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Small to Medium Enterprise Business Leaders Managing Change

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Abstract

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MS, Tiffin University, 2010

BS, Tehran University, 1987

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Organizational change is necessary for businesses to survive and prosper. One of the main reasons organizational change is unsuccessful is the inadequate leadership style used by business leaders. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies business leaders used to manage change. The target population comprised a purposeful sample of 15 business leaders from various businesses located in the metropolitan area of Southern California. The conceptual framework for this study was the transformational leadership theory, which holds that leaders can use inspiration and motivation to inspire employees, especially during times of organizational change. A pilot study confirmed that all research questions were relevant to the research topic. Data were collected through face-to-face semistructured interviews and company document reviews. Data analysis included identifying relevant themes using a thematic approach to pinpoint, record, and examine patterns. Data were compared during each phase of the data collection process, revealing themes of managing employee's needs, mentoring/training programs, motivation, influence, and communication. Member checking was used to validate themes and strengthen the trustworthiness of the interpretations. The results from this study may assist business leaders in facilitating organizational change. The implications for positive social change include the potential to contribute to job growth and employee prosperity in local communities.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my family. Thank you for all your patience, love, support, and encouragement throughout my doctoral journey. I could not have done it without you.

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Thank you to my chair, Dr. Robert Miller, for all his support and excellent mentor guidance. I could not have done this without his help. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Jill Murray and Dr. Theresa Neal for their valued feedback. Finally, thank you, Dr. Susan Davis, for your encouragement and inspiration to continue my doctoral journey.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in the United States continue to flourish even though some business leaders lack the leadership strategies required for successful organizational change (Penava & Sehic, 2014). Business environments constantly change, and managing change is a challenge for any business to adapt and survive (Carter, Armenakis, Field, & Mossholder, 2013). Bielinska-Kwapisz (2014) estimated that up to 70% of organizational change initiatives fail. Effective leadership is vital to the success of all organizations and positively affects commitment to change (Tyssen, Wald, & Heidenreich, 2014). Leadership style significantly affects job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Carter et al., 2013). A transformational leader provides a safe environment where employees can think creatively and challenge the status quo (Latham, 2013b). Employees' commitment to change occurs with leadership support and leadership job involvement with specific change initiatives (Yang, 2014). Transformational leaders recognize the need for change, create, and share a compelling change vision with all employees, inspire them to accomplish challenging performance, motivate them to perform beyond expectations, and transcend their self-interest for the sake of the company (Carter et al., 2013). Promoting a safe and empowering workplace encourages employees to accept change, therefore ensuring the survival of the business (Carter et al., 2013).

Background of the Problem

Organizational change is necessary for businesses to survive and prosper (Carter et al., 2013). Business leaders' inadequate leadership styles are the main reasons organizational change is unsuccessful (Penava & Sehic, 2014). Penava and Sehic (2014) suggested leadership behavior that supports change and includes personal involvement, persuasion, and influence leads to the success of the change. Transformational leaders influence employees in the change process by building strong connections through individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation (Carter et al., 2014). Transformational leadership is important to organizational change, and effective change strategies and leadership can support business success (Carter et al., 2014).

Researchers have discovered that organizations continuously address change, but that an organizational context subject to change increases the risk of conflict and lowered job satisfaction among employees (Sahin, Cubuk, & Uslu, 2014). Employees often resist changes because they fear unpredictable outcomes (Luo & Jiang, 2014). Therefore, change management remains a key organizational challenge (Luo & Jiang, 2014). Organizations encountering challenges when adapting to business conditions must design and successfully implement changes to their internal and external structures, processes, and strategies (Fuchs & Prouska, 2014). Mehta, Maheshwari, and Sharma (2014) emphasized successful change management is a function of effective leadership and transformational leaders' focus on change. At the employee level, an effective transformational leader changes the values, beliefs, and attitudes of employees (Allen, Smith, & Da Silva, 2013). At the organizational level, transformational leaders act as change agents who initiate and implement new directions within organizations (Allen et al., 2013). An effective transformational leader gets employees to accept change initiatives and embrace readiness for change (Allen et al., 2013).

Problem Statement

Business environments are constantly changing, and managing change is a challenge for the survival of any business (Bielinska-Kwapisz, 2014). Over 70% of all change initiatives fail because of unsuccessful leadership processes, practices, and behaviors (Bielinska-Kwapisz, 2014; Jansson, 2013). The general business problem is SME business leaders are often unsure how to embrace change and may realize less risk in maintaining the status quo. The specific business problem is some SME business leaders lack the strategies to manage change successfully.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies SME business leaders use to manage change successfully. The targeted population consisted of business leaders from a minimum of three SMEs located in Los Angeles, California, who has worked in leadership positions for a minimum of 3 years and had managed change successfully. This population was appropriate for this study because approximately 70% of all change initiatives fail (Bielinska-Kwapisz, 2014; Jansson, 2013), and those who initiate change often lack the strategies to implement it (Jansson, 2013). The implication for positive social change included the potential to provide SME leaders with strategies to implement change and survive in business, thereby contributing to job growth and employee prosperity in local communities.

Nature of the Study

The three research methods include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Bernard, 2013). I selected the qualitative method for this study. In this study, I focused on understanding the strategies SME business leaders use to manage change successfully. A qualitative research method is suitable for addressing research questions related to business practices (Marsh, 2013). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2014) explained qualitative business research provides an opportunity to focus on the complexity of business-related phenomena in their contexts. Researchers use quantitative research for empirical studies focused on examining leadership practices in the workplace to test the construct validity of the dimensions identified in the study, and to provide statistical evidence about emergent categories of leadership (Karakitapoglu-Aygun & Gumusluoglu, 2013). Using the mixed methods approach allows researchers to explore the experiences and behaviors of leadership by using both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) methods (Beck, 2014). A researcher who uses a qualitative methodology will understand people and their behavior in a social, cultural, or economic context (Hazzan & Nutov, 2014). Therefore, a qualitative method was most appropriate for this study because it enabled me to address social phenomenon, situations, and processes involving people, such as feelings, attitudes, and learning processes (see Hazzan & Nutov, 2014).

I considered four research designs that I could have used to conduct qualitative research on strategies to manage change successfully. The ethnographic approach allows researchers to explore social customs, behaviors, beliefs, and practices that define a culture (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). In a narrative study, the researcher studies the lives of individuals and turns their stories into a narrative about their personal experiences (Loh, 2013). A researcher uses a phenomenological design to explore individuals' lived experiences and perspectives regarding a concept or phenomenon (Kahlke, 2014). Using a case study design allows researchers to make inquiries concerning an event, activity, group, or individual using a variety of data collection procedures (Yin, 2012). Case study researchers have the advantage of examining a process or behavior within a location, company, team, department, or industry (Yin, 2014). Therefore, a case study design was the appropriate design for this study because, as Eriksson and Kovalainen (2014) have noted, study research allows researchers to present complex business issues in an accessible, personal, and down-to-earth format.

Research Question

What strategies do SME business leaders use to manage change successfully?

Interview Questions

1. What are some of the changes your business has made in the last 2 years?
2. What strategies are most effective in bringing about successful change within your business?
3. How did you address barriers to implementing the strategies for successfully managing changes affecting your business?
4. What additional information would you like to share about strategies for managing change successfully?

Conceptual Framework

I used the transformational leadership theory as the conceptual lens for this study. Burns (1978) first introduced the transformational leadership framework. Bass and Avolio (1997) later extended the works of Burns to include the key concepts/propositions underlying the theory: (a) individualized consideration, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) idealized influence. The basis of this theory is that leaders use inspiration and motivation to inspire followers to share the organization's vision (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Additionally, this theory holds that leaders can inspire followers to change their expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work towards common organizational goals (Bass & Avolio, 1997). As applied to this study, the transformational leadership framework allowed participants to explore perceptions and experiences related to transformational leadership behaviors as it pertains to managing change.

Operational Definitions

Change agents: Change agents sponsor and promote change initiatives in organizations (Klonek, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Kauffeld, 2014).

Change recipients: Change recipients are organizational members who carry out the change measures (Klonek et al., 2014).

Incremental change: Incremental change comprises purposeful adjustments that are small but ongoing and cumulative in effect (Carter et al., 2014).

Radical change: Radical change occurs in leaps, and disruptions (Carter et al., 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas a researcher assumes to be true without any further investigation or questioning (Jansson, 2013). My first assumption was that participants would give truthful answers to the interview questions. My second assumption was that the open-ended interview questions and document review would provide sufficient evidence to answer the central research question. My final assumption was that the sample size was large enough to reach data saturation.

Limitations

Limitations are factors that might arise in the study that are out of the researchers' control, which could affect the results and conclusions of the study (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013). The first limitation was my selection of Los Angeles as the geographical location for the study. Yin (2014) explained that limiting the geographic location to one specific area could limit the generalizability of the results to SMEs located elsewhere in the country. A second limitation was collecting data solely from SME business leaders. Marshall and Rossman (2016) acknowledged the sample population should include a broader range of business leaders to avoid a narrow population for analysis. According to Yin (2014), few case studies end as planned, and the researcher might have to make minor or major adjustments ranging from pursuing an unexpected lead (minor), to the need to identify a new case for study (major). Last, this study was limited to studying a small number of cases, so I was limited in making statements about how the research can transfer to other situations (see Yin, 2012).

Delimitations

The researcher defines the delimitations in the study, which are boundaries in the scope of the study that result from the researcher's specific choices (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first delimitation was my focus on business leaders and their strategies to manage change successfully. A second delimitation was my use of case study research to collect data from business leaders who met specific criteria in a chosen location. The final delimitation was that I examined the behaviors of business leaders in their natural context.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study may be of value to business practice because business leaders could use them to understand when to embrace change and to develop change strategies to help their businesses survive. In addition, I focused on transformational leaders and the behavioral characteristics necessary to initiate change. Focusing on the behavioral characteristics of business leaders and change may bring about an understanding of how successful leaders manage changes affecting their businesses.

