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Overcoming Barriers to Ascending to Leadership Roles for People with Disabilities

Dawne Marie Hardy
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Dawne Marie Hardy

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Walden University
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Abstract

Overcoming Barriers to Ascending to Leadership Roles for People with Disabilities

by

Dawne Marie Hardy

MPhil, Walden University, 2019

MA, Strayer University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

February 2021

Abstract

CEOs report difficulty finding skilled workers ready to assume leadership roles. The literature lacked effective strategies for individuals with disabilities to overcome barriers to gaining a leadership role. The specific problem was a potential source of skilled employees, individuals with disabilities, struggle to ascend to leadership roles while organizational leaders struggle to gain a competitive edge in developing a diverse base of skilled leadership. The literature lacked effective strategies for individuals with disabilities to overcome barriers to gaining a leadership role. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single embedded case study was to explore the perceptions of seven leaders with a disability about what barriers they encountered and effective strategies in overcoming such barriers. The research questions pertained to the perceived barriers and effective strategies. The triangulated multiple data sources included interviews, a virtual focus group, and journal notes. The analysis focused on the barriers encountered, the strategies used, and their organizational context. A 6-step thematic analysis model revealed thematic results in five categories: competencies, barriers to ascension, strategies used, workplace accommodations, and workplace culture or climate, with 16 themes aligned with the research questions. HR managers may use the results to develop trainings, mentorships, and other supports for people with disabilities to access the leadership pipeline. The results may contribute to positive social change by providing people with disabilities with effective strategies to advance to leadership positions, gain a better sense of self-determination, higher self-esteem, and a higher level of self-efficacy than other people with disabilities can model and aspire to similar roles.

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Dedication

I dedicate this professional accomplishment to my parents, Betty and Francis Hardy. My parents have always been by my side to encourage me throughout my entire life. I would also like to thank my siblings, friends, and co-workers for believing in me when I did not believe I could finish this milestone. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this milestone to all of the leaders that embody the true meaning of diversity and inclusion and exemplify their beliefs through their actions.

"If you hire only those people you understand, the company will never get people better than you are. Always remember that you often find outstanding people among those you do not particularly like." — Soichiro Honda, founder of Honda (Source: Honda R&D Americas)

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Thank you to the YMCA of Greater Charlotte family that have been there every step of the way, encouraging this journey. Lastly, I want to acknowledge the work that the National Organization on Disability (NOD) for the work they do to bring awareness to people with disabilities but also how they advocate for the participation of all people despite their ability. The celebration of everyone's ability in life is essential.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

One challenge facing organizational leaders is the scarcity of skilled talent in the pipeline to assume leadership positions (Emira et al., 2016; Manciangli, 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017; Zandi, 2016). Even with the scarcity of skill talent, organizational leaders continue to present barriers to leadership roles for some individuals such as women, various cultures (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Carbajal, 2018) and people with disabilities. In this study, I focused on the barriers faced by people with disabilities and the strategies they used to gain their leadership position.

This study was needed because the results could add to the current leadership literature on strategies to overcome barriers that people with disabilities face in ascending to leadership roles. A disparity existed in leadership positions held by people with disabilities because they continue to be overlooked despite a need for qualified leaders. A gap existed in literature focused on self-efficacy in leaders with disabilities (Emira et al., 2016). Individuals' self-efficacy expectation is driven by their desire to produce a given outcome (Bandura, 1977), such as people with disabilities advancing to leadership. To overcome barriers, individuals need self-efficacy for motivation, acquire the needed resources, and put a plan of action in place to accomplish a goal (Bandura, 1977; Bullough, & Dibble, 2016; Javidan et al., 2016; Johri & Misra, 2014).

The social implications of this study pertained to the potential benefits of understanding how people with disabilities who successfully advanced to leadership positions gain a better sense of self-determination, higher self-esteem, and a higher level of self-efficacy (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Marsay, 2014; Powers et al., 2002; Ward

& Meyer, 1999). When people with disabilities exhibit these leadership traits, other people with disabilities can model and aspire to similar roles. Chapter 1 includes a discussion of the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, summary, and transition.

Background of the Study

Globalization has created obstacles for operational leaders that jeopardize their organizations' success and sustainability (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Hurn, 2013). As leaders evaluated what steps need to happen to gain or remain competitive, it became clear that investment in the most productive asset, human capital, is most important (Khalid et al., 2014). When asked what was the most significant obstacle, CEOs replied that it was having developed skilled labor to assume leadership roles (Eichenger, 2018; White, 2017). Organizational leaders' focus on talent development leads to developing a strong talent pipeline and the key to a strong succession plan (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Gooding et al., 2018; McKee & Froelich, 2016). Strengthening the talent pipeline is more than hiring staff; studies are conducted on the factors needed to produce develop and qualified staff (Foster, 2015).

When I reviewed the literature on the employment of people with disabilities, many articles focused on organizational culture about hiring individuals with disabilities (Araten-Bergman, 2016; Brite et al., 2015; Cafferky, 2016; Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014). The literature focused on the perceived barriers, perceptions, and stereotypes that employers perpetuate when it pertains to hiring individuals with a disability. Even with

legislation that protects such individuals, the percentage of individuals in leadership positions lags behind those who do not have a disability (Brite et al., 2015; Cafferky, 2016; Jansson et al., 2015). Individuals with known disabilities are less likely to hold professional or management positions than those without disabilities, 33.7% with disabilities versus 40.3% without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Despite the shortage of qualified, skilled leaders in the talent pipeline, organizational leaders continued to overlook people with disabilities to assume those roles (Nota et al., 2014; Vornholt et al., 2013; Wehman, 2011). There was a significant gap in the literature, leadership studies, and practices that focused on leaders with disabilities that hold leadership positions (Bruyère, 2016; Karpur & Vanlooy, 2014). The specific research problem is that a potential source of skilled employees, individuals with disabilities, struggled to ascend to leadership roles while organizational leaders struggled to gain a competitive edge in developing a diverse base of skilled leadership (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017). Although some published research revealed reasons employers may pass over hiring individuals with disabilities into leadership roles, a gap existed in the body of scholarly research on effective strategies for individuals with disabilities to overcome such barriers to ascending to a leadership role. This study is significant to leadership scholarship because the results may inform human resource managers with information that could lead to the development of training, mentorships, etc., that deepen their talent pipelines. The results may provide strategies, a map for other leaders with disabilities on how to break perceived barriers, gain leadership roles, and ascend the corporate ladder.

Problem Statement

Employers face competition for skilled and qualified employees (Muhoho, 2014; Nolan, 2015). Despite challenges organizational leaders encounter in developing skilled and qualified employees (Borisova et al., 2017), organizational leaders continued to overlook specific populations for skilled leadership roles, such as individuals with disabilities, who continue to struggle to gain leadership positions (Brite et al., 2015; Cafferky, 2016; Jansson et al., 2015). Individuals with known disabilities are less likely to hold professional or management positions than those without disabilities, 34.1% with disabilities versus 41.0% without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Chief Executive Officers identified the development of skilled and qualified employees as a top, persistent problem (Eichenger, 2018; White, 2017).

Human resource leaders identified the need to bolster talent development efforts in their organizations to gain competitive advantage (Borisova et al., 2017; Fahed-Sreih, 2012; Foster, 2015). Organizational leaders are aware that their need to train and develop (Borisova et al., 2017; Fahed-Sreih, 2012; Foster, 2015) qualified staff presents a quantifiable financial burden on the organization (Fahed-Sreih, 2012; Khalid et al., 2016). Some research findings indicated that negative perceptions, prejudices, and biases contributed to decision-makers overlooking a skilled and qualified employee pool of persons with disabilities (Nota et al., 2014; Wehman, 2011). Competitive advantage requires leaders to invest in human resource assets such as employees in ways that require significant resource allocation (Khalid et al., 2016; Muhoho, 2014). Qualified and

skilled leaders mitigate the loss of resources, performance, and knowledge, all of which affect the organizations' profit margins (Khalid et al., 2016; Muhoho, 2014).

Building the leadership pipeline depends on getting skilled and talented people into the organization and developing them (Foster, 2015). Filling the talent pipeline must begin with managers hiring people who have the talent potential needed for the future (Foster, 2015). The social problem is that most organizations lack a sufficient diversity pipeline and need further work to develop the diversity talent pipeline to develop future leaders (Hunt et al., 2015).

According to research by McKinsey and Company, organizations with diversity among their leaders have better financial performance than other organizations ((Hunt et al., 2015). Companies with greater diversity are more successful at developing talented leaders (Eichenger, 2018; Hunt et al., 2015). Research findings also supported organizations' value of expanding leadership diversity beyond gender and ethnicity/race (Hunt et al., 2015), such as leaders with disabilities. The specific problem is that a potential source of skilled employees, individuals with disabilities struggle to ascend to leadership roles while organizational leaders struggle to gain a competitive edge in developing a diverse base of skilled leadership (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017). Although some published research revealed reasons employers may pass over hiring individuals with disabilities into leadership roles, a gap existed in the scholarly research on effective strategies for individuals with disabilities to overcome barriers to ascending to a leadership role (Bruyère, 2016; Karpur & Vanlooy, 2014; Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single embedded case study was to explore the perceptions of a sample of leaders with a disability in seven nonprofit organizations in the same industry sector about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a leadership role and effective strategies in overcoming such barriers. Case study research is characterized by a focus on a bounded situation and triangulation of multiple data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). My focus was on the bounded situation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014) of overcoming barriers to and attaining organizational leadership by people with disabilities. The units of analysis were the barriers encountered, the strategies used by leaders with different disabilities to gain their leadership roles, and organizational context. The multiple data sources that I triangulated included interviews and a virtual focus group that explored interview themes.

Research Questions

Research Question (RQ): What are the perceived barriers nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability encountered in obtaining leadership roles in their organizations and what strategies were effective in overcoming them?

Subquestion 1 (S1): What are the perceived barriers nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability encountered in obtaining leadership roles in their organization?

Subquestion 2 (S2): What strategies did nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability perceive were effective in overcoming barriers to obtaining leadership roles in their organization?

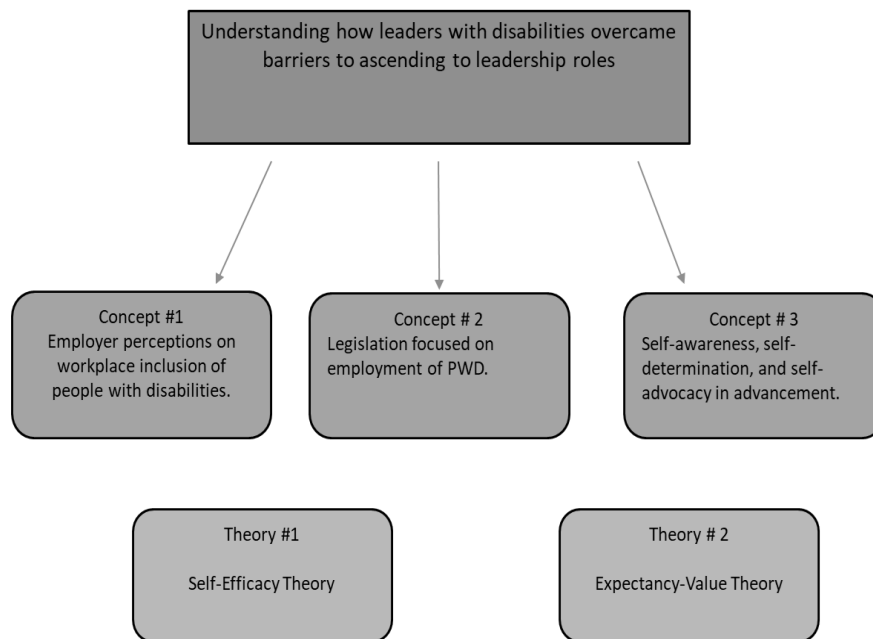
Subquestion 3 (S3): What was the contextual influence of the organization on the effectiveness of these strategies?

Conceptual Framework

I used a conceptual framework with a central focus on the barriers to obtaining employment and ascension to leadership roles for people with disabilities as the primary structure for this study. The map for the conceptual framework is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Understanding How Leaders with Disabilities Overcame Barriers to Ascending to Leadership Roles



The management concepts that grounded the study were self-awareness, self-determination, and self-advocacy. These concepts connected to the outcomes of people with disabilities in the workplace (Cafferky, 2016; Powers et al., 2002; Wehman, 2011). The elements of these concepts are the ability of a person to know themselves; correct or

control their behavior; harness their skills, knowledge, and experiences to produce the desired outcome; and lastly, contribute positively to their well-being (Cafferky, 2016; Powers et al., 2002; Vornholt et al., 2013; Wehman, 2011)

Individuals' ability to be self-aware contributes to their performance and behavior (Cafferky;2016; Wehman, 2011). People with disabilities who experienced success in gaining meaningful employment exhibited high levels of self-awareness (Cafferky; 2016; Wehman, 2011). Self-determination—the ability to master skills and tasks, relate to others, and be in control of your behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2002)—is directly related to previous studies about the motivating factors for the success of some people with disabilities (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Wehman, 2011). Self-advocacy is an outcome of an individual's knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication skills, and leadership skills (Schoffstall & Cawthon, 2013). These behaviors empower people with disabilities to stand in the gap and advocate for not only fair employment but also revised legislation regarding accommodation (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Ward & Meyer, 1999; Wehman, 2011).

One focus of studies conducted within the last 25 years has been on the employment practices of organizations in hiring adult individuals with disabilities. Many of these studies focused on some barriers leaders with disabilities faced in obtaining non-menial roles (Brite et al., 2015; Stolarczyk, 2016; Vornholt et al., 2013). Three concepts such as employer perceptions on workplace inclusion of people with disabilities, legislation focused on employment of people with disabilities, self-awareness, self-determination, and self-advocacy in advancement to leadership roles. These concepts

provided a foundation supporting how people with disabilities reacted to overcoming barriers to advancement.

As far back as the 1960s, factors such as attitudes by employers presented barriers for individuals with disabilities to job advancement (Avery et al., 2016; Heera, 2016; Jakovljevic & Buckley, 2011; Munyi, 2012; Vornholt et al., 2013; Wehman, 2011). In response to these attitudes and exclusion of individuals with disabilities from job advancement, legislation, both domestically and internationally, was enacted to dismantle the barriers created by perceptions and biases of employers. The Rehabilitation Act of 1978, the Americans Disability Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendment Act of 2009 were three domestic pieces of legislation designed to eliminate discrimination against individuals with disabilities (Gould et al., 2015; R. Owen & Harris, 2012; Wahab & Ayub, 2016). In 2009, the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified, further acknowledging the need to protect the rights to the employment of this population (R. Owen & Harris, 2012).

Once individuals with disabilities acquired leadership roles, they faced perceived barriers to ascending to other leadership roles. Studies conducted by Emira et al.(2016), Kulkarni & Gopakumar (2014), and Villanueva-Flores et al. (2014) examined how people with disabilities find success in leadership roles once they are hired. Some scholars, Kulkarni & Gopakumar (2014), Marsay (2014) Powers et al. (2002) and Ward & Meyer (1999) revealed that people with disabilities presented with a high level of self-awareness, self-determination, and self-advocacy as determinates of success. The development of strong self-efficacy derives from significant social models that model

high performance and self-esteem. Because people with disabilities are faced with known external biases (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; F. Owen et al., 2015), understanding how these individuals, when in leadership roles, perceive their ability to sustain an optimal level of performance provides insight to those seeking to ascend to leadership positions. Given the opportunity to hold a leadership role, skill levels increase as accomplishments affect outcomes (Bandura, 1977). With a gap in leadership positions held by those with disabilities, a gap existed in literature focused on self-efficacy in leaders with disabilities (Emira et al., 2016).

Many theories are used to support disability studies, leadership, and management studies. The two theories that were best suited for this study self-efficacy theory and expectancy-value theory. Self-efficacy is the perception that individuals have about their ability to summon up motivation, acquire the needed resources, as well as put a plan of action in place to accomplish a goal (Bandura, 1977; Bullough, & Dibble, 2016; Javidan et al., 2016; Johri & Misra, 2014). Having the skill and knowledge is not necessarily enough for an individual to garner the motivation to perform (Bandura, 1977).

Individuals who have strong beliefs about their capabilities, knowledge, and skills will effectively perform and accomplish goals (Javidan et al., 2016). Wigfield and Eccles (2000) contended that individuals' persistence and performance are driven by motivation, which is influenced by the value placed on exceptionally completing tasks.

Understanding these motivational factors and human behavior provides leaders with the knowledge to affect a sense of accomplishment in their teams.

Atkinson (1957) developed the expectancy-value theory in the 1950s. Atkinson sought to examine the motivating and risk-taking factors around the achievement of individuals (Atkinson, 1957). An individual's choice, persistence, and performance are influenced by that individual's belief in how well he or she will accomplish and value the task (Atkinson, 1957). Ability belief focused on present outcomes, while expectancy focused on future success (Atkinson, 1957; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). The belief in future success in disability studies is essential in examining the motivation for leaders with disabilities to ascend to leadership roles. Expectancies undergird success. To overcome barriers to ascension, people with disabilities must believe/expect success.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single embedded case study was to explore the perceptions of a sample of leaders with a disability in multiple organizations about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a leadership role and effective strategies in overcoming such barriers. The nature of this study was qualitative with an exploratory single embedded case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2010; Sholtz & Tietje, 2002; Yin, 2014). Exploratory single embedded case studies are characterized by the focus on exploring a common phenomenon, the case (Scholz & Tietje, 2002; Yin, 2014).

Most organizations lack a sufficient diversity pipeline and need further work to develop the diversity talent pipeline to develop future leaders (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015). Building the leadership pipeline depends on getting skilled and talented people into the organization and developing them (Foster, 2015). Companies with greater

diversity are more successful at developing talented leaders (Eichenger, 2018; Hunt et al., 2015). Research findings also supported the value to organizations of expanding leadership diversity beyond gender and ethnicity/race (Hunt et al., 2015), such as leaders with disabilities. Eichenger (2018), Foster (2015), and White (2017) contended that leadership development is one critical response to tackling keeping the talent pipeline ready for vacancies. Despite the need for skilled leaders, organizational leaders continue to overlook individuals with disabilities to fill leadership roles. I used the conceptual framework for this study to explore the phenomenon of how leaders with a disability overcame barriers and the strategies these leaders used to obtain a leadership role.

I used a single embedded case study because the external focus was on bounded situations consisting of a single case of leaders with disabilities and subunits encompassing barriers the leaders faced to gain a leadership role, and the strategies used to overcome the barriers in multiple nonprofit organizations. I used multiple sources of data for triangulation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). My goal was to explore what perceived barriers the participants overcame to ascend to leadership roles, the strategies used, and the contextual influences of the organizational subunit and attempt to replicate the findings across the units.

In this study, I explored a bounded situation that affected organizational behavior. I explored seven nonprofit organizations in the same service industry in the United States. I selected these nonprofit organizations because of the acknowledgment by other nonprofit organizations for their culture of diversity and inclusion, which extended from key stakeholders to employees and included people with disabilities. The leaders are the

case; the units of analysis are the barriers encountered, the strategies used by leaders with different disabilities to gain their leadership roles, and organizational context.

Through purposive and snowball sampling, I solicited a sample of seven leaders of nonprofit organizations, specifically executive dDirectors, vice-presidents, chief operating officers, presidents, and CEOs. I began sampling by using my existing network of nonprofit organizations and leaders with known disabilities to identify potential participants through purposive sampling. Leaders of these organizations volunteered to participate and referred other leaders who met the sampling criteria using a snowball sampling technique.

I secured access to leaders with disabilities in these organizations through my relationship with the gatekeepers at each site. The gatekeepers can be participants in the study. Key leadership levels are defined as the CEO, president, vice-president, and or executive director. Leader recruitment occurred by invitation. I provided these leaders with an extensive explanation of the study. I continued sampling and data collection until I achieved data saturation across the sample.

Consistent with case study research, the study involved the analysis and triangulation of multiple data sources within and across the units (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). The leaders participated in semistructured interviews and a virtual focus group to explore interview themes and support triangulation. I designed the interview and virtual focus group questions to explore their descriptions of perceived barriers to ascending to leadership roles and effective strategies to overcome these barriers to obtaining leadership roles.

I invited the participants to review all transcripts of interviews for verification purposes. I transcribed and coded data collected from the interviews and the virtual focus group to categorize them into common themes. Notes, memos, and themes were determined throughout the analysis process and aligned with the research purpose. Multiple types of data collected, multiple interviews and a virtual focus group satisfied triangulation, supporting the validity of data analysis. I processed the data through Atlas.ti, a qualitative research software used to support the identification of themes and assist in data analysis.

Definitions

This section included the definitions of terms used uniquely in the current study. The definitions of each term are specific to the uniqueness of this study. Each definition is supported with a citation from the literature.

Career barriers: Career barriers refer to obstacles presented through biased attitudes, organizational culture problems, and corporate succession management (Heera, 2016; Vornholt et al., 2013). In the current study, career barriers pertain to those barriers faced by people with disabilities in ascending to leadership positions.

Competitive advantage: Competitive advantage refers to organizational leaders' ability to lead in an economic environment when resources are scarce (Khalid et al., 2016; Muhoho, 2014). In the current study, competitive advantage pertains to nonprofit sector leaders' ability to feed their talent pipeline with qualified leaders.

Qualified disability: Qualified disability defined as a mental or physical impairment that impedes or limits one's ability to participate in any aspect of life's

significant activities actively; the person has a history of impairment or is known by others to have an impairment (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). In the current study, qualified disability pertains to the type of disability a leader in the sample may have.

Gatekeeper: A gatekeeper is an individual(s) with whom the researcher builds a relationship and can facilitate access to potential participants of the study (Maxwell, 2013). In the current study, the gatekeepers are persons at nonprofit organizations that facilitated access to participants for the study.

Leadership roles: Leadership roles are positions that are held by the chief executive, such as the CEO, COO, vice president, and executive director. Historically persons in these roles are responsible for the acceptable performance of the organization (McKee & Froelich, 2016). In the current study, leadership roles are the roles prospective participants hold in the nonprofit sector.

Qualified leaders: Qualified leaders are individuals with knowledge, skills, or ability that organizational leaders believe brings value to leadership roles (Eichenger, 2018; White, 2017). In the context of the study, qualified leaders are leaders with disabilities in the nonprofit sector.

Strategies: In the context of the study, strategies are the tools used by leaders with disabilities to overcome barriers encountered in obtaining leadership roles. These tools draw on the leaders' knowledge, experience, and skill (Borisova et al., 2017).

Talent pipeline: The talent pipeline is the recognition, development, and management of potential leaders flowing through a process for career preparedness resulting in employment (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Foster, 2015; Gooding et al., 2018;

Stewart, 2016). In the study, the talent pipeline refers to the pipeline of potential qualified leaders with disabilities in the nonprofit sector.

Assumptions

I made several assumptions in this study. Because the participants were asked to self-select as having a disability, the first assumption was that participants were truthful about self-selecting based on their having a qualified disability. This assumption was also based on the idea that people with disabilities were likely to respond to the invitation rather than people without disabilities, based on the selection criteria.

The second assumption was that the leaders with disabilities provided factual accounts of their experiences gaining leadership roles. This assumption was based on the leaders' realization that sharing the strategies they used to overcome barriers may contribute to recommendations for helping other people with disabilities to overcome barriers to leadership roles. Also, these leaders may be motivated to participate because they recognize the need to get more people with disabilities into the leadership pipeline to address the shortages of qualified leaders in the nonprofit sector.

Scope and Delimitations

Scope

The study focus was on a single case of leaders with disabilities encompassing several nonprofit organizations and multiple sources of data for triangulation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). Nonprofit organizations located within the United States were selected for the study because of the acknowledgment by leaders and staff of other nonprofit organizations for their culture of diversity and inclusion, which extended from

key stakeholders to employees and included people with disabilities. For-profit corporations were excluded as potential units. The leaders with disabilities comprised the case. The units of analysis were the barriers encountered, strategies used by leaders with different disabilities, and organizational context in multiple organizations.

The choice of people with disabilities as the prospective participants and their organizations was based on the experiences of their leaders as people with disabilities and the reputation of the organizations as social change engines. Through nonprobability purposive and snowball sampling, a sample of seven leaders of nonprofit organizations was solicited using the researcher's existing network of nonprofit organizations and leaders with known disabilities.

Delimitations

The study population was persons with disabilities who achieved a leadership position in their organization rather than persons with disabilities in non-leadership positions. The study was restricted to leaders with disabilities in the nonprofit sector rather than leaders of organizations in other sectors. The study was restricted to leaders with disabilities who held the position of executive director, vice-president, chief operating officer, and chief executive officer/president in nonprofit organizations. The study was restricted to these specific positions; therefore, the findings may not transfer to other people with disabilities outside of these roles or in these roles in other sectors. The study's focus was on the barriers leaders with disabilities encountered in obtaining leadership roles rather than other barriers people with disabilities faced. The study focus was also about the strategies they used to overcome these barriers to advancing to

leadership positions rather than strategies they used to overcome other barriers they may have faced.

Herzberg's motivational theory (Herzberg et al., 2017) and McClelland's achievement motivational theory (McClelland et al., 1976) were excluded from the conceptual framework for this study because neither of these theories aligned with the internal focus of the study on self-awareness, self-determination, and self-advocacy. Instead, the two theories that best support this study are self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) and expectancy-value theory (Atkinson, 1957; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Thus, the conceptual framework for this study incorporated the self-efficacy theory and expectancy-value theory.

Limitations

The study had several limitations. One limitation arose from the decision not to verify if the participants, people with disabilities, met the definition of having a qualified disability. The participants self-selected into the study as a leader with a disability based on specific criteria; their honesty was a potential limitation. Participants did not answer any verifying questions to establish if their self-selection was factual.

Because this study focused on nonprofits, weaknesses in transferability may exist when applying outcomes to other organizations such as for-profit entities that do not share similar operational models. The focus of the study is not intended to present a generalization concerning strategies to overcome barriers to ascending to leadership roles.

Limitations arose from the use of gatekeepers for the multiple sites from which participants, leaders with known disabilities, were accessed. Access to the hard-to-reach population depends upon professional relationships with the gatekeepers, thus narrowing the range of organizations from which leaders with disabilities were recruited.

Organizational turnover may have resulted in the loss of one or more gatekeepers, thus limiting access and necessitating new population sources.

