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Strategies for Change Implementation in the Energy Industry

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2024

Abstract

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MS, Eastern Connecticut State University, 2018

BS, University of Connecticut, 2014

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Many energy leaders struggle to effectively lead change initiatives amidst the evolving landscape of the energy industry marked by decarbonization, decentralization, and digitization. Unsuccessful change initiatives jeopardize organizations' sustainability and negatively influence business performance and profitability. Grounded in Lewin's concepts and the 3-step change model, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies leaders in the energy industry employed to achieve success in their change initiatives. Data were collected from nine U.S. energy leaders who successfully implemented organizational change initiatives, utilizing a combination of semistructured interviews and document reviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, revealing three themes: communication dynamics, incremental progress, and continuous monitoring. A key recommendation is for leaders to communicate the objectives and purpose of the change initiative clearly. The implications for positive social change include the potential to maintain low energy costs and promote environmental sustainability.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my dearest wife, partner-in-crime, and chief paper critic. Your unwavering support has been a beacon of light throughout this crazy journey. You have been my rock, from proofreading my endless ramblings to tolerating my “inspired” midnight writing sessions. Thanks to your patience and love, my drafts have transformed from complete trainwrecks into readable literature. Most importantly, you taught me that love is both a feeling and an action. You’re the proof that a good partner can help you cross every “t” and dot every “i” in life.

To my mom and dad, you two are the OGs of hard work and dedication. My parents instilled the value of relentless effort in me from an early age. Whether it was conquering math homework that felt like an alien language or tackling the chaos of life, your unwavering support and endless encouragement gave me the wings to soar. Thank you for all your sacrifices in aiding me in completing this journey.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The shift toward low-carbon and clean energy has substantially transformed the energy industry. Due to this transformation, energy industry leaders must be able to respond effectively to address change within their organizations. Although this transformation is widely acknowledged as crucial, successfully executing change initiatives is complicated and frequently disorganized (Schwarz et al., 2021). In this study, I explored successful energy industry leaders' strategies to implement change initiatives throughout this transformation. This section includes the background of the problem, a clear problem statement outlining the specific business problem, the purpose of studying change initiatives within the energy industry, details about the population sampling, the nature of the study, the research question, and the interview questions. Additionally, this section encompasses the conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study while emphasizing the study's significance and providing a comprehensive review of the professional academic literature.

Background of the Problem

The energy industry is undergoing substantial transformations due to worldwide movements towards decarbonization, decentralization, and digitalization (Arifin, 2022). This transformation is reshaping conventional business models and posing novel challenges in the energy industry that require leaders to plan, implement and lead change initiatives. Embracing change is essential, advantageous, and a prerequisite for organizational progress to ensure relevance and success (Sava, 2020). Despite the awareness that change is necessary, change initiatives continue to fail. According to Hubbart (2023a), approximately 70% of organizational change efforts fail, with a critical reason being insufficient support and engagement from stakeholders. This general business problem jeopardizes organizations' sustainability and negatively impacts business performance and profitability. Leaders should understand the importance of strategies in prioritizing support and engagement at all levels, among other factors of the organization, to ensure stakeholder investment, reduce resistance to change and increase the chances of a successful change initiative. The findings of this research may provide energy industry leaders with a deeper understanding of strategies that can aid them in successfully implementing change initiatives in their organizations.

Problem and Purpose

The specific business problem is that some energy industry leaders lack the strategies to implement organizational change initiatives successfully to remain sustainable. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study is to explore strategies that some energy industry leaders use for successful organizational change initiatives.

Population and Sampling

I intend to collect data from five or more purposefully sampled energy utility leaders in the United States who have accomplished successful change initiatives relating to the transformation in the energy sector. I utilized semistructured interviews to explore the strategies that participants have used to accomplish successful change initiatives. I also examined relevant organizational documents to obtain information pertinent to the study.

Nature of the Study

Researchers have the option of employing any of three different methods when conducting research. These three methods are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method (Lo et al., 2020). Researchers use a quantitative research study to focus on specific theories and hypotheses based on some conceptual framework analyzing relationships among variables (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019; Duckett, 2021). A mixed method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, allows the researcher to use a model that can accommodate multiple methods and measures (Stoecker & Avila, 2021). Qualitative research enables the researcher to explore a phenomenon while inquiring about those faced with the challenges (Saavedra et al., 2022). Quantitative and mixed method approaches are inappropriate for the current study because they require quantitative measures to study relationships among variables. I selected a qualitative methodology for this study because it aided in inquiring about those most familiar with successful organizational change initiatives concerning renewable energies.

There are four research designs for a qualitative research study: narrative, phenomenological, ethnographic, and case studies. I have chosen to use a multiple-case study design for this research. According to Dobbins et al. (2021), a case-study design fosters a cooperative relationship between researchers and study subjects, allowing for the co-creation of the narrative and challenging the conventional divide between researcher and participant. Through this design, researchers are encouraged to delve into the relationships and connections between the observations and experiences within a particular field, with a focused examination of specific elements within the social and cultural system to gain a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the overarching context (Dobbins et al., 2021). This research design allows me to explore multiple cases of successful organizational change initiatives in response to the increasing adoption of distributed renewable generation, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

According to Watz and Ingstad (2022), the phenomenological design examines human experiences; so, it is not appropriate for this study because it would limit the research to the lived experiences of energy industry leaders and would not sufficiently answer the research question. An ethnographic design, which according to Faisal et al. (2022) involves immersing oneself in a natural environment to explore data from a group, is also not appropriate because the research question does not require me to immerse myself in the natural environment of the group or person. A narrative design, according to M. C. Johnson and Thacker Darrow (2023), focuses on constructing and exploring knowledge by engaging in the act of storytelling and repeatedly recounting personal life experiences.

Research Question

What strategies do energy industry leaders use for successful organizational change?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to achieve organizational change successfully?

2. What was your approach to your change initiative's planning and preparation phase?
3. How did you measure the effectiveness of a change initiative during and after implementation?
4. What significant obstacles did you encounter, and how did you mitigate them?
5. Did you experience any failed change initiatives, and what were the lessons learned from it?
6. What strategies did you use to ensure the embedding of changes in the organization's policies, procedures, and practices?
7. What additional information could you offer regarding strategies you have used to implement change initiatives?

Conceptual Framework

Lewin offered a theory that explained the constructs of field theory and group dynamics and introduced a 3-step model for organizational change. To accurately predict, understand, and change an individual, one must consider everything about the person and their environment (Woody, 2020). These concepts can be translated to an organization and need to be understood by leaders to plan organizational change initiatives and proactively mitigate any resistance that might be encountered (Woody, 2020). Lewin's (1947a) 3-step change management model is the conceptual framework for this study.

The 3-step model for successful organizational change involves unfreezing, moving, and freezing (Lewin, 1947a). The first stage, unfreezing, necessitates acknowledging the need for change and disrupting the prevailing status quo to facilitate organizational transformation (Lewin, 1947a). The second stage, moving, requires the development of new behaviors, values, and attitudes or altering what requires modification to effect change (Lewin, 1947a). The final stage, freezing, requires ensuring that the change is entirely accepted and stabilized within the organization, allowing it to become ingrained and embedded in its practices and culture (Lewin, 1947a).

Lewin's change management model applies to my research study, as the framework could be the basis for understanding how energy leaders develop, implement, and execute change initiatives in an organization. Implementing these stages provides leaders of an organization with a roadmap for the successful execution of organizational change initiatives, thereby reducing resistance (Woody, 2020). Furthermore, the framework guides interviewing participants and understanding any similarities or differences within the findings.

Operational Definitions

Distributed renewable generation: Distributed renewable generation is a method of electricity generation that occurs locally, typically using renewable energy resources like solar and wind, rather than from centrally located power plants (U.S. Department of Energy, n.d.).

Prosumer: A prosumer is a producer-consumer who produces part or all their electricity demand and can insert any excess into the electrical grid (Sabadini & Madlener, 2021)

Utility death spiral: The utility death spiral is the cycle where rising electricity rates lead to lower customer-metered consumption, necessitating further rate increases for the utility to recover the cost from declining sales (Athawale & Felder, 2022).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions play a critical role in shaping the direction and outcome of a research study. Assumptions are a set of beliefs and perspectives that greatly influence the researcher's approach to their study, aiding the researcher in addressing the research problem and determining the best method for gathering information to answer the research questions (Almasri & McDonald, 2021). Two assumptions influenced the present research study, determining its direction and outcome. The first assumption is that participants in the study will provide honest and unbiased responses to interview questions. Participants may provide answers they think the interviewer wants to hear rather than truthful and honest answers. Power dynamics may also influence the responses given, with participants being less likely to provide honest answers if they feel they are in a lower-power position than the interviewer. The second assumption is that participants have the relevant knowledge to respond accurately to the interview questions. Participants may not accurately recall events or experiences, leading to biased responses.

Limitations

There are limitations in all research studies. The limitations present in the research are indicators of potential flaws that could impact the outcomes and conclusions derived from the research (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). Therefore, the researcher must disclose all relevant limitations wholly and honestly to the academic community in any study they present (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). This study has two limitations. The first limitation may be the scarcity of relevant documents. This scarcity might make it challenging to fully explore and capture a comprehensive understanding of the strategies energy industry leaders use for successful change initiatives. The second limitation is the participants' recollection and reporting of relevant information to the study, which may introduce incomplete, inaccurate, or biased responses.

Delimitations

The researcher employs a strategic approach to the inclusion and exclusion of specific elements, referred to as delimitations, within the research design to sharpen the study's focus and increase the ability to address the research question effectively (Coker, 2022). The delimitations of the present study encompass the target population and the geographical location, specifically targeting energy leaders within the United States who have demonstrated success in implementing change initiatives in response to the advent of distributed energy generation.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

This study is significant because the findings should be valuable to energy industry leaders who lack strategies for successful organizational change initiatives. Organizations that fail to implement strategies for successful organizational change initiatives have shown a decline in overall performance (Prasheenaa & Thavakurnar, 2020). Understanding the results of this research and implementing effective strategies can assist energy industry leaders in developing and implementing successful organizational change initiatives, allowing energy industry leaders to remain and or become profitable in an ever-changing energy industry.

Implications for Social Change

Successfully deploying and implementing strategies for organizational change initiatives may produce several positive implications for social change. One of these positive social changes is the potential to increase employment opportunities for the communities in which energy companies operate. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023) reported an increase of 3.6% in unemployment in the utility industry in February of 2023. Although many factors affect the unemployment rate, loss of revenue is a critical component of the rise of unemployment. Applying strategies that affect the organization’s overall performance, such as strategies for successful change initiatives, can aid in the overall performance of the energy organization, which should help in hiring more personnel as revenues increase.

Implementing these strategies should aid those in the community where energy companies operate by keeping energy costs low. With the advent of renewable distributed generation, primarily rooftop solar units, the fear for many researchers is that the energy industry will continue in a spiral that will see a rise in energy costs for those connected to the electric grid (Barazesh et al., 2019). By implementing strategies for successful organizational change, the energy industry should be able to adapt to the external environment, keeping the cost of energy to consumers lower than if they could not change to the external environment. According to the International Renewable Energy

Agency (2022), the transition to renewable energy forms can reduce up to 90% of energy-related carbon emissions. Strategies that aid in the transition to renewable energies can also reduce climate pollution and change, allowing for a cleaner and healthier environment for all.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study is to explore the successful strategies that energy leaders use to implement successful change initiatives. To gather academic and professional literature for this section, I performed several queries in the Walden University Library database and Google Scholar. These queries included words and terms such as *change, Kurt Lewin, change management, energy industry, death spiral, strategies for organizational change,* and *resistance to change and 3-step change model.* These queries resulted in using the following databases: Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Global, Sage, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, Directory of Open Access Journals, IEEE Conference, IEEE Xplore Digital Library, and CINAHL Plus with Full Text. I used peer-reviewed journals, books, and government websites to complete the academic and literature review. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the peer-reviewed versus nonpeer-reviewed journals and books used for my academic and literature review. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the peer-reviewed versus nonpeer-reviewed journals and books used for my doctoral study.

Table 1

Sources in Academic and Professional Literature Review Section

	Total	Total more than 5 years old at graduation date	Percentage of references within 5 years of 2024 graduation (2019-2024)
Peer-reviewed Journals	64	2	96.875%
Books	2	1	50.00%
Government Websites	1	0	100.00%
Non-Peer-Reviewed Journals	0	0	0.00%
Total	67	3	95.52%

Table 2

Sources in Doctoral Study

	Total	Total more than 5 years old at graduation date	Percentage of references within 5 years of 2024 graduation (2019-2024)
Peer-reviewed Journals	113	2	98.23%
Books	2	1	50.00%
Government Websites	5	1	80.00%
Non-Peer-Reviewed Journals	0	0	0.00%
Total	120	4	96.67%

The academic and professional literature review introduces Lewins' (1947a, 1947b) change concepts and the 3-step change model. This introduction is followed by unfreezing the energy industry and communicating the need for change. Subsequently, the literature review transitions to Lewin's move and freeze stages, where strategies to support leaders in achieving successful change initiatives are discussed. The literature review concludes with a comprehensive comparison and contrast of diverse viewpoints on change management.

Lewin's Frontiers in Group Dynamics I & II

Lewin firmly established the conceptual framework of this study within his change model in two sequential iterations (Lewin, 1947a; Lewin, 1947b). Lewin, a renowned social, organizational, and applied psychologist of the 20th century, synthesized and expanded on a range of concepts, including Gestalt psychology, psychological satiation, social climates, group life, action research, and field theory to develop his change model (Endrejat & Burnes, 2022). The evolution of these concepts has led to modern terms such as emergent states, burnout, design thinking, and organizational climate (Endrejat & Burnes, 2022). In the following paragraphs, I will explore the current understanding of Lewin's work by thoroughly examining Lewins' papers, incorporating critiques from other scholars. Through this comprehensive examination, the study endeavors to shed light on Lewin's holistic perspectives on change, providing a strong foundation for comprehending the change model he introduced in 1947.

Group Life

As organizations confront new challenges and emerging issues, collective efforts are required to address these complexities. The rise of new technologies and global competition has made collaboration and cooperation among group members more crucial than ever (Turner, 2021). At the core of Lewin's change model is the understanding that groups possess unique dynamics and social structures that should be comprehended and addressed to facilitate successful change (Crosby, 2022).

Lewin (1947b) proposed that effective change is attainable through a participatory approach involving all group members. The concept of group life refers to how group members interact with one another and the group as a whole. Lewin (1947a) explained that when attempting to change a social phenomenon, one must consider various factors, such as the personalities of individual members, the group's structure, its ideology and cultural values, and economic factors. Lewin argued that successful social change efforts must account for the multifaceted nature of the group and its members and the broader societal and economic context in which the group operates. Focusing solely on one aspect of the group or neglecting contextual factors can lead to incomplete or unsuccessful attempts at change.