The implications for positive social change include identifying change strategies to support SME business survival. SMEs with less than 500 employees are the mainstay of the U.S. economy and employment (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2015). Identifying transformational leadership behaviors used by successful SME business leaders could provide prospective and existing business leaders with the necessary information to implement organizational change to ensure the survival of their businesses. SMEs form a large part of the economy and are the drivers of socio-economic development in all countries (Karadag, 2015). Therefore, the survival of SMEs affects the economy and workforce of the world.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

I gathered literature for this review from peer-reviewed scholarly journals and seminal books. To gather this literature, I used online databases available through the Walden University Library including, but not limited to, Business Source Complete, ProQuest Central, Academic Search Complete/Premier, Emerald Management Journals, and Sage Journals. I also used Google Scholar, which enabled me to access government websites, such as the United States Small Business Administration (SBA). The SBA website served as a source of SME articles relevant to the topic of study. The literature review contains material from 121 peer-reviewed articles and books. Eighty-five percent were published within the last 5 years, from 2013 to 2017. The entire study contains material from 184 peer-reviewed articles and books, 85% of which were published within the last 5 years.

The research question for this study was: What strategies do SME business leaders use to manage change successfully? The question was appropriate for this study because the strategies of business leaders affect the outcomes of change. Understanding change and improving the ability to manage change is fundamentally important because all change processes involve engaging in change, resisting change, or causing the change to occur (Appelbaum, Degbe, MacDonald, & Nguyen-Quang, 2015). Transformational leaders win the admiration of their employees through successful strategies that achieve organizational change (Groves & LaRocca, 2012). Transformational leaders influence major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of their organization's members, building commitment towards the organization's mission, objectives, and strategies (Appelbaum et al., 2015). Effective leadership is vital to the success of all organizations and positively affects employee commitment to change (Tyssen et al., 2014).

Transformational Leadership Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how successful business leaders of SMEs manage changes affecting their businesses. In the literature review, I used the transformational leadership theory as a framework for analyzing the factors affecting change management practices. Reviewing this literature enhanced my understanding of how scholars and researchers view the importance of organizational change, the role transformational leaders play in employee engagement, and the causes of and strategies used to overcome resistance to change. The primary search keywords were *transformational leadership, leadership practices and strategies, change management,* and *business survival.*

In this review of transformational leadership, I explored (a) transformational leadership, (b) organizational change, (c) lack of organizational integration, (d) employee resistance to change, and (e) SME survival. I also explored the foundation of the theory in the introductory work of Burns (1978), and in the extended work of Bass and Avolio (1997). Further, I reviewed studies on the impact of transformational leadership theory on organizational change, and the lack of organizational integration resultant from insufficient research about organizational change and leadership. I then reviewed the role transformational leaders play in encouraging employees to accept change without resistance. I concluded with a review of literature on SME survival, and on the importance of leadership and change in maintaining a successful business.

The propositions advanced by the transformational leadership theory allowed me to explore and understand leaders' behavioral characteristics in managing and adapting to change. Transformational leadership is a collection of four dimensions: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Grant, 2012; Trmal, Ummi Salwa Ahmad, & Mohamed, 2015). Scholars have studied effective leadership approaches, and transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most important and influential leadership frameworks (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013). A transformational leader can articulate a vision for an attainable future attractive and engaging to subordinates (McKnight, 2013). Jin, Seo, and Shapiro (2016) found that followers who perceive their leader as more transformational tend to have higher performance levels, higher creativity levels, and higher frequencies of organizational citizenship behavior.

The transformational leadership model was first designed by Burns (1978). Burns defined transformational leadership as a lasting relationship characterized by more than exchanges and agreements. With transformational leadership, the leader and the follower raise each other to higher-levels of motivation and morality (Burns, 1978). The transformational leader seeks potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the person of the follower (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership, as defined by Lehmann-Willenbrock, Meinecke, Rowold, and Kauffeld (2015), is a process of influencing major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of the organizations' members; it builds members' commitment to align with the mission, objectives, and strategies.

Burns (1978) identified three concepts as central to the transformational theory: power, purpose, and relationship. Burns suggested that leadership is an aspect of power, but he viewed power as a separate and vital process. Transformational leaders possess power and exercise influence by mobilizing their power in such a way to establish control over the behaviors of others (Burns, 1978). Burns define purpose as the desire of the leader to help followers reach personal and professional goals (Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders also focused on developing relationships with followers fostered through inspirational and uplifting behavior (Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders are leaders who enhance organizational performance through empowering human resource and enabling change (Ghasabeh, Soosay, & Reaiche, 2015).

Bass and Avolio's (1997) extension of Burns' (1978) earlier work included a transformational leadership style based on four characteristics traits that they called *the four Is*: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four behaviors transform followers and motivate them to surpass their self-interests for the good of the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Bass and Avolio marked these four sets of behavioral characteristics as transformational in nature because they held that these could transform followers into high performers (Jin et al., 2016).

Idealized influence refers to engaging in charismatic role modeling that earns the respect of followers, and in articulating higher than expected goals (Kovjanic, Schuh, Jonas, Van Quaquebeke, & Van Dick, 2012). The idealized influence of the transformational leader leads to a shared vision and improves relationships with followers (Ghasabeh et al., 2015). Transformational leaders are consistent with their values, beliefs, and ethics, and are willing to consider their followers' needs over their own (Anderson & Sun, 2015).

Inspirational motivation takes place when a leader provides a vision and meaning to followers by demonstrating optimism and confidence that organizational goals are achievable (Kovjanic et al., 2012). Transformational leaders motivate their followers by giving meaning and challenge to their work (Anderson & Sun, 2015; Mokhber, Ismail, & Vakilbashi, 2015). According to Joo and Nimon (2014), followers not only seek guidance from inspirational leaders in volatile and uncertain business environments, but also want a challenging and empowering work environment.

Intellectual stimulation occurs when transformational leaders question assumptions, reframe problems, and approach existing situations with a fresh perspective (Dhingra, Gupta, & Gupta, 2013). According to Mokhber et al. (2015), intellectual stimulation assists followers to think innovatively and find alternative working processes to improve organizational innovation. Transformational leaders encourage followers to challenge existing approaches and find new solutions to correct problems (Kovjanic et al., 2012).

Individualized consideration refers to the transformational leader's attention to the achievement and personal growth of each follower by using a mentoring system (Dhingra et al., 2013). Individualized consideration takes place when the transformational leader considers the individual needs, strengths, and aspirations of each follower to develop their capabilities (Kovjanic et al., 2012; Mokhber et al., 2015). Transformational leaders help their followers achieve their true potential by providing them with a learning environment for their growth and development (Anderson & Sun, 2015).

Supporting and Contrasting Theories

Burns (1978) identified two basic types of leadership: the transforming and the transactional. Transactional leadership occurs when a leader takes the initiative to contact followers for an exchange of valued compensation; after the exchange, no enduring purpose holds them together (Burns, 1978). Furthermore, Li, Chiaburu, Kirkman, and Xie (2013) found that transactional leaders gain work effort from followers via whatever material incentives they offer. There is a clear difference between transactional and transformational leaders because a transformational leader engages with followers in such a way that both the leader and followers raise one another to higher-levels of motivation and morality (Burns, 1978). In addition, transformational leaders have a common behavioral trait; they can create, articulate, and implement a collective vision (McKnight, 2013). A leader with an attractive vision provides both a strategic and motivational focus and a clear statement of the purpose of the organization (McKnight, 2013).

In a 2016 study, Long, Yong, and Chuen used a quantitative method to explore the relationship between leadership styles and affective organizational commitment. With a sample size of 40 employees, the researchers collected data from questionnaires that covered dimensions of transformational leadership and transactional leadership style. The results of the study showed that transformational leadership style has a significant and strong positive relationship with affective organizational commitment, while the transactional leadership style has a significant and weak positive relationship with affective organizational commitment.

Studies of leadership effectiveness have led to the emergence of leadership trends and have thus impacted the leadership process. Four types of leadership often referred to in literature are (a) transactional, (b) transformational, (c) laissez-faire, and (d) change-oriented leadership (Appelbaum et al., 2015). Transactional leadership focuses on employee compliance and relies on organizational rewards and punishments to influence performance (Appelbaum et al., 2015). Laissez-faire leadership indicates a lack of active leadership, and leading followers is avoided and practically nonexistent (Furtner, Baldegger, & Rauthmann, 2013). Change-oriented leadership is more of an application of behaviors within the situational context of change implementation (Appelbaum et al., 2015). Transformational leadership, in contrast, focuses on meeting organizational needs, aims to satisfy individual needs, and evokes relationship-oriented behaviors (Furtner et al., 2013).

In a 2016 study, Prasad and Junni found a link between transformational and transactional leaders and organizational innovation. Using a multiple regression analysis of business leaders from 163 companies, Prasad and Junni found that both transformational and transactional leaders enhance organizational innovation. However, the researchers found organizations benefit more from transformational leadership in dynamic environments. The researchers also found that transformational leaders contribute to organizational innovation because of the leaders’ abilities to motivate organizational members. Whereas, transactional leaders may decrease the ability and motivation of organizational members to put forward new ideas, which could impede the introduction of new organizational structures, processes, and practices (Prasad & Junni, 2016). Organizations seeking to reinvent or restructure themselves require the support, engagement, and motivation of employees (Deschamps, Rinfret, Lagace, & Prive, 2016).

Transformational Leaders

Transformational leaders effectively achieve change by encouraging subordinates to continually anticipate and adapt to change (Stoker, Grutterink, & Kolk, 2012). Transformational leaders accept different opinions and encourage employees to participate in the decision-making process; they care about the feelings of their subordinates and foster a climate of trust (Men, 2014). Transformational leaders transform the beliefs of their subordinates, making them willing to work harder and perform at higher-levels than expected (Sahin et al., 2014). Transformational leaders are change-oriented and influence subordinates by elevating their potential, giving them the confidence to perform well beyond the desired outcomes (Gilmore, Hu, Wei, Tetrick, & Zaccaro, 2013).

Transformational leaders positively influence the well-being of subordinates and encourage organizational and individual performance beyond expectations (Kopperud, Martinsen, & Humborstad, 2014). Researchers have suggested that transformational leadership behaviors are ideal for any organization because charismatic dimensions contribute to a leader’s success in almost all organizational contexts (Gundersen, Hellesoy, & Raeder, 2012). Transformational leadership is a traditional style of leadership that is adequate for teaching employees to think independently, develop their ideas, and critically question results (Furtner et al., 2013). According to Furtner et al. (2013), transformational leaders establish high standards and goals, and provide meaning, purpose, and direction to followers and their work. Clearly defined leadership styles are important in businesses to promote employees' proactive attitudes and behaviors (Wang & Gagne, 2013). Transformational leaders motivate followers with feelings of trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect so that followers work voluntarily towards organizational goals rather than their individual interests (Song, Kang, Shin, & Kim, 2012).

