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Implementation Strategies for Organizational Change Initiatives

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MSOL, Shenandoah University, 2015

BS, Mountain State University, 2012

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Change initiatives within the higher education industry often fail because leaders are not successful in implementing change strategies. Higher education leaders who lack successful implementation strategies decrease employee productivity and increase educational costs for students. Grounded in Kotter's (1995) eight-step model of change, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives. The participants were four leaders of two higher education organizations in West Virginia who successfully implemented change initiatives in finance operations. Data were collected from virtual semistructured interviews and organization documents. Yin's 5 step process was used to analyze data, and three themes emerged: (a) increased communication, (b) importance of organizational culture, and (c) employee buy-in. A key recommendation is for leaders to determine a blend of change models depending on the organizational needs before, during, and after an organizational change. The implementation for positive social change includes a path for higher education leaders to successfully implement sustainable change initiatives that positively benefit student learning that can impact communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Ethan and Emma, and to my late mother, Sharon. I am so grateful for your love and patience throughout my doctoral journey.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Sustainable organizational change contributes to the success and survival of an organization in an ever-changing environment (Schweiger et al., 2018). How leaders approach, structure, and maintain the change will determine the success of the change. The management of organizational change represents the entire process, including organization, coordination, and modifications to increase efficiency and competitiveness (Moldovan & Macarie, 2014).

Background of the Problem

The implementation and maintenance of successful long-term organizational change initiatives is a dilemma faced by organizational leaders (Febriani & Yancey, 2019). The speed and complexity of change are increasing, and the success of an organization depends on how successful leaders are at leading that change (Wulandari et al., 2020). The most challenging aspects of leading an organizational change initiative are the leader's ability to quickly diagnose and develop the change capacity of the organization (Ramezan et al., 2013).

A component of an organization's change capacity is employee readiness for change (Ramezan et al., 2013). An employee's change readiness is a mental state that focuses on the extent to which organizational members' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions reflect and recognize the need for a particular change at a specific point in time (Rafferty & Minbashian, 2019). Leaders should strive to increase employee readiness when determining the way to introduce organizational change. Improved organizational communication and team collaboration are ways leaders can introduce organizational change while increasing employee readiness (Ramezan et al., 2013).

Problem Statement

Sustainable organizational change contributes to the success and survival of an organization in an ever-changing environment (Schweiger et al., 2018). Approximately 70% of organizational transformation initiatives fail due to a leader's lack of a clear understanding of the steps necessary to implement change successfully or ability to engage employees (Varney, 2017). The general business problem is that failed change initiatives impact employee productivity and organizational profits. The specific business problem is that some senior-level executives in higher education lack strategies to implement organizational change initiatives.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives. The target population for the study was four directors of two higher education organizations in West Virginia who have successfully implemented change initiatives in finance operations within the last 5 years. The results of this study may contribute to social change by reducing stress and uncertainty on employees and, therefore, better interactions with students. Less stress at work translates to less stress at home and more positive interactions with families and with others in their communities. Successful initiatives may also create efficient processes, reduce costs, and possibly slow increasing education costs for students.

Nature of the Study

There are three types of research methods available to researchers: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Gliner et al, 2017). Qualitative data analysis includes various techniques for coding themes and assigning meaning to data, which are usually words or images (Gliner et al., 2017). Qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative methodology was the appropriate choice of method because I used open-ended questions in interviews with direct observations to explore and understand the unique experiences of higher education leaders. Quantitative researchers examine variables' characteristics or the relationships among variables (Saunders et al., 2016). Quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study because examining relationships among variables would not help me identify strategies to implement organizational change initiatives successfully. The mixed-method is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Saunders et al., 2016). The mixed-method was not the best choice for this study because of the quantitative aspect; I did not plan to evaluate statistical data or the relationships among variables gathered through closed-ended questions.

To obtain data for a qualitative study, researchers may use many designs, including case study, or phenomenological designs (Yin, 2018). A case study design is used to develop a profound understanding of a phenomenon (Gliner et al., 2017). Case studies can be explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive (Gliner et al., 2017). A single-case study is based on a single case while using multiple data types and sources (Yin, 2018). A multiple-case study is organized with two or more case studies and is more rigorous for a broader understanding phenomenon and the ability to compare findings among cases (Yin, 2018). The multiple case study design was the appropriate choice for this study because I explored multiple cases for a broader perspective of the phenomena. Furthermore, conclusions derived from two cases, as with two experiments, are expected to be more robust than those arising from a single case (Yin, 2018). Phenomenology is a study of people’s conscious experience of their life-world (Mirriam & Tisdell, 2016). The intent of my study was not to explore the personal meanings participants place on experiencing phenomena, or their activities, or their beliefs which made a phenomenological design an inappropriate design for my study.

Research Question

What strategies do senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives?

Interview Questions

1. What is the role of management in implementing a change initiative in your organization?

2. How do you engage employees in the planning process for change initiatives?

3. How do you communicate an organizational change within your organization?

4. How did your organization identify and address the key challenges to implementing change initiatives?

5. How have you evaluated employee buy-in to the change initiatives?

6. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies for implementing the organizational change initiatives?

7. What additional information would you like to share related to the strategies your organization used to implement organizational change successfully?

Conceptual Framework

The primary model supporting this study was Kotter's eight-step model of change. Kotter developed a model of eight steps in 1995, for organizational leaders to follow when implementing large-scale change (Kotter, 2012). Leaders in organizations may use Kotter's eight-step change model to focus on the specific steps for leading the change process (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2017). Kotter argued that leaders should follow the eight-steps in the exact order indicated, and that missing one step may compromise the success of the organizational change (Appelbaum et al., 2017).

Kotter's eight steps for implementing change are (a) create a sense of urgency, (b) develop a guiding team that has trust and emotional commitment, (c) creates uplifting visions and sets of strategies identified by the guiding team, (d) communicate those visions and strategies, (e) give power, (f) create short-term wins, (g) keep momentum, and (h) make change stick by nurturing a new culture (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2017). Following the eight-step model during an organizational change requires overlapping stages and guiding teams at multiple levels in the organization (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Kotter's eight-step model was therefore selected as the conceptual framework for understanding how leaders create a deep form of influence to encourage followers to engage in and embrace organizational change through a model of change.

Operational Definitions

Organizational change: The process in which an organization changes its strategies, structure, or organizational culture to affect change within the organization (Nery et al., 2019).

Resistance to change: The action taken by individuals when they perceive that a change that is occurring is a threat to them (Umble & Umble, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Research assumptions are issues, ideas, or positions that cannot be avoided in research because every viewpoint holds, to some degree, a concealed assumption (Theofandisis & Fountouki, 2018). There were two assumptions associated with this study. The first assumption was that adequate information would be revealed through data collection to answer the research question. The second assumption was that the participants would answer questions openly and honestly.

Limitations

Limitations of a study include potential weaknesses that are usually out of the researcher's control (Theofandisis & Fountouki, 2018). This study had three limitations. The first limitation was the participants' potential hesitation to be open and honest in their experiences while answering the interview questions. The second limitation was the participants' ability to recall specific steps during a process that may be useful to the study. The third limitation was the sample size of the organizations selected, which could have impacted the time to reach saturation.

Delimitations

Delimitations of a study are set boundaries and define the scope of the study (Babbie, 2015). One delimitation of this study was the senior-level executives who participated in this study were from two higher education institutions in West Virginia. Another delimitation was that newly hired senior-level executives who are not familiar with strategies to implement change initiatives successfully were excluded from this study. The criteria for this study included senior-level executives in higher education with a minimum of 5 years of experience with a West Virginia higher education institution who had successfully implemented change initiatives to improve productivity and organizational profit.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Change initiatives that are unsuccessful in higher education pose a financial and political risk (Davis & Fifolt, 2017). Providing higher education leaders with a more profound understanding of successful change initiative implementation strategies may improve the financial wellness of the organization. Leaders may also benefit from understanding how employees are affected during change initiatives and understand what affects their support or resistance to change initiatives. The results of this study may help leaders in higher education successfully implement change initiatives that improve productivity and increase performance.

Implications for Social Change

When change initiatives are successfully implemented, employees are less stressed because of uncertainties. For example, Yu (2009) found that when employees understand or are involved in the change initiative plans, they are less stressed at work and at home (Yu, 2009). The involvement of employees in the early stages of an organizational change initiative, may improve the human conditions within the organization. A successful implementation of initiatives in higher education may result in less employee stress; therefore, students' learning could benefit and possibly reduce the rate of the increase in the cost of education. The results of this study may thereby provide a path for higher education leaders to successfully implement sustainable change initiatives that positively benefit student learning that can impact communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that senior-level executives in higher education used to implement organizational change initiatives. I organized the literature review by topics related to the study problem: change models, leadership styles, organizational change, and organizational culture. This literature review includes peer-reviewed articles and books from published materials in online databases and websites that include EBSCOhost, Emerald, Google Scholar, Harvard Business Review, ProQuest, and SAGE. Keywords included the following: *change management, organizational change, resistance to change, organizational culture, change models, transformational leadership*, *evolution of change,* and *change communication.* This study includes 104 references with 94 peer-reviewed references

(90%) with 78 references (75%) within 5 years of the anticipated graduation date of 2022.

Kotter's Eight-Step Model of Change

I chose Kotter's eight-step model of change to guide my investigation into what strategies business leaders used to initiate and manage successful change initiatives. Kotter's model includes eight steps for organizational leaders to follow when implementing large-scale change. Kotter's eight-step model of change Kotter's eight-step model of change, developed in 1995, is a change model used to identify steps leaders should concentrate on while leading an organizational change process (Kotter, 2012). Leaders in organizations may use Kotter's eight-step change model to focus on what steps to concentrate on while leading the change process (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2017). Leaders should follow the eight-steps in order because overlapping one step may compromise the success of the organizational change (Appelbaum et al., 2012; Baloh et al., 2018). The eight steps are (a) create a sense of urgency, (b) develop a guiding team that has trust and emotional commitment, (c) create uplifting visions and a strategic plan, (d) communicate vision and strategies, (e) give power, (f) create short-term wins, (g) keep momentum, and (h) create reinforcements of the new culture (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2017). Following a model through the process of change requires overlapping stages and guiding teams at multiple levels in the organization; some cases do not strictly follow the eight-step flow (Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

The first step of the model of change is to create a sense of urgency for the change. Employees need to feel a sense of urgency so that they feel that something must be done about the organizational problem (Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Wheeler & Holmes, 2017). This step begins the process of changing employee behavior and any perceptions regarding the change. Creating a sense of urgency includes a method of seeing, feeling, and improving by showing evidence from outside of the organization that demonstrates that change is required (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Creating short- and long-term goals, teamwork, and measuring success are important steps leaders should take when promoting urgency (Van den Heuvel et al., 2016).

In Step 2, the goal is to build a guiding team to lead the change. Leaders must create a team of individuals with the right characteristics to drive the change effort (Mohiuddin & Mohteshamuddin, 2020). After the team is established, there will be a process of development that will remove and replace members that are not sharing the vision of the change progress. Individuals that are enthusiastic, loyal, and can model trust and teamwork are the appropriate choice for the guiding team (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). The team should consist of all levels of employees, not just upper management (Van den Heuvel et al., 2016). The mixed group may help one another develop the team and prepare for the next step of creating a vision.

