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Developing Sustainable Leadership Strategies to Increase Corporate Revenue

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2016

Abstract

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by

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MBA, Western Michigan University, 1996

BBA, Western Michigan University, 1983

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

The business environment is in constant flux where stakeholders encourage organizational leaders to consider sustainable business tactics alongside corporate profits. While most business leaders recognize the importance of including sustainability into corporate goals, evidence suggested that only 10% have sustainable action plans in place. Using the honeybee leadership model as the conceptual framework, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the sustainable leadership strategies that business leaders from small- and medium- sized companies integrated to increase corporate revenue. These companies were B Corp certified which ensures a third party endorsement of sustainable practices. The data were collected through face-to-face, semistructured interviews from 4 B Corp business leaders of these sustainable businesses in West Michigan, B Corp sustainability ratings, and literature review documents. These four businesses represented 44% of the B Corp organizations in Michigan. Transcript evaluation, member checking, and methodological triangulation ensured reliability and strengthened the credibility of the data collected. From the data analysis, four themes emerged: (a) enabling culture, (b) stakeholder inclusion, (c) staff engagement, and (d) social responsibility. These study findings suggest that area small- and medium-sized companies seeking to implement sustainable business adopt these tactics to increase corporate revenue. Implications for social change include the advancement of community health through improved air and water quality, as leaders understand how their contributions fit within the greater community.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my 97 year old grandmother Catherine Edith Tomczak. From my earliest recollections as a child, Grandma Katie has been an inspiration and persistent influence in my life. Grandma your boundless energy and positive attitude have been a guiding force to my completing this study. Thank you for being such an amazing role model in my life.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

For nearly 25 years, interest in the sustainable movement has increased (Morris, 2012). Sustainability is a business model where leaders consider the people, profits, and the planet towards under a long-range outlook (Waite, 2014). Over the next decade, business models will likely contain sustainable strategies as a part of organizations' missions, visions, and everyday practices (Mysen, 2012). Sustainability is creating a new business model for organizations, and business leaders search for frameworks to integrate this new paradigm (Kantabutra & Avery, 2013). Brower and Mahajan (2013) found that while organizations may integrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies vertically or horizontally, those businesses that combine value creation and marketing and with broader stakeholder demands have greater CSR breadth. Therefore, those leaders who integrate CSR into organizational missions, values, and everyday tactics, have a deeper CSR commitments.

Leaders committed to sustainable leadership take a long-term view when viewing corporate performance, are more risk tolerant, have a personal commitment to sustainability, and incorporate sustainable practices into corporate decision making (Eccles, Perkins, & Serafeim, 2012). While individual practices of sustainable leadership exist, few models suggest a strategic approach to leading sustainable organizations. A sustainable leadership approach may provide organizations with a guide to adopt social and environmental practices (Mecalf & Benn, 2013). The goal of this research was to

explore effective, sustainable leadership strategies to create a leadership framework for organizations considering such an approach.

Problem Statement

Mmboswobeni and Solly (2012) found that sustainable business strategies increase revenue potential for businesses; however, most business leaders lack the sustainable leadership strategies necessary to implement them. Two-thirds of business leaders indicate that sustainability issues are significant; however, only 40% integrate sustainable leadership strategies into their organizations, and just 10% have sustainable action for creating competitive advantage (Kiron, Kruschwitz, Rubel, Reeves, & Fuisz-Kehrbach, 2014). The general business problem is that some business leaders do not know how to address the ever-changing global environmental impact strategically. The specific business problem is that some business leaders lack sustainable leadership strategies to increase corporate revenue.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the sustainable leadership strategies that business leaders integrate to increase corporate revenue. The population was four business leaders of small- and medium-sized businesses who have lead successful sustainable business activities in Western Michigan. These sustainable businesses represented 44% of the B Corps in Michigan. This population was suitable for this study because sustainable business leaders influence corporate initiatives that translate to more socially responsible actions and behaviors (Marais, 2012). Additionally, as leaders embrace innovation to differentiate and survive, sustainability becomes

important in their organizations (Waite, 2014). The implications for social change include the development of a leadership framework to implement sustainable business strategies, which consumers believe may positively impact environmental and social challenges (Borin, Lindsey-Mullikin, & Krishnan, 2013).

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative case study approach. Researchers use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method methodologies when studying problems (Symonds & Gorard, 2010). Yauch and Steidel (2003) implied that qualitative research allows researchers to use comprehensive questioning, so respondents can talk about the topics that are most important to them. Qualitative researchers use interviewing techniques and interpret meaning from respondents (Slevitch, 2011). Quantitative research addresses the problem of how many or often (Malina, Nørreklit, & Selto, 2011).

To explore the complexities of sustainable leadership strategies, a case study was most suitable. Case studies allow researchers to understand how business managers operate (MacGregor & Semler, 2012). Yin (2014) suggested that case studies advocate an empirical detailed inquiry that explores a current phenomenon, where the phenomenon and framework are not apparent. Researchers used methodological triangulation in case studies research to strengthen and corroborate results (Yauch & Steidel, 2003). Ciasullo and Troisi (2013) suggested that case studies cannot infer statistical generalizations, but can provide details of the researched phenomenon. I considered phenomenology and ethnography. Phenomenology works best when describing participants' lived experiences, while ethnography examines norms and patterns over an extended period

(Hays & Wood, 2011). These designs are useful for other qualitative research. A case study approach, however, allows researchers to collect data using a variety of data collection tools, providing different views on the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Thus, a case study was an ideal design to provide an in-depth account of sustainable leadership strategies.

<p style="text-align:center">Research Question</p>

How do business leaders integrate sustainable leadership strategies to increase corporate revenue?

<p style="text-align:center">Interview Questions</p>

I used the following interview questions to uncover sustainable leadership strategies that may move leaders beyond reactive methods.

1. How do you integrate sustainable leadership business strategies into your organization?

2. How do you reinforce these leadership strategies with all stakeholders and move beyond reactive activities?

3. Relative to sustainability, how do you balance brand equity, consumer satisfaction, and long-term stakeholder value with short-term financial viability?

4. What advantages does your organization realize when engaging in sustainable leadership strategies?

5. What disadvantages does your organization realize when engaging in sustainable leadership strategies?

6. What foundational practices, higher-level practices, and key performance drivers do you employ when integrating sustainability into daily operations?

7. How does sustainability fit in when going beyond the bottom line for results that enhance brands, consider customer satisfaction, and integrate long and short-term viability, while providing long-term value for all stakeholders?

8. What is your experience incorporating innovation and sustainability into your leadership strategy?

9. How do you keep ethical issues into perspective while maintaining profits?

10. What else would you like to share with me about how business leaders can integrate leadership sustainable strategies and move beyond individual reactive tactics, in order to gain competitive advantage?

Conceptual Framework

Avery and Bergsteiner's honeybee leadership model (HLM) provided the conceptual framework for this study. Introduced in 2010, this model outlines 23 sustainable leadership qualities that fall into three levels: foundation practices, higher-level practices, and key performance drivers (Kantabutra, 2012). These three levels form a pyramid akin to Maslow's hierarchy, where the bottom features foundational practices, the middle outlines higher level practices, and the top includes the key performance drivers (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). Foundational elements of the HLM include tenets that guide organizational leaders to integrate sustainability into daily operations. Kanabutra (2012) suggested that Avery and Bergsteiner's model goes beyond triple bottom line with results that enhance brands, customer satisfaction, and long and short-

term financial viability, while providing long-term value for all stakeholders. The top of the pyramid includes five performance results that guide leaders' actions (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). B Corp suggests a model where sustainable tactics, including the social and environmental aspects of business, are prevalent (Hickman, Byrd, & Hickman, 2014). Thus, by interviewing B Corp leaders, a measure of leadership tactics emerged.

Organizations are complicated systems within a complex system, creating an obfuscated environment for leaders (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Operating within a sustainable framework provides organizations opportunities and risks. Sustainable leaders understand the impact that such strategies can have on employees when the organizational values integrate honesty, competency, purpose, and consistency (Eccles, Perkins, & Serafeim, 2012). While leaders realize the opportunities a sustainable framework provides, there is little information on how leaders can insert sustainable practices into day-to-day operations (Hind, Smit, & Page, 2013). Waite (2014) found that conflicts exist in organizations attempting to integrate sustainability and innovation, and that successful leadership strategies provide an opportunity to facilitate this process. As managers attempt to create sustainable workplaces, following defined sustainable leadership models may allow employees and other stakeholders to work more collaboratively towards these goals.

Sustainable businesses leaders put moral and legal issues at the forefront of activities while sustaining profits (Mujtaba & Cavico, 2013). Avery and Bergsteiner (2011a) found that successful sustainable leaders were better able to include all stakeholders in organizational strategy, which often resulted in longer term solutions.

Additionally, Eccles, Ioannou, and Serafeim (2012) suggested that stakeholders' trust increases when organizational outcomes suggest making the world a better place. Stakeholders appreciate the altruistic intent when organizations integrate CSR strategies while meeting organizational goals. Further, Kahn and Manwani (2012) found that such adoption also improved brand image and brand loyalty.

Organizations are complex systems, and managers need a fresh set of skills to lead organizations as they adopt sustainable initiatives (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). The HLM's 23 leadership practices, going beyond the triple bottom line, provides three levels of leadership commitment of foundation practices, higher level practices, and key performance drivers (Kanabutra, 2012). Using the HLM leadership model as a framework, this study may provide business leaders with a starting point to integrating sustainable leadership strategies. Further, it provides new insights for those seeking B Corp certification.

Operational Definitions

Sustainable and environmental leaders use these terms to discuss organizational CSR strategy and tactics; however, the terms may not appear in everyday business language. It is important to have a basic understanding of these terms to comprehend sustainable leadership approaches.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR): Having social responsibilities to the environment, community, and other stakeholders, while integrating business ethics and corporate control and looking beyond profit maximization (Ahmad, 2012).

Corporate sustainability: An enduring decision-making process whose goal is to attain sustainable results in a constantly shifting world (Xiao, Faff, Gharghori, & Lee, 2013).

Green products: Environmentally responsible goods and services created using green technology with limited environmental repercussions (Sudhalakshmi & Chinnadorai, 2014).

Greenwashing: Using green environmentalism credentials to imply that organizations' policies are environmentally acceptable (Illia, Zyglidopoulos, Romenti, Rodríguez-Cánovas, & González del Valle Brena, 2013).

Honeybee leadership: Leadership type that integrates environment and socially responsible practices with innovation and sustainability with a long-term outlook (Kantabutra, 2012).

Sustainable marketing: Marketing strategy that fulfills organizations' and stakeholders' needs, while protecting and conserving environmental initiative (Rettie, Burchell, & Riley, 2012).

Triple bottom line (TBL): An approach that incorporates financial soundness with environmental accountability and social responsibility (Kantabutra, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs that researchers believe to be true without validation (Wahyuni, 2012). Researchers should consider study assumptions and understand their risk. In this study, I made a number of assumptions pertaining to sustainable leadership

strategies. The first assumption was that respondents answered questions honestly and without bias. The second assumption was that the results of this study could be shared across industries and geographical locations. The final assumption was that the results could provide useful data for organizations intending to engage in sustainable leadership strategies.

Limitations

Limitations may create restrictions in conducting research. Stating a study's restrictions, or limitations, helps define studies' parameters. The limitations of the study included the limited geographic area of West Michigan, which may not be representative of other regions. Another limitation was that data collection for this study was limited to small and medium-sized for-profit businesses. A final limitation was my inexperience interviewing and bias towards sustainable business activity.

Delimitations

Delimitations provide restrictions to characteristics of a study (Rufin & Medina, 2010). The greater the delimitations, the narrower the scope of the research. In this study, I explored sustainable leadership strategies with leaders in West Michigan. The organizations studied were small- and medium-sized. Given the fluid nature of sustainability, the literature review included peer-reviewed journals from 2011-2015.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

Contribution to Business Practice

This study contributes to business practice because limited information exists about the leadership qualities necessary to guide businesses leaders to initiate sustainable

practices. Business leaders recognize the need for sustainable skills and abilities. However, many do not understand the practical implications. Almost 70% of corporate managers indicated that CSR would increase in importance (Illia et al., 2013). Sustainable practices provide a business model that guarantees a stable and valuable ecosystem and perpetuates the well-being of communities (Mitra & Borza, 2010). These processes affect the environmental condition of communities by increasing the quality of air, climate, and water (Mitra & Borza, 2010). While organizations once considered CSR tactics to be embellishments to organizational strategy, today they are crucial to corporate relevance and sustainability.

Sustainable leadership strategies remain convoluted due to the intricacies of sustainability, the multifaceted nature of complex problem solving, and the compound nature of leadership (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Additionally, the facets of sustainable business are harder to measure, as they are nonlinear in nature (Sherman, 2012). However, business leaders consider sustainable business strategies as an way to increase corporate reputation, whereas failing to comply with such standards can negatively influence organizational character (Lourenço, Callen, Branco, & Curto, 2014). Corporate leaders may use these results to provide training models and directives to guide organizations as they integrate sustainable business practices into their culture.