Researchers found charismatic, transformational leaders with inspiring behaviors directly affect the attitudes of employees toward change (Babic, Savovic, & Domanovic, 2014). Charismatic leaders employ specific strategies regarding what they say and how they say it (Jacquart & Antonakis, 2013). Charismatic leaders create emotional bonds with their employees by stating their moral convictions, communicating high and ambitious goals, and they instill confidence in reaching high goals by using rich descriptions triggering a vivid vision (Jacquart & Antonakis, 2013). Charisma matters most for organizational performance in conditions of perceived environmental turbulence, and the charismatic leader is the savior of the organization operating in a risky environment (Jacquart & Antonakis, 2013). Charismatic leaders are those with high self-confidence, a clear vision, unconventional behavior while remaining realistic about organizational constraints (Michel, Wallace, & Rawlings, 2013). The key behaviors of charismatic leaders are role modeling, image building, and articulation of goals, demonstrating confidence, and arousing follower's motives (Michel et al., 2013).

The literature on the topic of transformational leadership received scholarly attention across leadership disciplines because of its relationship-oriented nature and positive influence on employee attitudes and behaviors, even though criticized for conceptual broadness and validity issues (Men, 2014). Transformational leaders have significant and positive relationships with organizational innovation (Mokhber et al., 2015). Researchers studied 32 companies in Taiwan and established a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational innovation (Mokhber et al., 2015). Researcher's findings regarding transformational leadership revealed that leaders are risk takers that facilitate new work processes and systems to ensure long-term benefits for the organization and its employees (Afsar, Badir, & Saeed, 2014). Transformational leaders are role models demonstrating their commitment to the core values and mission of the organization fostering a strong and shared identity perception among their subordinates (Boehm, Dwertmann, Bruch, & Shamir, 2015). Transformational leaders provide intellectual stimulation that encourages followers to find new ways to address previous problems without insubordination (Abrell-Vogel & Rowold, 2014). Transformational leader's foster mutual trust and support, and followers willingly support their organization's goals, values, and processes (O'Connor & Mortimer, 2013).

The main purpose of a transformational leader is to articulate a vision that helps employees focus attention on contributions to others and transcend their self-interest for the sake of their organization (Grant, 2012). Transformational leader's focus subordinates' attention on a shared entity based on acceptance of a leader's message and values (Li et al., 2013). To increase citizenship, transformational leaders foster employees' acceptance of organizational goals and shift team members' identities from self to team directed (Li et al., 2013). A transformational leadership style marked by inspirational appeals helps followers examine problems in new ways, and promotes and instills pride resulting in job satisfaction (Metwally, El-Bishbishy, & Nawar, 2014).

Transformational leaders incorporate the intangibles within an organization that motivates followers to make changes to optimize organizational procedures (Aga, Noorderhaven, & Vallejo, 2016). Aga et al. (2016) claimed that transformational leadership requires diverse skills, knowledge, and experience that few people possess. Transformational leaders must communicate a common vision inspiring and compelling organizational members to perform at higher than previous performance. They must create a team with the right combination of skills and knowledge. In addition, they must lead their team with a balance between drive and support and achieve organizational excellence while the organization transforms (Aga et al., 2016). Conversely, Salleh and Grunewald (2013) explained that Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) are suited to lead major transformational efforts, but few are successful even though most had a vested role in strategic planning. Salleh and Grunewald discovered most CEOs failed to accomplish transformational change because of the following reasons, failure to align the change initiative with the strategy, not involving participants in the right way, failure to install the needed reporting systems, and covering up downsizing efforts during the change. Shareholders and employees challenged these actions and the efforts compromised from the start (Salleh & Grunewald, 2013).

Sam Walton, the founder of Wal-Mart, is an example of a transformational leader (Dhingra et al., 2013). Walton traveled across the country to visit his stores and meet employees to express appreciation for their hard work (Dhingra et al., 2013). One of the main characteristics of a transformational leader is individualized consideration (Young, 2014), and Walton possessed this characteristic. Transformational leaders are comparable to exceptional parents that promote independent critical thinking and enhance a sense of self-efficacy and self-worth (Young, 2014).

Steve Jobs of Apple was a transformational leader, and his passion and enthusiasm empowered employees by encouraging them to be part of the decision-making process that ultimately affected the success of Apple (Kaliannan & Ponnusamy, 2014). Apple’s ability to innovate and adapt to change made it a successful organization (Kaliannan & Ponnusamy, 2014). Charles Schwab was also a transformational leader who took over one of Bethlehem Steel’s lowest producing mills to increase productivity (Pearson, 2012). Schwab’s transformational leadership skills converted the mill into the company’s highest producer, and his prestige as head of the company influenced workers to work beyond expectations by simple competition (Pearson, 2012). The aforementioned transformational leaders relate to the study because they all successfully implemented change into their business strategies, and possessed the behavioral characteristics of transformational leaders.

Among leadership theories within organizational research, transformational leadership captured scholars’ attention over the last 20 years (Latham, 2013a). Various studies suggested that transformational leadership consists of a set of extremely effective leadership behaviors specifically during challenging times of constant change (Latham, 2013a). Laukhuf and Malone (2015) conducted a study of 22 women entrepreneurs and discovered the transformational leadership style helped women entrepreneurs grow their businesses and develop personally and professionally. Brandt and Laiho (2013) revealed that male and female leaders are dissimilar because of different personality traits. Researchers discovered women are more transformational in leadership style than men are and differences in leadership have nothing to do with gender (Brandt & Laiho, 2013).

Leadership is important to organizations as a key differentiator for success, and the development of leaders is crucial for companies worldwide (Gentry, Eckert, Munusamy, Stawiski, & Martin, 2014). Leadership is a phenomenon considered a positive force for change and focuses on the development of individuals, groups, and organizations by spending significant amounts of time and money in the pursuit of increasing the quality of leadership (Waldman, Galvin, & Walumbwa, 2013). Transformational leadership is a commonly used model for understanding exceptional leadership behavior and outcomes and represents a viable basis for the development of more effective leaders (Waldman et al., 2013). The transformational leadership style captured the interest of scholars and organizations because it is an effective style of leadership (Yin, Leong, & Fischer, 2015).

Transformational leaders systematically initiate change by moving resources from areas of lesser to greater productivity (Singh, 2013). Transformational leaders can work with employees adapting their characteristics and achieve organizational growth and success (Singh, 2013). McCleskey (2014) stated transformational leadership has a positive impact on the employees and organizational performance. Researchers confirmed that transformational leaders have a direct impact on organizational performance, and direct involvement in all aspects within an organization brings about positive outcomes (Kovjanic et al., 2012). Transformational leadership, at higher-levels, is associated with higher-levels of employees identifying with the organization (Effelsberg, Solga, & Gurt, 2014). Subordinates that identify with organizational values have a strong feeling of affiliation and share in the organization's successes and failures as their own (Effelsberg et al., 2014). Leadership significantly contributes to the success and failure of an organization (Gentry et al., 2014).

The transformational leader's enthusiasm about the future of the organization is contagious, motivating employees to exert personal effort in their jobs to accomplish the leader's vision (Burch & Guarana, 2014). Transformational leaders that focus on coaching and mentoring transform their employee's skills and guide them to meet organizational objectives (Burch & Guarana, 2014). Transformational leaders encourage their employees to become part of the overall organizational environment and its work culture (Pongpearchan, 2016). Pongpearchan (2016) pointed out the main framework of transformational leadership mainly rely on trust and commitment created and sustained in the organization. The transformational leader stimulates employees to rethink fundamental traditions and reassess their organizational values and beliefs (Pongpearchan, 2016). Du, Swaen, Lindgreen, and Sen (2013) also revealed transformational leaders intellectually stimulate and encourage employees to question longstanding traditions so they can approach complex problems and issues in more innovative ways.

Pongpearchan (2016) explained leadership has evolved over time, theories have complemented each other, and practice has developed new elements and opened new lines of research. In today's business world, leadership must value teamwork, recognize diversity, share power, success, and failure with employees. Leadership, motivation, team, power, performance, satisfaction, and passion are terms that researchers have discussed for centuries (Pongpearchan, 2016). Transformational leadership is a new approach to management, and the roots of this concept date back to 1978 when Burns (1978) used the term for the first time. Transformational leadership is a process of organizational engagement, and a process of encouraging employees to achieve more than the desired outcome (Burns, 1978). Therefore, research has scientifically proven that transformational leadership directs organization member to accomplish the organizational vision, beliefs, values, and skills through team goals and positive performance (Pongpearchan, 2016). According to Mokhber et al. (2015), supporters of transformational leadership believe that by means of behavior, a transformational leader creates personal and professional commitment in employees toward higher-levels of self-esteem and self-actualization (Bass & Avolio, 1997).

Limitations

Andersen (2015) addressed the theoretical limitations of the transformational leadership theory as well as the lack of empirical support regarding the effectiveness of transformational leaders. Andersen indicated the transformational leadership theory neglects what leadership is about. Leadership is a set of behaviors that some individuals exhibits, which involves influencing employees to perform tasks (jobs), or to solve problems to attain organizational goals. Andersen pointed out there are no managers unless employees are present, and no managers unless tasks are solved (work to be finished). Andersen explained three main components emerged, leaders, employees, and responsibilities. Burns (1978), Seltzer and Bass (1990), and Bass and Riggio (2006) do not mention the word task in their index (Andersen, 2015). The transformational leadership theory does not explain task-oriented functions of leader's essential for organizational effectiveness (Andersen, 2015). The influence of transformational leadership's impact at work is unclear, and minimal empirical work exists examining the effects on employees or organizations (Kovjanic et al., 2012).

Leadership scholar's emphasized studies that are more empirical should be conducted to understand the role of values in the transformational leadership process, as well as the key mediating processes through which transformational leaders achieve their powerful outcomes (Groves & LaRocca, 2012). Groves and LaRocca (2012) observed that leadership research lacks support for the specific values that facilitate transformational leadership and how these behaviors generate follower beliefs relating to responsible business practices. Researchers discovered organizations should conduct a more formal assessment of the personal values of their leaders and develop a safe feedback mechanism to enhance their self-awareness of key antecedents to effective leadership (Groves & LaRocca, 2012). Transformational leadership behaviors occur more frequently in leaders more extraverted, more agreeable, more open to change, and more positive in their self-assessments, but further research is necessary to understand the factors that influence leaders to behave transformationally (Jin et al., 2016).

