated by the actions of the carer. This mode of care is inauthentic and average solicitude. The being of the recipient is disowned and unowned by the care of the carer (Cestari et al., 2017; Karban, 2017; Tomkin & Simpson, 2015).

The second mode of care is different in nature. Leaping-ahead solicitude is care that enables. In this mode, the carer facilitates the being of the other by leaping-ahead and opening up future possibilities and potential. This encourages the recipient to care about their being-in-the-world. Leaping-in solicitude can be perceived as authentic solicitude. The care of the carer encourages the recipient to own their ownedness (Babic, 2018).

Both modes of solicitude, leaping-in and leaping-ahead, can be understood as being positive, negative, contextual, temporal and fluid. As an example, leaping-in solicitude, while less enabling, may be experienced as support because the recipient (follower/leader) really needed the help of the carer this time (leader/follower). Thus, leaping-in and taking responsibility for the issue is experienced in the moment and context as being positive.

This dynamic view of solicitude has clear links to the phenomenon of this inquiry. Being-in-the-world with others often manifests in the concrete experience of being-in-a-team. The modes of solicitude illuminate the intentional relations between leading and *following* in senior leadership teams. For researchers, questions arise from moments where we leap-in and leap-ahead. How might this affect our interpretation of the phenomenon? How are our own prejudices at play when we leap-in and leap-ahead? What does it reveal of our own being, especially as it relates to *following*?

Before moving beyond Heidegger (1996) and his existentialia, it is important to restate the alignment of his philosophy with the methodology of this inquiry. Simply stated, Heidegger's aspiration was to enlighten our understandings of being through interpretation of meaningful experiences of phenomena in our lifeworld. His explication of solicitude, authenticity and mood have been separated for the purposes of explanation in the above discussion, but this is not the reality of our pre-reflective lived experiences. The experiences of being and being in *following* are ones of unity; thus, these Heideggerian essential structures are experienced as an intermeshed, interdependent whole that the researcher must thoughtfully contemplate to disclose essential meanings.

Beyond Heidegger

The discussions so far have centred on key ideas from Heideggerian philosophy that guided and at times demanded methodological choices. In grappling with the phenomenon of *following* and interpreting the stories of participants, two additional philosophical ideas assisted in reflectively and openly seeking meanings. As previously asserted, *following* in senior leadership teams in schools is situated in the whole school team and a multiplicity of interwoven teams. The phenomenological concept of being-with-others opens up possibilities that pre-reflective understanding of organisational life can be “we” experiences.

The “I” and “We” of teams

Sartre (1966), Buber and Smith (2002), Levinas et al. (1996), Husserl (1983), Heidegger (1996), and Merleau-Ponty (2012) have all recognised the fundamental role of groups/teams/communities to the experiences of being (Koo, 2015). This collective or “we”-relationship has also been of increasing research interest to sociologists, psychologists, social-neuroscientists, economists, and philosophers (Sánchez Guerro, 2016; Zahavi, 2021; Zahavi & RoCHAT, 2015).

From a phenomenological perspective, the we-ness in being me and the me-ness in being we, is always-already present in our lives. It is understood intuitively. As Szanto and Moran (2015) note, even though phenomenologists might differ by degree and commitment, they agree with the idea that all humans are social beings, acting within specific historical and cultural contexts which are embedded in a shared lifeworld.

By utilising phenomenological perspectives to contemplate experiences of *following*, we can gain further insights into the existential theme of relationality and how it reveals itself in *following* in senior leadership teams. Relationality encourages contemplation of how people are connected and disconnected in senior leadership teams. What meanings of community exist and are absent? What unfolds from being together? (van Manen, 2016).

Collective intentionality, Collective Phenomenology, the Phenomenology of Sociality and Collective Affective Intentionality are terms that umbrella much of the current discussion and debate about the multifaceted nature of being together (Blomberg, 2018; Zahavi, 2021). As other authors have revealed, the idea that experiences can manifest through, with and as a collective is not without issue. Is it possible to have truly irreducible shared experiences? Is a collective able to act or be in a way that presupposes the individual, or is the “I” constituted before the “we”. Perhaps there is an intertwinement of “I”, “you” and “we”? (León, 2018; Pacherie, 2017; Schweikard & Schmid, 2013; Szanto, 2017; Zahavi, 2021).

Relationality also considers how collective experiences may show up in ways of being-in-the-world together (van Manen, 2014). Joint attention, shared intention, collective acceptance, shared evaluative attitudes, care, reciprocity, empathy, politics, authenticity, and embodiment have all found a place in discussions (Blomberg, 2018; Fuchs, 2017; Pacherie, 2017; Sánchez Guerro, 2016; Schweikerd & Schmid, 2013; Szanto, 2017; Zahavi, 2015).

For this inquiry, considerations of “we” have encouraged viewing participants’ stories as lived moments of “I” and “we”. Specifically, the stories clearly represent an individual’s perspective of lived moments in senior leadership teams; however, these moments exist with others. The moments are shared, embedded and generative of on-going meanings of being-in-the-world together. Keeping this idea in play while interpreting and contemplating participants’ stories creates possibilities for uncovering new perspectives.

Of politics and power

Finally, Hannah Arendt (1973), who studied with Heidegger and Husserl, posited a phenomenology of actualised plurality with a particular emphasis on politics and power (Loidolt, 2017, 2018).

Actualised plurality reveals how understandings of lived experiences can emerge through power and politics of being “we”. Power is the capacity to act in concert for a public-political purpose. As Arendt (1973) noted, politics is framed as the action of people debating and discussing something that relates to a collective concern. When this is carried out with a genuine desire to act, speak and judge collectively, Arendt considered that the most fully formed version or authentic form of “we” is actualised (d’Entreves, 2019; Loidolt, 2018; van Manen, 2014).

In this vein, research that enacts healthy collective discussions can be seen as acting in concert to uncover phenomenological meanings through power and politics. This might involve discussion and feedback from supervisors in regular forums. Equally, researchers might bounce thinking off colleagues to see how ideas relating to *following* in senior leadership teams resonate with senior leaders, which van Manen (1990, 2016) described as-the phenomenological nod.

However, in reality, there are many possibilities for this framing of a fully formed “we” to appear in different guises: when our actions do not match our words, or our words do not match our actions; when a team’s narrative is guided by another agenda; when the lived experience is of someone speaking for the group but not representing the group; and when a member or members of the team control or manipulate other members of the team. Arendt argued that this is often our everyday way of being together in a modern society. The fully formed possibility of “we” is deformed, deconstructed, and absorbed (Loidolt, 2017)

Represented in Arendt’s work (1973) and throughout this study, politics and power can be a part of the lived experience of being in a team of leaders. The relational dynamic between leading and

following is complex and often weighted toward leading (Alvesson & Blom, 2015; Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Einola & Alvesson, 2021) This perhaps is not surprising, especially given the primacy of the Principal in the contextual experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams.

Using this philosophical thinking to ponder interpretations of lived experiences of senior leaders has been important to this inquiry. These interpretations are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

Hermeneutic circling and Gadamer

As previously noted, Heidegger (1996) re-envisioned the understanding of hermeneutics: our pre-reflective understandings of the world make interpretation of the lived text possible. In this shift he also re-purposed the hermeneutic circle. The idea of reflective circling of a text is known as the hermeneutic circle (Vagle, 2018). Conventionally, the hermeneutic circle was a method explaining how parts of a text were integral to an understanding of the whole text but the whole text was equally important for understanding the parts: the characters make the story, but story makes the characters (Miles et al., 2015). Heidegger utilised this approach to show how the individual and the lifeworld were inextricably linked, like the characters and the story. We experience phenomenon pre-reflectively as a whole but Dasein is so embedded within this experiencing that one is unintelligible without the other. Methodologically, the hermeneutic circle is an important process for interpreting and reinterpreting narratives from participants. This circling back and forth between the whole and the parts helps researchers to peel back the layers of meaning as they move from the phenomenon to its various manifestations and back to the phenomenon again (Suddick et al., 2020).

Gadamer (2004), especially, extended this understanding of circling by explicating the important role of language and the researcher. He showed, through hermeneutics, how language uncovers being. As a student of Heidegger, he posited that all understandings are phenomenological and that these understandings can only manifest through language. Therefore, language, understandings and interpretation are inextricably linked. Our lifeworld is represented in and through language and language is only real because our lifeworld appears in it (Barak, 2020; Sloan & Bowe, 2013; van Manen, 2016). He theorised that hermeneutics is not a set method, but a fluid set of guiding principles assisting the search for being in the forgetfulness of language. By this he meant that we already understand phenomena with and through our use of language. However, in our everyday ways of being, these understandings are taken for granted or hidden. Dialogue, both written and verbal, therefore is a manifestation of lived experiences. It has the potential to explicate the manifestations of the things, ontically and ontologically (Freeman & Vagle, 2013).

For Gadamer (2004), interpretation of lived dialogues was a method for illuminating the various modes of existence of a phenomenon. For researchers, this dialogue initially occurs in a phenomenological interview and often stimulates interpretations. Gadamer viewed these

interpretations as being imbued with prejudgments and prejudices which influence the understandings of this dialogue, opening and restricting meanings (Regan, 2012; Suddick et al., 2020). Our prejudgments consist of our social, personal, and cultural understandings which allow us to discern and engage with language. In research, this process opens up new meanings which form further prejudices, that create new ways of understandings and so on (Barak, 2020). This circling is further enriched when our own prejudiced understandings fuse with someone else's. Gadamer (2004) described this as a fusing of our horizons: " ... this process of fusion is continually going on, for the old and new are always combining into something of living value" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 305). This hermeneutic process creates understandings that inform many of the methodological choices for phenomenological inquiries.

Accordingly, as the researcher's understandings (prejudgments and prejudices) fuse with the lived text of participants, new meanings are disclosed. In this rich dialogic process between the researcher and the participant, alien and familiar aspects merge. The researcher has to hold this conversation open and grapple with the alien and the familiar. This interpretative process requires the researcher to write and re-write to fuse these horizons and contemplate new perspectives. This is a re-awakening of the text: probing, contemplating, forgetting, and re-imagining. Through writing and re-writing, the researcher circles the phenomenon as it appears, disappears, and reappears (Smythe & Spence, 2020; Vagle, 2018). This requires a personal involvement from the researcher (Dowling, 2007). Therefore, the inquiry, inquirer and the circle become inseparably bound to the dialogue (van Manen, 1990, 2014, 2017a, 2017b).

It is therefore not only manifestations of the phenomenon in its partial, temporal and fluid modes that are grasped by the researcher; the researcher's own being is also understood from a new perspective. This hermeneutic circling that bounces back and forward, generating new meanings, is like a positive conversation. It changes the text, the researcher, and the understanding of the being of the phenomenon (Barak, 2020; Smythe & Spence, 2020; Suddick et al., 2020).

Immersing oneself in this process, the researcher's dialogue with the participants' narratives is important. However, equally important is the dialogue the researcher shares with others (colleagues, supervisors, friends, and family), even those who disagree with him/her. This is part of the phenomenological methodology. The researcher needs to hold themselves open to others (ideas, beliefs, arguments) in order to interpret sufficiently the being of any phenomenon.

The Challenge of Heidegger's politics

For philosophers and researchers, Heidegger's politics have been a point of ongoing and problematic debate (Madsbjerg & Fried, 2015; Malpas, 2016). Is his philosophy irrevocably tainted by his association with Nazism and anti-semitic views or is it possible to separate Heidegger the man from

Heideggerian philosophy? This debate has been refuelled by the 2014 release of his “*Black Books*” a collection of his journals (1931–1941) that describe aspects of his political and philosophical thinking (Dallmayr, 2016; Nelson, 2016), including statements about Jews that even the most ardent Heidegger apologist would find difficult to discount (Trawny, 2016).

Factually, it is evident that Heidegger was an unapologetic member of the National Socialist Party (1931–34) which espoused anti-semitic views and actively discriminated against Jewish academics (Malpas, 2016; Nelson, 2016; Sharpe, 2018), yet his long-term partner, Hannah Arendt, was Jewish and defended what she described as his naïve politics (Joronen & Imre, 2015). This in part highlights the difficulty in reconciling Heidegger, his philosophy and his political views. As Malpas (2016) stated, “they are (facts), and as facts they are all too simple” (Malpas, 2016, p. 5).

The challenge for phenomenological researchers is determining how to interpret and respond to the various arguments. For critics of Heidegger, the facts are the facts simple or not and should not be ignored; Heidegger and his thinking should be recognised as indisputably anti-semitic (Sharpe, 2018). Other authors posit that Heidegger’s thinking should be seen as something that extends beyond the failings of the man. Nelson (2016) described this thinking as apologist and identified three types of apologist thinking: denial, disavowal and reaffirmation. Finally, as indicated above by Malpas (2016), there is an argument that more sophisticated understandings are required to determine how to situate Heidegger’s philosophy in research and practice (Babich, 2016; Fried, 2016).

For this researcher, the initial discovery of the extent of Heidegger’s politics was confronting. Is it possible to find that Heideggerian philosophy resonates deeply with your own world view without subscribing to blighted ideas? It also casts a shadow over those philosophers who followed Heidegger and adopted many of his ideas: Sartre (1966), Gadamer (2004), de Beauvoir (1962) and Arendt (1973). The thinking of these philosophers has been integral to opening up meanings pertinent to this thesis. Does the stain of Heidegger’s politics lessen the value of their contributions and relevance to this thesis?

These questions present a significant challenge to research and researchers. My position, fundamental to the research approach of this thesis, is that the question of “being” is relevant always and extends before and beyond Heidegger in research, practice and philosophy (Fried, 2016; Malpas, 2018). This statement is offered, appreciating that meanings are contextual, fluid and temporal.

Hence, as the debate about Heidegger continues to unfold so will my own interpretations of its meanings. However, it is the questioning of being—what it means to be in *following*—that resonates with this thesis and the ontological approach to research.

Concluding Comments

Phenomenological philosophy and methodology provided the foundations for this inquiry. The phenomenological approach challenges the researcher to move away from scientific, positivist understandings of being. For the phenomenological researcher, reality emerges through our intentional connections with phenomena that are already pregnant with meaning (Crotty, 2020; Scotland, 2012; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2016). These phenomena appear in our historical and culturally situated lifeworlds. Therefore, research needs to turn towards interpreting how these phenomena are made intelligible to people in their contextual settings. The role of the researcher is to peel back the layers of experiences in these lifeworlds to disclose essential essences of phenomena.

This interpretive process embraces the researcher, the research, and the phenomenon. The researcher cannot bracket themselves from this process in hermeneutic phenomenology. The richness of interpreted meanings is brought forth through the interplay of the researcher's historicity (prejudices, bias, beliefs, and understandings) and participants' experiential stories. The challenge for the researcher is to maintain an open and reflective attitude as he/she grapples with this process. By embracing this attitude when encountering both the alien and the familiar modes of the phenomenon, the researcher can uncover new meanings of the lived experience. This process is important for uncovering the essence of phenomena which are often hidden or taken for granted in our everyday lives.

Language plays an important role in hermeneutic phenomenological inquiries. Conceptualised originally by Heidegger (1996) and developed further by Gadamer (2004), hermeneutics infuses phenomenology with language. Language is not passive. Language is experience. It carries culture, history, beliefs, and practical wisdom that is continually shaped and shapes our being-in-the-world, especially as it fuses with others. Thus, language is fundamental to phenomenological research. The researcher's aim is to interpret this lived narrative to make intelligible the essential meanings that lie hidden, forgotten, or obscured. Language is a perpetual conversation between the researcher, the research, and the phenomenon. Questioning and pondering this conversation are approached through writing and rewriting as the researcher interprets the lived text searching for essential essences of the phenomenon.

This inquiry is philosophically and methodologically aligned with hermeneutic phenomenology. It is therefore guided by key ideas which are restated here:

- Opening the researcher up to experiences of the phenomenon of concern through thoughtfulness.
- Turning towards experiences as they are lived rather than articulated in theory.

- Gathering contextualised stories of the lived-experiences using an open, reflexive and flexible approach.
- Considering interpretation as the approach that reveals the essential essence of the phenomenon through and with language.
- Crafting interpretative stories that capture tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts.
- Disclosing new perspectives of meanings relating the being of beings in *following*.
(Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2016)

The next chapter focuses on the particular elements of method used to explore the experiences of *following* in senior leader teams in Independent Schools in Australia. These elements are a practical application of the hermeneutic inquiry founded on the key tenets of phenomenological philosophy and methodology identified above.

Chapter 4: The Research Method

Any method, in a procedural sense, inevitably technologizes and objectifies what it studies and thus fails to grasp what is singular, subtle, or what can only be grasped with inventive and vocative means of reflective writing. (van Manen, 2014, p. 30)

The purpose of the research method is to address the research question: What is the ontological nature of the phenomenon of *following* within the context of senior leadership teams in Independent Schools in Australia?

The research method used in this phenomenological inquiry is discussed in detail in this chapter. The purpose of this discussion is to make transparent the actions, thinking and decisions relating to the collection and interpretation of data. It is also the intent of this chapter to show the reader how phenomenological philosophy and methodology guide the method, rather than prescribe a process.

In phenomenological research, stories and storytelling are very much part of the interpretive phenomenological process. The stories of participants and the researcher fuse with meanings of the phenomenon to create fresh perspectives (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 1990, 2014). Hence, this chapter also narrates the uncovering of my understandings as they emerged through the lived experience of peeling back layers to reveal the essential meanings of the phenomenon of *following* in senior leadership teams.

As previously noted, the philosophy and methodology of phenomenology are intertwined and guide decisions about method. Chapter 3 discussed how phenomenology presents a world view that differs from scientific, positivist views. Accordingly, methodological questions concerning why, what and how reflect phenomenological philosophy, especially hermeneutic phenomenology. However, as the literature noted, phenomenology does not have a set of prescribed steps for collecting and analysing evidence. This creates a struggle for researchers as they try to interpret the complex thinking of Husserl (1999, 2001), Heidegger (1996), Gadamer (2004), Merleau-Ponty (2012) and others. The phenomenological researcher is presented with questions about appropriate choices, specific techniques and procedures that are reflective of hermeneutic phenomenology.

As a response to these questions, a phenomenological researcher must consider how our naïve contacts with phenomena manifest in our everyday interactions with our lifeworlds. In this space, our essential way of being-in-the-world exists, and the essential meanings of the phenomena are intelligible (Fernandez & Crowell, 2021). Therefore, for the purposes of this inquiry, the research methods were oriented towards the experiences of *following* as they are lived in the everydayness of senior leadership teams.

Hermeneutics points the researcher towards interpreting the rich language of everyday experiences. These textual concerns orient research methods to reveal how language and the world co-construct each other (Smythe & Spence, 2020). The participants' stories use language to narrate everyday experiences of *following* which cannot be divorced from these experiences. This language also contains meanings that arise when intermingled with other language and experiences.

Gadamer understood this mediating quality of language. He understood that we learn language in the everyday contexts of concrete experiences and that language's meaning cannot be divorced from those experiences (the phenomenological awareness of intentionality). However, he also understood that language itself has meaning that is contained in it and gets shifted whenever it is alongside other language or experiences (the hermeneutic problem). (Freeman & Vagle, 2013, p. 732)

Thus, phenomenological research methods strive to disclose possibilities of phenomena that emerge from the dialogue of life's ordinary occurrences: specifically, the experiential stories of participants. While other research methods also focus on meanings within language, phenomenology differentiates itself from other research methods, like narrative inquiry. Phenomenology's focus is on uncovering the essential modes of existence of the phenomenon of concern (van Manen & van Manen, 2021). What might this mean for the practice of phenomenological research?

Phenomenological Reduction

Phenomenology aims to reveal our taken-for-granted everyday ways of being (van Manen, 1990, 2014). To return to the things themselves, phenomenological research must undress taken-for-grantedness and get back to the world as we live it (van Manen, 2014). Simply stated, this process is called phenomenological reduction. Originally postulated by Husserl, reduction is a part of the hermeneutic phenomenological method. For Husserl, the process of reduction contained two components, epoche and reduction. Epoche suspends or brackets our cultural, social, and historical understandings, while reduction is the pathway to access the essence of our consciousness (Quay, 2016; van Manen, 2014).

A hermeneutic phenomenological method inspired by Heidegger is interested in reduction but the intent is different from Husserl's. As previously explained, Heidegger's phenomenology is interested in the being of beings, therefore the reduction is the process of moving from beings to being: from experiences of the phenomenon as a thing to pre-reflective experiences of the phenomenon as it is lived. As Quay explained for Heidegger, this meant "for us phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehension of a being, whatever may be the

character of that apprehension, to the understanding of the be-ing of this being” (Quay, 2016, p. 490). This clearly highlights the ontological perspective of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiries.

Zahavi (2019a, 2019b) suggested that researchers’ fascination with epoche and reduction potentially limited other important methodic choices. For Zahavi, when these Husserlian methods are chosen at the expense of other methods aimed at freeing us from our habitual ways of seeing the world, it constrains possibilities. My interpretation of his discussion is that it highlights again the need for phenomenological researchers to find their own pathways to disclosing new insights.

In this inquiry, the hermeneutic phenomenological reduction is made apparent through the researcher’s experiences of being in conversation with the phenomenon of *following*. In practice, this is the continual process of open reflection on the interpretive process captured in my writing. In a methodic sense, this is seen in this inquiry as it moved from participant interviews to transcriptions to crafted stories to deeper interpretations of the being of *following* in senior leadership teams.

The methods of writing phenomenologically

van Manen (1990) stated that writing is the phenomenological method. For van Manen, the act of writing encourages the researcher to be reflective, to be open to possibilities, to go deeper as he/she struggles to uncover meanings. It also creates a lived text that expresses the essence of a phenomenon in a way that is plausible, intelligible and relatable for the reader (van Manen, 1990, 2014). In this inquiry, journaling, short notes, transcriptions, crafted stories containing rich anecdotes, thematic analysis and further reflective writing were examples of this written process. van Manen (1990) identified six research activities and guiding principles that could help orient the researcher phenomenologically. He was careful to clarify that these research activities and principles act as a guide rather than a set method (van Manen, 1990). Therefore, as the researcher grapples with the phenomenon these activities can be applied flexibility and responsively.

In relation to the methods applied in this research, these activities were used as points of reflection, reminders, propellers, and rudders. As this chapter unfolds, it is expected that the reader, in addition to being able to clearly notice examples of these principles, will intuitively feel the presence of these principles in the research process.

Step one refers to turning to the nature of lived experience. In this step, we hear echoes of Husserl’s call to return to the things themselves. In relation to this study, it is a turning towards meanings of *following* as experienced in senior leadership teams.

Step two is about investigating experience as we live it. This is a reminder that the purpose of phenomenological methods is to uncover our pre-reflective understandings as they are lived.

Step three involves reflecting on essential themes across the experiences. This is a reminder to the

researcher that the task of phenomenological methods is to dig deeper than superficial or descriptive themes. Peeling back the layers should uncover essential essences: those structures that make the phenomenon what it is.

Step four involves the process of interpreting the phenomenon through writing and rewriting. Hermeneutically, the starting point of research is an understanding that participants have a bond with phenomena that comes into being through language which is influenced by historical and cultural contexts. As the researcher writes and rewrites for understanding, new perspectives of the phenomenon emerge.

Step five involves maintaining a strong orientated relation to the phenomenon. This was a continual struggle in this research. *Following* is embedded in a complex organisational milieu. At times, I found myself slipping into contemplation about teams and leading in teams. This emerged in my writing. *Following* was playing second fiddle.

Step six involves balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole. This is hermeneutic circling in action. This denotes how interpreted meanings are always moving, and that these meanings circulate within the research. As phenomenological researchers, our research methods are representative of a dialogue with these meanings. It is a conversation that moves back and forth but is situated in a contextual whole (Vagle, 2018).

To van Manen's six principles, I have added a seventh:

Step seven is derived from Vagle (2018) who has a strong commitment to phenomenological research methods that are grounded in a devotion to uncovering manifestations of phenomena: "the philosophical notion of intentionality, and post-structural commitments to knowledge (are) always already being tentative and never complete" (p. 32). This reminds researchers that the phenomenological methods do not strive to capture a finalised or complete version of a phenomenon.

Furthermore, and implicit in van Manen's principles, Vagle's thinking, and phenomenological research methods, is the importance of an open and reflective attitude. This attitude towards the whole research process is important phenomenologically. It creates a pathway for rich interpretation to occur and a barrier to falling back into our normal ways of thinking and seeing which could result in superficial descriptions of the *following*. This phenomenological attitude encourages a contemplative way of seeing, thinking, and expressing aimed at fresh perspectives and insights into the phenomenon of concern (van Manen & van Manen, 2021).

During interviews, transcribing, crafting stories and writing, I encountered a continual struggle to maintain this open and reflective attitude. I noticed myself wanting to leap in and leap forward:

listening until I heard or found an expected example; and listening for preconceived ideas of the meanings that would emerge. In these moments, I was not immersed in the research process. I was acting like a bystander. The result was often a regurgitation of my own thinking using participants' stories as evidence.

... being human and being involved in human activities imply that we have both already understood and are on our way to new understanding. This is of vital importance for research. Being in this process of understanding where we always already have understood something, places a huge responsibility on the researcher in terms of openness, so that we do not take for granted what it is that we see and understand. Researchers may not simply rush forward assuming that understanding is just an everyday matter of fact. (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019, p.3)

Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2019, 2020) elucidated the importance and difficulty of maintaining this open and reflective approach. Our preconceived assumptions and prejudices are always in play with the research process and the phenomenon. When the researcher maintains a genuine phenomenological attitude, he/she can sensitively and insightfully uncover essential meanings of phenomena (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020; Vagle, 2018; van Manen & van Manen, 2021). Equally, our ideas, values and beliefs can also restrict the research process and limit the possibilities for interpretation. This tension highlights the value of reflecting on, articulating, and declaring my preunderstandings. The language in these preunderstandings is rich in meaning for me and formed an important part of the research process.

The rest of this chapter will show the process of gathering stories from participants, dwelling with these stories and the hermeneutic phenomenological process of interpreting meanings within texts.

Declaring pre-understandings

As noted above, the statements that articulate my pre-understandings were important to the research process. They expose the social, historical, and cultural understandings that I brought to this research. As Gadamer (2004) highlighted, my lifeworld is represented in and through my use of language and my statements are only real because my lifeworld appears in them (Barak, 2020; Sloan & Bowe, 2013; van Manen, 2016). The fusion of these pre-understandings with this inquiry and the phenomenon of *following* opened up possibilities for new meanings to surface (Barak, 2020). Throughout this inquiry, the use of personal pronouns shows the importance of my pre-understandings to the research, my interpretations and choices of method (Crowther, 2014).

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach, unlike research grounded in Husserlian phenomenology, does not suggest that bracketing or holding back these pre-understandings is a part of the research method. Research methods that are based in hermeneutic phenomenology accept that researchers are inextricably situated in their lifeworlds which include the experiences of being in research. From a Heideggerian (1996) perspective, we cannot remove ourselves from our lifeworlds nor disown our pre-understandings; they are what make possible the act of interpretation and our inceptual understanding of the world. If they were not a part of my being-in-the-world, potentially, my ability to peel back the layers of meaning hidden in participants' stories would be lessened.

As an example, my statement below about Principals undervaluing Primary Schools (Pre-understanding No. 4) is born from my own personal experience and my prejudiced interpretations of Principals seemingly ignoring the needs of the Junior School. Stating this pre-understanding ensures that I am being transparent about my fore-conceptions but importantly it also elevates my prejudice. It hoists my taken-for-granted belief about Principals' relationships with Junior Schools to a more open and contemplative space. Why might this be my experience? Why is it not other people's experience? How is my reading of the textual life of participants affected by this pre-understanding? What might this reveal about *following*?

From this hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, my pre-understandings are always with me in research. As I conducted interviews, transcribed, and interpreted, there were times when issues particularly resonated with my pre-understanding. In other moments, it was not until I started writing my understandings and reflecting that I noticed how my own history was fusing with meanings of *following*. Whether my preunderstandings were obvious, hidden or taken-for-granted, they were key components of the research process.

The pre-understandings listed below should be read as being tentative, incomplete, and fluid. They have been, are and will continue to be important to me. However, as I continue to openly and reflectively circle the phenomenon of *following*, the meanings and language will shift. For example, "being a senior leader is fundamentally about being in leading" was my view of being a Head of Junior School. This inquiry, further reading, pondering about the lived experience of the phenomenon and grappling with *following* as an essential mode of being a leader, has caused a shift in my understandings. If I was to start another inquiry of a similar nature, perhaps I would rephrase it to state, "being a senior leader is a dynamic interplay between contextual modes of being with others in organisational teams."

My pre-understandings were:

1. Being a senior leader is fundamentally about being in leading.
2. Teams, leading and *following* are inextricably linked and fundamental to organisational life. An absence of one means the absence of the others.
3. Teams, leading and *following* are all phenomena. While *following* was the particular phenomenon of this inquiry, in school life these and other phenomenon make up the quagmire of the senior leadership experience.
4. Principals undervalue Primary Schools and Heads of Junior School.
5. Leaders are always guarded to a degree about their thinking, feelings, and values.
6. Teams are essential to a School. Teamwork is a valued attribute.
7. The relationship between leaders and followers is rich, dynamic, and taken for granted.

Below are two excerpts from my personal stories that show the presence of pre-understandings within experiences of *following*, which surfaced through an initial interview that was conducted by one of my supervisors. This personal narrative provides a lens for seeing my pre-understandings but also shows the lived text of the phenomenon of *following*.

People aren't really themselves in these meetings. They are guarded. It's almost adversarial. People are guarded and some of them have had experiences where they come along and present something and it's been hacked to death or stoned by the crowd and they've retreated and thought why did I bother? It's even to do with the fact that we all sit around a boardroom.

Journaling was a part of the reflective process for this inquiry that helped to uncover my pre-understandings but also helped to open up meanings of being in *following*. The entries were sporadic. Rather than writing what I thought as soon as I thought it, I let ideas sit to see if they took hold. If I felt there was life in an idea, I would often record it in the journal as a question rather than a statement. This was my method for encouraging thinking that was open to possibilities. For example, in relation to my story above I wrote "what does it mean to be guarded?" and "how might being guarded be understood by senior leaders?" while the story below led me to ponder: "what does it mean to get a tick?"

Last year I would've given maybe four or five across a whole year. For me it's a process where I've got to get a tick. Often, I've known that (the Principal) said "yay" to it

beforehand. I look at what's my best way of minimising the amount of input I actually have so that I can present something that will get a tick and I can move on and do what I really want to do. You are playing a game.

Through this process of reflective journaling, ideas crept out that had initially been overlooked. As an example, I initially paid less attention to the experience of "playing a game". However, as I interviewed participants, listened to their stories, and interpreted possible meanings, I kept circling back to this idea as an essential way of being in *following*. My journal entries stated: "What's playing a game?", "Am I being drawn into a sporting analogy", "Might this analogy help get to the heart of *following*?". Through writing, contemplating, and eventually considering Heidegger (1996) and Gadamer (2004), this manifestation of senior leaders' experience became an active part of my inquiry. Chapter 6, Being in Authenticity, explores further meanings of playing the game

The starting point—my own interview

In Chapter 1, I detailed how these pre-understandings developed and continue to develop as I reflect, understand, and reflect anew. Of particular importance in this process of unearthing my pre-understandings, was an interview conducted with a supervisor. Not only did it *show the way* in terms of a phenomenological interview but it began a dialogue with my pre-understandings. Upon reflection, it also felt like the starting point for turning completely towards the phenomenon of *following*.

Through this process I discovered that the phenomenological interview had a particular style, which I discuss below. I also discovered that I fell into a way of being in these interviews that potentially restricted real conversations. After re-reading my personal interview, I found that I was framing my responses in ways that met my pre-conceived views about a PhD interview. Rather than an open and flowing conversation, I felt, my responses were over thought. By this I mean I was responding with what I thought was required. My supervisor, an experienced phenomenological researcher, appeared to be much more natural.

I realised my response to a PhD interview may also be a possibility for participants and a relational challenge for conducting interviews well. It was another reminder for me about the power of assumptions (pre-conceptions). As a result, I paid attention during interviews to creating a relaxed conversational space. I also read the transcripts carefully and noted times where I could see that I had fallen back into this way of being.

Recruiting participants

Purposive sampling and snowballing were methods used to recruit participants. Purposive sampling is used in research to identify and select individuals or groups that are experienced in a phenomenon of interest (Campbell et al., 2020). It also allows the researcher to identify participants who have the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner (Palinkas et al., 2015; van Manen, 2014). Using this method was important for this inquiry because it ensured that the initial contacts represented a group who met the criteria and could contribute meaningfully.

Snowballing or snowball sampling is a research method that relies on networking and referral (Parker et al., 2020). A small group of initial contacts is identified through purposive sampling. This group begins the snowballing process: a participant recommends a colleague who then recommends another colleague and so on. This process is repeated with each new participant who agrees to take part in the study. This provides researchers with participatory momentum with the aim of gathering a sufficient number of stories (Parker et al., 2020). This approach was appropriate for this inquiry because it targeted the rich networks of school leaders which contained worthwhile participants.

Criteria for selection

Using these methods, the stories were collected from members of senior leadership teams in Independent Schools in Australia. The schools comprised students from Early Learning Centres to Year 12 because such schools are generally larger in terms of students and staff populations and therefore have reasonably sized senior leadership teams comprising a range of leaders (and followers) who have responsibility for key areas within the school.

In considering site and participant selection, several factors were considered:

- To lessen potential anxiety, the researcher will have no or very limited professional connections with the participants or sites.
- The participants selected will have at least two years' experience in senior leadership teams and will be current leaders or recently retired leaders (within the last 5 years).
- The participants will include a range of senior leaders; as examples, the Principal, Heads of School (eg. Head of Junior School) and Academic or Pastoral Leaders.
- The sites will be located in Australia.

Gathering stories from a diverse range of experienced senior leaders also enabled a range of voices to resonate with the phenomenon of *following*. In so doing, it allowed me to contemplate meanings of being in *following* from new perspectives. This experience was akin to walking a different way

home and noticing that the light striking your house at an unexpected angle illuminates a new view of your house. Your house takes on a different and perhaps unexpected feel when viewed from this street corner.

Ethical Considerations

Before commencing with the collection of stories from participants, important ethical considerations were identified that would be relevant to my inquiry:

1. The study will be conducted with professional integrity. The study plans to use reliable and proven techniques for collecting experiential stories (or accounts). In addition, the study aims to seek ontological understandings that are worthwhile and have practical applications for school contexts.
2. Informed consent from the participants will be sought prior to the study. All participants will be provided with information, including the title, purpose, the method used and the proposed timing of their involvement. Participation will be voluntary, and all participants will be provided with the researcher's and supervisors' email addresses so that they can ask questions or withdraw at any stage.
3. The study involves the potential for the collection of sensitive information that may cause anxiety or distress. For example, participants could be concerned with the privacy of the information. To ensure that this information remains confidential, data will be stored securely on a password protected site. Participants will not be required to record their name, site, organisational affiliation, or the names of any members of their leadership teams.
4. Access to appropriate counselling services will be provided to each participant should it be required.
5. All participants will be offered the opportunity to provide feedback. Once crafted, each participant's story will be returned to them for approval. At the conclusion of the study, an overview of the salient ideas will be shared, and each participant will receive a copy of an executive report.
6. The study will seek ethics approval from the University of Adelaide.