Implications for Social Change

Sustainable beliefs stem from social, economic, environmental, moral and spiritual beliefs (Ahmad, Soskolne, & Ahmed, 2012). While organizations increasingly engage in activities deemed socially responsible, a plethora of recent environmental

disasters provide critics with fodder, skepticism, and concern (Bayoud, Kavanagh, & Slaughter, 2012). CSR researchers suggest an evolution in sustainable business focus and strategy from the 1950s to today, where sustainable business is now a part of corporate strategy (Moura-Leite & Padgett, 2011). Consumers also understand that buying from sustainable companies may positively impact the environment (Borin et al., 2013). Thus, researchers may use these results to influence positive social change by creating leadership profiles and models, which may ultimately improve the lives of communities and stakeholders (Borin et al., 2013). Sustainable leaders are accountable for their companies' activities and contributions to society (Marais, 2012). A sustainable leadership model benefits society because leaders glean a more macro view of their fit within their respective communities (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Further, sustainable leadership practices may impact communities' environmental health through improved air and water quality (Mitra & Borza, 2010).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the sustainable leadership strategies that business leaders integrate to increase corporate revenue. In a literature review, a researcher presents a thorough analysis of prior research and identifies gaps in the literature to provide researchers with additional research opportunities (Aggarwal, 2013). This literature review provides an analysis of sustainable leadership strategies within the context of increasing corporate profits and social awareness. The method of organizing this review was by theme. This review of professional and academic literature, using peer-reviewed journal articles, provides an overview of the

evolution of sustainable business, with a focus on sustainable leadership strategies. I obtained data for this study from myriad of reference types including books, databases, and websites. The academic research databases I used included ABI/INFORM Global, Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, and SAGE Premier. These databases provided a full range of data on this subject. I used 78 references in this literature review. Ninety-two percent of these references were peer-reviewed journal articles published within the last 5 years. The entire study contains 113 references, and 85% were peer-reviewed journal articles published within the last 5 years. Because of the contemporary nature of this topic, I found a plethora of current peer-reviewed journal articles. Search terms for the study included *greenwashing, green strategy, honeybee leadership, sustainable business, sustainable leadership, sustainable reporting*, and any combination of these words.

Conceptual Framework

The honeybee leadership model (HLM) provided the conceptual framework for this study. Avery and Bergsteiner introduced this model in 2010, which resembles a four level pyramid. The researchers created a framework that includes 23 sustainable leadership qualities that fall into three levels: foundation practices, higher-level practices, and key performance drivers (Kantabutra, 2012). The foundation practices include strategies, such as ethical behavior, stakeholder approach, and developing people continuously (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). Higher level practices include culture, trust, and team orientation; and the three performance drivers are innovation, staff engagement, and quality (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2013). Kanabutra (2012) suggested that Avery and

Bergsteiner's model is an evidence based approach focusing on results that go beyond triple bottom. Avery and Bergsteiner developed the framework using practices with mostly Western economies' roots (Kantabutra, 2012).

At the apex of the HLM pyramid are five performance results. These outcomes include brand and reputation, customer satisfaction, financial performance, long-term stakeholder value (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). The five performance results are measures leaders can use to determine sustainable integration.

B Corp certification provides businesses with a third party endorsement of sustainable practices (Haymore, 2011). Certified B Corps integrate sustainable business strategies while assimilating social and environmental into corporate policy (Hickman et al., 2014). Using B Corp leaders in this study allowed me to identify which sustainable leadership tactics prevailed. Using the B Corp lens to study organizations ensured the inclusion of companies that met comprehensive sustainability standards and operated with transparency.

The complexity of organizations and the systems they work in creates challenges and opportunities for business leaders. Managers need innovative practices to incorporate sustainable initiatives (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). The HLM's 23 leadership practices provide a deeper commitment to sustainability while offering performance outcomes to measure sustainable strategy adoption (Kanabutra, 2012). This study may provide business leaders with a framework to integrating sustainable leadership strategies. Further, it may provide new insights for those seeking B Corp certification.

Sustainable Beginnings

While sustainable business models and CSR initiatives are not new concepts, they continually evolve. In the United States, one of the earliest recorded sustainable events was in 1822 when the government passed regulations to save a species of tree, in danger of depletion, used in shipbuilding (Morris, 2012). In the early 1900s, sustainable businesses focused on moral issues and did not engage stakeholders or connect to organizational performance and management (Moura-Leite & Padgett, 2011). External stakeholders include clients, stockholders, local and national governments, communities where organizations do business, academia, and various media outlets (Fontaine, 2013). Some of the earliest work on CSR revolved around Bowen's 1953 book *Social Responsibilities with the Businessman*, whose position was that leaders must consider what social responsibility their organizations had with their communities (Moura-Leite & Padgett, 2011).

In 1987, the United Nations General Assembly initiated the Brundtland Commission, which reviewed global environmental strategies and published the document Our Common Future (MacNeill, 2014). Once established, the Commission noted that environmental issues were global and determined the need for sustainable policies (Morris, 2012). This Commission, spurred by previous environmental disasters and climate change shifts, endorsed an adoption of sustainable development across the globe (MacNeill, 2014). In reviewing the initiatives recommended over 25 years ago, MacNeill (2014) suggested that organizations and governments made substantial strides since this 1987 proposal. MacNeill also suggested, however, that all too often, institutions

do not consider public opinion when considering actions such as these. Today consumers and communities are far more vocal and demanding of organizations and governments to behave in a moral and ethical manner and to consider more than just profitability (Fontaine, 2013). However, as vocal as consumers and communities are, traditional profit-centered organizational tactics often outweigh sustainable strategy adoption (MacNeill, 2014).

In the past quarter century, the sustainable movement has gained momentum (Morris, 2012). Disruptive innovation added to the sustainability movement while business, government, and community stakeholders realized adverse impacts of noncompliance (Christofi, Christofi, & Sisaye, 2012). Sustainable business initiatives abound across industries and countries. In 2004 Ford Motor Company became the first U.S. corporation to introduce the hybrid car in the United States and today commits 50% of its scientific research budget to environmental initiatives (Mitchell & Harrison, 2012). In England, Marks and Spencer began embedding sustainability into organizational structure and culture to be a global retail leader in sustainability (Adderley & Mellor, 2014). Timberland, a U.S. footwear manufacturer, began reporting on its sustainability efforts in the 1990s and continued to advance those initiatives to all stakeholders, including competitors (Kruschwitz, 2013). Over the past 10 years in Nigeria, there is evidence of sustainable business practices by oil companies (Aaron, 2012). General Electric coined the term *ecomagination* to describe a technological movement to reduce its carbon footprint while reducing costs and increasing public awareness (Lubin & Esty, 2009). The sustainable movement evolved continually over the past 60 years, and in the

process organizations began collaborating in their sustainable efforts (Christofi et al.,

2012; Moura-Leite & Padgett, 2011). Today's movement includes the balancing of both

internal and external stakeholders' needs (Boerner, 2013).

Sustainable Business Initiatives

Companies that engage in sustainable business practices integrate innovative

strategies too. With the increased pressure to become sustainable organizations,

companies assimilate innovation into corporate policy to gain competitive advantage

(Waite, 2014). However, Bouglet and Simon (2012) posited that organizations do not

always consider innovation and sustainability as complementary forces. While managers

find creativity and innovation as keys to organizational growth and competitive

advantage, sustainable development does not always have this reputation (Bouglet &

Simon, 2012). Today the connection between the two is present in organizational

strategy, vision, and culture.

Sustainability moves beyond organizations' commitments to society and includes

strategic planning, moral and ethical obligations, and a macro view of organizations'

impacts on the global community (Ahmad, 2012). Sustainable companies use preemptive

business strategies to initiate processes, instead of reactive tactics to combat issues

(Fontaine, 2013). Business leaders wishing to engage in sustainable practices incorporate

life cycle processes into new product strategy (Kara, Ibbotson, & Kayis, 2014).

Businesses no longer make sustainable decisions in a vacuum, but integrate sustainability

initiatives into all facets of organizational decision making. For many, sustainability is an

integral part of corporate culture. Kiron, Kruschwitz, Haanaes, and Von Streng Velken

(2012) suggested that businesses do not question whether they should adopt sustainable platforms but wonder how they will go about doing it. Marais (2012) found that chief executive officers (CEOs) who integrate sustainability into corporate vision could assist legitimizing such efforts. Further, Starbuck (2013) advocated that organizations integrate sustainability into corporate strategy instead of just incorporating it because of corporate compliance. Being proactive and creating change instead of reacting to policy shifts, allows organizations to determine their paths and be in control of them. BMW endured the global financial crisis in 2008, when it adopted sustainable business standards and became a stronger organization as a result (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011b).

Many smaller organizations value local CSR activities and commit resources beyond governmental regulation (Dincer & Dincer, 2013). CEOs of larger organizations use CSR rhetoric for a variety of stakeholders to legitimize sustainable business strategies (Marais, 2012). Organizations are complex and defining leadership strategies to support them is difficult (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Some suggest that investing in sustainable tactics can be perceived as risky and believe maximizing shareholder value is an organization's first responsibility (Williams, Page, & Petrosky, 2014). Others propose that corporations are responsible for a variety of stakeholders including employees, communities, suppliers, implying long-term strategies (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a).

Sustainable Tracking

Companies engage in sustainability reporting either through self-imposed requirements or government mandates. Early sustainability reporting evolved from organizational attempts to thwart unethical behavior (Christofi et al., 2012). Business

leaders incorporate sustainability reporting to let shareholders know they are mindful of

their social and environmental footprint (Wilson, 2013). Sustainability reporting allows

leaders to provide accounts of businesses' environmental and social report card (Christofi

et al., 2012). Saltaji (2013) suggested that sustainability reports are intangible assets that

may influence organizations' bottom lines, and companies should adopt them, given

today's business climate. However, Christofi et al. (2012) found that government

pressure provides the greatest motivation for organizations to enact sustainable practices.

Boerner (2013) reported that more than half of all the S&P 500 and Fortune 500

companies report their sustainability efforts, and those that do not are in the minority.

While some perceive sustainability reporting as elusive, more companies understand the

risk of not doing so could be harmful in the long run. Leaders realize the positive effect

on brand equity and that stakeholders expect it.

Organizations use sustainability ratings to further corporate image and promote

sustainable strategies, tactics, and commitment. Wilson (2013) suggested that potential

consumers view the corporate brand positively when corporations have positive

sustainability ratings. Christofi et al. (2012) found stakeholders put increasing pressure

on organizations to be sustainable entities, driving sustainable reporting. The two most

prevalent sustainability indices are the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) and the

Global Reporting Initiatives G3 Guidelines (GRI-G3; Christofi et al., 2012). The DJSI

measures more leadership components than other sustainability indices (Johnson, 2011).

The GRI-G3 provides comprehensive standards for reporting sustainability elements, and

companies of all sizes and scope can use the framework (Stoddard, Pollard, & Evans,

2012). These indices provide a summary of financial performance and sustainability metrics, offering investors a side-by-side comparison (Starbuck, 2012). The environmental tragedies of 1980s and financial scandals of the 1990s were the initiators of these sustainability indices.

TBL reporting, which incorporates people, profits, and the planet into reporting measures, took hold in the 1990s (Sridhar, 2012). TBL provides businesses with an approach to balancing the three paradigms equally. However, some still see the initiatives as financially driven, rather than a holistic effort (Sridhar, 2012). While TBL reporting does provide a review of all three components, the components cannot be added to provide a summative assessment (Sherman, 2012).

In spite of the rising importance of sustainability in corporate agendas and increased sustainability reporting, most stockholders remain skeptical of their ability to translate to corporate profits and revenues (Lubin & Esty, 2014). Lubin and Esty (2014) suggested that one challenge is the dialog used to report sustainability advances and achievements, which is not similar to the reporting language used in financial circles. Stoddard et al. (2012) alluded that TBL reporting should contain objectives for increased corporate performance, including metrics and timelines. The combination of qualitative measures and quantitative analysis may increase stakeholders' confidence in the sustainable reporting measures, such as TBL.

B Corp

B Corp is a nonprofit entity that certifies companies' sustainability efforts using the categories of governance, community, workers, and the environment (Hickman et al.,

2014). Once organizations meet the B Corp standards, B Lab certifies the organizations that then agree to consider comprehensive stakeholders interests (Hickman et al., 2014). The B Corp certification provides companies with a level of differentiation, given their broad reaching socially and environmentally responsible approaches (Haymore, 2011). Further, as a B Corp member, businesses attain credibility for the third party endorsement of their sustainability efforts (Haymore, 2011).

The B Corp designation may provide businesses with a differential competitive advantage compared to competitors (Andre', 2012). Additionally, B Corp-certified corporations might be more attractive to socially responsible investors (Haymore, 2011). Organizations with a B Corp status may gain recognition in their industries and with their stakeholders as they pursue long-term corporate viability, considering multiple stakeholders.

Contemporary Sustainability Efforts

Balancing corporate profits with social and environmental proposals is a challenge for businesses. The traditional for-profit business model, driven by stockholders, remains a corporate instigator today. Leaders struggle to equalize stockholders' needs with other stakeholders wants (Dincer & Dincer, 2013). However, after the corporate scandals by companies such as Enron and WorldCom, stakeholders demand that organizations behavior in a more ethical manner and consider more than just profits (Fontaine, 2013).