In Step 3, developing a vision and strategy occurs once a sense of urgency for the change has been created and a guiding team has been formed. A good vision serves three purposes: clarifies the general direction for change, motivates people to take action in the right direction, and coordinates the actions of different people in a fast and efficient way (Kotter, 2012). The guiding team asks questions to make the vision a reality, identify what change strategies are unacceptably dangerous, and what should not be altered

(Kotter & Cohen, 2002). The vision should be so clear that it can be articulated in one minute or written on one page of paper (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Leaders should create realistic and attainable goals that can easily be converted into reality (Van den Heuvel et al., 2016). When leaders provide a clear vision, it may help the team be ready to communicate the vision and strategies.

In Step 4, communicating the vision motivates and coordinates action towards the organizational change. Successful communication of a vision fails for many reasons, primarily because it is not communicated well enough to reach all levels of the organization (Kotter, 2012). If the change is expressed often, but poorly, the vision may not be carried out. Good communication is not simply a data transfer; leaders need to communicate in a way that addresses anxiety, accepts anger, and evokes faith in the shared vision (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Keeping the communication simple and heartfelt while trying to understand what people are feeling about a change is the key to effectively communicate for buy-in (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Leaders should avoid under-communicating the message and ensure consistency when communicating to gain support from employees at all levels of the organization (Van den Heuvel et al., 2016). Once leaders have gained support from employees at various levels of the organization through communication, they may be better prepared for the next step of empowering employees for action.

Step 5 includes empowering employees by removing barriers to implement change allows as many people as possible to move towards the vision. The most effective way to help employees understand and support a change vision is to remove any barriers

(Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Leaders should ensure that the organizational processes and structures are in place and aligned with the overall organizational vision. An existing organizational structure can undermine the new vision because employees at all levels become so accustomed to one basic organizational design and may be resistant to alternatives or the new direction (Kotter, 2012). Making sure that the structure is compatible with the vision and communicating the vision to employees are ways to empower employees and remove barriers (Kotter, 2012).

In Step 6, when leaders create short-term wins, employees impacted by the change may see how their efforts are contributing to the change effort. Short-term wins are an imperative component of a successful change effort (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Short-term wins generate faith in the change effort, emotionally reward frontline employees, and encourage positive growth towards the change (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Leaders can help employees reach short-term goals by understanding the relationship between leadership, management, and short-term results (Kotter, 2012). The wins must be visible to as many people as possible to build momentum towards the change (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). With these short-term wins, leaders and employees may continue to build on their success and avoid loss of momentum (Van den Heuvel et al., 2016). When employees reach short-term wins, leaders may be better prepared to keep the momentum by establishing new goals for employees.

In Step 7, leaders should motivate employees to adopt organizational change and make adjustments when needed after short-term wins. Short-term wins provide energy towards a successful organizational change and support the new direction (Kotter &

Cohen, 2002). However, the sense of urgency after several short-term wins can begin to decrease as an organization takes on more challenges to reach the organizational change goal (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). The first short-term wins are easy goals to reach, set by leaders to gain employee buy-in. However, the next set of goals to finalize a change is often much harder to attain. Leaders must continuously look for ways to keep urgency up, delegate tasks that are no longer relevant to new goals, and continue until the vision is a reality (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). When leaders establish ways to keep urgency up, they may be better prepared to make the new changes align with a new culture.

In Step 8, leaders should align new practices made as part of the change effort to ensure they are compatible with the current culture and values. Culture is influential as it refers to norms of behavior and shared values among a group of people (Kotter, 2012). When new practices are merged into an old culture, it is an opportunity to remove inconsistencies while successfully implementing change. To make changes stick, leaders should promote employees who act according to the new norms into influential and visible positions (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Leaders should communicate the benefits of what the change will bring to the organization to help support the new change (Van den Heuvel et al., 2016). Transformation efforts can have serious consequences when implemented without awareness and skill (Kotter, 2012).

The eight common errors that cause transformation efforts to fail include (a) allowing too much complacency, (b) failing to create a sufficiently powerful guiding coalition, (c) underestimating the power of vision, (d) under communicating the vision by a factor of 10, (e) permitting obstacles to block the new vision, (f) failing to create short-term wins, (g) declaring victory too soon, and (h) neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the corporate culture (Kotter, 2012). The consequences that occur due to common errors are: (a) new strategies are not implemented well, (b) acquisitions do not achieve expected synergies, (c) reengineering takes too long and costs too much, (d) downsizing does not get costs under control, and (e) quality programs do not deliver hoped-for results (Kotter, 2012). When results indicate that the new ways of working are better than the old, leaders will know the change has been anchored into the culture.

Lewin's Model of Change

Lewin's model is used by leaders for a short-stepped approach to help an organization and its employees through organizational change. Lewin's (1947) model of change has three phases: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing and is used by leaders for implementing change (Hussain et al., 2018). The model, originally developed as a means of resolving social conflict, such as racism rather than an approach to organizational change, has become an approach used by leaders as a tool for implementing change (Burnes, 2020). Lewin's change management model is a simple yet straightforward approach to successfully implementing an organizational change initiative. If used appropriately, this model can be useful to managers and leaders in organizations to track where change efforts are in the process and remind management of inherent culturing issues in the unfreezing and refreezing processes (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2017). Once the organization is ready to accept that change is necessary, leaders may begin the first step in Lewin's model of unfreezing.

Before an organizational change can be implemented, an organization must go through the unfreezing process. Unfreezing is the first step in Lewin's three-stage model of change (Dyer et al., 2016). The phase begins when leaders recognize and admit that the current situation is not producing adequate results (Dyer et al., 2016). During the unfreezing process, group behaviors begin to change, and involving those affected by the change should start at this stage (Hussain et al., 2018). The more employees know about the change, and why it is necessary, may increase the motivation to accept the change.

Once the unfreezing step is complete, leaders may move on to the next step in Lewin's model. The second step in Lewin's model is the change process; how a company adapts to its environment and learns new behaviors (Dyer et al., 2016). Leaders should recognize that this step includes a trial and error process. During this step, leaders should educate, communicate, participate, and provide emotional support and incentives to employees about change (Hussain et al., 2018). The employee's involvement will be more effective if employees are empowered and given a level of authority (Mathieu, Gilson, & Rubby, 2006). Once the change step is complete, and employees understand why it is necessary, they may be better prepared for the next step in Lewin's model of refreezing.

When the change step is complete, leaders may move into the last step of Lewin's change model. The final step of Lewin's change model is the process of refreezing (Dyer et al., 2016). To make a permanent change, leaders should formalize and institutionalize new behaviors, methods, procedures, and routines (Dyer et al., 2016). During the refreeze step, leaders move out of the change process and focus on sustaining a new culture

(Burnes, 2020). According to Schein (1999), motivation is not enough to implement change; a theory or a model of change must also explain the change mechanisms. Further, having position power is not enough to make planned change happen (Schein, 1999). In Lewin's model, there is a profound psychological process that involves unlearning without loss of identity and difficult relearning as one attempts to restructure one's thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes (Schein, 1999). Lewin's model outlines how leaders should acknowledge the anxiety that employees feel throughout the change and redirect these fears through cognitive redefinition (Schein, 1999). Leaders should celebrate the success with employees once this stage is successfully met to promote necessary future change with less resistance.

When leaders determine which model to use for organizational change, they should consider any social implications that a model may cause. The dominant role of leadership, employee involvement, and knowledge sharing are all interrelated factors for a successful change process (Hussain et al., 2018). If these factors are unbalanced, the change effort will be unsuccessful. The potential social implications include the framework of relationships between leadership to employee involvement and how leader behavior relates to engagement and knowledge sharing (Hussain et al., 2018). Kotter and Lewin's models are both multi-step models that include specific steps that should be followed by leaders to implement successful change (Galli, 2018). The difference between the two models includes Kotter's model outlines more detailed steps for leaders to follow for implementing change; by contrast, Lewin's model is broad and allows for leaders to make assumptions as to how to apply each step. Kotter and Lewin's models focus on the organizational change needed and the steps leaders should use to implement and sustain change. Lewin's model was not chosen as the conceptual framework for this study because I wanted to identify the specific steps used by leaders to implement change.

ADKAR Model

The ADKAR model is used by leaders to understand employee change adaption, as opposed to the change itself. The Prosci ADKAR model is a change management model that guides individual and organizational change (Balluck et al., 2020). ADKAR is an acronym that represents the five elements or objectives that must be in place for a successful organizational change (Hiatt, 2006). The five elements are (a) awareness, (b) desire, (c) knowledge, (d) ability, and (e) reinforcement. The use of this model may outline how business leaders can increase the likelihood that their changes are implemented successfully.

The first step in ADKAR model is the leader's responsibility to generate awareness of the organizational change. Awareness signifies a person's understanding of the nature of the change, why the change is being made, and the risk of not changing (Hiatt, 2006). The lack of awareness is the primary source of employee resistance during organizational change (Hiatt, 2006). For individuals within the organization that are dissatisfied with the current state, change may be welcome (Jones-Schenk, 2019). The steps that leaders can take to build awareness include effective communication, sponsorship, supervisor coaching, and business information availability (Hiatt, 2006). Effective communication begins with identifying audience groups, determining the appropriate message, and the timing for these communications (Hiatt, 2006). The person presenting the information should have credibility and be knowledgeable about the present organizational structure (Karambelkar & Bhattacharya, 2017). Supervisors are in charge of translating the change message from executive-level leadership to the rest of the organization, which provides an opportunity to collect feedback from employees and reduce any misunderstandings (Hiatt, 2006). Once employees are aware of the need for organizational change, leaders may be better prepared to move into the next step of the ADKAR model.

Once employees understand why an organizational change is needed, they would need to make a personal decision to support the change. Desire is the second step of the ADKAR model that signifies the willingness of the individual to support and engage in the needed change (Jones-Schenk, 2019). Hiatt (2006) indicated that making the transition from awareness to desire is the most challenging ADKAR element to achieve for employees. The challenge for leaders is creating a desire to change among employees (Hiatt, 2006). Karambelkar and Bhattacharya (2017) explained that during this phase, leaders should highlight employee opportunities that include gaining knowledge, career growth, access to resources, and socialization opportunities. This approach may help employees gain insight into what is in it for me. The factors that influence an employee's level of desire to change include the nature of the change, the organizational context for the change, an employee's personal situation, and personal values and motivators (Hiatt, 2006). The nature of the change should be addressed by leaders to include answers to common employee questions such as: *what is the change, how will the change impact me,* *and what is in it for me* (Hiatt, 2006). The organizational context for the change includes the organization's previous track record for successful change, current levels of change saturation, and the overall direction of the organization (Hiatt, 2006). An employee's personal situation may also impact their desire to change (Karambelkar & Bhattacharya, 2017). Individual factors include family status, career aspirations, age, health, and upcoming personal events (Hiatt, 2006). Leaders may better understand the employee's perceived resistance to change based on their individual situation.