Introducing the participants

Gathering participants who are willing to give their time to engage in research can be a challenge for researchers. As indicated, a commencement point for collecting experiential stories was identifying and contacting potential contributors. It was determined that an effective recruitment process would begin by contacting appropriate educational organisations. The educational organisations selected were deemed as fertile ground for potential participants who met the criteria. They

included the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) and the Independent Heads of Primary Schools Australia (IPSHA). Both organisations' memberships stand at approximately 400 leaders and therefore 800 potential participants in total.

Each of these organisations has state branches and a federal arm. State branches have an executive responsible for communicating local matters to members. The federal branch is responsible for issues affecting all members. Using my established networks at AHISA and IPSHA, I forwarded an initial email to key contact people at state and federal levels explaining my research project (Appendix 5). This email also included an attachment that could be sent to any member who my contacts thought might be interested.

The first participant contacted me by email and asked for further information. I sent a participant information sheet (Appendix 3) which provided potential contributors with the following information:

- what the project was about;
- who was undertaking the research;
- why he/she was being invited to participate;
- what was involved and how much time it would take;
- the risks and benefits of participation;
- how confidentiality and privacy would be protected;
- who they could contact with any questions;
- how they could withdraw and what to do if he/she wanted to participate.

After senior leaders had contacted me to say they were interested in participating, I emailed them the consent form (Appendix 4). Once I had received the consent form, a time and place for interview was determined. Whenever possible, the participant set the time and place. If the time suggested did not suit me due to work commitments, I asked participants for an alternative. An example of this communication follows:

Dear Carl

Let's set a time. Happy to do it in person rather than Zoom... we could do it at home... Tuesday next week after 11.00am until 3.00pm works

Wednesday between 9.30 to 11.00am also good Thursday between 2.00 and 4.00pm also good (SL9).

Once I had completed the first interview, this participant contacted a colleague who subsequently became my second interview. The 10 participants in the study were recruited from this snowballing approach. As my participant list grew, I recognised the need to intervene to ensure that there was a diversity of senior leaders represented. I, therefore, asked at the end of interviews whether they knew a suitable participant that matched identified criteria, for example, colleagues who were principals or heads of teaching and learning (or equivalent). All those recruited fulfilled the stated criteria. None of the participants withdrew during the study. The table below provides a snapshot of the contributors to my inquiry.

Table 1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Current Position (at time of interview)	Organisational Affiliation	Gender	Employment Status
SL1	Head of Junior School	IPSHA	Male	Full-time
SL2	Principal	AHISA	Male	Full-time
SL3	Head of Curriculum	AHISA	Female	Full-time
SL4	Retired	IPSHA	Male	Retired
SL5	Head of Junior School	IPSHA	Male	Full-Time
SL6	Head of Teaching and Learning	AHISA	Female	Full-time
SL7	Principal	AHISA	Female	Full-time
SL8	Unemployed	IPSHA	Male	Unemployed
SL9	Retired	AHISA	Male	Retired
SL10	Deputy Principal Well-Being	AHISA	Male	Full-Time

Prior to interview, most questions centred around timing, confidentiality and understanding what might be expected in the interview. The excerpt below from a participant gives a sense of the type of information sought.

I am happy to help, though have some questions:

1. The questions you have sent through do sound quite open-ended. Am I supposed to prepare a monologue in answer to these, to fill 45 mins, or is this a conversation/interview?
2. Given the confidential nature of the content, drawing on experience with real people, many of whom may read your PhD, I would like to know how confidentiality will be protected. For example, you speak about experiences being turned into stories, but I am

concerned that in order to answer your questions authentically, I will have to draw on experiences with current school leaders. I assume my name, nor the names of the schools in which I have worked, are never mentioned in the PhD?

3. I am not 100% sure about the focus of the interview. "*Following*" could mean strategically, personally, operationally, or a number of other things. So, what is your focus? (SL3)

The physical setting of the interviews

The physical setting is important for conversations because it can influence the style of conversation. An interview conducted in an office will potentially have a more formal feel while an interview in a participant's home or a coffee shop will be less formal. For participants' interviews, I believed it was important that senior leaders felt relaxed and at ease. Therefore, as part of the interview process, participants were provided with choices about the setting and format.

The interviewees could choose between ZOOM and face-to-face meetings. ZOOM meetings allowed participants to choose the setting and allowed interviews to occur when practical considerations relating to location were a concern. As an example, a participant in Western Australia would mostly likely be interviewed via ZOOM because the distance would make a face-to-face interview impractical, while a participant in South Australia might be face-to-face.

However, due to the COVID pandemic, all but one interview was conducted via ZOOM. This was convenient for both the interviewee and interviewer, but establishing rapport was more challenging in an online setting. It was also more difficult to communicate spoken and non-verbal prompts.

All the interviews conducted were one-offs. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the role of interpretation sits with the researcher, therefore there was no need to return to participants to clarify meanings or seek their interpretation of stories. The duration of the interviews was between 40 and 90 minutes.

Gathering the Stories

The phenomenological interview was the method used for collecting data for this inquiry. The idea of data gathering is often associated with scientific approaches where researchers gather data based on objective observation and measurement. As discussed in Chapter 3, Philosophical and Methodological Foundations, phenomenological orientation to research is different. The spirit of hermeneutic phenomenological research speaks to methods which generate rich narratives within a research experience. Through this experience, meanings surface through reflection and conversation

which reveal essences of the phenomenon (Finlay, 2011; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014).

The experience of my interview with a supervisor provided me with a sense of how a phenomenological interview felt. The idea of an interview feeling a certain way was an important consideration. As I previously stated, I knew that my style in interviews, while relational, was potentially overthought. A phenomenological interview is open and reflective, which means that both the participant and researcher fall into a contemplative meandering that is fluid and spontaneous (van Manen, 2014). Therefore, before interviews, I visualised how I wanted the interview to feel rather than how I wanted the interview to go. This enabled conversations that suddenly took unexpected turns, revealed moments of vulnerability, and moved intuitively.

The risk in conducting phenomenological interviews is that the dialogue shifts too far away from the phenomenon (van Manen, 2014; van Manen & van Manen, 2021). For example, I noticed that participants' stories moved quickly to experiences of leading initiatives. While not unrelated to the phenomenon of *following*, narratives that centred on the experience of leading provided fewer possibilities for understanding experiences of *following*.

A consistent difficulty with the interviews was getting participants to talk about concrete experiences. An essential goal of phenomenological interviews is to elicit rich descriptions of concrete experiences (Farrell, 2020; van Manen, 1990, 2014; van Manen & van Manen, 2021). Participants, however, often fell into hypothesizing, theorising, and sharing opinions. To help guide the interview towards concrete experiences of *following*, I sent participants reflective questions two weeks prior to the interview. These questions were aimed at encouraging reflection on lived experiences and providing participants with an understanding of the scope of my inquiry. Additionally, at the start of each interview, I restated that the focus of the research was on capturing experiences rather than sharing views about leading and *following*. The reflective questions I shared prior to the interview are listed below and can also be found in Appendix 4:

1. How would you describe your experiences of being in a senior leadership team?
2. Can you describe a senior leadership team experience that you thought was very good?

Who or what made this experience very good?

Where did his experience occur?

What made this experience meaningful? Who was leading this experience?

Who shared this experience with you? What part did they play in this experience?
3. Can you describe an experience or moment in a senior leadership team meeting when you thought "things are not going well"?

What was occurring?

Were team members relating differently?

How was this experienced by members of the senior leadership team?

Who offered comments and ideas?

4. Can you describe a senior leadership experience when you thought “we could do things differently”?

How were you thinking the senior leadership team experience might be different?

Regardless of the set questions and sub-questions the interviews seemed to have lives of their own. This speaks to the experience of gathering stories. For instance, my first interview was rich with deep descriptions of *following* in senior leadership teams. The participant opened up about his experiences, revealing moments of joy and vulnerability. Shared understandings were created that related to the phenomenon of *following* and uncovered what it meant to be a senior leader. I remember feeling energised as I read the transcript and began to ponder what his stories revealed about *following*.

The next interview, however, felt like getting blood from a stone. The interview stumbled from story to story and the participant often shared opinions about others’ behaviour. In this interview, I tried to invent ways to keep the participant talking about their experiences. I noticed that I became increasingly concerned about this off-trackness, the lack of rich descriptions and the stilted nature of the conversation. After reviewing the transcript, I made notes for myself to maintain a balance between keeping the conversation going with prompts and allowing for short periods of contemplative silence.

I discovered that maintaining the conversational approach was challenging when a prior relationship did not exist. Even though I spent the first 5 minutes of the interview getting to know the participant, this relaxed beginning did not always translate into a free-flowing dialogue. As a result, some participants’ interviews contained many rich and interesting experiences of *following*, others contained more superficial descriptions and were challenging to craft into experiential stories. Overall, my experience of the interviews was of highs, awkward stumbling, and in-betweens.

The processes that best supported the conversations were: trying to maintain an open and contemplative feel, orienting conversations towards the phenomenon and the lived experiences of senior leaders, and the use of the reflective questions which supported reflection and sharing.

Dwelling with stories

The research process in hermeneutic phenomenological research is a lived experience. This research process is brought to life when the researcher begins to gather stories. Prior to this experience, research feels like waiting in the changerooms for a game to begin. You are engaged with thinking and questioning but once you begin interviewing it is like being immersed in playing a relational game. The interviews, transcribing, crafting, interpreting, and re-interpreting stories are all processes that enabled me to sit with the stories. Early morning walks, long bike rides and driving to work are activities where I habitually mull things over. As I became more saturated in the research process, these activities naturally encouraged me to ponder on the emergent meanings in participants' stories. Dwelling, pondering, and mulling over are actions that resonated with my interpretive journey.

In hermeneutic phenomenology this interpretive process requires researchers to intimately understand the melding of their own experiences, the participants' shared stories and the phenomenon. As discussed, Gadamer (2004) described this as a fusion of horizons that allows new meanings to surface. For the reader, this interpretive process is made transparent by the researcher describing the flow from interview, to transcribing, to crafting stories, identifying essential meanings, and writing interpretively about the phenomenon of interest: *following*.

Although this process might appear linear, I found that I continued to move fluidly between the parts of this process. As I wrote and thought, searching for essential meanings, I would often return to a transcription or a crafted story before diving back into further reflective analysis.

From transcriptions to tentative meanings

Each interview was recorded. My interview with a supervisor and one other interview were recorded via an App on my phone. All other interviews were recorded by ZOOM. I transcribed fully my interview. This helped me understand the process of translating what was said into a script that could be understood. It also made me appreciate that it was difficult to really listen to shared stories when transcribing all interviews in this manner. Therefore, after this first experience, I trialled using the ZOOM transcription service before settling on Rev Transcription Services. This is an online company that can provide a rough draft transcription service. This rough transcription provides 80% accuracy and is machine generated.

This service allowed me to listen to the audio recording and track the created script. This was important for ensuring that the final transcription was accurate. It also freed me to really listen to what was being shared. Working with a partially completed transcription drew my attention to words, phrases, and stories that spoke to the experiences of *following*. The 80% accuracy provided by Rev Transcription Services meant having to listen and re-listen to what was said but it also

provided the freedom to attune to the stories and emerging meanings.

In addition, the use of a machine-generated transcript provided important information about my interview technique. As an example, I noticed that occasionally my verbal cues interfered with the flow of the participant's story. This information improved how I conducted future interviews.

I tried to maintain a pattern of interviewing, transcribing, and crafting one participant at a time. Adhering to this process ensured that I was fully attentive to a participant's story and possible meanings. Potentially, being at different stages of interviewing, transcribing, and crafting for multiple participants would have adversely affected this process. For the majority of the interviewing and transcribing, this was possible. For two interviewees, I had to bring forward their interviews to allow them to participate. The use of Rev Transcription Services was invaluable for these occasions. I was able to store the interview and return to it, once I had fully completed the previous participant's process. This helped maintain the integrity of the process— interview, transcribe and craft—and facilitated the participation of the senior leaders.

The crafted story translates the transcription into rich and reflective anecdotes that resonate with our own being-in-the-world. It moves the inquiry from concrete experiences towards meanings of the phenomenon of *following*. The process of crafting begins as the researcher transcribes. As previously stated, as I was reading and correcting the computer-generated transcriptions, I was noticing the experiences, noticing when the participant was expressing opinions, and noticing words/statements/paragraphs that opened up understandings about *following*.

The process of crafting is a practical and interpretive polishing of the rough and raw information embedded in the transcript. The beginning practical step is the removal of all details that are extraneous or irrelevant to concrete experiences. This includes words, sentences, elongated statements and occasionally whole paragraphs, for example, information about where the participant worked, how the school year was going, questions asked by me and filler words (ums and ahs). Once I had completed this step, the transcriptions reflected descriptions of the concrete lived experiences of the participant: "this occurred", "I was doing", and "he started to".

At this point, I re-read the reduced transcript. I began to see meanings emerge and would often write down a single word or a phrase that resonated with my experience and the phenomenon of *following*. These key words or phrases were used in the form of headings and acted as initial organisers for text and interpretation. The next step in the process involved collecting parts of the reduced transcript and placing them underneath the relevant heading. Once the experiential stories were organised in this way, I re-read each part and began to craft them into a series of polished anecdotes.

This polishing process involved getting the tone, flow and meaning of the story right. This meant changing grammar, adding words to improve flow, and changing sentence order. There were also moments that I realised that a selected piece of text fitted better under another heading or wasn't adding to the meaning of the story.

Once I had crafted a participant's interview using this method, each story would be re-read. Occasionally, I would return to the original transcript to better understand the experience or to see that it was still a sound reflection of the participant's lived experience. This resulted in further rewriting and editing of the crafted stories.

After I was satisfied with the polished version of the crafted story, I used a simple reflective guide offered by Crowther et al. (2017). This entailed using the following reflective questions and I found it beneficial in ensuring the integrity of the crafting process:

- Does this story "show" the experience?
- Does it engage?
- (Am I) still holding the meaning as gifted by the participant?
- Have (I) seen "more" in the process of crafting up this story?
- Does it work?
- Does it still need more pruning? (Crowther et al., 2017, p. 831)

All the crafted stories were returned to participants for their approval. Only one participant returned the crafted story with requests to change parts. After reading the crafted version, the participant felt that some of her descriptions were overly harsh or too exuberant. This story was changed to include the refined language choices she offered and then returned to her again for approval. A few crafted stories really resonated with some participants and their replies suggested that the interpreted meanings of *following* were worthy of continued contemplation: "thought provoking; and true. Keep going" (SL4) and "You have nailed it. Perfectly captured." (SL9)

As I collected these returned stories, tentative themes began to emerge that related to the whole experience of being in *following* rather than themes that seemed to fit with participants' stories. I continued to write reflective questions to help peel back the layers. These reflective questions consider actualised and un-actualised possibilities. As an example, what might it mean to be in *following* but not acting in *following*? When might I be compelled to follow but not called to follow?

I noticed that this method for the initial analysis aligned with what van Manen (2014) described as thematic analysis—the act of seeing meaning. I read the crafted stories as a whole text and wonder what meanings were captured by the text as a whole. I also re-read the crafted stories several times

and considered what phrases or statements seem to resonate across all of the stories (van Manen, 2014).

The subsequent emergent themes surfaced in my reflective writing. In considering these themes I also wondered how might the actualised and un-actualised manifestations be experienced by senior leaders in *following*. These manifestations are included in brackets after the emergent theme and reflective question and can be read as possible lived experiences:

- Hiddenness: What is it like to be hidden and in hiding? (siloe, disengaged, distracted/not fully present, apprehensive, silenced, concealed, unknown, obscured, suppressed)
- Seeming to be and being: What is it like to be seeming to be and to be? (authentic, true to oneself, true to others, deferential, obsequious, inauthentic)
- Sense of purpose: What is it like to have a sense of purpose? (habitual, ritual, traditions, structure, change, chaotic, drudgery, tempo)
- Being out on a limb: What does it mean to be out on a limb? (vulnerable, unsure, misaligned, comforted, safe, freedom, trust)
- Playing the game: What is it like to play the game? (roles, functions, expectations, rules, the way we are in *following* with others—relational)
- Esprit de Corps: What is it like to experience esprit de corps? (camaraderie, bonding, fellowship, solidarity, community of interests)
- Being compelled: What is it like to be compelled? (sense of duty, responsibility, engagement or disengagement, necessity, getting the job done, oscillating compulsion, experiencing faith/values/relationships, circumstance)
- The dance of *following*: What is it like to be in a *following* dance? (getting in sync, learning the steps, leading and *following*, performing your part in the dance, intuitive knowing of your partner in dancing)

At this point in the process, I began to connect these emergent themes with the philosophical thinking of Heidegger (1996), Merleau-Ponty (2012), Gadamer (2004) and Sartre (1966). For example, drawing upon Heidegger's and Sartre's thinking about authenticity revealed deeper meanings of being in hiddenness, seeming to be and being, and being out on a limb. I used Shakespeare's "*Hamlet*" (Shakespeare, 1992) to further reflect on the essence of authenticity. This process of writing, reflecting, pulling in inspiration from philosophy, the arts, humanities, sport, and other areas enabled my inquiry to draw closer to the nakedness of the phenomenon of *following*—stripping it of its taken-for-grantedness.

Are there sufficient stories?

Phenomenological methods collect stories that are rich with meanings (van Manen, 2014).

Therefore, the question was not how many senior leaders were interviewed but how many rich experiential stories were needed to provide unique insights into the enduring meanings of *following*.

Prior to commencing the research process, I envisaged that 60–80 stories from the participants would provide sufficient data. After interviewing 6–7 participants and working with their stories, I started to sense that I was nearing the point where I had sufficient rich narratives to unearth essential meanings of my phenomenon. After completing my tenth interview the decision was made to cease gathering further stories as ample stories had been collected. At this point, each interview had unearthed 8–10 meaningful stories.

Writing Phenomenologically

There are examples in the literature that elevate phenomenological writing to the extraordinary (Elley-Brown, 2015; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014). In embarking on this phenomenological inquiry, the thought of having to write like Heidegger or Gadamer, or of creating a text so rich in language that Shakespeare would be proud, was daunting. However, through the act of writing phenomenologically and reflecting, it is my view that a more accurate representation is that phenomenological writing represents a particular way of doing research.

The process of writing is foundational for the phenomenological method. The very nature of the act of writing embeds the researcher within the research and with the phenomenon. This interpretative writing process aims to create a text that not only reveals the essential structures of the phenomenon, but it aims to do so in a way that connects the reader with the being of beings. Additionally, it attempts to make the phenomenon relatable.

Accordingly, van Manen (2014) states, “in the reflective process of writing the researcher not only engages in analysis but also aims to express the noncognitive, ineffable and pathic aspects of meaning that belong to the phenomenon” (p. 239). This is a point of difference from quantitative writing and a challenge for creators of phenomenological text.

The phenomenological writer needs to employ devices that allow the text to resonate deeply with readers. Creative forms of writing use many different techniques for creating texts that not only speak of but speak to. This approach is consistently used within the creative and performing arts. When an artist paints, the painting speaks of something captured on the canvas. At the same time, the painting speaks to us. Perhaps it encourages reflection, surfaces emotions, touches memories, repulses us, and inspires action. Whatever the experience, lived experiences of viewing the painting resonate with us.

Writing is also a creative art. Writers use literary devices to speak of and speak to metaphors, similes, allusions, hyperbole, imagery, and allegory to name but a few. Therefore, in writing phenomenologically, I endeavoured to employ these devices where appropriate. Overuse of them can mask meaning, as can attempts to be overly clever or sophisticated. This guidance does not suggest that this inquiry has taken an unsophisticated and uneducated approach to writing. What it has encouraged, in my writing, is a balanced sensitivity toward the audience. The use of open questions was particularly important. How might I best write in ways that allow readers to feel the experience of the phenomenon? How might I use techniques that open new meanings for readers and encourage contemplation? How might I sensitively use techniques that allow readers to recognise the experiential possibilities of being in *following*?

Like the Years 5 and 6 writers I teach at school, there were moments when language escaped me in my quest to create a worthwhile text. The words that I used or devices I employed weren't sufficient. Upon re-reading I was left with a feeling of "that isn't it". Occasionally, I would be struck by how poorly my language choices captured my intent. I avoided writing poetry for this reason. My poetic writing never quite captures in words the textual experience I want to paint.

This was part of learning how to write phenomenologically. The phenomenon is difficult to grasp. It is difficult to capture in language. It is difficult to reveal the very essence of the phenomenon through writing. For this inquiry, most experiences of writing a phenomenological text left me feeling slightly dissatisfied. Although I appreciate it has been stated by other philosophers and researchers, reading the introduction to Vagle's book (2018) reminded me that phenomenological writing is not about having the final word. For me this took some of the pressure off trying to craft extraordinary pieces of phenomenological text.

Finally, making sense of the familiar and alien through writing poses an issue that requires sensitive attention. The comfort of the familiar revealed through interviews might cause a lack of deeper reflection: I write it as I know it already. As I wrote about experiences of being at home in *following*, this naturally resonated with me. The comfort of being at home and of being in *following* was a comparison that related to my lived experience. Therefore, I needed to be careful not to close myself off from other possibilities.

Equally, writing about the alien might generate inadequate descriptive language. For example, some participants' experiences of being called in *following* came from their experiences of being in a religious school. I have never worked in a religious school, therefore interpreting the nuances of the spiritual dimension in experience of *following*, while understandable, fell outside my own lived experiences. Finding the language to express effectively the meanings of their experiences was demanding.

van Manen (2014) provided a useful summary of the key components of a phenomenological text that also touch the key components of the lived experience of writing, and philosophical and methodological concerns. In writing Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I found that I attuned to this thinking as I wrote.

Texts should:

- induce a sense of contemplative wonder
- contain rich and recognisable experiential materials
- reveal deeper meanings of the lived experience through reflective insights
- Invite critical questioning of the distinct meaning of the phenomenon
- Speak to our sense of being a being-in-the-world
- make naked our naïve contact with the world
- Open up possibilities for grasping our intuitive, naïve way of being (van Manen, 2014, p. 355)

Ethics Approval

As part of the process for commencing research, I was required to apply for ethics approval from the University of Adelaide. Approval for this inquiry was granted by the University of Adelaide's Office of Research, Compliance and Integrity on 1 May 2020: Approval No. H-2020-061. The title for my PhD thesis was "Experiences of *following* within senior leadership teams in Independent Schools". The ethics application for my thesis was deemed as low risk for participants and met the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (see Appendix 1).

Trustworthiness

When discussing the trustworthiness of the method used for this inquiry, it is worthwhile acknowledging that debate surrounds the issue (McGinley et al., 2021). Fundamentally, it is a question about the trustworthiness of subjective interpretations of phenomena. The phenomenological researcher must demonstrate that their interpretations are credible, dependable, and worthy of trust.

van Manen (2014) argued that our criteria for assessing phenomenological research should align with understandings about the philosophical and methodological considerations of the research process. Arguably, from this position, judging phenomenological research using criteria from scientific, quantitative research is akin to using mathematics criteria to judge poetry. Yes, certain aspects may resonate, but application is unwieldy and there is a likelihood of failing to assess the poetry in a way that reflects its nature.

What criteria might be appropriate for phenomenological research? As underscored by van Manen (1990, 2014) and articulated by De Witt and Ploeg (2006), “expressions of trustworthiness” is a phrase that captures the phenomenological way better than criteria which can be associated with quantitative approaches (p. 226). The intent of these expressions of trustworthiness is to show the researcher’s process and how the chosen phenomenological methods uncover the identified enduring themes of the phenomenon (De Witt & Ploeg, 2006; van Manen, 2014).

Finlay (2011), van Manen (2014), Johnston et al. (2017), and De Witt and Ploeg (2006) all offer possibilities for considering expression of trustworthiness. van Manen and De Witt and Ploeg are often cited as resources for contemplating appropriate methods for phenomenologists. As examples, Crowther (2014) used De Witt and Ploeg’s approach to show the trustworthiness of her phenomenological inquiry into *Sacred Joy at Birth*, while Elley-Brown (2015) also used De Witt and Ploeg’s approach to make clear how her van Manen oriented research was credible, dependable, and trustworthy.

After considering the various positions, this inquiry took a slightly different approach which is captured in Table 2. This approach relies heavily on the criteria set out by De Witt and Ploeg but draws upon the open and reflective questioning of van Manen (2014) and Finlay (2011). It also draws inspiration from Errasti-Ibarrondo et al. (2018), whose clear tabulated explanations informed some of the method examples.

Table 2

Expressions of Trustworthiness

Expressions of Trustworthiness	Description	Possible Reflective Question	Methodic Examples from this inquiry
Balanced Integration	Articulation of the fit of the philosophical and methodological considerations with the research process	Does the phenomenological question relate to our everyday experiences of being in the world?	Clarifying that the phenomenon is a lived experience of concern
	Descriptions of the intertwining of philosophy and method	Are participants’ voices represented in the interpretive process?	Creating a phenomenological question that opens up possible meanings of the phenomenon as it is lived. What might experiences of <i>following</i> be like? What might it mean to be in <i>following</i> ?
	A balance between voice of participants and philosophy	Does the written text represent a clear articulation of lived experiences and philosophical considerations?	Collecting and representing stories from appropriate participants—ones who can speak to experiences of the phenomenon (Purposive Sampling and Snowballing).
			Identifying and clarifying philosophical and methodological alignment (Chapter 3).

Expressions of Trustworthiness	Description	Possible Reflective Question	Methodic Examples from this inquiry
Reflexiveness	The researcher's self-awareness and openness.	Does the inquiry show the researcher's open and contemplative attunement?	Articulating how the researcher approached the research.
		Are the pre-judgements and prejudices of the researcher clear?	Using open and reflective questions that represent the researcher's position but also invite further contemplation.
		Does the written text show how interpretations were elicited?	Using processes to unearth pre-judgements and prejudices
		Is the researcher's position in the research process clear?	Clearly stating these fore-conceptions and how they were used reflectively in interpretative activities.
		Does the text account for decisions made in the research process?	Providing examples that explicate decision making processes.
		How have I shown a sensitivity towards the ethical and moral concerns of being involved in the research process	Showing how the researcher dealt with issues that might adversely affect the participant
Concreteness	Descriptions and interpretations are written that capture concrete experiences. The reader may have lived through or can recognize clearly how the experience can be lived through in everyday life.	Does the collected material represent lived experiences of participants?	Reducing the rough transcriptions to experiential material that represents lived experiences.
			Polishing this experiential material into crafted stories.

Expressions of Trustworthiness	Description	Possible Reflective Question	Methodic Examples from this inquiry
Resonance	The felt effect of the writing that connects with the affective and spiritual life of the reader	Does the researcher's use of literary devices create felt meanings that touch readers?	The use of metaphors, similes, imagery, hyperbole ... etc
		Does the writing open pathways for the reader to engage emotionally or spiritually?	Introducing ideas from other areas (philosophy, the arts, sport...etc) that further open meanings.
		Does the writing unsettle current, taken-for-granted ways of being?	Remaining opening to possibilities while writing so that new perspectives can emerge.
		Does the writing encourage further contemplation?	Use of evocative language that brings forth memories, images, feelings, questions.
Actualisation	The research holds meaning now but also into the future.	What relevance might the research hold now? How might this research continue to be present in dialogue about the phenomenon?	Relating the findings to the phenomenon itself in contexts that are meaningful to the participants. Suggesting future directions and applications of meanings unearthed in the inquiry.

Concluding Comments

The purpose of this chapter was to clearly outline the research approach to this hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. This process involved an intertwining of philosophical considerations with the particular research choices I made. These decisions were reflected in the methods aimed at opening up new perspectives of the lived experiences of being in *following* in senior leadership teams.

Phenomenological research methods are not prescribed, therefore, in selecting these methods, it was important that I was attuned to the phenomenon of concern, the participants and their stories, and the meanings that emerged. The methods included identifying my prejudices and prejudgments, purposive sampling, interviews, crafting of experiential stories, interpreting and re-interpreting, and the inclusion of insights from philosophy, the arts, humanities, and sports.

Fundamental to this research process was the art of writing. In writing, my being-in the research found expression. This can be seen in my interpretations, method choices and also in the language used to make felt and intelligible the phenomenon of *following*. The purpose of my method and the subsequent discussion about the enduring meanings of *following* was not to have the final word. The created text aimed to capture a plausible, felt and intelligible interpretation of *following* as it is lived by the senior leaders in Independent Schools in Australia.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 represent a deeper exploration of the modes of being in *following*. Chapter 5 explores the mood of *following*, Chapter 6 contemplates authenticity in *following*, and Chapter 7 discloses the uniqueness of being in *following* in senior leadership teams.

Chapter 5: Being in *following* in the senior leadership team

In this inquiry, experiences of *following* for senior leaders exist, are discernible and matter within the setting of the school, especially in the senior leadership team. However, it is important to also recognise that Schools are embedded entities within a larger political, relational and societal world (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2016). They are not separate from but exist always in relation to ideas, objects and communities of people beyond the school gate. Thus, the background which discloses the meaning of *following* in senior leadership teams primarily sits within the school gates but is always embedded in the wider context of the community. Accordingly, this embeddedness is represented in the stories of senior leaders. A majority of the narratives relate, first and foremost, to experiences within the senior leadership team. However, there are also moments when the contextual mood beyond the school gate shapes lived experiences in *following*.

If meanings of *following* for senior leaders primarily manifest themselves in the context of schools and the senior leadership team, how might this context be interpreted for shared understandings, and what is its relationship to *following*? When might societal moods be felt and sensed within senior leadership team and in *following*?

The stories from participants showed there was a clear picture being painted about the nature of being in a senior leadership team. It is the team that is representative of the Principal within the school and the wider school community. In essence, it is the Principal's team. The team has a certain character that is shaped by and in turn shapes each experience (Crowther et al., 2018). Hence, the subsequent chapters seek ontological meanings of *following* that are revealed through the character of senior leadership teams and the experiences of shaping and being shaped in these teams.

In this chapter, I interpret the meanings of being in *following* through the lens of moods. In Chapter 6, being in authenticity in *following* is discussed. Finally, Chapter 7 contemplates how being in the Principal's team reveals situation-specific ways of understanding the phenomenon of *following*. Each of these chapters peels back the layers of experiential meanings of *following* in senior leadership teams in Independent Schools in Australia.

The Mood of following in the senior leadership team-atmospheres of existence

Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus. From the mountain you see the mountain. We animate what we can, and we see only what we animate. Nature and books belong to the eyes that see

them. It depends on the mood of the man, whether he shall see the sunset or the fine poem. (Emerson, 2015, p. 45)

In this chapter, I briefly recap the phenomenological perspective on moods discussed in Chapter 3. This perspective reflects Heidegger's (1996) thinking. I then turn towards deeper interpretations of the phenomenon of *following*. This interpretative process considers the Heideggerian perspective on moods, the experiences of participants and the phenomenon of *following*. This hermeneutic phenomenological process surfaces new meanings of being in *following* in senior leadership teams.

Moods and Atmosphere

Reiterating Heidegger's (1996) view, moods are essential to our ways of being-in-the-world. We are always in a mood and this mood allows us to interpret experiencing things, people and ideas in our lifeworlds, which are also mooded (Crowther et al., 2018; Elpidorou & Freeman, 2015; Lewis, 2017; Ringmar, 2018). Therefore, and importantly for understandings of *following* in senior leadership teams, it is our moods that make school life routine, familiar, comprehensible, and important to us.

Heidegger (1996) also posited that moods capture the atmosphere or vibe of situations we find ourselves thrown into: the atmosphere of a meeting, the vibe of a concert; or the felt sensuousness of a sunrise. The special character of these atmospheres discloses the meaning-rich background for understanding. As examples: I understand my experiences of a high-stakes meeting through the felt atmosphere of urgency; I experience feeling calm through the relaxed vibe of a music performance; and I experience being at peace through the special character of a morning sunrise.

In these experiences, there is a concrete merging of Heidegger's thinking about moods. I find myself already in a mood when I enter the meeting and the way I feel harmonises with the atmosphere or vibe of the meeting. This harmonising generates new mooded meanings which generate further moods and further meanings. This encapsulates the dynamic, fluid, and circular manifestations of phenomena.

Accordingly and ontologically important to this inquiry is an understanding that *following* experiences are always in relation to our mood and the vibe of our lifeworld (Ringmar, 2018). Moods are the fabric and flavours of *following* within the senior leadership team.

At this point in my research, I have pondered about the following questions: How might senior leaders in schools experience the fabric and flavour of *following*? What moods do senior leaders find themselves in *following*? Does the Principal's team have a mood (flavour) that distinguishes itself from other experiences for senior leaders?

Being in a mood in following

In this inquiry, senior leaders' narratives of experiences of *following* in the Principal's team disclosed ways that moods can be felt and sensed. These narratives revealed that moods make intelligible experiences of being in *following*. These moods of *following* are uniquely attuned to the varied context of the senior leadership team. However, what is common for senior leaders in *following* is that moods can be shared, that moods are constituted in being with others in *following* (especially the Principal), and that senior leaders find themselves falling into and being thrown into *following* in certain moods.

Moods can be shared by the senior leadership team. This does not suggest that everyone experiences a mood/moods identically. The lived experience is closer to people feeling the same way in relation to something. As highlighted in Chapter 4, language envelopes and discloses meanings of being-in-the-world. Thus, the sharing of a collective mood can be meaningfully captured through language, and the use of language can also open up ways of interpreting these collective experiences.

The German word *zeitgeist* captures the shared meanings of atmosphere/mood. *Zeitgeist*, used conventionally as well as in philosophy, can be interpreted as the spirit of a period in history. The use of descriptive language highlights the essence of these periods: the Swinging Sixties, the Roaring Twenties, and the Great Depression. This language conveys meanings about shared moments and the atmosphere of the times. The Sixties were swinging and hip. The Roaring Twenties were a time of growth, optimism and significant cultural change. Fashion, art and music reflected the atmosphere of both these historical periods. This doesn't suggest that everyone experienced roaring or swinging in the same way; however, it draws our attention to how the atmosphere of the times can create shared meanings. For example, jazz music of the Twenties doesn't reverberate with society in the same way today. It was felt and sensed in a way that reflected the atmosphere of the Twenties. Fashion, dancing and entertainment made sense because of the "new-age jazz". These cultural activities had a certain character that was reflective of the atmosphere (mood) of the times. Debatably, these cultural activities would not resonate in the same way today because the atmosphere is not the same.

Similarly, in *following* the atmosphere (mood) can be a shared experience that makes experiences intelligible to senior leaders. The mood of the team and the mood of the meeting are examples that resonate with anecdotes from senior leaders. In each of the subsequent recitations it is possible to grasp what the mood of team would be like and what it might be like to be in a meeting with these senior leaders. Like the atmosphere of the Roaring Twenties, these mooded moments for senior

leaders allow for the interpretation of experiences of *following* in these teams. These moments are understandable because the mood is discernable and thus the lived experiences are relatable.