Integrating sustainable activity into everyday activities challenges organizations that intend to advance corporate CSR efforts. Eccles, Perkins, and Serafeim (2012)

posited that becoming a sustainable organization requires large-scale organizational transformation that requires "reframing the company identity and codifying the new identity through employee engagement and mechanisms of execution" (p. 44). Further, becoming a sustainable entity is not just about the company's efforts, but includes its users and supply chain (Høgevold & Svensson, 2012). Employee engagement is an intangible outcome of sustainable efforts. However, it is hard to measure such activity (Sridhar, 2012). Incorporating sustainable practices into organizational culture requires engaged leaders, buy-in by all stakeholders, and employee commitment (Eccles, Ioannou, & Serafeim, 2012). Organizations struggle to tell their stories, after executing a sustainable platform (Sherman, 2012). Further, Kara et al. (2014) found that when sustainable tactics are government mandated, larger organizations contract third party contractors to become compliant. Thus, those leaders who commit from the top down may have better buy in from all stakeholders, as they realize the initiatives' intent and purpose.

Organizational leaders may see tangible and intangible outcomes, after committing to a sustainable program. In a study of 180 U.S. companies, those that embraced sustainable activities before 1993 performed better, over an 18-months period, in stock returns and accounting metrics, than low sustainability companies' commitment (Eccles, Ioannou, & Serafeim, 2012). When managers integrate sustainable behaviors, they may realize lower expenses in difficult economic times, thus achieving competitive advantage (Saltaji, 2013). Leaders link sustainable practices to brand strategies internally and externally, but the two biggest triggers are market needs and organizational value

factors (Lindgreen, Xu, Maon, & Wilcock, 2012). Mmboswobeni and Solly (2012) recognized sustainable business strategy as an integral marketing tool. Additionally, integration of sustainable practices can boost organizations' brand equity, without incurring substantial advertising and promotional costs, traditionally tied to increasing perception of corporate brand image (Khan & Manwani, 2013).

Mujtaba and Cavico (2013) developed the Business Sustainability Continuum (BSC) as a framework to engage in sustainable business activities and to guide decision making. The premise of BSC is to guide organizations to business activities that adopt a profit model, but also considers social intentions as a means of doing good business (Mujtaba & Cavico, 2013). Gadeikiene, Banyte, and Kasiuliene (2012) found that companies executing a sustainable framework see consumer loyalty as an outcome of their actions, giving customers a sense of belief and commitment to the organizations.

Leaders of larger organizations are under greater scrutiny and are faced with more opportunities to comply with CSR initiatives given their visibility. Small business leaders, though, have a favorable organizational structure to implement sustainable business and integrate it into corporate culture (Baumann-Pauly, Wickert, Spence, & Scherer, 2013). Further, it is easier to embed sustainable tactics into small businesses, as entrepreneurs drive corporate culture and can convert goals into strategy (Del baldo, 2012). Leaders of bigger organizations, however, have the infrastructure to promote sustainable activities outside of their organizations, leading to positive perceptions (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013).

Sustainable Leadership

Gomes, Scherer, Goncalves de Menezes, Da Luz Netro, and Kurglianskas (2013) uncovered a positive link between sustainable business practices and profitability however discovered that sustainable leadership strategy development was in its infancy. The intricacies of the adopting sustainability into culture, values, and structure suggests a team orientation (Waite, 2014). Leaders who engage in sustainable leadership strategies, balance long-term environmental and social outcomes with the various organizational stakeholders (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). Sustainability measures align more with personal values such as trust, morality, and environmentalism suggesting a non-traditional leadership style (Stuart, 2013). On the contrary, Metcalf and Benn (2013) found that leaders with a strong fiscal motivation adopted an autocratic leadership style with a micro worldview. de Oliveira, Valentina, and Possamai (2013) suggested that given the complex nature of organizations and the demands of stakeholders, traditional leadership models do not fit. Metcalf and Benn (2014) posited that authentic, ethical, and transformational leadership styles are more prevalent in sustainable organizations. Further, the complicated landscape of sustainable environments suggests that shared leadership strategy may work best, as it embraces a cooperative team mentality (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). While corporate interest in sustainability gains momentum, there is little evidence that outlines how to implement sustainable practices into corporate structure (Vlachos, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2013).

The foundation of sustainable leadership is that businesses are fragments of the natural world (McCann & Sweet, 2014). Sustainable leadership's (SL) foundation creates

value for all stakeholders (Tideman, Arts, & Zandee, 2013). Further, sustainable

leadership is based on balancing TBL principles (McCann & Sweet, 2014). Avery and

Bergsteiner (2011a) indicated that sustainable organizations do not focus on short-term,

low cost tactics but integrate long-term integrated strategies with a goal of developing a

loyal supplier base. These long-term relationships suggest partnerships with suppliers and

other stakeholders for a positive business relationship. Further, behaving in an

environmentally and socially responsible manner initiates customer and employee loyalty

and stockholder reinvestment (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). Vlachos et al. (2013)

advised that sustainable leadership models positively inspires employees and given them

greater job fulfillment. In addition, McCann and Sweet (2014) found that sustainable

leadership helped instill ethical and sustainable behavior among employees. Additionally,

Wolfgramm, Flynn-Coleman, and Conroy (2015) uncovered that leading sustainable

organizations required a particular type of leadership, one that required new skills and

abilities from leaders.

Sustainability is a mega-trend that requires an in-depth commitment by

organizational leaders (Stuart, 2013; Tideman et al., 2013). This movement mandated

that the businesses, the economy, society, and the environment no longer work in silos

but collaborate continuously (Tideman et al., 2013). Further, Avery and Bergsteiner

(2011a) suggested that not adopting a sustainable framework could increase the cost of

doing business, either through financial or economic disasters, creating irreparable brand

damage.

Organizational change is an involved process that takes time and expends resources. Even organizations ranked highly by their peers, continue to improve processes and streamline operations (Tideman et al., 2013). Sustainable leadership integration requires transformational shifts in terms of processes, thinking, and structures (Tideman et al., 2013). Avery and Bergsteiner (2011a) suggested that while it may be difficult for public companies to integrate a sustainability model, due to pressure for short-term profits, it is possible. A sustainability model or framework provides an organization with a roadmap and guidelines.

Eccles, Perkins, and Serafeim, (2012) found that a strong leadership commitment provided employees with incentives to commit to sustainable practices because they believed leaders were empathetic towards the organization and the stakeholders. Avery and Bergsteiner (2011b) found that sustainable leadership bonded all stakeholders as long-term goals were similar. While sustainable business leaders may experience uncertainty with external variables, such as economic issues and corporate mergers, it provided a framework for moving forward when such events take place (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). Vlachos et al. (2013) posited that charismatic sustainable leadership behaviors might influence employees' ethical and moral motives. McCann and Sweet (2014) also found that employees perceived sustainable leadership as a long-term strategy, rather than a short-term fix. Rahardjo, Idrus, Hadiwidjojo, and Aisjah (2013) outlined conditions that managers should promote to integrate corporate sustainability management including a strong commitment, long-term focus, a sustainable culture, inclusion of all stakeholders, and a collaborative model.

Del baldo (2012) suggested a prerequisite for a sustainable business model is the dedication and involvement of upper management, to create mission and vision away from profit maximization towards a longer term sustainable orientation (Del baldo, 2012). Stuart (2013) found that business leaders provided the structure to implement sustainable systems and provided the sustainable leadership that can transfer to the corporate brand. Further, Marais (2012) found that corporate CEOs must engage in sustainable rhetoric to legitimize sustainable practices.

While leaders made significant strides over the years, in sustainability integration, some still struggle to incorporate strategies into everyday processes. A global study of 5,300 managers and leaders, conducted by MIT Sloan Management Review and Boston Consulting Group (BCG), found that those companies self-identified as having sustainable corporate cultures increased 7 percent in the past five years (Kiron et al., 2014). Additionally, the data were vastly different from those who self-identified as having a sustainable mindset and those that do not. Of those organizational leaders who deemed sustainability as significant, 69% developed a business case for sustainability; whereas only 37% of all respondents indicated they adopted a business case (Kiron et al., 2014). Further, Sherman (2012) found that the inconsistency in sustainability reporting and measures provided an additional challenge for companies. Organizational leaders wishing to integrate sustainability measure into corporate policy may have difficulty determining how to get started. Many managers rely on measurable items to determine success in the sustainability arena. However, many of the outcomes of sustainable movement are intangible, thus difficult to measure (Kiron et al., 2014).

Leading a sustainable organization or leading the adoption of sustainable strategies presents challenges for leaders. Metcalf and Benn (2013) found that leaders must be able to wade through the complex issues organizations face today and leverage their emotional intelligence to solve the intricate challenges. Waite (2014) suggested that while leaders understand the value of integrating such policies into organizations, many still hesitate to bring sustainability efforts to the forefront, given the focus on stockholders' short-term profit-driven agendas. Thus, high intention does not always lead to successful implementation.

Sustainable leadership is a mega-trend that requires commitment and involvement from managers because of its connection to personal and organizational morals and values (Stuart, 2013). Stuart (2013) also posited that while leaders play an integral role in initiating sustainable business strategies into corporate policy, leaders also play a crucial role in perpetuating the organizations' sustainable brand. Further, leaders with high emotional intelligence are also better positioned to lead sustainable organizations due to the complicated problem solving skills necessary (Metcalf & Benn, 2013).

Sustainable leadership suggests a culture of shared vision and values (Suriyankietkaew, 2013). Further, sustainable leadership implies the need for managers and decision makers to take a global view of the organization to understand its goal and purpose (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011b). In addition, sustainable leadership suggests an inclusive model and team-like atmosphere. Decision making should be consensual and include all stakeholders (Suriyankietkaew, 2013). Leaders may also advance sustainable directives by encouraging and promoting self-directed employees (Suriyankietkaew,

2013). Further, leaders who can communicate sustainable strategies using persuasive language are better able to direct organizational change (Marais, 2012).

Honeybee Leadership Model

Avery and Bergsteiner's HLM provided the conceptual framework for this study. This model is a series of 23 sustainable leadership qualities that supports foundation practices, higher-level practices, and key performance drivers (Kantabutra, 2012). The HLM is a framework where there is a connected relationship between all stakeholders in an organization (Kantabutra, 2011). Stakeholders include leaders, employees, consumers, stockholders, suppliers, and the communities where companies do business (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011b). The HLM implies a humanistic approach that values stakeholders and considers an organization's contributions to society (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). Additionally, using the HLM, leaders may improve overall performance, potentially increasing corporate survival rates (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). The HLM suggests organizations focus on long-term initiatives while engaging actively in communities.

The HLM is a multi-layered model that goes further than the triple bottom line initiatives of people, profit, and planet (Kanabutra, 2012). Avery and Bergsteiner suggested that results from the HLM may that increase brand equity, customer approval, long and short-term financial viability, and suggested long-term results for all stakeholders (Kantabutra, 2012). Avery and Bergsteiner arranged the model's 23 leadership qualities into three categories in a pyramid shape, with 14 foundation practices at its base (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011b). Six higher level practices, such as staff retention and ethical behavior form the second tier of the pyramid, while three key

performance drivers occupy the next level (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011b). The summit of the HLM includes five performance outcomes which include: "(a) brand and reputation, (b) customer satisfaction, (c) financial performance, (d) long-term shareholder value, and (d) long-term stakeholder value" (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011b, p. 14).

The 23 practices are interdependent and reinforce one another within the levels (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011b). Outcomes from the HLM include brand equity, consumer approval, financial stability, long-range investor value, and enduring significance for all stakeholders (Kantabutra & Avery, 2013). Leaders adopting the HLM suggested shared vision and values are crucial to successful implementation (Suriyankietkaew, 2013). Avery and Bergsteiner indicated integrating this model might provide a greater potential for long-term organizational viability than a stockholder first model, which focuses on short-term returns for investors only.

The HLM is a stakeholder-first versus a shareholder-first focus. The stakeholder-first attitude promotes the retention of staff during difficult economic times, which allows organizations to retain valuable institutional knowledge (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). The model endorses a strategy, which focuses on sustaining organizations for the future (Kantabutra & Saratun, 2013). Avery & Bergsteiner (2011a) suggested that the HLM provides leadership with tools to propose a dramatic shift in culture, values, and expectations. To do so, conducting an audit of how leadership perceives the 23 practices within its organization, is a first step.

Businesses leaders may see appreciable gains after implementing the HLM. Johnson (2011) used quantitative analysis to assess the top three sustainable businesses,

as measured by the DJSI. These three organizations, in differing industries, were more financially stable than their nonsustainable counterparts were (Johnson, 2011). Kantabutra (2012) also found that after integrating the HLM into corporate strategy, Thailand's True Corporation increased its corporate reputation, improved customer loyalty, created long-term investor value, and produced stakeholder value. Finally, Avery and Bergsteiner, (2011b) found that under the HLM, BMW performed highly in all five performance outcomes. In fact in 2010, BMW ranked as the most reputable automotive manufacturer in the world (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011b). While organizations may see initial investments in resources to adopt the HLM, the results are far-reaching.