Significance of the Study

This research may be significant to business practice because the study addresses a gap that exists in leadership and human resource scholarship. The gaps pertain to an underserved population, individuals with disabilities, and effective strategies for overcoming perceived barriers in ascending to leadership roles. The results of studying these barriers and practical strategies for individuals with disabilities in overcoming perceived barriers to leadership roles may provide organizational leaders and human resource managers with information to address the disparity of career and leadership development (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014). The knowledge of effective strategies of leaders with disabilities to overcome perceived barriers to ascending to leadership roles could be used to inform key leaders and human resource managers with concrete examples of barriers. With these examples, leaders can support their efforts to address this disparity by dismantling such barriers by developing and implementing services (Jakovljevic & Buckley, 2011; Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014).

The current HRM literature on the competition for a skilled labor force addresses the gap in talent and the motivational factors needed to develop leaders once hired.

Existing literature regarding the employment of people with disabilities covers acceptance, social implications, quality of life (QOL), and financial constraints (Ra & Kim, 2016). In light of some advances of people with disabilities (Ra & Kim, 2016), a gap existed on effective strategies for individuals with disabilities to overcome such barriers to ascending to a leadership role (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2015; Nuwagaba, & Rule, 2016; Shakespeare et al., 2019). Knowledge of effective strategies for these individuals to overcome these perceived barriers to ascension is necessary to the field of leadership scholarship and is vital to organizational leaders committed to developing skilled workers in light of the high competition for skilled leaders (Al Arisset al., 2014; Collings, 2014; Leisy & Pyron, 2009; White, 2017). Understanding effective strategies for people with disabilities to overcome these perceived barriers may position leaders to develop ascension plans.

The inability of individuals with disabilities to ascend to leadership roles is a social problem (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; F. Owen et al., 2015; Ra & Kim, 2016) and a leadership problem, particularly when organizational leaders strive to gain a competitive edge in the development of skilled workers (White, 2017). Understanding effective strategies leaders with disabilities have used to overcome barriers to ascending to leadership roles can help to maximize their skills instead of placing them in menial roles, foster self-determination and high self-esteem, thus promoting positive social change (Wehman, 2011). Leaders who are secure in their abilities transfer a sense of self-efficacy to their employees (Ramchunder & Martins, 2014). The visibility of leaders with disabilities successfully performing in leadership roles sets the foundation for others with

disabilities to aspire to the same roles (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Powers et al., 2002). Socially, aspiring, and succeeding in gaining leadership positions promote a strong sense of self-determination and these leaders with disabilities add a different value to society (Wehman, 2011). Powers et al. (2002) revealed when leaders with disabilities self-direct their career path, develop public policies and drive service implementation for this population, self-determination in these individuals was inevitable.

Significance to Practice

The results of the study may provide practitioners with specific strategies for closing a gap that existed for people with disabilities to ascend to leadership roles. The outcomes may inform human resource managers with clear ways to dismantle barriers and assist in identifying developmental opportunities for leaders. Building an effective talent pipeline requires organizational leaders to recognize that it will take more than just hiring a large number of employees (Foster, 2015), but developmental opportunities may contribute to strengthening organizational succession plans (McKee & Froelich, 2016).

Significance to Theory

The specific problem is that a potential source of skilled employees, individuals with disabilities, struggle to ascend to leadership roles while organizational leaders struggle to gain a competitive edge in developing a diverse base of skilled leadership (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017). The study focused on the perceived barriers that people with disabilities encounter to ascending to leadership roles and the strategies they use to overcome such barriers. The theory of self-efficacy explains how individuals believe about their ability to summon up motivation, acquire the needed

resources, as well as put a plan of action in place to accomplish a goal (Bandura, 1977; Javidan et al., 2016; Johri & Misra, 2014). Individuals with disabilities are presenting with a high level of self-awareness, self-determination, and self-advocacy as determinates of success (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Marsay, 2014; Powers et al., 2002; Ward & Meyer, 1999). Understanding how these individuals, when in leadership roles, perceive their ability to sustain an optimal level of performance provides insight to those seeking to ascend to leadership positions.

Expectancy-value theory (Atkinson, 1957) informs the belief in future success in disability studies. This theory was essential in examining the motivation for leaders with disabilities to ascend to leadership roles (Atkinson, 1957; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Expectancies undergird success. To overcome barriers to ascension, people with disabilities must believe/expect success.

Significance to Social Change

The potential positive social change implications are that when people with disabilities who advance successfully to leadership positions gain a better sense of self-determination, higher self-esteem, and a higher level of self-efficacy, other people with disabilities can model and aspire to similar roles. Understanding the strategies these leaders used to overcome the barriers may provide a road map to others with disabilities striving to get in a leadership role (Bruyère, 2016). Improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities broadens the diverse talent pipeline and positions individuals with disabilities to contribute their untapped skills and gain economic stability, which enhances their ability to contribute to society and their communities (Bruyère, 2016).

An additional positive social change implication comes when leaders of organizations, particularly nonprofits, can use social return on investment (SROI) as support for securing governmental/private funding for the sustainability of the organization (F. Owen et al. (2015) found that utilizing a social return on investment analysis provides organizations with data that supported the benefits of their programs and services on quality-of-life. Because funding sources, governmental and private, are holding organizations accountable in a more rigorous way, having an alternative to financial reporting to support these results gives an organization a competitive edge for funding (F. Owen et al., 2015; Rotheroe & Richards, 2007). Measuring social outcomes shows accountability and transparency which translates to institutional sustainability (Rotheroe & Richards, 2007). Continuity in funding comes when funding entities trust that the revenue is effectively managed.

Summary and Transition

This chapter included a summary of the research study focusing on how people with disabilities overcome barriers to ascending to leadership roles. According to studies on employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, people with disabilities have historically fallen behind in obtaining leadership roles versus individuals that do not have a qualified disability. U. S. labor statistics show that people with disabilities holds 33.7% of leadership roles while 40.3% without disabilities hold the same positions.

Information presented in the chapter included a description of obstacles and problems that organizational leaders are facing regarding a lack of qualified, skilled leaders to fill the talent pipeline. This lack of experienced leaders puts organizations in a

position to lose a competitive advantage. Building an effective talent pipeline requires organizational leaders to recognize that it will take more than just hiring a large number of employees (Foster, 2015). Building an effective talent pipeline requires hiring employees with the skills and abilities to be future leaders (Foster, 2015). With this knowledge, organizational leaders continue to overlook a pool of skilled individuals, people with disabilities from ascending to leadership roles.

The study involved exploring how leaders with disabilities overcame barriers. An exploratory single embedded case study is the appropriate design because the focus was on exploring the participants' perspectives on an issue in their natural surroundings and answering "what" questions to explore possible outcomes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Harrison et al., 2017; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). The external focus was on bounded situations consisting of a single case encompassing multiple nonprofit organizations, leaders with disabilities, and multiple sources of data for triangulation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014).

Chapter 2 includes a description of the strategy used for conducting a review of pertinent literature, the search criteria, and the expansion of the conceptual framework. A review of relevant seminal and contemporary literature focusing on the key concepts of the study as well as the research problem was conducted. The literature review involved a synthesis of leadership scholarship and examination of information on the phenomenon of leadership development, barriers faced by individuals trying to ascend to leadership roles, how organizational leaders address a shortage of skilled leaders, and how people with disabilities struggle to ascend to leadership roles.

Chapter 3 includes a description and justification of the methodology, the researcher's role, and how the participants were selected. The instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis plans are described and justified. Chapter 3 concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 includes a focus on the findings of this single embedded case study, triangulated among the individual interviews with seven leaders with disabilities, the focus group, and notes taking during both. Chapter 5 focuses on an interpretation of the findings presented to confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline by comparing the findings to the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2, a description of the limitations to trustworthiness that arose from the execution of the study, the recommendations for further research and concludes with a description of the potential impact for positive social change at the appropriate level and implications for social change through tangible improvement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In a climate where organizational leaders are struggling to maintain a competitive advantage by developing a diverse base of qualified leaders, qualified people with disabilities strive to ascend to leadership roles (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017). The purpose of the qualitative exploratory single embedded case study was to explore the perceptions of a sample of leaders with a disability in seven nonprofit organizations about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a leadership role and effective strategies in overcoming such barriers. Case study research is characterized by a focus on a bounded situation and triangulation of multiple data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The focus of the study was on the bounded situation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014) of barriers to attaining organizational leadership by people with disabilities.

The units of analysis in this study were the barriers encountered, strategies used by leaders with different disabilities, and organizational context in multiple organizations. The multiple data sources that I triangulated included interviews and a virtual focus group that explored interview themes. A review of the current literature showed that individuals with disabilities are overlooked for leadership roles at a higher rate than those without disabilities and findings indicated that negative perceptions, prejudices, and biases contributed to decision-makers overlooking a skilled and qualified employee pool of people with disabilities (Nota et al., 2014; Vornholt et al., 2013; Wehman, 2011).

Chapter 2 includes a detailed account of the literature search strategy, a discussion of the conceptual framework of the study, and an extensive literature review of historical

and current research literature. In this review, I focused on topics such as leadership development, staff development, barriers that individuals, including people with disabilities, face to ascending to leadership roles, and equal opportunity legislation enacted to assist underrepresented individuals in leadership roles. The review also included an assessment of the common methods, techniques, and concepts reflected in the body of literature and a review of the qualitative exploratory single embedded case study.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search began with a focus on an overarching look for peer-reviewed articles on leadership and the disabled. As I finalized the research question, I broadened the search to include barriers faced by people with disabilities in employment, equal employment opportunity legislation, and relevant literature for research methods. Through the process, a gap in the literature surfaced about the underrepresentation of people with disabilities in leadership roles. The search for leadership literature and people with disabilities revealed a specific problem that employers face competition for skilled and qualified employees (Muhoho, 2014; Nolan, 2015). Despite challenges organizational leaders encounter in developing skilled and qualified employees (Borisova et al., 2017), organizational leaders continued to overlook specific populations for skilled leadership roles, such as individuals with disabilities. I extended the literature search to include talent development, talent pipeline, leadership, and staff development. Therefore, queries included the following search terms: *disability leader; disabled in leadership roles; disabled in management roles; people with disabilities; leadership roles; people with disabilities employment; disabled barriers leadership AND management; perceptions*

AND disabled; managers' attitudes; discrimination AND people with disabilities; talent development pipeline; talent development AND leadership roles; talent management; diversity AND talent pipeline; diversity in leadership roles; diversity AND people with disabilities employment; the ADA 2008; accommodations for people with disabilities AND workplace; legislation for people with disabilities; minorities AND barriers leadership; and Women AND barriers leadership.

I accessed the library databases specifically using ABI/Inform Collection; Business Source Complete; Dissertations & Theses by Walden University; EBSCO eBooks; Google; Google eBooks, Google Scholar; ProQuest Central; Sage Journals; Sage Research Methods online; Thoreau Multi-database and Walden Library books using the above key terms resulting in hundreds of scholarly journals and peer-reviewed articles. I filtered the results within a 5-year range. In the instances when searching for methodology and theory literature, the date ranges were expanded to include extant works. The results produced relevant literature extensive enough to conduct a thorough review.

Table 1 depicts the number and age of reviewable sources for content and methodology produced through this strategy as a means to reach saturation. The literature review included 138 sources, with 56.5% published between 2014–2020.

Table 1

Type, Number, and Age of References in the Review of the Literature (N = 138)

Sources	2014-2020			<2014		
	Content <i>n</i> (%)	Methodology <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i> (%)	Content <i>n</i> (%)	Methodology <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i> (%)
Scholarly articles	57 (41.0)	6 (4.3)	63 (45.6)	43 (31.1)	9 (6.5)	52 (37.6)
Trade publications	4 (2.8)	0 (0.0)	4 (2.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Organizational publications	2 (1.4)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.4)	1 (0.7)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.7)
Government documents	4 (2.8)	0 (0.0)	4 (2.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Dissertations	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Books	1 (0.7)	4 (2.8)	5 (3.6)	2 (1.4)	5 (3.6)	7 (5.0)
Total	68 (49.2)	10 (7.2)	78 (56.5)	46 (33.3)	14 (10.1)	60 (43.4)

Note. Content reference sources focused on research subject matter.

Conceptual Framework

Overcoming barriers to leadership roles and the strategies used by people with disabilities are the supporting concepts for the study. Understanding people with disabilities perceived barriers to ascension to leadership roles is required to present strategies for other people with disabilities that continue to be passed over for such roles. Wahab and Ayub (2016), in their examination of people with disabilities rights to economic promises afforded to all, contended that legislation such as the Disability Act of 2008 is a barrier to employment. Wahab and Ayub (2016) concluded that such

legislation needs to be revised because of the inadequacy to produce people with disabilities economic rights. Wahab and Ayub (2016) identified several barriers that are preventing people with disabilities from substantial employment. Social pressure, low paying jobs, and employer biases are just a few barriers that Wahab and Ayub (2016) indicated contribute to people with disabilities underemployment. Avery et al. (2016) found that not only did employer bias present a barrier to leadership ascension, but negative consumer response to people with disabilities also impacted their leadership. Stakeholders felt that adverse reactions by consumers influenced employers' actions toward people with disabilities. Jakovljevic and Buckley (2011), in their study conducted in South Africa regarding technology and the barriers new technology created for people with disabilities, agreed that legislation did little to break down barriers and enforce accommodation as intended. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) reported that individuals with known disabilities are less likely to hold professional or management positions when compared to those without disabilities. The statistics were 34.1% with disabilities versus 41.0% without disabilities.

Although barriers to employment existed, overcoming barriers to employment strengthens a sense of self-awareness, self-determination, and self-advocacy (Wehman, 2011). Powers et al. (2002) examined people with disabilities elevation in leadership roles through their self-directed advancement of legislation and exposure. This self-direction leads to self-determination, which Powers et al. (2002) found supports people with disabilities successful employment. Cafferky (2016) posited that when individuals utilize their skills, knowledge, and abilities at work, it strengthens their well-being. When

people with disabilities obtain roles where they feel they are using their skills and talents, they exhibit higher self-esteem (Wehman, 2011).

Employer Perception on Workplace Inclusion of People with Disabilities

Employer perceptions of the workplace inclusion of people with disabilities rely on many factors that affect the overall sustainability of the organization (Heera, 2016). Heera (2016) conducted a review to examine the influence of employers on the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce. After reviewing 25 years of leadership studies on disabilities, Heera (2016) concluded that employers' perceptions are connected to the opportunities that people with disabilities get in organizations. Those opportunities include but are not limited to being employed in nonmenial roles. Employers' stereotypes regarding people with disabilities and the impact of those stereotypes on corporate culture remain a barrier even though there is evidence that people with disabilities contribute to the overall competitive advantage of companies (Heera, 2016; Jakovljevic & Buckley, 2011). Gould et al. (2015) found that the employers interviewed expressed their concerns about indirect costs, direct costs, and fear of litigation as challenges to hiring people with disabilities.

The success of the inclusion of people with disabilities relies on the attitudes of the leaders who seek to include or exclude them (Popovich et al., 2003). Heera (2016), Jakovljevic and Buckley (2011), and Popovich et al. (2003) contended that with all strides to change the negative attitudes previously held about people with disabilities, no progress had been made to dismantle bias and negative stereotypes making inclusion in the workforce. Nota et al. (2014) examined employers' attitudes toward hiring

individuals with disabilities and concluded that employers view hiring people with disabilities through the lens of productivity, social acceptability, and capability to perform the task.

Munyi (2012) observed that no matter how many strides have been made in global financial markets, advances in technology and organizational sustainability, the traces of past attitudes toward the inclusion of people with disabilities continues to affect their employability. Cafferky (2016) and Wehman (2011) contended that work for people with disabilities fosters high self-esteem, self-determination, and self-advocacy. These concepts are connected to people with disabilities' abilities to overcome barriers to ascending to leadership roles.

Self-advocacy, Self-awareness, and Self-determination

Self-advocacy, self-awareness, and self-determination benefit the study. These concepts provide a foundation to show the connection between these concepts and how people with disabilities exhibit these traits not only once employed but when their skills and knowledge are utilized in a meaningful manner (Cafferky, 2016; Wehman, 2011). Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) examined strategies people with disabilities used to self-manage their careers. Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) found that when people with disabilities took control and successfully managed their careers, they developed high levels of self-esteem leading to self-efficacy and a greater sense of self. Self-determination or proactive personalities are related to skill development, career initiative, and innovation/re-designing job duties (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014). Such behaviors empower people with disabilities to stand in the gap and advocate for not only fair

employment but also revised legislation regarding accommodation (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Ward & Meyer, 1999; Wehman, 2011).

Legislation Focused on the Employment of People with Disabilities

Legislation focused on the employment of people with disabilities is a fundamental concept explored in the study and the examination of people with disabilities in the workforce as well as obtaining and escalating to leadership roles (Kruse & Schur, 2003). Studying the employment of people with disabilities is not possible without reviewing the legislation enacted to protect this group and provide economic inclusion (Schur et al., 2014). Kruse and Schur (2003) examined the employment of people with disabilities after the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) was enacted in 1990. Kruse and Schur (2003) contended that the ADA missed the mark on what it was intended to accomplish, which was to provide equality in employment for people with disabilities. The ADA does not protect all who have disabilities, unlike Title VII, which provides equal rights to all. Employers employing 15 or more employees are required to provide reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities as long as the accommodation does not cause undue hardship for the company. Kruse and Schur (2003) found that people with disabilities must prove that they have a qualified disability to receive accommodation. Kruse and Schur (2003) also found that the type of disability is left open for interpretation, which adds another barrier to accommodation, hence the enactment of the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) in 2008. As of 2016, The ADAAA, Title II and III regulations were revised to implement the original amendment of 2008. The ADAAA provided some clarity around defining a qualified disability (U.S. Department of Justice,

2019). Kruse and Schur (2003) stipulated that the ADA has provided the opportunity for people with disabilities to obtain employment in roles previously given to non-disabled employees.

Gould et al. (2015) examined the ADA after its enactment of 25 years. Gould et al. (2015) followed a 5-year study that was conducted at the University of Illinois, Chicago, centered on the evolution of the ADA. Gould et al. (2015) contended that preventing discrimination is a complicated task and the spirit of the act is difficult to enforce. Although attitudes toward disability have progressed, it remains challenging to determine the ADA's impact on the gainful employment of people with disabilities (Gould et al., 2015; Kruse & Schur, 2003; Schur et al., 2014).

Self-Efficacy Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory

Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and Atkinson's (1957) expectancy-value theory both focused on what motivates behavior in an individual and are the foundational theories for this study. Bandura (1977) hypothesized that self-efficacy would motivate an individual to activate internal coping mechanisms to overcome obstacles. Barriers to gaining leadership roles and the ability for individuals to develop strategies to overcome barriers to gaining leadership roles requires self-efficacy in that individual. Atkinson (1957), Vroom (1964), and Wigfield and Eccles (2000) examined how expectancy-value theory informed an individuals' belief in future success in disability studies. The expectancy-value theory is essential in analyzing the motivation for leaders with disabilities to ascend to leadership roles. Expectancies undergird success. To overcome barriers to ascension, people with disabilities must believe/expect success.

I conducted a review of pertinent literature pertaining to key concepts associated with the study. Key concepts for the study included a review of leadership studies, including the inception and evolution of leadership scholarship. The review included an examination of seminal and recent literature pertaining to the progression of leadership development, staff development, and pertinent motivational theories. The theories reviewed represent the conceptual framework that undergirds the study. Lastly, I reviewed and examined a review of literature about the employment of women, people with disabilities, and minorities, and the perceived barriers to ascending to leadership roles. I reviewed the legislation enacted to protect and provide equity for people with disabilities.

Summary of the Conceptual Framework

No matter how many strides have been made in global financial markets, advances in technology and organizational sustainability, the traces of past attitudes toward the inclusion of people with disabilities continue to affect their employability (Munyi, 2012). Wahab and Ayub (2016) identified several barriers that are preventing people with disabilities from substantial employment. Social pressure, low paying jobs, and employer biases are just a few barriers that Wahab and Ayub (2016) indicated contribute to the underemployment of people with disabilities. Avery et al. (2016) found that not only did employer bias present a barrier to leadership ascension, but negative consumer response to people with disabilities also affected their leadership. Although Munyi (2012) and Wahab and Ayub (2016) revealed reasons employers may pass over hiring individuals with disabilities into leadership roles, a gap existed in the body of

scholarly research on effective strategies for with disabilities to overcome such barriers to ascending to a leadership role.

Despite the enactment of employment legislation focused on the protection of this group and provide economic inclusion (Schur et al., 2014), people with disabilities continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles at a rate of 34.1% versus 41.0% of people without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Gould et al. (2015) followed a 5-year study that was conducted at the University of Illinois, Chicago, centered on the evolution of the ADA. Gould et al. (2015) contended that preventing discrimination is a complicated task and the spirit of the act is difficult to enforce. Although attitudes toward disability have progressed, it remains challenging to determine the ADA's impact on the gainful employment of people with disabilities (Gould et al., 2015; Kruse & Schur, 2003; Schur et al., 2014). Legislation focused on the employment of people with disabilities is a fundamental concept of the study and the examination of people with disabilities in the workforce.

Overcoming such barriers strengthens a sense of self-awareness, self-determination, and self-advocacy (Wehman, 2011). Powers et al. (2002) examined the elevation of people with disabilities in leadership roles through their self-directed advancement of legislation and exposure. This self-direction leads to self-determination. Herzberg's motivational theory (Herzberg et al., 2017) and McClelland's achievement motivational theory (McClelland et al., 1976) are referenced as theories that undergird previous studies focused on the internal reasons that individuals perform. Although motivation is an essential aspect of performance, when examining the concepts of self-

awareness, self-determination, and self-advocacy, the theories of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and expectancy-value theory (Atkinson, 1957) are more closely aligned with the study. The self-efficacy theory explains how individuals believe about their ability to summon up motivation, acquire the needed resources, as well as put a plan of action in place to accomplish a goal (Bandura, 1977; Javidan et al., 2016; Johri & Misra, 2014), while expectancy-value theory (Atkinson, 1957) informs the belief in future success in disability studies. This theory is essential in examining the motivation for leaders with disabilities to ascend to leadership roles (Atkinson, 1957; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Expectancies undergird success. To overcome barriers to ascension, people with disabilities must believe and expect success.

Literature Review

Based on an examination of leadership studies, scholars sought to attribute the beginning of a focus on leadership and organizational behavior to the 20th century. Many scholars attribute the origin to Weber's bureaucratic theory (McCleskey, 2014), but when looking beyond leadership studies focused on traits and attributes, the contention is that leadership studies began centuries ago (Landis et al., 2014). Landis et al. (2014) explained leadership as an interaction or a process between the leaders and followers, with a goal as a result. In the early 1900s, leadership studies and theories shifted from a focus of employees needing to be prodded for productivity to organizational leaders focusing on employee needs to achieve productivity then profitability (Stone et al., 2004). In this section, the review covers leadership literature that focused on leadership

development, staff development, and the barriers that people face while trying to ascend to leadership roles, particularly people with disabilities.

Leadership

Dinh et al. (2014) found that from 2004 to 2014, the emergence and advancement of leadership studies have grown, producing many leadership theories. Because leadership studies are still relatively recent, many different theories rose to clarify what leadership means. As of 2014, the literature reflected approximately 50 established theories and 35 emerging theories (Dinh et al., 2014). Dinh et al. (2014) believed that in addition to analyzing the person, the group, and the organization, the events that occur within an organization should be included to establish how leaders respond to such events. Such a new focus results in a shift in the focus of leadership theory (Dinh et al., 2014; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). Dinh et al. (2014) examined the evolution of leadership from a concept that focused on organizational processes for productivity to one of innovation, staff development, and globalization.

This shift in focus is in response to the changes that organizations begin to experience as globalization changed the landscape of the business world (Dinh et al., 2014; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). In this shift, understanding the context of the top-down control and the bottom-up process flow is imperative in the experience of leader-follower exchange. Dinh et al. (2014) contended that the advancement from the top-down control to a culture that fosters an environment that encourages leader-follower exchanges and shared outcomes is the future of leadership studies.

Organizational leaders began to recognize that followers' emotions and needs may impact productivity (Dinh et al., 2014). Uhl-Bien and Arena (2018) posited that today's leaders need to shift and lead organizations and people toward adaptability to the quick changes occurring in the business environment. Eichenger (2018) and White (2017) agreed that many challenges face organizational leaders in this quickly changing and fast-paced business environment, such as the scarcity of skilled employees, which produces a gap of qualified leaders for leadership roles. This gap caused organizational leaders to realize a need to focus on developing a strong talent pipeline and the key to a solid succession plan. Foster (2015) contended that the talent pipeline is more than hiring staff; studies are being conducted on the factors that are needed to produce developed and qualified staff. The response from organizational leaders was to focus on leadership development to feed the talent pipeline.

To summarize, leaders must be concerned with the emotional health of employees because emotions directly affect productivity (Dinh et al., 2014; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). Preparing agile workforces for a quickly changing environment is paramount for the survival of organizations in a global world. Organizational leaders agree that a shortage of skilled leaders is a threat to the sustainability of companies. This gap caused leaders to recognize that leadership development efforts to develop a robust talent pipeline is essential for organizational sustainability (Foster, 2015). With the threat of a shortage of skilled staff in mind, human resource leaders are focused on implementing leadership/staff development programs.

Leadership Development

As stated by Eichenger (2018), Foster (2015), and White (2017), a scarcity of qualified leaders is an ongoing challenge for today's organizational leaders. Eichenger (2018), Foster (2015), and White (2017) contended that leadership development is one critical response to tackling keeping the talent pipeline ready for vacancies and supporting the need for robust succession plans. Day (2014) reviewed the emergence of leadership development as a field of interest in leadership theory as a connection to intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships to the advancement and enhancement of leadership capacity. Leadership capacity in this context is defined as the ability of an individual to adapt to organizational challenges (Day et al., 2014). Day et al. (2014) and Maheshwari and Yadav (2018) asserted that the increasing focus and interest in leadership development has grown since 2005 and continued through 2018, creating a need for a clear development strategy. With the shift in leadership studies to focus on performance versus productivity, organizational leaders find a need to focus on closing the gap that existed of having skilled leaders in the pipeline ready to assume vacant leadership roles (Eichenger, 2018). The need for skilled leaders that are poised to lead in fast-changing global environments is paramount to the sustainability of organizations. Eichenger (2018), Foster (2015), and White (2017) contended that leadership development is one critical response to tackling keeping the talent pipeline ready for vacancies and supporting the need for robust succession plans.

The articles by Day et al. (2014), Eichenger (2018), Foster (2015), and White (2017) specifically focused on leadership development, the definition, and how important it is for organizational leaders to develop their staff.