Executive-level leaders may create an employee's desire to change by sponsoring the change, equipping supervisors to be change leaders, assessing risks, anticipating resistance, and engaging employees in the change process (Hiatt, 2006). Hiatt (2006) indicated that employees look to their immediate supervisors for cues on how to respond to change. Executive-level leaders should provide supervisors with the tools to prepare for open discussion about organizational change. Readiness assessments are examples of tools that identify potential challenges and points of resistance (Hiatt, 2006). Assessments help leaders assess potential resistances and provide material tailored to support the employees impacted most by the change (Hiatt, 2006). Once leaders establish the employee's desire for change, Hiatt (2006) indicated that leaders should continue a high level of communication regarding the change initiative.

Once employees have reached a level of desire to commit to the organizational change, leaders may be ready to move onto the next step of the ADKAR model. Knowledge includes the training, information, and education necessary to change (Shonhe & Grand, 2019). The knowledge that the change impacts employees need to know includes behaviors, processes, roles, and responsibilities (Hiatt, 2006). From a change management perspective, employees require training and education on the skills and behaviors needed to support the change (Hiatt, 2006). Employees and supervisors also need knowledge on performing effectively in the future state; once the change is established (Hyde, 2018).

Four factors impact the achievement of the knowledge element of the ADKAR model: the current knowledge base of an individual, the capacity of the person to gain additional knowledge, the resources available for education, and the access to the required knowledge (Hiatt, 2006). In some situations, an employee may already have the required knowledge needed for change; however, in other circumstances, there may be a large gap between their current knowledge and the desired level of expertise necessary to operate successfully in the future state (Shonhe & Grand, 2019). In addition to a knowledge gap, employees each have a different capacity to learn (Hiatt, 2006). Hiatt (2006) indicated that the highest rate of retention among employees comes from hands-on learning from well-designed applications. The availability of resources available to provide education and training to employees is the third factor in the achievement of knowledge. Hiatt (2006) explained that resources vary significantly from one organization to another; however, leaders may provide resources, including subject matter experts, books, and equipment, to support the training program. Providing access to the knowledge required for change is the final step in the knowledge stage. Hiatt (2006) indicated that depending on an organization’s geographic location, there may be limitations on subject matter experts and ready access to materials. Leaders should consider potential unsuccessful outcomes if knowledge materials are limited or unavailable (Hiatt, 2006). Once leaders establish knowledge through training and education, employees may be ready to move to the next step in the ADKAR model.

The next step outlined in the ADKAR model is ability. Ability represents the realization of the change by employees and is achieved when the group has demonstrated the ability or capacity to implement the change (Hiatt, 2006). Change leaders impact organizational change success by providing time, resources, and coaching to help impacted employees develop new skills and behaviors (Shonhe & Grand, 2019). Hiatt (2006) indicated that there is a difference between knowing how to do something and being able to do it; this is how employees transition from knowledge to ability. Leaders may foster ability among employees by providing additional support or mentoring as a change nears implementation (Hiatt, 2006). Coaching and mentoring can help build employee abilities; however, leaders may also include access to subject matter experts (Karambelkar & Bhattacharya, 2017).

Leaders should have patience with employees while developing ability as fighting old habits may be frustrating for employees during change. The potential challenges to ability include the force of habit, limitations in intellectual capability, and time (Hiatt, 2006). Humans are wired for habit and developing new skills while breaking old habits requires developing new neural pathways in the brain (Hiatt, 2006). Intellectual capability may impact the speed at which an employee can demonstrate a new skill (Hiatt, 2006). Leaders should recognize that depending on the nature of the change; not all employees will adapt at the same speed or level. The final potential challenge for employees is time. Similar to the knowledge phase, time is also needed for employees to gain ability (Karambelkar & Bhattacharya, 2017). Hiatt (2006) indicated that leaders should define the importance of change and remove time and priority barriers. Once employees have demonstrated the ability to implement the change through ability, they may be ready for the next step of reinforcement.

The final step in the ADKAR model is reinforcement. Reinforcement is the internal and external factors used to sustain a change (Shonhe & Grand, 2019). The reinforcement phase includes intentional actions such as recognition, rewards tied to realizing the change, and employee internal satisfaction with his or her achievements (Hiatt, 2006). Effective reinforcement serves three purposes: sustain the change and prevent individuals from reverting to old ways of processes, build momentum during the transition from the current state to the future state, and creating a history of successful and sustained change that increases agility for future changes (Hiatt, 2006). A celebration for successful implementation of the change would make employees maintain motivation to continue to perform well on the job and continue the new change (Karambelkar & Bhattacharya, 2017). The five elements of the ADKAR model are building blocks and must all be in place for organizational change to be realized (Hiatt, 2006). Once these steps are complete, leaders may be better prepared to implement organizational change.

Organizational change refers to any attempt to revitalize or refocus an organization (Hyde, 2018). Most members of the organization view change as legitimate; however, there may also be adverse reactions or protests (Moldovan & Macarie, 2014). During the implementation stage of organizational change, components including strategy, structure, information system, decision-making system, and methodologies should be implemented to increase the performance and competitiveness of the organization (Naeem, 2020). Change initiatives have a high failure rate due to the level of uncertainty surrounding change (Umble & Umble, 2014). This fear ultimately generates significant resistance to a proposed change (Zenab-Kazmi & Naaranoja, 2013). There are layers of resistance among employees that occur, and there are ways to promote ownership and create a successful change initiative by leaders (Umble & Umble, 2014). Change involves uncertainty about how it will affect people (Jabbarian & Chegini, 2017). The fear that is perceived includes threats to job status or security. The layers of resistance fall into three broad categories that are derived from three questions, what to change, what to change to, and how to cause the change (how the solution should be implemented). Addressing each question sequentially helps overcome resistance to change and will create buy-in from key stakeholders (Umble & Umble, 2014). This buy-in may reduce the high failure rate surrounding change.

When leaders use the ADKAR model they may be able to judge the level of readiness for change among the employees at each phase of the process (Zenab-Kazmi & Naaranoja, 2013). Further, the ADKAR model helps leaders create action plans to develop readiness for change among employees (Hiatt, 2006). However, unlike Kotter’s model, the ADKAR model does not provide a phase or step within the model for continuous organizational improvement (Zenab-Kazmi & Naaranoja, 2013). Leaders may need to determine a blend of models depending on the organizational needs before, during, and after the change.

Leadership

Leaders at varying levels of the organization play different roles in managing change. Sustainable change is about leading and communicating, as this engages staff to drive new behaviors (Lovelace et al., 2019). Leadership contributes to the success of any change projects; therefore, when leaders are negative about change, subordinates are likely to follow suit. Senior leaders have the authority to provide high-level guidance, while middle managers play an active, strategic role in guiding teams through change (Lyke-Ho-Gland, 2019). Senior management responsibilities should include leading by example and modeling changes others should make, incorporating feedback and eliminate challenges to change; and provide high-level guidance on behaviors necessary for change (Lyke-Ho-Gland, 2019). Middle managers should do the following when striving for change: explain what the change means for each member of the team, listen to employee feedback, coach employees through the change, and monitor staff to ensure that change sticks (Lyke-Ho-Gland, 2019).

Leaders must prepare for resistance when implementing change. Middle management requires additional support and training for the personal aspects of change that include addressing emotions and influencing behaviors (Lyke-Ho-Gland, 2019). If the training is matched to the need, then employees are more likely to buy into the change. Early employee engagement during the scoping and planning stages is a proven method of change effectiveness (Curtis, 2018). Organizational transparency about the change is another effective method of employee engagement.

Leaders should be willing to change too. Leaders must change their own behaviors; refusing to change will doom the change effort (Tobias, 2015). Gaining employee buy-in when the next organizational change effort is announced will take leadership that is willing to change too. Leaders must understand the change first and then lead by example (Tobias, 2015). This process would allow the leaders to acknowledge the need to change, and then credibly help others improve. In the United States, desired leadership behavior includes (a) charismatic leadership, (b) participative leadership, (c) humane-oriented leadership, (d) team-oriented leadership, (e) autonomous leadership, and (f) self-protective leadership (Northouse, 2016). Northouse (2016) indicated that the least important characteristic for the United States is self-protective leadership. Leaders that are willing to change and adopt behaviors that are conducive to promoting change within the organization may be more successful at reaching organizational goals.

Leadership Styles

Leaders have different styles to provide direction to accomplishing individual organizational goals. Leadership style consists of the behavior pattern of a person who attempts to influence others and includes both directive and supportive actions (Northouse, 2016). Directive behaviors assist group members in accomplishing goals by giving directions, setting timelines, defining roles, and showing how the goals are to be achieved (Northouse, 2016). Supportive actions by leaders help group members feel comfortable about themselves, coworkers, and the situation (Northouse, 2016). The different styles of leadership reviewed in this study were transformational, transactional, servant, and participative.

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership is a style of leadership that a leader may possess that is useful when guiding employees through change. Transformational leadership is the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Northouse, 2016). MacGregor Burns was instrumental in the development of the transformational leadership theory, which dates to 1978 (Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders use this style of leadership to change and transform people (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leaders communicate high expectations for followers and display confidence in followers' abilities to meet expectations (Northouse, 2016). The transformation is accomplished by satisfying the needs of followers by treating them as human beings. Northouse (2016) indicated that connections are made between leaders and followers through emotion, values, ethics, and long-term goals.

Transformational leaders integrate intuition, creative insight, and sensitivity to the needs of others when implementing change (Moldovan & Macarie, 2014). In a culture created by transformational leadership, a sense of family and purpose exist including four key elements: commitments are made on long-term, common interests join leaders and followers, members of the organization go beyond their self-interests considering that the organization is more critical than their self-interests, and leaders socialize members into the culture by serving as mentors, coaches, role models and leaders (Moldovan & Macarie, 2014). Transformational leaders motivate their followers to transcend their self-interests for the good of the team and organization (Farahnak et al., 2019). This style may also be used to transform individual employees to make them more receptive to bringing about organizational change (Khan & Khan, 2019). Transformational leader behaviors may have positive effects on followers' change commitment and acceptance to a specific change initiative (Herold et al., 2008). This leadership style is found to be associated with employee attitudes towards organizational change (Farahnak et al., 2019). Transformational leaders are inspirational and can adapt to different situations when implementing organizational change.

Transformational leaders often exhibit charisma. Charisma is a special gift that certain individuals possess that gives them the capacity to do extraordinary things (Northouse, 2016). Weber (1947) termed *charismatic* under the belief that leaders who possessed charisma could attract a community of supporters, mostly unconcerned with economic affairs (Eatwell, 2006). A charismatic leader displays actions synonymous with a transformational leader (Lovelace et al., 2019). Leaders that possess charismatic characteristics make compromises to complete missions or reach goals (Eatwell, 2006). Leaders with charismatic personalities also portray themselves as ordinary men or women and use collective terms such as *we* to help build coalitions (Sy et al., 2018). Further, these leaders set high expectations for themselves and their followers and display confidence that these expectations can be achieved (Antonakis & Day, 2018). The followers of a charismatic leader believe that their leader would bring about and accomplish change through extraordinary competence (Antonakis & Day, 2018). Northouse (2016) indicated that transformational leadership, combined with a charismatic personality, is effective because it connects followers and their self-concepts to the organizational identity. Transformational leaders may be the most effective to reach organizational change.