A vast amount of research established the benefits of transformational leadership for followers; minimal research reveals how the transformational behavior affects leaders themselves (Lanaj, Johnson, & lee, 2016). The researchers noted the lack of attention to leader outcomes is surprising given that transformational leadership ties to social exchange processes that affect both followers and leaders (Lanaj et al., 2016). Bass and Avolio (1997) stated leaders and followers are instrumental to the fulfillment of each other's needs. Unfortunately, research on transformational leadership has focused mainly on follower's needs and well-being while ignoring those of leaders (Bass & Avolio, 1997).

Concerns

Leadership is the key factor in organizational success, and the leadership theory that attracted the most attention is transformational leadership (Kovjanic et al., 2012). Researchers provided evidence that transformational leadership relates to a range of positive outcomes (Kovjanic et al., 2012). Given the effectiveness of the transformational leadership model, the next step is to examine why it evokes these desirable outcomes. Previous researchers focused mainly on (a) variables related to followers' self-perception, (b) follower's attitudes toward the leader, and (c) followers' perceptions of their job (Kovjanic et al., 2012). Kovjanic et al. (2012) suggested followers' psychological needs overlooked in previous studies. Kovjanic et al. revealed that job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and commitment to the leader occurred when follower's basic psychological needs met. Leaders affect the way employees believe in their jobs, and leaders motivate employees to perform beyond expectations, but minimal research has examined specific reasons how transformational leadership results in such a high-performance workforce (Trmal et al., 2015). Researchers discovered the leader-employee relationship influences an innumerable number of organizational outcomes, because leaders guide, support, and inspire their employees (Collins, Burrus, & Meyer, 2014).

Transformational leaders emphasize vision, values, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and inspirational motivation. Researchers explained that transformational leaders consider each employee as a unique person with different needs and interests (Bacha & Walker, 2013). Although, researchers have neglected a central mechanism proposed by the transformational leadership theory, the mediating role of employee's needs (Kovjanic, Schuh, & Jonas, 2013). Burns (1978) stated the essence of a leader's power is the extent to which they can satisfy the specific needs of the employees.

Bacha and Walker (2013) used transformational leadership theory in research and revealed transformational leaders do not pay much attention to the compensation employees receive, although this is an important factor to motivate employees. Transformational leaders must take the factor of compensation into consideration, or the researcher's findings contradict the characteristics of transformational leadership qualities because a transformational leader places the needs of employees first (Bacha & Walker, 2013). Transformational leadership is one of the most effective leadership styles, and researchers have attempted to explain its effectiveness and the mediating mechanisms that underlie the effect of transformational leadership on employee's needs (Kovjanic et al., 2013). Regardless of extensive research in the field of leadership, there is a lack of consensus concerning what makes a leader effective (Dabke, 2016). The researcher revealed that transformational leadership behaviors link to leadership effectiveness (Dabke, 2016).

Burns (1978) discussed a general view of the transformational leadership behavior, Bass and Avolio (1997) conversely provided detailed behavioral characteristics of a transformational leader. A review of transformational leadership uncovered behavioral qualities of trustworthiness, creativity, integrity, strength, and inspiration as key attributes of a transformational leader (Pongpearchan, 2016). The behaviors and strategies of a leader directly affect the level of certainty and adaptability among its followers (McKnight, 2013). Therefore, transformational leaders can resolve uncertainty among their followers, and they are adaptable to uncertainty and turbulence through the change process (McKnight, 2013). A transformational leader takes calculated risks necessary to advance the entire organization (McKnight, 2013). A transformational leader's adaptability to change enhances manifestations of leadership enabling followers to change (McKnight, 2013). The use of the transformational leadership style creates empowered leaders, and followers through the development of meaningful relationships (Burns, 1978).

Organizational Change

Organizations must constantly engage in change, and improve business processes to be sustainable and survive (Carter et al., 2013). Perkins (2012) discovered change is frightening, uncomfortable, exhilarating, and motivating, and since change is unavoidable, organizations must create conditions to encourage and promote change. According to Van Der Voet (2014), the main leadership theory that emphasizes organizational change is the theory of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership theory articulates a vision and provides individualized support enabling effective leaders to change the values, beliefs, and attitudes of subordinates especially during times of organizational change (Van Der Voet, 2014).

Existing literature in the field revealed approximately 70% of all change initiatives fail (Bielinska-Kwapisz, 2014; Jansson, 2013). Change itself is a high-risk undertaking for many organizations, and reinforced by a consistently poor record of accomplishment of change management success (Jansson, 2013). Managing change is one of the most critical challenges encountered by senior leaders today (Overstreet, Hanna, Byrd, Cegielski, & Hazen, 2013). Overstreet et al. (2013) discovered leadership style is one of the most important factors related to an organization's ability to implement and adapt to change.

Mehta et al. (2014) suggested regarding change that a successful leader should:

- Exercise professionalism and influence to show leadership abilities.
- Respect and identify with the people affected by the change.
- Communicate clearly and gain trust through genuine consultation.
- Recognize and use experience, knowledge, and skills of others.
- Remain visibly involved throughout the change.
- Be available to answer questions and discuss any aspect of the change process.

The attributes above of a successful leader contribute to managing change successfully. Carter et al., (2013) stated transformational leaders encourage employees to think critically about change initiatives, enhance their confidence addressing adaptation, and emphasize the importance of implementing the change. Employees view leadership trust as a social bond infused by fairness, integrity, and loyalty, and this social bond of trust encourages employee's commitment to change (Yang, 2016).

An important issue pointed out by Halm (2014), 70% of change initiatives fail to achieve the intended outcomes. Change happens relatively quickly, whereas transition is slower and more chaotic (Halm, 2014). The distinction between change and transition is important to gain an understanding of why employees have a difficult time letting go of what they are accustomed to than the change itself (Halm, 2014). Perkins (2012) stated everyone reflects on creating change, managing change, and addressing change, but most people are afraid of change. Few organizations can address change, and even fewer understand how to achieve change (Perkins, 2012). Scholars and researchers argued that continuous change require employees to modify their work routines and social practices (Carter et al., 2013). Employees selectively retain effective elements of their work routines and integrate them with new, efficient ones (Carter et al., 2013). Employees have difficulty in maintaining previous performance levels while adapting to new change initiatives (Carter et al., 2013).

Leaders address leading and implementing change within their organizations, and the decisions that lead to success or failure are the responsibility of the leader. Organizations that develop creative ideas that lead to incremental and radical organizational changes survive in today's ever-changing business environment (Allen et al., 2013). Researchers agreed that both incremental and radical changes occur in organizations, and Carter et al. (2014) discovered more than 95% of organizations change continuously through incremental changes. Carter et al. (2013) defined change as transformational if it results in improving overall organizational performance, and sustainment of the organization occurs. A transformation requires being more than satisfied with the change; it requires setting goals with the aspiration and needs to transform the organization beyond desired expectations (Carter et al., 2013).

Transformational leaders resolve conflict in the workplace by providing social support, reducing interpersonal tensions, and encouraging employees to consider the opinions of others (Yang, 2014). The purpose of leadership is to create a suitable work environment and implement change initiatives (Yang, 2014). Transformational leadership, as defined by Bass (1985) is one that communicates to an individual at a personal and emotional level, appealing to not only the person's intellect but also to their emotions at the psychological level (Vyas, 2013). The transformational style of leadership that takes the feelings of others into consideration initiates and sustains successful change within the organization (Vyas, 2013). Transformational leadership theory proposed that leaders bring about remarkable changes in the motivational states and behaviors of individuals and groups (Hannah, Schaubroeck, & Peng, 2016). A transformational leader assists with understanding how a leader can influence subordinates to make self-sacrifices, commit to difficult objectives, and achieves much more than expected (Hannah et al., 2016).

In a 2016 study on transformational leadership and change, Deschamps et al. explored organizational justice. With a sample size of 253 employees, the researchers collected survey responses. Deschamps et al. used a quantitative approach to analyze the data. The results confirmed that transformational leaders had a positive effect on their followers' perceptions of organizational justice. Moreover, the researchers found interesting results relating to how leaders influence their followers' motivation in the context of change. Transformational leaders motivate employees to do more than their expectations, increase their sense of importance and value, inspires them to go beyond their own individual interests and direct themselves to the interests of the team, organization or the community for raising the level of change to a higher level (Nging & Yazdanifard, 2015).

Researchers discovered leadership is a key factor to the success of an organization, and the first and most important element in helping organizations achieve greater effectiveness (Allen et al., 2013). In today's ever-changing business environment, leaders can foster an organizational climate that encourages and supports change and creativity (Allen et al., 2013). Transformational leaders inspire employees with an organizational vision and act as change drivers to get followers actively involved in creating an environment that fosters change and growth (Allen et al., 2013). Organizational leaders have influence over a range of traditional organizational outcomes, such as employee attitudes, commitment, performance, and safety (Robertson & Barling, 2013). Transformational leaders evoke emotions in employees' passion by using their behavioral characteristics: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Robertson & Barling, 2013). Transformational leaders that focus on influencing specific behaviors will provide employees considerable clarification as to what leader's value, thereby enhancing employees' clarity (Robertson & Barling, 2013). Transformational leaders have tremendous influence, and their style of leadership enables them to initiate and implement change (Singh, 2013). Leaders must determine what changes are necessary and how to implement those changes in a way that translates to helping employees change.

Transformational leaders are capable of encouraging performance improvement in times of rapid change that leads to innovative strategies (Ilsever, 2014). Transformational leaders persuade employees to work towards a common or required goal (Ilsever, 2014). Leaders can change how employees view themselves and have influence over their sense of belonging to the team (Ilsever, 2014). Transformational leaders build strong relationships with their employees and understand their individual needs, skills, and aspirations (Ilsever, 2014). Ilsever (2014) pointed out that transformational leaders meet the emotional needs of each employee and motivate them to excel beyond organizational expectations. Carter et al. (2014) explained that transformational leadership positively connects to work-related attitudes and performance. When employees accepted change, their attitudes towards the change were positive, and they willingly worked towards successful implementation (Carter et al., 2014).

A transformational leader is actively involved in relationships with employees, with change, and with organizational culture (Shanker, Bhanugopan, & Fish, 2012).

Leading change is one of the most important and difficult leadership responsibilities (Shanker et al., 2012). The transformational leader promotes change through qualities of enthusiasm, trust, and openness (Shanker et al., 2012). Leaders influence change by reducing uncertainty among employees by communicating a shared vision, supporting change, and developing a certain type of organizational culture (Vaccaro, Jansen, Van Der Bosch, & Volberda, 2012). Leaders help employees make sense of the change and provide guidance and support when changes seem unclear (Vaccaro et al., 2012). Transformational leaders stimulate changes in practices by giving teams of employees the freedom to take on roles other than those in their job descriptions (Vacarro et al., 2012).