Leader development focused on developing the individual, whereas leadership development focused on many individuals (Day et al., 2014). Day et al. (2014) posited that understanding leader development and leadership development processes relies on more than trying to assign it to leadership theory. Leadership development is about understanding what motivates individuals and effective development. As leaders continue to face more complex challenges in the business environment, traditional development processes such as training are no longer a sufficient means of developing multifaceted individuals (Day et al., 2014). Lord and Hall (2005) laid the groundwork in leadership development theory by positing that individual identity in developing leadership skills and expertise is an essential aspect of the leadership development process.

Lord and Hall (2005) contended that researchers conducted studies on development examining specific traits or competencies connected to the focus of leadership development, but a focus on skills is just as critical. Skills are taught, but attributes are personal (Lord & Hall, 2005). Skills, personality, experience, and ability to learn are directly connected to developing expert leaders (Day et al., 2014; Lord & Hall, 2005). Day et al. (2014) and Lord and Hall (2005) agreed that self-development is an individual's responsibility to guide his or her development and paramount to his or her success as a leader. The results of O'Connell's (2014) leadership development studies provided clear evidence that developing leaders are guided by context and time. Leaders

must have the capacity to change with the situation and what is happening for that period (O'Connell, 2014). Leadership development is a complex concept having many layers and does not stop at skill development (Day et al., 2014; Lord & Hall, 2005; Maheshwari & Yadav, 2018; O'Connell, 2014).

Martin (2015) agreed with Eichenger (2018), Foster (2015), and White (2017) that the talent pipeline of skilled employees presents a challenge for organizational leaders that must remain competitive and agile in this global business landscape. Agility is a term Martin (2015) used to express how nimble business leaders need to be for the sustainability of organizations in a fast-paced environment. Unlike the previously noted studies that focused on the response to the problem, Martin (2015) focused on the agility needed in talent development to prepare qualified leaders. Organizational leaders must identify employees with the emotional and mental capacity to ascend to leadership roles. Martin (2015) contended that the key to successful leadership development is to start with internal high performing staff. Aside from studying the need for leadership development, Reddy and Srinivasan (2015) took on the task of identifying a roadmap to constructing a corporate leader and leadership development plan.

Strategies for Constructing Development Plans

According to Maheshwari and Yadav (2018), the majority of the participants found a presence of development opportunities, but a small percentage found a lack of strategy. Like Collins and Holton (2004), Day et al. (2014), Griffith et al. (2018), Reddy and Srinivasan (2015), Maheshwari and Yadav (2018) concluded that leadership development is critical for building skilled employees. Leadership development efforts

must align with the organization's strategies, or context is lost, and the programs are less effective. From Maheshwari and Yadav's (2018) perspective, the contribution from the findings provides a foundation for future studies focusing on leadership development strategies.

As discussed by Reddy and Srinivasan (2015), scholars and researchers shifted focus away from research and toward examining development programs. Scholar-practitioners across the globe were leaning toward developmental science (Reddy & Srinivasan, 2015) to clarify the phenomenon of adult behavior. Understanding adult behavior is paramount to developing effective programs to build resilient leaders. Day et al. (2014) agreed that the research on leadership development and leadership development programs was still evolving. Which programs bring the best results remains unclear. Questions like what are the objectives of development programs, what are the outcomes, and what is the return on investment continues to be studied, and evolve and are revised by organizational leaders (Day et al., 2014; Griffith et al., 2018; Reddy & Srinivasan, 2015).

Griffith et al. (2018) examined leadership development, concurring with Mumford et al., (2007) that leadership skills are the foundation for leadership development. Mumford et al. (2007) included problem-solving, social judgment skills, and technical/knowledge skills, which Griffith et al. (2018) stated are overlapping skill sets. Agreeing with and understanding the skillsets for leaders is the basis for developing leadership plans and programs. Based on the organizations' strategic plan, human resource managers are developing and implementing development plans in two different

ways (Griffith et al., 2018) across the board for all leaders or investment in a specific leadership group based on the overall objectives of the organization. An organization whose leaders' strategy is to operate lean may only invest in the development of individuals that exhibit the desired skills or can be trained to lead in these circumstances. Katz (2009), on the contrary, introduced a model based on position-based development. Both models have advantages and disadvantages, as organizational leaders must decide who should receive development opportunities, which may limit the talent available for promotions; conversely, organizational leaders can realize the return on investment from those trained in either model.

As leadership development studies evolve, so must strategies for designing and implementing training programs. Griffith et al. (2018) developed a training model based on Katz's (2009) model that begins with an analysis of skill needs; second, organizational needs; third, individual needs analysis; and last, development of training programs. Based on the skill level of each employee and leadership position held (entry-level, middle manager, executive leader), training programs were developed to match the competencies needed for each role (Griffith et al., 2018; Katz, 2009). For example, entry-level managers are more likely to need the training to boost their technical skills, as these roles are traditionally tactical (Griffith et al., 2018; Katz, 2009). Middle managers' trainings would focus more on human skills and problem-solving where executive-level leaders need trainings focused on strategic and interpersonal skills (Griffith et al., 2018; Katz, 2009). Organizational leaders have mixed feelings about the examination of the transfer of the focus on these skill sets to employee development programs, particularly if the

organization's initiatives are focused on certain skill level (Collins & Holton, 2004; Griffith et al., 2018; Skylar Powell & Yalcin, 2010).

Staff Development

Collins and Holton (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of leadership development programs introduced between 1982-2001. Researchers of leadership development have used this analysis as a base for future studies on leadership development. Collins and Holton (2004) and Griffith et al. (2018) contended that conducting pre-analysis before developing programs to determine skill-based needs may ensure that the right training is specified for the right individual. Collins and Holton (2004) identified mentoring, specific job tasks, shadowing higher-level executives, feedback systems (360-degree evaluations), and formal training as leadership development opportunities that traditionally make up the training programs. Limitations of these opportunities existed due to some organizational leaders' inability to separate staff development effectively from staff performance, which is connected to the idea of a successful business (Collins & Holton, 2004).

Gurdjian et al. (2014) concurred that staff development might be tied to staff performance but also contended that development initiatives should not be treated as what works for one works for all. Gurdjian et al. (2014) and Shammot (2014) found that organizational leaders need to focus on three critical competencies versus having so many that staff is not getting the proper training linked to organizational strategies and objectives. By focusing on context and targeting development, better performance outcomes was realized (Gurdjian et al., 2014; Skylar Powell & Yalcin, 2010).

Implementation of directed development is the optimal way to get skilled leaders (Griffith et al., 2018; Gurdjian et al., 2014; Skylar Powell & Yalcin, 2010). Griffith et al. (2018), Gurdjian et al. (2014) and Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) stressed that directing specific development initiatives to staff that have the cognitive ability to lead is the most effective means to developing future leaders. Collins and Holton (2004) and Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) concurred that organizational leaders are responding to specific development plans for staff by focusing on individual development plans (IDPs). Individual development plans concentrate not only on the competencies needed in the role but also mentoring and executive coaching. Also, mentoring and executive coaching are quickly becoming the choice of development for middle-level leaders aspiring to executive-level leadership roles (Collins & Holton, 2004; Vanderford et al., 2018).

As a continuation of Collins and Holton's (2004) meta-analysis, Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) studied the evolution and effectiveness of training programs, focusing on three traditional pieces of training; sensitivity training, mentoring, and multi-source feedback. These trainings are conducted on the job and through formal classroom settings. Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) posited that these trainings are not always successful in building leadership skills because the staff falls back into old behaviors when they return to their roles. Gurdjian et al. (2014) agreed with the assessment of the effectiveness of such programs and suggested ways to determine if training initiatives/programs are effective. Gurdjian et al. (2014) stated that most staff only retain 10% of classroom learning but will retain 30% on the job learning. Gurdjian et al. (2014) recommended that organizational leaders first, design programs that are directly tied to

organizational objectives with direct outcomes; second, ensure that each leader grasps the strategic direction and priorities of the organization; third, understand the mindset of each potential leader to prevent unwanted behaviors; and lastly, measure results by assessing performance. Gurdjian et al. (2014) suggested 360-degree feedback assessment and executive coaching programs as tools to accomplish this evaluation.

Evaluating the progress of staff receiving development opportunities by assessing how many ascended to higher leadership roles within two years after going through programs, how many senior leaders went through development programs, and how many left the organization (Gurdjian et al., 2014) provided organizational leaders with a reliable gauge to evaluate effectiveness. Griffith et al. (2018) contended that corporate leaders, when faced with creating a comprehensive leadership pipeline (CLP), struggled with the advantages of promoting from within or hiring externally to fill gaps in critical skilled leadership roles. CEOs acknowledged that a gap existed in skilled employees to fill the pipeline, which threatens succession plans and the overall health of the organization (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Eichenger, 2018; Foster, 2015; Gooding et al., 2018; Griffith et al., 2018); McKee & Froelich, 2016; White, 2017). Despite the shortage of qualified, skilled leaders in the talent pipeline, organizational leaders continue to overlook people with disabilities to assume those roles (Nota et al., 2014; Vornholt et al., 2013; Wehman, 2011).

Summary of Leadership Development. Eichenger (2018), Foster (2015), and White (2017) contended that leadership development is one critical response to keeping the talent pipeline ready for vacancies and supporting the need for robust succession

plans. Gurdjian et al. (2014) and Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) examined leadership from concepts that focused on a shift from organizational productivity to one that focused on innovation, staff development, and globalization. Organizational leaders agree that a shortage of skilled leaders is a threat to the sustainability of companies (Maheshwari & Yadav, 2018). This gap caused leaders to recognize that leadership development efforts to develop a robust talent pipeline is essential for organizational sustainability (Foster, 2015). With this need to develop a robust talent pipeline in mind, Human Resource leaders are focused on implementing leadership/staff development programs.

In agreement with Mumford et al. (2007), Griffith et al. (2018) contended that leadership skills are the foundation for leadership development. Problem-solving, social judgment skills, and technical/knowledge skills are overlapping skill sets. Collins and Holton (2004) and Griffith et al. (2018) contended that conducting pre-analysis before developing programs is critical to addressing the issue of what is suitable for one is suitable for all (Collins & Holton, 2004). By focusing on context and targeting development, better performance outcomes were realized (Gurdjian et al., 2014; Skylar Powell & Yalcin, 2010). Organizational leaders are challenged to implement evaluation methods to determine if staff development efforts are producing qualified leaders (Collins & Holton, 2004; Vanderford et al., 2018).

Despite knowing that a gap existed in a diverse and skilled leadership pipeline (Foster, 2015), organizational leaders are struggling to maintain a competitive advantage by developing a diverse base of qualified leaders; qualified people with disabilities continue to be passed over for leadership roles (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; White,

2017). This research may be important to business practice because the study addressed current gaps in leadership and human resource scholarship. The gaps pertain to an underserved population, individuals with disabilities, and effective strategies for overcoming perceived barriers in ascending to leadership roles. With these examples, leaders can support their efforts to address this disparity by dismantling such barriers by developing and implementing leadership development services (Jakovljevic & Buckley, 2011; Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014).

Perceived Barriers to Ascension

As noted by Stewart (2016) and Foster (2015), developing a diverse and skilled talent pipeline is essential to the success of businesses in a fast-paced, changing global landscape. CEOs are facing many organizational challenges to remain competitive and sustainable, one of which is the scarcity of skilled employees to fill a gap in leadership positions. The diversity of gender, race, ability, and culture in the workforce is vital to mirror the demographics of the world; hence, the global business environment (Sabharwal, 2014). Sabharwal (2014) contended that organizational leaders do not necessarily have challenges getting a diverse workforce, but a barrier of integration and how to utilize diverse employees is the challenge. Although many groups are underrepresented in executive leadership roles, Sabharwal (2014) and Beeson and Valerio (2012) agreed that despite the implementation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Affirmative Action efforts to diversify workforces, barriers for women, African Americans, and the disabled advancement to executive level roles continues to challenge organizations.

Women in Executive Leadership

Beeson and Valerio (2012) examined how corporate executives can accelerate leadership development programs to get more women in the pipeline for executive leadership positions. Beeson and Valerio (2012) believed that most companies are challenged because they fail to establish clear criteria for granting promotions. Most companies promote based on prior good performance, but many managers are not ready for executive positions because they do not possess the competencies needed to transition from manager to leader. Because most executives are male, the advancement of women to similar roles must pass the biases of these men who follow traditional means of determining who is eligible to get the promotions (Beeson & Valerio (2012)). Beeson and Valerio (2012) sought to identify ways that such barriers could be dismantled and intentional leadership programs are created to prepare women to fill executive roles. Beeson and Valerio (2012) examined how women can take better control over their career development, how barriers are dismantled to ensure women get promotion opportunities, and what organizational leaders could do to create an equitable playing field. Traditionally women have held roles such as human resource managers that do not necessarily position them for executive roles (Beeson & Valerio, 2012).

Akpinar-Sposito (2013) agreed with Beeson and Valerio (2012) regarding the traditional roles that women held that hinder advancement to executive roles. As women advanced to executive roles, barriers to ascending higher became more prevalent for them versus men. Barriers in earnings, the wage gap, is an ongoing barrier that plagues women today (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013). The glass ceiling, a common metaphor used to explain

the barriers faced to succession to executive roles, was presented by Akpinar-Sposito (2013) as a serious challenge.

Akpinar-Sposito (2013) presented three glass ceiling barriers delivered by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission as barriers to women's successful climb to the top. The first class of barriers is societal barriers. Societal barriers are defined as the availability of qualified women and those that embody the needed leadership competencies to maintain their leadership role. The second class is internal structural barriers. Internal structural barriers are defined as a culture that exists in organizations where the leaders do not intentionally reach out to underrepresented groups and do not make necessary efforts to build the pipeline for future leaders. Leadership development opportunities are almost non-existent (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013). The third barrier class is governmental barriers. Governmental barriers are defined as the lack of implementation of monitoring and enforcement by governmental agencies for equity in employment. An example is Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which has done little to level the playing field for women and the salary gap (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013).

Akpinar-Sposito (2013) suggested that women must invest in their development to remain competitive with their male counterparts. Akpinar-Sposito (2013) found that male executives were more likely to invest in their education to obtain skills for future advancement. Lastly, traditionally, women are the primary caregivers in their families who may be a long-standing barrier to their advancement to executive-level roles. These roles may require time commitments that women are not willing or cannot give.

Ethnicity in Executive Leadership

The glass ceiling metaphor (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013), as discussed by researchers as a barrier for women's ascension to executive leadership roles, not only exists for women but others of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Stewart (2016) agreed with the findings of McKinsey and Company's (2015) study which indicated that organizations with diverse leadership would perform better financially. Not only is it essential to have an ethnically diverse leadership team, but an ethnically diverse board of directors is equally essential.

Similar to the barriers discussed by Akpinar-Sposito (2013) and Beeson and Valerio (2012) that plague women, the same barriers may face people of color. Underrepresented in executive leadership roles when compared to their white counterparts, African Americans have been victims of unconscious bias by employers assuming that this population is not qualified to hold leadership roles (Gündemir et al., 2014). Gündemir et al. (2014) contended that a barrier facing African Americans stems from pro-white leadership bias. In some instances, organizational leaders are likely to promote Caucasian individuals based on traditional norms. Gündemir et al. (2014) found that some African Americans presented a barrier based on the perception that obtaining an executive leadership role is futile; therefore, these individuals do not aspire to such roles. Biases based on stereotypes presented another barrier to breaking the glass ceiling. The prominent stereotype is that this group does not resemble or fit as traditional Caucasian leaders (Gündemir et al., 2014).

Gündemir et al. (2014) examined leadership categorizing theory (LCT) and pro-white bias as a connection to barriers for the elevation of ethnic (minorities) to leadership roles. LCT explained perceived leadership through the eyes of the evaluator who matches the characteristics of the candidate with existing leadership traits that historically have been tied to Caucasian leaders. Putting individuals in perceived categories presents a bias that creates a barrier. Gündemir et al. (2014) argued that typical leadership traits could not be applied to every individual, as these traits may be biased.

In their study on the advancement of Africa American women in leadership roles, Davis and Maldonado (2015) agreed with Akpınar-Sposito (2013), Beeson and Valerio (2012), and Gündemir et al. (2014) that women and African Americans struggle to shatter the glass ceiling to ascending to executive leadership roles. Davis and Maldonado (2015) examined the connection between gender and race when attempting to ascend the leadership ladder and leadership development. Davis and Maldonado (2015) found that little research had been done on this potential connection. The African American women in the study contended that race played a more significant barrier to their success versus their gender (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Access to formal and informal networks, mentoring, and sponsors continued to be barriers to minorities aspiring to executive roles. These individuals commonly hold middle management level roles and may not receive development due to organizational culture (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Wilson (2014) explained that career advancement is an essential factor in corporate culture and minority staff must learn how to navigate this culture in order to be successful, or this culture can become a barrier to advancement. Wilson (2014) conceded

that organizational leaders had done a better job providing development opportunities to minorities, but the glass ceiling remained intact. Minorities and women need to establish skills that their Caucasian counterparts do not have to hone intentionally, such as trust and relationship building. Wilson (2014) referenced a book written by Kenneth Roldan and Gary Stern (2006). Roldan and Stern (2006) stated that minorities might not have the education and work experience to hold executive leadership roles, which presents a barrier to advancement. Wilson (2014), however, did not concur because more recent studies had shown that minorities continued to get passed over for promotions to leadership roles when competing on a level playing ground. Akpinar-Sposito (2013), Beeson and Valerio (2012), Davis and Maldonado (2015), Gündemir et al. (2014), Stewart (2016) and Wilson (2014) agreed that despite the existence of the glass ceiling, corporate leaders were embracing culture shifts to develop a pipeline of skilled individuals to fill leadership gaps and build sustainability plans that are much needed to remain competitive in this global business landscape (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Gooding et al., 2018; McKee & Froelich, 2016).

Persons with Disabilities in Leadership

When scholars reference diversity in the leadership pipeline, they traditionally were speaking about gender, race, age, but not necessarily people with disabilities (Stewart, 2016). Stewart (2016) and Hunt et al. (2015) agreed that companies with diverse leaders perform better financially. In an era where corporate leaders are challenged to remain competitive in a global business environment, CEOs struggle to find qualified, skilled staff to fill gaps in leadership roles (Khalid et al., 2016; Muhoho,

2014). Faced with this challenge, organizational leaders continue to overlook a qualified pool of employees, people with disabilities. Individuals with known disabilities are less likely to hold professional or management positions when compared to those without disabilities, 34.1% with disabilities versus 41.0% without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

Heera (2016) concurred that people with disabilities faced many barriers to ascending to leadership roles similarly to women and minorities, but differences existed, so legislation was enacted to protect those with disabilities to level the playing field for equality in employment. Heera (2016) posited that employers' perspectives toward the inclusion of people with disabilities are a crucial indicator of acceptance. As previously stated by Wilson (2014), women and minorities are expected to have or develop skills such as trust and relationship building to gain acceptance. Acceptance is connected to trust and comfortability (Wilson, 2014). Heera (2016) agreed that people with disabilities might be presented with barriers to accessing training, education, and resources that hinder their ability to gain leadership roles. Heera (2016) contended organizations that have a culture that is inclusive and supportive of people with disabilities, successful maintenance of a competitive edge is an inevitable result.

Nota et al. (2014) studied how negative employer perspectives toward people with disabilities may present a barrier to people with disabilities obtaining leadership roles. Nota et al. (2014) found that stigmas and prejudices continue to guide employers' views on the performance of people with disabilities; therefore, the employer is less likely to look at people with disabilities when evaluating eligibility for promotions to leadership

roles. Employers were more likely to focus on the disability versus the strengths that the individual brought to the role. Nota et al. (2014) posited that when employers spent time getting acquainted with the staff that had disabilities and built relationships, the employers' attitudes toward the employment of people with disabilities were more positive. Conversely, Nota et al. (2014) also found that some employers evaluated the aptitude of people with disabilities based on the type of disability versus their actual ability.

Popovich et al. (2003) found that the observers' biases guided their attitudes toward people with disabilities. Popovich et al. (2003) concurred with Nota et al. (2014) and Heera (2016) that individuals' experiences and interactions with people with disabilities could produce positive attitudes. These positive attitudes are connected to positive employment results. Heera (2016), Nota et al. (2014) and Popovich et al. (2003) conceded that even though much research had been done on attitudes of organizational leaders toward people with disabilities, little was known about the connection of these attitudes to decision making for personnel decisions for people with disabilities.

Araten-Bergman (2016) suggested that programs to develop those with disabilities were created with the thought that organizational leaders would be likely to hire qualified individuals with disabilities if they had the knowledge and skill to fill key management roles. This assumption is challenged as people with disabilities continue to be passed over and represents a higher percentage of skilled workers not in leadership roles (Burke et al., 2013; Emira et al., 2016). Emira et al. (2016) concluded that institutional barriers, such as influences from traditional social norms (stereotypes),

presented the highest obstacles for people with disabilities in obtaining leadership roles. Burke et al. (2013) found that employers continue to hold misconceptions such as people with disabilities need more attention and time to complete tasks versus staff without disabilities. When asked, the employers stated that accommodations for people with disabilities could be costly to the organization (Burke et al., 2013). Emira et al. (2016) and Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall (2014) agreed that strategies need to be created by organizational leaders to dismantle exclusive cultures versus inclusive of people with disabilities in leadership roles. Emira et al. (2016) and Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall (2014) suggested intentional socialization of people with disabilities should occur upon hiring and the creation of a positive work environment could break down biases that existed within the workforce.

Emira et al. (2016) also addressed personal barriers that can affect productivity. people with disabilities are more likely to hide or not disclose their disability for fear of discrimination (Emira et al., 2016; Kulkarni & Lengnick-Hall, 2014). Emira et al. (2016) noted that people with disabilities fears asking for needed accommodations even though they have a legal right to such accommodations. Emira et al. (2016) found that people with disabilities felt that accommodations should be provided without them having to ask and being at the mercy of their supervisor to ensure that such accommodations will happen. Heera (2016) and Wehman (2011) found that when people with disabilities are secure and supported in their roles, higher self-esteem and self-efficacy were inevitable. Despite the barriers people with disabilities face in ascension to leadership roles, several scholars (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Marsay, 2014; Powers et al., 2002; Ward &

Meyer, 1999) examined how people with disabilities responded to such barriers while exhibiting high levels of self-efficacy, self-determination, and self-advocacy.

Summary of Perceived Barriers to Ascension. The diversity of gender, race, ability, and culture in the workforce is vital to mirror the demographics of the world; hence, the global business environment (Sabharwal, 2014). Despite the shortage of qualified leaders, organizational leaders continue to overlook diverse individuals as viable candidates for leadership roles. Despite the implementation of legislation to remove barriers for diverse candidates, barriers for women, African Americans, and the disabled still exist. As women advanced to executive roles, barriers to ascending higher became more prevalent for them versus men. Barriers to earnings and the wage gap are the ongoing barriers that plague women today (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013). The glass ceiling is a common metaphor used to explain the barriers faced to succession. Similar to the barriers discussed by Akpinar-Sposito (2013) and Beeson and Valerio (2012) that plague women, the same barriers may face people of color. African Americans have been victims of unconscious bias by employers who assume this population is not qualified to hold leadership roles (Gündemir et al., 2014). Women and minorities, people with disabilities faced many barriers to ascending to leadership roles, but differences existed, so legislation was enacted to protect those with disabilities to level the playing field for equality in employment (Heera, 2016). Common barriers that face women, minorities, and people with disabilities may fall into three categories: societal barriers, internal structural barriers, and governmental barriers (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013). In the study, the exploration focused on the perceived barriers faced by people with disabilities in

ascending to a leadership role and the strategies used to overcome these barriers. The study may provide practitioners with specific strategies for closing a gap that exists for people with disabilities to ascend to leadership roles. The outcomes may inform human resource managers with clear ways to dismantle barriers and assist in identifying developmental opportunities for leaders.

Self-Efficacy Theory

As the increase of leadership studies continues, scholars not only study what traits and competencies a leader possesses but what motivates individuals to perform to their highest capacity (Day et al., 2014). Martin (2015) contended that organizational leaders must identify employees with the emotional and mental capacity to ascend to leadership roles. Martin (2015) found that the key to successful leadership development is to start with internal high performing staff. Seminal research on motivation resulted in the evolution of some theories, such as Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and Atkinson's (1957) expectancy-value theory (Isaac et al., 2001; McCormick et al., 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Bandura (1977) posited that individuals' efficacy would initiate their coping behavior when faced with obstacles. Bandura (1977) also examined how much effort individuals will exert and how long they can sustain their coping mechanisms when the obstacle or adverse experience is extensive. As the negative experience is prolonged but presents no danger to the individual, Bandura (1977) found that an individual's self-efficacy produces positive responses. The consistency of the occurrence of the experience is connected to self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) acknowledged that the individual's state of

mind is an essential factor in self-efficacy and cannot be ignored when evaluating motivation.

Javidan et al. (2016) examined leadership differences between men and women in a global market and examined leadership traits through a self-efficacy lens. Javidan et al. (2016) defined a global mindset as a set of self-efficacies that leaders must have to navigate through the challenges a global market produces. Javidan et al. (2016) contended that there is a direct connection between the complexities of a global market and the self-efficacies of the leaders that must maneuver through this landscape. Ramchunder and Martins (2014) found a connection between performance and self-efficacy. Ramchunder and Martins (2014) stated that effective leaders must manage many complex changes. The global business environment requires leaders who have a strong self-efficacy to withstand such challenges.

Ramchunder and Martins (2014) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy in leadership style. Ramchunder and Martins (2014) found that emotional intelligence and strong self-efficacy contributed to effective leadership. Ramchunder and Martins (2014) agreed with Bandura (1977) and Javidan et al. (2016) that self-efficacy is connected to performance. Ramchunder and Martins (2014) posited that today's leaders must possess the ability to influence behavior in others to affect performance outcomes. Emotional intelligence is a critical competency that is critical for leaders to have and, combined with self-efficacy, will produce the needed outcomes.

Self-Efficacy and People with Disabilities

McCormick et al. (2002) conducted a review to determine the role of self-efficacy in leadership performance and agreed with previous results of studies by Bass (1990) and Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) that indicated self-efficacy is directly related to leadership performance. Leaders guided by high self-efficacy establish stretch goals, ambitions, and how much effort they will expend to accomplish associated tasks. McCormick et al. (2002) also stated that persons' experiences could hinder or enhance their self-efficacy when they encounter harsh or threatening situations. Wehman (2011) agreed with Emira et al. (2016) and Heera (2016) that when accommodations for people with disabilities are present, people with disabilities exhibit high levels of self-efficacy and self-determination. Wehman (2011) found that 11 of the participants exhibited strong self-efficacy and self-determination when selecting career choices.