Adopting an HLM can be disruptive and requires careful, deliberate implementation. Organizations adopting such a model could incur financial costs and could require additional resources (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). Further, leaders must invest in the organization's future, which may limit immediate growth during the adoption phase (Kantabutra & Saratun, 2013). Thus, leaders should consider all implication when adopting and share this information with stakeholders.

The essential goal of the HLM is to leverage the 23 leadership qualities so organizations can develop sufficient social capital to withstand potential economic slumps (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). Using the HLM, leaders may continue to concentrate on long-term initiatives, even when economic pressures suggest overthrowing them in favor of short-term fixes (Kantabutra & Saratun, 2013). Further, many components of the HLM correlate positively to overall shareholder value (Johnson,

2011). A driving force to integrating the HLM may be the potential cost of not becoming a sustainable organization.

Shared Value

The inclusion of sustainable business strategies and tactics into everyday corporate strategy suggests an emerging paradigm for organizations. Shared value is an approach that does not focus entirely on short-term profits for shareholders but long-term value for a multitude of stakeholders and society (Maltz & Schein, 2012). Thus, shared value construction means forging a deeper connection between social and economic development (Maltz & Schein, 2011). Haymore (2011) implied that leaders in public organizations who implement shared value systems are social enterprises and become leaders for others. Further, they employ roles traditionally occupied by governmental and nonprofit agencies (Haymore, 2011). Avery and Bergsteiner (2011b) suggested that shared values and vision as a foundation level component to its HLM.

Michelini and Fiorentino (2012) offered two approaches to attaining shared value, utilizing social and inclusion business models. The social business approach is a model where business leaders provide products and services for consumers for both low and high income constituents (Michelini & Fiorentino, 2012). Adopting this tactic may require companies to present a new value proposition, as it represents a holistic business approach. The inclusive business model, however, suggested leaders embrace low income consumers with an offshoot company (Michelini & Fiorentino, 2012). This may allow managers to tailor approaches specific to the demographic target market segmented. Managers who use either method may serve the underserved populations

using differing approaches. These methods are still relatively new concepts that are widely abstract (Maltz & Schein, 2011).

Sustainable Marketing and Greenwashing

Marketers use terms like eco-friendly, sustainable and pro-environment to describe promotes organizations' sustainable activities (Shahzalal, 2013). As a result, consumers and business professionals alike use the term sustainable marketing interchangeable with terms such as eco-marketing, green marketing, and environmental marketing. Morris (2012) proposed that one of the biggest challenges with sustainable development is the plethora of terms to define sustainability and the vagueness of some of the terms. Sustainable marketing refers to promotional activities that diminish environmental harm while appeasing all stakeholders (Arseculeratne & Yazdanifard, 2014). Green marketing strategy is not a new concept. It dates back to the 1980s when consumers demanded organizations adopt sustainable business practices, and environmentalists urged organizations to be respectful stewards of the environment (Arseculeratne & Yazdanifard, 2014). Consumer demand for environmentally friendly products and services hastened the development of green marketing strategies among businesses (Samarasinghe, 2012).

Operating under a sustainable lens allows organizations to not only provide products and services that do less harm to environments and communities but also to offer better goods and services and innovations (Hynds, 2013). Organizational leaders understand that if they engage in sustainable business activities, consumers are more likely to purchase their organizations' goods and services (Kang & Hur, 2012). As

consumers demand sustainable business methods, competition increases as companies provide more sustainable products using green marketing initiatives. Kang and Hur (2012) suggested that leaders focus not simply on sustainable business practices but also on sustainable branding, packaging, and marketing. Ahmad (2012) contended that when corporate leaders engaged stakeholders in sustainable planning practices, they became more impactful, because those actions connect with high-level self-definition needs. Further, Kang and Hur noted that business leaders must contemplate the relationship between customers' brand connections to augment corporate brand equity. Thus, when consumers and other stakeholders feel an organization satisfies an intrinsic need, they may become loyal customers.

Consumers will pay premiums for products perceived as green or sustainable (Tully & Winer, 2014). Mitchell and Ramey (2011) found that consumers paid more for sustainable products, even when economics times were difficult. Further, they suggested that consumers were willing to pay more money buying CSR products and services, if they believed they would be respected and admired because of it (Mitchell & Ramey, 2011). Hynds (2013) uncovered as organizations strive to reduce their carbon footprints, they may find consumers willing to pay more for sustainable products for either altruistic reasons or to reduce their consumption of natural resources. Barber, Kuo, Bishop, and Goodman (2012) revealed that personal intention and self-respect affect intention to pay more for sustainable products. In addition, aligning sustainable features and benefits to qualities consumers consider valuable may increase an organization's ability to attract new customers (Bask, Halme, Kallio, & Kuula, 2013). Further, customers use positive

CSR contributions to influence consumer decision-making (Vázquez, Lanero, García, & García, 2013). Thus, if organizations incur additional costs producing sustainable goods and services, consumers may be willing to pay a premium if they perceive the value.

The adoption process for eco-friendly products is irregular, unpredictable, and hard to determine patterns (Ramirez, 2013). Additionally, consumers still consider price as an essential influence in the decision-making process. Borin et al. (2013) found that even as the demand for green products increases, price is still a major driver to purchase decisions. Kuhn, Zajontz, and Kollmann (2012) found that while environmentalism is emotional for consumers, it does not play as crucial a role in changing suppliers as brand recognition or price. Because bringing sustainable products to the market is a sizeable investment for organizations, Ramirez (2013) suggested a reasonable pricing structure that does not take advantage of consumers.

While sustainable business efforts increase and consumers adopt sustainable purchasing habits, skepticism and confusion still exists among consumers. Raska and Shaw (2012) suggested that consumers are dubious about organizations' green intentions and sustainable initiatives. Gleim, Smith, Andrews, and Cronin (2013) found that consumers were ignorant about sustainable product availability, either because of low knowledge levels or poor shelf placement in retail outlets.

Much of the skepticism among consumers and other stakeholders is due to greenwashing claims. Greenwashing implies the distribution of incorrect or misleading information about an organization's environmental efforts to promote a healthy green image (Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla, & Paladino, 2012). BP supported its "Beyond

Petroleum" marketing initiative, prior to the company's disastrous oil spill, which

perpetuated consumers' greenwashing perceptions (Nyilasy et al., 2012). Some business

leaders see the emergence of sustainable business, as an opportunity to gain additional

market share without being fully invested in the process (Mitchell & Ramey, 2011).

These tactics, which appeared more as window dressing than authentic, sustainable

business commitments, can harm all firms with a legitimate interest in a sustainable

model. Nyilasy et al. (2012) proposed that those organizational leaders, particularly those

with a weak green record, should not promote sustainable tactics, due to skepticism that

already exists within consumers.

The positive brand image sustainability provides an organization is one reason

greenwashing may occur. Organizations may achieve positive brand equity and corporate

image when leaders honestly promote CSR activities and strategies (Ravi, 2012). Boerner

(2013) found that organizational reputation rankings were more likely to include

businesses that reported their sustainability activities. Further, Wilson (2013) suggested

that positive sustainability ratings implied organizations use more sustainable products,

production practices, and facility operations. These ratings may increase brand

perceptions' among consumers.

Business leaders use a variety of vehicles to communicate sustainable business

practices. Peters and Zelewski (2013) suggested that marketing approaches such as eco-

labeling and informational campaigns that promote and inform might help to enhance

consistent communication and educate consumers. Further, a quality leadership approach

augmented these initiatives (Peters & Zelewski, 2013). Kuhn et al. (2012) suggested that

eco-marketing tactics tap into consumers' emotions, and even though quality and brand play a greater role in decision processes, interest in sustainable continues to grow. Additionally, as green marketing becomes mainstream, consumers become aware and sustainable products gain in prominence (Ryan, 2012). Thus, green marketing can be a powerful, social force in both creating awareness and driving customers to sustainable products. However, Ryan (2012) warned that while marketing can be influential in consumer decision making, it could also have the opposite effect if greenwashing occurs.

Sustainable Metrics

Implementing sustainable measures into corporate strategy requires a collaborative and integrated effort. The fruits of applying such approach are not precisely quantifiable (Del baldo, 2012). Baumann-Pauly et al. (2013) found that inserting sustainable initiatives across large corporations required a substantial investment in infrastructure. This investment in terms of resources and time may deter some leaders from taking steps to initiate such strategy.

Corporate profits and additional revenue is a great motivator to commit to a sustainable agenda. However, 32% of respondents to the Sloan BCG survey perceived that sustainability-related actions impacted profits, and an equal number of respondents found the efforts neither added to nor subtracted from earnings (Kiron et al., 2014). Eleven percent of respondents thought the efforts reduced corporate profitability (Kiron et al., 2014). Additionally, corporate investors typically look at corporate profits as their sole measure of success, instead of reviewing holistic measures such as sustainability (Starbuck, 2012). In addition, respondents to the Sloan BCG survey believed issues of

competitiveness, which include corporate profitability, to be the most important economic item facing companies today (Kiron et al., 2014).

Høgevold and Svensson (2012) concluded that focusing on an organization's social and environmental impact could be profitable for businesses. Kruschwitz (2013) suggested that companies that adopt sustainable business tactics might experience a reduction in energy costs, as well as an increase in corporate image. Mujtaba and Cavico (2013) suggested a model that balances CSR with corporate profits. Additionally, Randheer, Al-Aali, and Al-Ibrahim, (2014) uncovered that consumers show increased interest in green consumption, creating profitable business opportunities for companies adopting sustainable business models.

Starbuck (2012) found that one of the greatest drivers of sustainability integration might be with investor relations, as private and institutional investors consider sustainability as a critical consideration. Rahardjo et al. (2013) indicated that the more socially responsible investors are, the greater the pressure for business leaders to adopt social and environmental stances. Further, as the advantages of sustainability reporting become stronger, companies will disclose more data, rendering the results more tangible and acceptable (Boerner, 2013).

Sustainability Debunked

While sustainability endeavors expand across organizations, challenges exist in implementing consistent strategy, compliance, and engaging all stakeholders. Integrating sustainability across the world is large in scope where more than seven billion people live on less than two dollars per day; and greenhouse gases and may have broad reaching

impacts on the environmental condition (Ravi, 2012). Further, as global trade expands across nations, organizations struggle to maintain consistent, sustainable supply chains (Abbasi & Nilsson, 2012). Attempts to calculate sustainability's success within organizations may also fall flat, where traditional measurement does not work (Eccles, Perkins, & Serafeim, 2012). Kiron et al. (2014) found that the more intangible the results, the less likely a company would be to integrate such strategies. Incorporating sustainable efforts requires deep organizational commitment and transformational change where results are not immediate (Eccles et al., 2012).

Two-thirds of respondents to the Sloan BCG survey indicated an interest in social and environmental concerns, however only 10 percent revealed their companies confronted the issues directly (Kiron et al., 2014). Thus, while leaders understand the need for sustainable strategies and tactics, few understand how to implement them. Wolfgramm et al. (2015) suggested that due to the intangibility of sustainability measures, employees often do not see leaders engaging in these efforts, rendering the tactics invisible. Further, Metcalf and Benn (2013) indicated that sustainable business and corporate leadership are both complicated matters, and combining the two results in a layering of complexity that is hard to maneuver. While managers may desire to start adopting some sustainable principles, the concept of where and how to start may be overwhelming. Leaders engage sustainable initiatives due to a multitude of business and environmental mandates (Iarossi, Miller, O'Connor, & Keil, 2013). One of the most compelling reason leaders incorporate sustainable strategies into corporate strategy is through visions and ambitions or corporate leaders (Iarossi et al., 2013).

The sustainable business model has its critics. While the recent financial and environment scandals provided greater visibility to sustainable practices, managers do not always understand the benefits of adopting new models (Kantabutra & Avery, 2013). There are a limited number of organizations that commit to a broad reaching sustainable model (Eccles et al., 2012). Engaging in a sustainable model requires a long-term macro view of organizational practices in an environment where the short-terms profits rule (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011a). Ravi (2012) suggested that until stockholders and stakeholders reward sustainable efforts, as they do for the profitability efforts, the tipping point for sustainable is unattainable. Further, while stockholders pressure organizations towards short-terms profits, public companies are also under scrutiny from financial analysts and their respective industries for high financial returns (Kantabutra & Avery, 2013). Some sustainable companies, such as BMW, have strong financial records and receive insulation from sustainable skeptics, however, other less-known organization do not have such experience to fall back on (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011b).

Business leaders are under scrutiny to focus on short-term returns from stockholders, which creates challenges in adopting sustainable strategies (Kantabutra & Avery, 2013). Additionally, consumer acceptance of sustainability is unclear. Raska and Shaw (2012) posited that green skepticism is prevalent, and consumers are wary of sustainability initiatives. Further, Williams et al. (2014) determined that unexpected lifecycle challenges might perpetuate perceptions of greenwashing. Nyilasy et al. (2012) found that ambivalent consumers were more likely to be skeptical about green claims. Additionally, Hahn and Lulfs (2013) uncovered that while sustainability reporting should

be a fair report of organizations' sustainable efforts, because it is voluntary, some may view the data as biased or untrustworthy. Thus, while sustainability remains a driving force in business strategy today, its future is not certain, and skeptics abound.