Change requires leadership, and organizations that desire change must identify change agents responsible for leading and implementing the change effort (Lines, Sullivan, Smithwick, & Mischung, 2015). Lines et al. declared organizations that did not identify their change agents encountered four times more resistance than those organizations that did. Identifying change agents was beneficial in two ways: (a) it assigns responsibility in such a way that certain organizational leaders are now accountable for change implementation success, and (b) change agents become a guiding force who can support other organizational members who may struggle with or question the change (Lines et al., 2015). No matter, what brings about change, it always requires some level of demands and pressures on the change agents involved in the change process (Malik & Masood, 2015). Change is something unavoidable. Therefore, it is important for organizations to hire and maintain a workforce ready and proactive towards change (Malik & Masood, 2015).

Lack of Organizational Integration

While organizational change depends on leadership, organizational change and leadership research has not sufficiently integrated (Carter et al., 2014). Latham (2013b) revealed a lack of agreement among researchers and academics on what constitutes effective leadership. Most leadership research over the past 60 years focuses on lower-level management (Latham, 2013b). Latham explained most leadership studies have been quantitative and less than 15 percent were qualitative. The use of qualitative methods would provide richer understandings and insights on effective leadership and change (Latham, 2013b).

Leadership is not a function of the person in charge, but a function of individual will and need. Leadership is different from management because managers ensure stability and leadership focus on change (Kaipa, 2014). Researchers explained leadership and changes are synonymous and considered the two most important issues organizations encounter (Kaipa, 2014). Change is inevitable and has an impact on all aspects of life, especially the business arena (Mehta et al., 2014). Bringing about change within an organization requires moving from a current unsatisfactory state to the desired future state (Van Der Voet, Groeneveld, & Kuipers, 2014). Exceptional leadership requires that leaders employ a range of thinking styles during periods of organizational change (Grant, 2014). A vital part of the change process requires leaders to reflect, review, and evaluate their leadership styles (Grant, 2014).

Holt and Vardaman (2013) stated the main factor influencing successful change is the initial readiness. Researchers defined readiness as the degree to which the organization and those involved are individually primed, motivated, and capable of executing change (Holt & Vardaman, 2013). Commitment to change has an indirect role as a facilitator to enhance the effect of transformational leadership on employee job satisfaction (Yang, 2014). Transformational leadership skills directly influence employees toward a commitment to change and improve job satisfaction (Yang, 2014). When change relates to employee's interests, they perceive the organization cares for them, and employees respond by supporting the change (Yang, 2014).

Leaders continually introduce and implement various initiatives to change their organizations (Dunican & Keaster, 2015). Most change efforts do not result in the intended aim or foster sustained change (Dunican & Keaster, 2015). Successful organizational change requires planning, analyzing, engaging, and thinking to execute a strategy that achieves sustainable results (Davidson, 2015). Organizational learning is a key factor to an organizations' ability to adapt to change and results in improved organizational performance and innovation (Tamayo-Torres, Gutierrez-Gutierrez, Llorens-Montes, & Martinez-Lopez, 2015). In summary, during times of change, organizational members become more receptive to transformational leaders because of their inspiring behaviors that generate confidence in the workplace (Karakitapoglu-Aygun & Gumusluoglu, 2013).

Employee Resistance to Change

For organizations to thrive in today's business world, they must constantly undergo change. The main problem associated with organizational change is to get employees to accept changes without resistance (Smollan, 2013). Resistance to change occurs when employees refuse to cooperate with leadership. Leadership responsible for organizational change often addresses resistance at all levels within an organization (Smollan, 2013). Smollan (2013) suggested that resistance to change is unavoidable, but anticipated, and to some degree managed. The goal of leadership is to minimize change impacts on all involved to avoid interferences and resistance (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2013). In the most successful organizations, leadership encourages employees to accept change initiatives and gives them a voice in the decision-making process to prevent resistance (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2013).

Employee resistance to change causes change management failures, and employees who experience poor change management in the past are more likely to resist change (Fuchs & Prouska, 2014). Organizational change causes employees to either actively support or actively resist the change effort because they fear unpredictable outcomes (Luo & Jiang, 2014). McClellan (2014) suggested communication between management and employees reduces resistance, minimizes uncertainty, and gains employee involvement for organizational change. Organizations rely on change agents to communicate change initiatives to change recipients, and one major obstacle change agents encounter resistance from change recipients (Klonek et al., 2014). Traditional change agents perceive employees who reveal resistance to change as problematic, and any chance of initiating the change initiative will fail (Klonek et al., 2014).

Employee's negative feelings towards organizational change contribute significantly to the implementation of the intended change (Bergstrom, Styhre, & Thilander, 2014). Change resistance occurs with employee's objectionable attitudes or behaviors in response to organizational change efforts (Jansson, 2013). If the change agent does not provide adequate explanations for introducing specific changes, spaces will open developing counter-arguments and reasons to resist the change efforts (Penava & Sehic, 2014). The participation of organizational members in the implementation of change is critical to its acceptance (Penava & Sehic, 2014).

Appelbaum et al. (2015) argued that leaders occasionally effectively implement change, and leadership style influences whether change takes place without resistance from employees. Researchers claimed leaders indirectly affect their employee's commitments to change, and significantly reduce resistance by adopting the appropriate leadership style to fit the organizational environment (Appelbaum et al., 2015). Leaders manage change by influencing employees (Mehta et al., 2014). Unfortunately, upper management who has certain ways of conducting business is the most challenging to work with and a source of resistance. Defensive tactics are common and adversely affect the organization's ability to implement changes necessary to achieve high performance (Latham, 2013a). Transformational leaders focus on the needs and development of employees by empowering them to achieve and maintain high performance (Latham, 2013a). Treating employees with respect increases the level of trust and cooperation, and reduces resistance to change (Latham, 2013b).

In a 2015 study on transformational leadership, Appelbaum et al. explored resistance to change. The researchers reviewed a range of published empirical and practitioner research papers to analyze the relationships in search of the variables that affect resistance during a major organizational change. The results revealed leadership influences organizational outcomes both directly by continuously shaping employee attitude throughout change, and indirectly by regulating the antecedents and moderators of their predisposition to change. The researchers confirmed the interaction of the organizational environment with these factors determines the organizational outcome resulting from the change initiatives. Van der Voet, Kuipers, and Groeneveld (2016) agreed transformational leadership indirectly influences affective commitment to change. The researchers concluded transformational leaders contribute to planned change, because they recognize the need for change, create and communicate appealing visions for change and inspire and motivate employees to implement organizational change.

Dawson (2014) observed minimal resistance to change when leaders actively engaged with the recipients of change. Research over the last two decades found change efforts fail to deliver the desired results because of the lack of employee commitment (Sharif & Scandura, 2014). Employees find it difficult to relinquish what is familiar even when the familiar does not work well. Leaders must assess the organization's readiness for a change and identify those who might resist, and develop strategies to address the diffusion of innovation (Georgalis, Samaratunge, & Kimberley, 2014). Over 60 years, researchers have transformed resistance from its original conceptualization as a change barrier to more individually and psychologically based attitudes that undermine positive responses to change (Georgalis et al., 2014). Resistance to change leads to change failures and resistance to change is the common reaction of change recipients (Georgalis et al., 2014). Some employees will support the change and others will be against it; a leader must minimize employee resistance by communicating, reducing anxiety, and providing support. In addition, Klonek et al. (2014) revealed that successful change management depends on effective communication with the employees whose work lives are affected.

Organizational change continues to occur at high rates in today's organizations (Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012). Researchers discovered change management literature estimated as many as 50% of all organizational changes fail to deliver expected results or meet the intended objectives (Shin et al., 2012). In a survey of global companies, Shin et al. (2012) estimated only one-third of organizational change efforts were successful, and employees were responsible for whether the change initiated. Bareil (2013) explained that human resistance to change had been a recurring theme and constant source of interest for practitioners and scholars for more than 60 years.

Continuing the discussion on resistance to change in organizations, Garcia-Cabrera, and Garcia-Barba Hernandez (2014) argued resistance to change in employees is a psychological state that affects the success of the change, and it is essential that organizations understand the phenomenon. Ming-Chu and Meng-Hsiu (2015) revealed leaders must confront and reduce employee's resistance to change because this disposition is an obstacle to successful organizational change. In summary, leadership should help employees mentally prepare for change by forming positive and supportive organizational climates that reward employees work efforts and pay attention to their emotional needs (Garcia-Cabrera & Garcia-Barba Hernandez, 2014).

Organizations need capable leaders to guide employees through organizational change. Successful change involves support of formulated strategies and the facilitation of change recipients being mindful during change efforts (Dunican & Keaster, 2015). Dunican and Keaster (2015) revealed that it is human nature to resist change and elements related to the process of change. Transformational leaders perceive the need for change, create and share compelling visions with employees, guide them through the change, and inspire them to accomplish the challenging goal of implementing change (Carter et al., 2013).

SME Survival

Business leaders constantly address change because of their vulnerable position in the marketplace, and businesses must continually adjust their everyday business practices to survive (Malik & Masood, 2015). Reactions to change may lead to the failure of planned organizational change and affect the well-being of the business (Sharif & Scandura, 2014). SMEs must address the implications of interferences caused by instability in their operating environments (Malik & Masood, 2015). Resilience is an important concept critical to building sustainable organizations (Akgun & Keskin, 2014).

Leadership development in SMEs is critical and challenging to implement because most SMEs lack formal leadership development practices, and therefore, are unlikely to have internal leadership development expertise (Garavan, Watson, Carbery, & O'Brien, 2016). Time constraints exist for managers giving few opportunities to undertake formal leadership development, and SME owners have limited time for leadership development (Garavan et al., 2016). Leadership and innovation impact the long-term sustainability of organizations, but also, a continuous process of adapting to internal and external changing conditions is necessary to maintain sustainability (Akgun & Keskin, 2014).

In a 2015 study, Byrne and Shepherd explored business failure and the emotional impact and loss associated with the closure. This qualitative multiple case study included a sample of 13 failed privately owned small businesses. The researchers collected data from interviews, observations, and archival records. The results of the study revealed that high negative emotions motivate making sense of a loss, while high positive emotions provide cognitive resources to facilitate and motivate making sense of the failure event. The success of a new business is critically dependent upon preexisting knowledge and capabilities of the businesses owner (Renski, 2015).