In terms of leadership teams, I've either been in charge of them, or quite high up in the structure. Currently, I'm at Newmore School. I've been here for 14–15 years, but part of the senior leadership team for about 10 of those years. During that time, I've been part of two different leadership teams, set up under two headmasters with different styles. (SL1)

We tended to have our meetings in holiday times because it was when we could have four hours together, really functioning at a higher level. I quite enjoyed this experience because it was very much free of the distractions of the day-to-day operation. You weren't thinking about some of the issues that you're going to deal with when you get back to the office. You knew that you had four big meetings a year. I felt that this created an experience where you were involved in the bigger picture of the school. I was much more involved in the budgeting process, much more involved in strategic implementation, and so on and so forth. It's also time with people who you meet with very regularly. So, you build up that common trust and common values. (SL1)

There was also an openness in this team and I think the Head was slightly more familiar. The meetings had a less formal feel. Whereas with the current team there's, at this stage, a bit more formality, even though that's not necessarily the style of the Head. I just think it's the nature of having a lot of people in that leadership team. I'd say my preference would be to have a slightly tighter group where you feel that there's a little more openness. That you can actually discuss things a bit more openly. If there was a preference that probably would be it. Sometimes you just feel, I'm just a little bit on the outer, just by virtue of the agenda items. (SL1)

In these anecdotes, the senior leader was acknowledging that each leadership team can have a different style—the mood can be different. The atmosphere in the first team was lighter, less formal, more familiar and open. In this atmosphere, the senior leader felt comfortable sharing, felt involved in the big picture, and felt connected to and trusted by other senior leaders. These experiences are

understood in this situation because of the atmosphere. Potentially, if the mood of the meetings was cautious or tense the experiences would not be understood in the same way. There is also a sense that the atmosphere in the second team is different. It is more formal, less collegial and less open. The experience of this mood of the team is one where the senior leader felt like he/she was a bit on the “outer”. In *following*, the leader no longer felt as connected or included. Lewis (2017) noted that teachers altered their behaviour or approach based on their experience of mood in the classroom. If the class felt dead or alive, their teaching became a reflection of the classroom atmosphere. Similarly, we can see in this story how the mood of the team impacts the way followers find themselves in *following*.

In the next anecdote, the senior leadership team had a different mood from the preceding stories. The atmosphere was more constrained and controlled. Perhaps unkindly, the atmosphere might be described as administrative or managed. The meeting was very organized and focused on aligning functions with a strategic plan. The school is religious and this brought its own special character to these meetings. The meetings started with a prayer or devotion. The agenda drove conversations and the Principal sought to control this space. Again, in the story below, we can sense and feel the atmosphere of this leadership team.

The team met weekly for one to two hours. The meetings were always minuted. The agenda was scheduled for one hour, but we all made sure we had two hours free. The agenda was based on the previous week's point of need and we would work through this. Primarily everything was keyed up and broken down into areas that aligned with our three-year strategic plan. Being a Christian School, we'd often open up with a little devotion or prayer. The principal would facilitate these meetings. My experience was positive in the group initially. It was good and had fairly good dynamics. (SL4)

The experiences of *following* for this senior leader are discernible against this specific background. Initially, the experience was positive and worthwhile. As the mood of this team shifted over time in his story so did the experience and mood of the senior leader. A positive experience became something damaging and negative. This is an example of the mood of the team shaping *following* and being shaped by the senior leader in *following*.

I'm trying not to be negative because there were good parts to his leadership. However, as I've reflected, I've realized that three people ran the school. It wasn't the Principal. We did all the running. The Principal just took all the accolades for the good things and passed on the blame for the bad things. (SL8)

In both these experiences, there was a tangible shift in the mood of the senior leader in *following*. His interpretation of experiences with the Principal also shifted dramatically. He questioned his experiences in the team and the way he experienced the Principal's intentions. Ultimately, this led to the senior leader feeling quite depressed about being in *following*. He noted:

If I had a leader I had confidence in, it would have been much easier to follow. It would have been great to take cues from a good leader and relearn and embed that.

Unfortunately, my experience has been that only handful of things were worth taking from my senior leader. (SL8)

His mood had shifted from being positive to being dejected and negative. This occurred in parallel with a shift in atmosphere for the team. The intertwining of situational atmosphere and personal mood was shaping the experiences of being in *following*.

In both anecdotes, there is evidence that the senior leaders are "tuned in" to the mood of the team. It is this tuning-in to the environment and the people within the team that makes the experiences for them discernible. Heidegger (1996) used the term attunement to capture this concept (Crowther et al., 2018; Lewis; 2018; Ringmar, 2018). As noted by Ringmar (2018) and Lewis (2017), the idea of attunement is not dissimilar to the musical idea of being in tune: we are "in" or "out" of tune in relation to pitch or interval. Human beings can be in and out of tune with their environment, ideas, and in being with others. When we are in tune, life feels harmonious. However, we can also experience being badly out of tune and moments of being well tuned in to a bad situation. There are many ways that we can find ourselves being in or not in tune with the team, Principal and situations in *following*. The preceding anecdotes highlighted examples of being attuned to the mood of the senior leadership team and the mood of others, especially the Principal. The interplay between the mood of the team, the mood of the Principal and the mood of the senior leaders existed in many experiential examples in this inquiry. Again, the context and mood of each of these leadership teams were unique but the experiences of mood were fundamental to being in *following*. What other experiences of mood might be shared by senior leaders?

The mood of being with the Principal

In *following* in senior leadership teams, the mood of the team is often experienced as being with the mood of the Principal. As previously noted, this might include being in tune with the Principal, being out of tune with the Principal, and being well-attuned to being out of tune with the Principal. In the previous anecdote, the senior leader was clearly aware that he was out of tune with the Principal. His attunement to this situation is depicted in his narration of how he felt during this experience. There is also evidence that the Principal's mood was influential in shaping the experiences within the

senior leadership team.

The mood of the Principal can also take a more substantive role in shaping the mood of the team. This occurs when the Principal's mood is experienced as the mood of the team. These encounters might be harmonious, disharmonious, and shades in between. Sometimes senior leaders find themselves in experiences where they are out of tune and well-tuned in to being out of tune with the mood of the Principal. In these moments, the Principal's mood can be experienced noticeably as the mood of the team. Using a musical analogy, it is like the strings of the guitar being out of tune and therefore out of tune with each other as well. This creates an overall experience of dissonance. The encounters are jarring and alien. The fusing of being out of tune with the mood of the environment where *following* exists, can substantially and negatively shape experiences for senior leaders.

The experience for the leader is different. He's not really aware that this is the experience for most of the team. He's a narcissist at the end of the day. There is only one opinion that matters, and he would twist and turn every other opinion into sounding like it was his or sounding like what he wanted to hear.

It was his glory. It was all his glory. And at the end of the day, that's fine. But there's not a lot of satisfaction in that. People can't escape from it and they're not happy. And nor are the people that are working around them because they're carrying an enormous amount of stress and strain.

This really meant you were *following* the leader in the most negative sense. There's not a sense of *following* with empowerment. There's not a sense of *following* to send messages out to your team. And that's the other part of the low, when you walk out of that meeting and you go to deliver the message to the next level down, you can't deliver it with any conviction. (SL5)

The shared mood of this team, shaped by the mood of the Principal in relation to being with other members of the senior leadership team, was decidedly negative. The mood was oppressive. The senior leaders "can't escape" and "there's not a sense of empowerment". There was no joy or life in being in *following* in this team. The senior leader who shared this story was tuned into the mood of this team and the mood of others within the team. This attuned and determined his interpretation of this negative experience in *following*.

Equally, there might be moments when senior leaders find themselves in tune with the mood of the Principal. The strings are in tune and the experience is melodious and unifying. The following anecdote, from a Principal, recounts experiences of the team being in tune with each other and with the atmosphere of the situation (a pandemic).

I couldn't believe how quickly everyone mobilized and with such goodwill. We knew what the World Health Organization was saying. However, we didn't have any direction from the Department of Education nor from the Government as to what constitutes a hotspot. We really had to say, okay, what is it that is most important to us? The most important thing to us is the safety of our students. If we operate from that premise, everything else has to be second. It was almost like a strategic planning workshop that's really effective. You have those lovely moments where you have a sort of an epiphany and everything becomes very clear. We were able to say these are our principles, this is who we are. (SL7)

The atmosphere of uncertainty that engulfed schools at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was felt and sensed by all members of school communities (White & McCallum, 2021). It was especially felt by senior leadership teams who were charged with navigating a chaotic and rapidly evolving environment. In this story, the mood of the team was flavoured by a strong sense of unity: “this is who we are”. The team was working together harmoniously in difficult circumstances, identifying what mattered and how they might align their subsequent plans. There was also a sense of pride in this story that underlined the mood of the Principal. In her example, she identified experiences of the team extending goodwill towards each other and working effectively. Her descriptions of “lovely moments”, “an epiphany” and “these are our principles” highlighted her attunement to the atmosphere within the team. The use of “we” in her narration also pointed towards the sharing of the mood and indicated the collegial atmosphere of this experience of being in *following*. In this example, the collegial and positive mood of the Principal was experienced as the mood of a team in harmony.

The preceding stories from senior leaders disclose how moods make intelligible experiences of being in *following*, how moods can be shared, how moods are constituted in being with others, and how the special character of the Principal's mood shapes experiences in *following*. What else might be revealed through considering the mood of senior leaders and the senior leadership team?

One of Heidegger's (1996) key ideas linked with attunement and mood is thrownness. Life is not static. Our everyday existence is constituted by being thrown into circumstances that already are mooded. This is how we pass through the train of moods and open up and understand our lifeworld (O'Shiel, 2017). Thus, in the above anecdote, it is possible to see how the team was thrown into an atmosphere of uncertainty that already existed. The uncertainty that surrounded the COVID-19 pandemic built rapidly and translated readily into our "new normal"—our lived experience. The experiences that arise from being thrown into a new situation open up meanings of being in *following* in the senior leadership team. This is, therefore, an example of how the mood of the community can influence the mood of the team, the mood of the Principal, and the mood in *following*. While the mood of the pandemic is an example of a crisis emerging beyond the school gate that shaped the experience for senior leaders, other examples of being thrown into community moods revealed further meanings of experiences of *following*.

In this next shared experience, the senior leadership team was thrown into the political atmosphere that was already embedded in the fabric of the location. This democratically imbued mood made clear what senior leaders cared about—a chance to voice a legitimate view and have that voice heard. The senior leaders considered it their right to be able to "speak up".

There's a legitimate opposition in Canberra—seat of parliament ... And that would ripple through many different aspects of the city of Canberra. People there have strong opinions and this was true of the staff. They had strong opinions—and they'd voice them. This was normal to do, and thus there was an additional complexity about BH Grammar. It was a beautiful school. ... but it was complicated. Yet you knew where you stood because people were prepared to speak up. The Head of Junior School, Jeff, was a good example of this. I think I had a really good working relationship with him. Jeff would tell me what I needed to know. He had a lot of licence to run the Junior School. I think that's how it should be. He'd speak up and tell me what was what. You need that because most Heads come from a senior school background and aren't Junior School experts.

(SL9)

The Principal and the team were thrown into the mood of the nation's capital. This mood shaped the mood of the Principal, the team and the senior leaders (followers). The interplay between moods is evident. The experiences for the Principal were complicated. His mood shifted to match the mood of the environment and the mood of the senior leaders. He created experiences where the Head of Junior School had a licence to be autonomous and voice opinions. The mood was felt and sensed as being democratic, like the context the school is embedded in.

Being thrown into the mood of following

Being thrown into these mooded experiences of a certain character shapes and is shaped by the senior leaders. The experiences not only make sense in these mooded contexts but also disclose ways of being in *following* in these settings: collegial in atmospheres that are uncertain, egalitarian in democratic mooded schools.

How else might being thrown into atmospheres of existence be experienced in *following*? This final story highlights an atmosphere that exists for many independent schools across Australia. It's the atmosphere of competition. The moodiness of the team in this next story is a reflection of being thrown into an environment where competition is at play:

Accountability for enrolments or performance can mean that senior leadership teams are high stress environments. This isn't always a great environment to operate in. When there is heightened competition over every enrolment this causes stress. In some places, there are one or two extra independent schools. In countries like England there are hundreds of independent schools that are often situated very closely. This causes competition for each enrolment. This competition for enrolments and related issues with the financial viability of the school impacts how the Principal relates to the team. Things are tighter within the team. There is less freedom to try ideas. It's more restrictive. In this space, the principal can remind you that they appointed you to do the job and do it properly. (SL10)

The experience of being in a competitive atmosphere in relation to other schools clearly shaped the mood of the Principal, the team and being in *following*. The senior leaders and the Principal were stressed, feelings were heightened, and relationships within the team were precarious. The experiences of *following* are reflective of this atmosphere. In *following*, the team was "tighter" with each other. The relational space that was created between senior leaders was experienced as being cautious, tight-lipped and less collegial. Senior leaders were looking over their shoulders because

there was an atmosphere of being closely watched by the Principal to ensure the job was being done properly. In *following*, there was less risk taking and openness to trying new ideas. The mood of the senior leaders in this team can be interpreted as being on tenterhooks. The senior leaders were attuned to this nervous mood and it created stressful moments, where it felt like every enrolment counted and every enrolment lost was a nail in the coffin.

Arguably, the previous examples of thrownness captured periods where the mood was abnormally heightened. Schools are challenged by change, a crisis, or specific contextual issues, and the mood of the senior leadership team shifts noticeably to match the mood of the challenge. Organisational life in schools can be characterised and punctuated by these moments of crisis. This is part of the lifeworld of schools and leaders within these schools. However, there are also moments of calm in organisational life, moments when senior leaders feel like life is back to normal, lived-time is felt as slowing (van Manen, 2014). The chaotic, rushed and heightened experiences of crises fall away. During these moments, *following* can be experienced as falling into routines, falling into familiar patterns of being with others, caring for and about established traditions.

Heidegger (1996) described fallenness as our average everyday way of being together (Anowai & Chukwujekwu, 2019). We are indistinguishable as individuals and slide into the habitual and unexamined ways of living. These ways of being lack curiosity and considered reflection. For Heidegger, this fallenness into averageness represented an inauthentic self (Wheeler, 2020). Extending this idea to a senior leadership team, these moments of returning to normal can be seen as a team falling into habitual and routine ways of being together. There are certainly indications of this in the stories of senior leaders in this inquiry: as examples, sitting in the same seats each meeting, starting meetings always with a prayer, and working through agendas in a linear and practiced fashion. The following story illustrates how this is lived and felt.

For these meetings, we'd sit around the big Board table. It is a massive table. It's enormous. It's a big executive too. I think there were seven or eight. We'd come into this meeting, grab our petit fours and coffee and then we'd sit down. People would always sit in the same spot. I would always sit next to the chaplain and he sat as far away from the Headmaster as he could. (SL4)

The Chaplain would always be invited to open with a prayer and then you'd go through the agenda, and it was mainly standing items. After the Chaplain's prayer, it was over to the Headmaster. He had his KPIs. His KPIs might get discussed and they were on the agenda, but usually he'd skip over all that and go to something else. The

thing that took the most time was under the Deputy Headmaster–Operations’ role.

He would spend a majority of the meeting going through all the HR. We’d get

bogged down in how many sick days John Smith had taken in the English

department. Each Head of Sub-School would report on the days taken off by staff.

No real questions just sitting and listening...or not. (SL4)

When you finally got through that mess, all that HR stuff, and breathed a sigh of relief,

you'd get to the next part of the meeting which was usually about policy documents

that needed to be updated. (SL4)

Unlike Heidegger, for Gadamer (2000, 2004), this story would contain examples of rituals rather than inauthenticity. What did Gadamer mean by ritual? He meant all that is encompassed of being a being in the world through mutual agreements, morals, and customs (Grondin, 2000; Jarvis, 2016). In the above anecdote, these rituals may also include the way senior leaders greet each other, the contemplative spirit of the opening prayer, the norms of being with others professionally, and turn taking during discussions. These are not the facts of the meeting or what Claude Romano (2009) described as the factum of an event: when it occurs, the order of the agenda, and the physical location of the meeting (van Manen, 2014). For Gadamer (2000, 2004) and Romano (2009), these were the meaningful experiences opened up by the rituals or factum of being with others, characterised by an everydayness that hid their significance. For example, professional norms of a meeting encourage turn taking during discussions. This turn taking is rich with meaning: who speaks when? who don't we interrupt and equally who do we interrupt? who always interrupts? who never takes their turn?

Therefore, in *following* in senior leadership teams, when we fall into returning to normal, the experiences can be, as posited by Heidegger, mundane, superficial and inauthentic. However, these experiences can also be reflective of Gadamer's conceptualisation of falling into the routines of *following*. These routines reveal aspects of being in *following* through the everydayness of the rituals of being together in senior leadership teams.

Moods, rituals and fallenness in following

Through considering in unison the three ideas of mood, rituals, and fallenness, what is observed in stories is a rich interplay between these phenomenological concepts. When time slows, calm returns and the experiences of being in *following* in senior leadership teams feel normal again; we fall into moods and senior leadership team environments fall into a particular mood. This particular mood is known by the senior leaders. It is differentiated from heightened experiences by established rituals.

These rituals are practised and applied rather than being explicitly discussed. They are the norms of being together professionally as the senior leadership team. Thus, the senior leaders and the team have fallen back into ways of *following* that satisfy the present but at the same time point to a future goal—keeping the mood calm. They have fallen back into this mood. It has become their taken-for-granted way of being in a team together.

Here, the interplay between these three ideas is clear. The mood is known historically and contextually. The mood is rich with the experiences of certain rituals that make sense to leaders during this time of perceived normality. However, the mood is never quite the same because each time the leaders fall back into this mood, their mood has been shaped by and shapes the mood of normality. Potentially, subtle shifts in the rituals may occur as the old but new mood shapes the mood of the senior leadership team. As an example, the mood of being thrown into COVID 19 crises fuse with the mood of falling back into periods of normality. This demonstrates the temporal nature of moods. They are continually modulating and our attunement to them modulates creating variation of our lived experiences. The temporality of experiences of *following* attunes the senior leaders into what is lived in these moments of crises and normality.

In addition to lived-time, experiences of falling into and being thrown into moods highlights the influence of experiential spatiality. Lived-space encourages consideration of how a space is experienced (van Manen, 2014). As an example, a classroom with high windows and views of a brick wall is experienced differently than a classroom with large windows that look out to a green space. The mood of each space may be felt differently when entering the classroom. Potentially, this shapes the mood of teachers and students in these spaces. When we fall back into normality, the space we meet in shapes experiences and the mood of the team and senior leaders in *following*.

Returning to the last anecdote of SL4 as an example, the lived-space is clearly felt. The size of the Board table is enormous. This suggests a traditional setting—a large, wooden table that takes up most of the space in a room. Possibly, the space is called the Boardroom. There is a cabinet or table that holds the coffee and food. As people enter this space, they pass the cabinet, make small talk and greet each other as they fill their cups. This resonates with Heidegger's (1996) description of falling back into moods that are mundane and superficial. People sit around the table in spaces they always choose. This reveals more about how the senior leaders are situated relationally. Who do I choose to sit next to? Who am I away from? Who can make eye contact with me and who can't? This is exemplified by the chaplain's choice. The lived-space between the Principal and the Chaplain reveals more about their normal relational space. The Chaplain has tuned into the mood of being together with the Principal when they fall into their average everydayness. Reading this story again, it's not difficult to imagine what this experience of lived-space would feel like or the mood it would create.

For these meetings, we'd sit around the big Board table. It is a massive table. It's enormous. It's a big executive too. I think there were seven or eight. We'd come into this meeting, grab our petit fours and coffee and then we'd sit down. People would always sit in the same spot. I would always sit next to the chaplain and he sat as far away from the Headmaster as he could. (SL4)

Concluding Comments

The preceding discussion about the foundational role of moods has divulged essential meanings for being in *following* in senior leadership teams. Importantly, it has shown that senior leaders, in *following*, are always in some mood or another. This is an inescapable way of being in the world. These moods for senior leaders help make intelligible their lived experiences. Thus, certain moods make familiar, routine, understandable and important the experiences of being in *following*.

In addition, the atmosphere which *following* exists in relates primarily to the senior leadership team and especially the Principal. Senior leaders are attuned to this atmosphere. This attunement shapes the experiences of *following* in this context. Attunement also describes the rich interplay that exists between the mood of the follower, the mood of the team, the mood of the Principal and the mood of the wider community. It is in these moments that senior leaders, in *following*, tune into being with others, lived-time and lived-space. This tuning into existential ways of being reveals further meanings of being in *following* in senior leadership teams.

Returning to Emerson's (2009) passage that set the mood for this chapter, I have re-arranged the words into the phenomenological key of *following* to illuminate essential meanings. These meanings disclose how *following* is felt, enacted and manifests in the school lifeworld of senior leaders.

Following is a train of moods like a string of beads and, as we fall and are thrown through them, they prove to open up lifeworlds which paint being in its own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus. From the team you see the team. We tune in to what we can, and we interpret only what we are tuned into. Leading and *following* belong to the eyes that see them. It depends on the mood of the senior leader whether those eyes shall see routine, opportunity or crisis. (adapted from Emerson, 2009, p. 45)

This chapter has highlighted the important contextual nexus of the senior leadership team to meanings of being in *following*. The mood of this team creates an atmosphere in which *following*

exists and is intelligible. Understanding that this team is seen and felt as the team that represents the Principal also raises further possibilities for exploring meanings of *following*. If the mood of the team can be felt as the mood of the Principal, how is this experienced by senior leaders? How might senior leaders find themselves in *following* when the mood of the team and the mood of the Principal are out of tune or harmoniously in tune with their own mood? In the ensuing chapter, this study considers these questions and uses the existential theme of authenticity to reveal how this can show up in *following* in senior leadership teams.

Chapter 6: Authenticity in *following*

The Head of Co-curricular (is) there, who knows nothing about my campus and would have no understanding of the context. I've also got the Head of Communication- same thing. It sounds a bit a callous, but actually I don't think they could give me advice that would be helpful. So maybe I'm being a bit disingenuous (SL1)

When are people being authentic and inauthentic in senior leadership teams? True to oneself and obsequious? Masked and revealed? The experience of being in authenticity in *following* are complex, dynamic, temporal, fluid and relational. It manifests itself in meetings, interactions and events. These relational interactions can be spasmodic and routine. As examples, senior leaders meet formally at designated times during the week and the year. They also haphazardly bump into each other at events and meet each other crossing the school grounds. There are also moments when a senior colleague or the Principal “drops in” for a chat. What is being revealed as authentic in these everyday experiences? What does it mean to be authentic, true to oneself, deferential, masked and obsequious in *following*?

The focus of this chapter is on phenomenological authenticity as it relates to our essential ways of being-in-*following*-in-the-world. It is argued that Heidegger’s (1996) concept of authenticity holds considerable promise as a way of interpreting and exploring meanings of being in *following* in senior leadership teams. When his account is coupled with those of Sartre (1966), de Beauvoir (1962) and Gadamer (2004), a rich tapestry of understandings emerges. This phenomenological tapestry intertwines the deep hue of Heidegger’s authenticity with contemplations of freedom and bad faith; the relational reciprocity of freedom; and the felt sense of being at play with experiences of an authentic self. The resultant picture invites and discloses open-ended meanings of *following* in senior leadership teams. These meanings are reflected in and reflective of lived experiences of participants in this inquiry. Importantly for this inquiry, being in authenticity creates new perspectives for understanding the phenomenon of *following* in senior leadership teams in Independent Schools in Australia.

It is the position of this inquiry that authenticity in *following* is a fundamental experience in senior leadership teams. Regularly, in experiences, in teams, senior leaders can be challenged by projects, relationships, thoughts and ideas. Sometimes these challenges align with their own desires, motives, values and behaviours. In other experiences, senior leaders might find themselves feeling misaligned. These moments may be strong and weak, sporadic and constant, felt by the team and by individuals. Whatever the context or experience, “we exist for the sake of ourselves: enacting roles and expressing character traits (that) contribute to realizing some image of what it is to be human in

our own cases” (Varga & Guignon, 2020, section 3.1, para 5). Thus, in senior leadership teams, in *following*, we are making choices and acting in ways that strive to be in kinship with our ownself. This striving to be in relation to our own self gives rise to being in authenticity in *following*.

Owning our Ownedness: a Heideggerian starting point for considering authenticity

What did Heidegger (1996) mean by being authentic? Heidegger’s authenticity is captured in the idea of owning one’s ownedness. This means that as I go about caring for things in my lifeworld, I am undertaking an on-going story telling of my life: owning what I am and what I do. The on-going and intertwined narration of my being and becoming manifests in my everyday ways of being a being-in-the-world. Being in authenticity discloses not only what matters to me now (our focus at this moment in time) but also points to what I might become as a result of my current focus (Anowai & Chukwujekwu, 2019). Thus, there is an experiential duality to being in authenticity.

Heidegger (1996) offered three modes of authenticity—authentic, average, and inauthentic (Blattner, 2007). As discussed in Chapter 3, authentic authenticity is experienced as owning our ownedness; inauthentic authenticity is disowned; and average authenticity is unowned. Unowned authenticity can be interpreted as our everyday way of being. For Heidegger, authenticity was a correction to falling into our everyday, taken-for-granted ways of being-in-the-world (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Wheeler, 2020). All three modes offer possibilities for revealing further meanings of being in *following* in senior leadership teams in schools

What then might it mean to be authentic in *following*? In contrast to being in relation to our disowned or unowned authenticity, our owned authenticity is marked by being resolute to oneself. In a phenomenological sense, this resolute and owned authenticity is also about being true to one’s own judgement by being open to the current context. Our owned authenticity is always in relation to something and, when we are being authentic, we use our judgement of that something to determine our resolute position. McManus (2019) described this process as relying on all things considered. When we own our authenticity, we make judgements relying on all possible considerations in our current context. This contrasts with a view that senior leaders make judgements by looking within for their strongest value. Heidegger (1996) viewed “all things considered” as a situated freedom. Situated freedom is a concept that asserts that “individuals are free to make choices, but their freedom is not absolute; it is circumscribed by the specific conditions of their daily lives” (Neubauer et al., 2019, p.94). This is an idea developed further by Sartre (1966), as discussed below.

Every day in their role senior leaders find themselves thrown into happenings and events not of their own making, already disposed by moods and responsibilities, with a past that can restrain their choices. Thus, leaders find themselves absorbed in the everydayness of school life—taking “care” of business. At the same time, this taking “care” of business cumulatively creates a particular kind of

person. By extrapolating this understanding to *following*, it is possible to see the duality of being in authenticity experienced in senior leadership teams. In *following*, when a leader is resolute in a key moment in a meeting, he/she cares about what one is standing resolutely for. This caring follows him/her beyond just this key moment. It shapes being in the world. Senior leaders intuitively recognise that if they don't stand up now something will be lost. This being-in-relation might also be evident in the next meeting where a colleague might state, "in the last meeting, our Head of Curriculum noted...." Thus, there is an attunement to the moment, the now, but also toward a future state of being. This is also evident when leaders choose not to speak up. Both moments are reflective of taking care of our ownedness (authenticity) in *following* (McManus, 2019).

In participants' interviews, there were concrete examples of this owned authenticity, moments when ideas were put forward and senior leaders needed to consider all the cards on the table—staff, students, parents, and the pros and cons. In this short anecdote from a participant, he is drawing upon a felt authenticity and practical wisdom to attune resolutely to what he cares about.

I am normally the one who tends to say what I think because I believe, if I'm in this team, and we are genuine about that idea, then I will honour that by speaking my mind politely on whatever matter came across the desk. (SL4)

Therefore, in *following*, I own my authenticity when I open myself up to all possibilities—all things considered constrained by situated freedom—to make an authentic judgement. This act of owning my decision leads to being and becoming authentic.

Moments of authenticity suggest that senior leaders must also experience inauthenticity. Disowned authenticity in *following* relates to experiences when senior leaders find themselves toeing the line, being obsequious and masked (hidden). In these experiences, they no longer own their own judgement. It has been given up to someone else. Senior leaders are no longer taking all things into consideration. The only point of view being considered is being espoused by someone else.

Heidegger (1996) depicted this experience as being shaped by the "they" (*das Man*). By the "they", Heidegger was presenting a construct that reflects what people view as their social reality.

Heidegger argued that people in being with others assume a passive role, accepting without question the constructed social reality. Furthermore, he proposed that this excuses people of personal responsibility, decision-making, and choice. Thus, disowned authenticity is characterized by unquestioning conformity to societal norms and values (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Wheeler, 2020).

In considering disowned *following* in senior leadership teams in schools, the social reality of being a senior leader is constructed primarily through the school. For senior leaders especially, this can be experienced through their involvement in the senior leadership team, for example when the Principal dominates discussions in meetings and sets the tone. In these circumstances, in *following*,

leaders can fall into unquestionably toeing the line. It can also be felt in the moments when others want to curry favour, especially if the norms and values of the team reflect and encourage this behaviour. Disowned authenticity, or being inauthentic, distinguishes itself from authenticity by the active action of disowning. As a senior leader, in *following*, I am disowning my judgements and giving them to the “they” (the norms and values of the team/Principal). Thus, I am no longer being true to my undisputedly original self and have disowned my authorship. I am actively moving towards being and becoming inauthentic.

Owned and disowned authenticity are two of Heidegger’s experiential modes. The third mode is unowning my authenticity, or the average mode of authenticity. What did Heidegger mean by the average(ness) mode of authenticity? For Heidegger (1996), this was the mode we are in most days of our lives—our average everyday mode. He stated that we fall into this mode of doing what one does (*Verfallen*). Thus, we are not owning up to being one’s own—we are unowning our authorship (what one does) and self (what one is). This unowned authenticity can be experienced habitually. We shower, walk the dog, have coffee, drive to work, park in our spot, sit our desk, and complete our tasks. In relation, to being in *following*, senior leaders might fall into sitting in the same seat at meetings, fall into responding or not responding consistently to certain items on the agenda, and fall into covering the same areas in reports. We might also fall into these habits in a relational sense, finding ourselves acting in unexamined ways with colleagues in our senior leadership teams. Unlike being inauthentic/disowned authenticity, this is not necessarily a negative but simply our average, everyday way of being a being-in-relation to *following* in senior leadership teams. However, Heidegger did suggest that it is not dissimilar to being inauthentic: our average way of being means that we are not owning up to ourselves. Leaders are allowing their actions and choices not to be their own. They are not taking into consideration all things as they resolutely author their own narratives in *following* in senior leadership teams.

Variation of Heideggerian Authenticity

Sartre’s Bad Faith, Freedom and Vignettes

Sartre’s (1966) notions of bad faith and freedom echo phenomenological understandings, especially Heidegger’s thinking about authenticity. In addition to his philosophical thinking about Freedom and Bad Faith, Sartre’s vignettes provide concrete possibilities for further exploring meanings being in authenticity in *following*.

Sartre (1966) proposed that our essential nature is being free. We have the freedom to make choices about who we are and who we are becoming. However, we often fall into acting in bad faith. By this he meant, acting as if we had no freedom (Daigle, 2011; Neuber, 2017; Sartre, 1966). He used three vignettes to show how this might be experienced concretely in the everyday lives of people.

The first vignette depicts a waiter who chooses to behave exactly as the role of a waiter determines he should (Sartre, 1966). This role is determined historically, socially, culturally and geographically. In adopting this role, the waiter reduces himself to a thing; not a human who is free to choose the sort of thing he/she wishes to be but a thing that is only capable of being that thing. Sartre argues that when we fall into these roles in unreflective ways we are acting in bad faith. In this case the waiter is wearing the mask of the waiter without owning other possible ways of being the waiter. In *following* in a senior leadership team, this might be experienced when we unreflectively take on a role in a meeting. This might be the role of the follower which is determined by the social, cultural, political, historical, and geographical context of the senior leadership team. Sartre describes these facets as our facticity. In participants' stories, the lived experiences of these dimensions of facticity were felt through the seating arrangements—everyone has their own seat. It was also experienced through the way senior leaders addressed the Principal—for one participant this meant always using Dr. before the Principal's surname. It also might be experienced in the way relationships manifest in the team—obsequiousness, openness, and supportiveness.

The second vignette describes a couple at a café (Sartre, 1966,). The gentleman is making advances towards the lady who is trying to avoid making a decision about his intentions. He takes hold of her hands and she steadfastly ignores the suggestion underscored through this action. In so doing, she is treating herself (her hands) or the situation as if it were an object or thing that exists separately from her being. This is an act of bad faith. Instead of recognising that she has the freedom to choose, she postpones or avoids owning her authenticity. In *following* in senior leadership teams, this might be experienced when a situation compels us to be involved, but we allow someone else in the team to decide for us. In these lived moments, we are disowning our authenticity.

Finally, Sartre's (1966) third vignette describes the situation where a man's previous actions suggest who he is and who he is becoming. He denies his actions are reflective of who he is and who he is becoming; while a close friend suggests that he should accept that his actions speak to who he is. Sartre argues that both are examples of bad faith. The man is avoiding owning who he is and what he is doing. The friend, on the other hand, defines the man's interpretations as being bound completely to his past actions. In owning our ownedness, freedom allows us to choose our future directions, not be determined by them. For Sartre, ignoring our facticity and allowing it to determine our freedom were both acts of bad faith. Pragmatically, he postulated that this ambiguous position was at play constantly in our lived experiences.

In *following* in senior leadership teams, this might be experienced when we allow the past to determine what we do and who we want to be. As an example, a heated discussion with a colleague might colour my future interactions. It might also change who I am and who I am becoming in *following*. This might manifest itself in the experience of falling into a pattern of relational

behaviour—this is how we make it work each day at school. As one senior leader stated: “Even when people might have something pertinent, or specific, to say they'll only say it when they know it is a hundred percent right. They won't challenge the status quo.” (SL5)

This is an example of senior leaders acting in bad faith, unowning their authenticity. The leaders in this experience were failing to realise the freedom they had to narrate their own story; their own ways of being-in-the-world with others.

de Beauvoir—authenticity, freedom in and with others

One exists or finds oneself attuned to the world and of how one is faring in the world with others. Indeed of being-there, and this always directly includes being with one another. (Elpidorou & Freeman, 2015, p. 664)

The discussion, so far, has considered authenticity from the perspective of ownedness (resolutely owning what one is and what one does). Although this wasn't Heidegger's intention, potentially this might give the impression that authenticity is an individual space: one created through our own interactions and interpretations. Certainly, “I” is a piece of the authenticity puzzle, but the “we” of authenticity in *following* moves our understanding closer to the lived-experience (Friesen, 2012). “We” suggests experiential sharing of the phenomenon and highlights the being-with-others of authenticity and *following*.

van-Manen (2014) offered the term relationality (lived self-other) as an existential theme for understanding the ‘we’ of experiential reciprocity. In relation to this inquiry, these are the meanings created by self and other with respect to the phenomenon of *following* in our everyday experiences (Friesen, 2012; van Manen, 2014). If we simply reflect on the language used to describe our relations with others during and after meetings, we can see that they can be full of “feeling, texture and flavour” (Friesen, 2012, p. 44). Potential examples include, she's a bit sour in meetings, he runs hot and cold, that interaction left a bitter after taste, and that communication was completely overdone. These kinds of expressions and our everyday experiences of being in teams with other leaders allow us to peer deeper into the authenticity of being in *following*.

Simone de Beauvoir's (1962, 2004) ontological authenticity was a cocktail of Heidegger and Sartre. For de Beauvoir, being authentic only exists in the freedom of others and this is the essential way we find ourselves in the world. Authenticity allows for our being to be revealed and made intelligible to us. Therefore, I can only own my ownedness when others have the freedom to own their ownedness as well. This speaks to the essential nature of the reciprocity of relationships.

Of particular interest to this inquiry is the reciprocity of relationships with colleagues in senior leadership teams. Teams by nature are relational and therefore reciprocity in all its variations is

always in play. It is often in experiences of this reciprocity (or lack of) that being in authenticity in *following* is felt for senior leaders. This is highlighted in participants' stories that reflect senior leaders' experiences of authenticity or freedom through their relationships with other senior leaders, especially the Principal. The following anecdote is an experiential example:

You want to feel like you can answer staff questions, knowing that you would be representing the Head well in that conversation. You can't do that, if they are hugely unpredictable in their behaviors. If they never share their thought processes with you, you've really got no idea. (SL3)

The lack of reciprocity in the experience above also reveals a stifling of freedom for the senior leader. She is hamstrung in her freedom to articulate the Principal's vision. This constriction of freedom which manifests in the experience of relational reciprocity reveals the inauthentic nature of *following* for this leader. She is unable to own her ownedness because of the lack of reciprocity.