Beveridge et al. (2002) found what they defined as the informing stage of an individual as the point in time when an individual learns about life choices about the world, work, opportunities, and external culture. In the context of people with disabilities, Beveridge et al. (2002) posited that people with disabilities exhibit self-efficacy tendencies similar to those that do not have a disability. The severity and timing of the disability determine levels of self-efficacy. Beveridge et al. (2002) observed that the timing of the disability in connection to career development was closely related to career self-efficacy. Career self-efficacy is influenced by pre-career onset disabilities, mid-career onset disabilities, and episodic disabilities.

Some researchers have examined career self-efficacy, evolving to today's leadership efficacy (Bass, 1990; McCormick et al., 2002; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) examined career development strategies for people with disabilities and agreed that career development behaviors such as career researching, setting career paths, and planning are no different for people with disabilities versus non-disabled job seekers. The individual's self-efficacy controls career development behaviors. Strategies centered on self-management for career development for people with disabilities requires individuals to be proactive, and proactivity requires high levels of self-efficacy to work past barriers they may encounter. Based on the research done by Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014), a similar consensus arose showing that people with disabilities self-efficacy is connected to experiences, the timing of the disability, and self-management abilities.

Summary of Self-Efficacy. As the increase in the number of leadership studies continues, scholars not only study what traits and competencies leaders possess, but what motivates individuals to perform to their highest capacity (Day et al., 2014). When examining theories regarding motivation, some theories, such as Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and Atkinson's (1957) expectancy-value theory (Isaac et al., 2001; McCormick et al., 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) are referenced most frequently in leadership studies. Bandura (1977) posited that individuals' efficacy would initiate their coping behavior when faced with obstacles. Bandura (1977) acknowledged that the individual's state of mind is an essential factor in self-efficacy and cannot be ignored when evaluating motivation.

Javidan et al. (2016) contended that there is a direct connection between the complexities of a global market and the self-efficacies of the leaders that must maneuver through this landscape. Ramchunder and Martins (2014) stated that effective leaders must manage many complex changes. The global business environment requires leaders who have a strong self-efficacy to withstand such challenges. Ramchunder and Martins (2014) found that emotional intelligence and strong self-efficacy contributed to effective leadership.

In the study, an exploration of how leaders with disabilities served to understand their perceptions of barriers they faced obtaining a leadership role as well as the strategies they used. Overcoming barriers requires these individuals to summon up motivation, acquire the needed resources, and put a plan of action in place to accomplish a goal (Bandura, 1977; Javidan et al., 2016; Johri & Misra, 2014). Based on Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, these leaders with disabilities need to initiate their coping behavior when faced with barriers to ascending to leadership roles.

Expectancy-Value Theory

As the theory of self-efficacy has been directly connected to the performance of leaders (Wood & Bandura, 1989; Javidan et al., 2016), so has the theory of expectancy-value. Leadership theorists (Javidan et al., 2016) focused on not only the competencies leaders must possess but what motivates individuals to perform. Atkinson (1957) examined motivation as a determinant of performance. Atkinson (1957) sought to solve two problems with the motivational theory. The first problem was what direction or action an individual would choose when faced with some choices. The second was how

long the individual would stay on that path of action when faced with obstacles or barriers. Atkinson (1957) specifically sought to determine the strength of achievement motivation as a continuation of McClelland's (1953) achievement motivation theory focusing on achievement motivation as a connection to performance. Atkinson (1957) posited that an expectancy of performance would result from some action taken. The strength of the expectancy is based on the outcome of the actions. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) examined the expectancy-value theory, resulting in an expectancy-value model. Critical constructs of the model included belief in ability, the expectancy of success, and the value of specific tasks.

Wigfield and Eccles (2000) also examined the above constructs in relation to performance and activity selection. Although their study focused on children and adolescents, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) contended that the individuals' beliefs influence expectancy and value constructs in their ability to accomplish tasks, goals, and experiences. The variables of Wigfield and Eccles's (2000) model, ability beliefs and expectancy, were the focus of the study. The participants were asked questions about their perceived ability in math and if they expected to be successful in math. Ability is based on the present and expectancy is based on the future. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) referenced Bandura's (1977) views on expectancy-value theories in which Bandura compared self-efficacy to expectancy-value, stating that self-efficacy is focused on performance and choice, which expectancy is focused on outcomes. Self-efficacy and expectancy-value are based on the belief that the individual has control over their ability to accomplish the task and the sustained outcome.

Wigfield and Eccles (2000) examined the expectancy of success versus performance outcome. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) defined achievement value in three ways: first as attainment value, secondly as intrinsic value, and lastly as utility value. Attainment value is defined as the importance of doing well on a task, intrinsic value is the internal satisfaction of completing a task, and utility value is based on the usefulness of the task concerning the individuals' future goals. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) found that as the students aged, their expectancy to do well in math declined, as their self-efficacy in reading increased. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) posited that the decrease in achievement value might have been connected to the students' ability to understand feedback and making comparisons to peers as they age. Bandura (1977) did not examine self-efficacy in connection to age.

Expectancy-Value Theory and Leadership

When examining motivational behavior, scholars rely on studies conducted by Ajzen (1985), Bandura (1977), McClelland (1953), and Atkinson (1957) as the foundation to draw connections between an individual's expectations, outcomes, performance, and utility. In leadership studies, McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) posited that some leaders possess the leadership motive pattern allowing them to achieve high levels of leadership roles in their organizations. McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) hypothesized that leaders valued power, high self-control, and activity inhibition (decision making) competencies making them great managers with an expectation of achievement as leaders. Winter (1991) challenged this hypothesis by stating it was too general, and the "leadership motive pattern" presented in all managerial positions, not

just top leadership roles. McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) found it relevant to understand that leaders with high achievement values care more about their success versus influencing others to be successful. McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) also found a high connection between leadership motive pattern and achievement and rate of promotions in non-technical managers. McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) cautioned that valued power, high self-control, and activity inhibition (decision making) competencies were the only variables tested, so results cannot be assumed across other competencies.

Isaac et al. (2001) examined the expectancy-value theory and a motivational model to determine how this model is connected to the motives that individuals exhibit in obtaining leadership positions. Isaac et al. (2001) agreed with McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) that individuals acting through self-interest would select the action that will maximize the desired outcome. In Isaac et al.'s (2001) research, that outcome is a leadership position. Isaac et al. (2001) specifically examined the connection between expectancy and leadership concepts to determine if the result was the creation of a motivational culture, high-performance outcomes, and a leadership role. Isaac et al. (2001) believed that all organizations need leaders at all levels, not employees, to remain competitive in the global marketplace. Isaac et al. (2001) contended that it is essential to eliminate the distinction between manager and leader. All roles must be leaders for the organization to be successful. Isaac et al. (2001) maintained that expectancy theory is a vehicle for individuals to realize their goals because of extrinsic motivational factors, such as pay, can be incentive enough for self-interest to drive the individual forward.

Isaac et al. (2001) found that expectancy-value theory has a direct connection to performance and the motivation of the individual to perform.

Even though these studies focused on leaders in general, Isaac et al. (2001) contended that expectancy-value theory could be applied to many situations, such as education, when evaluating the connection between motivation, choice, and achievement. A connection to leadership concepts remains a landscape to evolve. A review of the literature about expectancy-value theory revealed no studies focused on leaders with disabilities and expectancy-value theory as a concept of leadership studies. This gap poses an issue for leadership studies because a potential source of skilled employees, individuals with disabilities, struggle to ascend to leadership roles while organizational leaders struggle to gain a competitive edge in developing a diverse base of skilled leadership (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017). The lack of known effective strategies for individuals with disabilities to overcome such barriers to ascending to a le

Summary of Expectancy-Value Theory. As the theory of self-efficacy has been directly connected to the performance of leaders (Javidan et al., 2016; Wood & Bandura, 1989), so has the theory of expectancy-value- theory. Atkinson (1957) examined motivation as a determinant of performance. Atkinson (1957) sought to solve two problems with the motivational theory. The first problem was what direction or action an individual would choose when faced with some choices. The second was how long the individual would stay on that path of action when faced with obstacles or barriers. Atkinson (1957) posited that an expectancy of performance would result from some action taken. The strength of the expectancy is based on the outcome of the actions.

Bandura (1977) compared self-efficacy to expectancy-value, stating that self-efficacy is focused on performance and choice, while expectancy is focused on outcomes. Self-efficacy and expectancy-value are based on the belief that the individual has control over their ability to accomplish the task and the sustained outcome (Bandura, 1977). Wigfield and Eccles (2000) also examined the above constructs in relation to performance and activity selection. Although their study focused on children and adolescents, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) contended that the individuals' beliefs influence expectancy and value constructs in their ability to accomplish tasks, goals, and experiences. McClelland's (1953) and Atkinson's (1957) theories provide the foundation for scholar-practitioners to draw connections between an individual's expectations, outcomes, performance, and utility when examining leader motivation and the expectancy of desired outcomes. In leadership studies, McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) posited that some leaders possess the leadership motive pattern allowing them to achieve high levels of leadership roles in their organizations. When examining leader motivation and the expectancy of desired outcomes, these two concepts provide a part of the foundation for the study.

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of a sample of leaders with a disability in seven nonprofit organizations about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a leadership role and effective strategies in overcoming such barriers. To overcome barriers to ascension, people with disabilities must believe in and expect success. An individual's belief in how well he or she will accomplish and value the task influences their choice, persistence, and performance (Atkinson, 1957). The belief in

future success in disability studies is essential in examining the motivation for leaders with disabilities to ascend to leadership roles. Expectancies undergird success (Atkinson, 1957).

Employment Outcomes for Leaders with Disabilities

The U.S. Department of Justice (2019) is the division of the U.S. government that adjudicates the rights of people with disabilities. The definition of a disability, according to the Americans with Disabilities Act, is that a qualified disability is a mental or physical impairment that limits one's ability to participate in any aspect of life's significant activities. The person also has a history of impairment or is known by others to have an impairment (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). In the current study, qualified disability pertains to the type of disability a leader in the sample may have. The ADA does not name any impairments as qualified disabilities. The interpretation is left up to the individual to disclose the impairment.

Self-determination and Advocacy

people with disabilities who are qualified to work have historically been underemployed when compared to people without a qualified disability (Wahab & Ayub, 2016). Ward and Meyer (1999) examined the history of self-determination of people with disabilities, especially those with Asperger syndrome, cognitive disabilities, and physical disabilities. Ward and Meyer (1999) found that even though their review focused on three types of disabilities, all disabled individuals were striving to gain acceptance and respect in their sphere of influence.

Self-determination and Self-advocacy in Leadership Development. Ward and Meyer (1999) contended that disabled individuals need to harness their self-determination, which results in them taking control of their leadership development. Ward and Meyer (1999) presented a comprehensive recount of the history of the disability movement, including accounts of discrimination, institutionalization, and progression to advocacy. Ward and Meyer (1999) stated that self-advocacy and self-determination evolved from Sweden's Benget Nirje's (1972) normalization principle, stating that individuals with disabilities have the right to self-advocate. Self-advocacy groups in the United States followed quickly behind. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) began self-determination efforts when staff with disabilities developed the definition of self-determination (Ward & Meyer, 1999). The definition is the attitudes and abilities which lead individuals to set goals for themselves and take the initiative to accomplish those goals (Ward & Meyer, 1999). Ward and Meyer (1999) found that people with disabilities with self-determination will self-advocate and have opportunities to gain leadership roles that previously were unattainable.

Self-determination Strategies. Similar to Ward and Meyer's (1999) examination of self-determination, Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) examined how self-determination is a determinant in how people with disabilities control choices and their career development. Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) concurred with other scholars (Cafferky, 2016; Marsay, 2014; Nota et al., 2014; Wehman, 2011) that knowledgeable and skilled people with disabilities continue to be underutilized or overlooked in an environment when a need for skilled staff is at an all-time high. Through a self-determination lens,

Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) identified some strategies for people with disabilities to utilize in their career development. Their study, unlike some conducted in the past, provided practical strategies for development.

Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) found that people with disabilities took control over their development more often than their counterparts without a disability. Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) agreed with Stewart (2016) that having a diverse group of skilled employees in the leadership pipeline is advantageous for organizations. The diversity of employees is not just based on gender but also people with disabilities. Inclusive cultures translate to high productivity.

Self-determination Traits and Strategies. Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) and Stewart (2016) found that organizations with diverse leadership are high performers, highly innovative, and problem solvers. Also, individuals who self-advocate and are proactive in their development possess self-determination traits. These self-determination traits include but are not limited to control over ones' self-efficacy, proactive personality, control over career development, and occupational self-efficacy. These behaviors are directly linked to high performance, higher pay, and career satisfaction (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014).

Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) suggested clear strategies for people with disabilities to control their development. These self-development strategies include but are not limited to keeping an open mind and be persistent, getting people to see ability versus inability, actively participating in advocacy initiatives, and assist others with a disability in their career development. These strategies, when applied, resulted in a clear

direction for development for people with disabilities but also for those without a disability. Despite the development of legislation, for example, Titles II and III of the ADA, to protect and prevent discrimination against those with disabilities, people with disabilities continue to lag in gaining leadership roles when compared to those with similar skills but no disability (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Wahab & Ayub, 2016).

Summary of Self-determination and Advocacy. Ward and Meyer (1999)

examined the history of self-determination of people with disabilities. Ward and Meyer (1999) found that all disabled individuals were striving to gain acceptance and respect in their sphere of influence. Ward and Meyer (1999) contended that disabled individuals need to harness their self-determination, which results in them taking control of their leadership development. Similar to Ward and Meyer's (1999) examination of self-determination, Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) examined how self-determination is a determinant in how people with disabilities control choices and their career development.

Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) found that people with disabilities took control over their development more often than their counterparts without a disability. Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) concurred with other scholars (Cafferky, 2016; Marsay, 2014; Nota et al., 2014; Wehman, 2011) that knowledgeable and skilled people with disabilities continue to be underutilized or overlooked in an environment when a need for skilled staff is at an all-time high. Through a self-determination lens, Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) identified some strategies for people with disabilities to utilize in their career development. These self-development strategies include but are not limited to keeping an open mind and be persistent, getting people to see ability versus inability, actively

participating in advocacy initiatives, and assist others with a disability in their career development.

Although Kulkarni and Gopakumar (2014) identified some strategies for people with disabilities to use in their career development, the results of the study may provide practitioners with specific strategies for closing a gap that existed for people with disabilities to ascend to leadership roles. Because people with disabilities are faced with known external biases (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; F. Owen et al., 2015), understanding how these individuals, when in leadership roles, perceive their ability to sustain an optimal level of performance provides insight to those seeking to ascend to leadership positions. The concept of self-determination benefits the study, as this concept provides a foundation to show the connection between self-determination and how people with disabilities exhibit this trait not only once employed but when their skills and knowledge are used in a meaningful manner (Cafferky, 2016; Wehman, 2011).

Employment Legislation

According to the World Health Organization (2015), people with disabilities continue to experience lower levels of employment opportunities in comparison to those without a disability because people with disabilities are underutilized and encounter obstacles to meaningful employment (Kruse & Schur, 2003; Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Markel & Barclay, 2009; Stolarczyk, 2016; Wahab & Ayub, 2016; Wehman, 2011). In response to the disparity in employment opportunities for people with disabilities, governments across the globe implemented legislation as a means of leveling the playing field and prevent discriminatory actions on behalf of corporate leaders. In the

United States, the ADA was enacted in 1990 as an attempt to prohibit discrimination in employment. The Amendment of the ADA was enacted in 2008, expanding the reach of the ADA. Similar legislation covered by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, also addresses acts of discrimination.

ADA of 1990

Gould et al. (2015) conducted a review of where the ADA stands after 25 years in existence, seeking to determine if the intent of the act had accomplished what it was intended to do, which was to protect those with disabilities from discrimination in employment and employment opportunities. Gould et al. (2015) contended that the ADA needs to move beyond legislation and become part of the knowledge and employment practices of all organizations. The low rate of people with disabilities in leadership roles, as of 2017, was reported as 33.7% with disabilities versus 40.3% without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Gould et al. (2015) stated that it was difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the ADA to accomplish the goal in employment practices. An additional challenge was the definition of what qualified as a disability. The ADA does not list what a qualified disability is. The ADA amendment of 2008 was enacted to clarify what is a qualified disability. The definition of a qualified disability, according to the ADA, is a mental or physical impairment that impedes or limits one's ability to participate in any aspect of life's significant activities actively; the person has a history of impairment or is known by others to have an impairment (U.S. Department of Justice,

2019). In the current study, qualified disability pertains to the type of disability a leader in the sample may have.

After 25 years, implementation practices continued to be a challenge. Gould et al. (2015) examined records from national organizations such as the National Council on Disability and found that gaps in the implementation of the ADA continued after 25 years. Gould et al. (2015) concluded that individual perspectives on disability have changed and attitudes toward people with disabilities continue to shift in a positive direction. Secondly, self-advocacy for people with disabilities has gotten stronger, which translates to their ability to request accommodations without fear as well as the ability to face and counter barriers or obstacles to employment and advancement opportunities.

Wahab and Ayub (2016) agreed that people with disabilities continues to be underrepresented and underutilized despite the ADA. Underutilization continues to be a problem across the globe. Wahab and Ayub (2016) examined the effectiveness of the legislation in Malaysia and concluded that legislation has fallen short of the intended goals. Laws are not enough to move people with disabilities into equitable positions in employment or positioned for opportunities for advancement.

U.S. EEOC

The U.S. EEOC is responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against an individual for their gender, age, disability, religion, race, color, pregnancy, and sexual orientation (EEOC, 2019). The regulations are voted on by the commission but not without input from the public. Congress passes these laws, and they are signed by the President of the United States of America.

The EEOC is required by law to enforce anti-discrimination cases against anyone with a disability about employment, compensation, promotions, and layoffs. Harassment of a people with disabilities is also illegal, although simple taunting does not constitute harassment (EEOC, 2019). As recent as 2012, the EEOC brought a suit against Henry's Turkey Service for exploiting workers with disabilities. The company paid the disabled workers only \$.41/ hour and provided deplorable living conditions. The company was ordered to pay \$240 million in damages (Meyer et al., 2017). Meyer et al. (2017) contended that even with legislation in place to prevent such events, these events are more prevalent than is known. The events were reported to the Iowa Department of Human Services; it took a whistleblower for action to be taken.

Employment exploitation of people with disabilities decreased because of the impact the EEOC was making in enforcing the laws. Monteleone (2017) concurred with Meyer et al. (2017) and Pattison and Sanders (2017) on the need for a review of the impact of EEOC on employment discrimination and people with disabilities. Monteleone (2017) examined the challenges of individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) encountered even though they were qualified by skill level to be employed. Monteleone (2017) stated that individuals with ID obtain self-sufficiency, social acceptance, and economic independence. Legislation enacted to bridge this gap started with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Monteleone (2017) stated that this legislation was the beginning of critical strides to ensure people with disabilities were treated fairly. The Rehabilitation Act mainly protected severely disabled individuals.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014) was enacted to bring resources to individuals with disabilities seeking employment, training, and development. This act expanded previous acts, such as the Rehabilitation Act (1973), to ensure that employers were encouraged to make employment opportunities available (Monteleone, 2017). Monteleone (2017) warned that these legislations give a false impression about the state of employing people with disabilities. In the last report by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), only 34.1% of people with disabilities held leadership or management positions when compared to 41.0% without disabilities.

Pattison and Sanders (2017) examined a case study regarding the firing of a police officer with ADHD. The loose definition of a qualified disability required the EEOC to find in favor of the police officer who stated he had a disability, ADHD, and therefore could not be fired for what was perceived to be unacceptable behavior by his superiors. Pattison and Sanders (2017) agreed with Meyer et al. (2017) and Monteleone (2017) that disability legislation created ambiguity in implementation because of the looseness of what is considered a qualified disability.

Summary of Employment Legislation. people with disabilities are underutilized and encounter obstacles to meaningful employment (Kruse & Schur, 2003; Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Markel & Barclay, 2009; Stolarczyk, 2016; Wahab & Ayub, 2016; Wehman, 2011). In response to the disparity in employment opportunities for people with disabilities, governments across the globe implemented legislation as a means of leveling the playing field and prevent discriminatory actions on behalf of corporate leaders. In the United States, the ADA was enacted in 1990 as an attempt to prohibit discrimination in

employment. The Amendment of the ADA was enacted in 2008, expanding the reach of the ADA. Similar legislation covered by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which also addresses acts of discrimination.

Gould et al. (2015) stated that it was difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the ADA to accomplish the goal in employment practices. An additional challenge was the definition of what qualified as a disability. The ADA does not list what a qualified disability is. The ADA amendment of 2008 was enacted to clarify what is a qualified disability. One clear focus of the ADA is the concept of accommodation. Gould et al. (2015) contended that even though the ADA has some challenges with implementation, people with disabilities have made strides with asking for accommodations.

The U.S. EEOC is responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against an individual for their gender, age, disability, religion, race, color, pregnancy, and sexual orientation (EEOC, 2019). Employment exploitation of people with disabilities decreased because of the impact the EEOC was making in enforcing the laws. Monteleone (2017) concurred with Meyer et al. (2017) and Pattison and Sanders (2017) on the need for a review of the impact of EEOC on employment discrimination and people with disabilities. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014) was enacted to bring resources to individuals with disabilities seeking employment, training, and development. This act expanded previous acts, such as the Rehabilitation Act (1973), to ensure that employers were encouraged to make employment opportunities available (Monteleone, 2017).

Common Methods and Techniques

Leadership

The literature review focusing on leadership studies covered articles that were reviews of the evolution of leadership scholarship, leadership theories, and strategies organizational leaders need to consider for the sustainability of their companies. Leadership studies are quickly changing to keep pace with the changing global market and the need for organizational leaders to develop skilled leadership staff (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Eichenger, 2018; Foster, 2015; Gooding et al., 2018; Griffith et al., 2018; White, 2017). Stone et al. (2004), Landis et al. (2014), and Dinh et al. (2014) discussed the differences between quantitative studies on leadership versus studies with a qualitative method. Dinh et al. (2014) contended that quantitative research might not be an appropriate research method in leadership studies because quantitative studies usually focused on leadership processes in a global manner and within a single level of analysis. Therefore, the use of quantitative research to study leadership is not effective because the importance of time is not considered in organizational operations and changes (Dinh et al., 2014). Dinh et al. (2014) favored qualitative methods for leadership research, stating that multiple levels of analysis must happen but many leadership theory creations, 66 as of 2014, present a limitation to this view. Dugan (2017), in some ways, agreed with Dinh et al. (2014) regarding the complexities of leadership theories as the landscape of leadership studies is changing. Dugan (2017) identified the need to deconstruct traditional scholar-practitioners' views of leadership theories to keep pace with changes. Dugan

(2017) contended that foundation and emerging theories should be condensed to 20 theories grounded in clusters focused on an ongoing state of evolution.

Mumford (2011) believed that leadership is a phenomenon that requires many levels of analysis. Mumford (2011) stated that the levels of analysis are individual, dyadic, group/team, organizational, and societal. Mumford (2011) contended that five methods are generally employed in leadership studies: survey studies, field investigations, experimental, historiometric, and quantitative. When deciding which method to use, some considerations are critical no matter which method is used (Mumford, 2011). Mumford (2011) used all five methods and indicated that no one method is more effective than another. The phenomenon being studied directs the effectiveness of each method (Mumford, 2011).

Leadership Development

The study of leadership development has emerged as a significant phenomenon in leadership scholarship (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Hanson, 2013; Maheshwari & Yadav, 2018). When reviewing leadership development and its evolution, scholars agreed that additional work is needed to clarify how effective formalized development efforts are affecting organizations and leaders (Hanson, 2013). Collins (2001) and Day and Dragoni (2015) stated that additional studies are needed because of the infancy of leadership development studies. Collins (2001) conducted a literature review focused on leadership development. Like Collins (2001), Day et al. (2014) conducted a literature review, concurring that the reviews on leadership development are insufficient to determine the

effectiveness of leadership development in organizations because implications remain unclear.

Maheshwari and Yadav (2018) conducted a qualitative study to examine leadership development strategies and concurred with Collins (2001) and Day et al. (2014) that strategies to expand leadership development studies are limited and insufficient to determine if any real impact on organizational leaders is occurring. In an effort to develop a leadership development interface model that organizational leaders could employ to ensure alignment between leaders and organizations concerning effective leadership development, Hanson (2013) conducted a qualitative study. Hanson (2013) conducted case studies to explore the concept of leader/organization alignment. Hanson (2013) also agreed that research should continue as leadership development continues to evolve.

Staff Development

In more recent reviews conducted between 2010-2018, Collins and Holton (2004), Griffith et al. (2018), and Gurdjian et al. (2014) found that staff development programs such as training may be useful and the individual is responsible for the management of their development. Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) conducted a quantitative study to examine the effectiveness of training programs and the overall changes in effectiveness over the period 1952-2002. Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) took a meta-analytical approach and reviewed a sample of past research of 4,779 subjects. The limitation of their study was the use of the same methodology of past research. Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) examined the effectiveness of training

programs in this period but limited the sample to include only the business industry. Studies conducted by Collins and Holton (2004) included an expanded sample to include, as an example, the medical field.

Collins and Holton's (2004) study was intended to be a continuation of the meta-analysis conducted by Burke and Day (1989). Collins and Holton (2004) conducted a quantitative study focused on an examination of the effectiveness of staff development training. Collins and Holton (2004) stressed that conducting a meta-analysis comes with challenges centered on the analysis used in prior research with multiple designs. Collins and Holton (2004) used four designs to mitigate questions concerning the validity of the analysis and conducted individual analyses. The four designs were posttest with a controlled group, pre-test-posttest w/control group, correlation and single group, and single group pre-test-posttest. Limitations existed in Collins and Holton's (2004) study due to the use of Burke and Day's (1989) results, which were gathered when the meta-analysis was relatively new, and the instruments have since been updated.

Underrepresentation in Executive Leadership

Akpinar-Sposito (2013) conducted a qualitative exploratory case study to examine the barrier, glass ceiling, and the historical definition of the term in context to women gaining leadership roles. Akpinar-Sposito (2013) specifically examined the perceived effects of social and organizational culture on women gaining leadership roles. The article was limiting, as it did not include the results of the study and only focused on three concepts: barriers, social, and organizational culture. Christman and McClellan (2008) conducted a Delphi study to examine how women in educational leadership programs

sustained their leadership roles after 10 plus years. Christman and McClellan (2008) agreed with Akpinar-Sposito that women in leadership roles experience gender bias. The purpose of Christman and McClellan's (2008) study was to explore the resiliency these marginalized participants experienced and what motivated them to overcome the barriers they faced. Christman and McClellan (2008) concluded that the women in their study were able to maneuver through societal barriers placed in their paths. Sabharwal's (2014) study results showed that diversity management alone could not improve performance. Like Akpinar-Sposito (2013), Sabharwal (2014) agreed that diverse workforces contributed to higher performance levels.