The Sustainable Future

The future of sustainability is uncertain. While the HLM is a leadership framework that may guide organizations as they consider implementing a sustainable business model, the complex nature of sustainability presents a myriad of challenges (Kantabutra & Saratun, 2013). Fontaine (2013) posited that CSR strategies position organizations to focus on the needs of future generations. Predicting the needs of future generations, however, is a difficult task because of constant advances in technology that impact natural resources (Morris, 2012). Compounding this is the fact that governmental and organizational leaders may be more interested in their personal pursuits of winning their next election or their organization's next quarterly earnings report (Ravi, 2012). Thus, meeting needs for the future is one of the most difficult quests in sustainable development (Morris, 2012).

Christofi et al. (2012) argued that integrating sustainable metrics into corporate policy might thwart future efforts of corporate mismanagement. However, while public opinion of sustainability is strong, it is also unpredictable. Only 32% of millennials identify as environmentalist whereas 40% of older generations identify as such (Pew Research Center, 2014). Further, the inconsistent green strategies used by corporate leaders complicated the landscape for consumers, causing confusion and skepticism

(Borin et al., 2013). However, consumers indicated a willingness to pay more for sustainable products (Tully & Winer, 2014).

In the past, governmental leaders drove sustainability measures through compliance-like legislation (Starbuck, 2012). However in today's business environment, sustainability indices like the DJSI and GRI-G3 are sustainability assessments of large corporate entities (Christofi et al., 2012). Further, third-party organizations like B Corp allow consumers to be aware of organizations' sustainability scorecard (Andre, 2012). Leaders should view sustainability initiatives not as an added costs but as an investment and to counter the risks associated with environmental, financial, and social concerns and long-run viability (Christofi et al., 2012). Therefore, third-party endorsements may allow leaders to influence stakeholders and enforce a long-term approach and influence long-term viability.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how business leaders can integrate sustainable strategies and move beyond individual reactive tactics, in order to gain competitive advantage. Section 1 provided the basis for this study. This foundation introduces the problem and purpose of the study while also providing the conceptual framework and the significance of the study. Further, in Section 1 I outlined the research methodology chosen and introduced the research question for the study. In the review of literature, I presented a historical perspective of business sustainability practices and introduced contemporary sustainable leadership strategies. This perspective included Avery and Bergsteiner's HLM, which served as the conceptual framework for

this study. Additionally, in the literature review I presented an overview of sustainable

marketing and greenwashing, sustainability rankings, sustainable metrics. Finally, I

included a summary of concerns regarding sustainable initiatives.

In section 2, I define the project and provide specific details of this distinctive

study. I justified the choice of qualitative research method and design for this study. In

this section, I outline the role I played as the study's researcher and specify detailed

information about the participants. Further, Section 2 contains: (a) population and

sampling, (b) data collection instruments, (c) ethical research, (d) data collection and

analysis techniques, and (e) reliability and validity of the research conducted. In Section

3, I share the findings of this study in relation to the HLM conceptual framework.

Additionally, Section 3 outlines the application for professional practice, implications for

social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for addition research in

sustainable leadership. Finally, I reveal personal reflections on the research, sharing

personal biases and offering insights into my personal beliefs on the topic, having

completed the study.

Section 2: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how business leaders can integrate sustainable strategies and move beyond individual reactive tactics, in order to gain competitive advantage. Little information exists about this phenomenon, and there is increasing interest in sustainable business strategies to move organizations forward. Haymore (2011) acknowledged the challenges business leaders face when attempting to incorporate sustainability into corporate policy. In this section I outline the process for data collection, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization, data analysis, and the reliability and validity processes used.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the sustainable leadership strategies that business leaders integrate to increase corporate revenue. The population was business leaders who have lead successful sustainable business activities in Western Michigan. This population was suitable for this study because sustainable business leaders influence corporate initiatives that translate to more socially responsible actions and behaviors (Marais, 2012). Additionally, as leaders embrace innovation to differentiate and survive, sustainability becomes increasingly important in their organizations (Waite, 2014). The implications for social change include the development of a leadership framework to implement sustainable business strategies, which consumers believe could positively impact environmental and social challenges (Borin et al., 2013).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in a qualitative study is to collect information about opinions, attitudes, occurrences, expectations, and behaviors (Rowley, 2012). Qualitative researchers mainly use structured, semistructured, and unstructured interviews to gather data (Rowley, 2012). After obtaining approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I distributed informed consent documentation, which according to Wahyuni (2011), should be signed off by interview participants and the researcher. I then collected data using semistructured interviews to understand the leadership skills necessary to guide sustainable organizations. Semistructured interviews represent an amalgam of structured and in-depth questioning, allowing researchers to stay within a topic but also the flexibility to uncover detailed information about a phenomenon (Wahyuni, 2011). My role in this data collection process was to follow proper research protocols and my research objectives.

Researchers must consider ethical issues throughout the research process to ensure validity and reliability (Wester, 2011). The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research Subjects of Research (1979) created the Belmont Report to guide researchers on the ethical considerations of conducting research using human subjects. The Belmont Report has three ethical principles that should guide researchers as (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research Subjects of Research, 1979). I followed the protocols of the Belmont Report to guide my research. Researchers could be influenced

by their culture, experiences, beliefs, and background (Wahyuni, 2011). I teach in a sustainable business program and collaborate with colleagues on sustainable trends and movements, so I have a vested interest in the topic. Additionally, I am involved in sustainable community events and activities. However, the search for information connecting theory and data collected allowed me to be more self-aware of my potential biases. To moderate the effects of my personal bias to this topic, I used methodical triangulation of diverse data sources. Triangulation of varied data sources allows researchers to augment the integrity of the information researched and presented (Wahyuni, 2011). Further, IRB mitigates the overarching need to collect valuable data with the respect and ethical treatment of research participants (DeFeo, 2013).

Participants

The participants of this study included leaders from four sustainable businesses with B Corp certification. I obtained their names through the Local First West Michigan organization's business directory. I invited contributors via e-mail preceding data collection. I shared information with participants about the nature of the study through the informed consent form. I also shared the purpose of the study and discussed with them how their participation may affect the development of a sustainable leadership model. I notified them that their participation in the research was strictly voluntary and that anytime throughout the interview process, they could withdraw. Further, I discussed my relationship with the sustainability topic. I asked each potential participant to indicate what date and time they would be willing to participate in the interview in a return e-

mail. I then followed up each e-mail response with another e-mail to confirm their participation.

A consideration for the participants' selection was accessibility and willingness (Rowley, 2012). Purposive sampling allows researchers to choose the most appropriate participants given the study (DeFeo, 2013). Researchers should use discretion when using the purposive sampling approach. DeFeo (2013) warned that when interviewing those belonging to marginalized populations, a purposive sample could further marginalize the participants. The participants for this study were not from a marginalized class. Once participants agreed to contribute the study, I e-mailed them a statement of consent (see Appendix A) to complete.

Qualitative researchers must determine an appropriate sample size for the study. Rowley (2012) suggested that the number of participants interviewed depends on the research methodology and the participants should have varied backgrounds and experiences. The participants for this study were leaders from B Corp businesses in Western Michigan, serving a diverse customer base. Creating a contributor profile allowed me to enlist a diverse population. I used purposive sampling process of these four businesses until I achieved data saturation.

Research Method and Design

Qualitative research provides opportunities to explore values, beliefs, and assumptions (Yauch & Steudel, 2003). In this study, I explored how organizational leaders integrate sustainable business strategies into corporate culture required. The qualitative research approach was the best choice to investigate this issue. The case study

was the most appropriate design for an in-depth look at leadership qualities. In the

sections below, I outline the justification for using the qualitative research method and

case study design.

Research Method

Researchers apply qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research to explore

business issues. I investigated quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method research

designs, and qualitative methodology was the best fit to study sustainable leadership

strategies. Yauch and Steidel (2003) suggested that qualitative research enables

researchers to study what drives behavior. Slevitch (2011) noted that qualitative research

allows researchers to infer the meaning of a phenomenon through in-depth inquiry.

Caprar and Neville (2012) proposed that it is best to study sustainability through the lens

of cultural and organizational viewpoints, providing support that a qualitative study

worked best. Further, given the nature of sustainable business and the increased brand

enhancement that may occur with a sustainable business model, the qualitative inquiry

was be the best fit (Sridhar, 2012). Dincer and Dincer (2013) used qualitative research to

understand what factors motivated business leaders to invest organizational resources into

sustainable business tactics. Additionally, Baumann-Pauly et al. (2013) outlined the use

of qualitative research to investigate small and large firms, to determine which was better

able to integrate sustainable business strategies into the corporate culture. To research

sustainable organizations for a comprehensive look into leadership strategies, a

qualitative approach provided the best method for investigation. Further, as B Corp

certification is a newer phenomenon, there is not a large number of certified businesses in West Michigan to study.

Quantitative researchers use hypothesis testing, mathematical analysis, and statistical investigation to measure causation (Slevitch, 2011). Quantitative research allows researchers to test large samples to provide a broad view of a data (Slevitch, 2011). Gadeikiene et al. (2012) engaged in quantitative research methodology to examine the intensity of correlations is sustainable practices. In this study I examined a phenomenon and did not consider correlations of dependent and independent variables.

I also considered mixed-method research as a methodology. Bayoud et al. (2012) tested the relationship between consumers and sustainable products using mixed-method to understand the correlation between CSR reporting and age and industry type. Mixed methods provides researchers with the opportunity to leverage the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, potentially providing stronger results (Malina, Nørreklit, & Selto, 2011). Additionally, mixed-method studies allow researchers to test new paradigms that are not supported by previous research (Symonds & Gorand, 2010). Yin (2014) remarked that mixed-method studies typically include complex topics that require a vast array of research materials. While sustainable leadership is a newer phenomenon, it is not a complicated trend requiring an extensive search of varied data sources.

I chose a qualitative method to study sustainable leadership strategies. Allwood (2012) posited that it is best to choose a research methodology based on the research problem. The qualitative method allows researchers to search for patterns within the data

and to construe meaning to that data (Allwood, 2012). Thus, to explore the intricacies of leadership strategies and to obtain an in-depth view of operational effectiveness within sustainable organizations, a qualitative approach was the most advantageous.

Research Design

I assessed sustainable leadership strategies employing the case study design. Smith (1990) implied that the objective for using case study is to provide a narrative depiction rather than outline a correlation. Yin (2014) suggested that case studies advocate an empirical detailed inquiry that explores a contemporary phenomenon in everyday situations. Further, Ciasullo and Troisi (2013) submitted that researchers use case studies to portray and clarify evolving business phenomena. Yin proposed that researchers consider case studies as single-case studies or multiple case studies, depending on the research question. I investigated four sustainable businesses that have B Corp certification as the basis for this case study.

I considered other qualitative methods such as phenomenology and ethnography. A phenomenological study measures lived experiences (Hays & Wood, 2011); however, I conducted a more in-depth exploration of those lived experiences. Ethnography studies cultural norms (Hays & Wood, 2011), and I was not interested in exploring cultural norms. A case study approach allowed me to obtain data using a variety of data collection tools providing different views on the phenomenon. A case study approach provided an in-depth, detailed account of how sustainable leaders operate within their organizations (Yin, 2014). The evolving and contemporary nature of sustainable leadership suggested that a case study was the best research design for this study. Interviews provide

researchers with an opportunity to be exposed to the new phenomenon (Qu & Dumay, 2011). In-depth interviews are appropriate for case study research because detailed data takes time to uncover (Wahyuni, 2012).

Researchers search to comprehend themes from the data shared by participants (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Interviewers must continue to obtain data until data saturation occurs. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) suggested that saturation entails continually bringing in new research participants until there is redundancy in the information shared. Thus, researchers should continue to interview past the point of saturation to reach the highest quality data (Marshall et al., 2013). Researchers should step back after each interview to reflect on the information gathered to determine the data uncovered and the saturation level of the data. As such, I interviewed participants until no new data or information arose in order to reach data saturation.

Population and Sampling

I sampled this pool of leaders of B Corp businesses, to collect a diverse range of responses. The sampling for this study was purposive. DeFeo (2012) suggested that a purposive sample allows researchers to access those participants who best fit the study and may garner a rich data. DeFeo advocated that purposive sampling allows participants to share their individual experiences, and the broad range of participants provide a variety of responses, which enabled me to gain saturation. Ahmad (2012) used purposive sampling to determine what affect a university's CSR initiatives had on students. Purposive sampling allowed me to garner abundant data on the phenomenon of sustainable leadership strategies, to achieve data saturation. Saturation involves bringing

in new interview participants until there is redundancy in the information provided (Marshall et al., 2013). I achieved saturation once the interviews stop providing new data and information on the topic. Yin (2014) suggested that the nature of a case study allows researchers the benefit of opportunities that may come up in the interviewing process, allowing data saturation to occur. Yin also suggested interviewing 3 to 5 participants in a case study design. While I received data saturation after the third interview, I interviewed the fourth participant to strengthen the data.