We have all experienced reciprocal moments with others that have felt authentic. We watch the coach or player of our favourite team being interviewed and we sense that they are being authentic about a loss. It might be in the language they use that feels unguarded and truthful. It might be in the way they sit in front of the microphone, respond too quickly to questions, and appear relaxed or upset. Equally, we experience corresponding feelings when we hear a politician being interviewed on the radio. Perhaps their answers feel rehearsed, deliberately evasive or unreflective of what is really happening. This may confirm our past experiences when the way they dressed or impression they created looked too slick or like a used-car salesperson. In these moments, something is created through the choice of language, intonation, facial expressions, seconds of silence, personal presentation and our past experiential histories.

de Beauvoir's (1996, 2004) interpretation encourages us to see that authenticity can be in relation to some-thing (e.g., an idea, role, situation) but it most often relates to someone. It is this type of authenticity that Elpidorou and Freeman (2015) portrays when they described our attunement to the world with others. This is important for our understanding of the phenomenon of *following* in senior leadership teams because authenticity is often created in the relational space with others. We experience these moments when we sense someone has just been authentic with us during a discussion. This might relate to how and what is said but importantly it is in the sense that authenticity is created in the space between people.

Gadamer and being at play with authenticity

Gadamer's (2004) notion of play is also fruitful for understanding being in authenticity in *following*. The idea that we are free to be at play with who we are and who we are becoming resonates with experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams. This might be felt in the relational play of reciprocity or the play that occurs between the balance of freedom and bad faith. Equally, play provides a felt sense of how we might find ourselves owning, disowning and unowning our authenticity.

Gadamer (2004) also described how our lived experiences are "at play" with the fusion between our historical and cultural horizons. This fusion is also a play between our facticity and the facticity of others. This back and forth play and fusing of meanings is often felt for senior leaders in conversations. In this space, new meanings of being in authenticity in *following* are generated and made intelligible for senior leaders.

By returning to Heidegger's (1996), Sartre's (1966) and de Beauvoir's (1962, 2004) interpretations, we can now understand that authenticity in *following* describes:

- The experience of being free to actively author what one is and what one does
- The duality of authenticity shaping our being and what we are becoming,
- The modes of authenticity and the role of owning
- A story telling that relates to our concrete experiences of being-in-the-world with others
- How authenticity reveals deeper meanings of being (in *following*).

Phenomenological thinking, beginning with Heidegger's contribution about authenticity, creates a unique vehicle for interpreting the meanings of *following* in senior leadership teams. Through viewing authenticity in light of this thinking, deeper meanings are uncovered about being in senior leadership teams in *following*. However, this view of authenticity is not without issues in relation to the lived experience of being in *following*. The challenge of resolutely owning what one is and does in a team environment is constant: How might I maintain a sense of ownedness but still be a team player? What happens when my ownedness is contrary to the direction of the school or the ideology of the Principal? What is it really like being-in-authenticity in *following* in senior leadership teams?

When authenticity is like seeming and being

HAMLET

"Seems," madam? Nay, it is. I know not "seems."

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,

Nor customary suits of solemn black,

Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,

No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,

Nor the dejected 'havior of the visage,

Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,

That can denote me truly. These indeed "seem,"

For they are actions that a man might play. (Shakespeare, 1992, 1.2. 75-90)

Shakespeare's play, "*Hamlet*", has inspired reflection and interpretation from prominent philosophers like Hegel, Nietzsche and Derrida (Wilson, 2018). In a philosophical sense, Shakespeare's play suggests that determining which aspects of a person's character or actions are authentic serves to expose the fact that there is, perhaps, sometimes no difference between what is real and what is perceived; the acts people perform and the judgements they make become their past, present and future—which especially echoes Gadamer's (2004) and Heidegger's (1996) thinking.

The well-known expression "To be or not to be" (Shakespeare, 1992, 3.1.64), while generally understood to be a question about life or death in the play, highlights the lacuna that can exist between how things appear (seeming) and how they really are (being). It also suggests that this is self-authored behaviour: I can own "to be" or "not to be". From Hamlet's manufactured madness to the many schemes and plots of the main characters, things within Elsinore castle are hardly ever as they seem. The lived experience for the characters in Hamlet is that their authorship of their own narratives is often inauthentic or at best a version of average authenticity or acts of bad faith. Being authentic is a distant dream in the state of Denmark!

This divide in Hamlet between seeming and being encourages consideration of worthwhile questions for the experiences of being in authenticity in *following*. Is how we act or behave in senior leadership teams in kinship with our ownedness? Do our attempts to be a team player mask our real intentions? Is our engagement in discussions more about meeting expectations (team norms and the social reality) than actually taking all things into consideration? Like many characters in the play, are the members of the senior leadership team cloaked in an inky blackness? Are these the lived actions that many "men" play?

In light of these questions, Hamlet's revelations that all great people turn to bone and dust, and although people can seem worthy the reality is that they are far from it, are fitting of contemplation. While Hamlet's perspective perhaps paints a bleak picture of reality, it highlights further worthwhile considerations for the lived experience of being in *following*. The reality, possibly, of *following* in senior leadership teams, might be more like living in Elsinore Castle than in Heidegger's authenticity. The human experience could be an experience of perpetual bad faith. Our freedom and the freedom of others is potentially an idealist dream and this bleakness could be the real experience of being in *following* in senior leadership teams. It is possible that Heidegger's ideal of authenticity is a far horizon, a point in time that we touch fleetingly. In reality being in *following* is authenticity that is really unowned or disowned. Leaders are seeming to be in their everydayness and rarely being.

Certainly, from participants' stories, there are examples where senior leaders experienced a sense of being masked and alien, like the waiter in Sartre's vignette. One leader noted that "this unhealthy deference just meant we discussed something only if the Headmaster wanted to and only until he decided...that's enough!" (SL4). In this story, there is a sense of being in a social construction that doesn't allow for ownedness or the freedom of possibilities. Whether this is disowned or unowned is unclear. However, what is clear is the experience of not being able to take into consideration all things when making a judgement. The senior leader found that he was being masked or alien. Similarly, Hamlet states, "but break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (Shakespeare, 1992, 1.2.16) bringing together his own sorrow with his inability to share that sorrow with others. For both Hamlet and the senior leaders, the experience is one where they are either unable or unwilling to own their authenticity. They are not in authorship of what one does or is. A mask and an alien way of being with others has been created.

Hamlet's mask or alien way of being is his manufactured madness. He initially uses this to disguise his true intent and emotions. He knows he is surrounded by insensitive people and potential enemies. In *following*, in senior leadership teams, there might be moments when we have similar experiences. We sense that the team is not with us. It is possible that this can feel hostile and insensitive. This might manifest itself in the way senior leaders talk or the language they choose, whether they are active or passive, whether they allow their ideas, feelings and values to be ridden over, pushed aside and hidden away. When this happens, senior leaders might bide their time or wait until a meeting or discussion has finished so that they can ignore it and get back to 'what matters'. They might choose to mask their true thoughts and emotions.

In an experience echoing Hamlet's and highlighting the struggle senior leaders might feel to be authentic in *following*, a senior leader lamented:

I didn't sense that I had enough support. Not that others were unsupportive. In fact, I think people thought I had good ideas and would have privately supported me. But in the meeting itself...they were very wary about that. I got to the point where I wasn't going to push it. (SL4)

The struggle to own one's authenticity in *following* is laid bare in this statement. The leader clearly wished to own his authenticity but found seeming rather than being their only accessible pathway. It is evident too, that other members of the senior leadership team were also acting in ways and making judgements that created their past, present and future. This is clearly a regular challenge that is experienced by senior leaders as they navigate the relational space in which owning authenticity is created.

Other participants in this study commented that,

they are the first ones to give an opinion. And soon you realize that they're protecting themselves as much as anything. The responses they're giving initially are testing the water a little bit. They'll test the water and if they get the nod they'll keep going. They're not going to go against what the leader thinks. So no matter what the leader says they will follow it. (SL5)

and

I was afraid to speak up when things weren't going well. I could have suggested that we went in a different direction, but I didn't...even when I knew that was the right thing to do—speak up for what I believed in. (SL10)

These descriptions from senior leaders narrate experiences of being with others that feel obsequious, judged and deferential. In these experiences, elements of ownedness emerge. The senior leaders might want to actively author what one is and what one does but that is influenced strongly by both the social construct and being in the world of a leadership team with others. The leaders' being in owned authenticity is compromised and the experience, like Hamlet's, is closest to disowned authenticity. The duality of and struggle in being what one is and what one is becoming in

these moments is felt keenly. The leaders care about what is happening and how it is reflective of who they are and what they are becoming.

“Now I am alone”, Hamlet states (Shakespeare, 1992, 2.2.520), yet this is an often-stated outcome of being in leading—life is lonely at the top. Is this what it means to be in *following* in senior leadership teams? Like Hamlet’s madness, does our manufactured disowned authenticity become our reality? The experience is more like seeming (appearance) and less like being (reality). Senior leaders in *following* are disconnected from their team, from their Principal and from their ownedness. Their freedom is constrained by their political, social, cultural and geographical castle, as is the freedom of others.

If this is but one way of being in *following*, how else might experiences of *following* manifest in senior leadership teams?

When authenticity is like playing the game

If you play the game, you do things in the accepted way or in the way that people who are senior to you in an organization expect you to, in order to keep your job or to succeed. To do well in politics, you have to play the game. The two official opposition parties must also play the game by the President's rules. (Collins COBUILD Idioms Dictionary, 2012)

The phrase “play the game”, sometimes expressed as ‘it’s a game’ and ‘the game’, was used by participants to describe those moments in senior leadership teams that encapsulated relational experiences within a team. At times, the phrase was used to describe moments of authority dynamics, learning to fit into the team, knowing what to do and when, and instances where people were being true and fair. As examples from participants’ stories: “certainly, one was playing a game and the other one was trying to cope with it.” (SL1); “I could see him playing the political game” (SL8); and “The principal is the one who determines how you play the game” (SL5).

When we use the idiom “*playing the game*”, it is a reference that most people can relate to. It can be found in the works of Rudyard Kipling (1955)—“We’re playing the game, and we’ve the great advantage of knowing the game” (p. 1). A recognisable connotation is also found in Grantland Rice’s poem, *Alumnus Football* (1941): “(it’s) not that you won or lost but how you played the game” (p. 144). Playing the game captures experiences of playing fairly, by the rules, and conversely acting deceitfully and secretively, as in: She got what she wanted by playing the game.

Intuitively and experientially, there is a sense that playing the game is everyday life. We play the game at work by adhering to rules and expectations. Sometimes we leverage and take advantage of the social context of a situation—a gap in the rules or use of positional power. At other times, we act in ways that are authentic by playing the game fairly. Equally, we might play power games in our relationships with others. The point here is that playing the game is a shared intelligibility that shapes what one is and what one does: a pre-reflective way of relating to others that shifts dynamically in relation to context.

As previously noted, one influential account of play(ing) is that of Gadamer (2004). Gadamer described the phenomenon of play as one that involves seriousness and total absorption, even while the players know that they are playing a game. As Gschwandter (2021) referencing Gadamer stated, “Gadamer’s conception of play encourages us to see that ‘(the) game has its own spirit and draws the players into itself, even exercises a spell over them (p. 7)’”. Playing the game means that we are totally absorbed in the experience. It makes us forget ourselves as we are swept up and along in playing the game (Gschwandter, 2021).

Using the simile that *following* is like playing the game, opens up meanings that deepen our understanding of being in authenticity. During these experiences of *following* it might feel like we are playing the game. What might that mean for being in authenticity in *following*? If seeming and being help us to contemplate that the reality of *following* in senior leadership teams might be disowned and unowned authenticity, what might playing the game bring forth?

When playing the game in following is adhering to someone else’s rules and expectations

When playing the game is adhering to someone else’s rules and expectations, there are experiences of not being in control. My self-authoring of what I am and what I might become is restricted. This is expected. As Heidegger (1996) and Sartre (1962) asserted, all freedom is situated freedom—mediated by the facticity of my current context. Equally, it could be argued that this is what it means to be in a team, to act as a team: the essence of teamwork. I follow someone else’s rules and expectations for the good of the team. In this sense, I am setting aside my ownedness. If we accept that this is what Heidegger (1996) and de Beauvoir (1962) would consider situated freedom—my ownedness exists only in relation to the freedom of others within the team—what else might be revealed when playing the game by following the rules?

In *following* in senior leadership teams, we find ourselves thrown into environments that are not of our making, that are already aligned with particular commitments and ways of being relational, that are constrained by the histories and aspirations of the school. This is felt acutely when we move to a

new school and discover “how things are done”. It can also occur when we move into a senior role and find that how things appeared from the classroom are not what they seem like in the leadership team. To what degree this constraining occurs is shifting and contextual. The shared experience, however, is of shuffling ourselves to fit in. Shuffling is the choiceful actions I undertake to align my desires, motives, ideals and beliefs with those of my organisational context. I am playing the team game. In this sense, shuffling reflects the physical in and out movement of cards as they (mis)align and become a complete deck. Gadamer (2004) described this to-and-fro, back-and-forth movement as the constant renewal of self.

What does this shuffling show us about being in authenticity? When I am shuffling into a new role in a school, I care about how I fit in—relationally, culturally, professionally. I shuffle to align myself with the school values, team norms, expectations and ideology of the Principal. My caring is directed at how I show up for others. As I am learning to play the game and shuffling, what is occurring to owning my authenticity? The nature of this chaotic and uneasy shuffling was highlighted in one leader’s story about starting a new role.

It was difficult to work out what I was meant to be doing. I couldn't really figure out what the pitch was supposed to be. How weedy was I supposed to be getting? Do I need to bring just general questions? Am I supposed to be presenting on projects? What am I meant to be doing? I tried to use the first few meetings to get a read on the other few people and the kind of things that they shared, but I never quite got the hang of that.

(SL3)

Being new to a role and learning to play the game can be a wrestle. We shuffle back and forth to try “to get a read” (SL3) on the new context we have been thrown in to. Our new-ness as we are trying to read the game impacts our sense of lived-time. “My time” is experienced differently when I am thrown into a new role. I might feel rushed, days might pass quickly, and lack of time may weigh heavily on my shoulders. These lived-time experiences might create frantic and slightly chaotic owning of my ownedness. Moments of reflection disappear as I strive to adjust to this new social reality (van Manen, 2014).

Conversely, at a later point in time, I might have the game figured out. I know how to read the play. I’ve learnt what the expectations are; the norms and values of the team are no longer alien, they are familiar. At this point, our shuffling becomes considered. We no longer feel the urgent pull, unease or frantic nature of new-ness. Time is relaxed and managed. I feel in control of time. I know what to prioritise, when to listen, when to tune out, what rules of the game matter.

This sense of understanding how to shuffle and its relationship to time was borne out in experiences of senior leaders: “I played my cards quietly for the first couple of months, until I started getting my boots on. Then I felt more comfortable to contribute” (SL8). Another leader noted:

(I’ve been on) Teams where we all know what we're shooting for and what each other are doing. We all have a good sense of what's on each other's plates at a given point in time. We all know what kind of challenges we're having and where our lanes intersect ... and it just feels really easy. (SL6)

There is a definite sense in the stories of participants that learning to play the game, fitting in with rules and expectations of the school/team/Principal, is an essential part of being in *following*. When we are new, the frantic and uneasy pace of the role we have been thrown into means that we are shuffling rapidly to try and fit in. Not only does this leave little time for considering all possibilities, but in an effort to fit in we might be passively accepting the status quo. Hence, our authenticity is closer to being disowned or unowned. From a Sartrean perspective, in the new-ness of *following*, we are acting in bad faith. We are wearing the mask of the newbie.

One senior leader highlighted these lived moments of newness:

I watch closely. I listen and I try to understand what motivates the Head I am working with. I want to understand why he reacts the way he does and then try and use that to figure out how I can complement him or how I can best serve. (SL3)

It is clear from this experiential story that the new leader was not concerned with authoring her own narrative considering all situated possibilities. Instead, she was looking to the leader (the Head), to provide cues about how she should behave and relate within the new team environment. Another leader experienced a similar issue when he was new to the team: “I wouldn’t challenge unless I had something substantial based on data or experiences of others. So, it wouldn’t look like I was just pushing my barrow” (SL8).

Both of these stories highlight how authenticity is affected by playing the game: adhering to someone else’s rules and expectations. Our freedom is given over to others in these experiences in *following*.

In general, experiences of being in *following* in senior leadership teams require some adhesion to the rules and expectations of the game. In a sense, playing fairly, playing well and playing along with others is the essence of teamwork and hence essential to being in *following*. If we move beyond this situated team notion, leaders’ experiences suggest that lived-time has a key role to play in whether leaders’ authenticity is owned/disowned/unowned. When a leader is new to role, time is felt

differently to that of a long-standing leader. Time is heavy, rushed, chaotic and leaders feel like they are one step behind or playing catch up. In these experiences, leaders are more likely to disown and unown their authenticity as they shuffle back and forth in their new context trying to read the game.

Conversely, there are moments when playing the game—adhering to the rules—creates feelings of freedom. In these moments, leaders know how to play the game. The rules become a structure; the context in which they can consider all possibilities when making decisions. In these experiences, lived-time is lighter and is malleable. Leaders feel like time is on their side. It is something they can manage and work with. Experientially, leaders are more likely to own their ownedness in these experiences. They have the freedom to act in ways that feel owned.

It is not only new leaders who might wrestle with their owned authenticity as they adhere to rules and expectations. A new challenge, like the COVID-19 pandemic, can require followers to actively follow the rules. Equally, other personal and professional issues can impact on a leader's energy levels and focus. In these moments, he/she may not have the moral, emotional and personal reserves to meet a new challenge. It becomes easier to play the game—fall into the rules and expectations set by the school. Once again, in these moments, a leader's authenticity in *following* is disowned and unowned.

When playing the game is about being fair and true

Life is a journey towards truth, we have something to learn from each other, and everybody ought to have a chance to make the journey. So for us, a community is just made up of anybody who accepts the rules of the game, everybody counts, everybody has a role to play, everybody deserves a chance and we all do better when we work together. (Clinton, n.d.)

As this quote from Bill Clinton highlights, playing the game and ethical judgements can present in stark contrast to each other. The experience of playing fairly and truly is known to most. There is an intuitive understanding of what constitutes fair and true play. We know when things don't seem right: when somebody is taking advantage of the rules; when a decision goes against the grain. We are also equally aware through our experiences of what it means to play fairly.

True and fair are words in everyday nomenclature that are often associated with ideas and meanings of authenticity. Whether this is being true to oneself or in true authorship of oneself, and other (true) possibilities, being true resonates with being in authenticity. We know when someone plays the game truly. It suggests something about who they are (what one is) and how they behave (what one does).

This might be captured in somebody being true to their word—doing what they say they are going to do, and as Polonius reminds us: “to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man” (Shakespeare, 1992, 1.3.78). Also in this vein, we can hold true, something can ring true and we can be “true blue”. The meanings captured by these expressions can be different for each of us. When I hear “to thine own self be true”, the memories, images and experiences that it brings forth are unlikely to be identical to someone else's. However, there is a shared intelligibility, a pathway of meaning between authenticity, these expressions and our self—a wholeness that reveals more about being in authenticity in *following*.

As examples, the senior leader who follows through on a team initiative is being true to their word. Likewise, in *following*, senior leaders who resolutely take a stand are being true to their own values (self). Equally, being true blue, as used colloquially in Australia (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), suggests that in *following* a leader is fair dinkum, the real McCoy and not an imitation.

In participants' stories, we can see lived examples of playing the game truly. One leader described what it was like to be with the Principal of the school:

He's a guy who could talk to anyone about anything and he'd be genuinely interested in the other person. I think that was really great for the school because people felt that they liked him—that he listened to them, and there's no bullshit about him. Just a genuinely good guy. (SL4)

It is clear from this description that the experience of being with this Principal was one that left a sense that he was being real with people, not a pale imitation but true blue. In these moments, it is possible to be experiencing the experience of playing the game truly and fairly. Moments like these give rise to feelings that someone is playing the game fairly with us. They are being authentic.

Equally, our understanding of true and fair is also shaped by those moments that somebody is not playing by the rules of the game. As one senior leader observed, these moments lay bare the experience of a lack of authenticity: “my view is that he didn't actually care what we thought. He already had an opinion and he would often only raise, for points of discussion, things that he wanted ratified” (SL5).

This participant's story highlights those moments when it is clear that the rules of the game are being breached. Someone is not *following* what the established rules and expectations of being in the team. As this example underscores, these occurrences can be felt painfully. They become etched into our history as happenings when the game was not being played fairly. In future experiences, they also help us to interpret when someone is being true in playing the game.

Being true and fair in playing the game might also show itself in those moments where people are honest with each other, sharing vulnerabilities and mistakes. A story from one Head about owning a mistaken employment decision encapsulates this experience: “I remember saying ‘Okay, right, I just want to start this meeting by saying you were all absolutely right! Now we need to work out how we address this issue’” (SL9).

Polonius might have proclaimed that this is an example of “to thine own self be true”. Using Heidegger (1996), it can also be viewed as owning our ownedness. The Head knew he made a mistake and resolutely owned his mistake with the team, thus being false to no “man”. In instances like these, the Head’s vulnerability announces their authenticity and invites *following*. For the team, this experience can also blur the line between leading and *following*. As one senior leader noted, when these junctures occur it can feel like “everybody’s *following* and leading at the same time. It’s almost euphoric” (SL5). There is a sense here too of authenticity in *following* being created in the relational space with others through playing the game truly. Authenticity is revealed through the reciprocity of freedom with others.

Although playing the game might be commonly thought of as having negative connotations, it can also mean to play fairly and truly. Playing the game truly in *following* resonates with meanings revealed in participants’ stories. In relation to being in authenticity, playing the game truly suggests that authenticity is owned. Participants’ stories explicate that this might occur in relational moments between followers and leaders. Thus, leaders owning their ownedness co-creates being in co-authenticity—reciprocal instances of experiencing authenticity in *following*.

When playing the game is about playing a game—being manipulative, evasive and deceitful

The Kremlin is constantly changing the rules of the game to suit its purposes. We are not playing chess, we're playing roulette. (Kasparov, n.d.)

Unlike playing the game truly, there are occurrences when playing-the-game is about playing- a-game. Of concern for *following* in senior leadership teams, lived experiences that echo Garry Kasparov’s statement were not uncommon in participants’ stories. This suggests that Wagemans and Hackman’s (2010) observation that the worst example of a team in an organisation is the senior leadership team is close to the reality in some Independent Schools. As an example, one of Wageman and Hackman’s four ironies of senior leadership teams, discussed earlier in this study, is the issue of authority dynamics pervading the leadership team and not being discussed (Wageman & Hackman, 2010). This is encapsulated clearly in this participant’s statement: “He’d often sit there passively and then white ant me afterwards” (SL8).

When playing-the-game is about playing-a-game, there is a relational impact in senior leadership teams. As previously stated, our being in teams is a question of finding one's bearings in relation to being-with others (van Manen, 2014). Hence, owning our ownedness—considering all possibilities—acting in good faith—is contemplating the possibilities presented with and by others in the senior leadership team. All members of the senior leadership team bring to this space rich personal and professional histories that are always mattering in our ways of being together. The fusion of our rich histories, with our now and our future directedness, creates our ways of being with each other.

When playing-the-game is about playing-a-game what might this mean for being in authenticity in *following*? Participants' stories show that what occurs is a non-consensual constraining of what it means to be with and be in a team: a pilfering of the rich experience of being a team. Playing-a-game with others in *following* changes the relational life of the team. The way of being authentic is not owned, disowned or unowned. It is closer to being a coerced disowning that damages authenticity. This coercion includes moments when our ownedness is cajoled from us, wrestled from us, and pilfered from us. There is a felt intelligibility that we have very little freedom. While the result is the same as disowned authenticity—we no longer own our ownedness—it is the manner in which it occurs that is different. The process of coerced disowning also damages being in authenticity. This means in *following*, when someone is being deceitful, manipulative and evasive while playing-a-game, our ownedness is coerced, which has a deleterious effect on being in authenticity.

Stories from senior leaders in this inquiry suggest that this coerced disowning might be like a total diminishing of our “our-ness”. It might feel like a bridling of what it means to be together in a team. It could also be the guardedness that infects interactions. The value of understanding the meanings of these coerced ways of being is that it adds important meanings to possibilities of being in *following* that extend our understanding beyond concepts like Wageman and Hackman's (2010) ironies.

When we are adhering to rules and playing truly in the game, there is a relational richness that is created. Playing truly creates trust, reciprocal understandings, empowerment, vulnerability and authenticity. Adhering to rules, while more mundane, creates certainty, safety and support. It also helps team functioning and assists teams when significant challenges arise: you know who's doing what. When a game is being played with us, our humanness, togetherness and being are harmed. This might manifest itself in moments of feeling manipulated by others. It could be an instance where someone appears to be cloaking what they are thinking or what is truly happening, and it seems that this is occurring for their personal gain. It might also be felt when someone has not told the whole truth and we discover later that this has far-reaching implications. It could also be in those moments when we discover a team member has been discussing our actions with others.

When these non-consensual experiences of being-with occur, how do these instances manifest in the everyday experiences of senior leaders in teams? What might this mean for being in authenticity in *following*?

In this study, as previously stated, the stories narrate experiences of *following* in leadership teams that were marked by deceit, evasiveness and manipulation(s). These experiences ranged from significantly diminishing our “our-ness” through deceit, to being evasive, to subtle and not so subtle manipulation.

“The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose. An evil soul producing holy witness is like a villain with a smiling cheek, a goodly apple rotten at the heart. What a goodly outside falsehood hath!”

(Shakespeare, 2006, Act 1, Scene 3). As Shakespeare noted in *The Merchant of Venice*, the experience of deceit is one of a façade hiding true intentions: of someone playing-a-game with us. It also suggests that playing-a-game does more than disown authenticity. It damages our authenticity. From interviewees’ stories, experiences of deceit and manipulation appear to be the most damaging to *following* in authenticity. As exemplified in the ensuing stories, this type of experience rapidly unravels the authentic instances that are felt when the game is played truly.

In one participant’s story, an experience unfolded that typified this unravelling: “I thought this is not good. It was very clear from those meetings that no one in that room trusted anyone else in the school and no one else in the school trusted anyone in that room” (SL3).

Another participant noted the impact of deceit and manipulation on the members of the team:

The model of facilitation, in these senior leadership team meetings, was pick on one member of the executive and hammer them to the point of breaking almost. Using the guise of—we’re all in this together. We’ve all got a say in your part of the school. Let’s see if we can help you be better at your job, by stripping you down to your basic nakedness.

(SL5)

What is also laid bare in these stories is the use of power in playing-a-game and the subsequent feelings of being powerless created in *following*. This is the authority dynamics identified by Wageman and Hackman (2010) and Nadler (2021) as a lived experience. When the actions of a leader, cloaked in the guise of teamwork, leave a member of the senior leadership team stripped back to their basic nakedness, authenticity is not disowned or unowned, it is coerced, robbed, procured and removed. This active misappropriation of another leader’s ownedness, as highlighted in the action of stripping down, damages the authenticity of being-with in *following*. In these instances, the contrived process of deceiving and manipulating leaves senior leaders vulnerable, masked, defensive, and afraid.

In addition to being manipulative and deceitful, subtler forms of coercion were noted. Playing-a-game by being evasive was not an uncommon experience. This might manifest itself when someone deliberately avoids responding directly to a question or when they are deliberately unclear about what is required and intended. It might also be those moments when people choose how they might engage in meetings, often deciding when and with whom they should play. As examples, one senior leader in this inquiry recognised that he was often “disingenuous” in meetings by being selective about what he shared and with whom (SL4). Another leader described how people did speak up in meetings but “they were very wary about what they would say” (SL5). For one leader, their experience of others in the team being evasive was keenly felt: “the two (leaders) were worried about covering their own backs. The only time they would support me is if it eventually gave them support” (SL8). This left him feeling like it was “me verse (them)” which created a “lonely space”. Once again, this subtle type of disowned and coerced authenticity, while less forceful than deceit and manipulation, robs the senior leader of the possibility to own their ownedness.

From these stories, meanings emerge of a coerced and disowned authenticity that extends our understanding of Heidegger’s (1996) disowned authenticity, Sartre’s (1966) bad faith, and de Beauvoir’s (1962, 2004) freedom. Unlike Heidegger’s disowned authenticity and Sartre’s bad faith, where we give our ownedness to the “they”, participants’ stories show that this process can be a coercion of our ownedness. The reciprocity of freedom with others, described by de Beauvoir, suggests possibilities for understanding how this might be lived, especially the damaging effects of this misappropriated ownedness on *following* in authenticity.

As Alvesson and Blom (2015) explicate, there is a negative side to being-with in *following*. This was expressed by participants in this study. Alvesson and Blom suggested that this relational damage causes a negative spiralling of authenticity in the embodiment of leading and *following*. Put simply, this means that playing-a-game leads to less authenticity in *following* which then creates less authenticity in leading and so on.

The subsequent comments from participants in this inquiry highlight the spiralling and damage of coerced and disowned authenticity:

The team did not function well at times because of the tension between those two
(SL1).

and

You couldn't have that open frank discussion because of all of the tension in the
background (SL3).

If he issued an opinion, it was like throwing a wet blanket over everything else.

Everyone's thinking ended up hidden under a wet blanket (SL5).

and

This means, that when one of those people you know is aligned to the leader says

something against you, you don't retaliate, you don't offer your opinion (SL8).

Sabotage is too strong a word, but it was a lot of ... negative body language and general

hostility towards initiatives or anything. Even seating positions and ridiculous things

(SL7).

These meanings of playing-the-game in *following* emerged from the stories of participants. It was clear that playing-the-game was a shared intelligibility that shaped what one is and what one does. Thus, playing-the-game in *following* is a lived experience of being in authenticity in senior leadership teams. When being in authenticity in *following* is like playing-the-game, the lived experiences for senior leaders in teams are possibilities of owned, unowned, and disowned authenticity: a pre-reflective way of relating to others that shifts dynamically in relation to context. Additionally, when playing-the-game is like playing-a-game, a sub-strand of disowned authenticity emerges. This disowned authenticity is a coerced and damage possibility of *following*.

When authenticity is like being at home in following

Experientially, participants' stories that speak to being in owned authenticity also exude a sense of comfort, of being comforted, and of being comfortable: "I remember playing music and feeling completely comfortable doing that. There were staff concerts that I'd get involved in and the Headmaster thought that was great" (SL4).

This experience for a senior leader highlights these modes of comfort. The leader felt complete comfort owning his narrative. He could play music on the stage in front of colleagues and students, revealing a part of his life that may have been unknown or hidden. Furthermore, the performance of music was not a trivial matter, it was a deeply felt experience, an experience that completely mattered. The act of performing music allowed him to feel comfort, to feel known and revealed.

These are the moments in *following* when things seem to be "just right". The Goldilock's experience of things being just right, creates a metaphorically meaningful way of understanding a fundamental way of being in authenticity: being at home in *following*. It explicates experiences where we are at home with ourselves in our world.

Senior leaders might experience this when they feel free to speak their minds, reveal their values or share their vulnerabilities: a sense of being in comfort and equal potential for discomfort; the

familiar feelings we have of being at ease, safe, secure, known and understood. Equally, the experience of discomfort and being uncomfortable would create ways of being that feel like being left out in the cold and homeless. We know what home is and is not.

Thus, in the average and everyday way of being, followers might experience moments of authenticity, freedom, inauthenticity and bad faith. These manifestations of being authentic give rise to feelings of being in comfort and discomfort. These fundamentally ontological ways of being in comfort can be understood as home.

What is the essence of home? Home is a space and place that people intuitively understand. Most of us grew up in a home or homes. This home might have been a physical structure but equally home can be a place. The expression “returning home from overseas” suggests that a country or city can feel like home to us. Peter Allen (1980) captured this sentiment in the song, “I Still Call Australia Home”:

No matter how far

Or how wide I roam

I still call Australia home (Allen, 1980).

Equally, when we return from a day’s work, we might say “it was great to finally step inside the front door” highlighting the felt sense of home that is encapsulated inside the physical boundaries of a house. We talk about playing on our home-ground and being totally at home in new surroundings. This means we know it, feel it, sense it and understand the rich, deeply felt meanings that arise out of being at home.

Duyvendak (2011), in his book “*The Politics of Home*”, describes the cultural meanings attached to home. From his Indo-European and German definitions, home is precious, a place that has sentimental attachment that is created through familiar daily routines, regular activities and connection to significant people and stories (Duyvendak 2011). Seamon (2012) included the meaning of spirit in describing home. We have a spiritual connection to home which is felt and sensed. For Lajoie (2019), being at home is phenomenologically synonymous with belonging. While Jacobson (2009) highlighted the security of feeling at home.

These reverberating meanings of home are embedded in *following* in senior leadership teams. We know without knowing when we feel at home in *following*. We know when we belong, we feel secure, we feel connected to a place’s history, its stories and people. The stories from participants show how feelings of home are experienced in Independent School settings. What is noticeable is that there is a sense that feelings of home are uncovered when we reveal a side of ourselves that might be masked or hidden.

When this occurs, people in the senior leadership team can feel they have the freedom to be themselves, to act, to speak, and to feel in ways that align with their true selves. One participant described this freedom as feeling like he “could say just about anything” (SL4). Furthermore, he “knew (he) had the Headmaster’s permission to do just that.” In Heideggerian terms, he was able to own his ownedness in this moment. For Sartre, this would be an example of our facticity opening up possibilities of freedom. At the same time, de Beauvoir might state that it highlights how our freedom with others is essential for uncovering authenticity.

Another participant described a moment of vulnerability where they knew they had made a mistake publicly but felt comfortable enough to admit this mistake and ask for help in resolving it. They depicted this moment as one that felt “really, really good” (SL7). The result was an experience that released them to be real. This sense of being real suggested that they were revealing something of themselves that might have remained masked or unknown. The unmasking of a leader in this moment created personal comfort that was also supported by the comfort of their settings.

In these examples, there is a sense of security in knowing that you can say just about anything or make mistakes without judgement. It’s the type of freedom that is present at home with our families and friends. Likewise, there is a sense of connection to the Principal and the audience who witnessed the space, once again creating that comfort that feels like home.

In the ensuing story, a Principal shared the deep sense of comfort developed within a senior leadership team through informal activities. What is uncovered is the importance of being known not simply by roles but of something more of humanness being revealed. It also highlights how familiar routines create connection to others and shared stories.

As a senior leadership team, we developed the pattern of gathering well before school went back. We'd go off campus. Sometimes we'd go down to St Mark's just to use a different environment. It was hugely important for there to be a sense that these new team members were valued. They were known to each other. Known outside school to each other. So we did a lot of socializing. (SL9)

There is a comfort and security in being in *following* in this space. We are known. There is a deeply felt and comfortable connection to others in the senior leadership team who we can also be comfortable and authentic with. This sense of being in comfort can also manifest itself in meetings, when people demonstrate vulnerability or speak up as indicated here:

The experiences of working alongside a team that are unified can be really uplifting in lots of ways. I think that's where you learn your craft because you're always challenging

people, but you're doing it in a trusting comforted way; when someone's asking you a question, they're not threatening you. Then when you're having those conversations at the next level down or the level below that there's an understanding that this is the reason and our ultimate aim here is to impact on the child and the child's experience at school. In these moments, everyone in that leadership team is trying to synthesize information, but with a positive intent, trying to make the place better. (SL6)

These experiences of being in comfort align with Heidegger's (1996) description of owned authenticity—owning what one is and what one does. Particularly evident in these stories is the act of self-authoring and freedom with others, feeling free to reveal something that might be hidden in our regular way of being-with others. In the first story, playing music for others revealed a side of the senior leader that showed he felt like he was known and belonged. In the other's stories, we see glimpses of people feeling secure and connected through the familiar routines and activities of being in a team, with these experiences creating the deep comfort of being at home.