Transactional Leadership. Transactional leaders focus on supervision and meeting performance goals through incentives and consequences. Transactional leadership is a style of leadership that is based on rewards and punishment (Biscontini, 2020). Transactional leaders rely on authority instead of persuasion and are primarily concerned with maintaining order in day-to-day operations (Biscontini, 2020). In a transactional leadership model, there is not a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality between the leader and the follower (Northouse, 2016). Transactional leaders are a poor choice for an organization seeking a new direction (Biscontini, 2020).

Transactional leadership differs from transformational leadership because transactional leaders do not individualize the needs of followers or focus on their personal development (Northouse, 2016). Transactional leaders are influential because it is in the best interest of the followers to do what the leader requests (Northouse, 2016). Contingent rewards and management by exception are two types of transactional leadership styles that leaders use to gain leverage among followers. Contingent reward is an exchange process between and leader and a follower in which effort by followers is exchanged for specified rewards (Northouse, 2016). Management by exception is a transactional leadership style that involves corrective criticism, negative feedback, and negative reinforcement. Northouse (2016) indicated that both contingent reward and management by exception are considered negative forms of leadership.

Leaders can also blend transformational and transactional leadership methods to meet the needs of an organization. Leaders that display both transactional and transformational leadership qualities are considered the best type of leader (Biscontini, 2020). Lower-level managers may also act in a transactional manner, while high-level executives act in a transformational manner to guide the company and inspire employees (Biscontini, 2020). Transactional leadership is ideal when a systematic approach is to be used to carry out a project; however, it may not be the best choice for transforming the future of the organization.

Servant Leadership. Servant leaders seek to empower employees to develop and align an employee's sense of purpose to promote organizational change. Servant leadership is a leadership style that emphasizes that leaders be attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them, and nurture them (Northouse, 2016). Robert Greenleaf was instrumental in the development of servant leadership behavior, which was established in 1970 (Northouse, 2016). A servant-leader focuses on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong (Greenleaf, 2002). The model of servant leadership consists of three components: antecedent conditions, servant leader behaviors, and outcomes (Northouse, 2016). Antecedent conditions may impact the way servant leadership is carried out within an organization due to the organizational culture.

There are seven behaviors of leaders that foster servant leadership: (a) conceptualizing, (b) emotional healing, (c) putting followers first, (d) helping followers grow and succeed, (e) behaving ethically, (f) empowering, and (g) creating value for the community (Northouse, 2016). Conceptualizing refers to the leader's ability to understand the organization including its mission, purposes, and complexities (Northouse, 2016). Emotional healing refers to the leader's ability to be sensitive to personal concerns and well-being of others (Northouse, 2016). Putting followers first is the defining characteristic of servant leadership and means to use actions and words that clearly demonstrate that follower's concerns are a priority (Greenleaf, 2002). Helping others grow and succeed refers to a leader's goal to help followers accomplish goals (Greenleaf, 2002). Behaving ethically is doing the right thing the right way (Northouse, 2016). Empowering refers to allowing followers the freedom to be independent and be self-sufficient. Creating value for the community refers to a leader's commitment to giving back to the community (Greenleaf, 2002).

Servant leadership may make a significant difference in the success of organizational change. Servant leadership works well when leaders have a strong motivation and deep-seated interest in helping others (Northouse, 2016). Leaders should make attempts to share power and enable others to grow and become autonomous (Greenleaf, 2002). When leadership is framed in this perspective in an organization, egalitarianism builds among employees (Northouse, 2016). When implemented appropriately, servant leadership results in community and societal change (Northouse, 2016). Servant leaders have a sense of meaningfulness by their ability to relate change a larger picture that goes beyond the organization (van Dierendonck & Sousa, 2016). Servant leaders aim to build a learning organization, where each person in the group can be valuable in his or her own way (Yuan et al., 2020). Servant leaders encourage participative decision making with the use of persuasion instead of position authority, which has been shown to be essential elements for positive change (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991). When leaders engage in servant leadership, it may improve outcomes at the individual, organizational, and societal levels (Northouse, 2016). Servant leadership is similar to transformational leadership because both styles focus on the human aspect while working toward successful organizational change.

Change Management

Organizational change management includes changing an organization while determining who would be impacted, implementing support structures, and measuring the change process. High-level views on change must be supported by concrete, street-level structures that integrate the various components of the organization explicitly matching outputs to strategy (Gobble, 2015). The structure relates to the organizational design; however, the organizational chart does not equal organizational design. As the organizational chart is a useful map of the lines of responsibility and authority, it is not designed to maximize efficiency (Gobble, 2015). Designing for organizational change is more than just moving boxes on the organizational chart; leaders must consider all of the elements (Irimias et al., 2019). When creating an organizational design to support change, there are three highly abbreviated steps leaders should use (Gobble, 2015). These steps include identifying the core functions needed to support the strategy, defining what each function is accountable for and how it would be measured, and placing the functions in a structure. When the organizational structure runs counter to the strategy, employees will become frustrated and abandon change in favor of the path of least resistance (Gobble, 2015).

Leaders can identify when a change is needed; however, it is the approach to change that is not always easy to identify (Gobble, 2015). Leaders know that they need to be more innovative and more forward-thinking for the future; however, they do not always have the tools to accomplish these goals (Gobble, 2015). Organizational change is contingent upon individual change; therefore, a well-designed change does not guarantee organizational improvement unless stakeholder needs are accommodated (Scultz, 2014). Changing an organizational culture by design is challenging; however, not impossible (Whelan, 2016). Leaders may face resistance to change when implementing organizational change.

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change may be one of the biggest obstacles that leaders face when implementing change. Employees do not typically resist change; they resist the threats, pain, and loss of control that come from it (Schultz, 2014). There are three layers of resistance: (a) what to change, (b) what to change to, and (c) how to cause the change (Umble & Umble, 2014). There are seven layers of resistance that occur within the three broad layers of resistance: (a) disagreement that there is a problem, (b) disagreement about the nature of the problem, (c) disagreement about the direction of the solution, (d) disagreement about the details of the solution, (e) solution having negative side effects, (f) disagreement that the solution can be implemented successfully, and (g) unspoken and unresolved reservations (Umble & Umble, 2014). Overcoming resistance to change should be viewed as a process that must be resolved in a logical sequence by leaders (Umble & Umble, 2014).

The biggest obstacle to change is past success. Leaders trying to improve processes in their organizations should understand why people resist change (de Jager, 2001). Resistance is an effective and powerful survival mechanism used by employees, even if they know a change would make their processes easier (de Jager, 2001). Leaders should acknowledge past achievements when promoting why a change is needed to improve processes (Mohammed, 2018). As leaders navigate employee resistance to operational change, there are four questions to ask when preparing to advocate for change: (a) why is the old status quo no longer sufficient, (b) what would it cost to make the transition from the old way of doing things to the new method, (c) is the cost of transition justified by the incremental benefits of what is being proposed, and (d) does the proposed change support and reinforce existing core values (de Jager, 2001). Evaluate if the change is intended to remedy a deficiency or seize an opportunity; this would determine how employees would react to a change (de Jager, 2001; Mohammed, 2018). Leaders may experience rational or irrational employee resistance to organizational change (de Jager, 2001). Rational resistance is when employees feel that a change is forced upon them without feeling involved in the process (de Jager, 2001). A fear of having to learn a new process is another example of rational resistance (Gaubatz & Ensminger, 2017). Irrational resistance exists among employees who, no matter the amount of evidence, demonstration, or persuasion, would willingly adopt a change (de

Jager, 2001). Resistance to change is normal and natural among employees; therefore, leaders should not reject opposition; learn, listen, and lead from it (Watkins et al., 2017).

When leaders share power with followers and allow them the freedom to make decisions on their own, it is empowerment (Northouse, 2016). Empowerment builds confidence in followers and makes them think and act on their own because they are given the freedom to handle difficult situations how they feel best (Northouse, 2016). When employees are empowered and given shared authority, they are more likely to be willing to accept the challenges that come with change (Schultz, 2014). Employees typically know how to navigate their organization's culture and are savvy at using aspects of it to introduce new issues or to generate fundamental change (Howard-Grenville et al., 2020). When leaders wish to help employees through change, it is not always an easy task (Leiber, 2019). When the cultural change takes place, employees may become resistant to change if not introduced gradually and managed with care (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). Mirvis (1985) indicated that employees may pass through four stages of reactions to change: denial, anger or resentment, emotional bargaining, and acceptance. Leaders should recognize these stages of employee reaction to change to reduce the risk of change failure (Belias & Kousteliosds, 2014). Further, communication between management and employees is fluid, and they are prepared to implement change readily with little resistance due to high levels of transparency (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). Employee burnout may be lower in a prepared culture because employees typically like their job and look forward to going to work.

Management's Role

Managers drive the implementation process. When organizational change occurs, management may be the most prominent supporters, but also the biggest opponents (Ionescu et al., 2014). Management is the closest to the employees who need to support new processes and behaviors implemented by the organizational change (Ionescu et al., 2014). During the change management process, management assumes five roles: (a) communicators, (b) supporters, (c) trainers, (d) environment, and (e) managers of resistance (Ionescu et al., 2014). When a manager is in the role of communicator, they are the primary source of information regarding the organization and the change that would occur (Ionescu et al., 2014). When a manager is in the role of a supporter, it is important to demonstrate their support for change in an active and positive manner (Diab et al., 2018).

Tucker (2017) indicated that management should be transparent about the change and be prepared to support and validate employee concerns. The role of trainer includes providing staff support during the change process, specifically when change begins to affect daily activities (Inescu et al., 2014). The role of mediator involves management's collaboration with employees to collect feedback and report the information to the executive level (Insescu et al., 2014). The last role managers assume regarding resistance is the process of identifying employees who resist change and provide the training and tools to manage the situation as it occurs actively (Insescu et al., 2014). As managers transition through these roles, they should demonstrate that they are committed to the changes that take place (Inescu et al., 2014).

According to Tucker (2017), there are three roles that management can use to engage employees during an organizational change: (a) change agent, (b) development expert, and (c) communications director. Embracing the role of change agent requires managers to help employees adopt new ways of thinking and working (Tucker, 2017). The change agent role includes involving employees in the change process, demonstrating patience during the change process, and constant monitoring after change implementation (Tucker, 2017). The role of a development expert is the act of identifying development needs and encouraging learning and development (Tucker, 2017). The role of a communications director is the act of establishing good communication practices and implementing these practices within teams (Tucker, 2017). Managers should provide continuous communications about strategic and procedural issues, fully explaining why something needs to happen (Tucker, 2017). When leaders acknowledge obstacles they may face throughout change management, employee engagement may increase and promote successful change.