Malik and Masood (2015) asserted constant and unpredictable changes push companies to the breaking point, leaving them susceptible to failure, and SMEs are among the most vulnerable. SMEs considered the mainstay of the economy, constitute more than 90% of all enterprises in some countries (Gunasekaran, Rai, & Griffin, 2011). Despite the prevalence of SMEs, they are vulnerable and susceptible to competition (Gunasekaran et al., 2011). Mesu, Sanders, and Van Riemsdijk (2015) discovered SMEs are less likely to retain employees than their larger competitors because of lower pay and career prospects. Mesu et al. revealed that transformational leadership practices to be effective regardless of the size or characteristics of the employees within the organization.

Businesses structure employees into teams and employees satisfaction with the effectiveness of the team is critical to their commitment to the organization (Fong &

Snape, 2015). Fong and Snape (2015) discovered teams embedded within businesses require more than one level of leadership to be effective. Shuck and Reio (2014) discovered engaged employees are more likely to be productive, remain with their current employer, and care about the organization's performance and sustainability. Productive and functional businesses composed of employees physically, cognitively, and emotionally engaged in their work survive (Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014). Cleavenger and Munyon (2013) explained businesses recognized the necessity for effective leadership and discovered 75% of businesses reported building capable leaders is a challenge. Matzler, Bauer, and Mooradian (2015) revealed in owner managed SMEs; the owner has a crucial role in the decision-making process.

Managers have a difficult time making decisions because of the lack of interactions with upper management and subordinates within the organization (Verissimo & Lacerda, 2015). Researchers identified the importance of oral communication between decision-makers and all levels of employees within an organization (Verissimo & Lacerda, 2015). Researchers revealed that transformational leaders use positive emotions to enact their decision-making, and employees cooperate because of a sense of trust, and the leader's commitment to the organization (Verissimo & Lacerda, 2015). A decisions success depends on a leader's constant commitment to the decision (Smith, 2014). Andersen and Minbaeva (2013) argued a leader's style could directly affect employee behavior and the decision-making process. Researchers explained the best decisions are those understood and accepted by the individuals most affected by the decision (Hess &

Bacigalupo, 2013). Strategic decision-making must occur promptly to assure competitive advantage (Andersen & Minbaeva, 2013).

SMEs are important to maintain strong economic growth; however, how to sustain in the long-term is a significant challenge (Ates, Garengo, Cocca, & Bititci, 2013). Creating lasting organizational change will lead to business survival. To most employees, change is an intimidating word accompanied with a belief their performance is lacking somehow (Perkins, 2012). Enlisting employees in the change effort will create engaged employees that will help achieve business success (Perkins, 2012).

Relevancy of the Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how successful leaders of SMEs manage changes affecting their businesses. The review of professional and academic literature contains scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journals and seminal books. The literature review critically analyzed sources related to the research topic. Based on the findings of the literature review, business leaders of SMEs must embrace change and develop successful leadership strategies, practices, and behaviors to sustain in business.

Transition

Section 1 of the doctoral study provided the background of the study. The study presented a problem statement, the purpose statement, the nature of the study, the research questions, conceptual framework, and operational definitions. I discussed the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, and the significance of the present research study. An extensive literature review was conducted, specifically the transformational leadership theoretical framework. In Section 2, I presented the role of the researcher, the participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical procedures, and data collection and analysis. I also discussed the reliability and validity of the qualitative case study method and design. The third and final section presents the findings of the study, analyzes how the findings extend the application of the transformational leadership theory, discusses how the findings are relevant to improving business strategies, and describes the implications for social change.

Section 2: The Project

The target group for this qualitative multiple case study consisted of business leaders from SMEs located in Los Angeles, California. Fifteen leaders participated in semistructured face-to-face interviews. I organized this section into subsections dedicated to: (a) the purpose statement, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the participants, (d) research method and design, (e) population and sampling procedures, (f) ethical research practices, (g) data collection and analysis, and (h) the reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies SME business leaders use to manage change successfully. The targeted population consisted of business leaders from a minimum of three SMEs located in Los Angeles, California, who has worked in leadership positions for a minimum of 3 years and has managed change successfully. This population was appropriate for this study because approximately 70% of all change initiatives fail (Bielinska-Kwapisz, 2014; Jansson, 2013), and those who initiate change often lack the strategies to implement it (Jansson, 2013). The implication for positive social change included the potential to provide SME leaders with strategies to implement change and survive in business, thereby contributing to job growth and employee prosperity in local communities.

Role of the Researcher

I served as the primary data collection instrument (see Marshall & Rossman, 2016). My role included selecting the appropriate research method and design, recruiting potential participants, and collecting and analyzing data. I began my multiple case study by producing open-ended interview questions, and after receiving IRB approval, I recruited participants for this study. I conducted semistructured interviews with SME business leaders who had managed change successfully.

The data collection process involved gathering data from semistructured face-to-face interviews using open-ended and follow-up questions to inquire about the strategies leaders of SMEs use to manage changes affecting their businesses. Interviews provided in-depth information about the participants' experiences and viewpoints on the topic (see Turner, 2010). I used a qualitative method to interpret the experiences of the participants. Qualitative research involving human participants benefits society in many ways by improving the understanding of human experience and advancing professional practice and decision-making (McCormack et al., 2012). A qualitative study also depends on the researchers' observations and analytical abilities (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

A case study design guided this research study. A researcher must acknowledge and suspend preconceptions about the phenomenon, so the voices of participants are listened to (Bernard, 2013). Case study research is a useful tool for studying behavior in its natural context (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). The components of case study research include (a) the study questions, (b) the propositions, (c) the analysis, (d) the linking of the data to the propositions, and (e) the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2012).

The Belmont Report (1979) helped me understand the basic ethical principles and guidelines researchers use dot avoid and resolve ethical problems in research with human subjects. The Belmont Report further increased my knowledge about the distinction between research and practice, and the importance of three basic ethical principles: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. These three basic ethical principles guided me in this study. In preparation for the research, I completed the National Institute of Health’s web-based training on protecting human research participants (Appendix A).

I have owned retail and commercial businesses, and have garnered a vast amount of knowledge about what constitutes an exceptional leader and the skills required to initiate organizational change. As a business owner, I did not allow my leadership abilities to cloud my judgment. The decision-making process of some leaders differs from others in leadership positions. I noted my personal beliefs and biases regarding managing change before beginning the participant interview process and remained aware of biases throughout the data analysis process by keeping an open mind.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained that a researcher must identify any prior observations or associations that might influence the research and any personal connections that could create a harmful bias. I kept my possible biases in check by realizing that every leader has a different approach to the way they lead. Mitigating bias ensured the integrity of data collection and analysis process. Marshall and Rossman noted that *researcher bias* refers to the inability to separate oneself from the research. Avoiding biases by being sensitive to conflicting evidence is a researcher’s obligation to the participants (Yin, 2014). Bourke (2014) observed that biases might influence participants’ responses, the researcher’s observations and interpretations, and the nature of the study. I did not have any personal relationships with any of the participants in this study.

Noonan (2013) stated that semistructured interviews are the most common type of interviews in qualitative research, and predetermined questions allow the researcher to seek clarification. An interview protocol/guide helps achieve comfortable interaction with the participants (Noonan, 2013). An effective interview protocol is essential to obtaining the best information from the participants in the study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Developing a script from the beginning to the end of an interview helps the researcher remember critical details about the study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). These details include (a) explaining informed consent, (b) talking about yourself, (c) providing your contact information, and (d) informing participants there might be a second meeting to perform member checking and to ask for additional clarification on questions that might arise (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). My use of an interview protocol was vital to the success of this study. Following Jacob and Furgerson (2012) and Marshall and Rossman (2016), I developed and used an interview protocol (Appendix B) because the procedural guide directed me through the interview process from the beginning to the end.

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of business leaders from SMEs. All participants lived in the Los Angeles area, worked in leadership positions for a minimum of 3 years, and made decisions that brought about change within their businesses. Rowley (2012) noted that the findings of a research study depend on the selection of the participants. Purposive sampling aids the researcher in selecting participants by using predetermined criteria relevant to the study (Robinson, 2014). Purposive sampling assisted in my selection of participants to answer research questions and provide insight into the strategies business leaders of SMEs use to manage changes affecting their businesses (see Marshall & Rossman, 2016). An additional recruitment strategy is snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves asking participants to recommend acquaintances who might qualify for participation, leading to referral chains (Robinson, 2014). I used both purposive sampling and snowball sampling to select participants for this study. Purposive sampling allowed me to recruit participants who met specific eligibility criteria, and who understood the topic studied. The use of snowball sampling helped me obtain the number of participants required to conduct my research.

To gain access to participants, I used business listings from local Chambers of Commerce. These listings provided email addresses and contact information I used to access the target group. I sent invitations to participate (Appendix C) by e-mail, explaining the purpose of the study and asking for volunteers from leadership positions who have made important business decisions relating to organizational change. I selected volunteers from the e-mail respondents. I followed Walden’s IRB guidelines and the guidelines of the Belmont Report to ensure adequate protections and procedures while in contact with human research participants. I also provided a copy of my training course certificate from the National Institute of Health.

The main strategy I used to establish a working relationship with participants was trust. I established a bond of trust with my participants by explaining the study in detail, and by ensuring that the participants were in comfortable surroundings for the interviews. I discussed my background as a leader and business owner. I also informed participants that everything they shared in the interviews would remain confidential. Rubin and Rubin

(2012) stated that researchers should establish trust with research participants, and should be honest about the intended purpose and possible outcomes of the study. An additional strategy I used was finding participants willing to be open and honest about telling their stories (see Turner, 2010). Turner (2010) pointed out that it is easier conducting interviews with participants in a comfortable environment.