Lewin (1947a) further suggested that democratic participation within a group can promote the permanency of the change. Lewin acknowledged that individuals and groups naturally resist change because they are comfortable with their current practices and are apprehensive about the potential unknown outcomes that could arise from altering the status quo. Lewin observed that group dynamics and social structures could exacerbate this resistance to change. To address this resistance, he advocated for an inclusive approach that involves all group members in the change process and addresses individual and group needs and concerns. By ensuring equal and open participation, where all members' ideas, opinions, and concerns are heard and considered fairly and justly, groups can identify and address their limiting factors, thus empowering them to achieve change in real time (Crosby, 2022). This participatory environment enables groups to adapt to new challenges and opportunities rapidly, creating agility and resilience throughout the group, similar to electricity (Crosby, 2022). Therefore, democratic participation fosters issue identification and resolution, leading to a more sustainable and resilient change effort.

Field Theory

Lewin's theory of change and group dynamics sheds light on the dynamic nature of group life and the perpetual presence of change, emphasizing the importance of understanding the driving and restraining forces that influence change processes within groups. Lewin's (1947a) theory posited that change and constancy are not absolute, and that group life is constantly in flux. The degree and nature of change may vary, but change remains an ever-present force in group life. Lewin compared the change process to a river continuously changing its elements, regardless of whether its velocity and direction remain the same. According to Lewin, every system, including groups, is in a state of homeostasis or quasi-stationary equilibrium, sustained by driving and restraining forces that can either facilitate or hinder change. Identifying these forces is necessary to determine what present quasi-stationary equilibrium needs to move to the new and desired level of quasi-stationary equilibrium. Since a force field determines the equilibrium level, Lewin emphasized that permanency implies that the new force field must be relatively secure against change. Lewin's theory emphasizes the importance of understanding group life's complex and dynamic nature and the need for a comprehensive understanding of change processes that drive and restrain change in groups. Lewin's field theory explains the forces and processes shaping human behavior within a field.

Lewin's (1947a) field theory emphasized the significance of comprehending the interplay between individuals or groups and their environment to determine their behavior. The theory considers the totality of these interactions, which Lewin refers to as life space, or an individual's behavior at a specific moment. Life space determines the current behavior of individuals or groups, represented by Lewin mathematically as a function of P and E, where behavior (B) is a function of the interaction between the person or group (P) and the environment (E), or $B = f(P, E)$. Moreover, Lewin's field theory emphasizes that a group's behavior is constantly in flux and that the degree and type of change vary depending on the driving and restraining forces present within the group's environment. Thus, to understand and change group behavior, it is necessary to identify and analyze these forces and their interactions as they shape the group's quasi-stationary equilibrium and, ultimately, its behavior. Therefore, Lewin's approach to change emphasizes a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the group and its environment.

Action Research

Lewin's (1947b) iterative, action research approach to change involves a process that begins with identifying an unclear or ill-defined concept that appears as a vision or a wish for the desired level but lacks specificity or clarity in terms of what needs to occur to achieve it. To attain the desired outcome from the unclear or ill-defined concept, a leader should create a specific and detailed plan to direct actions toward it. Lewin noted that developing a general plan necessitates fact-finding, indicating that conducting a thorough analysis of the current situation and gathering relevant data before embarking on any planned change is essential (1947b). The iterative nature of Lewin's approach involves ongoing planning, action, and reflection cycles, with each cycle building on the insights and feedback gained from the previous one. Lewin's approach encourages a flexible and adaptive system to change that is responsive to the unique challenges and complexities of the situation by altering the goal somewhat based on fact-finding, indicating this approach's flexibility.

Lewin (1947b) suggested that circular causal processes involve individual and group actions, including those of individuals who may be considered insane. According to this idea, individual perception or "fact-finding" is linked to individual or group action, and the content of one is dependent on the other. How a problem or situation is perceived can influence the action taken to address it, and that action can shape future perceptions and fact-finding. Lewin emphasized the interdependence of an individual or group's cognitive and behavioral processes and believed this circular feedback loop was essential to his approach to change. To initiate change, Lewin viewed field theory as a way of identifying the specific forces that require disruption, while action research was the method used to facilitate movement toward the desired change (Burnes, 2020).

Three-Step Change Model

Lewin (1947a) contended that aiming solely for a change in performance level is inadequate, as it does not ensure the permanency or duration of the new level. Without a focus on permanency, groups may experience a transient improvement in performance after a change effort but eventually regress to their previous level of functioning. Lewin suggested that since any level of performance is determined by a force field, achieving permanency in the new level necessitates securing the new force field against change. Therefore, including the permanency of the new level as an objective of planned change is crucial to achieving sustained improvements in group performance (Crosby, 2022). According to Lewin, a successful change effort involves three steps: unfreezing (if necessary) the current level, moving to the new level, and freezing group life at the new level. Including permanency in the planned change objective shifts the focus from a short-term solution to a more sustainable and long-lasting one.

Unfreezing. Lewin's (1947a) unfreezing step involves breaking down the existing patterns, norms, and routines that govern individual or group behavior, creating a psychological readiness for change: identifying and destabilizing the current quasi-stationary equilibrium (Burnes, 2020). Unfreezing involves altering the beliefs and attitudes of an organization's members to support the change (Olafsen et al., 2021). This process challenges people's core assumptions about the existing status quo, so leaders need to build a coalition and gain consensus to address resistance to change (Mangaliso et al., 2022). Managing resistance to change may include directing the groups or individuals' concerns and creating an open and transparent communication environment to build trust and foster engagement. To facilitate the unfreezing process, leaders should develop a sense of urgency and communicate the need for change and its benefits to motivate individuals or groups to mitigate resistance. By involving stakeholders, leaders can prepare individuals or groups for change and manage resistance laying the foundation for change and preparing the organization for the following stages of Lewin's model (Crosby, 2022).

In addition to establishing a sense of urgency and communicating the need for change, leaders should also employ fact-finding. Lewins' (1947a, 1947b) papers emphasized the crucial role of fact-finding in identifying the specific forces that sustain the current level and hinder change. Fact-finding entails assessing the readiness of individuals and groups, including their commitment, skills, and resources, and identifying potential barriers that may impede progress. By evaluating the readiness and gathering relevant data, leaders can better understand the behaviors, B = *f*(P, E), and make the necessary changes to achieve the pursued outcome. Moreover, leaders can tailor their approach and strategies to the specific needs of individuals or groups, increasing the likelihood of success (Beasley et al., 2021). Through thorough fact-finding, leaders can also gather crucial information about readiness, barriers, and individual or group needs. Fact-finding enables leaders to make informed decisions, adapt their strategies, and adequately prepare for the next step, "move."

Move. Lewin's (1947a) moving step involves changing behavior to the desired outcome through action research. The main goal is to address uncertainties that arise during the initial stage of change by aligning the values of different stakeholders and creating consensus through open forum discussions to reach the desired state (Mangaliso et al., 2022). However, this process can be complex since individuals adapt to change at varying rates and must accept it voluntarily to guarantee success (Crosby, 2022). According to Tran and Gandolfi (2020), leaders should develop new behaviors, values, and attitudes, communicate, and engage stakeholders in the change process, offer training and development opportunities, and provide support throughout the transition.

Monitoring and assessing progress is critical in ensuring necessary adjustments to achieve the desired outcome. By focusing on these factors, leaders can increase the chances of gaining favorable and long-lasting change results, leading to a more successful organizational transition.

Freeze. Lewin's (1947a) freeze step involves the permanency of the planned change objective to ensure that individuals and groups do not revert to the previous semi-quasi equilibrium. One way to reinforce these changes is to celebrate wins during the change process; this helps to further buy-in and support from stakeholders and employees (Woody, 2020). Another essential aspect of the freeze stage is deliberately seeking out those who have contributed to the process and system improvements (Woody, 2020). Leaders should identify and acknowledge those who have been active in easing the transition through the support of the process and co-workers. To navigate the freezing stage effectively, leaders should provide continued support, communicate openly and transparently, and encourage feedback while locking in the new semi-quasi equilibrium. These navigational tools ensure that the changes made during the moving step are sustained and embedded into the organization's culture.

Criticisms. Kurt Lewin, widely recognized as the "father" of organizational development, has been criticized for his change model (Mangaliso et al., 2022). One of the criticisms levied against Lewin is that his model is too simplistic to address the complexities of change in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment (Coghlan, 2021). However, this criticism is only valid if one subscribes to the belief that Lewin's 3-step change model was a later, underdeveloped addition to his work (Coghlan, 2021). Despite Lewin’s premature death in 1947, Burnes (2020) argued that Lewin’s earlier work on child psychology, field theory, action research, and group dynamics which he began in the 1920s, formed the foundation of the 3-step change mode.

Burnes (2020) contends that Lewin’s change model is not a new or simplistic approach to change but a repackaging of his previous ideas with a more precise terminology of the three stages. In this repackaging, Lewin takes his concept of quasi-stationary social equilibria and social change presented in his work in 1947a and repackages it as the unfreeze stage. The permanency of change discussed in the same work becomes the freeze step in Lewin’s model. Lewin incorporated his discussion on locomotion through life space and action research from his 1947b work into the moving stage of his model. Lewin’s change model was not a subsequent underdeveloped addition to his work but rather a repackaging of his lifelong work.

A second critique is that Lewin’s 3-step change model has been criticized for applying only to incremental and isolated types of change while leaving other forms irrelevant (Ratana et al., 2020). Burnes (2020) argued that this criticism misunderstands Lewin’s model because of its applicability to radical change. Lewin recognized that change is a multifaceted and unpredictable process, where obstacles and unforeseen developments may arise throughout the change process (Crosby, 2022). To this end, Lewin’s model provides a framework adaptable to different situations and types of change. Cone and Unni (2020) successfully conducted change management in a pharmacy school using Lewin’s change model and embedding Delphi techniques demonstrating the adaptability and flexibility of Lewin’s change model.

According to Burnes (2020), the conventional portrayal of Lewin’s change model as a linear process in literature is erroneous. Burnes (2020) contends that Lewin’s model is a dynamic process comprising multiple stages and feedback loops. Unfreezing, the first stage of Lewin’s model, is an ongoing process that aims to prepare individuals for change rather than a one-time event (Burnes, 2020). Freezing, the third stage of Lewin’s model, is not the end goal but rather a step toward stabilizing and establishing the new state as the new norm (Burnes, 2020). Thus, Lewin’s change model is a comprehensive and flexible approach that recognizes the complex and evolving nature of the change process. It accommodates various types of change and techniques, enabling individuals to adapt to new circumstances and transform their behaviors and attitudes. The feedback loops in Lewin’s model ensure that the change process is continuous and can be refined based on the outcomes of each stage. Therefore, Lewin’s model offers a nuanced and adaptive framework that acknowledges the challenges and opportunities inherent in the change process.

The final criticism is that Lewin’s change model specifically addresses behavioral change (Ratana et al., 2020). Lewin (1947a) placed a significant emphasis on the behavior of individuals and groups; it is essential to note that Lewin also recognized the importance of cognitive and affective factors in the change process. Lewin’s change model emphasizes the importance of unfreezing current behavior and attitudes, moving individuals and groups through a transitional period, and freezing new behavior and attitudes as the new norm. While this model's first and third stages have clear behavioral implications, the second stage involves a significant cognitive component. During the moving phase, individuals and groups must engage in critical thinking, problem-solving, and other cognitive processes to determine how best to navigate the change process. Furthermore, Lewin's (1947a) concept of quasi-stationary social equilibria and social change suggests that change is not simply a matter of modifying behavior but involves broader systemic factors. Thus, while Lewin's change model does emphasize the importance of behavior, it is not limited to behavioral change alone.

Effective change management is crucial for organizations to thrive in today's constantly changing and dynamic business environment. Mitra et al. (2019) emphasize that it is a critical organizational capability. Despite receiving multiple criticisms, Lewin's (1947a) change model remains a widely used approach in change management. Some critics have misunderstood Lewin's work and viewed the model as simplistic, linear, and inflexible. However, Lewin's change model is dynamic, comprehensive, adaptable, and flexible.

Although Mangaliso et al. (2022) argued that Lewin's model is not a universal solution for all organizational change, it is still a valuable tool for change management. It provides a clear understanding of the change process and a flexible approach adaptable to different types of change. According to Endrejat and Burnes (2022), there have been efforts to improve management theory in response to criticisms. Lewin's change model is still widely used by organizations to rapidly change their culture, solve problems, and implement solutions (Crosby, 2022).

Therefore, it is crucial to recognize Lewin’s change model’s strengths and potential benefits. For this reason, it is the chosen conceptual framework for this study. While it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of any model, Lewin’s change model has proven effective in various organizational contexts. By embracing the dynamic nature of change and adapting to different types, organizations can use Lewin’s change model to achieve successful change initiatives.

The Energy Industry

The energy industry is experiencing significant changes due to global shifts towards decarbonization, decentralization, and digitalization, transforming traditional business models and presenting new challenges (Arifin, 2022). However, long-term investments in an uncertain economic and political environment and the unpredictability of long-term revenues are adding to the difficulties (Houldin & Yang, 2020). While consumption patterns have remained relatively stable over the past decade, companies in the energy industry must prepare for changes in consumption patterns that vary daily in the coming years (Tolmasquim et al., 2020). Rapidly adopting new technologies and establishing new market mechanisms are necessary to address this situation (Tolmasquim et al., 2020). Therefore, energy industry leaders should develop strategies, principles, and guidelines that address this new environmental challenge and avoid the utility death spiral.

Decarbonization

The Paris Agreement of 2016 conveyed a clear message to the global community regarding the imperative to decarbonize the economy, encouraging businesses to adopt a perspective that prioritizes both economic and ecological considerations over the long term (He et al., 2021). As a significant contributor to climate change, the energy industry is critical for decarbonization efforts. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (n.d.), power plants that use fossil fuels for energy production accounted for 99% of the United States CO_2 emissions associated with energy generation, despite only accounting for 61% of the country's net energy generation. The environmental impact of the energy industry's carbon emissions underscores industry leaders' difficulties in overhauling the energy industry to mitigate climate change and promote sustainable economic growth (Jakimowicz, 2022).

The energy transition is a challenging endeavor that impacts numerous interconnected subsystems of the global economy, such as society, economy, legislation, and the environment (Jakimowicz, 2022). The transition to alternative energy sources, such as renewable energy, requires changes to existing systems and practices, which presents a technical and logistical challenge. Transitioning to renewable energy sources requires significant investments in new technologies and infrastructure, such as smart grids and energy storage systems. The energy transition requires a comprehensive approach that considers the interconnectedness of various subsystems and involves collaboration between stakeholders in different sectors. Thus, industry leaders should consider the potential consequences of the transition and develop policies and strategies that minimize negative impacts while maximizing benefits.