Organizational Culture

Leaders and employees contribute to the values and beliefs of the organizational culture. Organizational culture is defined as the learned beliefs, rules, values, and traditions that are common to a group of people (Northouse, 2016). Leaders create an organizational culture when they instill certain values in the organization (Schein, 1993). Organizational culture varies from one country to another species in the way individuals define meaningful leadership. Leadership is associated with organizational culture, through the process of articulating a vision and also through the setting of expectations

(Belias & Koustelios, 2014). Organizational culture is held and maintained by all members of an organization, and it acts as a moderating variable with the implementation of change (Jirek, 2020). Leaders can influence the nature of the organizational culture; therefore, they can impact employees' attitudes and motivation to work (Schein, 1993). Organizational culture is one of the most difficult dimensions of change management and includes both formal and informal structural components (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). These components are not uniform and continually evolve (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). Organizational change typically begins from two sources, including change resulting from external or internal environmental factors that are outside the leader's control and change resulting from a planned implementation (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). Leaders should recognize that organizational culture identifies the beliefs of the employees, which are essential elements in the application of leadership (Aryani & Widodo, 2020).

Organizational culture can influence employees' and managers' approaches to implementing and sustaining organizational change. Organizational culture is the force that guides people in their interactions with one another; every organization exhibits a culture (Schultz, 2014). Departments within organizations also develop a culture over time (Schultz, 2014). Internal organizational cultures allow people to work together, even when there is no bond outside of the workplace (Schultz, 2014). Organizational culture plays a role when leaders begin planning for change within an organization. Any alteration to processes may affect people's feelings toward technical, emotional, and political issues, even when the current conditions are inefficient (Aryani & Widodo, 2020). Therefore, when making changes, leaders should address not only the technical aspects of needed change but also the potential cultural aspects of change (Schultz, 2014).

Organizational culture can be characterized as contra-prepared, prepared, or unprepared. Contra prepared is an organizational culture that adapts to change with great difficulty, a prepared organizational culture adapts to change rapidly, and an unprepared organizational culture adapts to change reluctantly (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). The life expectancy for unprepared and contra-prepared organizational cultures may be short, depending on the industry (Hurst & Hurst 2016). However, prepared organizational cultures are aligned around cultural factors that drive a high performing organization (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). Contra-prepared organizational cultures may struggle when faced with the need to change (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). This culture is prioritized around survival, and the organizational vision is not followed by employees (Metwally et al., 2019). The relationships between management and employees are weak, and there is a high level of mistrust between the two groups (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). Contra-prepared organizational cultures are ruled with fear causing stress and burnout among employees (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). Once an organization shifts into a contra-preparedness culture, it is a lower probability of sustaining performance (Hurst & Hurst, 2016).

Unprepared organizational cultures may also struggle when faced with the need to implement organizational change (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). This culture is less aligned in priorities, mission, vision, and values when compared to a prepared culture (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). There are areas of improvement needed around teamwork, communication, and relationships (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). In an unprepared organizational culture, there may be more employee turnover, higher levels of stress and burnout, and a corporate strategy to keep costs low without employee input (Hayes & Stazyk, 2019).

Prepared organizational cultures are aligned with vital cultural factors that drive a high performing organization (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). The cultural factors include a solid mission, vision, and value system that are well understood and followed by employees (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). In a prepared organizational culture, employees are willing to help one another and mentoring is predominant at all levels (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). Unlike a contra-prepared or unprepared organizational culture, prepared organizational cultures reflect high levels of trust among employees, low turnover, and reduced burnout.

Organizational culture and organizational change initiatives are interrelated. Leaders seeking to implement successful organizational change initiatives should realize the importance of organizational culture (Gochhayat et al., 2017). Leaders that understand the importance of organizational culture can assist their organizations to stand out from peers by showcasing authentic characteristics (Howard-Grenville et al., 2020). Leaders who increase their knowledge of their own and other organizations' cultures can assist employees in guiding change efforts and securing effective partnerships (Howard-Grenville et al., 2020). An organizational culture that exhibits collaboration, communication, mentoring, and a positive work environment is more likely to increase the likelihood of a successful organizational change.

Transition

In Section 1 of this study, I identified issues related to senior-level executives in higher education lacking strategies to implement organizational change initiatives. The research question for this study is what strategies senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives. Through the literature review, I summarized related research regarding change models, leadership styles, organizational change, and organizational culture. This section also included operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance of the study. In Section 2 of this study, I readdressed the purpose statement, present the description of the role of the researcher, and an overview of the participants. This section also includes the research method and design, ethical research, data collection organization and technique, and data analysis.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 of this study includes a restatement of the purpose statement, a discussion of my role as the researcher, and an overview of the study participants. This section also includes the research methodology and design, population and sampling, ethical researcher, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, and data analysis. In the final component of Section 2, I present the study's reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that senior-level executives in higher education used to implement organizational change initiatives. The target population for the study was four directors of two higher education organizations in West Virginia who have successfully implemented change initiatives in finance operations within the last 5 years. The results of this study may contribute to social change by reducing stress and uncertainty on employees and, therefore, better interactions with students. Less stress at work translates to less stress at home and more positive interactions with families and with others in their communities. Successful initiatives may also create efficient processes, reduce costs, and possibly slow increasing education costs for students.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout this study, I served as the primary instrument by conducting interviews, gathering data, and presenting the findings of the study. In the data gathering process, there are six types of data qualitative researchers could collect: (a) documents, (b) archival records, (c) direct observations, (d) interviews, (e) physical artifacts, and (f) participant observation (Yin, 2018). The human instrument may have shortcomings and biases that can impact a study; therefore, the researcher needs to identify any biases and monitor them as they cannot be eliminated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As a former leader in higher education, I was open and honest with the participants regarding my experience and current and previous positions. I have worked as a director in higher education for 2 years and as a senior manager in a public school system for 10 years. I did not include any participants in the study with whom I have had prior working relationships. As the researcher, my primary concern was to conduct an ethical study. The validity and reliability of a study depend on the ethics of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During a qualitative study, ethical dilemmas may emerge with the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings. It was my obligation to conduct this study with a relational ethic. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), relational ethics is when a researcher is aware of one's role throughout the research process, treating participants as people, not just subjects to gain an interview.

As the researcher, I used bracketing, member checking, and audio recordings to mitigate bias and avoid viewing data through a personal lens. Baksh (2018) indicated that bracketing requires researchers to set aside personal theories, inherent knowledge, and assumptions as separate from what is observed in the research process. One method of bracketing that researchers may use is incorporating a reflexive journal during the data collection process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I used this method of bracketing by maintaining a journal throughout the study to acknowledge any assumptions that I may have during the data collection process. Member checking is another method that I used to mitigate bias during my research. Birt et al. (2016) indicated that researcher bias may be reduced by using member checking, a method of returning an interview to a participant for verification of data. To perform member checking, I asked all participants to review and validate their responses after the interview process was complete.

As the researcher, I also followed the guidelines and principles outlined in the *Belmont Report*. The *Belmont Report* identifies the outlines the ethical principles for conducting research (Lantos, 2020). I conducted interviews with four leaders of two higher education organizations. Using seven interview questions included in the interview protocol (Appendix A), each participant's perspectives were recorded. I followed ethical principles during the data gathering process. Each participant was informed that their raw interview data would be confidential. To reduce errors, an audio recorder was used to capture each interview and transcribe the files after each interview. The recordings and participant data were transferred to a USB drive that is password protected and stored in a locked safe in my home office. All paper documents, such as signed consent forms, organization documents, and my notes would also be kept in a locked safe stored in my home office for 5 years. After 5 years from the completion of the doctoral study, all paper and electronic data will be destroyed.

Participants

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives. Collecting data through interviews first requires the researcher to determine who to interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The target population for the study was four directors of two higher education organizations in West Virginia who have successfully implemented change initiatives in finance operations within the last 5 years. The eligibility criteria for this study were: (a) the participant must be at least 18 years old, (b) must be in a director role for at least five years, (c) is currently employed in a higher education institute, (d) located in West Virginia, and (e) have successfully implemented change initiatives relating to finance operations within the last 5 years. I used purposive sampling and criterion-based selection to determine the participants for this study. Purposive sampling is a method of determining a sample based on what the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain from a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Two colleges located in West Virginia were selected for this study based on the physical location of their finance departments operating in West Virginia. To gain access to participants, I emailed and called potential participants using public directory information listed on each organization's website. I emailed the individuals directly to present an explanation and purpose of the study and invite their participation. A copy of the informed consent (Appendix B) was included for their review of the process and their role as a participant.

Once participants agreed to engage in the study, I scheduled a date and time to conduct the interview, a time that was convenient for the participants. I scheduled the interview virtually at the participant's preference. The initial contact with each participant is an opportunity to establish a working researcher-participant relationship (Harvey, 2017). During the initial contact, I introduced myself to each participant and reviewed the study’s explanation and purpose. I established a professional working relationship with study participants by conducting regular check-ins to build rapport and open communication. During the interview, I explained to each participant that they may withdraw at any time without penalty, and they may ask any follow-up questions during or after the study.

Research Method and Design

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to seek the strategies leaders use to implement change initiatives successfully. This section includes a discussion of the research method and why I selected the qualitative method. This section also includes a discussion of the research design and why a case study design was the best choice for my study.

Research Method

The three research methods considered for this study were qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method. The research method selected for this study was qualitative. The qualitative research method is used by researchers who are interested in understanding how their participants make sense of their world and their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative methodology was the appropriate choice for this study because I wished to explore and understand the unique experiences of higher education leaders to understand the how and why of the strategies they selected while implementing change.

The quantitative researcher uses tools such as questionnaires to collect numerical data. In quantitative research, researchers use mathematical methods to establish statistical relationships between variables to statistical modeling (Saunders et al., 2016). Quantitative researchers test hypotheses, make predictions, and analyze relationships (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The quantitative research method was not appropriate because my study did not focus on numerical data to determine relationships or variances.

Mixed-method research requires the use of multiple methods that combines the use of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analytical procedures (Saunders et al., 2016). McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) explained that mixed-method designs may provide practical advantages when exploring complex research questions; however, the analytic process of the quantitative component of the mixed-method design can be time consuming and expensive. Time and budget constraints may cause researchers to reduce sample sizes or limit the time spent interviewing participants (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The mixed-method was not the appropriate method for this study because of the quantitative component of this method to examine relationships between variables.

Research Design

I considered two qualitative research designs for this study: case study and phenomenological. I used the case study design for my research. A case study design is used to develop a profound understanding of a phenomenon (Gliner et al., 2017). Yin (2018) also explained that a case study is an empirical inquiry used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The case study design was the best choice for this study to gain an in-depth understanding of the strategies used by leaders in higher education.

A phenomenological study focuses on participants' lived experiences and their interpretations of those experiences (Saunders et al., 2016). A phenomenological researcher focuses on the essence or emotion of a participant's experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), phenomenological researchers may write about their own experiences of the phenomenon before conducting participant interviews. The intent of my study was not to explore the personal meanings participants place on experiencing a phenomenon, which makes a phenomenological design an inappropriate design for this study.