Given these experiences of senior leaders that speak to being at home in *following*, what is evident is a sense of self-authoring and freedom that is revealed in moments of being true to one-self. These feelings of being at home can be considered as something always present in *following* but showing itself differently in each team for each person.

Just like Goldilocks who tested chairs, beds and food to determine what felt just right, our senior leadership teams can be places and spaces that are intuitively felt as being, just right. These intuitive and often taken-for-granted experiences are created through our everyday belonging, spiritual connection, sentimental attachment, familiar routines, rituals and connection to stories and people in the senior leadership team.

Solemn and shadowed,

Soiled with memories these tendrils owned deep

Invisible, felt, buried,

Flushed with encompassing comfort

How the threads run... that make a home

(Salt, 2021, personal reflection)

Concluding Comments

The purpose of this chapter has been to interpret the way that authenticity manifests itself in the experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams. Heidegger (1996), Sartre (1966), and de Beauvoir (1962, 2004) characterised authenticity, in all its permeations, as a fundamental way of being-in-the-world. Through considering moments when participants' stories showed the meanings of playing the game, seeming and being, and the comfort of home, there is a rich sense of the place of authenticity in *following*.

From a philosophical position, van Manen's (2014) concepts of lived-time and lived-self other help to add further depth to the meanings of authenticity. Through this lens, we can see the importance of relationships (being with) to being in authenticity in all of its modes. *Following* is a reciprocal relationship in being with others. We understand our authenticity in relation to the team, the Principal, and individual members of the team.

Considering lived-time uncovers the hurried and chaotic moments when we are new to the role/activity and also moments when we feel that we are in control of the effects of time. Chaotic moments encourage followers to unown and disown their authenticity, while feeling that we are in control of our time encourages owning our ownedness.

Importantly, participants' stories also encouraged an understanding of damaged and coerced authenticity. These were the moments where authenticity became disowned because it was stolen from us, often by a more powerful individual or group of individuals. When this occurred our being in authenticity was damaged. It damaged how participants narrated their life-stories and related to others, limited possibilities, and pilfered their ability to be true to what one is and does.

Being in authenticity is a fundamental way of being in *following* in senior leadership teams. In the next chapter, I consider what it means to be in the Principal's team—a way of being that is understood intuitively but often only emerges when it is drawn to our attention, or a particular moment makes it obvious what it means to be in *following* in the Principal's senior leadership team.

Chapter 7: Being in *following* in the Principal's team

What life have you if you have not life together?

There is no life that is not in community. (Eliot, 1969, II)

The idea that meanings of *following* in senior leadership teams might manifest themselves through a shared intelligibility of being in the Principal's team could, at first, seem misleading and simplistic. Potentially, it suggests that experiences are related to a traditional view of being in a team. As one interviewee stated, "it sounds like captain's call" (SL3), an archaic sporting term referring to the privilege given to "captains" to choose or select without consultation. What is life like in the Principal's team?

A normal senior leadership meeting is one that's directed by the Principal of the whole school—all the way from the agenda through to him running the meeting. At various points in time, people will present something, others will sit and listen, and contribute if they feel they need to contribute and ask questions. Then there's a few standing items around OHS and risk management and enrolments. In terms of dialogue, back and forth, I don't even know if you would call it dialogue because it's not two people having a conversation. It tends to be one person reporting and others listening to see how it impacts on them. (SL4)

This story from a participant is not a resounding endorsement for being in a senior leadership team. It opens-up potentialities relating to the ontological experiences of *following* within these teams. It is possible, as suggested in the anecdote above, that the reality for senior leaders is that the senior leadership team functions only for the Principal. This raises questions about the essence of *following* in this team: is the senior leadership team really known and felt as the Principal's team? What shared meanings might the proposition of the Principal's team reveal for being in *following*? Using the language the Principal's team, evokes connotations not dissimilar to a sporting team that identifies with a place or larger community: the Wellington Hurricanes, the Adelaide Crows, or the Liverpool Football Club. While we may understand these teams belong to a corporate organisation, our experience of supporting them creates a sense of ownership, tribal togetherness and belonging that is separate from the parent organisation. In contrast, the language of the Principal's team suggests that the senior leadership team belongs to a single identity, an "I": the Principal. This raises worthwhile questions about lived experiences in *following*. What is the nature of a team conceptualised around a single identity? What shared meanings for *following* unfold from this conception of the senior leadership collective?

The felt sense of the Principal in following

In the experiences of senior leaders, the predominance of the Principal was common. As one senior leader stated: “the (Principal) made a difference in that school and to the experience of being in a team” (SL4). There was, as might be expected, evidence of the Principal being felt as a physical presence in meetings. However, there were also experiences of the Principal greater than these corporeal moments. These were the moments where the Principal’s principal-ness was felt and sensed by senior leaders. The Principal’s principal-ness was also intelligible in the senior leader’s connection to the team as an entity, to others in the team, and as a collective. As examples:

“I was *following* the Principal’s lead”, and “It felt like me versus the deputies and the Principal” (SL8); “The nice thing about the new Principal was she’d come without a lot of education baggage in the boot” and “In this case, it was trying to please the Principal” (SL3).

As highlighted in previous chapters, these experiences also explicate that the Principal’s team is where the phenomenon of *following* is keenly felt and makes sense to those leaders in the team. As examples, all interviewees referred to specific moments in senior leadership team meetings. Furthermore, in many of the stories these meetings were also at the heart of the experiences of being a senior leader.

The following extracts highlight how this was felt and enacted.

The Principal is the one who determines how you play the game” (SL5).

“It’s a meeting that’s set up that meets his needs as the Principal of the whole school but doesn’t necessarily meet the needs of the group (SL5).

and

...this was because I’d been able to make some of my own appointments. This is a recurring theme through my experiences. The opportunity to appoint your own team makes a positive difference (SL9).

and

I’ve been in the senior leadership team at three different schools and at one school, it was under two different Heads (SL1).

These references to the Principal show his/her important role in creating a shared intelligibility of being in *following*. It is felt, interpreted, and enacted often with a sense that the team is the Principal’s team. Highlighting this idea, the experience of being “under” a Principal, makes clear how strongly this can be felt in lived experiences.

If there is often an “I”, the Principal, in the experiences of being in *following* in senior leadership teams, this might change understandings of lived relationships within the team? What might the role of “I” mean for being in *following*? Perhaps mutually beneficial relational reciprocity in the Principal’s team is an exceptional experience.

Relationality in the Principal’s Team

As previously stated, there is no “I” in team is a well-worn idiom that captures the idea that the essence of team is a sense of us, not a plurality of “I”s, nor an “I” that is understood without the team, or an “I” that is the team. This view is existentially true for many forms of team and commonly represented linguistically. A sporting team needs to pull together to achieve a desired outcome. An orchestra needs to play harmoniously for the music to sing. These teams are clearly more than loosely coupled parts. There is a feeling of togetherness that is understood through the experiences of being joined in music and sport. As Austrian philosopher Alfred Schutz stated: “In the we-relation our experiences are not only coordinated with one another, but are also reciprocally determined and related to one another” (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 67).

While it would be incorrect to suggest that senior leadership teams are unique, they are certainly differentiated from the earlier examples of teams through the role of the Principal. As highlighted in the aforementioned stories of senior leaders, the Principal’s principal-ness creates an I-ness that permeates the lived experiences. When coupled with the dynamic relational nature of leading in a team of leaders and *following* in a team of followers, the Principal’s team is an interesting contextual nexus for *following*, as illustrated in the following anecdote.

I find in a big team, that you work out who are going to be your three or four people that you connect with well—and you have a strong connection with them. That's something that has become pretty evident. You stay really tight with the other Heads of Campus, and the Deputy. You've got to stay very tight with them and obviously also the Headmaster. (SL1)

While this explication of a Principal’s team is distinctive to this study, the idea that teams are important to our being-in-the-world is not new. As discussed, in previous chapters Sartre (1966), Heidegger (1996), and de Beauvoir (1962, 2004) all recognised the fundamentality of teams (being with others) to understandings of existence. Heidegger (1996) terms *mitsein* (being with) and *mitseinandersein* (being with another) capture this essential way of being in the world.

van Manen (2014) used the term relationality (lived self and other) to capture the existential mode of being with others. According to van Manen, relationality encourages contemplation of how people are connected and disconnected. In relation to *following* in senior leadership teams, this

raises questions about the meanings of community that exist and are absent. It also encourages contemplation of what unfolds from being together (van Manen, 2014).

Relationality also considers how collective experiences may show up in ways of being-in-the-world together. Joint attention, shared intention, collective acceptance, shared evaluative attitudes, care, reciprocity, empathy, politics, authenticity and embodiment have all found a place in discussions (Blomberg, 2018; Fuchs, 2017; Pacherie, 2017; Sánchez Guerra, 2016; Schweikard & Schmid, 2013; Szanto, 2017; Zahavi, 2015).

These collective experiences resonate with senior leaders and reverberate through participants' stories. Most of us can recognise moments in being with others when these experiences have been present. In *following* in Independent Schools in Australia, the senior leadership team is the contextual nexus for many of these experiences.

There is a clear sense of many of these elements in the following narrative from a senior leader:

If everybody around the table has a stake in that then, as a body, you've got this is uplifting view, that everyone's working hard. Everyone's high. Everyone's working harder than what we normally would. Everyone's gone wild and researching and bringing back ideas and thoughts.

Inside that room, therefore, is this excitement around being able to achieve something and people being on the same page, working in the same direction. I think when you reach those highs everybody's *following* and leading at the same time. It's almost euphoric. Everybody's working in the same direction. (SL6)

Senior leaders are all already shareholders in collective identities whose being is often revealed through a variety of institutionalized, ritualized, linguistically expressed beliefs, practices, routines and traditions. These collective identities (leadership teams and school communities) that we identify with share emotions, preferences, and values. These reciprocal relational experiences with other group members can cause senior leaders to feel, think and act as part of a "we" (Zahavi, 2021).

Therefore, considering the multifaceted nature of the we-relationship, already discussed, it is plausible to view moments of *following* as "we" experiences, and "I" and "you" experiences that occur within a situation-specific context coloured by the role of the Principal. Hence, senior leaders' experiences and the interpretations of their narratives encourages a view that *following* is a reciprocal relational web of being with others (the leadership team) and being with the Principal.

The embodiment of the Principal in following experiences

As highlighted above, the reciprocity of being with is often felt strongly as a being with the Principal. From this perspective, French philosopher Merleau-Ponty's thinking on embodiment is valuable. What is felt or sensed in *following* and leading during the moment of "having my team" is elemental to the meaning of *following*. Merleau-Ponty (2012) described the idea of flesh or felt sense to explicate how embodiment is fundamental to perception and thus always mattering in the creation of relational dynamics in senior leadership teams. I experience *following* and leading through my bodily interactions with others. When leaders find themselves in team meetings, with the team, the energetic presence of their body is sensed by other bodies who respond. A leader might state "my gut reaction is...". This is an example of our body sensing the others embodiment in a relational space (Ladkin, 2012). As an additional example from a participant's story, the felt sense of supporting each other in a crisis was described as "buckling down" (SL8).

Moreover, by extending Merleau-Ponty's (2012) notion of percipient perceptibles to *following*, it is possible to shed further light on the dynamic in-between space of leading and *following*. For Merleau-Ponty (2012), we cannot perceive without being perceived. The experience of knowing ourselves only through our interactions with others is highlighted in those moments when leaders share their vulnerability, frustration or anger. The leader knows through the followers' reactions that they have been understood. This might occur during those moments in meetings, when the Principal has his/her team around him/her and the followers nod heads in agreement or smile appreciatively or visible lean in towards the Principal (Kupers, 2015; Ladkin, 2012).

These are mutual moments, moments that are created and embodied simultaneously. Whether through the felt sense or through dynamic interplay of perceptions, being in mutuality is a profound and fundamental way of being in *following*. It is a relational intertwining of the I, you and we.

Solicitude, following and the Principal's team

Furthermore, we can see Heidegger's (1996) notion of care at play in the Principal's teams. As considered in Chapter 3, Heidegger's second existential mode of care, solicitude, describes our care for other beings who matter to us. This might include my riding group, my football team, my coffee friends, and my book club. Importantly for these groups, there is a keen sense of belonging captured through the possessive determiner "my". "My" not only suggests that I care about this group but, in an extension of Heidegger's notion of care, there is also a specific form of caring about something together (Sánchez Guerra, 2016). This is experienced in leadership teams when it is not just my response to a situation but it is our response. Equally, there are events that matter not just to me but they matter to us as the senior leadership team of the school. Thus, there is an intertwining of individual care (I care) and group care (we care). Our individual interpretation and

response might be different, but they are revealed through our care for the team.

Narratives from senior leaders reflected this idea of care. The use of “we” in the story below revealed how caring for the team was experienced during a crisis—the recent COVID 19 pandemic. It is probable that each leader had their own care for issues relating to COVID 19 in areas that were aligned with their portfolio (hygiene, online learning, kiss and drop zones, Year 12 final exams, boarding), however, you can sense in this story how individual care morphed into a collective caring for and about the team.

One of the only times we came together as a real team was during COVID. We met every other day. We had emergency meetings. Every day, there was a change, you know. Right at the beginning of March, when everything was changing so much, we even met on a daily basis for a number of weeks. We buckled down and we protected, the Principal. We put in and we were firing really well. We lost maybe two families. We had to pull together: put our agendas aside. We had these shared goals of getting our kids educated online or hand washing or developing more kiss and drives. We did whatever it took. (SL2)

The politics of being in following in the Principal's team

Finally, Hannah Arendt (1973) and Simone de Beauvoir (1962) articulated a common interest in freedom, action, politics and judgement (d'Entreves, 2019; Loidolt, 2016; Zebadúa Yáñez, 2018). Their philosophical ideas focused on interpreting socio-political forces as they are lived. Both Arendt and de Beauvoir proposed that the relational nature of being with others was political. They also suggested that this was an essential and inescapable reality. Being together in a senior leadership team, therefore, means that politics is always already present in our everyday experiences with other senior leaders. Not only is this represented in the narratives of participants, but this is an experience that is familiar for most people who have worked in teams with others.

Politics often has a negative connotation when used in relation to working with others. Arguably, it also has a Machiavellian flavour. As an example, the Harvard Business Review defines politics as “a variety of activities associated with the use of influence tactics to improve personal or organizational interests” (Jarrett, 2017, para. 5). The choice of influence, tactics and personal interests as key components of politics speak to this unhealthy perspective. de Beauvoir (1962) and Arendt (1973) would view this perspective as a possible way of living the experience of politics, however, it was not their fundamental view on the enactment of politics. For de Beauvoir and Arendt, politics is the lived experiences of people debating and discussing a common concern (Zebadúa Yáñez, 2018). However,

they did concede that these experiences of being together often manifest as deformed or abrogated possibilities of freedom (Loidolt, 2017)

Of particular interest to this study are their themes of power, sovereignty (antithetical freedom), and politics. As stated in Chapter 3, the relational dynamic between leading and *following* is complex and often weighted toward leading (Alvesson & Blom, 2015). This perhaps is not surprising, especially given the primacy of the Principal in the contextual experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams.

The subsequent anecdote, from a leader in this study, exemplifies how an infusion of de Beauvoir and Arendt opens up further meanings about being in *following*. Using de Beauvoir's thinking on freedom and sovereignty as a lens for experiential contemplation, the participant's story reveals the active process of reciprocal freedom. The restriction of freedom is felt as the relationship with the principal diminishes. This is compounded by the restricted freedom of others: "she kept quiet". It's also clear that power or sovereignty rests with the Principal and his/her supporters. The relational space is deformed and possibilities of being free in *following* are diminished. The result is a vulnerable and lonely space.

Things changed in the senior leadership team after the first year. I started to have these small differences of opinions with the Principal in my meetings but also in the team meetings. The previous Head of Primary hardly gave me any support because she knew her bread and butter was now in secondary. I thought she would back me a little bit in these meetings but she didn't. She kept quiet. Therefore, it was often just me being vocal and pushing back. It felt like me versus the deputies and the Principal. It was a lonely space. I actually voiced that at one point. I pointed out to the Principal that in our individual meeting you said this but in the team meeting you said that there was a disparity between our two lines of thinking. What else could I say (SL8)?

Participants' stories, therefore, provide the ensuing opportunities for exploring deeper meanings of being in *following* in the Principal's Team:

1. Experiences of the lived self and others: being with and being with others in *following*.
2. Experiences of the embodiment of the Principal in senior leadership teams.
3. Experiences of "Care" in the Principal's Team.
4. Experiences of Politics, Freedom and Power in the Principal's Team.

The unique nature of the Principal's team

Before considering how these four ontological meanings of *following* might show up in participants anecdotes, several key experiential features of the Principal's team need to be pondered. They shed further light on *following* in the specific context of the Principal's team and therefore possibilities for richer understandings.

As stated earlier, the phenomenon of *following* primarily exists and makes sense to senior leaders in an interesting contextual nexus, conceptualised in this inquiry as the Principal's team. From a Heideggerian (1996) perspective, *following* is already embedded in our lived experiences and manifests itself in our intentional relationships with objects (all things animate and inanimate, and ideas). Therefore, the phenomenon of *following* often appears in the situational nexus of Principal's team, especially meetings. Understanding more about key experiential features for this context encourages contemplation of how these leaders are connected meaningfully with the facticity of this senior leadership world—rituals, others, traditions, values and expectations.

Earlier in this chapter, teams who engendered a strong sense of belonging were discussed, e.g., my team. What is true of these “my” groups is the presence of choice. Although someone can be roped into the group by a friend/colleague, there is still a degree of autonomy; I chose to join and I can choose how long I stick with the group. I can also choose when to leave. Arguably the sense of care for the team and caring together manifests itself because of the strong role of choice. Conceivably, I don't care in the same way about groups I am forced to join or have less choice about joining. This is relatable to experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams.

Senior leadership teams fit in to distinctive category of collectives that might be considered to constitute a “we”. In these teams our membership is a by-product of another action. For example, being employed brings with it membership to the organisation and expectations about teams that you will be part of. Senior leadership teams are an interesting configuration of this idea. When I am employed as a senior leader for a role in a school, membership of the senior leadership team is both a by-product of my employment and an expectation of the role. Of relevance to this inquiry, and importantly for the experiences of *following*, the Principal will often be the majority shareholder in the decision-making process. He/she is selecting a senior leader for the Principal's team; encapsulated in this statement from a Principal: “I think I've finally got the team I need” (SL9).

This adds an additional dimension to the experience of being in *following* in this team. Not only is the Principal's principal-ness keenly felt, interpreted and enacted but the initial experience of joining the team is tainted with the Principal's hand. When this is added to the dynamic of being in a team of leaders leading and followers *following*, the grains of sand that make up the beach become diverse, fluid and relationally complex. It encourages further contemplation about meanings of

caring about the team and being with others in a team, especially the Principal. It also might open-up further meanings relating to power, freedom and politics in this team.

This could mean that the Principal's team can be contemplated as a specific type of organisational we-relationship. What might be contemplated about the principal-ness of the senior leadership team, phenomenological perspectives, and following? It is possible that social identification and adherence to the goals, values, norms, standards, beliefs, and practices—the group ethos—may lead members to share emotions and other experiential states (Sánchez Guerra, 2016). However, the embodiment of the Principal could distort the we-ness of the team and related experiences.

As previously stated, participants' stories certainly suggest that there is something more to being in a leadership team than participation as an individual follower or followers. Being in the Principal's team reveals a situation specific way of understanding the phenomenon of *following* that opens up new meanings. In the next section, this inquiry considers how this situation-specific way of being in *following* reveals itself in senior leadership teams and how these manifestations might be interpreted.

Being compelled in following

Invariably, there are going to be things that work well and things that don't work well, things that are more appealing and things that are less appealing, things that you just have to do and things that you really want to do. You move back and forward. You oscillate between these positions. I think that in many ways this is the experience of being in a leadership team. (SL2)

As this participant's story highlights, in *following* senior leaders can be attracted to certain ideas, projects, and events. Being compelled to act, believe, or feel in some way is different from being coerced and convinced. As the above story states—it's doing "things that you really want to do" (SL2). Duffy et al. (2018) framed these types of work experiences as being called. For them, being called are moments when we are seeking a sense of overall purpose and meaning and contributing to the common good (Duffy et al., 2018). Calling is often associated with religion, but the modern, secular descriptions describe calling as having a sense of purpose, direction, the desire to be helpful, personal fulfilment and a desire to contribute to the greater good (Willemse & Deacon, 2015).

In addition to the story above, participants' stories recount three possibilities for being compelled in *following*: being wholeheartedly compelled, being half-heartedly compelled, and being repelled. All three offer opportunities to uncover further meanings of the lived experiences of *following*.

There are moments when senior leaders are working in the leadership team and are called by ideas; projects, people and events that resonate with them completely. They invite curiosity, a sense of purpose, seeking meaning and effortless contributions. Frequently in a school setting, these moments relate to students, teaching and learning issues. These issues are often at the heart of why many people choose teaching, because they want to make a difference to students through a relational pedagogy. Therefore, what often calls senior leaders is tied to the heart of teaching. This is their sense of purpose and direction that engenders personal fulfilment and feelings of contributing to a greater good. When this occurs, there is an *esprit de corps* that permeates the we-relation of being in *following* in the Principal's team. These lived experiences are like being compelled wholeheartedly in *following*.

There are also moments when we can see that ideas, projects and activities are compelling, but we are not called in the same way. These include those experiences in *following* where the team realizes that they need to roll up their sleeves and get to work but they aren't called by this work. This half-hearted way of being compelled could include policy writing, risk assessments, Human Resources' reports, and issues that relate to only a small portion of the team. This half-hearted way of being compelled in *following* is therefore distinguished from wholeheartedness by an obscuring and a detachment from being called by the heart of *following*.

Finally, there are moments when the senior leaders are not compelled but repelled. These are moments when *following* might feel like being out on a limb and being in hiddenness. In these lived experiences of *following*, senior leaders are not acknowledged, they feel exposed and uncomfortably vulnerable.

How then might these three ways of being compelled in *following* be experienced in the day-to-day lives of senior leaders? What is experienced as compelling? What is experienced as not compelling? What ways of being partially compelled exist and are experienced in *following*? What nuanced meanings are revealed in these moments of compulsion?

Being Wholeheartedly Compelled in Following

In teams and life, the experience of being compelled might mean being really invigorated by an idea that propels us; it energises our bodies, engages our thinking, and demands our attention. It calls us. These are the moments in *following* in the senior leadership team when being compelled resonates with our hearts, whole-heartedly. These moments propel us, encourage us, and energise us in a way that being compelled by doing what needs to be done fails to do.

The experiences of working alongside a team that are unified, can be really uplifting in lots of ways. I think that's where you learn your craft because you're always challenging

people, but you're doing it in a trusting comforted way; when someone's asking you a question, they're not threatening you. Then when you're having those conversations at the next level down or the level below that there's an understanding that this is the reason and our ultimate aim here is to impact on the child and the child's experience at school. In these moments, everyone in that leadership team is trying to synthesize information, but with a positive intent, trying to make the place better. (SL6)

There is a clear sense in this leader's story that what matters in *following* goes to the heart of what matters in teaching—the child. This senior leader is being called wholeheartedly in a way that uplifts and connects them to their sense of purpose. There is also evidence of contributing to the common good—"trying to make the place better" and "the ultimate aim here is to impact on the child". Being with others, "working alongside the team" in "a trusting comforted way", creates the situational context for these experiences of being compelled in *following*. *Following* is experienced as something that matters to the team, with the team. Thus, in this anecdote, there is a strong alignment with the Willemse and Deacon (2015) description of being called—relating to our sense of purpose, being helpful, feeling personal fulfilment and contributing to the greater good.

Being compelled in wholehearted *following* opens up possibilities for further understandings about what it means to be in *following* in senior leadership teams. The shared experiences of senior leaders reveal that these moments might be like igniting passions, being pulled into and pushed along, and feeling a common spirit or esprit de corps. Additionally, whole-hearted *following* discloses a for-us-ness, care for the team, and also felt moments of the Principal's principal-ness.

These are energizing and euphoric moments. The subsequent stories expose how these show up in *following* in the Principal's team:

Honestly, it felt like riding on a rocket. That sounds a bit dreamy, but I didn't quite realize what a slick machine we had developed in that space, until I left. I just assumed all schools were benefiting from that sort of trajectory in that period. (SL6)

and

Inside that room, therefore, is this excitement around being able to achieve something and people being on the same page, working in the same direction. I think when you reach those highs everybody's *following* and leading at the same time. It's almost euphoric. Everybody's working in the same direction. (SL7)

and

Some (meetings) have been better. One that was better was more like an informal discussion. (The Principal) raised an issue that came off the back of something and said, “What do people think?”. It was a topic that impacted on everybody in the room—that was the key. The topic was, “Are people really unhappy in the workplace?” I think that the meeting took on a life of its own: people contributing, people bouncing off each other. There was disagreement and debate—that’s what was different. (SL11)

It is evident in these stories that what is occurring in *following* ignites passion. It creates a wholehearted calling that enlists the entire senior leadership team. “People”, “we” and “everybody” capture how this experience permeates beyond the individual and is experienced as a collective *following* experience—a team, the Principal’s team.

This wholeheartedness in *following* might be experienced as a gravitational pull and a propulsion. It might feel like “riding on a rocket” (SL6). When being compelled wholeheartedly we are drawn in and propelled forward. Sometimes our propelled ride is like water skiing—we are towed along.

Sometimes the ride is like being a member of the fishing crew—riding on a boat for a shared purpose, working together, fulfilling roles. Sometimes the ride is like being the dolphins frolicking in the bow waves of the ship, leaping forward with new thinking, delighting in playing together as a team, moving in spirited rhythm with the vision of the school. A difficult or challenging event/relationship or circumstance can create a similar experience. Adversity can be what draws us in and propels us forward. It is an experience of all hands-on deck; leaping to support each other; putting out spot fires; surviving the experience together. Being in *following* means we are drawn to, adhered to and energized.

We started to get runs on the board by working more strategically, more cohesively, in a more aligned fashion. The team and the school went from strength to strength. (SL6)

and

We were faced with a challenge. It was hard, but we got through it and we often look back and say, remember when, remember when. I think that was really good for our team. It was very unifying. In some ways we felt like pioneers in the area. It was a galvanizing experience (SL7).

These experiences of being wholeheartedly compelled in *following* also create moments when there is an esprit de corps. These lived experiences reveal a common spirit in the senior leadership team that inspires devotion and respect for the character of the group. This echoes Rathee's and Rajain's (2020) description of workplace spirituality as a felt meaningfulness. How might this esprit de corps be revealed in moments of being wholeheartedly compelled in *following* in senior leadership teams?

We don't all have to look the same, dress the same, be the same. It's just what we bring to the team. We are here to help each other. We need to be able to laugh. Sometimes all you can do is laugh at ridiculous moments. We also need to feel like we all have a sense of agency, of empowerment to make decisions. It becomes the culture of the team—the groove. (SL7)

In this story that discloses a common spirit—an esprit de corps—camaraderie, bonding, and fellowship characterise the experience of *following*. An esprit de corps means everyone taking an interest in each other—not equally or always—but more because there is care towards another human being rather than concern about how things might affect my portfolio or further my ambition. The experience unifies and lifts the team. It empowers them and the spirit of the team becomes their “groove”.

In the following stories, other facets of being compelled (propelled) wholeheartedly emerge. Camaraderie and fellowship promote an experience of comfort in the team. You are comfortable to share, to laugh, and to disagree during meetings. When togetherness is part of the experience of *following*, people seek each other out. Frequently, these interactions are not just limited to the meetings. Senior leadership retreats are not dreaded; they are a time to spend with each other. The work is a priority but so are the social interactions that occur after dinner, at breakfast, and in between. Togetherness creates energy, passion and freedom to be yourself.

We'd stay at the Crowne Plaza, Coogee Beach or we'd go to Bowral and stay in Southern Highlands. Lots of different places. It's a day and night away. You have a meal together. A lot of social lubrication which I think was really good. It added to the camaraderie of the group. (SL4)

and

If you do not have a loyal team, I do not know how you function effectively. I dislike being on an executive that works on the principle of 'buy in' or even uses the term 'buy in'. You don't want people to 'buy in' to your changes. You want them to invest sweat,

blood, tears, laughter, and whatever it might take. But you don't want them to just buy your idea—that's a really short-term exchange. That's my definition of a transactional experience; you've bought in. However, if you can transform thinking and the team actually believes it's so worthwhile, they'll sweat blood and you'll all have some hard fun doing it, that's my preferred leadership experience. I really like to see people having hard fun on the way to a good, hard goal. (SL6)

There were also stories that revealed how being with others in the Principal's team could be experienced as a calling. This facet of being compelled goes to the heart of what being a being means in *following*; a sharing of experiences that manifests as a "for-us-ness" (León, 2018). Caring for and with others creates space for support and a willingness to help. We can see this illustrated in the following story from a senior leader. The team members were connected through a common purpose—a shared vision which was experienced through working together on projects and activities that related to this vision. In these moments, what is evident is a "we" that cares together. A "we" (the Principal's team) that is compelled wholeheartedly to support each other, contribute to the team, and to put the needs of the "we" before the "I". This is a "for-us-ness" rather than "for-me-ness" in being in *following* (León, 2018).

We were a team that was without any doubt working to a shared vision. In fact, some of our best times were when we were developing strategy. There was this enormous appetite and capability to be contributing. There were no passengers. The team all contributed in different ways, but there were no passengers. If something needed to be done—we might be on a three-day planning exercise and it'd be five o'clock and we're exhausted—but if there's something that needed to be done before the next day there were always two or three that'd say, right we'll work on it. We'd just do it and we'd help each other. (SL7)

As previously discussed, whether research frames these experiences as a calling or a collective or a we-relation, a shared sense of purpose/common goals is often the essence of being compelled wholeheartedly in *following*. This shared sense of purpose might be obvious and palpable, for example, a strategic planning day that draws everyone together.

There are also the everyday experiences of sharing the common purpose of being the Principal's team—the team that represents the Principal. This form of purpose is less obvious and might be taken for granted in the everyday lives of senior leaders.

Arguably, whether it is noticed or not, the Principal is embodied in all experiences of *following* for senior leaders. This is shown in the ensuing anecdote, where the experience is the absence of the Principal in a shared moment: “There were even times when the Headmaster couldn’t be there and so someone else chaired the meeting. These meetings were different too because we could be ourselves. We weren’t reading the music. We were making it” (SL3).

Being compelled wholeheartedly could also be experienced when senior leadership teams identify shared goals that sit in the background and are only brought forth at special meetings or retreats. It might be felt through the norms and expectations of the team which are the habitually unspoken ways of being together. This shared sense of purpose might be experienced as a shared passion, an idea that resonates or impacts, a set of values/beliefs/goals and a circumstance/event that draws us together.

Being compelled wholeheartedly in *following* in the Principal’s team manifests itself in the everyday experiences of being in the senior leadership team. These collective *following* experiences might align with the essence of being leaders of a school: teaching and learning and children. They might reveal themselves in those collective moments of being in *following* when we are ignited by common goals, strategic aims and shared visions. They also might be meaningfully felt instances where the team is propelled to pursue an idea, activity, and project. These moments create experiences of shared purpose, esprit de corps, and togetherness. Being wholeheartedly compelled is a shared intelligibility of what it might mean to be in *following* in the Principal’s team.

There is a spiritual flavour to being wholeheartedly compelled. It is a felt intelligibility of the experience of a calling that touches our essential being. This resonating touch discloses the earthy positivity of these experiences for senior leaders. My poem is offered to invite readers to heartfelt wondering about the existential mode of wholehearted *following*.

I hear those soft voices,
Whispering, lingering, tickling fancies
half-heard, undeniable truths
Taking root and clambering for footholds
A deep heart-felt echoing
Calling, calling and compelling. (Salt, 2021)

Being Half-Heartedly Compelled in Following

There's not the immediacy that comes within the human fabric of what schools are about. This is an organisational imperative rather than a mission imperative (SL2).

Being half-heartedly compelled in *following* diverges from wholeheartedness through the obscuring of, and distance from, being called. Stated another way, when we are whole-heartedly *following* we find the calling compelling; when we are half-heartedly *following* we are called by compulsion. The above statement from a senior leader captures how this is experienced: "There's no immediacy"; it's not "what schools are about"; it feels like an "organisational imperative" (SL2).

Therefore, in the everyday ways of being in *following*, being compelled half-heartedly resonates and is experienced differently. Possibilities in senior leadership teams for being compelled to *follow* half-heartedly might present as a sense of duty, needing to meet the expectations of the role and the team, meeting an organizational challenge, and teams enacting traditions and rituals. These are the tasks that the senior leadership team knows must be done. They can see that these tasks are compelling for the organisation, the community and groups within the school.

A school-based example of an organizational imperative could be the Year 12 Graduation Ceremony. The senior leadership team knows this matters to the school, to Year 12 parents and most Year 12 students. It matters to the teachers of the Year 12 cohort. The senior leaders can see this is compelling and that it requires their joint attention and intention to make it work. Yet the experience is often different from those moments that really call them to follow. This is an annual event. The ritual is the same just the people are different. They are called by a sense of duty and expectation—a compulsion to do the job that needs doing. What else is revealed when senior leaders are *following* half-heartedly?

When we understand that a task is an imperative, we experience necessity. This is different from whole-heartedness, where the calling is compelling. Necessity in *following* is an almost inescapable and constant pull. It might even feel robotic—going through the motions. Contrastingly, when *following* wholeheartedly, leaders might be liberated, energized, propelled, and human.

This difference can be seen in the ensuing examples; necessity in *following* is being enacted through a sense of duty, professional expectations and positional responsibilities. When we complete a task or write a report, our heart might not be in it but we feel compelled to do it well because it aligns with personal, professional or organizational expectations. The human fabric that connects us with who we are as teachers, senior leaders and followers is not evident, but we still are compelled to engage. It is necessary. This is exemplified in these anecdotes from participants:

I don't think there is ever going to be a day in schools when the leadership team start clapping their hands and licking their lips about policy. But, I'm sorry, it needs to get done. (SL2)

and

You can see that the dynamic in the team is definitely more fragmented with these tasks. There's no real joy in doing this stuff, but it has to be done. Therefore, in a sense, the purpose is more diffused. The purpose with kids in schools is really clear. The purpose with this stuff is sometimes to avoid litigation, and to make sure that you're compliant. (SL2)

Thus, being compelled half-heartedly in *following* in these moments is not about doing things we really want to do. It's the experience of being compelled by necessity—the job “*needs to (be) done*”. This sense of necessity captures the focus and thoughts of the team. These moments of obligation are felt as a team in *following*. As one participant noted, “we went to a lot of events as a team. We didn't have to, but we felt obligated to go” (SL6).