Across the body of literature reviewed for underrepresented individuals in executive leadership, the methodologies applied were quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative designs were case studies; qualitative data collection techniques were interviews, documents, and literature reviews. Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) and Sabharwal (2014) chose surveys as their data collection techniques. The quantitative studies among the literature reviewed were meta-analyses. Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) and Sabharwal (2014) indicated new evaluation methods needed to be implemented in future studies. Despite the methodology chosen, Akpinar-Sposito (2013), Maheshwari and Yadav (2018), Skylar Powell and Yalcin (2010) and Sabharwal (2014) agreed that the studies conducted provided a foundation for future leadership studies. As per Dinh et al. (2014), future researchers need to ensure that the methodology approach chosen for leadership studies aligns with the underlying theory.

Conducting the literature review for the study revealed a gap focused on how leaders with a disability overcame barriers to obtaining a leadership role and the strategies they used to attain the role. Case study research is appropriate to address this research gap by exploring how a single case of leaders with disabilities in nonprofit organizations overcome the barriers they faced and the strategies that helped them. Case study research is appropriate to explore the participants' perspectives on an issue in their natural environment and answer "what" or "how" questions to explore possible outcomes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Harrison et al., 2017; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). In the study, the natural environment is nonprofit organizations and the outcome is attaining a leadership position as a person with a disability.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter included a review of extant and current literature that focused primarily on employment practices, specifically from a leadership lens. The expansion of the global marketplace resulted in the evolution of leadership studies, including leadership and staff development as major concepts to this scholarship (Dinh et al., 2014; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). According to Stone et al. (2004) and Landis et al. (2014), organizational leaders focused on shifts from managing productivity versus creating employees that lead. This transition required organizational leaders to focus on employees' skills and competencies. From this transition, the need to develop employees' leadership talents became significantly higher levels of performance, hence the emergence of leadership and staff development efforts (Dinh et al., 2014; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018).

Consistent themes emerged from the literature reviewed centered around barriers perceived by diverse populations such as women, ethnic cultures, and people with disabilities. Similarities between these groups emerged in hiring practices, but mainly the challenges each faced with ascending to leadership roles were prevalent. Akpinar-Sposito (2013) and Beeson and Valerio (2012) examined the barriers women faced to gaining leadership roles, while Akpinar-Sposito (2013) and Beeson and Valerio (2012) examined minorities and the barriers this group faced in gaining leadership roles. Davis and Maldonado (2015), Gündemir et al. (2014), Stewart (2016) and Wilson (2014) agreed that despite the existence of the glass ceiling, corporate leaders are embracing culture shifts to develop a pipeline of skilled individuals that may include women and minorities.

A gap existed in the past and current literature concerning strategies available for people with disabilities and other diverse groups as to how to tackle obstacles to ascending to leadership roles (Bruyère, 2016; Karpur & Vanlooy, 2014; Nuwagaba, & Rule, 2016; Shakespeare et al., 2019). Much of the literature focused on the underemployment and underutilization of skilled and qualified people with disabilities especially in a time when leaders are scarce (Kruse & Schur, 2003; Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Markel & Barclay, 2009; Stolarczyk, 2016; Wahab & Ayub, 2016; Wehman, 2011). A review in literature focused on anti-discrimination legislation revealed similar views that implementation and execution of the intended goals of the laws are difficult to gauge whether the laws are effective (Gould et al., 2015; Meyer et al., 2017; Monteleone, 2017; Pattison & Sanders, 2017). National agencies work to

maintain records of effectiveness, but unclear definitions of qualified disabilities hinder these efforts (Gould et al., 2015; Monteleone, 2017).

Lastly, an examination of literature focused on motivational theories was conducted to explore how self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977; Javidan et al., 2016; McCormick et al., 2002) and expectancy-value theory (Isaac et al., 2001; McCormick et al., 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) may undergird how people with disabilities overcame perceived barriers and strategy development. Bandura (1977) posited that individuals' efficacy would initiate their coping behavior when faced with obstacles. Bandura (1977) acknowledged that the individual's state of mind is an essential factor in self-efficacy and cannot be ignored when evaluating motivation.

Javidan et al. (2016) contended that there is a direct connection between the complexities of a global market and the self-efficacies of the leaders that must maneuver through this landscape, while Ramchunder and Martins (2014) stated that effective leaders must manage many complex changes. The global business environment requires leaders who have a strong self-efficacy to withstand such challenges. In leadership studies, McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) posited that some leaders possess the leadership motive pattern allowing them to achieve high levels of leadership roles in their organizations. McClelland and Boyatzis (1982) hypothesized that leaders valued power, high self-control, and activity inhibition (decision making) competencies making them great managers with an expectation of achievement as leaders. Winter (1991) challenged this hypothesis by stating it was too general and the leadership motive pattern presented in all managerial positions, not just top leadership roles.

Isaac et al. (2001) examined the expectancy-value theory and a motivational model to determine how this model is connected to the motives that individuals exhibit in obtaining leadership positions. Isaac et al. (2001) agreed with Winter (1991) that all organizations need leaders at all levels, not employees, to remain competitive in the global marketplace. Isaac et al. (2001) found that expectancy-value theory has a direct connection to performance and the motivation of the individual to perform.

Chapter 3 will include a description of the qualitative exploratory single embedded case study design and the rationale and appropriateness for its use in the study. Details on how the study was conducted, including participant selection, methodology, and data analysis are discussed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of qualitative validity and ethical concerns.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single embedded case study was to explore the perceptions of a sample of leaders with a disability in seven nonprofit organizations about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a leadership role and their effective strategies for overcoming such barriers. Case study research is characterized by a focus on a bounded situation and triangulation of multiple data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). The focus of this study was on the bounded situation of barriers to attaining organizational leadership by people with disabilities. The units of analysis were the barriers encountered and strategies used by leaders with different disabilities in multiple organizations. The multiple data sources triangulated included interviews and a virtual focus group to explore interview themes.

The following sections of Chapter 3 include an explanation of the appropriate research design and the reason that the design fits best for the study. The role of the researcher is described, including how personal bias was mitigated throughout the study, the participant criteria and selection, instrumentation to be used such as interviews, and how the data were analyzed. The chapter concluded with how trustworthiness was supported. A discussion regarding ethical consideration, conclusion, and transition to Chapter 4 will conclude this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single embedded case study was to explore the perceptions of a sample of leaders with a disability in seven nonprofit organizations in the nonprofit sector about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a

leadership role and effective strategies in overcoming such barriers. The method for this study was qualitative and the design was an exploratory single embedded case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2010; Scholz & Tietje, 2002; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative research is underpinned in discovering how individuals grow to understand their experiences and how they use these experiences to build their world around them.

According to Yin (2014), five rationales exist for using case study research: critical, unusual, common, revelatory, and longitudinal. The study aligned with a common single embedded case because the goal was to explore “how” or “what” circumstances in a single case. In this study, I focused on how a single case of leaders with disabilities in the nonprofit sector overcame barriers to ascending to a leadership role and what strategies they used. An exploratory single embedded case is characterized by the focus on exploring a subunit or subunits. The subunits provide for richer analysis supporting the overarching case (Yin, 2014). Case studies present the participants’ perspectives on an issue in their natural setting and answer *what* questions to explore possible outcomes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Harrison et al., 2017; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). The study aligned with single exploratory embedded case study because the real-life contextual influences within the bounded situation consist of a single case of leaders with disabilities and the subunits of barriers to ascension, strategies used to overcome the barriers, and the contextual influences of the organization. The subunits encompass the barriers encountered and strategies used by leaders with different disabilities in multiple

organizations, with multiple sources of data for triangulation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014).

Erikkson and Kovalainen (2010) examined how case study research was used historically in social psychology, education, medicine, and law and is recently being used in business. Erikkson and Kovalainen (2010) stated that business leaders are using case studies to examine operational efficiency and to train their staff teams in best practices learned from real-life business case studies. Business case studies are conducted to solve problems and examine fast-changing business practices reasonably and practically.

The exploratory single embedded case study was appropriate for this study to solve a leadership problem of a potential source of skilled employees, individuals with disabilities, struggled to ascend to leadership roles while organizational leaders struggled to gain a competitive edge in developing a diverse base of skilled leadership (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017). The case study is an inquiry of a contemporary phenomenon and the background of the case is not known (Yin, 2014). Based on Yin's (2014) description, the study aligned with an inquiry of a contemporary phenomenon in which the background of the case is not known nor how the subunits provide context to the phenomenon being explored.

Role of the Researcher

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the role of the researcher is as the primary instrument, data collector, and analyst of the study. An advantage of conducting qualitative research is that the researcher can be nimble and responsive to any changes that may happen during the stages of the study. One disadvantage of conducting

qualitative research is the biases and subjectivities of the researcher could affect the findings and results of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In this study, my role as the researcher was to select the participants, collect data, and analyze the responses. The integrity of the responses must be maintained to ensure an accurate reflection and interpretation of the participants' information. I conducted a thorough and extensive literature review to provide a clear context to the necessity of the study. As a leader in a nonprofit organization, my experiences may be similar to the experiences of the participants in the study. These possibly similar experiences may include perceived barriers faced in gaining a leadership role. I used a reflexive exercise aimed at identifying the researcher's beliefs, values, and emotions about the research topic (Chenail, 2011; Roulston & Shelton, 2015), potential biases were disclosed to the dissertation committee. During the data collection and analysis processes, I used multiple data collection methods, such as member checking and continue reflexive exercise, to help mitigate bias.

Through purposive and snowball sampling, I solicited a sample of seven leaders of nonprofit organizations, specifically executive directors, vice -presidents, COOs, presidents, and CEOs. I began sampling by using my existing network of nonprofit organizations and leaders with known disabilities to identify potential participants through purposive sampling. Leaders of these organizations volunteered to participate and referred other leaders who meet the sampling criteria using a snowball sampling technique.

Leaders from my organization, although it meets the criteria, were not included in the study to avoid bias, perceived coercion, and lack of confidentiality. A prior relationship existed with some of the participants, but the participants hold higher levels of leadership. I gained access to leaders with disabilities in these organizations through the relationship I hold with the gatekeepers at each site.

Methodology

The methodology determines how the researcher views the study, what the focus of the study will include, and how the researcher will interact with the participants and with the data collected (Mills et al., 2010). In a qualitative design a phenomenon is explored from the participants' point of view (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell (2013) stated that qualitative researchers commonly examine a small sample of individuals or situations and secure individuality throughout the analysis process. The interest rather than the process is the focus of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In case study research, five components are important: (a) the study's question, (b) the proposition, (c) the units of analysis, (d) the logic connecting the data to the proposition, and (e) the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2014).

Participant Selection Logic

In qualitative studies, choosing participants is purposive, selecting individuals that bring enlightenment to the research questions and heighten the understanding of the phenomenon under study (Sargeant, 2012). According to Sargeant (2012), selecting the participants for the study is based on the research questions, the conceptual framework, the theoretical view, and the evidence presented. In this single exploratory embedded

case study, the case was composed of leaders with disabilities from nonprofit organizations known for their culture of diversity and inclusion, which extended from key stakeholders to employees and included people with disabilities.

Leaders at several YMCAs in the Northeastern, Midwestern, and Southern United States were in my existing network of nonprofit organizations and have agreed to refer and solicit participants via purposive and snowball sampling. Through purposive and snowball sampling, I solicited a sample of seven leaders of nonprofit organizations, specifically executive directors, vice -presidents, COOs, presidents, and CEOs. I used purposive sampling to ensure that the information I collected was from the specific group associated with the research question and the case produces rich information to learn of the phenomenon (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2016); Yin, 2014). The sample criteria included leaders with a qualified disability, in a role as an executive director, vice president, COO, CEO, or president, who live in the United States and employed for a minimum of a year in their leadership role in a nonprofit organization. Sampling began by using my existing network of nonprofit organizations and leaders with known disabilities to identify potential participants through purposive sampling. Leaders of these organizations volunteered to participate and referred other leaders who meet the sampling criteria using a snowball sampling technique. Participants self-selected based on these criteria.

Stake (2006) stated that the sample size in case study research relies on the richness, validity, and meaningfulness of the information collected. Yin (2014) warned against defining a number of sample sizes because of the relationship between the phenomenon and the context of the case. Stake (2006) and Yin (2014) did not specify a

size. An initial sample size of seven leaders with a disability participated and additional leaders were added if saturation was not met with the initial seven leaders. I invited the same seven leaders with disabilities to participate in a focus group, which occurred after the interview process in order to explore the results of the interviews. Daniel (2012), Guest et al. (2013), and Martínez-Mesa et al. (2016) agreed that the selected sample size in case studies varies in size and can be expanded until saturation is achieved. Saturation occurs when data collected does not produce new findings.

Instrumentation

To collect narrative responses from the sample, the study instrumentation included an individual interview protocol and a focus group protocol. According to Beitin (2012), in agreement with Nunkoosing (2005) and Sandelowski (2010), the individual interview is the most commonly used data collection method in qualitative studies. As with all instrumentation, the interview must be connected to the research question (Beitin, 2012). Limitations existed with interviews, such as the chance that the interviewee may withhold pertinent information, but researchers understand that this method creates a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. In research, this relationship is critical to gaining important accounts of the phenomenon (Beitin, 2012).

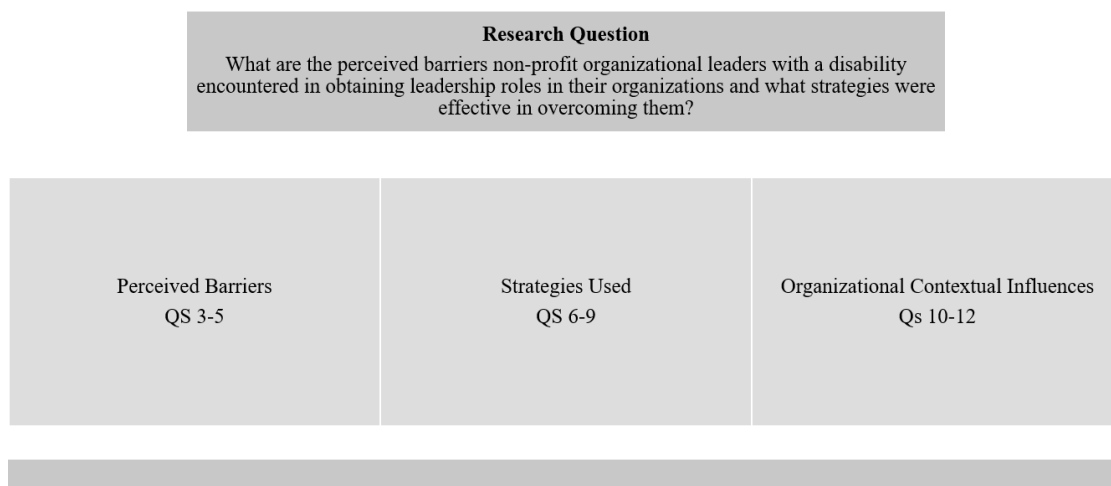
For the study, I developed a 13-question open-ended interview protocol that aligned with the research question. The conceptual framework also informed the interview questions, which focused on the concepts of employer barriers, legislation (accommodations), and self-advocacy, self-awareness, and self-determination. I designed the interview questions to explore the participants' descriptions of perceived barriers to

ascending to leadership roles and effective strategies to overcome these barriers to obtaining leadership roles.

The interview protocol was aligned with the research question by focusing on the concepts of barriers, strategies used and the contextual influences of the organizations of the participants. Interview questions 1–2 set the context for the interview. Interview question 3–5 specifically focused on the barriers each person with disabilities faced. Interview questions 6 – 9 addressed the strategies that each participant employed. Interview questions 10 –12 addressed the contextual influences in the organizations that may have contributed to the leader’s experiences.

Figure 2

Alignment: Research Questions and Interview Questions



The interview protocol (Appendix A) consisted of an introduction to the study, an explanation of the study, and a warm-up question allowing the participant to get comfortable. I invited the leaders in the study to participate in a semistructured virtual

focus group to explore interview themes and support triangulation. The design of the virtual focus group questions generated discussion among the participants about shared themes uncovered from the interviews of individual participants regarding the ascension to leadership roles, barriers encountered, and common strategies used to overcome barriers. The virtual focus group sample questions evolved based on the results of answered gathered from the interview questions.

The virtual focus group protocol (Appendix B) consisted of five topics with preplanned probes, an introduction, which included an explanation of the study, and clarification of terms; study-related questions; and a closing statement (Redmond & Curtis, 2009). The questions aligned with the concepts of the study. The virtual focus group protocol also included a breakdown of how to conduct the virtual focus group and any needed supplies.

In a field test, three professional staff at the vocational division of the N.C. Department of Human Services (NCDHHS) reviewed the interview and focus group questions. The purpose of their review was to provide feedback on the interview questions for appropriateness and alignment with the focus of the study (Proudfoot, 2015). This review by the experts provided an opportunity to revise any questions that may elicit inappropriate responses from the participants. Because the participants of this study were from a protected group, these experts considered how the questions could negatively affect the participants. I sent the interview and focus group questions to the field test experts via email (see Appendix C). They returned their suggestions about the

instruments via email, and I revised the questions, if needed, in consultation with the chair and committee.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The participants were solicited using the researcher's existing network of nonprofit organizations known for their culture of diversity and inclusion, which extended from key stakeholders to employees and included people with disabilities. Leaders at several YMCAs in the Northeastern, Midwestern, and Southern United States are in the researcher's existing network of nonprofit organizations and agreed to refer and solicit participants via purposive and snowball sampling. Solicitation occurred through email, the organizations' social media, the researcher's personal LinkedIn page, and a nonprofit employee LinkedIn group. Gatekeepers at each organization acted as the conduit between the researcher and the participant. The leaders for the virtual interviews were recruited through a formally constructed invitation distributed via email. The invitation (see Appendix D) included the purpose of the study to ensure each participant is aware of the context and reason for the study. The invitation indicated that prospective participants who met the selection criteria should contact the researcher for further information and next steps.

The prospective participants were contacted by phone or email to set up an agreed-upon time to obtain informed consent and conduct the interview. Because some organizations and participants are located outside of Charlotte, North Carolina, those interviews were conducted virtually through Skype or similar media. The interviewees were offered the option of an audio recording of the interview to ensure the accuracy of

the transcription. If the interviewee declined the use of recording, notetaking captured the responses. The interviews lasted no more than 45 minutes to an hour unless the participants needed additional time to share their experiences. Interviews were conducted until data saturation is achieved. The same interview protocol was applied in the same way across all participants.

Each virtual interview participant was identified according to a pre-determined alpha-numeric system (e.g., A1, B1, C1). Identifying each participant with a naming code assisted in keeping the data organized and maintain the privacy of the participants. The interview recordings were transcribed both manually and through the transcript provided by the virtual conference call company. The manual transcription provided the accuracy of the recorded transcript. The transcriptions were presented to each participant to conduct a transcription review check for the accuracy of the interview. The individual interview participants received a formalized thank you letter once the study is concluded.

Researchers use more than one instrument to collect data to provide triangulation as a means to mitigate bias (Yin, 2014). In this study, a virtual focus group was conducted. I recruited the participants for the virtual focus group from the sample of interview participants by asking them at the end of the interview if they would be interested in participating in the next phase of data collection and following up with them after the interview data are analyzed. The target for the virtual focus group was a minimum of three participants.

According to Liamputtong (2011), online virtual focus groups are an additional way that participants can share sensitive information that they may not in a traditional

virtual focus group. Because the participants in the study are from a protected group, an online virtual focus group and online interviews created another level of a safe space so that they can share more freely. I recorded the responses to capture the discussions. I participated as the moderator, ensuring that the participants' responses are captured and transcribed by the individual that they may trust. As a moderator, I transcribed the discussion because first-hand recollection is paramount to accurate data collection. Virtual focus group participants received a formalized thank you letter.

Data Analysis Plan

In case study research, Yin (2014) stressed the need to develop a strategy for analyzing the data before actually attempting the analysis. Yin (2014) stated that case analysis might be the most difficult because a fixed formula for analysis does not exist. Case study analysis relies on the researcher's ability to empirical thinking, sufficient evidence, and acceptance of alternative interpretations of the data (Yin, 2014).

In this study, I created an Excel workbook that contains the name of the case (leaders with a disability), the participant information, and the transcribed interview for each participant. Secondly, I created a coding system to identify themes in the form of patterns, concepts, and perceptions (Yin, 2014). The initial application of codes (open coding) and analysis of themes was done manually using a conceptually clustered matrix (Miles et al., 2014; Stake, 2006). This type of matrix allows for the organization of themes based on the conceptual framework of the study as well as the research questions. This format allows for the comparison of participant responses and helps with the case and subunit analysis.

I created and filled in a codebook to capture the initial codes, definitions of the codes, and frequency of each occurrence during the open coding process. During the open coding process, categories based on the conceptual framework were developed to guide the analysis; codes informed by the data were determined and themes were recorded. A memoing strategy occurred throughout this process to capture my notes that were used in the analysis process (Yin, 2014). A secondary coding process (selective coding) occurred to provide clarity about the relationship between the categories and themes that emerged to define a more refined and focused analysis (Yin, 2014).

I used Atlas ti computerized analysis software to find new themes or validate previously coded themes. This software has the capability to provide a transcription of audio and video data, mitigating transcription errors. This system also provided a mind mapping tool that will assist in the visualization of patterns and themes (Ang et al., 2016). The coding process is not in itself analysis; coding is interpretive (Yin, 2014); therefore, CAQDAS assists in the process and does not replace the need for the researcher to manage the entire process. The data from the two collection techniques ran continually through the program until saturation occurs (Stake, 2006).

Table 2

Example of Codebook

Code	Definition of Code	Examples from Data	Count
XXX	Describes how you would identify that code in data	More than one example from data, with quotation marks	Include the frequency count.

The use of discrepant, negative, or deviant data (Mills et al., 2010) is vital to the study. The inclusion of the deviant data is essential to the trustworthiness of the interpretation of data. The inclusion of these data demonstrates that all data are considered relevant. In the study, discrepant data were analyzed, and the explanation of these data was reported along with the other data. The discrepant data assisted in generalization and transferability (Mills et al., 2010).

The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the data collected adequately provided support and rich information to inform the study. This section explains the plan to analyze the data. In the following sections, the description and justification of the plan to address the trustworthiness of the data during and after the analysis is discussed.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In case study research, validity or credibility is continuously in question (Yin, 2014). As a researcher, developing clear, open-ended questions is vital to mitigate the introduction of bias to the study. Because the researcher is an instrument as well (Yin, 2014; Stake, 2006), personal experiences could influence the study, therefore, challenge the credibility of the data collected.

Although participants from the researcher's organization were not solicited for participation, the participants for the study were recruited through gatekeepers that are personally and professionally connected to the researcher. The researcher acknowledged that the challenges and barriers faced to move into a leadership role may be similar to the

experiences of the participants. These similarities with the participants helped establish a rapport during the interview process. Not hiding biases allows a researcher to reflect on them and keep them from hindering the data collection process (Stake, 2006).

To address credibility questions in the study, analysis and triangulation of multiple data sources occurred within the case and within and across the units of analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). The triangulation of multiple data sources included people with disabilities and nonprofit organizations. Multiple data sources included interviews and a virtual focus group.

A transcript review was a critical method to ensure accurate interpretation of each participants' interview responses. Each interview and virtual focus group participant in this study reviewed the transcriptions of their responses to ensure accuracy, minimize errors, and reduce the introduction of researcher bias (Brite et al., 2016). I conducted additional virtual interviews and virtual focus groups if data saturation was not achieved with the initial data collected. I used audio recordings to capture responses to interview questions because of the proximity of the participants. If the interviewee declined the recording technique, I took notes instead. All of the interviewees agreed to the audio recording.

As a means to remain reflective, I journaled the interactions between the participants and myself from the beginning of the study until the end (Janesick, 2014; Mills et al., 2010; Yin, 2014). By keeping written notes, monitoring, and critiquing of interactions with the participants allowed for the mitigation of researcher bias. Researcher

bias cannot lead the participants' responses, the analysis, and reporting of the study's findings (Janesick, 2014; Mills et al., 2010; Yin, 2014).

Transferability

Transferability focused mainly on the concept of generalizability, which is the ability to take the findings of the research and apply the same findings and conclusions across other populations and situations (Mills et al., 2010). The final report must demonstrate that the researcher is convincing in explaining the interpretation of the data across other people, places, and experiences (Miles et al., 2014). Yin (2014) stated that generalization is against a theory versus a population in case study research. In this study, the purpose was to explore the barriers that leaders with disabilities overcome to become leaders and the strategies they used. Identifying the barriers and strategies provided a useful map for other persons with disabilities in an organizational setting experiencing similar barriers. The final report included any limitations that may occur with the selected sample that may hinder generalization to other organizations and suggestions as a need for future studies (Miles et al., 2014).

Dependability

Dependability is directly related to the integrity and quality of all aspects of the research process (Miles et al., 2014). My role was to ensure that all aspects of the study have been given proper attention to consistent detail. The interview questions are tied to the research questions to ensure that all responses address the study's context. Data collection methods were either face to face, audio, or virtual. Recording all interviews and virtual focus groups and allowing member checking to ensure transcriptions

accurately supported dependability. I established a matrix to capture the case, all units of analysis, responses, and notes to ensure consistent information storage, creating a clear audit trail.

Confirmability

Confirmability or objectivity is questioned regularly in qualitative research because of the researcher's experiences informing the study (Mills et al., 2010). The minimization of bias occurs when the researcher acknowledges the existence of bias and is reflexive throughout the study. Throughout this study, memoing to capture observations of the participants and a clear and accurate account of their responses occurred. The step of memoing, noting the step by step process, supports confirmability. Member checking was implemented to mitigate researcher bias. Triangulation of the data sources and the use of computerized software, Atlas.ti, for analysis provides an additional strategy for establishing confirmable results.

Ethical Procedures

When conducting case study research, protecting human subjects is vital throughout the entire process (Yin, 2014). Protecting the study against bias is just one aspect of operating ethically. Data collection, analysis, and revisiting the data is a strategy to ensure credible results.