Digitization

The energy industry has undergone a significant transformation due to rapid adoption of technologies such as smart meters, energy storage systems, electric vehicles, and advanced automation, compelling energy companies to adapt their business models to remain competitive (Arifin, 2022). These new technologies have also facilitated the development and integration of renewable and non-renewable energy production (Jakimowicz, 2022). Energy storage systems, for example, allow excess energy generated by renewable sources such as solar and wind to be stored and strategically released during peak hours. Smart meters have enabled energy companies to monitor energy usage, providing patterns and real-time data on energy demand and supply, and optimizing energy production and distribution, increasing energy efficiency. Electric vehicles have also created new opportunities for energy companies, enhancing revenue by providing charging infrastructure. Advanced automation has streamlined energy production and distribution processes, reducing operational costs. However, as new technology is adopted, the energy industry must ensure its systems are secure and protected against cyber threats to avoid potential data breaches or electrical disruptions.

On December 23, 2015, a cyber-attack was launched against Ukraine’s energy grid, causing a six-hour blackout for approximately 225,000 customers (Jakimowicz, 2022). The electric grid in the United States is a critical infrastructure that enables health care, telecommunication, transportation, water, and sewage systems, and any destabilization of this infrastructure threatens human life and health (Jakimowicz, 2022). Jakimowicz (2022) noted that the rapid energy transition to new technologies, including distributed renewable generation, will allow for the energy industry's digitization to grow in complexity, compounding the risk of cybersecurity threats. As technology rapidly evolves and reshapes business models, companies should adapt and find innovative ways to cope with its unpredictable and fast-changing nature (Arifin, 2022). This rapid digitization change requires energy leaders to constantly stay updated with the latest technological developments and be proactive in incorporating them into their operations to remain competitive in their respective industries.

Decentralization

According to Tolmasquim et al. (2020), the era of traditional utilities and passive consumers in the energy industry has ended. The energy industry has begun to move from a conventional centralized energy system towards a decentralized model representing a fundamental shift in energy generation, distribution, and consumption. The situation started to shift gradually with the advent of cost-effective photovoltaic solar panels, which enabled many customers to become energy prosumers (Jakimowicz, 2022). Today, the Internet of Things (IoT) coupled with cost-effective photovoltaic solar panels allow prosumers to accurately monitor and regulate their energy consumption and improve distribution capabilities. Consumers and prosumers can easily manage and reduce energy usage using IoT devices like smart thermostats, lighting controls, and monitoring systems, reducing consumption and revenue in the energy industry. According to Fuentes and Sengupta (2020), this penetration of distributed renewable generation technologies calls for a different approach to managing electricity reliability for semi-independent households.

Prosumers. According to Jakimowicz (2022), households install distributed renewal generation primarily to increase self-consumption due to the potentially lower cost of self-generated electricity than grid electricity, which is subject to various taxes and fees. Other factors include the emergence of new third-wave information technologies, increasing inflation, the erosion of conventional bureaucratic service delivery, and the growth of structural unemployment (Jakimowicz, 2022). These factors have made consumers no longer passive energy consumers but active prosumers who can participate in energy markets and generate their electricity, promoting a decentralized energy model. According to Arifin (2022), the energy industry faces challenges from these disruptive technologies, compelling companies to be innovative in their approach to adapt and survive.

One way the energy industry has aided prosumers in the transition is by integrating distributed renewable generation into the electric grid by introducing interconnections. Interconnections allow energy prosumers to engage in commercial activities in three ways: self-generation and sale of electricity, providing energy storage services, and participating in energy efficiency and demand response programs (Jakimowicz, 2022). Nonetheless, interconnection challenges, such as prolonged timelines, costly grid upgrades, and regulatory and technical obstacles, have restricted the advantages of distributed energy generation (Valova & Brown, 2022). This advantage includes integrating renewable energy, providing utility demand response features, and proactively managing generation assets (Mondal et al., 2022). Furthermore, if deployed appropriately, this integration can strengthen resiliency and reliability and economically benefit the prosumer and the energy industry (Mondal et al., 2022). Valova and Brown (2022) advocated for the energy industry to design interconnections rules and regulations that enable the rapid and efficient integration of distributed energy generation.

Grid Defectors. The decreasing costs of solar and storage technologies have raised worries about prosumers and customers disconnecting from the electric grid and generating their electricity (Gorman et al., 2020). At present, disconnecting from the grid incurs significant initial expenses but also promises substantial returns on investment (Peffley & Pearce, 2020). Peffley and Pearce's (2020) research in Michigan revealed that commercial and industrial customers would technically and economically benefit from disconnecting from the electrical grid. This situation requires utilities to adapt to a time when new technologies profoundly affect their business operations (Tolmasquim et al., 2020). One consideration for the energy industry is to make grid-tied net metering more attractive to commercial and industrial customers to remain customers to avoid a utility death spiral (Peffley & Pearce, 2020).

Utility Death Spiral

The electric utility industry faces an unparalleled business threat, potentially the most significant in its history, as evidenced by the recurring fear of the utility death spiral. According to Athawale and Felder (2022), a decade ago, net metering was the primary reason for concern about the utility death spiral. The current apprehension is due to the emergence of low-cost distributed renewable generation technology, the potential benefits of on-site energy storage, and digitization, which could significantly reduce costs to the customer (Athawale & Felder, 2022). This penetration of distributed renewable generation is threatening the traditional business model of the energy industry, enabling consumers to become prosumers shrinking revenue, and creating difficulties in recovering fixed costs of investments in the infrastructure for generation, transmission, and distribution (Jakimowicz, 2022). In response to the emergence of distributed renewable generation, utilities may have to raise prices since electricity demand is decreasing. However, such an action could lead to cross-subsidization, where the distribution of utility's fixed costs between prosumers and traditional consumers is uneven. (Jakimowicz, 2022). The transfer of escalating electricity costs onto traditional consumers may result in some of them choosing to disconnect from the grid and transition to self-generation as an alternative, creating the vicious cycle referred to as the utility death spiral (Jakimowicz, 2022).

Researchers have proposed several solutions that might slow or prevent the problem of the utility death spiral. Fuentes and Sengupta (2020) suggested an energy insurance market for prosumers and defectors in which the energy industry provides assurances to avoid power loss in case of system failures. Barazesh et al. (2019) argued that high population growth and low-distributed renewable generation penetration decrease the utility death spiral risk. Athawale and Felder (2022), Venkatraman et al. (2021), and Houldin and Yang (2020) concluded that the traditional volumetric rate design would require a redesign in the advent of distributed renewable generation, prosumers, and defectors. These new technologies have a problematic interaction with the current volumetric rate structure (Beaufils & Pineau, 2019). However, some in the energy industry struggle to cope with distributed renewable generation and the increasing costs associated with renovating and maintaining aging infrastructure, causing them to experience the consequences of the death spiral (Barazesh et al., 2019). Hence, there is a growing need for policies and strategies that encourage efficient infrastructure adaptation, such as implementing smart grid approaches alongside corresponding business models that prioritize flexibility (Riveros et al., 2019).

Strategies for Change

According to Lewin (1947b), change is the variation between a previous state and a subsequent state due to internal or external factors. The rapid change in the external environment of the energy industry necessitates adopting new technologies, modifying business models, and compliance with new regulatory frameworks for the energy industry to remain competitive. These changes are fundamental and substantial, affecting multiple parts of an organization, including structure, processes, policies, and culture (Sava, 2020). Leaders in an organization should acknowledge that change is the only constant and it significantly affects a business's life cycle (Covic & Planinic, 2020). It is an ongoing process that requires individuals and organizations to be adaptable, flexible, and responsive.

Latilla et al. (2020) concluded in their study of innovation and change in energy utilities that change and business innovation can effectively improve the performance of energy utility companies. They further suggested that energy utilities should respond proactively to the external energy environment and be willing to adapt business models and organizational structures to meet the challenge (Latilla et al., 2020). Proactively meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing energy environment is a complex undertaking that various political, regulatory, and budgetary constraints may impede. To increase the chances of success of these change initiatives, leaders should understand and comprehend change management strategies and how these strategies interconnect within the organization, individuals, and groups. Failure to do so can have a long-lasting negative effect on the organization.

Resistance to Change

Reducing the long-lasting negative effect requires organizations and their leaders to manage resistance to change. Throughout history, change and resistance toward change have always been present (Warrick, 2022). Lewin (1947a) described resistance to change as a counteracting force against the driving force for change and suggested that breaking the pattern of behavior or action is necessary to augment the driving force while diminishing the resisting forces. Lewin's change model characterizes this breaking of the pattern as the unfreezing step, where strategies such as addressing the concerns of stakeholders and encouraging participation aid in getting stakeholders ready for the change.

Addressing resistance to change and preparing stakeholders for change effectively requires the recognition of various factors, such as actors, interrelationships, collective movements, and external elements associated with change (González et al., 2022). According to González et al. (2022), most scholars consider resistance to change as a negative condemnation and a threat that the organization needs to eliminate for the successful implementation of change and optimal performance. A minority of academic's view resistance to change as a vehicle by which organizations can effectively address various aspects of their operations to change initiatives, including strategies, processes, and structures to generate benefits for the organization (González et al., 2022). In this everchanging business environment, the leader must determine whether to uncover and investigate the causes of the resistance to the change or confront resistance (Warrick, 2022). Determining how to approach resistance to change determines how a leader views the phenomenon of resisting change.

The Phenomenon to Resist. The literature on resistance to change has identified many factors contributing to this complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Warrick (2022) categorizes the underlying reasons for resistance to change into three primary areas: personal, organizational, and leadership factors. Personal factors that can affect an employee’s response to change include their level of comfort with the current state of affairs, limited access to information, a sense of uncertainty regarding the potential effects that changes may have, and cynicism (Teofilus et al., 2022; Warrick, 2022). Organizational factors contributing to resistance to change are a negative or unpleasant organizational culture, top-down and demotivating hierarchical structures, and a lack of consideration for employees’ well-being (Warrick, 2022). In addition, resistance to change can also arise from negative perceptions of the change agent’s reputation or leadership style and a lack of effective communication, engagement, transparency, and trust. However, simply identifying the factors contributing to resistance during the change process is insufficient; leaders should also comprehend the intricacies of the resistance and the interactions among the individual, the group, and the organization (González et al., 2022).

Understanding the intricacies and interactions among all stakeholders involved in the change process can be challenging, as signs of resistance may not always be readily apparent or visible (Warrick, 2022). During the change process, the leader should be attentive to cues such as a tense atmosphere, employee disengagement, and heightened employee stress levels, which are signs of resistance to change (Shala et al., 2023). Other evident forms of resistance to change include inciting others and deliberately slowing down work, reducing performance, or refusing to do tasks related to the change (Shala et al., 2023). The capacity of a leader to identify and effectively manage resistance to change is likely to enhance the likelihood of a successful change initiative.

Leadership

The electric utility industry faces a global transition due to the increasing demand for sustainability and distributed renewable generation. Governments and enterprises worldwide focus on reducing their carbon footprint and transitioning to cleaner energy sources like wind, solar, hydro, geothermal, and nuclear. For the successful transition to renewable energy, leaders in the energy industry must take significant steps to implement organizational, market, regulatory, and technological changes that will address the necessary transformations (Wilkinson et al., 2021). Despite leadership efforts to implement change initiatives in organizations, more than half of these initiatives do not accomplish their intended objectives (Maali et al., 2022). Although there may be some disagreement about the precise accuracy of this statistic, no one can dispute the importance of successful change initiatives to an organization’s sustainability, business performance, and profitability.

Sahin (2022) argued that talented leadership is crucial for successful organizational restructuring, turnarounds, and change. Change initiatives are at risk of failure without capable leaders who can guide the organization through the necessary transformations. Effective leadership is vital for providing a clear vision, motivating employees, and allocating resources to achieve desired outcomes (Sahin, 2022). While the environment remains outside a leader's sphere of control, leaders have agency over their responses to changing conditions (Lippitt, 2021). Therefore, leadership plays a critical role in driving organizational change, and a lack of it can hinder efforts in such circumstances.

Numerous theories and models exist within leadership studies, each with a unique perspective and approach to understanding effective leadership (Allio, 2023). The overabundance of ideas and concepts has led to complex and fragmented literature, posing difficulties for academics and professionals to comprehend and incorporate the multiple leadership styles. Lewin (1947a) investigated the influence of diverse leadership styles on group productivity and decision-making. Lewin conducted an experiment examining the impact of three leadership styles: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Lewin concluded that the democratic leadership style was the most effective in promoting productivity and quality decision-making.

The democratic leadership style entails guiding and directing employees occupying subordinate hierarchical positions while concurrently facilitating active engagement and involvement from the group, particularly in the decision-making processes (Morkel et al., 2021). It is part of Lewin's social discussion of group life, field theory, and action research (Crosby, 2021). This leadership style requires leaders to anticipate and proactively plan for change by emphasizing collaboration, open communication, and active participation from group members (Burnes, 2020). Lewin contended that this leadership style shows effectiveness in situations requiring a collective effort to achieve a common goal, such as during organizational change (Lewin, 1947a).

Criticisms. Although Lewin was a proponent of democratic leadership, Lippitt (2021) argued that a systematic and disciplined situational approach is necessary to face rapid and complicated environmental changes. According to Sahin (2022), while democratic leadership has several advantages, it also has drawbacks. Lewin (1999) argued that many who conceptualize leadership as a single continuum may perceive democratic leadership as a leadership style between authoritarian and laissez-faire. This view oversimplifies the complexity of democratic leadership and neglects the unique features and advantages of the democratic leadership approach (Lewin, 1999). Instead, democratic leadership blends authoritarian and laissez-faire to varying degrees to create an effective situational model (Crosby, 2021). This leadership style adds to Lewin's change model dynamic and flexible framework for organizational change.

To make effective decisions, a competent leader considers various factors, such as their understanding of organizational priorities, interpretation of the environment, and stakeholders (Allio, 2023). While including subordinates in the decision-making process can foster a sense of ownership and accountability, adverse situations may arise, such as loss of time (Sahin, 2022). Arriving at a consensus may take longer than expected, impeding, and delaying change initiatives and increasing costs (Sahin, 2022). Another negative aspect of democratic leadership is that requiring everyone to give their opinion may lead to incorrect decisions, specifically if the subordinates do not have the expertise to contribute to the decision-making process (Sahin, 2022). While democratic leadership can be effective, excessive adherence to democratic leadership principles by a leader may lead to a lack of clear direction and ambiguity in decision-making processes, potentially impeding effective performance outcomes (Haryanto et al., 2022). Leaders should adopt a leadership style that is appropriate for them and their situation and can help them achieve their strategic goals (Crosby, 2021). It is not enough to formulate a strategy; leaders must also be able to execute it successfully while being flexible, situational, and authoritative to be successful (Sahin, 2022).