Research Method and Design

I used a qualitative multiple case study to explore the strategies used by SME business leaders to manage change successfully. I used open-ended questions to interview SME business leaders in the Los Angeles area. After closely reviewing different research methods and designs, I determined that a qualitative exploratory multiple case study was the best approach. Qualitative research is the most beneficial approach to exploring individuals' lived experiences and perspectives regarding a concept or phenomenon (Kahlke, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Research Method

A researcher must select the right method of inquiry to obtain meaningful results (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). The three methods of research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Researchers can obtain different forms of data from each of these methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers use quantitative research for empirical studies focused on examining leadership practices in the workplace to test the construct validity of the dimensions identified in the study and to provide statistical evidence about emergent categories of leadership (Karakitapoglu-Aygun & Gumusluoglu, 2013). A mixed methods methodology allows researchers to explore leadership experiences and behaviors by using both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) instruments (Beck, 2014). Qualitative researchers observe behaviors, explore documents, and interview participants to gather their perceptions of a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A qualitative method was thus appropriate for exploring how successful leaders of SMEs manage change because a qualitative methodology guides the researcher to address social phenomenon, situations, and processes involving people, such as feelings, attitudes, and learning processes.

Research Design

The ethnographic, narrative, phenomenological, and case study designs are practical choices for conducting qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers use an ethnographic approach to study social customs, behaviors, beliefs, and practices that define a culture over a prolonged period (Percy et al., 2015). In a narrative study, the researcher studies the lives of individuals and turns their stories into a narrative based on their personal experiences (Loh, 2013). A researcher uses a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of a concept or a phenomenon (Kahlke, 2014). Case studies involve an inquiry concerning an event, activity, group, or individual in the real-world context, using a variety of data collection procedures (Yin, 2014). A case study design was appropriate to study the strategies leaders of SMEs use to manage changes affecting their businesses. Yin (2014) explained that a case study design is useful when (a) the focus of the study is on answering how and why questions, (b) a researcher has minimal control over behavioral events, and (c) the focus of the study is a contemporary phenomenon. One of the important sources of case study evidence is the interview, and Yin pointed out that case study interviews resemble guided conversations instead of structured inquiries.

Fusch and Ness (2015) noted there is no one-size-fits-all method to reach data saturation. Morse (2015) explained that data saturation would occur if there is no new data, no new themes, no new coding, and if the collected data can be replicated in another study. During data collection, a researcher can attain data saturation by collecting rich (quality) and thick (quantity) data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Interviews are a method by which results reach data saturation (Bernard, 2013). Bernard (2013) claimed the number of interviews needed for a qualitative study to reach data saturation is not reachable. Fusch and Ness explained data saturation could occur with as few as six interviews, depending on the sample size of the population. However, researchers have confirmed that it might be best to think of data in terms of “rich and thick” instead of the size of the sample (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

There is a direct link between data triangulation and data saturation; the one ensures the other (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources of data (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Triangulation is not about getting the truth, but rather about discovering the multiple perspectives for knowing a social world (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Yin (2014) pointed out that after a researcher has triangulated the data, the case study’s findings are supported by more than a single source of evidence. Yin recommended six sources of data for case studies: (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) interviews or surveys, (d) direct observation, (e) participant observation, and (f) physical artifacts. The two sources of data for this multiple case study were interviews and organizations' documents about leadership and managing change. The most important use of documents is to supplement evidence from other sources (Yin, 2014). The use of multiple sources of data could ensures the study reaches data saturation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Data saturation occurs when enough information has been gathered to the point where no new themes emerge (Fusch, & Ness, 2015).

Population and Sampling

The target population for this qualitative multiple case study included a purposive sample size of 15 business leaders from a minimum of three different businesses who have managed change successfully. Purposive sampling is a method used in research to select participants based on the study criteria (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013). Researchers select participants most capable of providing rich descriptions of their experiences, practices, and their perspectives as related to the phenomenon of interest (Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, 2014). The appropriate sample size for a qualitative study was 15 to 20 participants (see Bernard, 2013). Baskarada (2014) emphasized less than 15 interviewees per case study are insufficient. Robinson (2014) declared most studies require a provisional decision on sample size at the initial design stage. Robinson pointed out instead of a fixed number, an approximate sample size with a minimum and a maximum is sufficient. Qualitative research has no established rules for sample size, and the sample size is usually determined based on informational needs (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013).

The size of the sample relies on the concept of saturation, or the point at which no new information or themes occur in the data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Guest et al. (2006) explained when the goal is to describe a shared perception or behavior among a homogeneous group, a sample of twelve is sufficient for the study. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to obtain participants based on commonality, and the more similar participants are about their experiences, the sooner saturation will occur (Guest et al., 2006). Purposeful sampling assists qualitative researchers with identifying and selecting information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Yin (2014) suggested two or more cases for a multiple case study would achieve literal and theoretical replications and exemplary outcomes that ensure data saturation. Boddy (2016) argued a single case study is not enough to reach saturation because data saturation can only be known after at least two cases are examined. The idea of sampling until data saturation occurs is justification for using a sample size in any qualitative research (Boddy, 2016).

To ensure data saturation, I committed to continuing interviewing until no new data emerged. The concept data saturation for all qualitative research that uses interviews as the primary data source entails bringing new participants continually into the study until the data set is complete, and data replication is indicated (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Researchers use methodological triangulation, the use of multiple data collection methods to correlate data assists researchers in reaching data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Wilson, 2014). I used member checking to assist in triangulating the data. During member checking, I provided interview summaries to the participants and asked for reactions, corrections, and further insights. Transcripts of the interviews will provide participants a chance to modify any inconsistencies (see Houghton et al., 2013). The member checking follow-up interview helped reach data saturation through obtaining in-depth information and enhance the academic rigor.

The criteria for selecting participants include SME business leaders living in the Los Angeles area, working in leadership positions for a minimum of 3 years, and having made decisions that brought about change within their businesses. The rationale for choosing these participants was to obtain responses from individuals experienced in managing change. Marshall et al. (2013) claimed other than selecting a research topic and research design; no other task is more important to creating credible research than obtaining an adequate sample of participants. Defining a sample universe allows a researcher to choose participants by using inclusion criteria (Robinson, 2014). Robinson explained that inclusion criteria should specify specific attributes that cases must possess to qualify for the study. A researcher seeks potential participants who can answer the research questions and provide insight into the phenomenon under examination (Rowley, 2012).

The interviews took place in the participant's place of business in a conference room or private office. Participants share more information and feel less restricted when interviews take place in a comfortable environment (Turner, 2010). According to Rowley (2012), a researcher must be willing to visit an agreed location for the interview, and the location often selected to suit the convenience of the interviewee. A researcher may be required to obtain permission to ask participants questions or to enter a setting to collect data, and often requires approaching the organization's upper management (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Kemparaj and Chavan (2013) suggested qualitative researchers must identify a site consistent with the research topic and contact key actors to ensure cooperation and access to the proposed participants. Qualitative researchers begin by conversing with or observing people who have first-hand experience with the phenomenon under study and choose the cases that will best contribute to the information needs of the study (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013).

Ethical Research

This section of the study covers the consent process, participant withdrawal procedure, incentives, data protection, and participant confidentiality. Potential participants received an invitation to participate (Appendix C) by email, providing all the details about the study. I informed potential participants that I am a doctoral student conducting research as part of my graduation requirement. An explanation of the purpose of the study and potential benefits of participating assisted them in deciding whether to participate. Participation is voluntary, and any participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Crow, Wiles, Heath, and Charles (2006) stated participants have the right to withdraw from the study without any adverse consequences for them. Participants who wanted to withdraw from the study could do so by sending an email, notifying me they no longer wished to participate.

Each participant signed a consent form in person before the start of the interview. The form explained in detail the background information, procedures, voluntary nature of the study, risks, benefits, privacy, and my contact information. Crow et al. (2006)

explained the principle of informed consent requires the researcher to provide prospective participants with information about the project in which their invited to participate so they can freely decide whether to participate. Informed consent in recent years is subject to rigorous monitoring and regulation by bodies concerned with research ethics (Crow et al., 2006). Consent forms and all written data are stored in my locked office safe, and electronic data are stored on my password-protected computer and password- protected external hard drive. All research documentation and raw data are stored for the allotted period of five years and then destroyed by shredding documents and erasing the computer data and external hard drive.

There were no incentives offered for participation in this study. According to Head (2009), providing monetary incentives could compromise the key ethical principles of participation in research, that of free, informed consent. The downside of financial incentives pointed out by Robinson (2014) is that incentives provide motivation for fabricating information in an interview for monetary gain. Monetary incentives could result in a skewed study with participants who are needy (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I will provide each participant a copy of the finished doctoral study, and a one to two-page summary presenting the results.

Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves studies that protect the rights, interests, and welfare of the participants. The role of the IRB is to review research proposals, ensuring the proposal meets the criteria set forth by Federal regulations. The IRB also ensures adequate protection of the rights and welfare of the study participants (Abbott & Grady, 2011). Before data collection, the IRB evaluates the proposal to meet ethical protection requirements. When the IRB approved my request to conduct research, I proceeded with participant recruitment and data collection. The Walden IRB approval number is 03-08-17-0364785.

To ensure the integrity of the relationship with the participants, I discussed the ethical issues of maintaining their confidentiality. Yin (2012) argued data collection, data storage, and data analysis must be secure to ensure the protection of the rights of the participants and to preserve their privacy. I protected my participants by upholding the principles of academic integrity, research ethics, and human dignity. Numbers instead of names to identify the participants ensured privacy. A qualitative researcher assigns numbers to each participant to protect their identity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers do not disclose the names of participants or the organizations they work for in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Each of the 15 participants in this study was assigned a number from 1 to 15 to protect their identity.

Data Collection Instruments

In this qualitative multiple case study, I was the primary instrument to collect and analyze data (e.g., Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The phrase primary instrument referred to the researcher as an active respondent in the research process (Cope, 2014). This qualitative multiple case study involved semistructured face-to-face interviews with business leaders of SMEs. My secondary data consisted of public company documents and various business reports about leadership and organizational change. There exist six methods of collecting data for case studies: (a) interviews, (b) archival records, (c) direct observations, (d) documents, (e) participant observations, and (f) physical artifacts (Yin, 2014).

Turner (2010) declared a qualitative research design can be complicated, and is dependent upon the researcher's experience with a specific type of methodology. Interviews provide in-depth information concerning the participants' experiences and viewpoints of a topic, and these interviews take place with other forms of data collection (Turner, 2010). Therefore, a researcher needs to use an interview protocol to conduct interviews. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) explained an interview protocol is much more than a list of research questions. An interview protocol includes a script of what the researcher will say before and after the interview, prompts the researcher to collect informed consent, and reminds the researcher about the information they intend to collect (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). An interview protocol is a procedural guide for directing a researcher through the interview process. My interview protocol (Appendix B) included the following: (a) designing open-ended questions focused on the central phenomenon of the study, (b) recruit participants that can best answer the research questions, (c) find a location to conduct interviews, (d) collect consent, (e) conduct semistructured face-to-face interviews, and (f) record and transcribe the interviews.