Population and Sampling

The population for this qualitative case study was four directors of two higher education organizations who have been successful in implementing organizational change initiatives. Purposeful sampling is used when the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In purposive sampling, the researcher must determine the selection criteria that are essential in choosing the individuals to be studied (Ames et al., 2019). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a criterion-based selection method allows the researcher to decide what attributes of the sample are appropriate for the study purpose then find individuals who meet the criteria. I used a criterion-based selection method as I have identified the eligibility criteria for my study. The eligibility criteria for this study were (a) the participant must be at least 18 years old, (b) must be in a director for at least five years, (c) is currently employed in a higher education institute, (d) located in West Virginia, and (e) have successfully implemented change initiatives relating to finance operations.

Saunders et al. (2016) explained that researchers should collect qualitative data until data saturation is reached. Data saturation is when the data collected provides little new information or new themes (Saunders et al., 2016). Qualitative data may be collected in the form of interviews, either in person or over the phone (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I conducted virtual interviews to collect qualitative data for this study. I scheduled each interview at a time and place convenient to each participant. The interview setting was appropriate for this study because I wanted to observe nonverbal cues and ensure the participant was in an environment that was comfortable for them. To ensure data saturation, I continued interviewing participants until no new themes or information arose. Data saturation may be reached faster if the researcher selects participants who meet a specific criterion defined in their role in the implementation process (Palinkas et al., 2016).

Ethical Research

After I received approval from Walden University's IRB, I initiated data collection. I first contacted the human resources department of both organizations for names and contact information of potential participants who meet the eligibility criteria.

After I received approval from each organization, I contacted potential participants by email, introducing myself, the nature of the study, and the informed consent form. Participants were informed that they would not receive an incentive for participating in the study and that they could withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me by phone or email.

Researchers are responsible for protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants as a result of their participation (Yin, 2018). Confidentiality may be preserved by assigning codes to participants and removing names and gender (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure participant confidentiality, I assigned codes to each participant to safeguard their privacy, such as P1, P2, P3, and P4. The coding structure that I used for each organization was O1 and O2. Participants were asked to sign a consent form by replying to the initial email correspondence indicating that they consented to the study. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me by telephone or email.

Data collected through interviews was transferred to a USB device. The device was password protected and locked in a safe in my home office. Any paper documents such as consent forms, my interview notes, and any organization documents were also stored in the locked safe. The final doctoral manuscript included the Walden IRB approval number 06-28-21-0931895. The final doctoral manuscript did not include the companies' or participants' names, and I provided a 1-2 page summary of the final approved study to the participants.

Data Collection Instruments

As the researcher, I served as the primary data collection instrument for this study. I used virtual, semistructured interviews and organization documentation as the two methods of collecting data for this study. A semistructured interview is guided by a list of questions in a format that requires specific data from all respondents (Kallio et al., 2016). I asked each participant seven open-ended questions regarding implementation strategies in higher education. I recorded each interview with the permission of each participant to ensure validity. An interview protocol was used for this study (see Appendix A). According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), an interview protocol is an instrument of inquiry that includes a variety of interview questions, a script to guide and move the inquiry forward, and follow up questions.

Organization documentation was the second form of data collection that I used for this study. Yin (2018) stated that documentation is increasingly available through online searches; however, may not always be accurate. Prior to performing interviews, researchers may use online documents to prepare and orient themselves with the organization (Yin, 2018). I gathered organization data through online research prior to conducting interviews to orient myself with the organization.

Reliability and validity are the key characteristics of research quality (Saunders et al., 2016). Reliability assumes that repeated measures of a phenomenon using objective methods would establish the certainty of the findings (Cypress, 2017). Validity in qualitative research is associated with the accuracy and the truthfulness of scientific conclusions (Cypress, 2017). To ensure reliability, the same questions were used for all participants. To enhance reliability, member checking was employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collection process. Member checking is an accountability practice after the interview process that may increase trust and cooperation with the participants (Naidu & Prose, 2018). To perform member checking, the researcher provides a summary of the research data to the participants to allow them to confirm the accuracy of the information (Saunders et al., 2016). I had all participants review and validate their responses after the initial data analysis was complete to perform member checking.

Data Collection Technique

For this qualitative multiple case study, the primary data collection technique was face-to-face in-person or virtual, semistructured interviews once approval was given from Walden University's IRB. Opdenakker (2006) indicated that the advantages of face-to-face interviews include social cues such as voice, intonation, and body language. The disadvantage of using face-to-face interviews is the potential for the interviewer to guide the interviewee in a certain direction (Opdenakker, 2006). The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was followed during the participant interviews, and each was asked the same seven interview questions. Each interview was audio-recorded, and I took handwritten notes during the interviews. During the interviews, I listened for and noted keywords and shared experiences or processes used by participants. Upon completing the interviews, I summarized each participants' responses and emailed a copy to each participant for review. Member checking is one way to achieve validity by ensuring a mutual agreement and understanding of the shared information (Caretta & Perez, 2019).

Each participant was asked to review the interview summary, add any additional information, and email me with a confirmation once their review was complete.

Yin (2018) explained how the four principles of data collection, including using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database, maintaining a chain of evidence, and exercising care when using data from social media sources, can assist with establishing the construct validity and reliability of the evidence. The second data collection technique for this study was documentation. The advantage of using documentation is that it can be reviewed multiple times by the researcher (Yin, 2018). Organization documents were collected, such as published policies, procedures, and general demographic information available through online platforms. A possible disadvantage of using organizational documentation is that the information may change during the study or may not be relevant.

Data Organization Technique

A system for organizing and managing data should be devised early in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I used a voice recorder, Microsoft Word Dictation, journals, and NVivo software to organize the data for this study. The electronic and handwritten data, including journals, were organized and transferred to a USB device. Once transferred to the USB device, the information was categorized and coded to safeguard participant privacy.

Researchers are responsible for protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants as a result of their participation (Yin, 2018). To ensure participant confidentiality, I assigned codes to each participant to safeguard their privacy, such as P1, P2, P3, and P4. The coding structure that I used for each organization was O1 and O2. Data collected through interviews was transferred to a USB device. The device was password protected and locked in a safe in my home office. Any paper documents such as consent forms, interview notes, and organization documents were stored in the locked safe for 5 years from my conferred degree date. After five years, I will shred all paper copies and destroy the USB device with electronic data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between data and concepts, inductive and deductive reasoning, and between description and interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used methodological triangulation as the data analysis process for this multiple case study. Methodological triangulation includes the use of a qualitative multiple case study, which also requires validation of the data received (Fischer & Hester, 2019). My triangulation process involved conducting semistructured interviews, reviewing organization documents and policies, and executing member checking.

Yin (2018) identified five steps in data analysis: (a) compiling, (b) dissembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. The first step was to compile data. I compiled data using methodological triangulation. The second step was dissembling the data collected. I disassembled the data collected using NVivo software. The third step was reassembling the collected data. I organized and coded the data in NVivo software to find patterns in the data. The fourth step was interpreting the data. I interpreted the data and removed any personal bias that may change the data analysis process. The fifth step was to draw a meaningful conclusion from the collected data. Yin (2018) explained that the use of clustering, coding, and non-biased interpretation may draw meaningful conclusions. I drew meaningful conclusions by coding the collected data and identifying key themes that relate to the research question.

Thematic analysis is used in qualitative research to identify themes or patterns within a given data set (Miller, 2020). I used NVivo software to organize the data collected from interviews, organization documents, and member checking results. Once organized in Excel, I evaluated the data for themes and patterns. I analyzed the data following the process suggested by Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method for data analysis of (a) bracketing, (b) reduction, (c) imaginative variation, and (d) synthesis of meanings. Once themes were determined, I categorized them with the current literature and conceptual framework of the study.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in research design is based on the assumption that if a researcher can replicate an earlier research design and achieve the same findings, the research would be reliable (Saunders et al., 2016). Krosnick (2018) indicated the researcher might enhance a study's trustworthiness by asking the right questions during an interview and document rationale for decisions made during the research process. Using an interview protocol, I interviewed each participant using the same questions for each participant until no new data was discovered to reach data saturation. Data saturation occurs when continued data collection produces no new information or insights into the phenomenon that one is studying (Yin, 2108).

In qualitative research, dependability is the stability of data over time and conditions (Ellis, 2019). According to Yin (2018), dependability is comparable to reliability and refers to being able to replicate cases procedurally without the attempt to replicate results. Qualitative results cannot be transferred to a different population; however, if the researcher clearly describes the sample and research methods, the reader can decide if the results are applicable to their own population (Yin, 2018). I ensured dependability by using an interview protocol (see Appendix A). I used member checking to verify data by having each participant review any summary of their interview responses for accuracy.

Validity

Saunders et al. (2016) referred to validity as the process of verifying research data, analysis, and interpretation to establish credibility and authenticity. Two validation techniques include triangulation and member checking. I used methodological triangulation, including member checking to confirm data accuracy and review organizational documents to address the study's credibility. Triangulation increases the validity and strengthens the research and occurs when the researcher uses more than one data source to ensure data credibility (Cypress, 2017).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, triangulation and member checks were used to establish credibility. Credibility refers to the degree the research correctly presents participant perceptions and feelings (Yin, 2018). Journaling is another approach to establish credibility because it allows for reflection of the data collected (Yin, 2018). According to Janesick (1999), a reflective journal may be used as an interactive tool of communication between the researcher and participants of the study, as a type of interdisciplinary triangulation of data.

Transferability of a study means researchers in a different field or location are enabled to form conclusions of findings (Lioa & Hitchcock, 2018). Yin (2018) indicated that researchers should provide as much information about the nature of their study so that other researchers could replicate the study if they wished. I ensured the study's transferability by maintaining an audit trail of my research and documenting each step of the process. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was used to ensure transferability by asking the same questions in the same order during the interview process.

Confirmability is the level to which the analyses of collected data were coherent and whether the data's interpretations were fair (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). Amankwaa (2016) indicated to establish confirmability the researcher should use an audit trail and triangulation that includes all raw data, including written notes, interpretations, process notes, and observations. I ensured confirmability by documenting a step-by-step process in the data collection process. Documenting each step provides an audit trail and may increase the study’s reliability.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2 of this study, I presented the project's description, including my role as the researcher and the participants. The sub-topics included the research method, research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, and data collection techniques. This study's reliability and validity are also highlighted in Section 2, detailing appropriate methods to ensure both are met while performing research. This conceptual framework represents the outline of the procedures that were used to complete this study.

In Section 3, I present the study's findings, the application to professional practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for action, and suggestions for further research regarding organizational change strategies. The data collected may provide insight into questions regarding effective organizational change. In Section 3, I also reflect on my experience within the DBA Doctoral Study process at the study's conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives. I conducted virtual semistructured interviews to gather data with four leaders of higher education organizations from four different organizations located in West Virginia. Three main themes that emerged from the interviews were employee involvement, high levels of communication, and understanding employee culture.

The four higher education leaders who participated in this study used strategies to implement sustainable organizational change. The strategies used by these leaders may be useful to other organizations to develop or improve their strategies for implementing change initiatives. Leaders in higher education using the conclusions of this study might contribute to social change by creating efficient processes, reducing costs, and possibly slow increasing education costs for students.