Alternative Leadership Approaches. Although Lewin's Democratic and Situational hybrid approach to leadership is widely regarded by many as a more effective and favorable approach to change management, many other approaches are used to implement change. A study by Mekonnen and Bayissa (2023) found that employees' commitment and efficacy to organizational change increased when leaders exhibited transformational and transactional leadership behavior. Transformational leadership involves a reciprocal and motivating relationship between leaders and followers to reach a heightened level of moral growth and advocate for principles of justice and equality (Mekonnen & Bayissa, 2023). Transformational leaders have charismatic qualities and a deep sense of empathy, empowering others to embrace change and think creatively.

These leaders set clear goals and communicate a compelling vision, igniting enthusiasm and commitment among their team members.

Transactional leaders revolve around an exchange relationship between leaders and their followers (Mekonnen & Bayissa, 2023). The leader establishes and communicates a clear set of expectations and goals the followers are expected to meet. When followers meet goals and expectations, they are incentivized and rewarded; however, if the follower cannot meet the expectations and goals, they are penalized. This is why this leadership style, according to Chukwuma et al. (2023), may cause a stressful environment where followers may mistrust and fear their leaders, which is not conducive to change.

Chukwuma et al. (2023) conducted a study examining the impact of transactional and transformational leadership on change initiatives. They discovered that both leadership styles were beneficial for driving change; however, transformational leadership encountered less resistance than transactional leadership. The researchers also emphasized that transactional leaders typically operate within the confines of the existing organizational culture. In contrast, transformational leaders take a more proactive role in actively shaping and transforming the organizational culture (Chukwuma et al., 2023). These distinct leadership approaches represent diverse strategies that leaders can employ to achieve successful organizational change initiatives. By understanding the strengths and limitations of each style, leaders can effectively navigate change and foster a positive and adaptive organizational culture.

Addressing Resistance. Leaders should adopt a positive perspective toward resistance to change and view it as a natural part of the necessary evolution of businesses rather than seeing it as a hostile or unwelcome attack (Sahin, 2022). Attacking resistance to change only enhances stakeholders' fears, concerns, and doubts concerning the change initiative. Leaders should recognize that every stakeholder can contribute as a change agent, and their impact on the change process can be either positive or negative based on how leadership addresses their concerns and involvement (Mustafa, 2022). By adopting a positive perspective, leaders can create an environment conducive to effective change management, where concerns are addressed and active stakeholder involvement is encouraged.

Change management is a multifaceted undertaking that requires coordination across various levels and the constructive alignment of diverse interests among all stakeholders (Metz, 2021). However, leaders can tackle resistance to change through appropriate change management processes and effective strategies (Zainab et al., 2022). The approach to such strategies may vary based on the type of change initiative, leadership style, and situation, yet the existing literature consistently highlights specific strategies as effective solutions. Sahin (2022) stated that a leader should set an example, establish a clear vision and values, and act consistently with them while paying close attention to the small details. Leaders should motivate stakeholders to realize the change initiative's goals (Sahin, 2022). Motivating stakeholders to achieve the goals of a change initiative can be done by leading with integrity, listening, understanding their perspective, and engaging. Above all, communicating clearly and often is the most significant form of motivating stakeholders.

Communication

Communication is critical to a successful change initiative (Fadzil et al., 2019). Germes et al. (2021) identified communication as one of the four essential interdisciplinary skills for implementing renewable energy projects. The absence of communication or a lack of clarity in messaging can lead to uncertainty among employees regarding the change initiative (Zainab et al., 2022). Such uncertainty can result in resistance, reluctance, and decreased employee morale, ultimately impeding the initiative’s success. Lewin concluded that communication aids in creating awareness of the need for change, building support for the change, and coordinating the actions of individuals and groups. According to Sahin (2022), the effectiveness of change initiatives is contingent upon leaders who can cultivate organizational change capacity. Leaders build this capacity through clear communication of the intended change. Leaders who effectively communicate the objectives and rationale for the proposed change can ensure employee understanding and support, ultimately leading to successful change implementation. Zainab et al. (2022) identified a lack of clear communication and an inappropriate leadership style as the two most prevalent reasons for the failure of change initiatives. The absence of effective communication can lead to employee confusion and resistance, whereas inappropriate leadership styles can impede communication efforts and cause employee dissatisfaction. Therefore, to ensure the success of change initiatives, organizations must prioritize clear and effective communication strategies and cultivate leadership styles conducive to change.

Effective communication is essential for leaders to facilitate collective meaning-making for change (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021). Leaders must deeply understand others' perspectives to achieve successful outcomes (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021). By grasping others' viewpoints, leaders can develop and convey messages that resonate with their audience, build trust, and promote a sense of shared purpose. Effective communication is not limited to the dissemination of information by leaders. It involves a two-way dialogue requiring leaders to actively listen to and consider their subordinates' perspectives before making decisions (Sahin, 2022). According to Sahin (2022), leaders must be clear about their vision and values for a successful change initiative, establish two-way communication channels that empower subordinates, cultivate mutual respect, and build trust between leaders and subordinates. Based on current practices, it is crucial to foster active participation in the change process, employ effective communication methods to convey the change initiative, and utilize persuasion techniques to underscore the significance of the change among organizational members (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021). These are critical components for promoting constructive change behaviors, including openness, readiness, and commitment, among organizational members (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021).

Trust. In the rapidly changing business environment, organizational leaders encounter significant challenges establishing employee trust (Men et al., 2020). To mitigate these challenges, leaders should communicate a clear and comprehensive vision, conveying a meaningful, compelling, worthwhile, and easily understandable vision to gain the employees (Men et al., 2020). Moreover, leaders should demonstrate care for their employees to build community and encourage trust (Men et al., 2020). These communications should be honest, transparent, and frequently repeated throughout the change initiative to facilitate trust and buy-in (Hubbart, 2023a). By doing so, leaders can ensure that employees know the change initiative's purpose, goals, and outcomes.

According to Hubbart (2023a), research has indicated that for a leader to effectively motivate and maintain employee buy-in during an organizational change initiative, they should be a reliable source of guidance in leading others. Employees must trust their leaders' ability to navigate change and guide the organization toward success (Hubbart, 2023a). However, trust is a valuable and delicate asset that is impossible to achieve overnight, and leaders should earn and cultivate trust over time through consistent actions and transparent communication (Men et al., 2020). The trust established over time enables the leader to encourage openness toward change and gain employees' support for change initiatives (Men et al., 2020). As a result, employees work together towards a shared goal of achieving desired outcomes

The attitudes and behaviors of employees towards the proposed changes are essential to the change initiative's success (Neill et al., 2020). Leaders should understand that they are not only responsible for making decisions and setting the direction and strategy of the organization, but they also influence employee perceptions, attitudes, and actions through their communication behaviors, styles, and messages (Men et al., 2020). Effective communication during a change initiative, which includes envisioning, energizing, and enabling, can positively impact employees' trust in the organization and change (Men et al., 2020). Employees with a sense of trust and an open and participative communication environment are likelier to engage in extra-role behavior and champion change (Neill et al., 2020).

Organizational change is a universal aspect of a successful organization, but the achievement of trust and buy-in at all levels is imperative for the success of such change (Hubbart, 2023a). Despite promoting efficient communication to garner trust during a change initiative, implementing these ideas often falls short in practice due to a tendency for organizations to selectively adopt specific strategies or implement them in an isolated manner (Hubbart, 2023a). Often there may be a lack of alignment and coordination among the various change management strategies in the organization, leading to confusion and a lack of clarity for employees (Hubbart, 2023a). Neill et al. (2020) suggested that for an organization to carry out changes effectively, it is essential for leaders to establish open communication channels, build a culture of trust and participation, and involve employees in the decision-making process.

Engagement. The topic of employee engagement has gained significant importance among academics, practitioners, and organizations (Saks et al., 2022). Organizations need to implement various strategies to actively engage their employees to achieve optimal performance to survive in a fiercely competitive business environment that is rapidly changing (Riyanto et al., 2021). Optimal performance provides the organizational pillars, which include performance alignment, psychological harmony, and the capacity to learn and change (Riyanto et al., 2021). These pillars echo Lewin's viewpoint that effective leaders must equip their team members with the necessary tools to navigate change, involve every individual in the change process, and delegate roles that facilitate successful implementation.

During an organizational change, employees can experience various negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, helplessness, and anger (Harikkala-Laihinen, 2022). Leaders should comprehensively understand employee emotions to effectively manage their satisfaction and engagement levels to handle the upcoming changes (Verčič & Men, 2023). Engaging employees is crucial because the concept is a factor in change initiative success and turnover intention (Kossyva et al., 2021). According to Harikkala-Laihinen (2022), when employees are involved in decision-making processes, they create a sense of ownership and become engaged in achieving the organization's goals. This sense of ownership and engagement fosters a positive attitude toward change, and employees are more likely to support and embrace change initiatives (Harikkala-Laihinen, 2022).

Leaders can promote employee engagement by utilizing internal communication to highlight benefits, establish themselves as desirable employers, promote positive relationships, and provide employee growth opportunities (Verčič & Men, 2023). While traditional communication methods such as information sharing can help ensure regular operations and address concerns, they do not effectively involve employees in the change process (Harikkala-Laihinen, 2022). To involve employees in the change process, leaders should employ a communication strategy involving listening, providing feedback, showing care and support, and building connections and community (Verčič & Men, 2023). Furthermore, Harikkala-Laihinen (2022) suggested that effective communication is a continuous and interactive process where all parties can express their thoughts and emotions. The success of the communication depends on the leaders creating an atmosphere of openness and participation, which engages the employee, aiding them to comprehend the rationale behind the changes fostering a sense of ownership and control, which encourages them to work towards achieving the change (Harikkala-Laihinen, 2022).

Culture

Organizational culture refers to distinctive and enduring patterns of behavior, values, beliefs, customs, and norms that shape how individuals and groups behave and think within an organization, ultimately guiding their actions (Covic & Planinic, 2020). Leaders should understand organizational culture comprehensively and acknowledge the existence of multiple levels, from visible to invisible (Sava, 2020). Visible elements, such as dress code, office layout, and communication styles, and invisible elements, such as underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions, guide behavior and decision-making. Understanding these various elements of the organizational culture is essential, as it allows leaders to identify and address any discrepancies between the communicated and what is understood and expected in the organization during a change initiative.

Organizational culture can positively and negatively affect the success of change initiatives (Covic & Planinic, 2020). The ideal objective for any organization is to cultivate an organizational culture that its employees positively embrace, ensuring and promoting harmony between organizational goals and employee needs (Covic & Planinic, 2020). When employees embrace organizational goals, they are more likely to work proactively and collaboratively, leading to change agents for the organization while simultaneously creating a positive culture. The positive embrace of organizational culture fosters a sense of trust and commitment towards the organization and leader, which may increase employee engagement and job satisfaction. This positive culture of teamwork and the willingness to change increases the likelihood of successful organizational change (Ellis et al., 2023). Conversely, a negative culture where the employees feel helpless and disengaged from the change initiative can arise and hinder the change process (Harikkala-Laihinen, 2022).

A learning culture that prioritizes learning and development by providing support, promoting individual and collective learning, and encouraging the sharing of information and experiences can create a highly adaptable organization (Covic & Planinic, 2020). These flexible organizations generate new ideas and modify working practices to align the organization with the ever-changing external environment (Covic & Planinic, 2020). Leaders can create training programs, mentoring, and coaching and have open communication channels with their employees to facilitate this organizational culture. This organizational culture also supports the employees’ continuous learning and growth to develop skills and competencies that enable them to adapt, which will aid in the change process. On the other hand, if the organizational culture does not employ learning and development, employees may not have the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to change initiatives. Furthermore, a culture that does not learn or is not motivated to seek new ideas and approaches leads to stagnation which may result in the inability of the organization to remain competitive in the ever-changing world.

According to Covic and Planinic (2020), the success and survival of an organization in today's everchanging world depend heavily on its ability to adapt and embrace change; in other words, change readiness. An organizational culture that does not exhibit positive teamwork and change readiness may struggle to adjust and ultimately fail to accomplish the goals of the change initiative. An organization's culture is prevalent and observable in every function by influencing every aspect of its operations (Sava, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to give special consideration to the organizational culture when implementing changes, as it is relatively easy to alter a technological process but difficult to modify the thinking and behavior of employees, along with the values and norms that guide them (Sava, 2020). The difficulty is that leaders must prioritize expanding individual and collective knowledge and transmitting new behavior and patterns over time (Covic & Planinic, 2020). However, by establishing a change readiness culture that can adapt and innovate change, organizations decrease the likelihood of employee resistance to change and foster a constructive attitude towards the change initiative (Covic & Planinic, 2020).

Alternative Change Management Models

Organizational leaders should acknowledge and recognize that change is the only constant, significantly impacting a business's life cycle (Covic & Planinic, 2020). Organizations undertaking change initiatives face challenges, barriers, and enablers that can significantly impact the success of their efforts (Bojesson & Fundin, 2021). If the organization cannot adapt to the ever-changing external factors and overcome the challenges and barriers, sustainability and competitive advantage will be seriously questioned. In addition to using Lewin's concepts and 3-step change model, energy industry leaders may use other models to guide the organization as they implement change initiatives to adapt to the ever-changing external factors.

Kotter's 8-Step Change Model

In 1996, John Kotter, a Harvard Business School professor, introduced a transformative change model that has since become widely recognized and adopted across various industries (Onia, 2022). Kotter's change model is a comprehensive and structured framework consisting of eight essential steps to guide organizations through successful change initiatives. The steps consist of the following: (a) creating a sense of urgency, (b) building a guiding coalition, (c) forming a strategic vision and initiatives, (d) enlisting a volunteer army, (e) enabling action by removing barriers, (f) generating short-term wins, (g) sustaining acceleration, and (h) instituting change (Adelman-Mullally et al., 2023). Kotter's 1996 model emphasizes the significance of strong leadership, creating a sense of urgency, and involving employees at every stage, providing a roadmap to effectively navigate the complexities of change.

Onia (2022) chose Kotter's model as the framework for their study on leading change at the University of Khartoum due to its proven effectiveness in facilitating change within a university environment. However, to simplify the implementation process, Onia (2022) reorganized the original eight steps into three manageable stages that leaders could utilize: (a) creating a climate for change, (b) engaging and enabling the organization, and (c) implementing and sustaining the change. These three steps bear notable similarities to Lewin's (1947a) 3-step change model of (a) unfreeze, (b) move, and (c) freeze. Both models recognize the importance of preparing the organization for change by creating a climate that fosters readiness and openness to new ideas (unfreeze). Subsequently, they emphasize the need to engage and enable the organization to embrace and implement the changes effectively (move). Finally, they underscore the significance of reinforcing and stabilizing the changes to ensure they become ingrained and sustained within the organization (freeze). Onia (2022) proposed reorganizing Kotter's change model to overcome its drawbacks, including potential time constraints and limited adaptability to diverse organizational contexts. The revised framework offers a more streamlined and flexible approach to leading change initiatives effectively.