The participants in this study are leaders with a disability. Because the participants have a disability, ensuring their privacy is especially critical. I used an alpha-numeric code to identify each participant to protect their privacy and the confidentiality

of their information. Tracking of their identity and the associated code was kept in a matrix.

The participants for virtual interviews were recruited from my social media groups, LinkedIn, and Facebook. Posting the invitation to Walden University's participation pool and snowball sampling completed the recruitment process. A gatekeeper at each organization disseminated the request to participate. The virtual focus group participants were a subset from the individual interview participants. No incentives were given for participation.

Once the sample was selected, each participant signed an informed consent form at the beginning of the interview or a virtual focus group. The consent forms for virtual interviews (see Appendix E) and virtual focus group (see Appendix F) were collected via email prior to the beginning of the interviews/discussions. The consent form included information to inform participants that they can withdraw from the study at any time and that their personal information will not be used outside of this study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted permission before any data collection activities begin.

With the permission of each participant, the interviews were digitally audio-recorded. If the interviewee declined to have the interview recorded, notes were taken. Participants checked their interview transcripts for accuracy and accurate reflection of their experiences. An alphanumeric code name was assigned to each interview participant to protect the participants' confidentiality. In the virtual focus group, the participants were granted similar considerations. With the group's permission, the platform Go To Meeting was used to record each session. If any of the participants objected to having it

recorded, notes were taken. The identity protection process included using a coding system identical to virtual interviews for the virtual focus group.

The data were stored in three places: the One Drive cloud, Atlas.ti cloud, and a jump drive. All are password-protected, and only I can access these storage places. The data will be destroyed in accordance with the IRB policy 5 years after the completion of the study.

Summary

A qualitative single exploratory embedded case study design was applied to explore the perceptions of a sample of leaders with a disability in seven nonprofit organizations about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a leadership role and effective strategies in overcoming such barriers. The nonprobability purposive and snowball sample consisted of seven leaders of nonprofit organizations. The units of analysis were the barriers encountered, strategies used by leaders with different disabilities, and organizational context in multiple organizations. Multiple data sources included individual interviews and a virtual focus group. The initial analysis of themes and application of codes was done manually using a conceptually clustered matrix and then Atlas. ti, a computerized analysis software, was used to analyze further the data finding new themes or validation of previously coded themes. Chapter 3 included a description and justification of the methodology, the researcher's role, and how the participants were selected. The instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis plans were described and justified. The chapter concluded with a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

A review of this study's purpose, the research questions, and summarization of how data were collected and analyzed will appear in Chapter 4. The chapter will also include a description of the composition of the case and the characteristics of the sample. Chapter 4 will cover evidence of trustworthiness and a presentation of the results. The chapter will conclude with a restatement of the findings and transition to Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single embedded case study was to explore the perceptions of a sample of leaders with a disability in seven nonprofit organizations in the same industry sector about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a leadership role and effective strategies in overcoming such barriers. HRMs may use the findings to develop training, mentorships, etc., that deepen their talent pipelines. The findings also provide strategies for other leaders with disabilities to break perceived barriers, gain leadership roles, and ascend the corporate ladder.

One research question and three subquestions guided the study:

RQ: What are the perceived barriers nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability encountered in obtaining leadership roles in their organizations and what strategies were effective in overcoming them?

S1: What are the perceived barriers nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability encountered in obtaining leadership roles in their organization?

S2: What strategies did nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability perceive were effective in overcoming barriers to obtaining leadership roles in their organization?

S3: What was the contextual influence of the organization on the effectiveness of these strategies?

Chapter 4 includes a description of the field test, the research setting, data collection and analysis, the demographics of the sample, the results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

The chapter concludes with a summary and a preview of Chapter 5.

Field Test

In the field test, three professional staff at the vocational division of the North Carolina Department of Human Services (NCDHHS) reviewed the interview and focus group questions. The three professional staff provided feedback on the questionnaire for appropriateness and alignment with the focus of the study. The professional staff's review provided an opportunity to revise any questions that may have elicited inappropriate responses from the participants. Because the participants of this study were from a protected group, people with disabilities, these experts considered how the questions could negatively affect the participants (Proudfoot, 2015). I sent the interview and focus group questions to the field test experts via email. They returned their feedback about the instruments via email and indicated that the interview questions aligned with the research questions and should not cause the participants any negative experiences. They did not suggest any changes.

Research Setting

I recruited the participants by contacting gatekeepers at nonprofit organizations and my social media groups, LinkedIn and Facebook. Posting the invitation to Walden University's participation pool and snowball sampling completed the recruitment process. A gatekeeper at each organization disseminated the request to participate. The four virtual focus group participants were a subset of the sample of individual interview participants. Each participant contacted me via email and each signed informed consent form was collected via email.

At the time of the interviews and member checking, the participants were working from their homes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I conducted the interviews via the online platform Go to Meeting due to the inability to meet face to face during the pandemic. Each interview lasted, on average, about 48 minutes per participant. I transcribed each interview and sent the transcript to each participant to verify an accurate account of the participant's responses. I conducted a virtual focus group to explore the themes that emerged from the individual virtual interviews. I conducted the virtual focus group using Go to Meeting.

None of the participants expressed that being interviewed during the COVID-19 pandemic-influenced their ability to respond to the questions. The participants continued to work during the pandemic, but two of the seven participants expressed concerns about organizational changes due to the pandemic. These two leaders expressed concern about economic factors that affected staffing decisions. They had to furlough staff and were concerned about the livelihood of the staff. These concerns did not affect the interpretation of the study results, as they were not pertinent to the research questions. Monitoring of the participants occurred through the interviews to guard against any adverse effect the climate had on their answers to the interview questions and the analysis of the results.

Demographics

I collected the participants' demographic information pertaining to employment to describe the sample characteristics. To meet the selection criteria, each participant had to hold a leadership position as executive director, vice-president, COO, CEO, or president

in a U.S. organization for a minimum of 1 year in that role. The mean tenure of the participants in their current leadership role was 17.7 years. I collected data on the geographic location of their organization. These characteristics are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Demographic Characteristics (N=7)

Leadership role	<i>n</i> (%)	Years of service	<i>n</i> (%)	Location	<i>n</i> (%)
CEO	4 (57.13)	1-3	0 (0.0)	East	4 (57.13)
COO	1 (14.29)	4-6	1 (14.29)	Southwest	1 (14.29)
President	1 (14.29)	7-9	1 (14.29)	Midwest	2 (28.58)
Executive Director	1 (14.29)	10 or more	5 (71.42)		

Data Collection

I collected data via virtual individual semistructured interviews with each of the seven participants and a virtual focus group with four participants. I conducted the individual interviews via video conferencing using Go to Meeting over 3 months, April 12 through June 20, 2020. These interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes.

The individual interview period lasted longer than anticipated due to a delay in recruitment attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced most employees to work from home, which made contacting them more difficult. Because of the delay in recruitment, the data collection period lasted approximately 60 days. During that period, I sent the formal invitation to the gatekeepers at nonprofit organizations. Recruitment of participants also occurred through LinkedIn groups, Facebook groups, and Walden University's study participant pool.

Each participant agreed to either video or audio recording of the interview. Four participants were audio-recorded and three were video recorded. Transcription of each interview occurred using online transcription software, Temi.com. Once the interview transcripts were available, I edited each line to ensure that the transcript accurately reflected the interviewee's intention. The edited transcript was sent to the participant to member check the accuracy of the transcript regarding their intended responses. Each participant returned the transcript with minor revisions, such as the spelling of colleges attended and the correct spelling of residences. I uploaded the video, audio, and transcripts to Atlas.ti for storage, coding, and analysis. The individual interview process concluded on June 20, 2020, when no new themes emerged, and saturation was achieved.

The second phase of data collection involved a virtual focus group to explore interview themes and support triangulation. The virtual focus group questions generated discussion among the participants about shared themes uncovered from individual participants' interviews regarding the ascension to leadership roles, barriers encountered, common strategies used to overcome barriers, and organizational culture or climate. The four virtual focus group participants were a subset of the sample of individual interview participants. The focus group lasted 90 minutes and was conducted using GoTo Meeting. The interview was audio-recorded. The transcription of the interview occurred through online transcription software, Temi.com. Once the transcription was available, I edited each line to ensure the accuracy and intention of the participants. I sent the edited transcript to the participants for their review. One participant suggested two corrections

regarding the correct spelling of an organization. There was no variation in the data collection plan described in Chapter 3.

I kept a journal recording notes from the interviews and focus group. During the individual interviews and focus group, I took notes regarding the disposition of the participants. These notes mainly captured their body language, nuances of their speech patterns, attitudes, and emotions. I captured a memo about two suggestions made by the African American male participants to ensure no biases were reflected in the analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process consisted primarily of video and audio recordings of semistructured individual interviews and one focus group. An Excel workbook that contained the names of the case (leaders with a disability), the participant information and the transcribed interview for each participant review was cataloged. I developed a secondary Excel spreadsheet, a coding book, to capture the codes, categories, and themes.

I began the initial open coding process with the development of a color chart to assist in the first stage of open coding the interview transcripts. In descriptive coding, I assigned codes to strings of raw data that are created based on the conceptual framework and research question. The initial open coding process produced 90 codes that I analyzed for inherent redundancy and then grouped into similar codes. Second, I used an axial coding process which assisted in identifying related codes through an inductive and deductive process. This process reduced the number of codes to 56. I grouped the 56 codes into five key categories tied to the research questions individual interview response, and conceptual framework: (a) competencies, (b) barriers to ascension, (c)

strategies used, (d) workplace accommodations, and (e) workplace culture or climate.

These five categories produced 16 interview themes, five focus group themes that aligned with the interview themes, and three journal note themes, which also aligned with the interview themes (see Table 4).

I used a conceptually clustered matrix that allowed for organizing themes based on the study's conceptual framework and the research question. This format allowed me to compare participant responses and helped with the case and subunit analysis. This type of analytical strategy, thematic analysis, and identifying patterns and themes emerged across the case and subunits.

Once the interview themes were identified, I developed the focus group questions. The participants' discussion was guided by questions developed based on the themes that emerged from the individual interviews. I applied an open coding process to the focus group transcript, similar to the process for the individual interviews. The themes that emerged from the focus group aligned with six themes from the interviews. The associated focus group themes were (a) external perceptions (negative and positive), (b) self-perceptions, (c) staff support, (d) transparency, and (e) staff development (people with disabilities) and (f) intentional Diversity & Inclusion initiatives.

Four of the interviews were video-recorded; three were audio-recorded only. Notes taken during interviews and focus groups captured participants' body language, speech patterns, attitudes, and emotions. Like the focus group analysis, I applied an open coding process which produced two themes aligned with the five categories from the interviews. The themes were self-perceptions and transparency.

The patterns, categories, and themes that emerged reoccurred across the data. The five categories were (a) competencies, (b) barriers to ascension, (c) strategies used, (d) workplace accommodations, and (e) workplace culture or climate. Sixteen themes emerged that aligned with the five categories. Table 4 is a representation of the categories and associated themes for all data sources.

Table 4

Categories and Themes

Category	Interview themes	Focus Group	Journal themes
Leadership competencies	Communication		
Barriers to ascension	Interpersonal Opportunity Access Health and medical challenges Self-perceptions	Interpersonal	Self-perceptions
Strategies used	Coping techniques Technology Psychological support Staff support	Technology	Technology
Workplace accommodations	Transportation Transparency		
Workplace culture or climate	Negative perceptions Positive reinforcement Staff development (people with disabilities) Intentional D&I initiatives	Negative perceptions Staff development (people with disabilities) Intentional D&I initiatives	Negative perceptions

The analysis involved the application of Clarke and Braun's (2013) 6-step thematic analysis model; the research question drove the process. The 6-step analysis included familiarization of data, coding, generation of themes, review of themes, define and name themes, and lastly, the write-up. Table 5 reflects the number and percentage of participants whose responses contributed to each theme.

Table 5

Theme Occurrences for interviews (N=7), Focus Group (N=4), and Journal (N=7)

Category	Interview themes	n (%)	Focus Group themes	n(%)	Journal themes	n (%)
Leadership competencies	Communication	5 (71.4)				
	Interpersonal	7 (100.0)	Interpersonal	4 (100.0)		
Barriers to ascension	Opportunity	4 (57.1)				
	Access	4 (57.1)				
Strategies used	Health and medical challenges	6 (85.7)				
	Self-perceptions	5 (71.4)			Self-perceptions	5 (71.4)
	Coping techniques	4 (57.1)				
	Technology	6 (87.5)	Technology	4 (100.0)	Technology	5 (71.4)
Workplace accommodations	Psychological support	6 (85.7)				
	Staff support	7 (100.0)				
Workplace culture or climate	Transportation	3 (42.8)				
	Transparency	7 (100.0)				
	Negative perceptions	5 (71.4)	Negative perceptions	4 (100.0)	Negative perceptions	4 (57.1)

Positive reinforcement	4 (57.1)		
Staff development (people with disabilities)	4 (57.1)	Staff development (people with disabilities)	4 (100.0)
Intentional D&I initiatives	5 (71.4)	Intentional D&I initiatives	4 (100.0)

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Several procedures were implemented to ensure credibility. The procedures included (a) detailed recount from the individual interviews; (b) multiple methods of data collection to support triangulation of the information, such as field test, audio recordings, video recordings, and focus group transcripts; (c) self-reflection, journaling, and analysis on mitigating any personal biases or beliefs; (d) member checking by participants to ensure accurate accounts of the interview transcripts, and (e). The research questions and conceptual framework guided the data collection and analysis processes. Data saturation was reached through the collection of rich and thick data from multiple sources that produced a repetition of codes and themes across each dataset. The interviews and focus group were continued until no new codes or themes emerged supporting credibility.

The field test with three individuals employed at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services of the interview questions served to obtain feedback on whether the questions were designed to gather the intended information and were

appropriate for the intended sample. The field test provided feedback on the questionnaire for appropriateness and alignment with the focus of the study.

During the interviews, note-taking served to capture the participants' expressions, tones, body language, and critique of interactions with the participants, which helped mitigate researcher bias. Note-taking helped capture real-time interactions with the participants, which provided the context for interpreting the interview responses and triangulation data. Participants member checked the interview transcripts for an accurate presentation of their experiences.

Following the individual interviews, a focus group was conducted to explore the themes that arose from analyzing the interview transcripts. The focus group provided additional data to support triangulation. Triangulation of the results from multiple data sources helped to support consistency in the findings. Consistency in data collection and analysis across all data sets supports credibility in the findings.

Transferability

Transferability is supported by demographic data; the geographic location of the participants' organization, years of service, and position held were collected. Identifying the barriers and strategies provided a useful map for other persons with disabilities in an organizational setting experiencing similar barriers. The final report includes limitations that occurred with recruiting and obtaining the sample that may hinder generalization to other organizations and suggestions for future studies (Miles et al., 2014). Those limitations are discussed in Chapter 5. The COVID-19 epidemic may have slowed recruitment as people shifted to working from home. The findings cannot be transferred

to other cases. The results might not be transferrable to leaders who are in their current role for less than a year.

Dependability

The interview questions were tied to the research questions, which helped ensure that all responses addressed the study's context. Data collection, individual interviews and focus groups were conducted virtually using Go to Meeting. This platform was used consistently for the interviews and the focus group. Adjustments were made to conduct the interviews virtually rather than face-to-face due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview questions were consistently presented to the participants and the probing follow up questions were applied consistently. Recordings of all interviews and the virtual focus group were member checked to ensure transcriptions were accurate. Throughout the study, memoing to capture observations of the participants and a clear and accurate account of their responses supported dependability. An Excel matrix to capture the case, units of analysis, interview and focus group responses, and researcher notes was established to ensure consistent information storage, creating a clear audit trail.

Confirmability

Journaling helped capture instances during the interviews and focus group where redirection of the participant was necessary to keep them on track and guard against steering them in a direction that could be categorized as leading. Avoiding leading the interview and focus group diminishes researcher bias. Remaining reflexive throughout the study was supported by noting emotions and thoughts about the participants' experiences that mirrored and resonated with the researcher's personal experiences, such

as being told that they would never be a leader. I also held a leadership role in a nonprofit organization and had similar experiences as the participants. Acknowledging such experiences in writing assisted in mitigating researcher bias.

Member checking was another strategy implemented to mitigate researcher bias. Triangulation of the data sources and the use of computerized software, Atlas.ti, for analysis provided an additional strategy for establishing confirmable results.

Study Results

The data collected from the participants proved to be thick and information rich. The key findings derived from the interview questions and focus group responses aligned with the central research question and subquestions and were triangulated across participants and data sources. The central research question and subquestions were designed to explore the perceived barriers nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability encountered in obtaining leadership roles in their organizations and what strategies were effective in overcoming them. The thematic findings presented in this section are organized by the central research question and the three research subquestions. Table 6 represents how the categories and themes within and across data sources align with the central research question and subquestions.

Table 6

Alignment of Major Themes to Research Questions and Subquestions

Research Question and Subquestions	Interview themes	Focus group themes	Journal themes
RQ: Perceived barriers and effective strategies	Communication Interpersonal Opportunity	Interpersonal Negative perceptions	Negative perceptions

	Access Health and medical challenges Self-perceptions Coping techniques Technology Psychological support Staff support Transportation Transparency Negative perceptions Positive reinforcement Staff development (people with disabilities) Intentional D&I initiatives		
S1: Perceived barriers?	Opportunity Access Health and medical challenges Self-perceptions		
S2: Effective strategies	Coping techniques Technology Psychological support	Technology	Technology
S3: Contextual influence of the organization effectiveness of strategies	Staff support Transportation Transparency Negative perceptions Positive reinforcement Staff development (people with disabilities) Intentional D&I initiatives	Staff development Intentional D&I initiatives	

Triangulation of All Data Sources

The individual interviews and focus group comprised the majority of the data for this study. Journaling during the individual interviews helped to capture the participants'

nuances, such as body language, tone, and facial expressions. The notes from the interview and focus group provided an additional form of data. All data sources were used for triangulation and contributed to the credibility of participant responses and reported experiences. The focus group transcripts and journal notes were coded in the same manner as the individual interviews. The focus group questions were derived from the themes of individual interviews. The initial coding process produced 90 codes that were subsequently reduced to 56 codes. Of the 56 codes, the focus group analysis supported five of the interview themes and produced 16 of the same existing codes. The journal notes aligned with two of 16 themes (technology and negative perceptions).

In individual interviews, the leaders of this study shared their experiences of the perceived barriers they faced in ascending to a leadership role. They also shared the strategies they used to overcome those barriers. The themes that emerged aligned with the central research question and subquestions. The leaders shared perceived barriers of the opportunities for advancement, access to resources, health and medical challenges, and self-perception that hindered effectiveness or supported the leader's success. The strategies included coping techniques, the need for technology and psychological support. Lastly, the leaders shared that workplace accommodations were necessary for their success. The key accommodations were transportation and staff support. The themes were explored in a virtual focus group setting. The focus group responses supported the

experiences relayed in the individual interviews and aligned with the central research question and subquestions.

A strategy for accomplishing triangulation was to explore the themes derived from the interview responses by creating the focus group questions. Note-taking helped capture real-time interactions with the participants, which provided the context for interpreting the interview and focus group responses and triangulation data. Table 7 represents the number of codes across the data sources.

Table 7

Triangulation of Data Sources

Category #	Category names	# of total codes	Interview codes	Focus group codes	Journal codes
1	Leadership competencies	12	10	2	0
2	Barriers to ascension	16	11	5	0
3	Strategies used	13	5	5	3
4	Workplace accommodations	5	4	0	1
5	Workplace culture or climate	10	4	4	2
Total		56	34	16	6

Research Subquestion 1: Perceived Barriers to Obtaining Leadership Role

Category 1: Leadership Competencies

The first category that emerged from the analysis was leadership competencies. In alignment with interview questions 1 and 2 and SQ1, the participants were asked to describe, in their experience, what competencies make an effective leader in a nonprofit organization. Two themes emerged in this category: (a) Communication and (b) Interpersonal.

Theme 1: Communication. When asked what competency makes an effective leader, five of seven participants (71%) responded that communication, both verbal and non-verbal was the most effective for a leader. Having an “open door” policy and open dialogue were important and effective forms of communication. Through their experience as leaders, the participants recounted specific examples as to why communication is important. The leaders agreed that active listening was an effective and key communication skill that all leaders must possess. The leaders shared that engaging in active listening creates respect and trust between staff and the leader. Effective communication is a key factor in building trust. Therefore, effective in building relationships as relationship building relies on trust between the leader and the recipient. These leaders mentioned that being open to new ideas, not pushing your agenda, and the ability to lead by example is at the root of relationship building. The leaders agreed that the ability to mobilize a workforce, motivate them to action, and understand the organization's strategic vision is key to an organization's success. This mobilization can

only happen through effective communication. Participant P4 stated, “Well, definitely, obviously, communication. The ability to listen, rather than always promote your agenda, be open to a variety of different ideas, and more importantly, always be a good example.”

Another reason noted by Participant P2 was the importance to him that he has a great relationship with his team. P2’s communication skills contributed to the trust they shared because of his ability to communicate effectively, creating the culture he expected. Each morning he would visit each team member to welcome them to work. Some leaders also relayed that written communication was as important as verbal communication. Having exceptional written communication skills is paramount to success in a leadership role. The leaders cited poor written skills as a barrier to effective communication.

Theme 2: Interpersonal. Interpersonal competencies in leadership emerged as the second theme. There are leadership competencies tied to an individual’s skills and are developed through their life and work experiences. Some leadership competencies are innately the individuals’ and are developed and honed but are not tied to skill. When asked what competencies make an effective leader in a nonprofit organization, the leaders agreed that interpersonal skills are important to effective leadership. Many interpersonal skills exist, but the common skills that emerged were a passion for serving, relationship building, building trust, and empathy. Passion for serving is an innate skill that cannot be taught. Participant P3 stated, “so, I think what pushed me ahead is what helps me with my job and the board saw a passion that they couldn't buy.” P3 talked of when she tried to convince her board of managers to find a new CEO because she did not have the skills that most CEOs possess. The board members refused to agree because of her passion for

serving. Based on their experiences, the leaders relayed that relationship building and trust are key interpersonal competencies.

Two of the participants noted that empathy is critical because being able to empathize with those you lead puts you in their position and therefore, the team can reciprocate, mirroring the behavior of the leaders. Empathy cannot be taught and therefore comes from within the individual. Empathy is defined as the ability of one to be able to understand and share someone's feelings. Both participants shared experiences of empathy with staff members, which led to lasting relationships and trust. Participant P7 agreed with the action of empathetic reciprocity. P7 gave an example of when she exhibited empathy for a staff member who lost a parent. That staff member is P7's strongest team member. P7 contributes the increased productivity to the relationship that was strengthened based on the trust they now share.

Based on the interview theme of effective leadership competencies, the focus group participants were asked to recall in their experience if their competence as a leader was ever challenged because of their disability. After clarifying that this theme was through the lens of their disability, the group began discussing whether they experienced challenges from executive leaders regarding their competencies to be a leader. Participant FG4 began by explaining that he experienced challenges due to his disability and his race. Although race was not a concept in this study, FG4 felt it an important part of his story. The group agreed that they experienced a situation when their leadership competency had been challenged because of their disability.

In alignment with the individual interview responses centered on communication, a common thread emerged of a challenge based on their ability to communicate effectively. Three leaders were challenged on their writing skills, while one was challenged to pronounce certain words correctly. According to participant FG3, she did not experience the same challenge, but she relayed that she challenged her abilities to communicate. FG3 introduced a challenge of how she had to really push herself because she never wanted to be viewed as the sick one. In her example, FG3 relayed that her staff would have to slow her down to reserve her energy. Some of the leaders responded that they worked harder to overcome what they lacked, but leadership's challenge fueled them to work harder than to use it as an excuse not to succeed. The leaders that shared the experience related to their challenges with communication skills shared their strategy of purchasing computer software to transcribe notes and emails. The leaders' shared experience of implementing this strategy aligned with the shared experience introduced in the individual interviews. Participant FG2 stated, "So, you know, I learned early on that if I wanted to be successful, um, I just had to put more time in." Challenges, although hurtful, were driving factors for success for these leaders.

Category 2: Barriers to Ascension

The second category that emerged was barriers to ascension to a leadership role. When asked about the barriers they faced in gaining a leadership role, five participants (71%) initially stated that they did not experience barriers and two (2.8%) identified barriers quickly. As the five continued to talk during the individual interviews, several barriers emerged that they were not identifying as barriers. Once individuals with

disabilities acquired leadership roles, they faced perceived barriers to ascending to other leadership roles. When asked what types of perceived barriers they encountered in ascending to a leadership role, the themes of the opportunity, access, health and medical challenges and self-perceptions presented as a barrier to ascension to a leadership role.

Theme 1: Opportunity. Opportunity in this context is defined as the lack of experiences to possible advancement to a leadership role. Based on the individual interviews, four (57.1%) of the seven leaders experienced barriers to opportunities for advancement in their careers. The leaders spoke of experiences of senior leaders who negatively influenced their opportunity to become a leader and their personal negative perceptions of leadership that presented a barrier to advancement. Some of the leaders shared experiences where they were told that they would struggle to become a leader because of their communication skills. P6 spoke of how hurtful it was, and he knew immediately that he would never be successful serving with this particular leader. He did not let this challenge stop him from progressing. He used negative feedback to fuel his desire to be successful. He found employment in another organization that focused on his strengths. Some of the leaders relayed experiences of lack of opportunity to gain a leadership role due to their negative self-perceptions. These leaders explained that they put self-imposed barriers to opportunities because they were convinced that they were not skilled or ready for the role due to their disability. These leaders would create narratives that would have their leaders interacting with them in a negative manner, therefore, the participants would never approach their leaders for opportunities for fear of being passed over. As an example, leader P1's barriers to opportunities were self-imposed. He allowed

his negative self-perception to hold him back from pursuing opportunities to ascending to leadership roles. P1 would seek roles that he was clearly overqualified for because he let his disability guide his choices. P1 stated that he was holding himself back and blocking his opportunities. Based on their environments and length of service, some of the other participants did not believe they encountered barriers that prevented them from gaining an opportunity to ascend into their leadership roles. Each one of these participants has tenure in their organizations of 10+ years.

Theme 2: Access as a Barrier. The second theme of access emerged as a barrier faced by four (57.1%) participants based on their leadership experiences. Access in this context is defined as the individual's ability to access resources that would support them in their role or ascension to their role. Being an effective leader requires specific resources that allow the person to be efficient. Initially, some of the leaders expressed that they did not experience a barrier of access. As they continued to relay their experiences, a common access barrier was access to efficient technology. The leaders relayed that based on their inability to communicate effectively, they found a need to purchase computers and computer software that aid in their ability to be an effective leader. These leaders relayed that because they were not spending large amounts of time editing their correspondence, they could concentrate on more important factors of their roles.