Presentation of Findings

One overarching research question guided this study: What strategies do senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives? Virtual interviews provided participants the opportunity to share experiences of strategies used to implement organizational change. Before conducting each interview, I reviewed public organization policies and handbooks published on each employer's website to familiarize myself with each organization. After each interview, I provided a follow-up email with each participant for member checking. After collecting the data, I transcribed the audio recordings and used NVivo software to code the data for themes with which I identified the three themes: high levels of communication, the importance of organizational culture, and employee buy-in. The themes aligned with Kotter's (1995) Lewin's (1947) models of change outlined in the conceptual framework. The themes also supported some peer-reviewed studies from the literature review.

Theme 1: Increased Communication

Increased communication was the first theme that emerged from the interviews. Each participant indicated that they believed increased or high levels of communication was an effective strategy they used to develop and implement sustainable change initiatives within their organization. A factor in change management is communication (Umble & Umble, 2014). All participants expressed that increased employee communication throughout all stages of an organizational change is critical.

The participants indicated that being open to feedback also assists with employee buy-in for an organizational change. P4 stated the following:

> The wrong way to communicate change is to send out an email to all staff saying, here is what we are going to do and how we will do it. We have to start by floating an idea by speaking with select groups and putting the idea out there. Sometimes I will float an idea, and the idea will die, but you are testing the waters to see the appetite. If the idea lives, we become more purposeful in our communication, influencing what we do next. Next, we shift the focus to internal and external influential people who provide a fair and accurate analysis of responses to the change.

P4 shared a redacted copy of an email used to announce a change in the organization's employee evaluation program. The email stated that "the organization will host an information session regarding proposed ideas for a change in the employee evaluation program." The communication included the dates and times for three sessions inviting employees to receive an overview of the proposed changes and provide feedback regarding the prosed change. P4's organizational documents included a strategic plan that outlined increased employee communication as an organizational goal. P4's organization also listed dates and sign-ups for upcoming seminars with community leaders to discuss how proposed organizational changes will impact the community. Previous seminars were recorded and posted on the organization's website for employees to view. P1 reaffirmed P4 on the importance of communicating change to all levels of employees and why communication needs to go beyond email. P1 discussed the importance of meetings for employee communication. P1 indicated that their employee and in-service sessions were informal and did not require formal meeting minutes; however, P1's organization posts the statistical information shared during these meetings to their website after each meeting. The statistics located on P1's organizational website include project timeline updates that indicate target date goals. P1 stated the following:

> I share a lot of information via email; however, verbal face-to-face communication is what I believe is the best method to use for organizational change. During in-service meetings, I use many visuals to explain change, and I am not referring to a chart with a lot of statistics; I am trying to help employees of all levels see as a group why we need to make a change. One of the visuals that I

use is a pie graph that shows enrollment changes through the years; specifically, outlining where we were and why we need to make these changes. This helps get the conversation moving and then we are open to feedback, both positive and negative to keep the momentum of the change.

Each participant mentioned the importance of communication during team meetings before and after the change and how it positively impacted sustainability. P2 stated, “I met with teams weekly just to keep them in the loop and make sure that the transition was as comfortable for them as it was for me.” P3 added, “small group discussions among team members were time-consuming but were needed often to allow staff to have an opportunity to provide some excellent feedback throughout the entire process.” P3 shared an example of a project timeline document that was used during a recent change initiative project that outlined scheduled time for small group discussions.

Correlation to the Literature

Theme 1, increased communication, was consistent with Ramezan et al.’s (2013) findings in that improved organizational communication and team collaboration are ways leaders can introduce organizational change while increasing employee readiness. Hiatt (2006) indicated that effective communication begins with identifying audience groups, determining the appropriate message, and the timing for those communications. Communication also plays a key role in increasing employee engagement (Tkalac Verčič, 2021). “Communication is such an important aspect in obtaining employee commitment to change.” (P3). Participants in this study used weekly team meetings, emails and visual aides to create effective communication. These initiatives may provide other leaders the same results when implementing successful organizational change.

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework

Theme 1, increased communication, is a strategy that aligns with Kotter's eight steps for implementing change. Kotter (2012) stated that successful communication of a vision fails for many reasons, primarily because it is not communicated well enough to reach all levels of the organization. The participants in this study indicated that sharing information with all employees was necessary for a successful change. Kotter and Cohen (2002) noted that good communication is not simply a data transfer; leaders need to communicate in a way that addresses anxiety, accepts anger, and evokes faith in the shared vision. All participants in this study shared that positive and negative employee feedback was an essential aspect of sustainable change.

Theme 1, increased communication, also aligns with the first step of Kotter's (1995) eight-step model of change, create a sense of urgency. Kotter and Cohen (2002) indicated that employees need to feel a sense of urgency so that they feel something must be done about the organizational problem. P2 stated, "clearly defining how the change, if not accomplished timely, may negatively impact employees' day-to-day tasks tends to motivate them to keep momentum." The study participants agreed that the sense of urgency should be incorporated through increased communication to help employees understand why the change is needed. P3 indicated, "I felt sending constant correspondence specific to our new goals would help employees understand the need to stay on schedule." Creating a sense of urgency through communication is the first step to begin the process of changing employee behavior and any perceptions regarding the change.

Theme 2: Importance of Organizational Culture

The participants in this study expressed the understanding of organizational culture is a factor to consider and understand before implementing an organizational change. Tkalac Verčič (2021), indicated that understanding organizational culture is an important step for employers wishing to promote organizational change. Whelan (2016) explained that changing an organizational culture by design is challenging; but not impossible. P3 stated, “Understanding the culture helps leaders understand the background of an organization, specifically the demographic and why things are the way they are.” P2 explained, “Having a diverse employee culture is one of the biggest strengths of our organization. When we are met with challenges, our strong culture helps us navigate change.” P2 commented the way that their organization measures a strong culture is having low employee turnover and positive results returned from climate surveys. P2 shared organizational documents, including an example of the climate survey used to measure employee understanding of the organization’s mission, work conditions, and opportunities. P2 indicated the climate survey is emailed to staff annually to measure areas of needed improvement. The results of the climate survey are posted on P2’s organization’s website each year. The climate survey measures the number of surveys distributed, the response rate, and the dimensions of the study. Prior year results are included with current year results to show areas of growth and needed improvement. P2 indicated that the organization uses two different climate surveys; one for staff and one for students. The climate survey results located on P2's organization's website reflect the distinction between the two surveys. The employee climate survey measures employee training, safety, employee growth, and career opportunities. The student climate survey measures fair treatment, diversity, knowledge of policies, and gender identity.

The strategic plan located on P4's website includes enhancing organizational culture as one of the organization's ongoing goals. The strategic plan outlines the proposed steps to enhance and transform employee culture by "understanding values, interpersonal relations, environment, and desired incentives." According to company documents, the steps P4's organization uses to accomplish enhanced employee culture are diagnosing, ideating, deciding, and executing. During the diagnostic stage, the organization collects data on the current culture. Step 2 is to conduct brainstorming sessions on priorities and solicit feedback on ideas from team members. Step 3 is to evaluate ideas and prioritize workshop initiatives. Step 4 is to execute and communicate the roll-out plan with an emphasis on communication. P4 stated,

> I think one of the key strategies when leading an organization in change is that you have to create the culture. It's not where the leader is leading the change, but the leader creates a culture that everyone wants to be a part of. It takes 3 to 5 years to establish a culture that implements all of the necessary strategies to really make the change.

P1 explained,

> When implementing the change, the culture we want to model is open and caring instead of closed off and persnickety. Leaders make the mistake of trying to

change many things within the organization without understanding and appreciating the current culture. New leaders must find ways to gauge and understand an organization’s culture before making changes because it is a recipe for disaster if they do not understand.

P1’s organization website reflects examples of a caring organizational model. Examples include employees volunteering in the community to serve area homeless shelters and holiday toy drives for low-income families. Internal examples include employee appreciation articles and information for accessible mental health assistance. P1 stated, “Our leadership team is cognizant of the balance between employee well-being along with meeting organizational growth goals.” P4 also discussed the balance of employee well-being and merging change into an existing culture. P4 stated,

> We do live in a world that changes all the time; I mean it's abundantly clear. You know you get your new phone one day and the next version is out the next day. You know you can't keep up with all of that stuff and I think trying to implement, too many changes all at once, is not a tenable situation to find yourself in, because you're going to tax out the people that really have to do the work, and moving them onto the next change, or a new project can really have a negative impact on the culture. Sometimes you just have to wait and be patient and understand when the time is right to another change.

P1 indicated the importance of creating short and long-term goals and using incentives such as luncheons, pay bonuses, and paid time off to achieve goals when implementing change initiatives. P1’s organization website listed these incentives under job postings and additional compensation. Incentives are calculated and distributed on quarterly results directly related to the change we are implementing (P1). P1 explained that using the quarterly incentive method, employees reach goals faster and often leads to a more positive work environment.

Correlation to Literature

Theme 2, the importance of organizational culture, is consistent with the research findings from Jirek (2020). Jirek found that organizational culture is held and maintained by all members of an organization and acts as a moderating variable with the implementation of change. Organizational culture is one of the most difficult dimensions of change management (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). All of the participants in this study disclosed that understanding the organizational culture before making a change was tough but required to be successful.

Each participant discussed organizational culture and how it aligns with the organization's mission and vision statement. P1 and P4 provided organizational documents that show the organization's mission and vision statements include culture as a foundation. Saks (2021) emphasized that employees who work for organizations that embrace a nurturing culture may have a higher personal sense of commitment and responsibility to the organization. Employees who work for organizations that embrace human development may experience a positive work culture (Chamberlain, 2017). The culture of an organization and leadership behavior affects employee turnover rates (Alzubi, 2018). P2 indicated that low employee turnover rates are one source used to determine a positive organizational culture in their organization.

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework

According to Kotter's (1995) eight-stop model, incorporating vision and strategy into a company's culture is key to a successful organizational change. In Step 8 of Kotter's (1995) eight-step model, Kotter explained that leaders should align new practices made as part of the change effort to ensure they are compatible with the current culture and values. Leaders' common errors during transformation efforts include neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the organization's culture (Kotter, 2012). P4 indicated the importance of recognizing the right time to make a change and the negative impact too many changes can make on employee culture. When the change results are working better than the old, leaders would know that the change is anchored into the culture.

Theme 2, the importance of organizational culture, is also a strategy consistent with step 6, create short-term wins, of Kotter's (1995) change model. Kotter and Kohen (2002) indicated that short-term wins generate faith in the change effort, emotionally reward frontline employees, and encourage positive growth towards the change. Short-term wins are an easy way for leaders to help employees quickly reach goals and create employee buy-in for the change. P1 expressed, "When we implemented our last strategic plan, we provided quarterly goals along with the long-term goals. Employees were able to easily achieve the short-term quarterly goals, and I think this kept them motivated and positive." P1 provided a copy of the organization's strategic plan that outlined the finance department's goals for the next five years. A quarterly short-term goal included converting remaining paper files to electronic formats by the end of the second quarter.

P1 rewarded staff with lunch and handwritten thank you cards for completing the goal ahead of schedule. Short-term wins help leaders build momentum towards a positive change; thus, promoting a positive organizational culture.