Sometimes necessity in *following* might be felt as urgency, when a job needs to be done quickly and the stakes are high. This might be true when an event that is external to the normal role in the senior leadership team compels all of the team to act and be engaged. A death in the school community, a pandemic, falling enrolments or finance issues might be examples that are experienced regularly in senior leadership teams.

Not surprisingly, participants' anecdotes of being compelled urgently in half-hearted *following* reflected the COVID 19 pandemic. These urgent and necessary moments engendered “all hands-on deck” experiences. Importantly, these possibilities of being compelled urgently in *following* are revealed through being with others in the Principal's team.

COVID pressed us in ways that we could never, ever have imagined. Amongst all of that there were a couple of critical incidents as well. We lost two kids. So again, you throw in critical incidents on top of what the team were already managing. It was a very challenging and changeable set of circumstances. I haven't really had time to reflect but it was a remarkable performance by a group of people that had never been in that situation, there was no manual for this. There wasn't a chance for anyone to back away, you couldn't afford to in that situation. (SL2)

This senior leader is clear about the urgency and necessity to act. The team is compelled to address a very challenging and rapidly changing set of circumstances. To get the job done and protect the Principal, they have to buckle down, pull together and put their normal agendas aside.

While experienced differently, there are also similarities with being compelled wholeheartedly. The team has shared goals and a sense of purpose, they care about the team in these moments of crises, and there is an esprit de corps evident in the language used (pull together, came together, a real team). There is also a strong sense of “we”. It is a for-us-ness which is mattering in *following*. The leadership team are unified in *we-following* through being compelled to get the job done.

Hence, half-hearted *following* may be experienced as urgent and necessary. It may create moments that are robotic, routine and inescapable, but it can craft possibilities that galvanise a team in *following*. In the next example of coping with the urgent necessity of the Pandemic, the followers’ foci are diffuse: the Business Manager is worried about public relations; the Head of Junior School is worried about perceptions and everyone is experiencing it differently. However, the experience as a team in *following* is positive. It galvanizes the team and there is, once again, evidence of the senior leaders caring for and about each other in *following*.

Different members of the team experienced it differently. Although everyone agreed, we were doing the right thing. There were levels of anxiety, definitely. The Head of Junior School was worried about perceptions. The Business Manager was thinking about the impact of adverse PR. We also have a deputy who's also in charge of boarding. She was very, very keen to ensure that we did follow through on our principles. She felt extremely supported and heard. What was special about that time, even though it was hard, we were so united as a leadership team, and we were also very supportive of one another. (SL7)

In these stories from participants about being compelled in *following* half-heartedly, what is also noticeable are the moments when there is a strong sense of the Principal: “we felt obligated to go”, “we buckled down and we protected the Principal” and “this is an organizational imperative”. These instances explicitly and implicitly underscored the relationship of the Principal to the moments of being compelled in half-hearted *following*. While it is possible this may also be true of whole-hearted *following*, it was not represented strongly in this inquiry. The Principal’s principal-ness was more present in experiences of half-hearted *following*.

The three phrases from participants, “we felt obligated to go” (SL3), “we buckled down and protected the Principal” (SL8), and “this is an organizational imperative” (SL2) also show how the

presence of the Principal is felt even when he/she is not present. Arguably, in these moments senior leaders are not compelled by their own desires (wholeheartedly) but by a sense of obligation to the Principal's team and the Principal. Thus, the hand of the Principal is represented in these moments of compulsion. There is also a sense care for the Principal's team; not equally committed to caring about individuals in the team but caring about the team that represents the Principal.

These experiences of being compelled half-heartedly in *following* disclose further meanings of what it is like to be in *following* in a senior leadership team. When we are called by compulsion in *following* there is a sense of duty, professional expectations, and positional responsibilities at play. It's not necessarily about doing what you want to do, it's about doing what needs to be done. As the participants' stories highlight, doing what needs to be done compels us to act out of necessity rather than with our hearts. Arguably, the experience obscures and distances senior leaders from the essence of being in *following through* the practicalities and urgency of necessity.

Being repelled in following

I think everybody is running for the hills and saying, 'well this isn't me. This is somebody else's job. I am here to tell naughty kids off, or to make sure teachers fill out their curriculum documents' (SL2).

Being compelled wholeheartedly and half-heartedly in *following* also opens up possibilities for moments when we are not compelled. Whenever senior leaders are not compelled in *following*, the experience is like being repelled— "running for the hills" (SL2). Unlike *following* wholeheartedly and half-heartedly, where a sense of togetherness, sharing, and team exists, these moments of being repelled can be experienced as floating free, feeling untethered, and rudderless. These experiences of being repelled disclose further variations of *following*: those moments of being repelled that are like *not-following*.

Not-following may appear to be out of place in a study about *following* in senior leadership teams, however, a phenomenological inquiry encourages a curious attitude to uncovering hidden or taken for granted meanings. This requires contemplating phenomena from all perspectives. In this space, moments when we make choices to be or not to be reveal different views of the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, it is this inquiry's position that *not-following* is an essential mode of being-in *following*. Experientially, this position resonates with participants' stories but also reverberates with many other possible lived experiences: choosing not to teach a lesson because the students are not in the right mood; choosing not to respond to the inflammatory email; choosing not to lead because the moment requires something else.

How might these moments of *not-following* be experienced by senior leaders? What becomes of the collective, *we-following* experiences that existed in whole-heartedly and half-heartedly *following*? What is the lived experience of the Principal's principal-ness in these occurrences of *not-following*? The everyday stories of participants in this inquiry suggest that being repelled and *not-following* is experienced quite differently from being compelled: there is a breakdown in *we-following*; care for team is less present; and the Principal's principal-ness weighs down senior leadership teams.

When senior leaders are *not-following* they may not really listen, engage or be present during discussions. They might seek ways to distract themselves—doodle or answer emails. They may also act as if they are engaged by responding or contributing to the discussion occasionally. Senior leaders may also actively choose to ignore being compelled. They might know that they should be involved and engaged but they actively choose to avoid completing the task and contributing to thinking. In *not-following*, senior leaders do not find the calling compelling, nor are they called by compulsion. In these lived moments, absence manifests in *following*.

As described earlier, experiences of *following* exist and are understood in the context of the senior leadership team—the Principal's team. The setting for many of these lived-experiences of the Principal's team is the senior leadership team meeting. It is in these regular meetings that *not-following* is made intelligible.

I can clearly remember an experience that highlighted these meetings. I was sitting next to the Chaplain—who's doing his PhD. Normally he is a very social being, but he's withdrawn because he didn't see the point in being there. If it were more compelling to be in the meeting, he'd be involved. But it wasn't. It should have been the most exciting place in the school. The most engagement, surely, would come from that. But it didn't. So you have this super gregarious guy, got a good mind, he's doing his PhD. He's got a Master of Letters as well and he's withdrawing and going on with his own thing. It wasn't that he didn't care. He just didn't feel respected. (SL4)

In this story, the Chaplain (a member of the senior leadership team) is not engaged and not interested. This senior leader also noted that the Chaplain experienced being repelled in most meetings:

He was doing other stuff during the meeting. He was writing a sermon for chapel or some service. He was writing his PhD in there too. I'd see it every meeting. He'd be tapping away, proof reading, or mailing his supervisor. (SL4)

The experience of *not-following* in these moments for the Chaplain is of being disengaged, disinterested, and potentially bored. Moments of being pulled, propelled, and ignited that existed in whole-hearted *following* are not present. Equally, being called by urgent necessity found in the stories of half-hearted *following* is also absent. The Chaplain is there in body alone; an experience of being present but absent.

The Chaplain's story is not exclusive to his situation or school context. Most participants shared stories that highlighted moments of *not-following*. Sometimes for senior leaders, *not-following* manifests as a fixed experience, as evidenced in the story about the Chaplain and in the next anecdote, as well.

During these meetings, everybody around the table has got a laptop in front of them and we're sending each other messages or answering emails, not actually being actively engaged in the conversation. The only time this doesn't happen is when there was something more urgent that we all collectively thought we should have some participation in, but that might last for a few minutes in an hour and a half meeting that we would have on a weekly basis. You were listening just in case your name came up so you could have a response. You were never really involved. (SL5)

For other participants, *not-following* experiences were more fluid: "You are part of it but sometimes you don't feel you're as fully part of it as you would in the Senior School" (SL1). Regardless of the extent of these lived experiences, *not-following* exists for senior leaders as moments of being less engaged, less interested, distracted and, on occasion, damaged.

Evident also in the lived experiences of participants when being repelled and *not-following* is the absence of "we". Whole-hearted and half-hearted *following* created existential moments when truly collective experiences of *following* were enacted. "We" was experienced and felt in *following*. This was often indicated in stories through the use of "we". In the stories that narrate being repelled in *following* there is a strong sense of "I":

The Principal didn't see himself as the bridge between the people in his senior leadership team. He very much kept them in their silos, by virtue of selectively sharing aspects of information quite deliberately. People only ever knew as much as they needed to know. There was a bit of a divide and control sort of style. The senior executive was even divided into two groups. It was incredibly hierarchical and so everyone was aware of their particular place in the pecking order. There was very little

interest in each other's portfolios..... not maliciously. Just a benign lack of interest. It was a bit more like the United Nations. There was advocacy for their strata or their area. Just as passionate, just as committed to improvement, but very siloed. (SL6)

As Zahavi (2021) points out, “I” isn’t excluded in experiences of “we”. What the above anecdote highlights is the dominance of “I” and the felt absence of “we” in these experiences. The leader in this story doesn’t feel care for the team or cared for by the team. The sense of “we” that might be created from the Principal and me, and the senior leadership team (including the Principal) and me, is absent. The absence of care is creating moments of being exposed and lonely.

In stories where the “I” is dominant and the collective “we” is experienced as being less present and absent, what is revealed are experiences that leave senior leaders feeling exposed, vulnerable, uncertain and lonely. Caring for and with the team in these vulnerable moments is diminished. As one senior leader stated, it is like “stripping you down to your basic nakedness almost ... and then leaving you there” (SL5). It is in these moments that the Principal’s principal-ness is most keenly and often negatively felt. These moments of *not-following* distinguish themselves because they harm the relational space between the team, especially between the Principal and those in *following*.

Alvesson and Blom (2015) raised an interesting point about leading and *following*: the very idea of leading assumes that someone is wanting to be in *following*. If *following* is an injurious experience, why would any senior leader in a leadership team be compelled to *follow*? Not only would senior leaders be repelled but the nature of being a leader in *following* would manifest itself in a way that discouraged any form of present and future *following*: feeling fallen or pushed, *not-following* that harmed, would smother the everyday experiences of senior leaders.

This raises further questions about the lived moments of *following* in senior leadership teams. If senior leaders are *not-following* because of the deleterious and unattractive nature of the phenomenon of *following*, how is this experienced? What meanings are manifest in the lifeworld of senior leaders when *not-following* is present and toxic?

Politics, Sovereignty and Power in following in the senior leadership team

While there are many moments when the Principal’s presence is experienced positively—a steadying hand, a supportive mentor, an instigator of ideas—sadly, participants’ stories also reflected experiences when politics, sovereignty and power have a harmful effect on the experiences of senior leaders. This detrimental variety of *not-following* often appears in the reciprocal space between the Principal and the senior leaders. Being with others in these instances, discloses moments of politics, sovereignty and power which were discernible for senior leaders as being out on a limb and in hiddenness.

As previously discussed, Arendt (1973) and de Beauvoir (1962) espoused that politics is created whenever people gather for the purpose of discussing and deliberating about matters of public concern. The space this active form of politics exists in is between people, echoing Heidegger's (1996) notion of being with others (*mitseinandersein*). Legitimate power is the joint action of people compelled to work for the public good (d'Entreves, 2019). Arendt and de Beauvoir both perceived that in this political relational space the experiential possibilities were positive (freedom and actualised plurality) and negative. Sovereignty (de Beauvoir) or totalitarianism (Arendt) were the two relational states that created negative experiences. Sovereignty is the antithesis of being free in the freedom of others (Zebadúa Yáñez, 2018). Totalitarianism is the action of corrupting or deforming political power (d'Entreves, 2019).

Thus, possibilities of politics, sovereignty and power exist in senior leadership teams whenever the team turns its joint attention and intentionality to matters that matter for the school. This was evident in anecdotes about being compelled whole-heartedly and half-heartedly.

However, when *not-following* is detrimental, often the team's narrative is guided by another agenda—the lived experience is of someone speaking for the group but not representing the group; and a member or members of the team controlling or manipulating other members of the team. This form of *not-following* deforms and deconstructs legitimate power. Arendt (1973) suggested this often manifested in a political sense as totalitarianism, while for de Beauvoir (1962) they were experiences of sovereignty. This study found that senior leaders' experiences of politics manifested as being vulnerable, isolated, uncertain, lonely and dominated. When this occurred, they found that they were being forced out on a limb by the Principal and his/her allies.

Being out on a limb suggests that you are positioned away from the support of the tree. You are exposed and susceptible. This separation is especially palpable when the trunk is the Principal—your leader who you might expect to offer care and support. This vulnerability is highlighted in this next anecdote.

I think what can isolate you from your team is when you are aware of something, but no one else seems to want to talk about it. That's isolating because you feel like you're the only person that can see this. Sometimes that happens in schools where a Head doesn't want to listen to you or isn't interested in what you have to say. You can't find any allies on the team. That sometimes happens, even for something quite operational. It sometimes happens when you feel like, "am I the only one that feels this?" (SL3)

and

I often found myself out on a limb, saying things that others felt or thought but didn't have the courage to say. It's isolating when this occurs. (SL4)

It may appear contradictory to state that senior leaders can be with others in a team but still experience being out on the limb. However, as illustrated in these anecdotes, when the "we" is absent, the relational space between others can feel vacuous. This is experienced more profoundly when the actions of the Principal distort relationality. In these moments "you can't find allies". It is in these experiences that meanings of being isolated, lonely, uncertain and vulnerable are understood.

There was also very little strategic discussion in these meetings which I found strange. It was all about solving problems. Who were the staff that aren't behaving themselves? ...It was very clear from those meetings that no one in that room trusted anyone else in the school and no one else in the school trusted anyone in that room. (SL3)

and

People aren't really themselves in these meetings. They are guarded. It's almost adversarial. People are guarded and some of them have had experiences where they come along and present something and it's been hacked to death or stoned by the crowd and they've retreated and thought why did I bother? (SL4)

and

When you're sitting in those meetings, through your vulnerability, you're actually exposed and that's used against you in a lot of different ways. So you've actually got people who are afraid of the leader's position. Every time you put forward a different perspective, it's howled down by one of the other members of the leadership team. (SL5)

No matter the extent of general alignment with the Principal and the senior leadership team (the trunk), there are always moments when senior leaders can feel isolated and exposed. The above stories underscore the experience of being out on a limb. The senior leaders might be hoping that someone or something aligns with their sense of purpose. They might be looking for threads or thoughts that could connect them to shared goals, but the ideas and feelings are hollow. There is no shared experience. The joy of the team is not shared joy. The troubles and triumphs are not shared. You are a part of the team by name but experience a lacuna that cannot be easily crossed.

Unfortunately, in these occurrences, the Principal's hand taints the reciprocal space. In addition to feeling isolated, uncertain, and vulnerable, there is evidence of senior leaders being scared and dominated.

He very much kept them in their silos, by virtue of selectively sharing aspects of information quite deliberately. People only ever knew as much as they needed to know. There was a bit of a divide and control sort of style. The senior executive was even divided into two groups. (SL6)

and

Although I think these elements are always in play, when things go wrong you really notice them. In one of the schools, the Headmaster said to me, "I want you to lead the school better academically". I don't think he actually believed that. He had his KPIs to consider and this was his approach to getting me to "do better". It was a scare tactic and the leverage he had was my contract period. He even suggested to me on one occasion, "I might not give you five years. I'm probably only going to give you two because even though I haven't got any idea how you can lead the school better academically, I want you to do it". The contract period was his lever. His way of scaring me into doing better. I know he did this with others as well. (SL4)

de Beauvoir's (1962) and Arendt's (1973) discussions about politics suggest that it is almost inevitable that people will fall into corrupting legitimate power. In these moments when senior leaders are being scared and dominated, we can see this being enacted in the lifeworld of *following*. Senior leaders are pushed out on a limb through being-with the Principal and his/her allies. The result is that, even with the best intent and desire to be loyal, to be a team player and to care about the team, the senior leader is harmed by politics. The subsequent example from a senior leader explicates how this can be felt, enacted and lived in senior leadership teams:

The model of facilitation, in these senior leadership team meetings, was pick on one member of the executive and hammer them to the point of breaking almost. Using the guise of—we're all in this together. We've all got a say in your part of the school. Let's see if we can help you be better at your job, by stripping you down to your basic nakedness almost ... and then leaving you there. (SL5)

The discussion in this section has highlighted those moments for senior leaders when *following's* deleterious and unattractive nature is experienced. These harmful and toxic moments of not-*following* manifest themselves in the lifeworld of senior leaders and create experiences of being isolated, uncertain, lonely, vulnerable and damaged. In these instances, the Principal's principal-ness is especially present and injurious. The stories of participants highlight how "*absolute power corrupts absolutely*" (Lord Acton, n.d.).

The Principal's team creates the situational context for these experiences for senior leaders. It is the team that represents the Principal as a we in *following* and thus the stories from participants disclose how this manifests often in shared experiences, especially senior leadership meetings. What is revealed is the unique role of the "I", the Principal, in the embodiment and embeddedness of everyday meaning of being in *following*. What has emerged from interpretations of senior leaders' stories is that being in the Principal's team has moments of being whole-heartedly compelled, being half-heartedly compelled, and being repelled in *following*. They have also disclosed meanings of we-*following*, care for and about teams, and the felt presence of the Principal and, additionally, experiences of hiddenness.

Being in hiddenness in following

"It is a joy to be hidden, and disaster not to be found." (Winnicott, 1963, pp. 186-187)

What meanings of hiddenness are revealed in *following* experiences? The quote from Donald Winnicott exposes how hiddenness in *following* might be experienced by senior leaders: sometimes the experience of being hidden is a joy and at other times it is disastrous. Experientially, these two modes of hiddenness are often matters of choice. In *following*, senior leaders may choose to be hidden, for example, hiding behind the laptop in meetings in the hope that your opinion is not sought. At other times, the experience of hiddenness is of not being seen, heard and known. This might occur through choices made by the Principal or other members of the senior leadership team: the Principal chooses not to acknowledge your voice in a meeting.

Sometimes when you are hidden, doors are closed, locks are changed, questions are unanswered, voices are silenced, and ideas are unsolicited. The experiences of being hidden in *following* can manifest itself during meetings or interactions. You are there but you are hidden. This might be like an experience at a dinner party: the guests are all in on the conversation and you are left out. It could also be similar to experiences with colleagues when your opportunity to contribute an idea passes because others fill the space or the conversation moves on and your ideas seems less relevant. The following anecdote from a participant divulges how this can manifest in senior leadership teams.

The Padre's trying to speak—to get through. Then the Headmaster's decides to say something funny. The Chaplain just hit a wall. I heard what he said under his breath. He said, "right, I'm bloody going to leave!". He got up out of his chair and went to the door. These meetings really were not working for him at this time because he felt so disengaged anyway. Then he tries to engage but he wasn't allowed in. (SL4)

In this experience of hiddenness, the Chaplain is not seen and heard. As a result, there is an experience of not being recognized or valued. This is felt as being unknown which leaves the Chaplain being disengaged from the team, the agenda, the Principal and *following*.

The experience of being hidden might also be felt as deliberate. When you are not asked to contribute your thinking to ideas that relate to your portfolio or expertise, the experience might be like being hidden purposefully. There are no expectations about how you might contribute. You are left feeling that your contributions are not valued.

The low for me has been sitting in a weekly leadership team meeting, knowing that nothing I say or do is actually going to impact on the decision making of the school or even for my section, realistically. You're having to fight and justify everything that you think is right. (SL5)

Additionally, the next story, detailing an experience of dealing with a student in crisis, discloses moments when being hidden compromises professional integrity.

In my experience when this happens, students are especially at risk. There is an absence of discussion in this space and the Principal is only interested in hearing opinions that align with their views. As an example, in an experience involving a serious event with a student, the Principal didn't actively seek advice, especially external professional advice which was needed to deal with the crisis. The result was that the course steered didn't match the needs of the student concerned. The Principal chose the course that aligned with their needs and the need to avoid damaging the reputation of the school. The pupil's needs didn't appear to be on the same level. In reality, the risks to the reputation of the school really didn't match the rhetoric and certainly didn't balance out the risks to the student. It was a crisis that was poorly handled on reflection.

When this was occurring, I felt hidden as a member of the senior leadership team. I was

afraid to speak up when things weren't going well. I could have suggested that we went in a different direction, but I didn't...even when I knew that was the right thing to do—speak up for what I believed in. (SL10)

In dealing with this situation, the senior leader feels unheard. He knows what the right course of action is and feels a strong sense of obligation to speak up. However, through the actions of the Principal, the senior leader's concerns, knowledge and voice are purposely hidden. In these moments, it might be like standing on the outside and looking in. In *following*, you have been silenced and side-lined through the actions of the Principal.

This also resonates with phenomenological discussions about seeing. Seeing is the pre-reflective experience that allows people to perceive and interpret their world. Therefore, seeing, phenomenologically, is not a biological process but points to what and who is seen. This ontological connection between sensing what and who resonates with Merleau-Ponty's description of our bodily perception of the world. For Merleau-Ponty (2012), sensations make up the essential texture and fabric of coexistence. Thus, through our sense organs we open ourselves up to being in the world with others in meaningfully different ways (Montani, 2019; Walsh, 2020). The examples of being in hiddenness in *following*, therefore, reveal how meanings unfold through the eyes and ears of the beholder and the beheld.

Sartre (1966) also discussed being seen, which he called the look-of-the-other and the gaze (Fraleigh, 2019). This also suggests a relationship between who is seeing and who is seen, and who is hearing and what is heard. In the previous story about a student crisis, who and what was the Principal seeing in these moments? He/she might be seeing strategic intent and problems. Equally, the Principal could be seeing a child and hearing about a need. He/she might be seeing a capable senior leader but the leader might not be seeing the Principal in the same light. Furthermore, the Principal might choose to listen but not to hear.

Saevi and Foran (2012) discussed the idea of being seen but still not seen. If we extend this thinking to include hearing and knowing, debatably the Principal is seeing a problem and not a person; hearing issues and not hearing a leader; knowing strategic possibilities and as a result leaving the senior leader unknown in *following*.

In these anecdotes of *following*, senior leaders are being seen but not seen, heard but not heard, and known but not known. "The low for me has been sitting in a weekly leadership team meeting, knowing that nothing I say or do actually (matters)" (SL5). In this one statement, the senior leader revealed what the experience is like of being not-heard, not-known and not-seen. These experiences matter to senior leaders and matter to being in *following*. They encapsulate what it means to be in hiddenness in *following*.

May we live like this.

May we see each other for who we are, for what we are.

May we face each other,

Seeing and being seen.

Loving and being loved.

May we see all of each other.

May we see all of us.

May we be seen. (Omid Safi, 2017)

This poem from Omid Safi expresses the hopefulness of being with others and being seen, heard and known. Sadly, what is laid bare in moments of hiddenness in *following*, is the antithesis of the hope captured in Omid Safi's poem. The senior leaders are not "in", not valued, not respected, and not cared for. They are often hidden through the actions of the Principal. They are hidden in the relational space between leading and *following*. As highlighted previously, the Principal's principal-ness is keenly felt and his/her "for me-ness" distorts and subjugates the potential "for-we-ness" in *following*.

Reverberations of Heidegger's (1996) concept of being in inauthenticity, previous discussions about politics, and subtle and coercive forms of playing the game are also disclosed. In this respect, the Principal's principal-ness is hiding followers' authenticity (owning their owned-ness) through not-knowing, not-hearing and not-seeing. This is clear in the comment from the senior leader who stated, "I felt hidden as a member of the senior leadership team. I was afraid to speak up when things weren't going well" (SL10).

All of these cumulative experiences again reveal a darker side to being in *following*, which raises further challenges to being in *following* and to senior leaders' appetite to continue to follow. Possibly this is why there are moments when senior leaders choose to hide; hiding experiences provide senior leaders relief from *following* and protection. How do these moments of choiceful hiddenness manifest for senior leaders? Perhaps hiding is the experiential Linus' blanket for being in *following*—it creates experiences of safety and comfort.

Choosing to be hidden in *following* might mean moments of avoiding confrontation. It could also be experienced as crossing the road to avoid being in the physical presence of another. Being in hiding in *following* could mean protecting your patch, not venturing out, and keeping your thoughts close to your chest.

The ensuing anecdotes from two Heads of Junior School show how hiding can be lived out during regular leadership team meetings. Evident in both stories is their desire to keep their thinking from being exposed to a wider group of people. Keeping things close to their chest might mean that they are less likely to be subjected to questions by people who they view as not understanding their patch.

In the senior leadership team, there's also no doubt that you don't share everything.

You don't necessarily want to air all of your dirty laundry so you put on a relatively positive spin. It's just not the appropriate forum to go into the depths of an issue—a major issue. A: It wouldn't be relevant to all of them. B: you just feel that you'd be wasting their time. I'm much more likely to take those conversations outside of the room. Talk to people who I know I need to talk to. I don't actually want all of that issue shared in a big group of people. I've got the Head of Co-curricular there, who knows nothing about my campus and would have no understanding of the context. I've also got the Head of Communication—same thing. (SL1)

In these experiences, the senior leaders are choosing not to reveal all of the matters that they care about. They are choosing to be unheard, unseen and unknown. Arguably, this is providing them with experiences of being protected from the scrutiny of the rest of the team. Being hidden is a blanket that obscures the examination of the team and the Principal and allows the leader to do what they really want to do. Equally, there is also the possibility that this reveals a disconnect for certain leaders in the senior leadership team. They don't actually want to share their issues because they aren't seen as relevant by the rest of the team. Instead, the leaders choose to hide and hide their thinking. Thus, unsurprisingly, one of them noted: "The percentage of business that really is discussed to do with the Prep Schools is probably about a 95%, 5% split. In that 95% of the time, we're really talking about Senior School issues and about 5% Prep School issues". (SL1)

This inquiry also noted subtle forms of experiences of being in hiding. These were discernible as moments of being guarded and watchful. When you are in *following* in senior leadership teams, you can guard against the experience of revealing your true self or your thoughts and feelings. These experiences allow senior leaders to test the waters to decide whether they should retreat, remain in partial hiddenness or step into the light.

I think, whilst people were prepared to speak, they were very wary about what they would say. There were also times when the Headmaster would just shut it down by saying we're going to do this or he'd cut across the talk and say "I don't believe in that".

Then it was, okay, well that's the end of that discussion. Whereas I tend to think, we should be discussing those ideas. You brought us here together and now you're making what I would call a god almighty statement, can't we just explore that idea? ...but I didn't sense that I had enough support. Not that others were unsupportive. In fact, I think people thought I had good ideas and would have privately supported me. But in the meeting itself...they were very wary about that. (SL5)

In this anecdote, the senior leaders are waiting to see how the Principal is positioned in relation to their thinking. They are being watchful to ensure that they have read the play correctly. In other stories from senior leaders, the relation to the Principal remained important but the watchfulness was experienced differently. Here, what is disclosed is a falling toward our average everydayness. In *following*, we fall into the rituals, expectations, ways of being together and conventions of the senior leadership team. In this subsequent story, the lived experiences of everyday (and every meeting) watchfulness manifests as being tight lipped, passive, and safe with each other.

A lot of the time people were trying to please. In this case, it was trying to please the Principal. You could actually tell people were trying to do the right thing. There was a really predictable sort of pattern of responses. So less challenging of ideas, less humour. Really much more tense. Very deliberate and careful about what was said. So being very tight lipped. It was much more self-conscious. Everyone was a lot more self-conscious. Like their performance was being judged. Rather than the task at hand being the focus. So less collegial banter and less awareness of others. (SL6)

People were far more passive. They spoke when they were spoken to. Answered when they had to, but not much more. You know, fairly tight. I actually described them that way when I first met them. I let them know that I felt they were being tight with praise because I never heard them praise each other. I thought, you've got to be more generous. I think they were quite taken aback because they had just gotten out of the habit. (SL6)

In these stories of hiding in *following*, experiences might be felt, enacted and lived as choosing to hide completely. In this mode of being in hiding, senior leaders avoid contributing and they actively disengage. Experiences of hiding can also be more subtle and can show up as being guarded and

watchful. In these moments, senior leaders are being careful before revealing themselves. This might be experienced as trying to read the room, especially in relation to the Principal. It also might occur when senior leaders fall into ways of being with others that are carefully passive and tight-lipped.

Regardless of the flavour, being in hiding in *following* creates instances when senior leaders are able to seek relief and protection. This disengagement from active *following*, while less desirable for functional and relational aspects of being in a team, possibly provides senior leaders with the space they need to survive, thrive and exist within a senior leadership team.

Whether hidden or hiding, to be in *following* means experiencing being in hiddenness. This hiding or being hidden is always in relation to something—the principal, the team, the vision, the project and thinking. Experiences of hiddenness might relate only to meetings/one-off events but could also permeate the whole experience of being in *following* in senior leadership teams. Possibly, moments of hiddenness suggest that being in *following* can manifest as experiences that are damaging at worst and undesirable at best.

Concluding Comments

The purpose of this chapter has been to consider how the experiences of being in the Principal's team manifest for senior leaders in *following*. In all of the stories shared by senior leaders, the Principal's presence featured strongly. The Principal's principal-ness is embodied in most relational experiences for senior leaders. These include moments when the Principal is physically present and moments when his/her presence is felt but he/she is absent.

How might a team exist as team and how might *following* exist with leading in these moments? There is clear evidence that senior leaders do experience "for-us-ness" moments. These lived experiences of self with other reveal instances in *following* of being a collective, not simply a plurality of "I"s. This was noticeable in participants' narratives where they described being compelled whole-heartedly and half-heartedly in *following*. The use of "we" in these stories, the explicit sense of caring for and about the team, shared intentionality and instances of collective purpose, highlight meanings crafted as a "we". These experiences also suggest that harmony between leading and *following* is a mode for being in *following* in senior leadership teams. These are the moments when senior leaders' lived experiences match the notion of a true team expressed earlier in the idiom there is no I in team.

Equally, senior leaders' anecdotes disclosed moments of discord in the reciprocal relational space of being with others in senior leadership teams. Senior leaders' lived experiences included manifestations of being repelled, of politics, sovereignty and power, and of hiddenness. In these moments, senior leaders were out on limb, exposed, vulnerable, damaged, unheard, unseen and

unknown. It is in these moments that the dark side of being in *following* is revealed. Collectively these instances can be described as being in *not-following*. These are the moments when the experience is not of being called and compelled to *follow*. These moments repel and encourage senior leaders to remain hidden.

Not-following is, therefore, an essential mode of being in *following*. It reveals meanings that are often hidden and undisclosed by senior leaders. Unearthing these moments and associated meanings is important for understanding the foundational experiences of *following*.

This chapter, therefore, has revealed both positive, heartfelt meanings of being in *following* and also negative modes of *following* in senior leadership teams. The next chapter brings together the interpretations explored in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 and offers suggestions for understanding the fundamental meanings of *following* in senior leadership teams.

Chapter 8 Conclusions

What we call the beginning is often the end

And to make an end is to make a beginning.

The end is where we start from. And every phrase

And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,

Taking its place to support the others,

The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,

An easy commerce of the old and the new,

The common word exact without vulgarity,

The formal word precise but not pedantic,

The complete consort dancing together. (Eliot, 1942, V)

What is the ontological nature of the phenomenon of *following* within the context of senior leadership teams in Independent Schools in Australia? This thesis has contemplated this question through the experiential stories of being in *following* for senior leaders. Turning towards this phenomenon and exploring this essential but often taken-for-granted mode of existence has revealed deeply personal experiences for senior leaders. Chapter 1 opened a dialogue about being in *following* in schools and senior leadership teams. It also introduced a research approach appropriate for surfacing experiential meanings of being in *following*. Chapter 2 provided concepts, theoretical frameworks and glimpses of the phenomenon of *following* as it is understood in the literature. Importantly, the focus was on uncovering meanings that resonated with hermeneutic phenomenology and this inquiry's research question.

The phenomenological philosophy and method, discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4, allowed this inquiry to see through the suppositions that have trapped and hidden understandings of being in *following*. Being in *following* discloses something fundamental about our humanness that is made intelligible through attuned moments of being-in-a-team. Its presence is ever present, appearing in everyday life, especially organisational life. However, its value is not mirrored in thinking and reflection about school life. Ironically, even though *following* is experientially ubiquitous in schools, arguably its absence from the school narrative is equally ubiquitous. Therefore, it has been the purpose of this inquiry to shed an ontological light on this phenomenon and in so doing peel back the silence that surrounds it.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 explored the ontological thumb print of *following* through the lived experiences of senior leaders in Independent Schools in Australia. This revealed new meanings of being in *following* that have not been fully explored in other studies (Matshoba-Ramuedzisi et al., 2022).

This included: how senior leaders find themselves attuned to the mood and atmosphere of being in *following*; the lived experiences of the diverse modes of *authenticity* in *following*; and the meanings that emerge from contemplating *following* as a way of being in the Principal's team. These enduring meanings resonated with the participants' lived experiences and illuminated fresh perspectives.

In this final chapter, the unifying concept of reciprocity (de Beauvoir, 1962) is considered in relation to these new meanings, alongside possibilities for further interpretations, questions and meanings of being in *following*. The discussion then turns towards contemplating the fusion of essential meanings with my own preunderstandings, current research and other related thinking. I also appraise the reasonable limitations of this study and possibilities for further research. In conclusion, the inquiry acknowledges how this research journey has influenced my own understanding and interpretations before finishing with a final perspective on the phenomenon of *following*.

Synthesising Personal Insights: In-Seeing or seeing meaning

The practical value of phenomenology (is) found in the sheer pleasure of insight and feeling touched by things that reach the depth of our existence and confirm our humanness (van Manen, 2014, p. 68).

Phenomenology is wrapped in descriptive language that reveals fluid, fleeting and meaningful moments of being. This inquiry has turned towards pre-reflective understandings of experiences of *following* through the concrete experiences of senior leaders in Independent Schools in Australia. These experiences have revealed meanings that are taken-for-granted, hidden and absent. Seeing into the possible meanings of *following* has revealed essential understandings in, about and beyond the phenomenon itself. These meanings, therefore, reveal what it means to be in *following* in senior leadership teams but also point towards further potentialities.

The purpose of this concluding chapter is not to reduce the ontological experience of *following* into explicit themes. Reading, re-reading, interpreting, and writing brings forth partial fluid and temporal understandings of *following* that have been described in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Hermeneutic Phenomenology, with a Heideggerian flavour, encourages exploration of a simple yet complex question: how "am (I)one with the simple unity of the experience (?)" (Quay, 2016, p. 490).

Reflecting on the many differing ways participants found themselves being in *following*, a range of human emotions, feelings, and thoughts surface for me. This lived reaction to others touches my own humanness just as the stories reveal the humanness of *following*. From a phenomenological

perspective, it is my embeddedness in this inquiry that brings forth greater knowing of the everyday ways participants found themselves in senior leadership teams and how I find myself as a senior leader. In the context of this inquiry, therefore, the experience for me is turning towards the humanness of being with others in *following* in senior leadership teams. This perspective becomes the ontological pathway for in-seeing and deepening my interpretations of the simple unity of the phenomenon of *following*.