Selecting an appropriate sample size is one of the essential elements of creating reliable research (Marshall et al., 2013.) Inconsistent information exists regarding the ideal sample size for qualitative. Marshall et al. suggested that guidelines for samples sizes in case studies are difficult to determine. Yin (2014) recommended from three to five interviewees per case study. Sample size correlates directly with data saturation (Marshall et al., 2013). Marshall et al. (2013) suggested that researchers spend more time with participants when sample sizes are smaller. Participants participated in or reinforced their companies' B Corp certification. They provided a plethora of in-depth data about their sustainable processes.

This purposive sample consisted of four leaders from four B Corp organizations. The population was business leaders who have managed successful sustainable business activities in Western Michigan. This population was suitable for this study because these business leaders influence corporate initiatives that translate to more socially responsible actions and behaviors. I conducted the interviews at the business leaders' places of business, to better accommodate their schedules.

Ethical Research

Researchers must consider ethical issues when conducting research. When using

human subjects, researchers must protect the participants and acquire informed consent

before beginning the study (Yin, 2014). A guiding standard for all researchers is to do no

harm to participants during the interviewing process (Qu & Dumay 2011). Due to the

fluid nature of qualitative research, the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis

software (CSQDS) helps researchers to collect, record, and manage data (Sinkovics &

Alfoldi, 2012). CSQDS provides researchers organize the multifaceted data collected and

emphasize relationships among participants (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). I used audio

files to collect the interview data. I then recorded the interview data and entered the

transcribed information into NVivo software. NVivo assisted in coding and labeling the

data.

The participants for this study were over 18 years of age and were not in a

protected class. I used informed consent (see Appendix A) to notify them of the purpose

of the study and to acquire their agreement to participate (Yin, 2014). Once participants

signed the informed consent form, I reminded participants that they could choose to

withdraw from the study, by e-mailing or calling me, at any time and were not coerced to

contribute. I outlined these details in the informed consent form. Further, participants

were not offered any compensation to participate in this study. The interview questions

were not harmful or threatening. I did not commence collecting data until I acquired

approval from Walden University's IRB. Obtaining IRB approval ensures compliance

with the university's ethical standards, as well as the U.S. federal regulations. All electronic data collected are in a password-protected computer file on my personal computer. I stored all paper files in a locked cabinet. Storing data using locked cabinets and password protected files enables me to comply with ethical requirements (Wahyuni, 2012). I will keep the collected data for 5 years, as mandated by Walden University, to safeguard the rights of participants. I will then destroy all files by shedding paper files and deleting digital files. Further, I will not disclose the names of the participants and participants' organizations. I coded this information numerically, using labels Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 4.

Data Collection Instruments

I served as the primary data collection instrument, using face-to-face semistructured interview to explore sustainable leadership strategies in sustainable organizations. Rowley (2012) posited that researchers use interviews to gather information about opinions, approaches, occurrences, and attitudes. Interviews allow researchers to uncover participants' perspectives regarding a phenomenon (Wahyuni, 2012). Qualitative researchers also use questioning processes to interpret meaning (Slevitch, 2011). The interview is a crucial data collection instrument in qualitative research and requires critical listening and reporting skills (Rowley, 2012). Semistructured interviews allow researchers to probe further on topics introduced by the interviewee, suggesting a managed conversation (Cachia & Millward, 2011).

The semistructured interview questions I used were open-ended, probing questions. Probing questions allow participants to provide an account of the subject

(Wahyuni, 2012). Probing questions allow researchers the opportunity to clarify content and to delve deeper into a subject (Wahyuni, 2012). The probing quality of open-ended question is one of the assets of qualitative research (Yauch & Steidel, 2003). The central research question for this study was the following: How do business leaders integrate sustainable leadership strategies to increase revenue? I used the interview questions (Appendix B) to probe participants of this study.

Interviewing consists of questioning participants then decoding the answers (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The interpreting of the responses allows the researcher to uncover themes. Qu and Dumay (2011) proposed that researchers use interviews to gather information and appreciate themes about experiences. Marshall et al. (2013) suggested that research quality is the highest once researchers reach the data saturation point. After I completed the interviews, I debriefed each participant to expose any data not uncovered during the interview process and then transcribed the interviews. Once I attained data saturation, I used NVivo to organize the information into themes.

Researchers must put measures in place to ascertain reliability and validity. Reliability and validity ensure that the research is replicable in other settings (Wahyuni, 2012). Homburg et al. (2012) posited that participants' position and tenure within an organization add to the data's reliability. I engaged leaders in sustainable organizations, who held management positions. Additionally, I confirmed data accuracy through member checking. I used three data points to establish reliability through triangulation. Documentation for methodological triangulation included participants' interviews, peer-reviewed industry articles about sustainable leadership, and the organizations' B Corp

sustainability report data. B Lab is a nonprofit organization that independently scores corporations worldwide from 60 industries in five areas: governance, employees, customers, community, and the environment (Hickman et al., 2014). All companies interviewed are B Corp certified. Homburg, et al. (2012) noted that reliability aligns with key contributors' hierarchy and tenure within an organization. Thus, interviewing key business leaders helped validate the research findings. Finally, methodological triangulation also increased the credibility of the data collected (Wahyuni, 2012).

Data Collection Technique

Data collection for this study consisted of information collected from interview participants, peer-reviewed industry articles, and the B Corp sustainability index. I conducted semistructured interviews of participants to understand the participants' perspectives. To access participants I e-mailed them, explained the objective of the study, and asked for permission to conduct semistructured interviews. I e-mailed participants to obtain informed consent (Appendix A). The participants were organizational leaders working in a variety of businesses that are B Corp certified. B Corp's focus on governance, employees, customers, community, and the environment provided the backdrop for these organizations' sustainable efforts (Hickman et al., 2014). Leaders of B Corp certified organizations demonstrate a commitment to sustainable efforts within their communities (Andre, 2012).

The interview is a critical element of qualitative research (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Wahyuni (2012) suggested that the primary appeal to semistructured interviews is they allow the researcher some structure in the interview process while also giving participants

opportunities to discuss any subject explored in the interview. Semistructured interviews allow researchers to explore the phenomenon and provide some structure to the discovery process. Ramirez (2013) found that in-depth interviews provided for a clear understanding of a phenomenon. Using semistructured interviews allowed me to explore sustainable leadership strategies with participants to gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon. It also provided an in-depth perspective into these leadership strategies. Qu and Dumay (2011) cautioned that when interviewing small numbers of participants, care should be taken to protect their identities and their companies' identities. Further, this technique was resource intensive, and it was necessary to use probing questions to uncover the appropriate data for the study (Marshall et al., 2013).

Upon obtaining informed consent (Appendix A), I scheduled appointments with the participants via e-mail. I conducted the in-person interviews asking the interview questions (Appendix B). Interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. I conducted each interview in a secluded location to protect the participants. I audiotaped each participant to capture the data shared. Throughout the interview, I provided participants with the opportunity to review the audiotape and to confirm the accuracy of the data shared. Further, I debriefed participants upon completion of the interview allowing them to correct or add to any data already shared (Wahyuni, 2012).

Data Organization Technique

Researchers should organize data to protect participants and organizations. Wahyuni (2012) proposed locking all hard data collected in a file cabinet and storing all electronic data collected in a password encrypted folder. I sheltered all electronic data

using password protected files. I keep all paper documents locked in a cabinet, which only I have access to. To further protect participants, I eliminated names and organizations on all documents and identified participants by participant number. I will keep all data for five years, as required by Walden University; and then I will destroy this raw data, to safeguard participants' information and identity. I named the electronic file folder DBA data. Within the data file, I created subfolders to identify participants' interviews collected, and informed consent saved.

Data Analysis

Data investigation is a complex process. The data analysis process involves arranging, classifying, categorizing data, summarizing data, translating data, synthesizing data, and writing up the results of the findings (Rowley, 2012). No two research studies are the same, and the data analysis approaches are not the same either (Rowley, 2012). Wahyuni (2012) posited that researchers' values might affect researchers' interpretations. Thus, removing biases and verifying reliability and validity are crucial to the process.

The central research question for this study was: How do business leaders integrate sustainable leadership strategies to increase revenue? After interviewing the study participants, I recorded responses to interview questions (Appendix B) into a Word document. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CSQDS) aids researchers as they collect, record, and handle data (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). I used the CSQDS tool NVivo, from QSR International to code and categorize the data. NVivo allowed me to integrate data from multiple sources to sort the information into themes (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). CSQDS facilitates the coding and theming of research

topics (Rowley 2012). Further, Sinkovics and Alfoldi (2012) suggested CSQDS programs, such as NVivo, allow researchers to manage data efficiently.

After the data was coded and subcoded, I synthesized the data into themes and subthemes. Sinkovics and Alfoldi (2012) proposed that CSQDS aids researchers in organizing the data into topics. The themes aligned with my study's research questions. I used the qualitative content thematic analysis to analyze the data, making sure themes aligned with the research questions as well as the literature (Wahyuni, 2012). I aggregated the themes to find connections to the study's conceptual framework. I compared the themes and searched for quotes to support those themes.

Researchers used triangulation to determine and enhance the accuracy of the information using multiple data sources (Homburg, Klarmann, Reimann, & Schilke, 2012). Documentation for triangulation included participants' interview responses, peer-reviewed industry articles about sustainable leadership, and the B Corp sustainability reports. B Lab is a third-party nonprofit organization that rates corporations worldwide from 60 industries in five areas, governance, employees, customers, community, and the environment to determine if they earn B Corp status (Hickman et al., 2014). All the companies I interviewed were B Corp certified. Homburg, et al. (2012) noted that reliability aligns with key contributors' hierarchy and tenure within an organization. Thus, interviewing key business leaders helped validate the research findings.

Triangulation of data helps support research findings. Homburg et al. (2012) suggested researchers engage in methodological triangulation to strengthen data accuracy, using several data sources. Yin (2014) suggested researchers use corroboratory

strategies to triangulate data. I used methodological triangulation to triangulate and corroborate results using participants' semistructured interviews, peer-reviewed industry articles about sustainable leadership, and results from the organizations' B Corp sustainability assessment.

<div align="center">**Reliability and Validity**</div>

Reliability

The significance of research is dependent upon the reliability and validity of the contents. Researchers rely on credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability to strengthen and validate research findings (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). Wahyuni (2012) stated that researchers rely on reliability and validity to assert that studies are replicable. Thorough and detailed accounting for the research process also suggests dependability in the research process allowing for replicability (Wahyuni, 2012). To increase confirmability of the study, I kept research summaries and memos, as I worked through the data analysis process. Further, I checked all interview transcripts for inaccuracies, used member checking, and detailed all data collection and analysis steps to ensure accuracy. This collection of detailed information provided a comprehensive audit trail to support confirmability of the study.

Validity

In qualitative research studies, credibility is similar to internal validity while transferability is similar to external validity (Wahyuni, 2012). Member checking allowed me to confirm the accuracy of participants' responses. I confirmed credibility through member checking after the write-up phase, giving each participant a copy of the

transcript. Once I reached data saturation, I used NVivo to organize the information into key topics. To confirm validity, I triangulated the data using the participants' semistructured interviews, peer-reviewed industry articles about sustainable leadership, and results from the organizations' B Corp

Transferability suggests how applicable research is in other circumstances or settings (Wahyuni, 2012). A detailed and in-depth explanation of the research conditions may allow other researchers to transfer the research findings in this study of sustainable leadership strategies to other settings (Wahyuni, 2012). Further, Wester (2011) posited that following appropriate ethical procedures, such as IRB approval may guide researchers in attaining validity of results. The in-depth review of the research conditions may allow researchers to transfer this research to consider other geographic locations or specific industry segments.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how business leaders can integrate sustainable strategies and move beyond individual reactive tactics, in order to gain competitive advantage. In section 2, I provided an overview of the role of the researcher and participants. In section 2, I also justified the choice of research design and the research method. Additionally, I provided a description of the data collection instruments, techniques, and analysis. Finally, I outlined how I ensured reliability and validity of the study.

In Section 3, I presented the research findings. I also confirmed the application to professional practice and the implications of social change. I recommended future action

steps and further research based on the study outcomes. Finally, I shared my personal biases to the topic studied and provided personal reflections on the research outcomes. I explained how the study affected my own thoughts on the topic after reflection on the results.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

In Section 3, I outline the results of this research study. This section of the study includes the following: (a) overview of the study, (b) presentation of the findings, (c) applications to professional practice, (d) implications for social change, (e) recommendations for action, (f) recommendations for further study, (g) reflections, and (h) summary and study conclusions. I communicate the presentation of findings via the four emergent themes of organizational culture, stakeholder approach, staff engagement, and social responsibility.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the sustainable leadership strategies that business leaders integrate to increase corporate revenue. The central research question for this study was the following: How do business leaders integrate sustainable leadership strategies to increase corporate revenue? The participants were leaders working in businesses that were B Corp certified. The data collected for this study included information collected from participants' semistructured interviews, B Corp sustainability ratings, and literature review documents. This final section contains the results of the research study and connects the findings with the conceptual framework and the central research question.