These leaders also expressed in their day-to-day environments, they realized that they did encounter an access barrier. After walking through his work environment, P4 realized that not having access to updated computer equipment and software presented a

barrier to his efficiency as a leader. He stated, “What I recognized early on is that was the great equalizer, because if I could have the same access to files and databases, and Word documents as everybody else, then I would have a, you know, equal access.” Some of the other leaders agreed that having software such as Dragon software, Microsoft Word, and other programs were the equalizing asset. P6 shared making sure you get the right support, that you’re transparent with your organization, so you can get the systems that you need is critical to access.

Because of the type of disability, participant P2 encountered a different access barrier. Access to his building was a barrier. Before P2 got a wheelchair, he could not get from floor to floor in his building. As a leader, it is essential for him to greet his staff every day. P2’s access to his team was impeded by his inability to get around the campus. Participant P2 associated his ability to get from one floor to another as being efficient. P2 acknowledged and acted to resolve this barrier; he relayed it would have impacted his team’s productivity. Participant P2 stated, “I meet with my team and we developed a plan. I also know when I must rely on help. I sometimes need help accessing the building.” Three participants did not express that having access to resources was a barrier to their leadership role ascension.

Theme 3: Health and Medical Challenges. The third theme of health and medical challenges emerged as a barrier for six (85.7%) of the seven participants at some point in their leadership experience. Health and medical issues were a key barrier that impeded these leaders' progression to move into leadership roles and be effective in their current roles. Health issues included mental health issues as well as physical issues. The

leaders expressed how mental health issues, including dealing with high-stress levels, plagued them throughout their entire careers. The leaders spoke of seeking professional management for pain, stress, and psychological impairments. Based on their disability, the participants discussed the long-standing medical conditions that impeded their effectiveness in their roles. For example, physical pain caused some leaders to implement strategies to get through their day to operations. The leaders experienced hospitalizations when stress levels exacerbated their symptoms. These instances required the leaders to rely on professional help to teach them how to manage the challenges. Some leaders with a learning disability experienced extremely high-stress levels that required eliciting services from specialized psychologists. For example, participants P6 and P7 both explained how excess stress brought on medical issues that triggered their disabilities. Both relayed that always trying to be aware of additional stressors, which manifests in health issues. The seven participants spoke at length about the physical aspects of their disability and how those issues impeded their progress but, more importantly, their effectiveness as a leader.

Theme 4: Self-perceptions as Barriers. The fourth theme is self-perceptions as a barrier to leadership ascension. Five (71.4%) of the seven participants stated that self-perceptions impacted their ascension to leadership roles or in their current leadership roles. The interview and focus group produced responses such as slow, arrogant, gritty, and mean. Although five participants said that negative self-perceptions impacted their leadership experiences, the leaders acknowledged that the negative self-perceptions drove them to their leadership roles. The leaders explained negative self-perceptions as

instances when their disability presented and these leaders were able to use these instances to gain strength to move forward.

The leaders relayed that when faced with negative self-perceptions, they were not always successful at that moment in pushing through, but in the end, they could move past their pain and become positive. For example, One participant, P3, mentioned that she would not survive; therefore, becoming the CEO of a prominent nonprofit organization was never imaginable. P3 mentioned the negative perceptions she carried around were rooted in her pain. The constant pain drove her to get professional mental health treatment. Gradually, the negative self-perceptions changed to positive reinforcements.

Not all of the leaders were successful in managing to overcome the negative self-perceptions without these instances affecting their leadership roles. The leaders spoke of instances of self-doubt, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, and the internalization of others' perceptions. For example, participant P4 acknowledged that a key barrier was the lack of self-confidence. P4 stated, "I think one of the biggest barriers that I had to overcome, well, there were a couple, one of them was just self-confidence." P4 mentioned that there is a perception that if you hold a leadership role and have a disability, that translates to success. P4 quickly stated that perception is wrong. On the other hand, participant P2 mentioned that he practiced keeping a positive attitude when faced with the challenges related to his disability. P2 relayed that there are people in the worst situations; therefore, he draws on that visual when he begins to get down.

Research Subquestion 2: Strategies to Overcome Barriers

Category 3: Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

In alignment with Subquestion 2, which focused on the strategies the nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability perceive were effective in overcoming barriers to obtaining leadership roles in their organization, the findings produced a third category of the strategies used to overcome barriers. These findings aligned with interview questions 6 through 9; the participants were asked to describe, in their experience, what types of strategies they used, how the strategies helped them to gain a leadership role, what strategies were most effective, and how they saw these strategies supporting other leaders with a disability.

Theme 1: Coping Techniques as a Strategy. The first theme of employing coping mechanisms emerged when participants were asked what strategies they used to overcome the described barriers. Key responses such as color-coding files, self-determination, meditation, and medication came from the interviews. The participants reported that using various coping mechanisms was a key strategy to dismantling barriers to obtaining a leadership role. Participants described meditation as a coping technique that they employed when experiencing symptoms or increased stress during work hours. The leaders also mentioned how essential it was to learn to meditate as a strategy to deal with pain and extremely stressful situations.

Employing these coping mechanisms allowed these three individuals to make it through most workdays. P3 said, “I close my eyes and do some mental health exercises that I've learned in pain management.” When discussing what strategies are most

effective, participant P7 spoke about many coping mechanisms to meditate. P7 said, “I could just probably be sitting in there to meditate to, you know, to release stress.” These participants agreed that the use of coping mechanisms to manage stress was an essential strategy for making them an effective leader. This self-awareness level came with years of examining “triggers” and acknowledging the necessity of some strategy to get through challenging times. A strategy was employing coping mechanisms translated to self-determination among all participants.

Some leaders specifically spoke about how they were determined to move beyond their disability to break down barriers resulting in successful leadership tenures. Both P4 and P5 relayed experiences when they were self-determined. Their actions produced positive outcomes. For example, P5 said that whenever he was questioned about his writing skills, the questions drove him to work harder to dispel any negative perceptions.

Theme 2: Technology as a Strategy. The second theme of the acknowledgment and the need for updated technology was a key strategy for dismantling barriers affecting leadership. This theme emerged from six (85.7%) of the seven of the participants. The participants explained that based on their disability, updated technology was essential in their ability to be an effective leader. The leaders spoke of how the introduction of updated computers and software was a “great equalizer” Through the use of technology as a strategy to be an effective leader, the participants attributed success in their roles to the support received from software that minimizes the struggles that come from their disability. P5 stated “it is too difficult to manage all the information that comes to a CEO without assistance.” The participants mentioned the use of software such as dragon

software and zoom text which minimized the number of mistakes in his writing. As an organizational leader, good communication skills, writing is essential in this role.

The leaders spoke of how the implementation of this strategy allowed them to compete with leaders that did not have a disability. Each of these leaders explained that their organizational leaders expected that the leaders with a disability would manage their organizations in the same manner that a leader without a disability would. For example, both P5 and P6 had been admonished for their poor writing skills. Both relayed that the admonishment pushed them (self-determination) to overcome that challenge. Participant P1 mentioned using the “read aloud” function available in Microsoft Word. When asked about strategies he employed regarding technology, participant P2 touched on making his computer work better for him; he did not go into depth about its use. He simply stated, “how can I make my computer easier to handle?”

In the focus group interview, the participants spoke of the use of technology as an effective strategy for obtaining a leadership role and being an effective leader. The leaders’ discussion supported the experiences relayed in the individual interviews. The leaders mentioned that purchasing computers or assistive software was a key strategy. The leaders expanded on their experiences by sharing how impactful this strategy was on their ability to lead their teams and key volunteers. The leaders relayed that they were able to keep up with the high demands of their roles because of the technology they used, such as Dragon software, Zoom text. Implementing this strategy was vital to overcoming communication barriers. For example, journal notes were recorded capturing participant P6’s strong emotions through the change in tone in his voice and heavy sighs while

discussing his introduction to software that minimized the number of errors in his writing. P6 expressed that he had wished that he found such aids earlier in his career. Because of a previous relationship with P6, remaining unbiased was accomplished by jotting empathetic feelings and sticking to the interviewer's role. Participant P1 exhibited nervous behavior by laughing when discussing his writing challenges.

Theme 3: Psychological Support as a Strategy. The third theme of psychological support goes beyond medical health. When asked about strategies to overcome barriers, strategies that provide psychological support emerged as a key strategy from six of the seven participants. Interview responses, such as seeing a therapist, meditating, and self-talk were frequently mentioned by the participants. Six participants (85.7%) spoke about not revealing their disability as a measure of protection. Some of the leaders choose to seek out medical help to work through the inability to focus, episodes of lack of confidence, and pain management.

The leaders relayed experiences of having to meet with a therapist to learn how to manage the ongoing pain caused by their disabilities, stress, and PTSD. For example, P7 spoke about the need for therapy to function on a daily basis. A high-stress situation caused three of the leaders to be hospitalized. The stress exacerbated their symptoms and caused their bodies to shut down. In the experiences of these leaders, they learned to meditate as an effective strategy to gain control of the symptoms that previously derailed them. The leaders spoke of the inability at times to separate this instance from their workday. For example, P1 mentioned to protect himself against ridicule; he used social techniques, such as self-talk, to maneuver around the disability. Participant P1 relayed an

experience when he was ridiculed for his writing and spelling skills. P1 spoke of the strategy to talk through the situation to reduce anxiety. This strategy was taught to him through therapy sessions. The participants agreed that they do not always divulge that they have a disability to protect themselves from discriminating barriers.

During the focus group, the participants shared life experiences about their families and how they were raised. The participants spoke of how these experiences provided context to how they handled their disabilities. Four of the participants spoke about the positive support they received. The leaders' experiences relayed in the focus group support the experiences shared in the individual interviews. The leaders expanded their responses by sharing that their parents did not let them use their disability as a “crutch.” Two of the participants did speak about the challenges they had with family that psychologically affected how they managed their disability. Participant P4 was an outlier. P4 exhibited high self-confidence. P4 stated that he never lacked confidence, so therefore he did not mention any psychological support systems as strategies. Participant P4 stated, “I have no; I have no lack of confidence.

Category 3: Workplace Accommodations

Based on the findings, the fourth category that emerged was workplace accommodations. In alignment with the interview question 10, the participants were asked what accommodation would benefit from gaining a leadership role and how those accommodations help in advancement. When the question was posed, the participants initially reported that they did not need any accommodations. As the participants continued to talk about their experiences, two main accommodations came to the surface.

Theme 1: Staff Support as an Accommodation. The first theme of staff support emerged as an accommodation that all seven (100%) participants relied on for their success. Accommodations are very individualized. Each participant identified the accommodation(s) that help them be the most effective in their role. The leaders stated that they lean on staff to support them in their disability. Five (71.4%) of the seven participants agreed that having an administrative assistant was key accommodation for success as a leader with a disability. The administrative assistant, a secretary, or some form of administrative support took the pressure off some of the core functions that these participants were unsuccessful at accomplishing or had challenges based on their disability. The teams' knowledge of P7's behaviors allow them to shield her from unnecessary stressors. The leaders shared that the administrators provide assistance in editing written materials, preparing notes for meetings, and any duties that could derail a senior leader's day.

The leaders relayed that it was important to be transparent with their staff team and gain their trust. By gaining the trust of the staff teams, the staff teams were likely to ensure that their leader was successful in vulnerable areas due to her disability. The leaders shared that communication skills are paramount to being an effective leader. The leaders agreed that as senior leaders, their writing skills need to be above reproach. Participant P5 also explained that having an assistant is key to his success. P5 shared an experience where it said he had horrible writing skills. P5 stated he used this deficiency as motivation to get better. Participant P7 spoke of how important it was to allow the staff team to support her when she could not concentrate on tasks. Participant P3 relayed that

her team steps up to protect her from overextending. For example, participant P3 stated, “And I do have problems, but I’ve recognized what they are, and people surround me, I’m surrounded by people who know what they are, and they hold me up.”

Theme 2: Transportation as an Accommodation. The second theme of a need for transportation or help with transportation emerged among three (42.8%) of the seven participants. Based on their disability, participants P2, P4, and P5 rely on transportation as an accommodation. Although all three stressed that they did not view their disability as limiting, at times, the inability to drive frustrates them. When hired, these three individuals did not meet with any resistance from their leadership team for this accommodation. P2 relies on Uber to get to work and various meetings. Participant P4 stated, “probably the only accommodation obviously is I needed to have people who would provide transportation to me, drive me places, et cetera.” The final four aside from staff assistance as an accommodation, Participant P7 mentioned getting training regarding emotional intelligence would be beneficial for her based on the feedback she received from her manager.

Research Subquestion 3: Contextual Influence of the Organization

Category 5: Workplace Culture or Climate

Findings for subquestion 3 aligned with interview questions 11 and 12. SQ 3 pertained to the participants’ perceptions of the influence of the organizational context on the effectiveness of the strategies the participants used to advance to a leadership position. The interview responses produced such words as assimilation, transparency, mentoring, accountability, and acceptance.

Theme 1: Transparency, Workplace Culture or Climate. When asked how the participants' organizations' climate or culture helped them use their strategies to overcome barriers and how did organizational leaders support or help in using their strategies, the theme of transparency was one theme that emerged. The theme of transparency surfaced among all of the participants. Throughout their ascension to their leadership roles, the participants relayed that learning to be transparent about their disability to their superiors allowed them to implement effective leadership strategies. The participants agreed that transparency was pivotal in their effectiveness as a leader. The supervisors were more likely to support and implement accommodations when they knew these leaders had a disability. Participant P6 stated, "But making sure you get the right support, that you're transparent with your organization, so you can get the systems that you need. The participants agreed that being prudent about disclosing their disability was extremely necessary. Being transparent for these participants worked to dismantle barriers they faced, such as needing transportation and technology. The leaders spoke of experiences when being transparent was once a fear that they harbored.

As they matured in their careers, the leaders' determination to be effective leaders overtook their fear. Their perceptions of negative backlash or embarrassment diminished as their emotional intelligence matured. The leaders shared that when they became advocates for themselves, resulting in security which led to transparency about their disability. The leaders stated that being transparent about his disability got them computers, computer software, and other accommodations they needed to succeed. For

some, accommodation for transportation was needed and these leaders were secure to seek this accommodation.

Theme 2: Negative Perceptions, Workplace Culture or Climate. The second theme of negative perceptions is described as negative interactions from others and negative perceptions that the participants have of the organizations' culture or climate. A leader with a disability ability to activate key strategies to overcome barriers can be affected by the organization's culture or climate. The leaders shared experiences that they had as they matured in their leadership roles. A few leaders experienced instances when their senior leader, key volunteer, or board of directors, treated them negatively once the senior leader or volunteer became aware of the disability. In these examples, the senior leaders belittled the participants or presented barriers to ascension to a leadership role. For example, Participant P6 shared that he was met with negative perceptions about his disability throughout his leadership career and relayed that these perceptions might have impacted his leadership roles. Participant P6 mentioned that his supervisor told him that he would never be a senior leader because of his communication skills challenge. P6's supervisor told him that P6's pronunciation of the word "ask" would hinder P6's ascension to any leadership role. P6 relayed that being transparent about your disability is important but also scary. Scary because of the chance of ridicule.

During the focus group, the participants shared experiences of negative perceptions that supported the experiences shared in the individual interviews. The focus group participants shared instances of when they brought their personal negative perception of the situation. For example, FG3 shared an experience when she perceived

that her disability was hindering her effectiveness in handling the duties of a CEO and relayed that her board of directors felt the same. The board relayed that they had total confidence in her abilities despite her disability. Participant P7 mentioned that her superiors misinterpreted how she “showed up” and labeled her aggressive. This label, aggressive, forced participant P7 to create a persona that she would use to protect herself when she was in situations where she felt threatened. Some leaders did not experience similar experiences in their work environments. These leaders expressed experiences of being fully supported by their leaders and key volunteers. During the focus group session, these outliers spoke of the support they received from their parents which manifested in high self-esteem. These few leaders relayed that this support allowed them to dispel negativity and meet challenges “head on.” For example, FG2 attributed his positive attitudes about his disability to how his parents raised him. The leaders agreed that hard work and positive outcomes dispel negative perceptions. The group was in consensus about working hard to prove individuals wrong. When probed for further discussion, the participants began to talk about how newer leaders do not have the same hard work ethic.

A journal entry was made because even though three of these leaders had completely different upbringings and backgrounds, they agreed that hard work is the key to their success. An additional note was made about the consistency in responses from the individual interviews to the focus group. The focus group was held weeks after the individual interviews.

Theme 3: Positive Reinforcement, Workplace Culture or Climate. On the opposing side of negative perceptions in the workplace, the third theme of positive

reinforcements emerged. When interviewing leaders of a nonprofit, four of the seven participants spoke of experiencing positive reinforcement throughout their accession to their leadership roles. The leaders shared experiences that began with their personal leadership styles. These leaders agreed that they are responsible for setting the culture or climate in their realm of influence. The leaders spoke of presenting a positive attitude will manifest positivity in the environment therefore the staff teams would in turn exhibit positivity. For example, Participant P2 spoke of how positive attitudes among the staff foster a positive work environment. Participant P2 found that positive reinforcement as a strategy for being an effective leader was most important. P2 mentioned: “I would just say do your best not to use your disability as a means not to be able to do something, um, use it as a positive again, versus a negative.” The leaders mentioned that positive interactions with their staff supersedes negativity. When challenges arise, meeting these challenges with a positive attitude was how these leaders chose to deal with their teams. For example, P3 shared that she handles mistakes made by a staff member without negativity.

These leaders relayed that they are responsible for mentoring staff; therefore, interactions must be constructive. P3 relayed an experience she had with a staff member that made a huge mistake. P3 stressed that she could have “dressed the staff member down,” but P3’s leadership style is to work together to find a solution versus weighing on the negative. Some of the leaders spoke of how their board of directors held them accountable similar to those leaders without a disability. Their leaders spent time “teaching them the ropes” and positioning them to be successful. The leaders agreed that

when they approached their barriers positively, others picked up that behavior and positive reinforcement became the culture under their leadership. For example, participant P3 spoke of the positive relationships she developed with her staff team because she did not “whine” when she was having a bad day. Her team supported her when she was having a bad day.

Theme 4: Staff Development, Workplace Culture or Climate. When discussing workplace culture or climate, the fourth theme of staff development for people with a disability arose as a potential need in the advancement of people with disabilities to leadership roles. In the focus group discussion, the participants agreed that although most HR professionals are responsible for staff development, it is also the responsibility of organizational leaders. Participants P4 and P5 spoke of the need to “pay it forward” in response to bringing along other staff. The leaders stated that they could mentor people and give them support and encouragement. Based on their positive experiences with previous supervisors and mentors, the leaders drew on their experiences when contemplating helping others with a disability to gain leadership roles. In the focus group, the leaders expanded their discussion supporting their views on the importance of staff development. A common thread of hard work was the first response all the participants felt that individuals with a disability should not use their disability to get a break. Two of the leaders shared that both of their predecessors spent time teaching them the business, which contributed to their success as a leader.

When the leaders stepped into their CEO roles, they were well prepared and positioned to continue mentorships. The leaders demonstrated through their experiences

that they were committed to fostering environments for development opportunities for their staff teams as well as themselves. The leaders identified competencies, where they demonstrated low efficacy and sought development opportunities to become stronger in those areas. As an example, P5 realized he lacked fiscal management skills, so he took classes and did a lot of reading. The group agreed that developing training programs is not a sufficient answer to staff development. In the focus group, the leaders mentioned a strategy to surround yourself with stronger ones where you are weak. The strategies they used would benefit people with a disability aspiring to obtain a leadership role.

Participant P5 stated, “and we just have to keep doing it one person at a time. I don't know a better way, but yeah.” For example, participant FG4 stated that each individual should work to their strengths and not place themselves in roles or situations that work against their strengths. The leaders expressed that knowing and working to your strengths is the key to success. FG4 shared an experience where he saw a book about knowing and working to your strengths. The group was in consensus about hard work, self-determination, mentoring, and working to your strengths were the keys to upcoming leaders' success.

Theme 5: Intentional Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives, Culture or Climate.

The fifth theme of intentional diversity & inclusion initiatives incorporation in organizations emerged in the discussions with participants. Five (71.4%) of the seven participants felt that organizational leaders must incorporate intentional initiatives to include education focused on diverse abilities. Participant P6 stated, “the one thing that when organizations talk about diversity and inclusion, there's not a conversation around

or spaces for diverse learning abilities. The leaders relayed that organizational leaders should prepare to have leaders with disabilities, but the participants were also unsure how organizational leaders could get it accomplished. Participant P4 concluded his interview by adding,

And we need to be sure that our leaders who are making the decisions for us, the future of people who are in leadership roles give the same opportunity to folks who are blind as they do to our sighted counterparts.

All participants took ownership and agreed that they have a role to play in mentoring and getting staff ready to move into a leadership role. In the focus group, they all agreed that moving the dial is not an easy task. FG4 stated, “You make me think about what role do I play, what's my role in it? Have I even done enough?” A journal note was made because two of the participants asked for a future study that focused on African American male leaders with a disability.

Research Question Summary

The findings answered the central research question and subquestions pertaining to the perceived barriers that nonprofit leaders with a disability faced in obtaining their role and the strategies they used to overcome those barriers through the central research question. Sixteen of the themes addressed the central research question. The themes of communication and interpersonal competencies emerged as the most critical skill to have based on the participants' responses. Opportunity, access, health and medical challenges, and self-perceptions specifically addressed most of the participants' barriers. Coping techniques, technology, psychological support and staff support were the top strategies

used to overcome the barriers they faced. Transportation was an accommodation but aligned with the strategies because it three participants relied on transportation as an effective means to overcome a significant barrier they faced. Transparency was addressed as a strategy to overcome the barrier of negative perceptions. The participants' experiences supported their responses for overcoming barriers and the implementation of effective strategies.

Summary

Chapter 4 focused on the findings of this single embedded case study, triangulated among the individual interviews with seven leaders with disabilities, the focus group, and notes taking during both. Five categories emerged, (a) competencies, (b) barriers to ascension, (c) strategies used, (d) workplace accommodations, and (e) workplace culture or climate, aligned with the central research question and research subquestions. Sixteen themes were developed from the categories and provided a rich and thick description of the leaders' experiences with a disability about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a leadership role, effective strategies in overcoming such barriers, and the influence of the organizational context supporting the effective strategies. The 16 themes were: communication, interpersonal, opportunity, access, health and medical challenges, self-perceptions, coping techniques, technology, psychological support, staff support, transportation, transparency, negative perceptions, positive reinforcement, staff development, and intentional diversity and inclusion initiatives.

In Chapter 5, an interpretation of the findings is presented to confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline by comparing the findings to the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. The chapter also includes a description of the limitations to trustworthiness that arose from the execution of the study. Next, the chapter includes recommendations for further research grounded in the current study's strengths, limitations, and study findings. The chapter concludes with a description of the potential impact for positive social change at the appropriate level and implications for social change through tangible improvement.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The general management problem is that one challenge facing organizational leaders is the scarcity of skilled talent in the pipeline to assume leadership positions (Emira, Brewster, Duncan, & Clifford, 2016; Manciangli, 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017; Zandi, 2016). Even with the scarcity of skill talent, organizational leaders continue to present barriers to leadership roles for some individuals, such as women, various cultures (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Carbajal, 2018), and people with disabilities. CEOs identified the development of skilled and qualified employees as a top, persistent problem (Eichenger, 2018; White, 2017). Human resource leaders identified the need to bolster talent development efforts in their organizations to gain a competitive advantage (Borisova et al., 2017; Fahed-Sreih, 2012; Foster, 2015). The specific problem is that a potential source of skilled employees, individuals with disabilities, struggle to ascend to leadership roles while organizational leaders struggle to gain a competitive edge in developing a diverse base of skilled leadership (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017).

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single embedded case study was to explore the perceptions of a sample of leaders with a disability in seven nonprofit organizations in the same industry sector about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a leadership role and effective strategies in overcoming such barriers. I collected data from seven leaders in nonprofit organizations. I conducted individual semistructured interviews and then analyzed them using Atlas.ti software. The analysis produced five key categories and 16 themes. I conducted a focus group with four

participants using five questions created to explore the themes from the individual interviews.

In alignment with the research questions, the current study's key findings revealed that the participants encountered barriers to their ascension to a leadership role. Four key themes of opportunity, access, medical and health issues, and self-perceptions emerged as barriers faced by 71% of the participants. The key themes associated with strategies aligned with subquestion 2 were coping techniques, technology, psychological support, and workplace accommodations. Seven themes aligned with subquestion 3, contextual organizational influences, were staff support, transportation, transparency, negative perceptions, positive reinforcement, staff development, and intentional Diversity & Inclusion initiatives. Chapter 5 includes the interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications of the study, and possible positive social change.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this exploratory single embedded case study support and confirm current leadership scholarship, through the case and embedded units presenting examples that align with the literature in Chapter 2 regarding the need to develop leaders to fill a gap in the leadership pipeline. I presented an interpretation of this study's findings to confirm, disconfirm, or extend leadership studies knowledge. The results of this study revealed 16 pertinent themes aligned with the central research question, which provided the foundation for exploring how leaders with a disability overcame perceived barriers to ascending to a leadership role and the effective strategies they used.

RQ: What are the perceived barriers nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability encountered in obtaining leadership roles in their organizations and what strategies were effective in overcoming them?

The study's 16 major themes also address the three subquestions.

S1: What are the perceived barriers nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability encountered in obtaining leadership roles in their organization?

S2: What strategies did nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability perceive were effective in overcoming barriers to obtaining leadership roles in their organization?

S3: What was the contextual influence of the organization on the effectiveness of these strategies?

The current study findings largely align with research that has focused on barriers that people with disabilities face in gaining leadership roles. Despite the shortage of skilled organizational leaders, people with disabilities are disproportionately overlooked for such roles compared to people without a disability (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Carbajal, 2018).

Barriers to Ascension to a Leadership Role

Research subquestion 1 pertained to the perceived barriers that leaders with a disability faced in gaining a leadership role. People with a disability aspiring to obtain an organizational leadership role continue to be overlooked by current organizational leaders (Brite et al., 2015; Cafferky, 2016; Jansson et al., 2015). The participants reported encountering barriers to gaining a leadership role. Six of the study's major themes pertained to the perceived barriers the participants shared. Those themes included

perceived barriers of communication, interpersonal, opportunity for ascension, access to resources, health and medical challenges, and self-perceptions.