The humanness of being in following with others

The taken-for-granted, everyday thread that runs through this inquiry is our ways of being human with others. My own experiences as a leader and follower, the experiences of participants and my experiences of this phenomenological research have made this apparent. When peering deeply into the phenomenological pool, this idea has taken shape as being integral to the pool itself. This should not be understood as an attempt to reduce being in *following* to a single attribute: it is the felt intelligibility of the experience of the pool as a whole, an experiential, unified, and personal knowing that can only come from concrete moments of being in, beside, under, and with the pool. When an evocative description of this resonating experience touches us, it reverberates with knowing agreement. This sensation of recognition can be described as the phenomenological nod (van Manen, 2014).

Phenomenological nodding is the lived experience of an idea resonating deeply with our own interpretations and being (Adams & van Manen, 2017; Nelms, 2014; van Manen, 1990, 2014; van Manen & van Manen, 2021). We know it deeply and it presents as an essential meaning of the phenomenon. Describing *following* as a fundamentally human way of being with others is an ontological pathway to the subtle, nuanced and felt knowing of the experiences of being in *following* that creates this nodding. In this inquiry, the first nod came from participants; the second nod from the researcher; and ongoing nodding from readers, supervisors, colleagues, and friends: affirmations of touching and being touched.

Reciprocity

When I consider my own stories of being in *following* in senior leadership teams, I keep circling back to moments of being with others. I am not on my own. I am not acting, feeling, and thinking on my own. My thoughts are always directed outside of myself and towards something in the senior leadership team. It is an inescapable way of being in senior leadership teams, but it is also an inescapable way of being in schools. I am always with parents, staff, students, and colleagues. This is my way of being human every day—being in exchange with others in my lifeworld.

For this inquiry, therefore, the centrality of reciprocity was important for pondering lived experiences. It acted as a bridge connecting thoughts and interpretations with participants' stories

and the phenomenon. It was also the glue that bound the manifestations of *following* into an experiential whole. Hence, the felt intelligibility of the humanness of being with others in *following* is revealed by and reveals the relational reciprocity of being with others. In straightforward language, this inquiry has pondered the existential theme of being with others which has opened-up pre-reflective meanings of relational reciprocity in *following*. Correspondingly, contemplating reciprocity in *following* has divulged further meanings of the existential theme of being-with-others in senior leadership teams.

It is acknowledged that my interpretation of relational reciprocity being fundamental to our being is linked to de Beauvoir's (1962) thinking. For de Beauvoir, this reciprocity revealed our authentic being in the world. While authenticity is important for this inquiry too, multiple modes of being in reciprocity with others have emerged through contemplating *following*. These modes were evident in the concrete examples gathered in interviews, where the felt intelligibility of being with others in relational reciprocity tumbled out of the stories of senior leaders. In this inquiry, this disclosed pre-reflective ways of being in *following* in politics, authenticity, compulsion, moods and atmosphere, home, and play.

For senior leaders, there are moments when these ways of being are lived and moments when their absence is lived; moments when senior leaders acted in bad faith and good faith in the company of others; moments when the human face of *following* was masked, deformed, abrogated, and misappropriated with and by the sovereignty of others. These pre-reflective modes of being, nodding to the manner in which being with others in reciprocity discloses our ways of being-in-*following*.

Contemplation of *following* in senior leadership teams also reveals further meanings of the existential theme of being with others in senior leadership teams. Senior leadership teams are a complex, dynamic, *inter-mashing* of reciprocal relationships: leaders and leaders; leaders and followers; followers and followers. These relationships exist in these unique teams as moments of being with an other and being with multiple others. Dancing in and out of these moments and modes is the lived experience in *following*. Arguably, this is also the lived experience of being with others: dancing back and forth, in and with reciprocity. Returning to the idea introduced at the start of this chapter, this can be captured as follows: in *following* we experience the dance of our humanness with others.

Through pondering participants' stories, and emergent and enduring themes, this research shows how being in *following* discloses concrete manifestations of being with others in senior leadership teams: being vulnerable in the face of others, being out-on-limb with and without others, being in a relational rhythm with others; and being in belonging with others.

What is highlighted through the preceding discussion is the rich, interwoven, embedded and embodied nature of being in reciprocity in *following*. When viewed through a de Beauvoirian lens, relational reciprocity touches and opens up the ontological world of *following* in ways that highlight what it means to be human.

This underscores the need to thoroughly engage with the phenomenon of *following*. Its relevance and relationship to the team-rich lifeworld of schools appears obvious, but I also contend that greater attention to its place in and beyond organisational life is warranted.

Thesis of the Thesis

Following is an essential way of being for senior leaders in leadership teams in Australian Independent Schools, according to this study. It is an unavoidable mode of existence when two or more people are teamed together to achieve shared or collective goals. Just as *following* is an unavoidable way of being for leaders, teams are an unavoidable way of experiencing organisational life. Teams are ubiquitous in schools. They present in a variety of formats with a diverse range of purposes.

This study has focused on the senior leadership team. Senior leadership teams are essential to the experience of school for the whole community. They are also a unique combination of senior leaders who are teamed together. Therefore, uncovering understandings of *following* that are meaningful to senior leaders, senior leadership teams and schools is vital.

Following

The general concept of being a follower including the act of *following* has been with us for a long time (Leung et al., 2018). However, as highlighted in the literature review (Chapter 2), it has often been viewed negatively, reduced to fundamental parts or perceived as an outcome of leading (Khan et al., 2018; Riggio, 2020). Unsurprisingly, the history of research focused on *following* is comparatively short, sparse, and sporadic; leading, leadership and leaders have dominated the spotlight (Hurwitz & Koonce, 2016; Leung et al., 2018; Malakyan, 2015). In a phenomenological sense, *following* is taken-for-granted, often hidden, and underplayed in the discourse that relates to organisational life. This thesis contends that understandings of *following* are at least as important as those of leading for senior leadership teams in schools. Hence, a deeper understanding of this phenomenon is required.

New Perspectives

As highlighted in the literature review (Chapter 2), historical and current research approaches to both *following* and teams have been relatively homogenous in their philosophical and methodological perspectives (Burak, 2018; Lord et al., 2017). This creates a gap in understanding

which is also recognised in the literature, especially relating to *following*. This inquiry has therefore approached the phenomenon of *following* from an under-represented research path: hermeneutic phenomenology. While this inquiry's approach is built on the foundations laid by Heidegger (1996), its unique contribution is seen in the consideration given to multiple aligned philosophies. Contemplating Sartre (1966), de Beauvoir (1962, 2004), Gadamer (2004), and Arendt (1973) in conjunction with Heidegger has brought forth new perspectives on the phenomenon of being in *following*.

Arguably, hermeneutics phenomenology is the most appropriate research approach for contemplating the focus of this thesis: the experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams in Independent Schools in Australia. Hermeneutic phenomenology allows the researcher to explore the pre-reflective, taken for granted, everyday meanings of lived experiences. It does this by interpreting the concrete experiences of participants as they relate to the phenomenon of concern. For this inquiry, it has enabled the researcher to get to the heart of *following*, creating descriptions that resonate deeply.

Accordingly, hermeneutic phenomenology was the appropriate choice for unearthing new perspectives on *following* that are meaningful for senior leaders, schools, interested readers, and for this researcher.

In summary, this thesis contends that deeper, richer meanings of the phenomenon of *following* have been and can continue to be unearthed through hermeneutic phenomenology. These meanings are essential for senior leaders and leadership teams. The meanings also offer the possibility for further contemplating the lifeworld of organisations and extending current understandings of theory and practice.

Fusing Horizons: merged meanings generating new possibilities

My own preunderstandings

At different moments in undertaking this research, I noticed my preunderstandings surfacing as they found a home and clashed with emerging meanings. Of particular note was the entanglement of my own perspectives of being in a senior leadership team with the perspectives of others. My experiences and those shared with me by colleagues, suggested that senior leadership teams could be dysfunctional—not necessarily always or drastically. However, the overall experience of being in the team was like riding with a slightly deflated tyre on your bike; you are not performing at the optimal level.

I was surprised to find that participants in this study gave much more positive accounts of their experiences. The people in these teams perhaps weren't resigned to bumping along on a partially

flat tyre. Their tyres were full or filled by being with others in the leadership team. This, in turn, encouraged me to reflect on my own experiences.

This reflection revealed my slightly linear, fixed, and personal projection of self onto experiences of others. My experiences were not always like theirs and theirs were not always like mine. As I am describing this emerging recognition, its reality seems obvious. I find myself asking why would I ever assume such a thing? What acts of bad faith have followed? How has my assumption merged with experiences of *following* in the senior leadership team? These questions exemplify the fusion of my emergent understandings with those of the participants. Meaning is temporal, fluid and dynamic. Meanings of teams, school, senior leadership teams and *following* are temporal, fluid and dynamic. Thus, my interpretations and the interpretations of others are continually writing and re-writing themselves.

When I look on the faces of colleagues during meetings and peers at network gatherings, I now experience them differently. I recognise that what is common is not our roles but a shared experience of being with others in senior leadership teams, an experience open to a multitude of interpretations, possibilities, and ways of being together in teams.

“Principals undervalue Primary Schools and Heads of Junior School” is a preunderstanding that I have found hard to shift during this inquiry. This has been compounded through the stories of Heads of Junior School who have found experiences of the Principal to be difficult. However, it was obvious that the Principals involved in this study had ample respect for Heads of Junior School. The Principals discussed enthusiastically the positive contribution of the Head of Junior School and how they valued personal and professional qualities. The Principals’ stories also mirrored experiences of Heads of Junior School. In *following*, they were attuned to the reciprocal nature of being with others. They suffered moments of vulnerability, feeling exposed, being guarded, as well as experiences of being supported, comforted, and valued by the team.

The disparity between my prejudgements and the experiences of Principals in this study has developed my appreciation for the commonalities in our differences. What is shared is the experience of being human with others, even though there are differences in this experience. Leading and *following* are not two separate ways of being, instead they are modes of the unified experiences of being in relational reciprocity with senior leaders in teams.

The contemplation of the enduring themes of *following* has also challenged my perspective on being a leader. Prior to commencing this study, I took it for granted that the role of the leader was leading. Even when I was listening to others in Junior School Executive meetings, I was still doing so as the leader. When I distributed or shared leading, I was doing it as the leader. The Junior School

leadership team often calls me Mr Salt which has always irked me. Upon reflection, it indicates a level of respect but at the same time an unhealthy deference to my position. How could they be expected to act differently if their leader, Mr Salt, saw his fundamental position in the school as the leader? Leaping into *following* has made me understand that *following* and leading is an unhelpful dichotomy. It creates a divisive situatedness where people fall into expected ways of being together. Letting go of this thinking is important for my leading and *following*. Letting go of this thinking also helps to bring the Junior School Executive closer to the ideal of teamwork. Letting go of this way of being reflects my prejudgements fusing with my research and the phenomenon to create new meanings.

Research

There are links in my thesis with other hermeneutic phenomenological studies, interesting connections with research about leading and *following*, and associations with philosophical thinking. For example, Ladkin and Probert (2019) made similar links to the role of politics, power, freedom, and relational reciprocity in their discussion about differences between conventional and Foucauldian views of power. They posited that power works through relationships; is accumulated but surfaces in interactions between people as well as between people and their contexts; and is everywhere –not just among humans but also as a result of institutions, history, discourse, and society. Additionally, those affected by power are always free, therefore power's effects are always indeterminate. Power is fluid and unstable (Ladkin & Probert, 2019). Although Foucault rejected Sartre's thinking on freedom (Gutting & Oksala, 2021), it is difficult not to see the association with Sartre's (1966), de Beauvoir's (1962), and Arendt's (1973) thinking in these ideas.

Being with others in relational reciprocity is particularly evident in many of the above-mentioned ideas about power. An interesting view that extends this meaning is Ladkin's and Probert's (2019) discussion of Foucault's interpretation of the power in and of social networks. Power comes into being through alignment within social networks. When ideas, actions and language align with particular networks of people, they gain power. Fusing this understanding with this inquiry's proposition about relational reciprocity in *following*, the experience of power in teams is given concrete expression. Ladkin and Probert (2019) cited Donald Trump as a recent example of a person able to enact power through language and ideas targeted at specific groups (p. 7). In this inquiry and in senior leadership teams, this might be likened to experiences in meetings when there is an evocative appeal for understanding of those involved in specific areas: as an example, an appeal for empathy directed at student welfare.

Probert and Ladkin (2019) argued that power through social alignment is the domain of the leader who reads the play and determines the appropriate approach. Considering the meanings unearthed in this study, this perspective could be re-imagined as a dynamic balancing of power. Moving beyond

role taking explanations (leader or follower), senior leadership teams could be considered as a dynamic relational network where members align power through micro-networks within the team. Therefore, rather than power being static or only existing when there is alignment, it could be viewed as an experience that is always present. Not only is power always at hand but it shifts and swirls within the relational network of the team. This fused perspective generates additional meanings of the lived experiences for senior leaders in *following*.

The spirit of curiosity, creativity and freeing of thinking in Mark Vagle's work (2018) resonates with my own personal predilections. When I read his work and his encouragement for researchers to embrace what he sees as a phenomenological imperative—not to be bound by rules but to be called to finding meanings—it fostered thinking about ways I could extend my own understandings of philosophical and methodological approaches. How would it work if ...? What might happen if I considered this...? Could I link this idea with this approach to ...?

In Vagle's (2018) latest book, he introduced Deleuze's and Guattari's account of lines of flight. Lines of flight is an extension of the phenomenological idea of intentionality. Philosophically, intentionality describes the many ways we are meaningfully connected with our lifeworlds. Lines of flight is derived from the meanings of the French word *fuite*, which encapsulates both flight and escape: "Fuite covers not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance (the vanishing point in a painting is a point de fuite)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p.xvi).

Using the meaning of *fuite* as a vehicle, Vagle encouraged considering intentionality as a plural. This signifies that the invisible lines of meaning that connect us to our lifeworlds are not fixed: "they elude, flee, entangle and take on various intensities in and over time, across contexts" (Vagle, 2018, p. 129). In relation to this inquiry, it encourages a view that the meaningful connections of senior leaders in teams in *following* are multiple and varied. Hence, I am not connected to the other in one fixed way. The meaningful and reciprocal connections are diverse, elusive, and entangled.

Additionally, the analogy of flight relates to my written descriptions of enduring meanings in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. These meanings are fleeing the words as they are written. This captures, in many ways, my growing understanding of being. Being is not fixed. It is complex. Its interpretation is always moving and difficult to capture. Our apprehension of it is always fleeting and bound to our own facticity.

The other interesting idea posited by Vagle in relation to lines of flight is the notion that we always begin research somewhere in the middle. van Manen (1990, 2014) described the starting point for phenomenological research as a turning towards the phenomenon itself. Upon reflection, in commencing this inquiry I considered my research was beginning. However, as Vagle (2018) stated:

Phenomena are always being written and rewritten. It is tantalizing to try to find the beginnings and endings of what our inquiries mean—to try to discern what “caused” the phenomenon to be written this way or that. But entangled line of flight phenomena tend to not operate this way—they and, they travel, and they move, in and through intensities. (Thus) we always enter into the middle of things. (pp. 129-130)

Hence, my research commenced somewhere in the middle of a messy discourse about the phenomenon of *following*, a discourse that has started, stuttered, stopped, and started again. A suitable flight analogy to describe the positioning of my research in relation to this ongoing discourse might be: the plane has been stuck on the runway after initial successful flights but after renewed interest has been cleared for take-off with the possibility of new flight routes.

At the commencement of this chapter, I felt the pull to try to describe a conclusion, a final word, and an ending. The messy middle idea helps situate the phenomenon and the research process in reality, not in my preconceived, linear notions of beginning, middle and end.

Fusing with other philosophical thoughts

We never come to thoughts. They come to us.

That is the proper hour of discourse.

Discourse cheers us to companionable reflection.

Such a reflection neither parades polemical opinions nor does it tolerate complaisant agreement.

The sail of thinking keeps trimmed hard to the wind of the matter.

From such companionship a few perhaps may rise to be journeymen in the craft of thinking.

So that one of them, unforeseen, may become a master.

(Heidegger, 1947, *The Floating Library*, n.d.)

The experience of thoughts is writ large in many phenomenological discussions, especially those relating to Heidegger (1966). Experientially, his poem reflects a personal moment for me. I teach philosophy to primary school students and therefore often listen to philosophical podcasts in an effort to track down thoughts that might resonate with 11–12-year-olds. In one of these moments, I stumbled across Rom Harré, discussing Wittgenstein (Warburton & Edmonds, 2013). Aside from being a fellow primary school teacher, Wittgenstein (1889–1951) is a well-known Austrian–British philosopher who was interested in many areas of philosophy—logic, mathematics, language, and the

mind. Two particular contributions from his thinking that have resonated on this inquiry come from his application of the linguistic turn in philosophy and his logical solutions to intractable philosophical problems.

Simply stated, the linguistic turn was a philosophical turn towards understanding how people find themselves embedded in a world of language used in particular ways to describe our being (Warburton & Edmonds, 2013). Wittgenstein (1953, 1969) employed this concept in his later philosophical thinking. His approach to intractable problems was to turn towards thinking that did not lead to the same dead ends; thus he did not provide a solution to the problem but considered other ways it could be understood.

As an example that resonates with the phenomenological approach presented in this thesis, Wittgenstein (1969) invited us to abandon the dichotomy of mind and body. The mind–body problem is a philosophical issue that Wittgenstein would consider intractable. The dichotomy suggests a divide between the attributes that make us human. It is a divide that has continued in philosophical thinking and research for more than 300 years (Warburton & Edmonds, 2013). As Rom Harré stated:

Descartes initiated the tradition of dividing the attributes that we assign to persons into two incompatible and incommensurable groups, material properties and mental properties. Each group was supposed to have its proper object of predication. ... (T)his is fundamentally mistaken... both sets of properties are properly attributable to one and only one type of being—a person. Thus, a person has material and mental, moral and social properties and is, so to say, a *unitas multiplex*. But in the ordinary sense, a person is not a collection of parts. (Harré, 2015, p. 493)

For Wittgenstein (1969), the issue with the intractable mind–body problem is not the proposition of our existence as beings in the world (who have a mind and a body), the problem is the way we have favoured the use of a particular couplet to understand our existence. Wittgenstein (1969) invites us to consider different linguistic couplings as a way to approach the issue from a fresh perspective: alive and dead, moral and immoral, and other dichotomies that provide diverse linguistic ways of understanding our being (Harré, 2015).

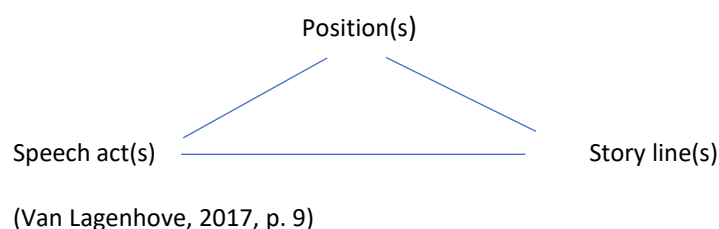
This very brief explanation of a complex and lengthy discussion about Wittgenstein's later philosophical thinking (1969) outlines a particular idea that merges with an issue related to this inquiry. There is a clear dichotomy in thinking and in research about leading and *following*.

Linguistically, these labels constrain my being and understandings of our being in senior leadership teams. I am reduced to being in leading and *following*, and being a leader and follower, and being in leadership and followership. A possible way to free ourselves to consider all possibilities is to remove the labels and consider new sets that encourage ways of seeing the meaning of being with others in teams: authentic and inauthentic, fair and foul play, vulnerable and resilient, exposed and supported, to name but a few possible ways of being. How might our views of leaders and followers shift if this approach was taken? What might research reveal that considered the lived experience of being vulnerable with others? Furthermore, how might it change the ways we relate reciprocally to others, if multiple fresh dichotomies were chosen?

A related consideration that springs from a turn towards linguistics is Positioning Theory, especially as it is associated with Harré's focus on the existential reality of dialogue (Harré, 2015; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999; Hiroven, 2019; McVee et al., 2021). Briefly summarised, Positioning Theory is explicated by a metaphorical triangle where the essential structures dynamically interact (Figure 1). The three points of the triangle are: positions, speech acts (illocutionary forces) and storylines (Van Langenhove, 2017). Fundamentally, it captures the social reality of people "locating themselves within discursive acts and in relations to others" (McVee et al., 2021, pp. 193–194).

Figure 1

Positioning Theory



Position refers to the pre-understanding of rules and practices that govern our lived experiences. Harré refers to these as the moral order (McVee et al., 2021). This order can incorporate social, cultural, political, legal, institutional, and personal rules and practices. This resonates with this inquiry's discussion about our personal experiential history or, as Sartre (1966) describes it, our facticity.

These rules and practices weave with our own facticity and our reciprocal speech acts with others. The speech acts of these interactions create story lines which fuel further speech acts and our interpretations of the moral order. This continuous dialogue with others, ourselves and our lifeworlds creates meanings for our being-in-the-world. In relation to this inquiry, a fusion of positional theory and phenomenology suggests that our lifeworld has a meaning-rich moral order that we interpret everyday through speech acts and story lines. The interplay of these factors

creates meanings of being in *following* in senior leadership teams.

Of interest to this study is recent research focusing the alignment of Positioning Theory with teams, groups, organisations and, therefore, potentially with *following*. Hiroven (2019) and Debray and Spencer-Oatey (2019) have highlighted the value of considering the lived experiences of dynamic reciprocal relationships within the team-rich environment of organisations. Their studies show how conversations (speech acts), storylines, and institutional moral orders interact to marginalise, support, or define the position of people within workplace teams.

Merging their research with this inquiry encourages contemplation of the experiences of lived reciprocal relations that are fuelled by conversations and story lines. In senior leadership teams, these two corners of the triangle might constrain or free the positioning of senior leaders in *following*.

For example, when a senior leader is employed at an Independent School, he/she enters a context that is rich with institutional orders, storylines, and habitual speech acts. These can include school expectations, legal expectations, team norms, greetings, and rituals. These are the taken-for-granted way of being in the school environment. For new senior leaders, some of these contexts will be familiar and some might be experienced as alien. We learn when to speak up, when to be quiet, who to address matters to, who we can trust, and who we are supported by. After a period of time, we understand the storyline, speech acts, and moral orders which have been reinforced through our reciprocal relations in the team. This becomes the taken-for-granted storyline of being in the position of *following* in a senior leadership team.

The example also provides a potential framework for understanding the way time merges with the experience of being in *following* in a senior leadership team. The moral orders become our taken-for-granted ways of being in the world. They are learnt and experienced initially as the rules, or the ways things are done. Once we have learnt the rules and practices of our lifeworld, they become the everyday experience of navigating our existence with others. They become the intuitive background that makes experiences intelligible for senior leaders. Again, these ideas resonate strongly with those already discussed from Heidegger (1996) and Gadamer (2004) especially.

Additionally, contemplating time from this perspective illuminates how meanings and experiences shift. When I am new to being in *following* in the senior leadership team, the moral order constrains my freedom (Harré, 2015). If I become more comfortable within the team, I recognise the moments that it is possible to be positioned as being free to speak my mind or take a view contrary to the institutional rules and practices.

Finally, merging ideas from positioning theory with contemplations of the phenomenon of *following* discloses understandings of being-in-a-team. Being part of a team requires teamwork. That implies a

constraining of my personal moral orders, storylines and position in favour of those embedded already in the team. As highlighted by Hiroven (2019), this tension can create experiences of personal and professional conflict with others in the team. As revealed in this inquiry, that conflict is often lived through the speech acts and storylines of being with others.

Recommendations

Following has unique meanings for schools, teams, leadership teams and senior leaders. This thesis has highlighted the importance of understanding the enduring meanings of being in *following* that are fundamental aspects of school life in Independent Schools in Australia. Through contemplating *following*, the reciprocal experiences of being human together in teams is revealed.

This thesis, therefore, is a call to heed the place of *following* in our understandings of the lived experiences of senior leaders. Below are expressions of possibilities for considering the importance of *following* in senior leadership teams. These possibilities have emerged from stories in this inquiry, current research, and my own first-hand experiences of being in senior leadership teams in Independent Schools. It is hoped that rather than being read as a definitive selection of recommendations, this discussion will resonate with readers and encourage further interpretation of possibilities.

For Learning

Following is hidden in learning about organisational practices. It is comparatively underrepresented in the literature; it is relatively unheard of in schools; and its place in undergraduate programs, higher education degrees and other professional learning activities is overshadowed by leadership (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2020). The result is a constraining of how senior leaders understand themselves in relation to all facets of school life. “I am the leader” reduces the possibilities for my being with and in a team.

Elevating *following* as a phenomenon that should be learnt and understood alongside leading is vital. Schools are richly human, relational, and educational. Given the fundamental human and relational experiences of *following*, limiting opportunities for understanding this phenomenon is inexplicable. This thesis has shown how senior leaders have benefited from and been harmed by being in *following*. Arguably, better understandings about what it means to be in *following* could enhance the positive aspects of being a senior leader and lessen the impact of the negative ones. This offers the potential to positively impact senior leaders’ sense of well-being, enhance the functioning of leadership teams, and improve outcomes for other inter-related staff teams.

Such learning should be careful not to re-represent what this study has argued is a fault of some current approaches to understanding *following*: that it is an outcome of leading. This causal and limited understanding of the complexities of being-in-teams in schools should not be duplicated but be replaced with deep, subtle, and nuanced meanings.

For Senior Leaders

As stated above, adding the label of *following* to *leading* creates a richer interpretation of what it means to be a senior leader. Extending this notion even further, *following* and leading should be seen as an experiential whole that describes how we find ourselves being human in organisations. This would mean that, rather than roles or descriptors like authentic and shared, narrating how we should be or how we should act, a senior leader could be freed to consider the possibilities of the moment. This would align with what Giles (2019) described as relational sensibilities: intuitive, practical wisdoms that leaders bring to their everyday concerns. According to Giles, these relational sensibilities “can be formed in a leaders’ way-of-being through deliberate, contemplative and reflective consideration of experiential accounts” (p. 67). Given the findings in this study, this reflective process should consider meanings of being in *following*: what did the experience mean for ways of being in leading and *following* with others? Therefore enriching the interpretation of the lived experiences and the learning for senior leaders.

As stated in this study, being-in-teams is being-with-others in the world. Of relevance to senior leaders, this inquiry has revealed how our authenticity is exposed through being in *following* in senior leadership teams. For Heidegger (1996) and de Beauvoir (1962, 2004) especially, being authentic revealed essential meanings of our being human: to be free is to be human. However, our lifeworld conspires to constrain, wrestle and rip freedom from our grasp. Therefore, for senior leaders, an attuned sensitivity to the possibilities of authenticity is required.

What might this look like? An attuned sensitivity would encourage senior leaders to experience reciprocal relationships amongst peers/colleagues as on-going conversations. These speech acts could create storylines that share how senior leaders, in moments of leading and *following*, interpret their authenticity (possibilities of owning their ownedness) in the context of the team. Equally, an attuned sensitivity to interpretations of authenticity being wrestled, ripped, and constrained from others would help senior leaders to accentuate positive experiences and resist falling into being in sovereignty.

For Leadership teams

For leadership teams, new perspectives about *following* open up fresh possibilities for senior leaders to understand their ways of being-a-team. *Following*, arguably, encourages ways of being a “we”, a group, a team. It occurs because the linguistic and experiential meanings we attach to *following* encourage people to act, feel and think in relational ways.

Leading, on the other hand, is constrained by historical, social, cultural, and linguistic foundations. This can be felt in large schools where there is a clear hierarchy, delineated by roles and represented in phrases such as “leadership and staff”. As a senior leader in a senior leadership team, I know the hierarchy of the team and I know my place in the school hierarchy. This lived experience of being a senior leader weights meanings and interpretations towards an “I”. However, considering *following* does not attenuate or dismiss the reality of being an “I”. As Heidegger (1996) advanced, being starts with the “I” (Dasein) understanding their being in the world. What *following* offers is an extension of possible meanings of being an “I” that facilitates a reciprocity with being-in-the-world with others.

For leadership teams, meanings of being in *following* offer opportunities to move towards becoming a team characterised by teamwork. Through reflecting on experiences of being in *following*, the senior leaders could develop practical wisdom about developing, sustaining and being a team. The following ideas are possible ways for senior leadership teams to explore this space:

1. Developing shared meanings of being-a-team should move beyond considerations of roles, functions, outcomes and effectiveness. Teamwork, the essence of being-a-team, should be viewed as developing out of relational reciprocity. This reciprocity should be grounded in a dynamic understanding of leading and *following*: I see my fellow senior leaders as leading and *following* depending on their engagement with particular organisational issues. Arguably, this is what the best team members do. They are authentically relational. They understand how to play the game fairly, respecting the person rather than the role.
2. The team of leaders is often the worst example of being-a-team (Nadler, 2021; Wageman & Hackman, 2009). How might this change if the team of leaders did not view themselves exclusively as leaders? *Following* creates opportunities for other potential ways to view their possibilities. As discussed above, altering perceptions about how we find ourselves relating to others puts the “we” back in team. It also produces opportunities for teams to reframe their understanding of authentic leadership, shared leadership, and servant leadership. Teams might question how these understandings of leadership might fuse with meanings of being in *following*. This could create new understandings about being the best example of a team.
3. One of the constraining issues for leadership teams and senior leaders is the hierarchical nature of Independent Schools. This hierarchical way of being encourages and maintains a

view about the place of leading and how we find ourselves relating to and being leaders. Reflection about the positioning of *following* and leading in the hierarchical context of school generates possibilities of more fluid understandings of school hierarchical structures, roles, and leading.

4. Additionally, induction processes for senior leaders (or any leaders) should include discussions about the relevance and importance of *following* in teams. These induction processes should not fall into only describing the lived experience through the lens of organisational practices, administration, roles and responsibilities of leaders.

For Schools

Middle leaders in schools are becoming the vehicles for the implementation and interpretation of change initiatives, strategic plans, and school visions (DeNobile, 2019). Perhaps more than any other group of leaders, they are wedged in a space where a tension between being in leading and *following* is tangible. From a hierarchical perspective, they are the meat in the sandwich between the senior leadership team and staff: thus they can be expected to lead the staff and follow the senior leaders. Beyond replicating vague statements that everyone is a leader and therefore everyone is a follower too, there is potential to elevate the role of *following* in experiences of Middle Leaders.

As underscored in the literature review, *following* can be perceived to be a negative way of being (Einola & Alvesson, 2021). From my personal experience of providing professional development to Middle Leaders, this group is attuned to the benefits of being a leader and the problems of being in *following*.

For schools, then, there is an opportunity to highlight the importance of *following* in the success and practice of organisational growth. Schools should promote a view for Middle Leaders that both leading and *following* are essential to the ways we find ourselves being in our roles as leaders; that these fundamental ways of being are dynamic, fluid, and interrelated; and that experiences of *following* need not be viewed as a negative or less preferred way of being in the role of Middle Leader.

Opportunities for Further Research

This inquiry has unearthed possibilities for further research linked with the phenomenon of *following*, associated thinking, and phenomenology.

New labels – leading and following

As discussed, the dichotomy of leading and *following* creates limitations to understandings about being a senior leader. This division also generates possibilities for future research. This view is

emphasised in Malakyan's article titled "Depersonalizing Leadership and Followership" (Malakyan, 2015). The article addresses issues with the traditional view of leader and follower "as separate persons and processes in leadership research" (p. 227). Malakyan contended that this is a myth but one that has been difficult to shake. In line with the earlier discussion in this chapter, he argued that leading and *following* need to be viewed and researched as unified ways of being a senior leader. Future research, therefore, should avoid the unhealthy dichotomy and associated labels. Researchers should attempt instead to understand how leading and *following* are experienced as possibilities of being human together in organisations.

Furthermore, future research could also consider how it might be possible to reframe the labels of leading, *following*, leaders, followers, leadership, and followership. In "Waiting for Godot: Eight major problems in the odd field of leadership studies", Alvesson (2019) drew attention to the many issues associated with the ideas of leading and *following*, especially the disconnect between theory and practice. It may seem unlikely that society could rid itself of this entrenched terminology; however, drawing upon Wittgenstein's (1969) linguistic couplets offers a direction worth exploring. Conceivably, this approach would loosen the meaning-rich constraints of these labels and allow for fundamental ways of being to emerge which resonate with lived experiences.

Experiences of following in other leadership teams/teams

The ubiquitous nature of teams in all organisations underscores the importance of understanding the experiences of being in *following* in multiple contexts. This study has revealed what being in *following* is like in senior leadership teams in a range of Independent Schools; however, research could focus on experiences in many forms and contexts of leadership team. This might include examples from schools but equally from other work settings.

This research could focus on formal teams that exist as part of the organisational structure. It could also include teams that lead initiatives within the organisation for various lengths of time. This would also enrich and deepen the meanings of being in *following*.

Experiences of following in other educational settings

The experiences of *following* in this inquiry were situated in large Independent Schools (R-12) in Australia. Plausibly, this created a homogenous set of participants and experiences. Future research could consider *following* in a variety of educational settings. This might include remote and regional schools, Government and Catholic schools, medium-sized and smaller schools, secondary-only and primary schools.

Experiences of well-being in following in senior leadership teams

The stories of participants in this study highlighted both positive and negatives experiences. This

suggests that there are opportunities to explore how well-being is experienced in senior leadership teams. Potentially, including well-being in *following* in future research will create more substantial understandings of senior leaders' well-being (APPA, 2017).

Philosophical perspectives

This inquiry has utilised the thinking of Husserl (1970, 1999, 2001, 2013), Heidegger (1968, 1972, 1995, 1996, 2014), Sartre (1966), de Beauvoir (1962, 2004), Arendt (1973) and Gadamer (2004) to contemplate possible meanings of being in *following*. Researchers have also used other well-known phenomenological philosophers to approach phenomena. Three philosophical thinkers, in this tradition, that offer potential for future researchers interested in *following*, are: Merleau-Ponty (2012), Levinas et al. (1996), and Nancy (2000).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2012) philosophy considers our embodiment in the world: how we know the world primarily through an embodied being rather than a reflective intellectualising of it. As briefly touched on in this inquiry, this might be our bodily reaction to being with others or our gut feel for making a certain decision. Equally, future research might also include meanings of being touched, being seen, and being heard in *following*.

Emmanuel Levinas' (1996) philosophy focuses on otherness. It is through the otherness of others that being is revealed. An example of this is meeting the face of another. It is in the face of another that meaning is revealed. A simple example would be meeting the face of Mona Lisa in the Louvre Museum. What is experienced in this moment of meeting the face of Mona Lisa that reveals our being? For researchers, this might translate into asking about experiencing the face of the other in *following*? What reciprocal meanings for *following* might be disclosed through the experiences of participants in an inquiry?

Jean Luc Nancy's (2000) philosophical thinking has many threads, but an obvious research possibility in relation to *following* would be his contemplation of Community. Nancy's philosophy in this area is reflective of Heidegger's view of being-with but extends this thinking to understandings of co-existence or co-existential. This is our positioning with each other and the world that reveals the phenomenon of community. The complexities of experiencing social identity in community, freedom in community, and being with others in community are explored in his thinking. Schools are often referred to as a community: as examples, a community of learners, a community of educators and a whole school community. Therefore, research could consider the many meanings of community that reveal and are revealed by meanings of being in *following*.