Onia (2022) conducted a study at the University of Khartoum and observed the successful implementation of Kotter's model in leading change. The university adopted strategies such as developing a clear vision with specific goals for all staff and fostering collaboration among them. One of Onia's (2022) recommendations for the University of Khartoum is to establish new norms and values that promote a culture of continuous change, encouraging and empowering the staff to embrace transformation. By doing so, the university can effectively navigate the challenges of change and foster an adaptive and progressive organizational culture.

The study conducted by Onia (2022) on leading change at the University of Khartoum using Kotter's theory offers valuable insights into change management in an academic setting. The author conducted a qualitative study using semistructured interviews with 11 leaders at the University of Khartoum. Although the theoretical foundation differs from Lewin's (1947a) 3-step change model, the conceptual framework for this study, they are similar in finding strategies that aid successful change initiatives. Strategies such as developing a clear vision with specific goals for stakeholders and fostering collaboration among them are identical strategies that may be found in both studies. However, the contrast between the studies lies in their theoretical focus. Kotter's model emphasizes leadership's significance and actively drives change throughout the process. In contrast, Lewin's model centers on understanding the psychology of change, preparing individuals and organizations, and ensuring the changes are stable and sustained through reinforcement.

ADKAR Change Model

The ADKAR change model by Prosci is an acronym that represents 5 outcomes that must be achieved within the organization for lasting and successful change (Balluck et al., 2020). These outcomes consist of the following: (a) awareness, (b) desire, (c) knowledge, (d) ability, and (e) reinforcement (Balluck et al., 2020). Balluck et al. (2020) wrote an article in which the authors discussed the ADKAR model used for successful organizational change in one healthcare system. The leaders of this healthcare system initiated organizational change by recognizing the need for it and openly communicating this requirement to the relevant personnel candidly and straightforwardly. They proceeded by assessing the stakeholders' willingness and readiness for change. Subsequently, they provided a clear vision of the change's implementation and facilitated training and classes to impart the necessary knowledge and skills to everyone involved. Finally, they identified and implemented new processes and procedures to reinforce the change and ensure its integration.

Through this change, the leaders of the healthcare organization were also complementing the ADKAR model with the CLARC model, an acronym that represents roles managers should take to support the teams during the change initiative (Balluck et al., 2020). These roles consist of the following: (a) communicator, (b) liaison, (c) advocate, (d) resistance manager, and (e) coach (Balluck et al., 2020). The leaders of the healthcare system instituted the CLARC model by providing the following strategies, communication about the need for the changes, providing a liaison to report to senior leaders, demonstrating their commitment to the change, taking time to understand, and overcome resistance to change and by helping employees build the knowledge and ability to adopt the new behaviors. According to Balluck et al. (2020), the CLARC system provided the healthcare system with a smooth transition to implementing successful change.

The ADKAR system, however, bears remarkable similarities to Lewin's 3-stage model. Bose (2020) emphasizes that Lewin's first stage of "unfreeze" aligns with the outcomes of "awareness" and "desire" in the ADKAR model. Similarly, Lewin's second stage of "move" corresponds to the outcomes of "knowledge" and "ability" in the ADKAR model. Lastly, Lewin's "freeze" stage is equivalent to the "reinforcing" outcome in the ADKAR model. Although similar in some aspects, ADKAR emphasizes facilitating individual change more than the overall change process, a critical focus in Lewin's concepts and three-stage model. However, the strategies of communication, clear vision, addressing resistance, and training are common themes in both Lewin's and ADKAR's models for change.

Change Models and Leadership

Change management models are valuable frameworks designed to guide leaders through the complex organizational change process. These models offer various strategies, steps, and approaches to navigate change initiatives effectively. While different models may have specific focuses and unique features, they often overlap in certain fundamental principles. Recognizing these overlaps can help leaders comprehensively understand the change process and choose the most appropriate model for their organization's specific needs. It is crucial for leaders to assess their organization's culture, readiness for change, and specific challenges to identify the best-fit model. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and leaders must adapt the selected model to suit the organization's unique context and circumstances. Ultimately, the success of change management efforts hinges on the leader's ability to discern the organization's requirements and implement the most suitable model with foresight, empathy, and effective communication.

Transition

The primary aim of this study is to explore strategies for successful change initiatives in the energy industry. In Section 1, I presented the background of the problem, problem statement, research question, interview questions, and the study's significance and social impact. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study and a comprehensive review of the relevant academic literature were discussed. The literature review establishes the study's foundation and demonstrates its connection to existing research. I conducted an in-depth analysis and synthesis of literature related to Lewin's change management concepts, the 3-step change model, and the imperative for change in the energy industry, considering external environmental factors like decarbonization, decentralization, and digitization. The review also explored potential strategies, barriers, and alternative change management approaches to implement change initiatives effectively. Through this research, the study contributes to the existing knowledge base and offers valuable insights for successful change management in the energy industry.

In Section 2 of this study, I will present the description of the project, including the role of the researcher, participants, the research method, the research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis and the reliability and validity of the study. Finally, in Section 3, I will present the study’s findings, its application to professional practice, the implications of social change, the recommendation for action, recommendations for future research, a reflection on my experience within the DBA doctoral study process, and a conclusion of the study.

Section 2: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies that some energy industry leaders use for successful organizational change initiatives. In this section, I restate the purpose of the study and provide details on the role of the researcher, the participants, the research method, the research design, population and sampling, and ethical research. This section also encompasses the data collection instruments, techniques, data analysis, reliability, and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this proposed qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies that some energy industry leaders use for successful organizational change initiatives.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is crucial because they bear the responsibility of collecting data to address the overarching research question. Collins and Stockton (2022) stress the active and complex nature of researchers' roles, positioning them as the primary instrument, significantly influencing the data collection process and promoting a comprehensive understanding. In this study, I assumed the active and crucial role in the data collection process by recruiting and engaging participants, conducting semistructured interviews, and collecting data by reviewing organizational documents to address the research question effectively.

To ensure integrity and transparency, researchers should be honest and forthcoming with participants about any prior knowledge, such as knowing the participants before the study or having previous experience with the investigation topic (Leko et al., 2021). To mitigate bias, I excluded any participants from this study with whom I have had a previous personal relationship. Furthermore, I disclosed that I have been an energy industry professional for over 13 years. During this time, I have participated in and led multiple change initiatives. To maintain rigor in research, researchers should engage in reflexivity and acknowledge and address ethical considerations (J. L. Johnson et al., 2020). My professional experience with the material may lead to confirmation bias. Barbosa Chaves et al. (2022) suggested deliberate reflection and using the SLOW acronym (Sure about that, Look at the data, Opposite, and Worst case scenario) to mitigate confirmation bias.

Collins and Stockton (2022) emphasize prioritizing ethical considerations and preventing coercion in the design and data collection phases. To prioritize ethical concerns, I followed the principles and guidelines outlined in *The Belmont Report* by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979). These ethical principles include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. I was transparent and straightforward with participants to ensure compliance with these principles.

Lastly, this qualitative study employed an interview protocol (Appendix A) to guide the data collection process. Using an interview protocol, the researcher can collect rich and detailed data from participants, enabling a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon. This protocol entails gathering, interpreting, and analyzing data from participant interviews, observations, and documents, as Leko et al. (2021) recommended.

The use of a comprehensive interview protocol is essential for obtaining accurate and consistent data in qualitative research, as it establishes the reliability and consistency of the research (Braaten et al., 2020). The protocol provides a structured approach to data collection, ensuring that all relevant topics are covered while allowing for flexibility and spontaneity in the conversation. The semistructured interview began with an introduction of the researcher and an overview of the study's purpose, followed by open-ended and probing questions tailored to the participant's response, as Leko et al. (2021) recommended. The interview concluded with gratitude, a recap of the following steps, and member checking.

Participants

I recruited and gathered data from energy utility leaders in the United States who have successfully introduced and implemented change initiatives. This deliberate selection of research participants to maximize the quality and relevance of the data obtained to address the research question effectively is purposive sampling (J. L. Johnson et al., 2020). The eligibility criteria for these purposefully selected participants were (a) having successfully implemented change initiatives to address the changing environment of the energy industry and (b) having a leadership position in the energy industry. Ensuring the fulfillment of these selection criteria is essential to obtain participants who can provide the necessary data for the study.

I employed a systematic approach to ensure access to eligible participants for my qualitative study. Firstly, I visited websites such as neppa.org and publicpower.org, which provided valuable information about energy utilities in the United States and their contact details. By exploring these websites, I also identified reputable companies that have successfully implemented change initiatives in response to the evolving energy industry. Once I had identified potential energy companies, I initiated communication with the company leaders through phone calls and emails, employing an invitation letter (see Appendix B) that succinctly outlined the study's objectives and eligibility criteria to determine their interest in participating.

To establish a working relationship with all participants, I prioritized transparency and respect during all my interactions with possible participants. I also ensured that I disclosed relevant information about the study, providing a clear understanding of its purpose, goals, and potential implications. Furthermore, I demonstrated respect toward all possible participants throughout the research process. Respectful behavior includes actively listening to their perspectives, valuing their opinions and expertise, and acknowledging their contributions. According to Bergen and Labonté (2020), such displays of respect and transparency are essential to building rapport with participants. By employing these techniques, transparency in disclosure, and displays of respect, I can enhance communication, establish rapport, and create an environment that promotes openness and understanding, which ultimately improves the quality of the research interaction by facilitating a better understanding of the participants' perspectives and ensuring their active participation in the study.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Stoecker and Avila (2021) suggested that researchers choose appropriate research methods based on their research question and the intended objectives. The three methods for conducting research are quantitative, mixed-methods, and qualitative (Lo et al., 2020). Qualitative research allows the researcher to investigate a phenomenon by examining the experiences of individuals who have encountered related challenges (Saavedra et al., 2022). Quantitative research tests a hypothesis by measuring variables from a representative sample of a population and subjecting them to statistical analysis (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Integrating qualitative and quantitative research results in a mixed method study (Hands, 2022). Based on my research question and the intended objectives, I selected a qualitative research methodology for this research study to explore strategies energy leaders use to implement successful change initiatives.

Although both mixed methods and quantitative methods have their strengths, they were not the most suitable to answer my research. In quantitative research methodology, information gathered is typically expressed in numerical form and is assessed using mathematical and statistical methods (Limone et al., 2022). Researchers collect and analyze numerical data through standardized instruments, such as questionnaires, surveys, and experiments to test hypotheses and identify patterns or relationships. Unlike a quantitative research methodology, qualitative research aims to explore and understand the phenomenon rather than manipulate and explain its associated variables (Nassaji, 2020). A qualitative methodology is a naturalistic approach that focuses on nonnumerical data allowing for an in-depth examination of the phenomenon and providing rich significant detailed insight (Nassaji, 2020).

A mixed method approach utilizes qualitative and quantitative techniques, enabling researchers to employ a flexible framework in their study (Stoecker & Avila, 2021). Moreover, the mixed method approach allows researchers to gather and analyze data from multiple perspectives, leading to a more in-depth and holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Hands, 2022). The flexibility of this approach and the various perspectives allow researchers to employ the best qualities of quantitative and qualitative research. The mixed and quantitative methods were inappropriate for my research because I explored energy leaders' strategies to implement successful change initiatives. I did not collect quantitative data or use quantitative measures to study relationships among variables. Instead, I used a qualitative methodology.

Research Design

I considered four qualitative designs for this study: narrative, phenomenological, ethnography, and case study. A narrative design involves the sharing and recounting personal life stories in a collaborative effort to construct knowledge of these experiences (Johnson & Darrow, 2023). A phenomenological design allows the researcher to investigate a phenomenon through the perspective of the participant's experience (Watz & Ingstad, 2022). An ethnographic design enables the researcher to examine a particular cultural group's conduct, actions, and communication patterns within their natural environment over an extended period (Danford, 2023). A case study design involves an in-depth analysis of a singular person or group's event, program, process, activity, or shared experience, and this examination must be thorough in obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Danford, 2023).

After careful consideration, I concluded that a case study design was the most suitable design to answer the research question and achieve the intended objectives of exploring the strategies of energy industry leaders for successful change initiatives. The narrative design would not be suitable because it involves sharing or recounting personal life stories, which is not the focus of this study. The phenomenological design would also not be appropriate as it aims to study the meaning of a participant's experience, which is not the primary objective of this study. An ethnographic design would also not be suitable as it focuses on researching culture, which is not the primary focus of this study. Instead, this study aimed to explore strategies for successful change initiatives and conduct in-depth data analysis to comprehensively understand the phenomenon, which correlates with Danford's (2023) description of a case study design.

Achieving data saturation is essential to comprehensively understand energy industry leaders' strategies for successful change initiatives. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) defined data saturation as the stage in which a researcher cannot identify new information or perspectives, and the collected data begins to repeat itself. While there is a consensus among many scholars regarding this definition, the adequacy of sample size in qualitative studies remains a topic of ongoing debate due to the many factors that go into attaining data saturation (Mwita, 2022). These factors include pre-determined codes and themes, sample size, respondents, triangulation methods, and length of the data collection process (Mwita, 2022).

According to Mwita (2022), purposive sampling enhances the likelihood of researchers achieving data saturation as the subjects obtained through this technique often possess rich information, which I employed in this study. Additionally, using multiple data collection tools, such as examining relevant organizational documents, further increases the chances of attaining saturation (Mwita, 2022). According to Mwita (2022), this technique allows for collecting data from diverse methodological perspectives aiding in achieving both triangulation and comprehensive saturation. Furthermore, data saturation offers several benefits, such as enabling the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions and produce detailed findings, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, and, most crucially, ensuring that the results are valid and reliable and provide valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Gumede & Badriparsad, 2022; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Stewart & Lowenthal, 2022). To ensure I reached data saturation in my doctoral research, I conducted semistructured interviews and reviewed relevant organizational documents until no new information or themes emerged.

Population and Sampling

In this qualitative multiple-case study, I employed criterion sampling, a form of purposive sampling that falls under nonprobability sampling methods (Williams, 2022). It is a viable and effective method for engaging with individuals who may be challenging or less accessible in a research setting (Williams, 2022). By utilizing criterion sampling, researchers can meticulously select participants with the desired knowledge and expertise, allowing for the collection of targeted and in-depth data that offers valuable insights into the research topic.

Determining the number of participants for a qualitative multiple-case study is difficult because data saturation factors beyond sample size should be considered (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Factors such as the research design, research question, data collection methods, analysis techniques, and the nature of the phenomenon all contribute to achieving data saturation in a qualitative study (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). I intend to purposefully select and collect data from at least five energy utility leaders in the United States who have successfully implemented change initiatives. However, I conducted interviews and reviewed organizational documents to ensure data saturation in my doctoral research until no new information or themes emerged.