The interview participants held leadership roles at four small- and medium-sized West Michigan companies that had attained B Corp status. Data collection for this study

included semistructured interviews, which I conducted in the privacy of participants'

business offices. I e-mailed participants, explaining the objective of the study, and asked

for permission to conduct semistructured interviews. I also e-mailed participants to obtain

informed consent (Appendix A) and asked them to reply "I consent" to my e-mail upon

agreeing to participate in the study. I told potential participants that contributing to the

research was voluntary. I conducted all interviews at the participants' businesses in

private spaces. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. I recorded all interviews

and took notes during the interview process.

Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed the participants' interviews into

a Word document. Once I transcribed the interviews, I e-mailed the transcribed

interviews back to participants and asked for corrections or additions. When I received

the revisions, I added them to the original transcripts and uploaded the data to the NVivo

11 software program. I identified four themes from the data collected: (a) organizational

culture, (b) stakeholder approach, (c) staff engagement, and (d) social responsibility.

Presentation of the Findings

The research question guiding this study was the following: How do business

leaders integrate sustainable leadership strategies to increase corporate revenue? I used

the following interview questions to explore sustainable leadership strategies that may

move leaders beyond reactive methods and uncover in-depth details about their

leadership processes.

1. How do you integrate sustainable leadership business strategies into your

    organization?

2. How do you reinforce these leadership strategies with all stakeholders and move beyond reactive activities?

3. Relative to sustainability, how do you balance brand equity, consumer satisfaction, and long-term stakeholder value with short-term financial viability?

4. What advantages does your organization realize when engaging in sustainable leadership strategies?

5. What disadvantages does your organization realize when engaging in sustainable leadership strategies?

6. What foundational practices, higher-level practices, and key performance drivers do you employ when integrating sustainability into daily operations?

7. How does sustainability fit in when going beyond the bottom line for results that enhance brands, consider customer satisfaction, and integrate long and short-term viability, while providing long-term value for all stakeholders?

8. What is your experience incorporating innovation and sustainability into your leadership strategy?

9. How do you keep ethical issues into perspective while maintaining profits?

10. What else would you like to share with me about how business leaders can integrate leadership sustainable strategies and move beyond individual reactive tactics, in order to gain competitive advantage?

A case study design was the best choice to explore sustainable leadership strategies to increase corporate revenue. Case study research allows researchers to

explore the how and why of a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Participants from four companies were chosen using a purposeful sampling approach. These potential participants received an invitation to participate in the interview and informed consent form (Appendix A).

The participants were leaders from small- and medium-sized businesses that attained B Corp recognition for their sustainable business practices. I found the potential participants on the B Corp community page, which showcased companies from Michigan. Eleven companies in Michigan are B Corp-certified, and nine of these are from West Michigan. I then investigated contact information on the Local First West Michigan organization's business directory. From this list, I contacted potential prospects from five businesses. Four responded to the interview request, and one did not respond.

The interviews were conducted in the participants' private office locations for the comfort of the participants and to ensure confidentiality. I asked the same questions to all participants to confirm the reliability of the study. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed into Word. After transcription, I forwarded the transcripts to the interviewees to check accuracy and add or delete information that was not translated accurately. I used NVivo 11 to help code and evaluate the data from the interviews, peer-reviewed industry articles, the B Corp sustainability reports. I achieved data saturation once the information became repetitive and no additional data came forward.

I used the HLM to analyze the data and guide me in the research. This framework promotes a humanistic approach to sustainable leadership (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2013). The HLM also fosters an environment that shapes communities, values stakeholders, and

endorses long-term value over short-term results (Kantabutra & Avery, 2011). I used the

HLM to develop potential themes for the research and to understand how business

leaders guide stakeholders towards sustainable practices. Once I transcribed the data, four

themes emerged. These themes included enabling culture, stakeholder inclusion, staff

engagement, and social responsibility. I identified participants as P1, P2, P3, and P4.

Emergent Theme One: Organizational Culture

Organizational culture was the first emerging theme, generating the most

responses from participants. Subthemes to organizational culture included sustainability

and B Corp. This emergent theme of organizational culture, which includes all

stakeholders, aligns with the conceptual framework in that enabling culture is a higher

level practice of the HLM. Those sustainable organizations with an enabling

organizational culture tend to maintain corporate ideals, even in times of turbulent

economic times or when undergoing strategic changes (Kantabutra & Avery, 2013). All

participants suggested that sustainability was a key part of organizational culture since

the organizations' inception. Some of these participants' responses included: "The

leaders valued sustainability as a whole and integration of sustainable practices has to

start with the leadership team. It would be very hard to initiate this if it wasn't a part of

corporate beginnings." (P1) "From the moment we had the business plan in our heads, we

knew that sustainability would be a value." (P4) "Sustainability was a part of us day one.

Sustainability is a part of our brand and who we are as a company." (P3) "Sustainability

needs to be ingrained in the culture. We built this model for the past 30 years and

building the soul of the company is a different ethos." (P2)

All participants also mentioned B Corp certification as being a part of organizational culture. P3 stated, "The B Corp is the best way of proving to people that we are doing those good things. That is why I think the B Corp movement is growing quickly because of the new consumer mindset and the things they are concerned about." P1 shared "I think being able to be verified by a third party, B Corp, strengthens our brand equity, because we do live in a word of environmental ambiguity." So while all participants suggested that sustainability was a part of organizational culture since their beginnings, having efforts reinforced, by a third party, legitimized these efforts to other stakeholders.

Participant responses to questions 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, and ten alluded to organizational culture. The plethora of responses relating to organizational culture suggests that an enabling culture runs deeply in all the organizations. Table 1 outlines the frequency of when organizational culture as mentioned by the participants and what percentage of the responses included organizational culture.

Table 1

Number of Times Organizational Culture Mentioned

Organizational Culture	Times mentioned	% of responses
P1, Interview questions 1, 3, 9, & 10	4	40
P2, Interview questions 1, 3, 4, 9 & 10	5	50
P3, Interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, & 9	6	60
P4, Interview questions 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, & 10	6	60

Much of the literature supported the notion of a strong organizational culture. Rahardjo et al. (2013) found that organizations with strong commitments to sustainability

had robust organizational cultures and identified social and environmental matters as corporate opportunities. Employees and suppliers perpetuate a sustainable culture by sharing core values with other stakeholders (Kantabutra & Avery, 20130). Further, Rahardjo et al. asserted that in order to successfully implement sustainability into organizational operations, a sustainable culture is key. Suriyankietkaew (2013) discovered that organizations with strong sustainable leadership promote a culture of shared vision and values. Shared vision and values was mentioned by P1 who stated "we have an incredible handbook that outlines values, vision, and goals. This makes our leadership group known and people feel like they can come to us." Organizational culture is a key component to these organizations' business models and standard day-to-day practices.

Emergent Theme Two: Stakeholder Inclusion

The second theme to emerge was a stakeholder approach to business. Stakeholder inclusion aligns with the HLM as stakeholder approach is foundation practice for the HLM. The stakeholder approach suggests an "everyone matters" philosophy instead of a stockholders only perspective (Kantabutra & Avery, 2013). All four participants reiterated their firm's commitment to stakeholders. Engaging stakeholders from all areas suggests a more transparent and ethical business model (Andre, 2012). P2 noted when answering Interview Question 2 that "we try to work with as many local farms as we can and for our suppliers that we do 80% of our business with, we provide them with a scorecard."

Community engagement was a subtheme to the stakeholder inclusion theme. All

four participants indicated a commitment to their community partners. When answering

Question 8, P3 stated "we ask our employees what they want to do for volunteer hours.

Yes, that does cost money to give people time off to volunteer, and while we account for

it, we don't see it as money lost." P4 answered Question 4 and stated "we have an

ongoing incentive the past couple years. If employees follow certain criteria, like

commuting to work or shopping at another local business, they can receive a gift card to

another local small business."

Participants' responses to questions inferred stakeholder inclusion. Table 2

outlines the frequency of when stakeholder inclusion was mentioned by participants and

what percentage of the responses included stakeholder inclusion.

Table 2

Number of Times Stakeholder Inclusion Mentioned

Stakeholder Inclusion	Times mentioned	% of responses
P1, Interview questions 4, 9	2	20
P2, Interview questions 2, 4, 8, 10	4	40
P3, Interview questions 2, 4, 7, 8	4	40
P4, Interview questions 2, 3, 6, 8, 9	5	50

Note: N = Frequency

Prior literature also supports the concept of stakeholder inclusion and

engagement. Ahmad (2012) suggested two operational facets to consider when adopting a

sustainable strategy: the quality of leadership and the integration of a broad range of

stakeholders. Each of the four participants indicated the importance of stakeholders in

everyday operations. Stakeholder inclusion is a consistent topic in past literature

discussing sustainable leadership. Wilson (2013) proclaimed that input from stakeholders

has been an integral role in the adoption of sustainable leadership strategies.

Sriyankietkaew and Avery (2014) found that organizations that value sustainable

leadership value stakeholders. Integrating stakeholders into business models allows for

transparency and for organizations to have a more inclusive culture. Establishing a

relationship with stakeholders is a critical component to creating value in organizations

(Kruschwitz, 2012). Further, Dincer and Dincer (2013) found that business models for

small businesses need to include a community element in organizational decision making.

     Every interview participant mentioned the importance of stakeholders as a way of

being inclusive. Three of the four interviewees suggested mentioned community as an

integral part of business operations. When answering Question 4, P2 stated "one of the

first things we do when holding employee sustainability classes is make sure they

understand sustainability is not just environmentalism. It is social and community too."

Further, when discussing stakeholders, three of the four participants mentioned the

importance of connecting with other local B Corps to share best practices and guide each

other to be a more sustainable business. P1 stated, "Local B Corps meet one a month to

have a round table to talk about sustainability and other global issues," in her reply to

Question 4. P2 stated when responding to Question 2 "this group of West Michigan B

Corps have become my friends, and I can go to them with questions, because I know they

are coming from the same place I am with our values aligned." Thus, there is support

among the local West Michigan B Corps that offer support and best practices to other B

Corps and the local community in general.

Another stakeholder subtheme discussed was the influence the Local First

Community organization has on the local sustainable business community. P4 declared,

"Local First really should be credited with the increase in B Corps in West Michigan.

Most other communities do not have the support that we do here" when responding to

Question 6. P2 detailed when replying to Question 4, "Local First is putting together a

group of sustainable businesses who are not necessarily B Corps and will have a mixer to

talk about sustainability issues." Later in the interview, P2 stated, "Local First was a great

resource to us in attaining B Corp with resources and background." Local First acts as a

conduit to local businesses and their sustainable efforts. Local First supports businesses

with B Corp efforts and general sustainable business strategies.

Emergent Theme Three: Staff Engagement

The third emergent theme to arise from the data collection process was staff

engagement. Staff engagement is a key performance driver for the HLM. Key

performance drivers are the highest leadership level components in the HLM (Kantabutra

& Avery, 2013). Leaders who support the staff engagement leadership quality appreciate

and value a committed staff and the ensuing loyalty that comes as a result (Kantabutra,

2012). All participants suggested a commitment to staff engagement and development

throughout the interview process. P4 stated, when reacting to question 6, "we are always

open to and encourage suggestions. We also encourage what others have done that should

be recognized, from a sustainability or customer service standpoint." P1 mentioned, "with

employees it's a 360-degree feedback process" when replying to Question 2. P3 indicated that "when you talk about a living wage and employee benefits, then it's more important to them (employees)" when answering Question 2.

Participants perceived employee training and development as crucial elements to their business models too. Three of the four participants indicated that they had formalized training processes where sustainability was an integral part. P2 stated, when answering Question 1, "our onboarding process includes sustainability where we talk about what sustainability means to us, what it means to your job, and how we can get your comfortable talking about it." P4 stated, "when we are training new hires, the B Corp is a part of that. It helps new hires understand our brand ethos and our values and what we stand for" when sharing insights on Question 1. P1 added "education is continuous. There is a defined training process, and it's slightly different at each location," when responding to Question 2.

Table 3 shows how often participants mentioned staff engagement when replying to the interview questions. It also outlines the percentage of participants' responses related to staff engagement. Respondents' responses shared a consistent message of valuing employees and employees' contributions to their organizations. P2's answer to Question 4 provided useful insights into leadership perceptions of staff when she stated "our staff is awesome. They love being here and don't leave without a good reason."

Table 3

Number of Times Staff Engagement Mentioned

Staff Engagement	Times mentioned	% of responses

P1, Interview questions 1, 2, 3, 8	4	40
P2, Interview questions 1, 2, 4, 9	3	30
P3, Interview questions 2, 8	2	20
P4, Interview questions 1, 6	2	20

Note: N = Frequency

Existing studies enforce the emergent them of staff engagement. McCann and Sweet (2014) found that business models that encourage sustainable business behavior engaged employees at all levels of the organization. Fontaine (2013) suggested that sustainable business is not just about satisfying shareholders but engaging employees and other stakeholders. Also, inclusive staff engagement can lead to positive employee satisfaction (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2014). Eccles, Ioannou, and Serafeim, (2012) indicated that high sustainability companies engage employees and have a long-term business orientation. P3 stated "as we go about educating our employees, it is understanding some of them may never really get it; but, they will get the bigger picture that we are not just a company here to make money" when he responded to Question 2.