Hiatt (2006) argues that short-term outcomes are not always indicators of progress (Stouten, 2018). Metrics that indicate change over time specific to what employees value instead of what management values are a considerable component before implementing organizational change (Stouten et al., 2018). Kotter's (1995) change model focuses on management's expectations for expected outcomes on short-term wins. Prosci's ADKAR model does not focus on winning short-term goals; instead, it provides information for leaders to focus on the employees before the outcomes (Stouten et al., 2018).

Theme 3: Employee Buy-In

Employee buy-in was the third theme that emerged when analyzing the data gathered for this study. Each participant stated that employee buy-in was a key component to successfully implementing a change initiative. P3 said, "Employee buy-in is one of my biggest challenges when implementing change. It is hard to accommodate every employee, so you have to figure out ways to determine what individuals view as worth the change." P2 explained, "Without employee buy-in to any organizational change, you might as well start over." P1 stated,

> Employee buy-in is how I gauge success during an organizational change. It is like a snowball effect that's rolling downhill gains popularity. We measure employee buy-in by universal popularity and support. It is like another sign of

> success when the majority have seen it, understood it, and embraced it. The buy-in is a continuous effort to maintain, even after the change is complete.

P4 explained,

> Evaluating employee buy-in is primarily qualitative. For example, it means asking employees what they think about potential changes and listening to the feedback. We use surveys, emails, and many face-to-face conversations to determine how employees feel about change. Open sessions to discuss potential concerns are another way we measure employee buy-in.

P4 provided organizational documents that included a copy of a blank survey used to determine how employees feel about current organizational changes. The survey provided by P4 contains questions related to job satisfaction, understanding current growth initiatives, organization communication, and transparency. P4 indicated, “The organization does a great job communicating with the employees through surveys to gauge their feelings on each change.”

Correlation to the literature. Theme 3, employee buy-in, is consistent with the research findings from Trumbach et al. (2021) in that employee buy-in is essential in the higher education environment. Guerra-Lopez and Dallal (2021) indicated gaining an understanding of employees’ perspectives can help establish a strong buy-in for a change. Employee buy-in may reduce the high failure rate surrounding organizational change (Umble & Umble, 2014). Leaders must be willing to change when an organizational change effort is announced to gain employee buy-in (Tobias, 2015). All of the participants in this study disclosed that there must be employee buy-in to the change, or the change would not be successful. Each participant stated that employee buy-in is measured with open communication and transparency from leadership.

Correlation to the Conceptual Framework

Theme 3, employee buy-in, is a strategy that aligns with Kotter's eight steps for implementing change. The second step of Kotter's (1995) eight-step model of change is to develop a guiding team that has trust and emotional commitment. Individuals that are enthusiastic, loyal, and can model trust and teamwork are the appropriate choice for the guiding team (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). P1 stated, "If you can get a few champions within the staff to model the right attitude towards the change, then other people begin to follow suit and the buy-in continues to grow." P1 indicated that the employees who display a positive attitude toward change or have displayed a positive attitude in the past during organizational change are considered champions or team leaders. Organizational records showed leaders are committed to employee leadership growth by providing leadership program opportunities to employees. The leadership programs are designed to motivate employees and increase overall engagement (P1). The continued buy-in toward the organizational change increases communication among various levels of the organization.

The key to effectively communicating for buy-in is to keep the communication simple and heartfelt while understanding what people are feeling about a change (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Overcommunicate the message to gain support from employees at all levels of the organization (Van den Heuvel et al., 2016). Guerra-Lopez and Dallal (2021) indicated that addressing employee questions throughout change will create buy-in from key stakeholders. P1 and P3 discussed addressing employee questions throughout a change through email and during small group settings. P2 indicated, “Employees feel like they have a voice and you are listening when you respond to their questions promptly.” Leaders must continuously look for ways to keep communication pathways open and check for understanding.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings from this study identified what leaders of higher education organizations believe are critical to successfully implementing a change initiative. This study may be beneficial to other leaders who are interested in implementing sustainable organizational change. Unsuccessful change initiatives in higher education pose a financial and political risk (Trumbach et al., 2021). Providing leaders a more profound understanding of successful change initiative implementation strategies may improve the organization's financial wellness.

With virtual semistructured interviews, organization documents, and organization website reviews, three themes emerged from this study. Theme 1, increased communication, was significant to all of the participants. Each participant recognized the importance of communicating throughout the entire change process to create sustainable change. Theme 2, the importance of organizational culture, indicated the importance of understanding an organization’s culture before making organizational change. In Theme 3, employee buy-in, each participant noted that employee buy-in may help cultivate the acceptance of the change.

The research for this study was conducted during a pandemic; therefore, all participants indicated that they were actively going through organizational and operational changes during the interview process. According to the participants' interview responses, all participants were required to transition operations through a virtual platform with little instruction on how to do so successfully. All participants indicated that over-communicating to employees through every step of the transition is why they were successful. All participants indicated during the data collection process that increased communication through virtual platforms such as email, virtual meetings, and prerecorded videos enabled them to over-communicate daily changes. During the data collection phase of this study, participants were able to provide pre-pandemic and real-time strategies for successfully implementing organizational change.

Implications for Social Change

Change involves uncertainty about how it will affect people (Jabbarian & Chegini, 2017). Successful implementation of change initiatives in higher education may result in less employee stress; therefore, students' learning could benefit and possibly reduce the rate of the increase in the cost of education. The findings of this study may thereby provide a path for higher education leaders to successfully implement sustainable change initiatives that positively benefit student learning that can impact communities.

The implications of this study may encourage increased employment stability, which can improve local economies. The involvement of employees in the early stages of an organizational change initiative may improve the human conditions within the organization. Organizations that follow successful change strategies may become more profitable, experience growth, and create new jobs. Communities may benefit from successful long-term operating organizations.

Recommendations for Action

Leaders of higher education organizations may consider using the findings from this study to aid them when implementing a change initiative within their organization. My recommendations for leaders unsure of an implementation strategy include increasing communication, the importance of organizational culture, and ensuring employee buy-in. Organizational change models serve as a guidebook for organizational change; however, leaders may need to determine a blend of the models depending on the organizational needs before, during, and after the change.

The first recommendation is that leaders of higher education increase their communication to all employees before, during, and after the change process. Leaders should communicate often and use different methods of communication. Communication should be vertical and horizontal among all employees. The communication should be transparent and explained to understand how the change will impact them. The study participants explained that using this method of communication helped achieve successful implementation results.

The second recommendation is that leaders of higher education understand the importance of organizational culture before implementing change. Leaders need to understand the current organizational culture before preparing to implement change. Understanding organizational culture is often a challenge for new leaders interested in implementing change within an organization. Internal stakeholders need to understand the how and why's of the change, specifically if it would potentially disrupt the current culture. Leaders must be willing to change and adapt, model, and support the new culture the change will bring. The participants of this study frequently discussed the importance of organizational culture and how it plays a substantial role in successful change.

The third recommendation is to ensure and evaluate employee buy-in when implementing a change initiative. The participants of this study explained that without employee buy-in, there would be no successful change. Evaluating buy-in goes further than sending satisfaction surveys and emails requesting feedback. Face-to-face conversations and weekly team meetings encouraging constant feedback were the preferred methods discussed by study participants.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies that senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives. I recommend further research based on the limitations that I have identified from the results of this study. The first limitation of this study was that the sample size was comprised of four leaders of higher education organizations located in West Virginia to provide perspectives on their organizational change strategies. Another limitation of this study was that the results of this study could vary among other higher education organizations across the country. I propose two recommendations for further research.

My first recommendation for further research would be to select a different region for the location of the organizations to be studied. Expanding to other areas of the United States may yield different study results. My second recommendation for further research would be to select participants with more than 10 years of experience in a leadership role to participate in the study. The participants in this study were required to have at least 5 years in a leadership role. A longer tenure may result in different responses to the interview questions. Further research may also include a quantitative study using organizational climate surveys to determine a relationship between change initiative procedures and employee job satisfaction. I also recommend conducting similar research in similar industries to understand the similarities and differences across organizations.

Reflections

The Walden Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program journey was the most humbling and rewarding experience throughout my academic career. After completing my first residency, I knew that this would be a long journey that would require extreme dedication and the will to succeed. The data collection process was very intimidating for me; however, I found that I thoroughly enjoyed speaking with all of the participants and learned so much from them.

During the data analysis process, Dr. Campo introduced me to NVivo software as an alternative to using Microsoft Excel for coding. Although intimidating at first, the software made organizing and coding my data much less time-consuming. After completing the data analysis process, I found such a sense of accomplishment and realized that I had finally reached a point in this journey that I often felt would never arrive.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives. The study findings may be relevant to business leaders in the public and private higher education industry. In this study, I used Kotter's eight-step model of change as the conceptual framework. I conducted virtual interviews with four experienced leaders who successfully implemented an organizational change in higher education organizations in West Virginia. The triangulation process included semistructured interviews, reviewing organization documents, and executing member checking. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: increased communication, the importance of organizational culture, and employee buy-in.

The findings from this study indicated that following a change model may increase the probability of success during an organizational change. Study participants agreed that implementing change is complex and does not always work out as planned. The key to implementing a successful organizational change is constant communication, understanding organizational culture, and striving for employee buy-in. Following a change management model or blending multiple models can improve the probability of success.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What will you do	**Script**
Introduce myself and the purpose of the interview. Allow the participant to introduce themselves and provide a little background information.	Hello, my name is Laura Massie. Thank you for taking time to meet with me and participate in this doctoral study. The purpose of this study is to explore strategies that senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives. The main research question for this study is: What strategies do senior-level executives in higher education use to implement organizational change initiatives? During this interview, I will ask you 7 interview questions. As a reminder, you have consented to be a part of this study by signing the consent form that I received prior to our meeting today. You may withdraw from this study at any time as your participation is voluntary. Do you have any questions or concerns about the confidentiality of your participation? Do you have any questions about the informed consent form or about the process before we get started?

Watch for non-verbal queues Paraphrase as needed. Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth.	1. What is the role of management in implementing a change initiative in your organization? 2. How do you engage employees in the planning process for change initiatives? 3. How do you communicate an organizational change within your organization? 4. How did your organization address the key challenges to implementing change initiatives? 5. How have you evaluated employee buy-in to the change initiatives? 6. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies for implementing the organizational change initiatives? 7. What additional information would you like to share related to the strategies your organization used to implement organizational change successfully?
Wrap up interview and thank participant.	This will now conclude our interview. Thank you again for you time.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview.	I will use today's audio recording to transcribe this interview along with my handwritten notes to summarize my interpretations of your responses. Once this is complete, I will email you a copy

	of the transcripts within five business days for your review. Please review for any errors in my interpretation of your responses.
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage. Provide a copy of the succinct synthesis via email prior to follow-up interview. This interview will be held via email or by phone. Walk through each question, read the interpretation and ask: Did I miss anything or would you like to add anything?	During this meeting, I will review a succinct synthesis of your responses to each question asked during our initial interview. Please let me know if I have missed anything or interpreted a response incorrectly.