In this study, eligibility criteria for participants included the successful implementation of change initiatives to address the evolving energy industry business environment and participants in a leadership role within the United States energy industry. Establishing an appropriate interview setting minimizes potential discomfort or unease that participants may experience during the interview process. Buys et al. (2022) recommended that the researcher work closely with the participant to secure a mutually convenient date, time, and adequate duration for the interview, preferably a location with minimal distractions to ensure a focused and uninterrupted interview environment. Therefore, I worked closely with participants to locate a mutual interview setting. I conducted the semistructured interviews in a private setting, which participants found convenient.

Ethical Research

The ethical conduct of this research involving human subjects adhered to three fundamental principles widely acknowledged within our cultural tradition and relevant to research ethics: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), 2022). To ensure adherence to these principles, purposively selected participants signed a consent form, and the data collection and analysis did not begin until the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and confirmed that the study fully met the required ethical standards. I provided a consent form to the participant without coercion while ensuring they understand its purpose and implications, as Taquette and Borges da Matta Souza (2022) recommended.

The informed consent form also enables the researcher to uphold research integrity and quality while respecting participants' dignity and liberty and maintaining ethical awareness throughout the research process (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). The consent form plays a crucial role in informing the voluntary participants about the purpose of the study, the rationale behind their selection, and how the research is conducted (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). The consent form also lets the participants understand that they could decide to stop participating at any point without facing any negative consequences. They could request to withdraw from the study at any time, either by email or by directly contacting the researcher, without needing an explanation, thereby safeguarding their right to withdraw without facing any adverse consequences or researcher-induced pressure. The consent process also informed the participants that no incentives were available for participating in this study.

The researcher should always ensure the participants' ethical protection during the research process. To ensure the ethical protection of the participants, I followed the guidance of Alquwez et al. (2022), who employed code names for each participant to protect their identity. To ensure confidentiality, I assigned codes (e.g., P1, P2) to participants to protect their identity, and organizational data were also coded (e.g., O1, O2). I protected the confidentiality of the data by storing all digital data in a password-protected computer and securing all analog data in a safe that only I could access. I will securely store the data for five years, as mandated by Walden University. After that, I will delete all digital data and shred all analog data.

Data Collection Instruments

In this qualitative study, I was the primary data collection instrument. According to Collins and Stockton (2022), in qualitative studies, the researcher plays a vital role as the primary instrument, actively participating in the process. I conducted semistructured interviews and thoroughly reviewed public organizational documents to gain comprehensive insights into the subject matter. This multifaceted approach enabled me to assess and analyze leaders' various strategies to implement and develop change initiatives successfully.

Because I conducted semistructured interviews, I used the interview protocol found in Appendix A to enhance the reliability and validity during the interview process. According to Braaten et al. (2020), an interview protocol is essential for obtaining accurate and consistent data in qualitative research, as it establishes the reliability and consistency of the research. The interview protocol consisted of predetermined questions and a script, which obtained IRB approval before any interview. This approach ensures a well-rounded and comprehensive exploration of the research topic, enabling me to get in-depth insights from the participants and enrich the study's overall quality.

At the beginning of the interview process, I used the interview protocol to share with participants the nature and purpose of the study. Furthermore, I assured them that we would treat any information they shared with strict confidentiality. I also emphasized their right to terminate the interview at any time if they wish to do so, ensuring their autonomy and comfort throughout the research process. The interview protocol included seven open-ended questions, with an option to ask probing questions depending on participants' responses. I also gathered public documents from the organization using company websites, social media platforms, and media outlets.

After each semistructured interview, a crucial follow-up interview, known as member checking, was scheduled after each semistructured interview. This step holds significant importance in enhancing the reliability and validity of the research. According to Motulsky (2021), member checking is an essential credibility strategy that serves a dual purpose: validating research findings and cultivating a collaborative relationship with participants. By involving participants in the validation process, member checking allows them to review and confirm the accuracy of their responses while also enabling the researcher to ensure comprehensive data collection.

Moreover, the combination of member checking and an interview protocol further bolsters the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument and process. The interview protocol adds consistency as one of the criteria for rigor and trustworthiness, as emphasized by Janis (2022), ensuring that the research is conducted systematically and rigorously. This comprehensive approach contributes to the overall reliability and validity of the study, instilling confidence in the research outcomes and conclusions.

Data Collection Technique

After acquiring the necessary IRB approval, I conducted semistructured interviews comprising seven comprehensive questions and did not conduct a pilot study. According to Dolczewski (2022), semistructured interviews are a data collection approach where two individuals interact, one posing open-ended questions and the other providing responses typically revolving around a specific theme. Additionally, I collected public organizational documentation pertinent to the organizational change initiative to amass data for this qualitative multiple-case study. Combining semistructured interviews and thorough analysis of organizational documents provided a robust and holistic understanding of the change processes and strategies implemented by the organizations under study.

During the interview process, I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A), which outlines the researcher’s actions and script during the interviews. The protocol includes informing the participants about the recording of the interview, voluntary participation, the option to withdraw at any time, and the questions to be asked during the semistructured interview. The interview protocol aids in obtaining accurate and consistent data in qualitative research while also establishing the reliability and consistency of the research (Braaten et al., 2020).

There are advantages and disadvantages to each data collection method. One advantage of conducting semistructured interviews, as highlighted by Dolczewski (2022), is that it enables researchers to gather more rich data compared to other methods. Moreover, given the research question and the objective of investigating the strategies of energy industry leaders for successful change initiatives, a semistructured interview design is the most appropriate method for achieving the intended goals because it allows for a flexible and in-depth exploration of the topic, enabling participants to provide rich and detailed insights into their experiences and strategies for change initiatives. Furthermore, the semistructured interview method facilitates data collection that may be challenging to obtain through other research approaches (Dolczewski, 2022). While this advantage ensures unparalleled data quality, it also presents a disadvantage due to the requirement for more complex data analysis than information collected through self-reported methods (Dolczewski, 2022). Another potential disadvantage is that the interviewer’s presence can influence the interviewee in various ways, such as suggesting answers or steering the conversation in a particular direction (Dolczewski, 2022). This potential disadvantage emphasizes the critical importance of methodological triangulation.

I also collected public organizational documentation pertinent to the organizational change initiative to obtain methodological triangulation. One of the advantages of collecting public organizational documentation is the data’s stability, as the researcher cannot influence the data (Morgan, 2022). However, a potential disadvantage of collecting public organizational documentation is working with limited data, as sometimes these documents do not exist (Morgan, 2022). Public organizational documentation, when available, serves as a valuable resource for researchers, enabling them to gain insights, identify trends, and develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

I also employed member checking to improve the reliability and validity of the data collected. By employing member checking, interviewees can validate or rectify the interviewer's comprehension of their answers, thereby enhancing the overall accuracy and credibility of the findings (Coleman, 2021). I performed member checking by transcribing the interview and emailing it to the participants for them to review. I asked for a follow-up interview to ensure that the participants concur with my interpretations and ask any follow-up questions as needed. This comprehensive approach of member checking reinforces the validity and robustness of the research outcomes, further ensuring the reliability of the study's findings.

Data Organization Technique

During my research, I implemented a robust cataloging and labeling system for the gathered data, encompassing recordings, field notes, and emails. The primary objective of this system is to enhance the accessibility and retrieval of the data. Each item was labeled using the participant number and the specific data type. For instance, recordings of semistructured interviews with Participant 3 were labeled as (P3) audio file, and public documents from Organization 2 were labeled as O2-document.

Digital data were securely stored with password protection to ensure utmost confidentiality, while analog data was safeguarded in a personal safe. This approach ensures that sensitive information remains protected and is only accessible to authorized individuals. Moreover, I strictly adhered to Walden University's guidelines stipulating the retention of data for a period of five years. After this time, all analog and digital data will be either deleted or shredded. By diligently following these guidelines, I prioritize data protection and demonstrate responsible data management throughout the research process.

I diligently maintained a reflective journal encompassing the various elements during my research journey. Buys et al. (2022) state that a researcher should capture the journey in a reflective journal. They suggested that this journal should encompass various elements such as personal notes, emails, field notes, methodological decisions, and moments of enlightenment. Embracing the reflexivity journal's balance between subjectivity and objectivity, as well as my involvement and detachment, aided in managing potential biases during interviews, ensuring the integrity of the research process (Buys et al., 2022). Furthermore, employing efficient data organization techniques is essential to maximize the potential of the collected data. By enhancing accessibility and retrieval of the data, these techniques contributed to assuring data integrity and facilitating data analysis, ultimately optimizing the research outcomes.

Data Analysis

Natow (2020) identified four forms of triangulation: multiple data sources, multiple methodologies, multiple data analysis techniques, and multiple researchers while conducting their study. The multiple researchers' form of triangulation involves a scenario where, as the name implies, more than one individual actively participates in different parts of the data collection or analysis process. Multiple data analysis techniques utilize various data analysis techniques to achieve data triangulation (Natow, 2020). In Nyhagen et al. (2022) study, the researchers achieve multiple methodologies triangulation by actively conducting both participation observations and individual interviews. Natow (2020) explained that multiple data sources can be obtained by collecting data from various periods, locations, or perspectives, allowing for a comprehensive and diverse understanding of the phenomenon. I utilized multiple methods of triangulation or methodological triangulation in this study by gathering and analyzing data from semistructured interviews and organizational public documents.

After each interview and gathering of documentation, as well as conducting member checks for accuracy, the data analysis process commenced. The analysis consisted of two main steps. Firstly, I analyzed the interview transcripts using NVivo software, following the guidelines recommended by Allsop et al. (2022), which involves preparing the data, identifying core themes, coding the data, and presenting the findings. Secondly, I analyzed public documents to validate the data gathered in the semistructured interview process. Allsop et al. (2022) provided a practical guide for qualitative data analysis, which encompasses steps such as data preparation, data importation, familiarization, coding, analysis and exploration, and interpretation and reporting, involving techniques like matrix coding, tree maps, and word frequency analysis, and utilizing tools like charts, diagrams, and reports. A comprehensive thematic analysis of the qualitative data is achievable by following the steps recommended by Allsop et al. (2022). Upon completing the comprehensive thematic analysis of the qualitative data, the next step involved correlating the identified themes with relevant academic literature, including new studies published since writing the proposal and the conceptual framework. This process addresses definitional issues and provides insights into the various theoretical interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation (Domenico et al., 2021).

Reliability and Validity

Accomplishing validity and reliability in qualitative research studies ensures rigor and trustworthiness. The principles for achieving validity and reliability, according to Janis (2022), are dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. The strategies that I employ to accomplish rigor and trustworthiness are detailed below.

Reliability

Ensuring reliability in qualitative research is paramount for achieving consistent and replicable findings. According to Nassaji (2020), reliability in qualitative research entails the reproducibility of results, where independent reviewers should arrive at similar conclusions when examining data and interpretations. To achieve this level of reliability, researchers must employ strategies that address dependability throughout the qualitative research study. By carefully considering and incorporating these reliability-enhancing techniques, researchers can strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of their research outcomes.

Dependability. Dependability, or consistency, is one of the four criteria for the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Janis, 2022). According to Nassaji (2020), this would require reporting the study in a manner that allows others to arrive at similar interpretations when reviewing the data. Enhancing dependability requires researchers to document all research activities actively and comprehensively, including capturing evolving conclusions and modifications that may occur throughout the research process (Nassaji, 2020). To improve dependability in my research, I documented all research activities by keeping a journal encompassing personal notes, emails, field notes, methodological decisions, and moments of enlightenment. The interview protocol (Appendix A) established the plan I followed when performing the research in the field, allowing the research to be consistent in how the data is collected. While following the interview protocol, I utilized multiple techniques to enhance the reliability and dependability of the study, including recording interviews, coding responses, and employing analytical methods for data analysis, as Quintão et al. (2020) recommended. Another technique I used was member checking of the data interpretation during the semistructured interviews. To achieve this, I shared the interpretations of the data gathered during the semistructured interviews with the participants. This process allowed me to seek validation and rectify any potential misinterpretations of the participants' answers, ensuring consistency in the understanding between the participant's statements and the researcher's interpretation. To do so, I shared the interpretations of the data gathered during the semistructured interview to seek validation and rectify my comprehension of the participant's answers, allowing consistency in the meaning of what the participant said and what the researcher interpreted. Member checking enhances reliability and contributes to a qualitative study's thoroughness (Muldoon et al., 2022). The strategies above ensured the reliability of the study.

Quintão et al. (2020) stated that fundamentally, a researcher demonstrates reliability through triangulation. According to Nassaji (2020), enhancing reliability involves meticulous documentation of research activities, including evolving conclusions and modifications. I collected data from semistructured interviews and relevant public organization documents in this study, thus performing methodological triangulation. I enhanced reliability by diligently documenting all research activities by keeping a journal encompassing various elements such as personal notes, emails, field notes, methodological decisions, and moments of enlightenment. Furthermore, the eligibility criteria for participants facilitated an in-depth exploration of relevant cases, allowing for a comprehensive investigation of patterns, differences, and similarities across instances, thus bolstering the reliability and consistency of findings.

Validity

While it is impossible to ensure absolute validity, employing specific strategies can significantly mitigate validity threats and enhance the credibility of the conclusions drawn in a research study (Coleman, 2021). According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), the validity of findings in qualitative studies is often contingent upon the sufficiency of the collected data to address the research questions; this means reaching data saturation. To ensure data saturation, I employed purposive sampling, which according to Mwita (2022), increases the likelihood of obtaining data saturation and performing methodological triangulation by utilizing semistructured interviews and collecting documents. I also continued the data collection and analysis process until no new information or themes emerged. I strived to meet the credibility, transferability, and confirmability criteria to achieve rigor and trustworthiness and enhance validity.

According to Nassaji (2020), credibility in qualitative research emphasizes the believability and truthfulness of the research findings, reflecting the reality of the investigated phenomenon. I employed methodological triangulation to enhance credibility by conducting semistructured interviews and collecting relevant public organizational documents. Additionally, I utilized member checking. According to Motulsky (2021), member checking is an additional credibility strategy vital in validating research findings and enhancing participant cooperation. To accomplish member checking, I shared the interpretations of the data gathered during the semistructured interview to seek validation and rectify my comprehension of the participant's answers. By conducting methodological triangulation and member checking, researchers can achieve a comprehensive and accurate understanding of participants, context, and processes, ensuring the interpretations are inclusive and credible (Nassaji, 2020), significantly enhancing the overall credibility of the research.

Transferability. According to Nassaji (2020), the transferability of qualitative research refers to the extent to which the researcher's interpretations and conclusions apply to other similar contexts. The responsibility for providing evidence to support this transferability lies with those interested in using the findings in alternative contexts rather than solely on the original researcher (Pratt et al., 2020). However, to aid future researchers in achieving transferability, I meticulously documented and presented comprehensive details of the research process, including transparent explanations of the data collection and analysis techniques employed. I also used an interview protocol to reach data saturation. Doing so will empower readers and future researchers to evaluate the transferability of the findings precisely and make informed judgments about their applicability in different situations.