Emergent Theme Four: Social Responsibility

Social responsibility was the fourth them uncovered during the data collection. All four participants mentioned social responsibility in their responses; however, the frequency of social responsibility was less than the other three themes. Social responsibility is a foundation level principle of the HLM. Social responsibility includes respecting communities and people, and leaders typically engage in social responsibility because it is the right thing to do (Kantabutra & Avery, 2013). Social responsibility is a component of legal or ethical behavior and a compass measuring a firm's interest and

engagement in social issues and causes that affect the community around them (Mujtaba & Cavico, 2013). P3 stated in interview Question 2 "we are here for the long-term and hope to have a positive effect on employees' lives, the community, and our customers." P1 stated "sustainability is inter-disciplinary. We've been able to able to connect with legislators, which is great because often small business is not represented" when answering Question 4.

Table 4 displays how often participants mentioned social responsibility when responding to the interview questions. It also shows the percentage of participants' responses related to social responsibility. Participant 4 shared multiple examples of social responsibility when sharing programs the company engaged in where they sponsored community events, promoted zero-waste, and partnered with other businesses.

Table 4

Number of times Social Responsibility Mentioned

Social Responsibility	Times mentioned	% of responses
P1, Interview questions 1, 4	2	20
P2, Interview questions 2, 4	2	20
P3, Interview questions 2, 8	4	40
P4, Interview questions 1, 2, 3, 8	2	20

Note: N = Frequency

Existing studies reinforced the emergent theme of social responsibility. Leaders understand that advancing their social responsibility and engagement can help to accomplish corporate objectives (Vázquez et al., 2013). Further, Marais (2012) found that leaders can use social responsibility messaging to influence corporate stakeholders and

encourage changes in processes. P1 stated in interview Question 4 that "we work in community outreach that is food and sustainability focused to stay in line with what we do." All participants indicated their organizations engaged in community outreach and included employees in their outreach efforts.

Applications to Professional Practice

The themes of organizational culture, stakeholder approach, and employee engagement are outcomes to small and medium businesses that may provide guidelines for management searching for guidance in adopting sustainable leadership strategies. Leaders adopting sustainability into corporate business models is a mega-trend, however, it presents challenges (Tideman et al., 2013). Further, the complex nature of organizations make integrating or adopting a new business model complicated (Metcalf & Benn, 2014). However, more stakeholders demand that organizations adopt policies that are environmentally friendly and socially responsible (Kiron et al., 2014). Thus, organizations will need to consider a longer-term approach to their business models as they balance people, profits, and the planet (Ravi, 2014).

Kantabutra and Avery (2013) found that companies that operate with in a transparent ethical manner and integrate a sustainable culture have positive brand images in their communities and draw talented employees. Rahardjo et al. (2013) also posited that a sustainable leadership strategy must include commitment to social and environmental issues, a strong organizational culture, effective relationships, with a humanistic approach, to all stakeholders. There is an interconnectedness among corporate

culture, mission and goals, market behavior; and the political environment influences the adoption of sustainability leadership (Mysen, 2012).

Integrating a sustainable leadership model, however, is a new concept for many and presents challenges for stockholders and stakeholders (Sridhar, 2012). Further, leaders familiar with only traditional systems to determine their successes may not be able to perceive sustainability's impact on their organizations (Eccles et al., 2012). This could prove to be frustrating and could discourage integration of such efforts.

Management that already supports sustainability in core principles may find that becoming B Corp certified could provide a third party endorsement which could legitimize their efforts even more. Further, management with leaders who are already socially and environmentally focused may have an easier time integrating a sustainable business model.

Municipal leaders who wish to promote local sustainable businesses may consider investing in a local non-profit community organization that can provide support and guidance. Participants of this research showed support for the Local First community organization which promotes local West Michigan businesses and encourages them to be more sustainable. Local First leaders also guide organizations on the B Corp certification process, providing resources and expertise. Finally, a group of businesses that support sustainable business could also provide a foundation to a community for promoting such practices.

Researchers and companies may apply these findings to businesses, which could provide a basis and framework to adopting sustainable leadership strategies. By

considering integrating a sustainable culture, stakeholder approach, and staff inclusion, managers have a starting point for this adoption. Further, by broadening their understanding of sustainable leadership models, leaders may guide other managers seeking to adopt a sustainable framework.

Implications for Social Change

Researchers may utilize these results to influence positive social change by creating leadership profiles. These strategies may enhance the lives of communities and other stakeholders. The issue of sustainable business is in constant change today. Continued pressure from consumers, employees, non-governmental agencies, and other stakeholders provides impetus to encourage organizations to adopt sustainable business practices (Wilson, 2013).

Sustainable leadership strategies remain complex due to the complexities of sustainability, the multifaceted nature of complex problem solving, and the compound nature of leadership (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Vague sustainable terminology and inconsistent policies are also a challenge for businesses (Morris, 2012). Further, many facets of sustainable business are hard to measure, as they are non-linear in nature (Sherman, 2012). The evolution of sustainable thinking, however, is continuous and businesses think of sustainability as a part of corporate strategy and everyday practice (Moura-Leite & Padgett, 2011). Consumers too realize that patronizing sustainable companies may have a positive effect on the environment (Borin et al., 2013). Business leaders consider sustainable business strategies as a way to increase corporate reputation; whereas failing to comply with such standards can negatively influence organizational

character (Lourenço et al., 2014). Operating under a sustainable framework allows management to provide products and services that do less harm to environments and communities while offering better goods, services and innovations (Hynds, 2013). Business leaders may use the findings of this study as a framework to implement sustainable leadership strategies and serve to alleviate some of the inconsistencies in thinking. Results of the study could also provide specific tactics that businesses may utilize to commence sustainable movements in their organizations. Sustainable leaders feel a responsibility to community and all stakeholders (Marais, 2012). The findings could impact communities' environmental health, through improved environmental conditions (Mitra & Borza, 2010). Further, communities could benefit from the community service outreach the employees engage in.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the sustainable leadership strategies business leaders integrate to increase corporate revenue. Organizational leaders understand the growing importance of a sustainable business model because increased numbers of stakeholders demand it (Fontaine, 2013). However, only 40% of organizations from the Sloan BCG survey indicated management was addressing sustainability in everyday operations (Kiron et al., 2014). While the integration of sustainability into everyday practice is a driving force today, business leaders need guidance in the integration.

The findings of this study could apply to existing and future leaders of small- and medium-sized businesses wishing to incorporate sustainable business practices into

everyday operations to ensure and increase corporate profits. The results could also apply to larger privately held companies who already include some sustainable in corporate strategy. I uncovered four themes from the data collected: enabling culture, stakeholder approach, staff engagement, and social responsibility. The integration of these long-term sustainable business strategies may guide leaders as they seek to differentiate themselves in the marketplace. Further, regional non-profit organizations that promote local businesses should heed these recommendation as ways to promote local business.

I will share these results with business leaders and academic leaders to perpetuate the sustainability movement. I may also share these results at local and national sustainability conferences. I also recommend that leaders wishing to adopt a sustainable leadership strategy, seek out local peer businesses and consider joining or starting a sustainable business support network. Sharing best practices and challenges allows everyone to benefit in a complex business environment.

Recommendations for Further Research

The intent of this study was to explore how business leaders' experiences guide organizations to attain competitive advantage through proactive sustainable strategies. Sustainable business is an increasing movement in the business climate, suggesting business leaders will need additional leadership abilities and skills. Additionally, organizations are complicated systems, and they will require skills to lead sustainable activities (Metcalf & Benn, 2013).

Many opportunities for future study could evolve from this research. Researchers may consider replicating this study in other areas of the United States to understand

regional differences and complexities. Additionally, a quantitative study may uncover correlations that exist between particular leadership behavior and financial outcomes. Researchers may also consider repeating this researcher with organizations with a strong, sustainable culture but that have not earned B Corp status. Finally, repeating this study in three to five years may uncover new sustainable leadership attributes. From the time I embarked on this research on sustainable leadership to the time I completed it, the number of B Corp certified companies in West Michigan doubled. Given the supportive nature of this West Michigan business community, I would expect this trend to continue. This would suggest an opportunity for future research.

Reflections

This research allowed me to explore sustainable leadership strategies with leaders of companies that have attained B Corp certification. Interest in sustainable business has been on the incline over the past 10 years, with initiatives increasing over the past five years. I have had an interest in sustainability for many years, and to explore sustainable leadership strategies with successful organizations that have become community and regional leaders was enlightening and humbling. The data I uncovered throughout this process helped me to understand the complexities of adopting a sustainable leadership model and the culture that must exist for it to prevail.

To mitigate any research bias or ethical considerations, I practiced appropriate interview protocol (Qu & Dumay, 2011). I met one of the interview participants before interviewing her. However I used reflexivity to check any research bias. I used member checking after each interview, to ascertain reliability. Member checking also allowed

participants to check the accuracy of my accounts and allowed them to add information

participants neglected to provide during the interview process. I integrated triangulation

of three data sources: peer-reviewed literature, participants' interview responses, and B

Corp sustainability data to ensure validity. Four of the five potential participants I

contacted were willing to participate in the study. Their participation in this process

allowed me to succeed in this research endeavor.

While I have admired organizations that included sustainability into their

missions, I had limited knowledge of the details of how these models could be successful.

After completing this research, I have a greater appreciation of how integrated

community, environment, and corporate profits are in sustainable businesses. While it is

admirable to be altruistic in your business approach, without a defined profit motive,

success is not possible. Further, I learned how engaging with the community and valuing

employees' contributions can contribute to that profit motive through greater employee

and patron satisfaction.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Sustainable leadership strategies provide increased brand reputation, stakeholder

satisfaction, and financial rewards. All the participants shared that their organizations'

leaders held sustainability as a guiding principle from the inception of the business.

Additionally, I uncovered three emergent themes of enabling culture, stakeholder

inclusion, and staff engagement. For all four organizations, sustainability was a core part

of corporate culture. Further, the participants mentioned community as an integral part of

day-to-day business. Employee training and development was also a key component to

staff engagement strategies. These themes and subthemes provide a framework for sustainable leadership integration. Finally, peer organizations with like-minded practices and local non-profit organizations may provide the resources and support needed for interested firms to begin a journey is sustainable business practice adoption.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent

You are invited to take part in a research study of proactive sustainable leadership strategies. The researcher is inviting leaders of organizations that have attained the B Corporation designation. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Linda Goulet Crosby, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this case study is to explore the sustainable leadership strategies business leaders integrate to increase corporate revenue. I hope to understand the specific strategies and tactics leaders engage in to lead their sustainable organizations.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Schedule an interview with me, which will last approximately 45 minutes.
- Permit me to audiotape the interview, which will help me document the accuracy of your responses.
- Provide follow-up answers, to ascertain the accuracy of your initial answers.
- Review the audiotape and provide additional clarification, if necessary.
- Share a copy of your organization's sustainability report.
- I will e-mail a short summary of the results of the study, upon its completion.

Here are some sample questions:
- How do you integrate sustainable business strategies into your organization?
- How do you reinforce these strategies with all stakeholders and move beyond reactive activities?
- Relative to sustainability, how do you balance brand equity, consumer satisfaction, and long-term stakeholder value with short-term financial viability?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Participation in this study does not pose any risk to your health, safety, and well-being. By participating in this study, you may help develop best practices for leading sustainable organizations.

Payment:

Participants receive no compensation for participating in this study.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information or your organization's information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name, your company's name, or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by coding all participants' names' with a corresponding number. All data collected with be kept in a password protected computer file on my personal computer, which is also password protected. Data collected will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by Walden University.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via linda.crosby@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep, or you may print a copy for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this e-mail with the words, "I consent", I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

I used the following interview questions to uncover sustainable leadership strategies that may move leaders beyond reactive methods.

1. How do you integrate sustainable leadership business strategies into your organization?

2. How do you reinforce these leadership strategies with all stakeholders and move beyond reactive activities?

3. Relative to sustainability, how do you balance brand equity, consumer satisfaction, and long-term stakeholder value with short-term financial viability?

4. What advantages does your organization realize when engaging in sustainable leadership strategies?

5. What disadvantages does your organization realize when engaging in sustainable leadership strategies?

6. What foundational practices, higher-level practices, and key performance drivers do you employ when integrating sustainability into daily operations?

7. How does sustainability fit in when going beyond the bottom line for results that enhance brands, consider customer satisfaction, and integrate long and short-term viability, while providing long-term value for all stakeholders?

8. What is your experience incorporating innovation and sustainability into your leadership strategy?

9. How do you keep ethical issues into perspective while maintaining profits?

10. What else would you like to share with me about how business leaders can

integrate leadership sustainable strategies and move beyond individual

reactive tactics, in order to gain competitive advantage?