Blending perspectives

Earlier in this chapter the idea of Position Theory was discussed. Positioning Theory, as articulated by Harré (2015), is an interesting fit for a phenomenological inquiry. Whilst not strictly

phenomenological in origin, it is my view that it is ontological in nature. The triangle metaphor of position (moral orders), speech acts and story lines, resonates with phenomenological discussions about situatedness, facticity, language, authenticity, and being-with-others. Its focus, therefore, is very much on understanding our being-in-the-world. Future research that studies the interweaving of position (moral orders), speech acts and story lines as they are lived in *following* would disinter new meanings. This would provide a novel research approach that imparted fresh perspectives about lived experiences.

Different phenomena

Finally, using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to examine associated phenomena is a worthwhile consideration for future research. Two possibilities deserving of consideration are the phenomena of teams and of dialogue. Both offer researchers opportunities to explore phenomena that are ever-present, taken for granted, essential to the lived experience and rich with meanings of being.

Limitations

This study focused on the lived experiences of participants in large Independent Schools (R-12) in Australia. In an Australian context, geographically, most of the population is centred on the major cities and this is true of the Independent Schools represented in this research. The schools, due to their size and location, would be considered as well-resourced and the communities they serve as being privileged. Smaller Independent Schools were not represented, and neither were Independent Schools in regional and remote communities. While it is envisaged that being-with-others in *following* in senior leadership teams manifests in similar ways, the experiences of *following* for senior leaders in other Independent School settings were not included in this study.

As previously noted, the education landscape in Australia is constituted by three distinct systems: Independent Schools; Government Schools and Catholic Schools. The Government and Catholic Schools are not represented in this study. The inclusion of senior leaders from these systems may have benefitted my inquiry. Due to their systemic nature, and governance by an external organisational body (the Catholic Education Office and the Department of Education), it is plausible that different experiences of being in *following* may have emerged. However, the experiences of senior leaders from Independent Schools in this study resonates with my own personal experiences as a senior leader in an Independent School in Australia.

As described above, the choice of large Independent Schools may have created a group of participants who were limited by the type of experiences presented in their context and by a context that was limited in a variety of experiences. Gathering stories from more diverse settings is feasible and worthy of consideration for future research approaches.

Participants

Snowballing preceded by Purposive Sampling were the methods used to recruit participants for this inquiry. In Chapter 4, I discussed how I purposefully ensured that there was a reasonable representation of senior leaders. However, due to the limited number of participants required for hermeneutic phenomenology and a reliance on snowballing as a method for finding participants, participant diversity is a potential limitation (i.e., gender).

This study included 10 participants. These participants were all part of senior leadership teams and fulfilled a variety of roles. Three of the participants were female. Two of the participants were Principals. While it was expected that the participants had been in their role for at least five years, a majority were over 50 years of age and had been senior leaders for substantially longer than five years. A less experienced group of participants containing more females and Principals may have created other opportunities within this research.

The Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological approach is challenging for researchers. It is enmeshed with complex philosophical, methodological, and method choices. A researcher's response to this complexity can limit the research. Below are examples of potential limitations of phenomenological research. The potential for these limitations has been experienced and considered during this inquiry. While they are possible limitations, as explained in Chapter 4, regular reflection has been used to address these issues. However, they are acknowledged below to demonstrate trustworthiness and rigour.

The phenomenological approach is an open and contemplative attitude to finding the meanings of being in relation to phenomena (van Manen, 2014). This approach requires the researcher to attune to the research process, the phenomenon of concern, and the lived experiences of participants. In so doing, the researcher finds their own way to uncover enduring meanings of the phenomenon. Therefore, each hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry may require a different methodological and method options.

This lack of a prescribed approach generates possibilities for misinterpreting the philosophical understandings that guide the inquiry and generating limited interpretations of the phenomenon. These potential risks have been noted not only in theses but also are issues for seasoned practitioners (Grant, 2019; van Manen, 2019; Zahavi, 2019). As discussed in Chapter 3, a phenomenological thesis should situate itself in a particular philosophical tradition. This inquiry has drawn on a greater range of philosophical thinking than some hermeneutic phenomenological theses which often focus on Heidegger (1996) and Gadamer (2004). The selected philosophers' orientation is Heideggerian and thus clearly situated in hermeneutic phenomenology.

The interpretative process can also limit research possibilities. This might occur if the researcher leaps in or leaps ahead during the process of interpretation. This could result in the researchers' perspectives overshadowing the concrete experiences of the participants. This inquiry has been careful to ensure that prejudgements have supported the interpretative process rather than hindered it. The sharing of these interpretations with others, particularly supervisors, has ensured that these feasible limitations have been avoided.

Phenomenology is intersubjective. This means that the researcher is not an objective observer nor a subjective participant. The phenomenological researcher is situated actively in the interpretive research process with the phenomenon, the stories, the created text, and their own prejudgements. In this active process, the researcher is circling between, with, and around, employing an attuned and contemplative attitude. However, during the inquiry, it is easy to fall into "getting the job done" and "meeting deadlines". While these facets are important for researchers, they also shift the attitude away from being attuned and contemplative: this might be experienced as taking your eye off the ball. The likely result is that something is missed or washed over.

The challenge of writing phenomenologically also creates possible limits to this inquiry.

Phenomenological writing aspires to connect with the spiritual and affective life of the reader. van Manen (2014) describes this as creating a resonating text. The writer's tools and techniques are therefore in service to the potential interpretations of readers. Failing to achieve and under-achieving with these writing techniques are risks. In a phenomenological inquiry, this would mean that the text does not touch the reader in ways that challenge, create contemplation, and connect emotionally with their own experiences. Like most writers, phenomenological researchers hope that they have sufficient writing skills to evoke the desired response. A process that has been used in this inquiry and other hermeneutic phenomenological studies is of seeking the phenomenological nod from readers. This is the nod that is given when interpretative writing strikes a chord. This inquiry has relied on supervisors, family, and colleagues to provide the nodding. On many occasions, partial nods, head shaking, and head scratching led to a reshaping of my phenomenological text so that it did not limit the engagement of the reader.

Reflexive Circling

Reflexive circling is my term for the active process of unfolding meanings in this inquiry. Being reflexive can be thought of as the act of turning back on yourself. In a grammatical sense, this means to turn back towards the subject of the sentence. Phenomenologically, this is turning back towards the phenomenon of concern. Circling, in my use of reflexive circling, can be considered as an encircling of something with our arms—to hold something in an embrace. When we encircle something in this manner, our attention is drawn to it, we are in open conversation with it, curious

about it, attuned to it, and connected emotionally. The embrace is careful. It is not an embrace that imprisons or constrains freedom. The embrace is an exchange—a back and forth movement.

In a hermeneutic phenomenological sense, reflexive circling, therefore, is the continual motion of turning back towards the phenomenon, the research process, my preunderstandings, and participants' stories and encircling them. In this inquiry, this has been experienced during interviews, writing, interpreting, contemplating, moving between chapters, conversations with supervisors and returning to my initial thoughts and preunderstandings.

This process also articulates my personal journey with this thesis. As I circle back and re-read my introductory chapter, my pre-understandings now appear to be crude interpretations of a complex process. The initial questions I posed need embellishment and my stated understandings of phenomenology and *following* are embryonic. As I have continued to move with the phenomenon and the research, I can see how my understandings have developed. I can also recognise how the inquiry has affected my experiences of being a senior leader.

Personally, two interpreted modes of being in *following*, compulsion and authenticity, resonated most with me and have caused me to consider my own possibilities. Prior to this inquiry, I would have described authenticity as the experience of being and showing my true-self. This suggests being completely transparent and free to do what best reflects my true-self. I now understand that being authentic is more nuanced and illuminates how I find myself on most occasions. Contrary to my naive thinking, I can be authentic when I have the freedom to consider how I show up for people in senior leadership teams. This may mean that I choose moments to be less forthcoming, masked and guarded.

Accordingly, this new perspective suggests that a way of being authentic in leading might be choiceful moments of being guarded in interactions with other leaders and staff. Contrastingly, my authenticity might also be represented in moments when I choose to be vulnerable and exposed. Authenticity is saturated with possibilities for being human through reciprocal relationships in my organisational lifeworld.

Understandings from this inquiry about being authentic and also how our authenticity can be corrupted have allowed me to reflect on instances when this has been true for me in teams. It has also encouraged me to consider when I have been responsible of creating inauthenticity within teams. In this space, I circle back towards my reciprocal relationships with peers and colleagues and ask myself: How might these be experienced for my peers? Have I through positioning or speech acts deformed others' authenticity? How might I do things differently in the future?

The ways we are compelled in *following* also align with my personal experiences of being in senior leadership teams. I can identify moments when I have felt called, compelled, and repelled in teams.

Importantly, I can now see that these modes of *following* are how I find myself each day at school. I am always being in compulsion. This might be experienced as a strong calling, a weak compelling or genuine disinterest (repelling). Drawing on Vagle's (2018) post-intentionality, I now understand that being in compulsion also produces a dynamic entanglement and fluid intensities of experiences. As an example, the experience of doing my playground duty might feel like being compelled when the bell rings for recess. However, this might shift dynamically to being called when I interact positively with a child. This is a simplification of the complexities of compulsion, but I can see how it is always at play in my work and the work of being with others.

Concluding Comments

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And to know the place for the first time (Eliot, 1942, V).

This research has reminded me of the importance of teams to organisational life. It has also surfaced new perspectives for realistic, practical, and intuitive meanings of being-in-a-team. People find themselves in organisational teams from the moment they are employed in their first job, and they remain in a teamed environment until retirement. People may not notice this way of being. They may see themselves as being completely autonomous. However, as this inquiry has highlighted, being with others in the world is an inescapable and taken-for-granted way of being.

Important to understanding the complexities of teams and our organisational lifeworld is the phenomenon of *following*. *Following* is a phenomenon that is not well-represented in research or understood by people in leadership roles. It is often forgotten, hidden, and underplayed. However, this inquiry has uncovered meanings of being in *following* that produce an imperative for further exploration. It is the position of this inquiry that *following* is fundamental to our ways of being in the world. Therefore, its place in research, education and understanding of the dynamic relational space of teams is also fundamental.

Furthermore, this inquiry has revealed that *following* in senior leadership teams is deeply relational. This relationality is our reciprocal entanglement with peers. We are caught in a complex network of reciprocal threads that bind us to our peers. These threads dynamically shift with the experience of reciprocity—strong to weak, partial to full, authentic to inauthentic, and comforting to exposing. Hence, being in *following* in reciprocity exposes the humanness of our existence in organisational teams.

Research approaches that move understanding beyond positivist paradigms and uncover new perspectives have been called for repeatedly in the literature. The understandings of *following*

described in this study present a unique view of considering *following* as our human way of being in senior leadership teams. This understanding of the very human nature of teams also brings into question the current view that leading and *following* are distinct from each other and exist in a hierarchical and causal relationship. A phenomenological approach challenges this way of knowing and considers that leading and *following* are experienced as a whole not as two separate ways of being.

Returning to the impetus for this study, in Chapter 1 I articulated how a continuing interest in teams, teamwork, the recognised difficulties of senior leadership teams, and the possibilities of *following* provided the momentum for this research. In completing this study, I can see that *following* is an essential part of any discourse relating to these issues. Our understanding of teams, leading, teamwork and being in organisational life is limited without consideration of *following*.

In conclusion, therefore, it is essential for researchers, educators, and leaders to take seriously the place of *following* in the ongoing discourse relating to the lived experiences of senior leaders. It has remained hidden for too long and this has weakened both theory and practice. What is required is courage and commitment to ensure that the reciprocal relational way of being human in organisations revealed through *following* becomes part of the human sciences landscape.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval

Our reference 34356

01 May 2020

Professor Faye McCallum

School of Education

ETHICS APPROVAL No: H-2020-061



RESEARCH SERVICES

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS, COMPLIANCE
AND INTEGRITY

THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE

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MALL

ADELAIDE SA 5000 AUSTRALIA

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EMAIL hrec@adelaide.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00123M

Dear Professor McCallum

PROJECT TITLE: Experiences of *following* within senior leadership teams
in Independent Schools

The ethics application for the above project has been reviewed by the Low Risk Human Research Ethics

Review Group (Faculty of Arts and Faculty of the Professions) and is deemed to meet the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018)* involving no more than low risk for research participants.

You are authorised to commence your research on: 01/05/2020

The ethics expiry date for this project is: 31/05/2023

NAMED INVESTIGATORS:

Chief Investigator:	Professor Faye McCallum
Student - Postgraduate	Mr Carl Salt
Associate Investigator:	Associate Professor Mathew White
Associate Investigator:	Emeritus Professor David Giles

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL: Thank you for addressing the feedback. The revised ethics application provided on the 24th of April 2020 has been approved.

Ethics approval is granted for three years and is subject to satisfactory annual reporting. The form titled Annual Report on Project Status is to be used when reporting annual progress and project completion and can be downloaded at <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/research-services/oreci/human/reporting/>. Prior to expiry, ethics approval may be extended for a further period.

Participants in the study are to be given a copy of the information sheet and the signed consent form to retain. It is also a condition of approval that you immediately report anything which might warrant review of ethical approval including:

- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants, previously unforeseen
- events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project, proposed
- changes to the protocol or project investigators; and the project is discontinued
- before the expected date of completion.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Anna
Olijnyk
Convenor

Dr Jungho
Suh
Convenor

The University of Adelaide

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet



Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

This research project is about the experiences of *following* within senior leadership teams in Independent Schools. What is *following*? Traditionally, the idea of *following* has had negative connotations. *Following* was viewed as passive or problematic. Leading, by comparison, is characterised as active, effective and influential. However, current research portrays *following* in a different light. *Following* can be viewed as a positive and active role that facilitates the co-construction of leadership and the achievement of organisational goals. As examples, in a senior leadership team, I could follow an idea, a feeling, a path, a process, a person, a story, my team, my heart, my intuition or my passion. Given the potential frequency of these experiences in senior leadership teams, it could be argued that *following* is more present in our professional life than leading.

It is envisaged that this research will contribute new insights into the experience of *following* that will be worthwhile for theory and practice. Additionally, it is hoped that the research will equip principals/heads with insights that will be of value, not only for senior leadership teams but also for other teams within their schools. Although this proposed study may be limited to independent school environments, it might provide useful guidance for principals in other settings.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Carl Salt. This research will form the basis for a PhD at the University of Adelaide under the supervision of Professor Faye MacCallum, Associate Professor Mathew White and Professor David Giles. Carl Salt is employed at an Independent School in Adelaide.

Why am I being invited to participate?

You are being invited to participate because you are between 30 and 70 years old and have at least two- years' experience as a member of a senior leadership team in an R-12 Independent School in Australia. Alternatively, you are a recently retired senior leader (within the last 5yrs) from an R-12 Independent School in Australia who is also 30 to 70 years old.

In addition, you have no personal relationship with the researcher or a very limited relationship researcher (e.g. may know through a mutual colleague)

Please note, participants should also be fluent in English

What am I being invited to do?

You are being invited to respond to questions, in an interview, about the experience of *following* in senior leadership teams. Audio from the interview will be recorded on a hand-held device. The interview can take place in person, by phone or via communication software such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. You will be able to choose the format that is most appropriate for you and your circumstances. These interviews will be transcribed and then crafted into stories that relate to the phenomenon of *following*. Well-crafted stories reveal ways of being, thinking, and acting that will shed light on what is like to experience *following* in senior leadership teams. You will also be asked to approve your crafted story/stories.

How much time will my involvement in the project take?

It is envisaged that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes. There will be no additional interviews. An interpreted version of your interview will be sent to you for approval. This interpreted version will include the key stories identified by the researcher that relate to your experience in a senior leadership team. Please note that this will not be an exact transcription of your interview but an interpreted version.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There is a slight inconvenience in completing the interview and a very low risk that it might cause discomfort or anxiety. If at any time during the interview you feel discomforted by the nature of the question/s or the experiences being discussed, you may stop the interview for a period of time or terminate the interview completely. If required, the researcher can provide you with contact information of organisations who may be able to provide further support.

What are the potential benefits of the research project?

While the potential benefits of the research cannot be guaranteed, it is envisaged that the research might result in a better understanding of the experience of *following* within senior leadership teams. Furthermore, this understanding may support leaders and teams within a school environment as they strive to meet the complex and evolving needs of students, staff and school communities.

Can I withdraw from the project?

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at various times. Please see below for more details

You may withdraw

- anytime up until the interview.
- during the interview or directly after the interview.
- prior to receiving your crafted story (within a month after the interview).
- within two weeks of giving your approval for the crafted story.

NB: Two weeks after approving your crafted story, your information can't be withdrawn from the project.

****** An email will be sent a week before this deadline reminding you about the option to withdraw and clearly stating the final date for withdrawal.

What will happen to my information?

Confidentiality and privacy: While all efforts will be made to remove any information that might identify you, as the sample size is small, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, the utmost care will be taken to ensure that no personally identifying details are revealed. Pseudonyms will be used for you, your school, and any staff member named during the interview. In addition, original transcripts will not be used as part of project. Instead, your interview will be crafted into a story/stories that relate to the phenomenon of interest. Wellcrafted phenomenological stories reveal ways of being, thinking, and acting that will shed light on what is like to experience *following* in senior leadership teams. Crafted stories also further reduce the risk that information could be linked to your current employment. In addition, you will be able to provide feedback about both the interpreted version and the final version of this project. This creates an additional opportunity for you to ensure that your information is confidential.

Storage: The information collected during this project will be stored on a secure Adelaide University site. Only the researchers will have access to this information. The information will be kept for the duration of the project and at the completion the University will keep the information for a minimum of five years. This information may be accessed after the project for any research that is an extension of, or closely related to, the original project or in the same general area of research as the project.

Publishing: The information will form part of a PhD thesis. This information may also be used in a journal article or conference presentation. As stated above, you, your school or staff members will not be identified in this thesis and all publications resulting from this research project.

Sharing: Once a story/stories have been crafted from your original transcript this will be shared with you. A crafted story is the researchers attempt to interpret the essence of your story. As an example, a crafted story may emerge that highlights the role of interdependence in senior leadership teams. From your original transcript it is possible that several crafted stories will be written. The crafted stories that become part of the thesis will also be shared with you before the completion of the project. In addition, your information will only be used as described in this participant information sheet and it will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except as required by law.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Researcher: Carl Salt	email: carl.salt@adelaide.edu.au
Principal Supervisor: Prof. Faye McCallum	email: faye.mccallum@adelaide.edu.au Ph: 83135692
Supervisors: Assoc. Prof. Mathew White	email: mathew.white@adelaide.edu.au Ph:08 83135706
Prof. David Giles	email: david.giles@adelaide.edu.au Ph:+642108855825

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (approval number H-2020-061). This research project will be conducted according to the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. If you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on:

Phone: +61 8 8313 6028

Email: hrec@adelaide.edu.au

Post: Level 4, Rundle Mall Plaza, 50 Rundle Mall, ADELAIDE SA, 5000

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If I want to participate, what do I do?

If you wish to participate in this project, please email Carl Salt (details above). Carl will organise with you a suitable time for your interview and discuss arrangements in relation to the venue or video conferencing. He will also send the interview questions to you two weeks prior to your interview. If you have any questions, please email the research team using the addresses above.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Faye McCallum, Assoc. Prof. Mathew White, Prof. David Giles, Carl Salt

Appendix 3: Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

Title:	Experiences of <i>following</i> within senior leadership teams in Independent Schools
Ethics Approval Number:	Researcher to insert this number (allocated once the project has been approved).

1. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, and the potential risks and burdens fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the project and my participation. My consent is given freely.

2. Although I understand the purpose of the research project, it has also been explained that my involvement may not be of any benefit to me.

3. I agree to participate in the activities outlined in the participant information sheet.

4. I agree to be:

Audio recorded ☐ Yes ☐ No

Video recorded ☐ Yes ☐ No (only for interviews using video conferencing)

5. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project

- anytime up until the interview.
- during the interview or directly after the interview.
- prior to receiving your crafted story (within a month after the interview).
- until the commencement of the interpretative analysis. An email will be sent informing you when the project has reached this point.

7. I have been informed that the information gained in the project may be published in a journal article/thesis/conference presentation. I have been informed that in the published materials I will not be identified, and my personal results will not be divulged.

8. I agree to my information being used for future research purposes as follows:

Research undertaken by these same researcher(s) Yes ☐ No ☐

9. I hereby provide "extended" consent for the use of my data in future research projects that are:

- (i) an extension of, or closely related to, the original project: Yes ☐ No
- (ii) in the same general area of research (for example, genealogical, ethnographical, epidemiological,):

Yes ☐ No ☐

10. I understand my information will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except where disclosure is required by law.

11. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

Participant to complete:

Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher/Witness to complete:

I have described the nature of the research to _____
(print name of participant)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: _____ Position: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 4: Interview Questions



It is envisaged that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes. There will be no additional interviews. An interpreted version of your interview will be sent to you for approval. This interpreted version will include the key stories identified by the researcher that relate to your experience in a senior leadership team. Please note that this will not be an exact transcription of your interview but an interpreted version.

The information collected during this interview will be stored on a secure Adelaide University site. Only the researchers will have access to this information. The information will be kept for the duration of the project and at the completion the University will keep the information for a further five years.

Questions

1. How would you describe your experiences of being in a senior leadership team?
2. Can you describe a senior leadership team experience that you thought was very good?

Who or what made this experience very good?

Where did this experience occur?

What made this experience meaningful? Who was leading this experience?

Who shared this experience with you? What part did they play in this experience

3. Can you describe an experience or moment in a senior leadership team meeting when you thought “things are not going well”?

What was occurring?

Were team members relating differently?

How was this experienced by members of the senior leadership team?

Who offered comments and ideas?

4. Can you describe a senior leadership experience when you thought “we could do things differently”?

How were you thinking the senior leadership team experience might be different?

Appendix 5: Introductory Email

Dear

I am currently completing a PhD on the experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams in Independent in Australia. Given my own experience in Independent Schools and current research, I believe that this project is important to schools and leading within schools.

The notion of *following* is relatively new but holds promise to reshape how we view leading and as such provide school leaders with contemporary and practical wisdom. As examples:

- Is the experience of *following* the essence of leading? We are all *following* something!
- How might our knowledge of being in *following* influence how we lead?
- Is our current understanding of leading and *following* sufficient to describe the dynamic experience of being in a leadership team? Would new understandings of this experience improve many school leaderships teams?

Therefore, I am hoping with your support to share the attached information with your members. If your organization was interested, I would be available to discuss this project at a branch meeting, share an executive summary with state/federal executive, or present at future conferences.

If you have any further questions, please contact me: carl.salt@adelaide.edu.au

With thanks and warm regards

Carl Salt

Appendix 6: Raw Data to Crafted Story

Raw Transcription

Yeah, I think the thing that makes them more so is that at the time you're not threatened. Um, and they might be really difficult vulnerable moments. And when you're, as an example, the times when senior leadership have worked well together or have been when I've seen it work really well and really badly is when we've actually sat in a retreat as an example, we might have been looking at, um, maybe strategic development, um, or organizing a new strategic plan. And we've had a facilitator come in and, and work alongside us. And as a leadership team, the most senior leader is the one that determines whether or not you, um, your voice is going to be heard or not. And you can, it's obvious when the senior leader is looking for your voice and everyone's voice in the process because it's drawn out. It allows you to be slightly vulnerable in the moment. I think you learn when you're vulnerable that in the right environment you can actually, you can step past the vulnerability and become stronger.

Whereas the opposite of that is when you're sitting there and through your vulnerability, you're actually exposed and then that's used against you in a, in lots of different ways I suppose. Um, and the trust is mitigated as a consequence. So I think that, uh, the highs come when, when you're in a heightened state of decision making ... and you need to make quick and sustainable decisions. And if, again, if you've got a team that's trusted you can actually thrash through things pretty quickly and get to an end point that everybody agrees and works towards, then what you have is a team that spreads out into, into the other teams and delivers a consistent message. And that's really empowering for everybody

That's, um, that's when you shut down. When over a period of time, your views, your thoughts, your passions are negated to the point where you think, you know what, nothing I say or do right now, is going to impact on the decision that's pretty much felt like it's already made. And um, and you get the entire opposite of that. You get one, you get a dictators or, or an autocrats perspective..... You get the narcissist perspective. Where every time you put forward a different perspective in the room, in the leadership team, you've got those, those three or four that are aligned to the leader's vision. You've got two or three that might, will be afraid of the leader's position. So no matter what the leader says will follow it. Or when one of those people they know is aligned to the leader says something, against you, you don't retaliate, you don't offer your opinion. Again, you might say I'm a little bit concerned, but you're not sure where it's going to go. Then it's howled down by one of the other members of the leadership team. Not necessarily the leader, but you know that's where it's coming from. And ultimately what happens is that you walk away and you leave the meeting and

you do whatever it is that you want to do and you're never quite sure whether or not you're going to be called into the office to be reprimanded for doing that or not. So there's that sense of mistrust, that sense of fear, that sense of, um, it's a lack of respect at the end of the day for your talent, your skill. And coming back to the highs- if you're in that leadership team, you're there for a reason.

You've got skill, you've got talent, but it's different to other people's for whatever reason, whether you're the worst leader in the room or not by whatever definition you want to use you're still there because you've got something and good leaders bring out whatever that is. Bad leaders, just see everybody as nowhere near as good as them. The low for me has been sitting in a weekly leadership

going to impact on the decision making or the school or even from my section realistically. Um, and you're having to fight and justify for everything that you think is right. You're pretty sure that you're not team meeting, knowing that nothing I say or do is actually

getting the support you want.

Yeah.

everybody around the table has got a laptop in front of them and we're sending each other, or two or three would be sending each other messages or answering emails, not actually being actively engaged in

the conversation around it. Um, the only time that that didn't and wouldn't happen is when there was perhaps something more urgent that we all collectively thought we should have some participation in, but that might last for a few minutes in an hour and a half meeting that we would have on a weekly basis. So, and you can see people, people started off early with their screens open, but concentrating on the discussion and then after a while you get just 60% of us. When engaged you were listening just in case your name came up so you could have a response. You were never really involved.

Fascinatingly, I'm sure that the chair, the principal, the leader knew what we were doing but didn't care or didn't have the balls enough to say, hang on put your screen down, let's have a conversation around this. What do you really think? My view is that he didn't actually care what we thought. He already had an opinion and he would often raise, for points of discussion, things that he wanted ratified. So he

Crafted Story (Being in the Game- the senior leadership meeting)

The low for me has been sitting in a weekly leadership team meeting, knowing that nothing I say or do is actually going to impact on the decision making of the school or even for my section, realistically. You're having to fight and justify everything that you think is right. You're pretty sure that you're not getting the support you want.

I'm sure that the principal knew what he was doing, during these meetings, but he didn't care or didn't seem to care. He didn't say let's have a conversation around this. What do you really think? My view is that he didn't actually care what we thought. He already had an opinion and he would often only raise, for points of discussion, things that he wanted ratified. So often his mind was generally made up before the question was asked and therefore he would shut down conversation pretty quickly.

During these meetings, everybody around the table has got a laptop in front of them and we're sending each other messages or answering emails, not actually being actively engaged in the conversation. The only time this doesn't happen is when there was something more urgent that we all collectively thought we should have some participation in, but that might last for a few minutes in an hour and a half meeting that we would have on a weekly basis. You were listening just in case your name came up so you could have a response. You were never really involved.

When you're sitting in those meetings, through your vulnerability, you're actually exposed and that's used against you in a lot of different ways. So you've actually got people who are afraid of the leader's position. Every time you put forward a different perspective, it's howled down by one of the other members of the leadership team.

These three or four members are aligned to the leader's vision and they speak almost all the time. So when an opinion is sought from the chair, they are the first ones to give an opinion. And soon you realize that they're protecting themselves as much as anything. So the responses they're giving initially are testing the water a little bit. They'll test the water and if they get the nod they'll keep going. They're not going to go against what the leader thinks. So no matter what the leader says they will follow it.

This means, that when one of those people you know is aligned to the leader says something against you, you don't retaliate, you don't offer your opinion.

The model of facilitation, in these senior leadership team meetings, was pick on one member of the executive and hammer them to the point of breaking almost. Using the guise of --we're all in this together. We've all got a say in your part of the school. Let's see if we can help you be better at your job, by stripping you down to your basic nakedness almost..... and then leaving you there.

Ultimately what happens is that you walk away and you leave these meetings and you do whatever it is that you want to do and you're never quite sure whether or not you're going to be called into the office to be reprimanded for doing that or not. You get twisted. You spend your entire time working out, how am I going to make this workable? And so everything's a compromise. It's a game.

But there's a fine line because you know, at one point, you will get questioned by the bloke above you- *are you saying good things about me in this process?* So you've got to be very careful how you go about the process.

This didn't just happen in the senior leadership team meetings. He would come down to my leadership team meetings and criticize me because I didn't have a strict agenda, which was followed every week. He wanted to know what the action items from the previous meeting were. What have you done about them and,..... it was ticking the box. It wasn't developing the growth effectively. It was just ticking boxes and I think others around the senior leadership table adopted that model and just ran with that because it was easier than fighting

Appendix 7: Crafted Story to Initial Interpretations

Crafted Story

The model of facilitation, in these senior leadership team meetings, was pick on one member of the executive and hammer them to the point of breaking almost. Using the guise of --we're all in this together. We've all got a say in your part of the school. Let's see if we can help you be better at your job, by stripping you down to your basic nakedness almost and then leaving you there.

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The vulnerability of following: Vulnerability is an essential structure to being in *following*. In *following*, you experience vulnerability in a variety of ways. You can feel vulnerable in meetings, where you know that the support of your team members is not there. This is evident when members of the senior leadership team align closely with the principal but you feel like your out on a limb and perched on a precipice and skating on thin ice. Vulnerability can be experienced in *following* when you feel out of your depth or uninformed about an agenda item during meetings. This might be experienced when you read an unexpected item on the agenda that relates to your portfolio. You are not sure why it is there or how you are meant to respond to this item. You can feel vulnerable as you walk to a senior leadership team meeting or a meeting with the principal. The lonely walk that creates a feeling of exposure. No emperor's new clothes. No blissful unawareness. You understand exactly how you will be *exposed and what that experience will entail*. *Vulnerability can also be a positive experience in following*. When you are provided with the space to be vulnerable, it can lead to trust and professional growth. Vulnerability can be caught by other team members when it is

permissible to vulnerable. When this occurs, people can freely share their vulnerability with each other, during meetings and in conversations. This creates the freedom to share problems, mistakes and inadequacies without judgement or persecution. Being there in *following* is being in vulnerability.

The uncertainty of *following*: The experiences of *following* in senior leadership teams can be uncertain. When there is a lack of trust in the team, the foundations of *following* are uncertain. We are in relationships, but these relationships are not providing care, support or encouragement. This might be experienced when you are called upon to make a report for the senior leadership teams. You can be uncertain of your position. You might be uncertain of how your ideas will be received. You might be uncertain how your thinking aligns with the team. Uncertainty can manifest itself in meetings where the Principal challenges your thinking or your approach. You leave the meeting being uncertain of where you stand. You enter the next meeting, still being uncertain of your position or relationships. This can also be evident when the principal attends meetings run by you. Normally, you are certain about your interactions, thinking, ideas and approach. The principal's presence creates uncertainty. Am I running this meeting correctly? This isn't how he runs meetings will he think I can't do the job properly? What's he thinking about my team and the ideas we are sharing? Lack of communication and/or relationship increases this experience of uncertainty. When the principal is absent from your professional life, it increases the uncertainty. If there is not on-going dialogue or verbal/written confirmation that you are valued and supported, there is uncertainty. The experience of being in *following* is uncertainty.

Appendix 8: Emergent Themes of being in following in senior leadership teams

Hiddenness:

What is it like to be hidden and in hiding;?

What does it mean to be hidden or in hiding?

Being siloed, disengaged, distracted/not fully present, apprehensive, silenced, concealed, unknown, obscured, suppressed?

Seeming to be and being:

What is it like to be seeming to be and to be?

How might I experience seeming to be and being?

Being authentic, true to oneself, true to others, deferential, obsequious, inauthentic?

Being in a rhythm/pattern:

What is it like to be in a rhythm?

What does it mean to be in a rhythm?

Being habitual, ritual, traditions, structure, change, chaotic, drudgery, tempo?

Sense of purpose:

What is it like to have a sense of purpose?

What does it mean to have a sense of purpose?

Being engaged, connected, passionate, pulled into, pushed along?

Being Out on a limb:

What does it mean to be out on a limb?

How might we experience being out on a limb?

Being vulnerable, unsure, misaligned, comforted, safe, freedom, trust?

Playing the game:

What is it like to play the game?

What does it mean to play the game?

Being in roles, functions, expectations, rules, the way we are in *following* with others-relational?

Esprit de Corps:

What is it like to experience esprit de corps?

What does it mean to experience esprit de corps?

Being in camaraderie, bonding, fellowship, solidarity, a community of common interests?

Being compelled:

What is it like to be compelled?

What does it mean to be compelled?

Being in a sense of duty, responsibility, engagement or disengagement, necessity, getting the job done, oscillating compulsion, faith/values/relationships, circumstance?

The dance of *following*:

What is it like to be in a *following* dance?

What does it mean to be dancing in *following*?

Being in sync, learning the steps, leading and following, knowing your part in the dance, knowing your partner in the dance)

Appendix 9: Contemplating Enduring Themes

Being compelled in *following*- What does that mean in senior leadership teams?

Wholeheartedness- Being compelled wholeheartedly. Being propelled Wholeheartedly. Being Repelled wholeheartedly.

Being compelled (is the role or values)

Being propelled (passion or ideas)

Being repelled (finding ourselves misaligned or not engaged or unrepresented by the idea or thinking)

1. When we are compelled in *following* by our role (getting the job done- being thrown into a crisis-covid). Associated with how our experiences manifest intentional with professional — rules, roles, expectations
2. When we are compelled in *following* by our values (children, religious, professional integrity). Associated with experiences that manifest themselves in relation to something that is symbolic of meanings that we value. Perhaps, analogous with how Heidegger interprets moods.
3. When we are compelled in *following* by ideas and passions (igniting the flame, getting excited, push and pull). Associated with experiences that manifest in our heart- what is felt.
4. When we are compelled by misalignment. (compelled to act and ignore and dig our heels in and be distracted) Heidegger and boredom. Bored by or with something. It is worthwhile playing with this idea. I think being bored with a meeting is like being bored with an evening (Heidegger's example). This would also tie into the idea of being inauthentic.

The mood of *following* in senior leadership teams- atmospheres of existence

Following in senior leadership teams has a mood. This mood is what opens those *following* up to experiences of being in these teams. It may also turn people away from experiences and away from *following*.

1. Being-There: "one exists or finds oneself attuned to the world and of how one is faring in the world with others. Indeed of being-there, and this always directly includes being with one another" (Heidegger) The mood of *following* is always in relation to others in the senior leadership team. Moods are circumspective. Moods are about mattering.
2. Thrownness: "Dasein always already finds itself in social, political, cultural, and historical situations that it did not choose, that are beyond its control, but that importantly and fundamentally determine who Dasein is and can be." We are, therefore, thrown into *following* in senior leadership teams.
3. Finding ourselves out on a limb (vulnerable, unsure) For the most part, moods disclose Dasein's thrownness "in the manner of an evasive turning-away"
4. Finding ourselves in comfort (safe and supported)

5. Finding ourselves disengaged (bored and disinterested). Same routine, same agenda, same pattern of meetings (time, place, tone of the meeting). Same seats that set our mood. Indicates how we might relate to others.

Being in hiddenness in *following*:

In *following* we can find ourselves hidden or hiding.

1. Hiddenness in being hidden by an idea/project/discussion/item
2. Hiddenness in being hidden by the principal
3. Hiddenness in hiding
4. When we are not hidden or in hiding

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