Confirmability. According to Nassaji (2020), confirmability in qualitative research refers to the degree to which others can validate the interpretations and conclusions made by the researcher. To achieve confirmability, researchers should perform a detailed account of the data and findings that allows for external verification (Nassaji, 2020). To accomplish confirmability, I began by utilizing member checking accurately and depicting the participant's views without any researcher bias. Furthermore, I used the accurate data gathered to perform a detailed account of the findings.

Data Saturation. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), data saturation occurs when a researcher reaches a point in their study where they can no longer discover novel information or gain new insights. At this stage, the data they have collected starts to duplicate or reiterate itself, offering no further substantial or meaningful additions to their research. I employed purposive sampling and various data collection methods to accomplish data saturation, including examining pertinent public organizational documents and conducting semistructured interviews. I continued this process until the data analysis phase of the research revealed no new insights or novel information.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2 of this study, I presented the description of the project, including the role of the researcher, participants, the research method, the research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis and the reliability and validity of the study. In Section 3, I will present the study's findings, its application to professional practice, the implications of social change, the recommendation for action, recommendations for future research, a reflection on my experience within the DBA doctoral study process, and a conclusion of the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies that some energy industry leaders will use for successful organizational change initiatives. In this section, I present the research findings. Additionally, I offer an in-depth analysis of the finding's application to professional practices, the broader implications for social change, actionable recommendations, opportunities for future research, reflective insights, and a comprehensive conclusion to encapsulate the study's essence.

Introduction

In this qualitative multiple-case study, I explored the strategies employed by energy industry leaders to achieve successful organizational change initiatives by conducting semistructured interviews with nine energy leaders and reviewing relevant company documents such as user guides, training manuals, newsletters, and websites. All participants emphasized the importance of establishing communication to aid in stakeholder engagement. Participants also used communication strategies to secure buy-in from stakeholders, build trust, and establish credibility while defining the organization's change initiative. Participants also experienced success as they instituted incremental progress, achieving small, attainable goals that contributed to the organization's desired change. Lastly, participants advocated for ongoing assessment of the change initiative, both before and after execution, to ensure accountability and successful integration into the organization's practices, procedures, and culture. These strategies aided participants in implementing successful change initiatives in their organizations.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was as follows: What strategies do energy industry leaders use for successful organizational change? I conducted semistructured interviews with nine energy industry leaders in the United States to gather data in response to this question. This group exhibits diverse experience levels and represents organizations of varying sizes in the energy industry. Table 3 summarizes the participants' collective experience, current roles and tenure, organizational annual revenues, and number of employees.

Table 3

General and Demographic Information on Energy Leaders

Participant Code	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9
Current Position	GIS Manager	General Manager	General Manager	Integrity Manager (Electric)	General Manager	CEO	General Manager	General Manager	General Manager
Years in current position	15	23	16	8	11	9	4	1	1
Number of Employees	51-200	1-50	1-50	51-200	51-200	51-200	51-200	51-200	1-50
Annual Revenue (Millions)	75-100	5-10	5-10	75-100	50-74	50-74	75-100	75-100	5-10

The semistructured interviews provided detailed information and insight into the participants' experiences implementing change initiatives, emphasizing the strategic approaches and methodologies employed to attain successful organizational change. Furthermore, I examined organizational documents, encompassing user guides, training manuals, newsletters, and company websites, to achieve methodological triangulation within the study. The collected data were transcribed, interpreted, and analyzed, reaching a point of data saturation while member checking was concurrently conducted with participants to ensure rigor of the findings. With the aid of NVivo software as a tool, the analysis yielded three main themes, which were (a) communication dynamics and stakeholder engagement, (b) incremental progress, and (c) the continuous monitoring and evaluation of change initiatives. Furthermore, Theme (a), encompassing communication dynamics and stakeholder engagement, revealed subthemes, including securing stakeholder buy-in, cultivating trust and credibility, and defining the change initiative. Theme (c), the continuous monitoring and evaluation of change initiatives, unveiled subthemes about adaptability and flexibility and the imperative task of holding stakeholders accountable for integrating change into the organizational policies, procedures, and cultural fabric. I compared the results with existing literature in the field of change to affirm and broaden insights in the discipline. The conceptual framework was aligned with the findings to validate the conclusions of the prevailing literature on effective business practices.

Theme 1: Communication Dynamic and Stakeholder Engagement

The first emerging theme was communicating with all stakeholders in the change initiative. All the energy industry leaders in the study indicated a strong reliance on communication as a strategy used in their successful change initiatives. Saxena and McDonagh (2022) asserted that a communication strategy is advantageous for leaders early in the process. P5 emphasized the importance of transparent and effective communication as it aids stakeholders in understanding the reason behind the change and fosters a sense of involvement and ownership. P8 stated that the first thing they do is identify and involve all relevant stakeholders early in the change process, ensuring that their perspectives and concerns are considered, creating a sense of ownership among the teams affected by the change. Furthermore, P7 stated that it was crucial to establish clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders and maintain open communication channels to promptly address issues. This holds significance because leadership is tasked with formulating a vision for the organization and consistently conveying it clearly and frequently to stakeholders, providing direction, purpose, and clarity. Effective communication of the change initiative helps align employees' efforts towards common goals, fostering a sense of engagement, unity, and shared purpose within the organization and aiding in ensuring a successful change initiative.

While each leader exhibited a distinct approach to the implementation of communication strategies and the delineation of the intended outcomes, there was a unanimous consensus that a failure to communicate the change initiative could result in resistance to the change, and in the worst-case scenario, the outright failure of the initiative itself. Thus, it is essential to cultivate an environment that values transparency and motivates staff to express their thoughts and suggestions (Hubbart, 2023b). To cultivate this environment, P3 and P4 commenced the communication process by convening a comprehensive stakeholder meeting. Conversely, P1 opted to initiate communication by hosting stakeholder meetings while concurrently providing supportive documentation pertaining to the change, encompassing elements such as training and guidance materials. In a different approach, P8 communicated with internal and external stakeholders to not only shape the direction of the change but also to seek insight into needs and expectations. P9 employed newsletters to introduce the impending change to the stakeholders, followed by subsequent face-to-face meetings to address any concerns, explain the benefits, and expound upon the rationale behind the change initiative. P9 also sought input and relayed change incentives to customers using independent websites and social media. These multifaceted communication and engagement strategies emphasized the significance of tailored approaches for diverse leadership contexts. Although the communication methods may have been different, they all understood the need to communicate early and effectively with all stakeholders to facilitate the change initiative, as recommended by Saxena and McDonagh (2022).

Buy-In

Creating communication pathways with all stakeholders involved with the change also allows leaders to get buy-in for the change initiative effectively. All but one of the participants alluded to using communication pathways to get buy-in from stakeholders. Hubbart (2023b) stated that inclusive, empathetic, and considerate communication could lead to early organizational buy-in and acceptance of the change. P2 reiterated this by stating that change takes buy-in from the folks on your team. P7 stated that it is crucial to identify your stakeholders as an initial step. Afterward, securing buy-in from key stakeholders is equally important for their input and to ensure their commitment.

Although communication pathways are a strategy for buy-in, energy leaders employed other strategies to obtain buy-in. P2 stated:

> In the context of my role as a general manager, I could have unilaterally made decisions, but I recognized that implementing significant changes required the support and commitment of the team members. To facilitate this process, I

> engaged the most experienced customer service representative with over 30 years of tenure within the organization. I involved her in meetings with our existing legacy service provider. These meetings typically occur annually during our 5-year evaluation process with the legacy provider. I secured her buy-in for the transition once she became well-informed about the provider's lack of innovation. She was pivotal as the office manager and lead customer service representative, possessing extensive knowledge of the legacy processes. With her support, I could confidently proceed on the organizational change initiative.

The endorsement from the office's most senior individual facilitated a cascading effect of support within the organization, enabling the utility leader to garner buy-in for the change. The respected status of this senior figure played a crucial role in fostering approval for the change initiative throughout the organization.

Another form of buy-in involves cultivating credibility and trust for the leader spearheading the change and the initiative itself. Building trust and credibility serves to diminish resistance to change in organizational initiatives (Hubbart, 2023b). P5 accomplished trust and credibility by communicating transparently about the purpose and benefits of the change initiative. P4 provided context emphasizing the multifaceted nature of credibility in the change management process.

> First and foremost, I established the credibility of our change initiative by aligning it with the necessary federal requirements that prompted its necessity. Moreover, I strongly emphasized the practical effectiveness of the proposed alterations, ensuring that the change would authentically enhance our work

> processes. Employing a strategic approach, I implemented smaller changes, often called "small wins," strategically showcasing our capacity to navigate and execute manageable initiatives successfully.

This step-by-step buildup of credibility fortified the groundwork for the broader change initiative and fostered trust in the organization's leadership and overall change initiative.

Theme 2: Incremental Progress

The strategy of incremental changes to accomplish the change initiative goal was another strategy implemented by over half of the participants in their successful change initiatives. P3 described the approach of incremental progress by saying,

> You don't want to try to hit the grand slam home run; you're better off trying to hit a bunch of singles, and so that's kind of the approach that I've taken here that we have a long series of small successful steps along the way to get us to the next place.

P4 described it as "small wins." According to Sujová and Simanová (2022), gradually optimizing changes carried out in enterprises led to successful implementation and higher performance. According to P4, the benefit of this strategy is that it gradually builds momentum, earning credibility for the leader and the change initiative while paving the way for the implementation of the larger change initiative. Acknowledging the value of smaller changes as equally significant to more extensive ones is a key insight emphasized by P8.

To optimize the implementation of this strategy, P6 inferred that leaders must meticulously establish clear goals and objectives tailored for each stakeholder, aligning these with the organization's overall goals. P3 stated that the approach a leader should take for incremental progress entails delineating precise and achievable goals and acknowledging and celebrating incremental successes that contribute to the advancement of the comprehensive change initiative. Furthermore, as indicated in the insights of P4, leaders collaboratively worked with a project team to formulate an intricate project plan. The collaborative process involved soliciting input from stakeholders and departments, delineating clear timelines, allocating resources judiciously, and specifying tasks in detail, is integral to achieving incremental progress on the ongoing change initiative.

Theme 3: Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation of Change Initiatives

Unanticipated obstacles can impede the successful implementation of the change effort during change initiatives. P1 identified several challenges, particularly in adapting to new technology and implementing hardware changes. P6 described challenges with stakeholder commitment to the change initiatives. P7 omitted various stakeholders, thereby eliciting initial resistance to the proposed change. Participants implemented a continuous monitoring and evaluation system to address these issues, fostering transparent two-way communication between leadership and stakeholders. Hubbart (2023b) stressed the importance of active listening, responsive feedback, and commitment follow-through in building trust and reducing resistance to change. By adopting this approach to the change initiative, leaders can effectively identify unforeseen obstacles and assess what is functioning successfully. According to P9, a leader must listen to and comprehend the concerns and perspectives of employees before initiating any changes.

Each participant, however, employed a different strategy in the continuous evaluation and monitoring approach. P6 implemented key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor various aspects of the organization’s performance related to the change initiative. P1 adopted a hands-on approach, ensuring stakeholder satisfaction during the change initiative. P8 established a collaborative approach, promoting effective communication and enabling stakeholders to identify and address obstacles promptly. P7 maintained two-way communication with all stakeholders. Regardless of the option chosen, the various approaches helped leaders inform their team about accomplishments and obstacles, cultivating a collective sense of ownership and commitment to the change initiative’s goals and contributing significantly to its success.

Flexibility and Adaptability

Monitoring and evaluating the process of change initiatives, however, represented just one facet of the overall equation. To mitigate challenges once they have been discovered. According to P5, leaders must be flexible and adapt to unexpected challenges. P8 stated that when obstacles arise from the original plan, necessary adjustments must be made based on feedback and lessons learned from challenges. Leaders should model desired behaviors, embrace adaptability, and demonstrate a commitment to learning and growth, cultivating a culture of transparency and flexibility essential for successful organizational change management and long-term success (Hubbart, 2023b). To ensure the success of the change initiatives, P7 adapted the change initiative to include stakeholders and employees who have been left out. In the face of the stakeholder commitment challenge and unmet KPIs, P6, despite the difficulty, made the executive decision to part ways with their uncommitted vice president. Although challenging, this consequential action ultimately reshaped the organizational culture positively, fostering a more receptive environment for adopting the change initiative and contributing significantly to its success. According to P8, the essential elements for successful change implementation include flexibility and responsiveness to the feedback received.

Accountability

Monitoring and evaluating the process of change initiatives can also ensure that leaders and stakeholders are held accountable. According to P2, there should be a clear leader in the change initiative, and leaders must drive that change initiative and manage accountability. P6 stated that reinforcement and holding stakeholders accountable are needed for the change initiative to be successful. McKenzie et al. (2023) stated the importance of defining roles and responsibilities in change initiatives, positing that such delineations function as psychological anchors for staff amidst uncertainties. This structured approach ensures accountability by establishing milestones for identifying and reporting performance outcomes. P6 delved into an instructive case of a partially unsuccessful change initiative involving introducing a tool accompanied by comprehensive training on its utilization and guidelines for enhanced efficacy. Although the change initiative initially employed KPIs to maintain stakeholder accountability, leadership's subsequent lapse in tracking these indicators resulted in stakeholders discontinuing the tool within a relatively short timeframe. Notably, stakeholders continued to utilize the training and guidelines provided. P6 contends that the tool and associated training would likely have been more readily accepted if there had been a more rigorous accountability framework for employees during this change initiative. This experience indicated that effective monitoring, a responsive approach to feedback, and continual follow-up are imperative during change initiatives.

The interdependence of accountability and trust is intrinsic to organizational dynamics. According to Hubbart (2023b), the trust between leaders and employees relies on the assurance that both parties will perform their responsibilities with integrity and reciprocally maintain accountability for their designated roles. Establishing this trust and accountability is integral to fostering a collaborative and effective work environment where both leaders and employees contribute to the overall success of the change initiative and the organization’s success.

Findings Related to Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is Lewin’s 3-step change model (Unfreeze-Change-Freeze) and its accompanying concepts, which together form the basis for successful organizational change. The themes from the research were as follows: Theme 1, encompassing communication dynamics and stakeholder engagement, including securing stakeholder buy-in, cultivating trust and credibility, and defining the change initiative; Theme 2, incremental progress to aid in achieving the change initiative; and Theme 3, the continuous evaluation and monitoring of change initiatives, adaptability, flexibility, and the imperative task of holding stakeholders accountable for integrating change into the organizational policies, procedures, and cultural fabric. These findings align with the fundamental change principles of Lewin and his well-established 3-step change model, consistent with the literature review in Section 2 of this study.