The current study participants indicated that they experienced situations when they were denied or did not pursue an opportunity to gain a leadership role due to their disability. The participants described being ridiculed and told explicitly by their supervisor that they would never advance because of their disability. These findings are consistent with the findings that Vornholt et al. (2013) and Wehman (2011) presented in their studies on the barriers people with disabilities face from employers. Some research findings indicated that negative perceptions, prejudices, and biases contributed to decision-makers overlooking a skilled and qualified employee pool of persons with disabilities (Nota et al., 2014; Wehman, 2011). The current study supported similar findings where the participants relayed that they experienced negative perceptions and biases from organizational leaders when attempting to gain a leadership role.

Previous studies indicated that when a people with disabilities encountered a barrier to opportunities to gain leadership roles, lack of access to resources was not a clear barrier. A lack of access to resources that would make them an effective leader was a clear barrier in the current study. This finding was not consistent with previous studies that revealed barriers to gaining opportunities for advancement to a leadership role existed when the individual had a disability. The current study participants relayed that having the resources to be an effective leader led to a strong sense of self-determination. In these instances where the participants exhibited strong self-determination to succeed, these experiences supported Wehman's (2016) study, which showed many people with

disabilities exhibit high self-determination levels when faced with challenges. The participants in the current study spoke of obstacles turning into driving reasons to succeed, supporting Dwivedi et al.'s (2020) position that efficient and skillful leaders may lead to successful organizations, as leaders must adapt to alternative work environments.

In the current study, a small number of participants spoke of negative self-perceptions as barriers to not pursuing or obtaining a leadership role. The participants relayed experiences of hearing negative talk from supervisors, which stopped them from ascending. These negative experiences were major barriers. As they grew in their careers, the participants learned to work through the negativity. Javidan et al. (2016) found that individuals with strong beliefs about their capabilities, knowledge, and skills will effectively perform and accomplish goals. The perceived barriers of opportunity, access, health and medical challenges and self-perceptions found in the current study align with the specific research problem that leaders with a disability perceive that barriers impeded their ascension to a leadership role. The findings indicated that the participants experienced similar barriers mentioned in the literature.

Effective Strategies to Overcome Barriers

Subquestion 2 pertained to the perceived effective strategies that leaders with a disability employed to overcome the barriers they encountered to ascending to a leadership role. Three key themes emerged in the current study regarding the strategies the participants used to overcome barriers. The themes pertinent to strategies are coping techniques, technology, and psychological support. The current study's findings support

the extension of leadership scholarship surrounding effective strategies to overcome ascension barriers. The findings support the past and current literature concerning strategies available for people with disabilities and other diverse groups as to how to tackle obstacles to ascending to leadership roles (Bruyère, 2016; Karpur & Vanlooy, 2014; Nuwagaba, & Rule, 2016; Shakespeare et al., 2019).

The current study participants easily identified key strategies that were effective in breaking down barriers. They worked to implement what they referred to as coping techniques. They defined coping techniques in the context of strategies as meditation, isolation, and medication. Employing coping techniques during work hours was essential in managing symptoms or increased stress. The participants attributed their success in implementing coping techniques to their self-awareness. The participants were very aware of their challenges and knew when to employ such techniques. The participants' ability to identify their challenges and implement strategies supported Cafferky (2016) and Wehman's (2011) findings that individuals' ability to be self-aware contributes to their performance and behavior. people with disabilities who experienced success in gaining meaningful employment exhibited high levels of self-awareness.

Contextual Influence of the Organization on the Effectiveness of These Strategies

Subquestion 3 pertained to the contextual influences that organizational leaders affected the effectiveness of the current study participants' strategies. The findings suggest that organizational leaders' behaviors could affect the participants' ability to implement effective strategies. Previous studies addressing organizational leaders' attitudes and actions regarding hiring people with disabilities presented a gap in

leadership scholarship regarding effective people with disabilities strategies to dismantle barriers. The findings of the current study could generally extend leadership scholarship. Based on the participants' responses, five key themes aligned with organizational influences on strategies emerged. Transparency, negative perceptions, positive reinforcement, staff development, and intentional diversity and inclusion initiatives were reported as actions that influenced strategies' effectiveness.

In the current study, the participants indicated that most of their leaders were willing to make accommodations for their disability based on their experiences. Being transparent with their leaders was most effective in gaining those accommodations. These findings contradict the findings from previous studies that indicated organizational leaders resisted implementing accommodations due to increased costs (Emira et al., 2016). In the current study, the participants indicated that they hesitated to be transparent about the resources they needed to be effective in their leadership roles. As they progressed into higher leadership roles, the participants relayed that transparency not only got them the needed resources, but disclosure assisted in dismantling negative perceptions.

In the current study, a few participants did not experience the same acceptance and chose to hide their need for accommodation for fear of ridicule. These participants shared the negative perceptions that their leadership had once the participants' disabilities manifested. In previous studies, negative perceptions from organizational leaders were reported as normal behavior. Emira et al. (2016) noted that people with disabilities fear asking for needed accommodations even though they have a legal right to such

accommodations. Emira et al. (2016) found that people with disabilities felt that accommodations should be provided without them having to ask and being at the mercy of their supervisor to ensure that such accommodations will happen.

Other current study participants reported that receiving additional training, such as emotional intelligence training, would help implement effective strategies in their leadership roles. One participant spoke of being reprimanded by her supervisor because of her personality change when the participant was having challenges with her symptoms. The participant agreed that with positive reinforcement and training, she could learn to be more approachable. Foster (2015) found that building the leadership pipeline depends on getting skilled and talented people into the organization and developing them. Developing staff translates to optimal levels of performance (Foster, 2015). Qualified and skilled leaders mitigate the loss of resources, performance, and knowledge, all of which affect the organizations' profit margins (Khalid et al., 2016; Muhoho, 2014).

Positive reinforcement was a strategy that other current participants agreed was an effective strategy easily implementable by the leadership team. Positive reinforcement in their organizations created an inclusive culture that did not single out individuals, particularly people with disabilities. The inclusion of people with disabilities in the leadership team creates a diverse workforce. The participants of the current study spoke of the importance of having a diverse workforce. A diverse workforce promotes diversity of skill and thought, which translates to high-performance levels. Sabharwal (2014) contended that organizational leaders do not necessarily have challenges getting a diverse workforce, but a barrier of integration and how to utilize diverse employees is the

challenge. The participants' experiences align with Sabharwal's (2014) conclusions and the participants expressed concerns about what their individual roles are in integrating and utilizing diverse ability individuals under their leadership.

Limitations of the Study

One of the most important limitations of this study was commencing data collection at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced organizational leaders to furlough their staff teams, making it difficult to recruit participants. Difficulty in contacting the leaders proved to be a barrier because the leaders were not checking work emails which was the main form of communication. The gatekeepers did not have the same access to the participants as they did prepandemic. The recruitment barrier required returning to the IRB to get permission to recruit through Walden University's participant pool. The individual interviews and focus groups had to be conducted via audio and video conferencing. The audio conferencing was limiting in this study because capturing facial expressions and body language was impossible. These traits were important nuances that could not be captured in the journaling process. Audio conferencing was also limiting because of external interruptions that impacted the recordings. While conducting one of the interviews, external noise that could not be controlled forced me to stop the recording and interview until the sounds subsided. The participant was very accommodating and gave extra time toward the interview.

Another limitation arose from the decision not to verify if the participants, people with disabilities, met the definition of having a qualified disability. The participants self-selected into the study as a leader with a disability based on specific criteria; their

honesty was a potential limitation. Participants were not asked to answer any verifying questions to establish if their self-selection was factual.

An additional limitation was the size of the sample as it pertains to transferability. The findings of the current study cannot be transferred to other cases. The thick descriptions of this case are relevant to this study only. This study's purposive sample consisted of seven leaders with a disability in a nonprofit organization and in the United States. These nonprofit leaders with a disability are not a typical sample of leaders because their experiences cannot be transferred to leaders with a disability in the for-profit sector. Leaders in the for-profit sector may have different experiences based on their industry.

Leaders with a disability outside of the United States may experience different barriers. Therefore, their strategies to overcome those barriers would differ from the participants in this study. Criteria specifying that the participants must have been in their role for at least 1 year was an additional limitation in this study. The results might not be transferrable to leaders who are in their current role for less than a year.

Recommendations

The participants in the current study provided rich textural information about and conveyed their experiences of how they encountered barriers to obtaining leadership roles and the strategies they used to dismantle those barriers. Future studies should include a more extensive and diverse sample. The current study focused on senior leaders with a disability. Senior leaders were defined as executive directors, COO, vice-presidents, CEOs and presidents of nonprofit organizations. A recommendation would be to expand

the criteria to include the leadership group referred to as program directors in a nonprofit organization. This leadership group are junior managers that provide day to day program development and implementation in the organization and maybe in the pipeline for future senior leadership roles.

One limitation affecting transferability was the focus of the current study on leaders in a nonprofit organization. An additional recommendation is to expand the study to other sectors, such as for-profit organizations, which could support or contradict the findings of this study about encountering barriers and identifying effective strategies for overcoming those barriers to ascension to a leadership role.

A future study could focus on exploring the perceived barriers and the strategies used to overcome the barriers in terms of gender, race and other demographics. The findings of this current study did not establish participants' perceptions of how gender, race, or demographics may have contributed to the barriers experienced. During the interviews and focus group, some of the participants in the current study asked if a future study could focus on gender and race. A CEO of a nonprofit organization outside of the United States inquired about a future study that would focus on nonprofit leaders with a disability outside of the United States. Exploration of the similarities or differences of organizational leaders with a disability in different countries could expand leadership knowledge about people with disabilities in leadership roles and the perceived barriers they encountered in gaining their roles and strategies they used to overcome those barriers.

An additional recommendation could be to conduct a future study to build on the strategies identified in the current study using a different research approach such as a Delphi study. An exploration of how a panel of experts views the desirability and feasibility of strategies that people with disabilities can use to overcome the barriers they face as they ascend to leadership positions could be conducted. Also, a similar study on the desirability and feasibility of implementing the supports identified in the workplace could be explored.

Implications

One challenge facing organizational leaders is the scarcity of skilled talent in the pipeline to assume leadership positions (Emira, Brewster, Duncan, & Clifford, 2016; Manciangli, 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017; Zandi, 2016). Despite acknowledging that this scarcity is an issue, organizational leaders continue to overlook qualified and skilled people with disabilities to add to their leadership pipeline. The current study's findings indicate that leaders with a disability encountered barriers to obtaining their leadership roles and had to create and implement strategies to overcome those barriers. This study has contributed to leadership scholarship by provided clear strategies that other leaders with a disability can use to overcome similar barriers they faced to gain a leadership role. In earlier studies, the leaders with disabilities demonstrated that when faced with barriers or challenges to gaining a leadership role, they could summon levels of self-determination (Wehman, 2011) to enact effective strategies to overcome those challenges. In the current study, the leaders also understood their limitations associated with their disability and this level of self-awareness was critical to their effectiveness as a

leader. The potential implication was when these leaders with a disability exhibit high self-awareness acumen associated with their disability, these leaders could identify potential barriers to effective leadership, identify effective strategies, and implement those needed strategies to overcome such barriers.

The Implication for Social Change

Individual Positive Social Change

The potential positive social change implications are that when people with disabilities, who advance successfully to leadership positions, gain a better sense of self-determination, higher self-esteem, and a higher level of self-efficacy, other people with disabilities can model and aspire to similar roles. Understanding the strategies these leaders used to overcome the barriers may provide a road map to others with disabilities striving to get in a leadership role (Bruyère, 2016). Improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities broadens the diverse talent pipeline and positions individuals with disabilities to contribute their untapped skills and gain economic stability, enhancing their ability to contribute to society and their communities (Bruyère, 2016). The findings of this current study showed that these leaders were able to identify and break down barriers to gaining leadership roles by implementing key strategies. The leaders in the current study demonstrated high levels of self-determination, self-awareness, and self-efficacy by identifying effective leadership competencies and skills they needed to be successful. The results of this study could help individual leaders with a disability with a potential roadmap to breaking down barriers and the strategies to accomplish their goals. Through the implementation of such strategies, these individuals are capable of gaining

roles that enhance their livelihood for the long run and could result in high levels of self-efficacy. These leaders become examples for upcoming leaders by opening doors to career advancement and expanding the talent pipeline for future leaders with a disability.

Organizational Positive Social Change

An additional positive social change implication comes when leaders of organizations, particularly nonprofits, can use social return on investment (SROI) as support for securing governmental/private funding for the sustainability of the organization (F. Owen et al., 2015). Measuring social outcomes shows accountability and transparency, which translates to institutional sustainability (Rotheroe & Richards, 2007). Continuity in funding comes when funding entities trust that the revenue is effectively managed. The leaders in the current study are invested in creating diverse organizations, including people with disabilities, strengthening the diversity of skills. Each leader brought more than five years of tenure, one serving in his CEO role for 40 years, translating to organizational stability and continuity. Having multiple years of tenure allowed these leaders to build cultures that are inclusive of people with disabilities and create opportunities for skilled people with disabilities to enter the leadership pipeline supporting future stability for people with disabilities.

Implications on Theory

The conceptual framework of the current study incorporated the theories of self-efficacy and expectancy-value as applicable to leaders with a disability when faced with barriers to obtaining a leadership role. According to Bandura (1977) and Atkinson (1957), individuals summon the motivation to activate internal coping mechanisms to

overcome obstacles and inform the belief in future success. The leaders' experiences and behaviors in the current study demonstrated an alignment with Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Atkinson's expectancy-value theory. Each of the leaders exhibited high levels of self-awareness, self-determination, and self-efficacy. At the beginning of their careers, the leaders spoke of how they learned to motivate themselves when confronted with barriers or challenges to gaining leadership roles. As each progressed in their tenure, their belief that they were skilled and deserving overcame the barriers or challenges they encountered. The leaders' internal motivation pushed them forward and supported their success in developing and implementing strategies. They made choices to (a) get professional help, (b) obtain accommodations, and (c) craft a supportive and positive culture that aided in their success. Based on these findings, the leaders in this study showed that when faced with barriers to their succession to a leadership role, they summoned up the motivation to establish effective strategies to overcome the barriers they faced. The leaders' actions affirm the theories by demonstrating the leaders' ability to find the motivation to face their obstacles head-on, develop strategies and implement those strategies, and be self-aware to identify their personal limitations.

Implications for Practice

Previous leadership studies revealed an ongoing shortage of skilled individuals to fill organizations' leadership pipelines. CEOs agreed that such a shortage threatens the organizations' competitive edge (Emira et al., 2016; Marsay, 2014; White, 2017).

Scholars found that organizational leaders continue to look over skilled individuals, including people with disabilities, to fill those roles even with such a shortage. Further

studies on people with disabilities employment showed that employers exhibit bias and lean on stereotypes when considering hiring people with disabilities (Emira et al., 2016). Organizational leaders have been known to present barriers to employment and career advancement of people with disabilities. Individuals with known disabilities are less likely to hold professional or management positions when compared to those without disabilities, 34.1% with disabilities versus 41.0% without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

Additionally, little was known about what strategies people with disabilities in leadership roles used to overcome barriers to gaining a leadership role. Without clear strategies, individuals with disabilities may continue to face challenges in breaking down barriers. The findings of the current study extend the knowledge in leadership practice by revealing effective strategies that this group of leaders used to overcome barriers based on concrete experiences. Understanding the strategies these leaders used to overcome the barriers may provide a road map to others with disabilities striving to get in a leadership role (Bruyère, 2016). The results revealed how leaders in this case succeeded in using strategies such as the use of technology, computer software that supports weaknesses in communication skills. The leaders' ability to summon the motivation to activate internal coping mechanisms to overcome obstacles contributed to their effectiveness and could for novice leaders.

The leaders in the current study spoke of the need for organizational leaders to bolster staff development. Organizational leaders are aware that they need to train and develop staff (Borisova et al., 2017; Fahed-Sreih, 2012; Foster, 2015). Qualified staff

presents a quantifiable financial burden on the organization (Fahed-Sreih, 2012; Khalid et al., 2016).

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single embedded case study was to understand how leaders with a disability overcame perceived barriers to ascending to a leadership role. An additional purpose was to explore the effective strategies they used to overcome those perceived barriers. Data were collected from semistructured individual interviews with seven leaders with a disability from nonprofit organizations, a focus group with four of those leaders, and journal notes. Thematic analysis across the multiple data sources revealed 16 themes in five categories. Six of the study's themes addressed the perceived barriers the participants shared about their experiences in obtaining leadership roles in their organization: perceived barriers of communication, interpersonal barriers, opportunity for ascension, access to resources, health and medical challenges, and self-perceptions. Three key themes pertained to the strategies they used to overcome barriers: coping techniques, technology, and psychological support. Six themes emerged that align with organizational influences on strategies: transportation, transparency, negative perceptions, positive reinforcement, staff development, and intentional diversity and inclusion initiatives were reported as actions that influenced strategies' effectiveness.

The case of leaders with a disability encountered barriers to obtaining their leadership roles and had to create and implement strategies to overcome those barriers. The results of the current study have decreased the gap in leadership scholarship about how leaders with a disability overcame barriers to ascending to a leadership role and the

strategies they implemented to gain their roles. When faced with barriers or challenges to obtaining a leadership role, the leaders in the study summoned levels of self-determination to enact effective strategies to overcome those challenges. The leaders also understood their limitations associated with their disability and self-awareness was critical to their effectiveness as a leader.

The potential implications for positive social change are that when people with disabilities who advance successfully to leadership positions gain a better sense of self-determination, higher self-esteem, and a higher level of self-efficacy, other people with disabilities can model and aspire to similar roles. Understanding the strategies these leaders used to overcome the barriers may provide a road map to others with disabilities striving to get in a leadership role (Bruyère, 2016). The current study's findings support Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Atkinson's expectancy-value theory. Each of the leaders in the current study exhibited high levels of self-awareness, self-determination, and self-efficacy. At the beginning of their careers, the leaders spoke of how they learned to motivate themselves when confronted with barriers or challenges to gaining leadership roles. Implementing strategies such as the use of technology and computer software helped leaders to address weaknesses in communication skills. Recommendations for future studies include exploring different demographics such as gender and race, and leaders in other countries other than the United States, and focusing on other employment sectors. As the findings of this study indicate, the strategies that these leaders with a disability used on a day to day basis were effective in their success in gaining and remaining in their leadership roles.

The current study findings indicate that leaders with a disability who are self-aware and self-determine exhibit high levels of self-efficacy. Persons with a disability who develop these traits over time have a higher chance of gaining the skills and competencies to ascend to a leadership role. Organizational leaders who seek skilled individuals to fill the leadership pipelines will have a diverse pool to activate.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction: Hello, I am Dawne Hardy, and I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. In this study, I will explore how leaders with a disability overcame any perceived barriers to obtaining a leadership role and the strategies they used to get there. With your permission, I would like to record the interview to ensure that I capture an accurate account of your responses. If you do not want the interview to be recorded, I will take notes instead. Your identity and place of employment will be kept confidential. Please feel free to ask me any clarifying questions as they may arise.

Name:

Job Title:

Participation #:

Years in leadership role(s):

Organization:

Interview Questions

1. In your experience, what competencies make an effective leader in a nonprofit organization? In your opinion, why are these competencies important?
2. What unique leadership competencies must a person with a disability possess to overcome perceived barriers to advancement to a leadership role?? Why are these competencies particularly important for a leader with a disability?
3. What types of barriers did you encounter in your ascension to a leadership role?
What are a few examples of these types of barriers?
4. How did these barriers impede your progress? What are a few examples?
5. Which of these barriers was the most difficult for you to overcome? Why?

6. What types of strategies did you use to overcome these barriers? What are a few examples?
 7. How did these strategies help your ascension to a leadership role?
 8. In your opinion, which strategy or strategies were most effective? Why?
 9. In your opinion, and if applicable, how do you see these strategies supporting other leaders with a disability seeking to ascend their organization's leadership ladder? What are a few examples?
 10. What workplace accommodations, if any, did you benefit from to gain a leadership role? How did the accommodation(s) help you to advance to leadership?
 11. In your experience, how did the climate and culture of the organization help you use strategies to overcome barriers and ascend to leadership? What are a few examples?
 12. In your experience, how did organizational leaders support you or otherwise help you use strategies to overcome barriers and ascend to leadership? What are a few examples?
- Closing: Is there anything additional you would like to share about your experiences in using strategies to overcome barriers to ascend to a leadership position?

Appendix B: Virtual Focus Group Protocol

Introduction:

I am Dawne Hardy, your moderator and I want to thank you for participating in this virtual focus group. In this study, I will explore how leaders with a disability overcame any perceived barriers to obtaining a leadership role and the strategies they used to get there. The purpose of the virtual focus group is to explore themes derived from the individual interviews. With your permission, I would like to record the session to ensure that I capture an accurate account of your responses. If you are uncomfortable, I will take notes instead. Your identity and place of employment will be kept confidential. Please feel free to ask me any clarifying questions as they may arise.

1. Welcome

Introduce yourself and send the Sign-In Sheet with a few quick demographic questions (the type of position held) around to the group while you are introducing the virtual focus group.

Review the following:

- Who you are and what you are trying to do?
- What was done with this information?
- Why I asked you to participate.

2. Explanation of the process

Ask the group if anyone has participated in a virtual focus group before. Explain that the virtual focus group is being used more and more often in research.

About virtual focus group

- I learn from you (positive and negative)
- Not trying to achieve consensus, I am gathering information.
- In this project, I am doing both interviews and virtual focus group discussions. The reason for using both of these tools is that I can get more in-depth information from a smaller group of people in a virtual focus group. This allows me to obtain feedback from multiple people in a shorter time and allows access to people not in my vicinity. The intent is to explore the emerging themes with the virtual focus group participants.

Logistics

- The virtual focus group will last about one hour.

3. Ground Rules

Ask the group to suggest some ground rules. After they brainstorm some, make sure the following are on the list.

- Everyone should participate.

- Information provided in the virtual focus group must be kept confidential.
 - Stay with the group and please do not have side conversations.
 - Turn off cell phones if possible.
4. Turn on the session recorder within GOTOMEETING.com.
 5. Ask the group if there are any questions before we get started and address those questions.
 6. Introductions
 - Go around the group: give your first name or a pseudonym and state the type of organization where you work. [Prior to the focus group, the participants were allowed to select a pseudonym to protect their privacy. The moderator will refer to each participant based on the participant's request.]

The discussion begins, make sure to give people time to think before answering the questions and do not move too quickly. Use the probes to make sure that all issues are addressed but move on when you feel you are starting to hear repetitive information.

Focus Group Questions: IRB approval # 04-01-20-0520749

1. A common theme from the interviews was negative external perceptions about one's disability. If you have experienced negative external perceptions about your disability, how have they affected your ascension to a leadership role?
2. What are some suggestions for how to dispel negative external perceptions about your disability (in terms of your leadership role)?
3. A common theme in the interviews was challenges to one's competence. If executive leaders challenged your competence as a skilled leader because of your disability, how did you respond to such challenges?
4. In your opinion, what actions do individuals with a disability need to implement to be prepared to ascend to a leadership role?
5. Based on your experience as a leader with a disability, how should organizational leaders (CEO/presidents and board members) prepare their organizations to fill the talent pipeline with people with a disability?

That concludes our virtual focus group. Thank you so much for coming and sharing your thoughts and opinions with me. If you have additional information that you did not get to say in the virtual focus group, please feel free to email it to me at [REDACTED].

Materials and supplies for the focus group moderator

- Notebook for notetaking

Appendix C: Field Test Request Letter

Date

Hello,

I, Dawne Hardy, am inviting leaders in a nonprofit organization who have a qualified disability according to the Americans with a Disability Act (ADA) to be in the study. This form is part of a process called informed consent to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of a sample of leaders with a disability in five to six nonprofit organizations about what barriers they encountered in obtaining a leadership role and effective strategies in overcoming such barriers.

I am seeking your support by providing feedback the appropriateness of the interview and focus group questions for this protected group of participants.

Below is the research question (RQ-S3) and subquestions and the interview/focus group questions.

RQ: What are the perceived barriers nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability encountered in obtaining leadership roles in their organizations and what strategies were effective in overcoming them?

S1: What are the perceived barriers nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability encountered in obtaining leadership roles in their organization?

S2: What strategies did nonprofit organizational leaders with a disability perceive were effective in overcoming barriers to obtaining leadership roles in their organization?

S3: What was the contextual influence of the organization on the effectiveness of these strategies?

After reviewing the research questions and enclosed interview questions, please answer the following about the interview and focus group questions:

1. Based on the purpose of the study and research questions, are the interview and focus group questions likely to elicit a response that will inform the study?
2. Are the participants likely to find any of the questions inappropriate? If yes, why and do you have any suggestions on revisions?
3. Were any of the questions difficult to understand? If yes, do you have any suggestions on revisions?
4. Please feel free to provide any feedback that is not covered in the above questions.

Should you choose to serve as an expert in this field test, please answer the four questions above, but please do not answer the interview or focus group questions intended for the participants of the study.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Dawne M. Hardy

[REDACTED]

Appendix D: Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear Sir/Madam,

I want to invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting for my dissertation in the doctoral program in Management at Walden University. I am conducting the study to explore the barriers that people with disabilities face in ascending to leadership roles. I will also explore the strategies that leaders with disabilities used to gain their leadership roles. I contacted you to participate because you are a leader in a nonprofit organization that is located within the United States that other nonprofit organizations have acknowledged for its culture of diversity and inclusion, which extends from key stakeholders to employees and included people with disabilities.

The criteria for participation in the study are (a) a leader in a nonprofit organization and (b) has a qualified disability according to the ADA. Feel free to pass this invitation on to those who might meet the participation criteria. If you meet the criteria above, I would very much appreciate your participation in my study, which involves an individual interview and a virtual focus group. You may decide if you want to participate in just the individual interview or in the individual interview and the follow-up virtual focus group. The focus group is virtual. We will use SKYPE or a similar medium. Your responses were audio-recorded to ensure an accurate account. The virtual focus group will consist of discussing and exploring in-depth the themes identified from the analysis of the individual interviews across the participants; no individual responses will be disclosed.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions before responding to the invitation to participate. If you are interested, please contact me at the number or email provided below. I will contact you to set up a face-to-face or virtual interview. If a Virtualinterview, we will agree on a place to ensure your privacy. If the interview is virtual, we will use SKYPE or a similar medium. Your responses were audio-recorded to ensure an accurate account. If you are uncomfortable with the audio recording of the individual interview, I will take notes instead. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Dawne Hardy, dawne.hardy@waldenu.edu