The first theme encompassing communication dynamics and stakeholder engagement is one that Lewin employs leaders to use during a change initiative. Communication plays a crucial role in expressing the necessity for change, instilling a sense of urgency and awareness among the stakeholders, and although introduced in the Unfreeze stage of Lewin's 3-step change theory, communication is critical throughout the entire change initiative. According to Zainab et al. (2022), lack of communication or unclear messaging can result in employee uncertainty regarding the change initiative. Lewin's Field theory suggests that change introduces instability and a reorganization of individuals or groups affected by that change, coupled with a lack of communication and clarity can result in resistance, reluctance, and decreased employee morale, hindering the success of the change. According to Sahin (2022) and Verčič and Men (2023), the signs of an effective leader through a change initiative is one that provides a clear vision, motivates employees and allocates resources to achieve desired outcomes through communication to engage stakeholders by highlighting benefits of change and promote positive relationships. Lewin proposed that achieving effective change is possible through a participatory approach involving all group members, emphasizing the importance of engaging stakeholders in the change process.

Through communication, energy leaders could establish buy-in for the change initiative. Although Lewin does not mention the term "buy-in," his 3-step change model incorporates the need to create a readiness for the change, which may include "buy-in" from stakeholders. According to Hubbart (2023a), a leader should be a reliable source of guidance in leading others to effectively motivate and maintain employee buy-in during an organizational change initiative. One example, given by P2, as discussed previously, created readiness for change by acknowledging that due to the organization's group life (group dynamics), the change initiative's success would be higher if the senior person affected by the change supported the change. This approach implied that once the leader secured buy-in from the senior person, other stakeholders were likely to follow suit, contributing to the change initiative's success.

The second theme, incremental progress to support change initiatives, and the third theme, focused on continuous monitoring and evaluation, introduces concepts not explicitly addressed by Lewin. When observing Lewin's 3-step change model strictly as a linear process, it might seem that there's no provision for incremental progress or ongoing monitoring and evaluation. However, this perception is incorrect. Burnes (2020) challenges the conventional representation of Lewin's 3-step change model, arguing for its dynamic and iterative nature, involving various stages and feedback loops.

Examining Lewin's 3-step change model reveals that the first phase (unfreezing) and the concept of quasi-stationary equilibrium in Field theory enable a gradual and continuous readiness for change. The ongoing nature of the Unfreezing stage highlights its role in fostering a gradual and continuous readiness for change, as Burnes (2020) emphasized. This concept supports the idea of many small incremental progressions leading to holistic change.

Considering quasi-stationary equilibrium or the force field of the group, as Lewin (1947a) asserts in the realm of management, understanding and managing the conditions in which a process maintains stable equilibrium is crucial. The width of this range, or the variety of conditions under which stability is held, is fundamental. This understanding serves two primary purposes: (a) preventing major catastrophes by avoiding deviations beyond the boundaries of stability in a managerial process, which could lead to failures, and (b) facilitating desired permanent change. Understanding the boundaries of stability helps implement change effectively without causing disruptions or catastrophes. Thus, recognizing the need for gradual or incremental changes becomes crucial for successfully implementing permanent change.

Further examination of Lewin’s 3-step change model reveals that the second phase (moving) and the concept of action research enable monitoring and evaluation. The moving stage of Lewin’s 3-step change model consists of gathering data, analyzing results, and evaluating the effectiveness of the change. The move phase is coupled with Lewin’s action research concept, a fact-finding method to facilitate movement toward the desired change (Burnes, 2020). If the desired outcome for the change is not achieved, the feedback is incorporated into action plans to achieve the desired outcome of the change initiative. Echoing the flexibility and adaptability that leaders must possess during a change initiative. Once the desired outcome is reached, the change, the freezing of the new norms into the organization’s culture, processes, and procedures, begins, and employees become accountable for the change.

The conceptual framework for this study is Lewin's 3-step change model (Unfreeze-Change-Freeze) and its accompanying concepts, which establish a foundation for successful organizational change. The identified themes arising from the study—communication dynamics and stakeholder engagement, incremental progress, and continuous evaluation—align with Lewin's principles and provide valuable insights into his 3-step model and change concepts. The emphasis on effective communication in initiating and sustaining change, securing stakeholder buy-in, and cultivating trust emphasizes the pivotal role of communication during the change process. Additionally, recognizing incremental progress and continuous evaluation emphasizes the dynamic and iterative nature essential for successful change implementation. This research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of change processes, emphasizing the need for communication, gradual, incremental changes, and continual evaluation to achieve permanent and effective organizational change.

Applications to Professional Practice

The outcomes of this study provide valuable contributions to organizations undergoing change by uncovering the strategies energy leaders employ to implement change initiatives successfully. According to Hubbart (2023a), a staggering 70% of organizational change efforts fail. Given the substantial transformations occurring in the energy industry due to global shifts toward decarbonization, decentralization, and digitalization, traditional business models are undergoing significant transformation, accompanied by new challenges (Arifin, 2022). The findings from this research could support energy leaders in navigating change initiatives, ensuring they do not become part of the alarming statistic of failed change efforts.

Moreover, this study provides insights into the effective strategies accomplished energy leaders employ for successfully implementing change initiatives, thereby enhancing overall organizational success. Strategies encompassing communication and stakeholder engagement, incremental change, and monitoring and evaluating change initiatives are validated approaches for achieving successful change initiatives in organizations. In the dynamic landscape of the energy industry, where adaptability and flexibility to external environments are paramount, these proven strategies could emerge as a valuable resource for leaders striving to implement successful change within their organizations.

Implications for Social Change

Effectively implementing successful strategies for organizational change initiatives holds the potential for tangible improvements in communities and organizations, thereby benefiting social change. One notable positive impact is the prospect of increased employment opportunities within the communities served by energy companies. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023) highlighted a 3.6% rise in unemployment in the utility industry in February of 2023, indicating the significance of revenue loss as a contributing factor. Successful change initiatives geared towards enhancing overall organizational performance could contribute to the economic vitality of energy organizations, potentially leading to increased hiring as revenues grow.

Furthermore, these strategies could play a pivotal role in keeping energy costs low for communities served by energy companies. In the face of rising energy costs associated with expanding renewable distributed generation, such as rooftop solar units (Barazesh et al., 2019), successful organizational change could enable the energy industry to adapt to the evolving external environment. This adaptability is crucial for maintaining affordable energy prices for consumers connected to the electric grid.

Embracing strategies that facilitate the transition to renewable energy sources could significantly reduce energy-related carbon emissions, as highlighted by the International Renewable Energy Agency (2022). Achieving this transition contributes to environmental sustainability and fosters a cleaner and healthier living environment. In essence, the positive implications of successful organizational change extend beyond the immediate organizational context, positively impacting broader social, economic, and environmental spheres.

Recommendations for Action

Current and future organization leaders seeking effective strategies for implementing change initiatives may consider recommendations based on the findings from this research. These recommendations are to (a) communicate and engage all stakeholders that the change initiative will impact; (b) make small and incremental changes that lead to the successful implementation of the change initiative; (c) monitor and evaluate the change, remaining flexible and adaptable in response to the feedback received. The study findings emphasize these recommendations, which could impact the success rate of change initiatives in all organizations.

The first recommendation for organizational leaders instituting change is to prioritize communication and engagement with all stakeholders affected by a change initiative. Clearly articulating the objectives and purpose of the change fosters engagement, buy-in, and establishes trust and credibility for both the leader and the change initiative. Conversely, a lack of communication or unclear messaging can introduce uncertainty among employees regarding the change initiative, as Zainab et al. (2022) noted. It's crucial to recognize that communication should not solely be formal and top-down; informal communication and feedback from the bottom-up are equally important. According to the participants in this study, effective communication emerged as a critical factor influencing the success of change initiatives.

The second recommendation for organizational leaders instituting change is to implement small and incremental changes that pave the way for the successful execution of the change initiative. Lewin recognized that resistance to change is inherent in individuals and groups who find comfort in their current state. Introducing small and incremental changes makes it more manageable for subordinates, allowing for the change initiative to have success as it is implemented. As expressed by P3, rather than aiming for a grand slam home run, the better strategy is to focus on hitting a series of singles, ensuring a more effective and sustainable approach.

The final recommendation for organizational leaders instituting change is to monitor and evaluate the change initiative. It's imperative that change initiatives have well-defined and measurable goals, which should be continuously monitored and evaluated, whether through KPIs or SWOT analysis. Recognizing that not all change initiatives unfold as initially planned, monitoring and evaluation could empower leaders to adapt and be flexible based on the feedback received. It also enables leaders to enforce accountability among employees regarding the change, tackling any challenges stemming from insufficient effort or commitment. Subsequently, leaders may implement training and coaching to ensure the successful implementation of the change or as recognized by P6, consider parting ways with individuals who resist the change.

Recommendations for Further Research

I conducted a qualitative multiple case study to explore the strategies utilized by energy industry leaders in achieving successful organizational change initiatives. I gathered data from nine purposefully sampled energy utility leaders in the United States through semistructured interviews and examined relevant organizational documents. To improve practice in business, I offer the following two recommendations for further study:

1. To further understand the phenomenon of change in the energy industry, a study that explores successful strategies from the employee's perception should be conducted. Successful strategies can then be compared to truly understand what both leaders and their subordinates agree are strategies for implementing successful change initiatives.
2. To overcome the constraints associated with acquiring documentation and relying on participant recollection, a longitudinal study is recommended, facilitating an in-depth examination throughout the progression of the phenomenon. This approach allows for the participants' recollections to be simultaneous, ensuring a

heightened level of precision, and minimizes the potential loss of documentation as the change initiative becomes more deeply embedded in the organizational culture.

Reflections

My journey at Walden University has been transformative, providing me with the essential tools to evolve into an independent scholar. As I reflect on the challenges encountered throughout this academic journey, I can say that it served as a catalyst for growth, personally and professionally, making the entire journey well worth it. One of the pivotal elements that facilitated my progression was the constructive feedback I received from my chair and the second committee member. Their guidance and insights were invaluable in navigating the intricate academic research path. This support system honed my research skills and instilled in me the confidence to navigate the complexities inherent in doctoral studies.

When I initially embarked on this study, my perception was anchored in my experiences within the energy industry. I held a preconceived notion that managers in this industry significantly struggled when implementing change initiatives. Through the course of my study, however, my perception changed. Engaging in meaningful discussions with leaders in the energy industry allowed me to glean insights into their successful implementation of change initiatives. This challenged my initial assumptions and broadened my perspective on the capabilities and strategies of adept leaders in overcoming challenges associated with change, expanding my understanding of the dynamics within the energy industry.

Conclusion

In the business landscape, change remains a constant; within the energy industry specifically, the external environment is undergoing transformations driven by decarbonization, decentralization, and digitization. However, according to Hubbart (2023a), approximately 70% of organizational change efforts fail. This failure can lead to stagnation, loss of competitive advantage, and financial consequences that can lead to organizational decline. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the strategies utilized by energy industry leaders in achieving successful organizational change initiatives. The findings I presented offer insights into effective strategies employed by successful energy leaders to foster and sustain successful change initiatives, which can lead to organizational success. These insights encompass communication strategies for stakeholder engagement, the importance of incremental progress, and the ongoing assessment of change initiatives. The implications of this study could extend beyond the energy industry, providing valuable strategies and a deeper understanding for business leaders navigating organizational change initiatives.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

What will you do	What will you say - Script
• Introduce the interview and set the stage.	Good morning/afternoon, my name is Elier Alvarado, and I am sincerely grateful for your willingness to participate in this study. The following interview will be semistructured, I have seven questions prepared, but I am also open to any additional insights or perspectives you may have. During this time, I will audio record the conversation for accuracy and to take notes. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project by signing the informed consent form. Please note that your involvement is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. I appreciate your cooperation and look forward to learning from your valuable insights. Before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns regarding the interview process or confidentiality? Are you ready to begin?

• Ask interview questions.	1. What strategies have you used to achieve organizational change successfully? 2. What was your approach to your change initiative’s planning and preparation phase? 3. How did you measure the effectiveness of a change initiative during and after implementation? 4. What significant obstacles did you encounter, and how did you mitigate them? 5. Did you experience any failed change initiatives, and what were the lessons learned from it? 6. What strategies did you use to ensure the embedding of changes in the organization’s policies, procedures, and practices? 7. What additional information could you offer regarding strategies you have used to implement change initiatives?
Wrap up interview thanking participant.	This concludes our interview. Thank you for taking the time to participate and for sharing your insights and perspectives with me. Your contribution to this research project is greatly appreciated, and your input will be invaluable in helping to further our understanding of successful organizational change.

Schedule follow-up member checking.	I will diligently transcribe this interview and craft a summary highlighting the most prominent concepts from your responses. You can expect to receive the summarized interpretation via email within three business days from today. Please review the information to ensure I have accurately captured the essence of your insights. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to schedule a follow-up interview with you to ensure the utmost accuracy and validity of the findings. This follow-up interview would allow me to obtain valuable feedback, ensure that you concur with my interpretations, and ask any follow-up questions. I propose conducting the follow-up interview one week from today at your convenience. Your active participation in this validation process is of utmost importance in upholding the accuracy and integrity of the research outcomes. Your input will significantly contribute to the overall reliability of the study. Thank you for your collaboration and valuable contributions to this research. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you again for your time and valuable input during this interview.
• Introduce follow-up interviews and set the stage. • Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each question. • Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found-note the information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to IRB approval.	Good morning/afternoon, my name is Elier Alvarado, and I am sincerely grateful for your willingness to participate in this follow-up interview. The following interview will be to review transcribed information emailed to you. During this time, I will audio record the conversation for accuracy and to take notes.

• Walk through each question, read the interpretation, and ask: Did I miss anything? Or what you like to add?	Please note that your involvement is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. I appreciate your cooperation and look forward to learning from your valuable insights. Before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns regarding the interview process or confidentiality? Are you ready to begin? 1. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation-perhaps one paragraph or as needed 2. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation-perhaps one paragraph or as needed 3. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation-perhaps one paragraph or as needed 4. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation-perhaps one paragraph or as needed 5. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation-perhaps one paragraph or as needed 6. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation-perhaps one paragraph or as needed 7. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation-perhaps one paragraph or as needed

Appendix B: Invitation Letter

August 29, 2023

Re: Invitation to Participate in Our Multiple Case Study on Successful Change Strategies in the Energy Industry

Dear,

There is a new study about the dynamic evolution within the energy industry and how to successfully implement change initiatives that could help business leaders better understand the benefits and challenges of using particular strategies for successful change in the energy industry. For this study, you are invited to share your experiences employing strategies conducive to successful change initiatives.

About the study:

One 45-60 minute phone or online interview that will be audio-recorded (no videorecording)

To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Business leader
- Has successfully introduced and implemented change initiatives in the energy industry.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Elier Alvarado, a DBA student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during September 2023.

Please reach out to [redacted] to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.

Thank you for considering our invitation, and we hope to hear from you soon.

Best Regards,

Elier Alvarado