Transcript review was a method to enhance the reliability and validity of a study. Rowley (2012) suggested soon after the interviews occur, the researcher should listen to the interview recordings and transcribe the interviews verbatim in preparation for further analysis. Participants can review the transcripts and make corrections or approve the transcript. Marshall and Rossman (2016), encouraged participants to modify interview transcripts to make them accurate; providing participants an opportunity to give voice to their experiences. The researcher now can also follow-up with questions clarifying some key points (Rowley, 2012).

To enhance the reliability and validity of the study, I used member checking during my research. Member checking is a quality control process with which a qualitative researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity during an interview (Harper & Cole, 2012). Harper and Cole (2012) explained the researcher restates or summarizes information and then questions the participants to determine accuracy. The participants either agree or disagree if the summaries reflect their views, feelings, and experiences, and if the participants affirm the accuracy, then the study has creditability (Harper & Cole, 2012). Houghton et al. (2013) stated member checking involves the active process of asking the participant if the description of the interview is complete and realistic and if the themes are accurate, and the interpretations are fair. Member checking also decreases the incidence of incorrect data and misinterpretation of data, with the primary goal of providing findings that are trustworthy (Houghton et al., 2013).

Triangulation refers to the use of more than one research methodology to investigate a research question to obtain confirmation of findings through the convergence of different perspectives (Carter et al., 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explained that triangulation is the use of multiple methods in the study of the same object. Triangulation involves a variety of data, investigators, theories, and methodologies (Carter et al., 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The following are the four basic types of triangulation. One, data triangulation is the use of a variety of data sources in a study and has three subtypes: (a) time, (b) space, and (c) person. Person analysis has three levels: (a) aggregate, (b) interactive, and (c) collectively. Two, investigator triangulation consists of using multiple rather than single observers of the same object. Three, theory triangulation consists of using multiple rather than single perspectives about the same set of objects. Four, methodological triangulation is the use of multiple methods to study a single problem or program (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The main purpose of triangulation is to eliminate or reduce biases and increase the reliability and validity of the study (Yin, 2014). I used methodological triangulation for this study.

Yin (2014) explained the use of multiple sources of evidence in case study enables a researcher to address a larger range of historical and behavioral issues and the findings or conclusions are more convincing and accurate if based on multiple sources of information. The evidence drawn on for this study contained personal interviewing, as well as public company documents and various business reports about leadership and organizational change. Case study methodology, when applied to a business context, will adapt to the type of sources and procedures available (Yin, 2012). Yin (2014) asserted the case study method allows researchers to retain the holistic and important characteristics of real-life events, such as individual and small group behavior, and organizational processes. The use of multiple data sources provides the case study researcher with a richer set of data and promotes the transferability of the study's findings (Cope, 2014).

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study evidence because they resemble guided conversations (Yin, 2014). Yin noted that interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies address human affairs or actions. An interview is a face-to-face verbal exchange in which the interviewer attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinions or beliefs from the interviewee (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I used semistructured, open-ended questions (Appendix E) to interview leaders from SMEs. Doody and Noonan (2013) claimed semistructured interviews involve the use of predetermined questions where the researcher is free to pursue clarification. Semistructured interviews are flexible with open-ended questions and the chance to explore issues that arise unexpectedly (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The researcher can explore new paths that emerge during the interview that was not initially addressed (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Rowley (2012) emphasized the importance of conducting a pilot study to ensure all research questions are relevant to the research topic. Pilot studies can contribute invaluable information to assist with the conduct of important inquiry (Morin, 2013). Lancaster (2015) asserted pilot studies are a smaller version of the main study used to test whether the components of the main study can all work together. I conducted a pilot study before the initial interviews with a business associate and one of the study participants. The pilot study ensured the interview questions made sense and determined that no changes were necessary.

Yin (2014) pointed out that document review is relevant to every case study topic. A variety of documents are available, such as letters, emails, personal documents, announcements and minutes of meetings, internal records, and news clippings and other articles in the mass media (Yin, 2014). In case study research, the important use of documents is to verify and supplement evidence from other sources (Yin, 2014).

Documents are valuable to case study research because they provide clarity to other sources of collected data (Yin, 2014). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), researchers can ask interviewees for appropriate documents relevant to the discussion. I used document review as my second source of evidence in my study. Reviewing public company documents helped corroborate and expand the data gathered from the interviews. I reviewed public company documents to back up and provide clarity to the participant interviews. The collection of documents and various business reports provided information that I could compare to responses from the interviews to bring clarity to the study.

Data Collection Technique

The primary data collection technique I used for this study was recorded semistructured interviews. Yin (2014) endorsed the interview as one of the most important sources of case study evidence. Interviews are the most frequently used method for collecting data in qualitative research and are popular because of the conversational context (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Interviews generate contextual accounts of the participants' experiences and their interpretations of the interview (Turner, 2010). Rich data are the hallmark of qualitative inquiry and regarded as a key factor to the credibility and persuasive strength to qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Yin explained the researcher has two jobs during the interview process: (a) to follow the case study protocol and (b) to ask questions in an unbiased manner.

An interview protocol guided the interview process from beginning to end to ensure successful interviews (Appendix B). An interview protocol is more than a list of interview questions; it includes a script of what needs addressing before and after the interview (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Doody and Noonan (2013) pointed out developing an appropriate interview protocol can help achieve a comfortable interaction with the participants and enable the participants to provide detailed accounts of their experiences. Marshall and Rossman (2016) emphasized using the same interview guide for each participant will assist a researcher to establish and ensure the reliability and validity of the semistructured interviews.

Before conducting interviews, I obtained consent forms from participants to participate in the study in person before the start of the interview. The same interview protocol for each interview ensured the reliability of the study. A researcher should cultivate the habits of labeling audiotapes, carrying a backup recorder, and setting up a quiet place for taking notes immediately after collecting data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I recorded all interviews to gather valid information for this study. Yin (2014) claimed recording devices provide an accurate interpretation of an interview but do not use if the participant refuses permission or appears uncomfortable. After completion of each interview, I listened to the recording, wrote notes on the important points from the interview, and identified major themes and issues that needed further clarification. At this point, I became familiar with similar key points made by the participants and began to understand their various perspectives. After data collection, I coded, transcribed, evaluated, and analyzed the data.

NVivo software keeps all sources of data together in one place and ensures easy, effective, and efficient coding (Zamawe, 2015). NVivo allows the researcher to categorize and summarize the coded results easily (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014). NVivo does not perform the analysis but provides an effective interface to code data drawing meaning out of a richer organization of analyzed data (Zapata-Sepulveda, Lopez-Sanchez, & Sanchez-Gomez, 2012). Using member checking, I conducted follow-up meetings to collect additional data to capture and clarify the participants' perceptions of managing change successfully. The rationale for selecting this data collection technique was to gather an understanding of what strategies leaders of SMEs use to manage change successfully.

In case study research, the most important use of documents is to support and supplement evidence from other sources (Yin, 2014). Documents have an explicit role in data collection in conducting case study research because of the overall value (Yin, 2014). Documents provide contextual and historical information within which to frame the case (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013). Yin (2012) confirmed document review is a data collection method that enhances existing sources of information and enables the researcher to make in-depth comparisons with other collected data. One disadvantage pointed out by Yin (2014), is that researchers must not assume that all documents are the absolute truth, and the case study researcher is a vicarious observer because the documentary evidence reflects communication between other parties attempting to achieve some other objectives.

Semistructured face-to-face interviews and company documents relating to the strategies business leaders of SMEs use to manage change were the research instruments used to gather data for this multiple case study. Rowley (2012) defined a face-to-face interview as a verbal exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee to acquire information to gain an understanding of another person's beliefs, behaviors, or experiences. Document review refers to the use of documents as a source of contextual information about events not directly viewable. Documents also confirm or question information from other sources (Boblin et al., 2013). The document review consisted of public company documents and various reports relating to leadership and organizational change. A document release form was not necessary because all the collected documents for this study were public company documents. As noted, a sample of business leaders participated in the study that had at least three years of experience. Each participant held leadership positions in SMEs that had managed changes affecting their businesses. I developed all the interview questions for this study.

The semistructured interview is popular because it is flexible, accessible, and capable of disclosing important and often hidden facets of human and organizational behavior (Turner, 2010). An important advantage of a semistructured interview is the convenience of gathering information because it has its basis in human conversation and allows the researcher to modify the style, pace, and ordering of questions to evoke the responses from the participant (Turner, 2010). The researcher can explore new paths that emerge during the interview (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Doody and Noonan (2013) pointed out a disadvantage to semistructured interviews; a novice researcher is often unable to identify when to ask prompt questions or probe responses, so some relevant data may not get collected.

The basis of this study was to solicit answers to the central research question. When designing the primary data collection technique, I took into consideration the purpose of the study and the importance of all the possibilities and outcomes that could arise from the interviews. An open-ended format for the interview questions allowed the participants to provide thoughtful answers, facilitating follow-up questions for further clarification. Marshall and Rossman (2016) reported interview questions allow each participant the opportunity to articulate their thoughts and viewpoints. The qualitative interview method elicits data from participants with insightful perspectives on the issues that need clarification (Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2015).

Interview Process

Los Angeles Chambers of Commerce provided the names and contact information of the 15 interview participants for this study. I began by emailing invitations to participate to SME business leaders located within the Los Angeles area. From the several responses received, I recruited the cooperation of 15 participants from five different SMEs. All participants met the criteria for participating in the study by working in leadership positions for a minimum of three years and managing change successfully. Each participant signed a consent form in person before the start of the interview. The principle of informed consent is to provide the research participant with the information about the study so they can decide to participate or not (Crow et al., 2006).

I conducted a pilot study before the initial interviews with a business associate and one of the interview participants. The pilot study ensured the interview questions made sense and determined that no changes were necessary. At this point, I proceeded to set up the initial interviews with the 15 participants for this study.

The interview process began by introducing myself and explaining the research topic. Rowley (2012) noted that introducing yourself and your research would get the conversation started. I asked participants for permission to audio tape the interview before proceeding. Yin (2014) pointed out that a researcher should not believe that a recording device is a substitute for listening closely. Besides recording the interview, the researcher should also take notes during and after each interview to record additional information in the form of research memos (Wahyuni, 2012). I informed the participants the interview would last approximately one-hour, and an additional one-hour would be set up for a later date to conduct member checking. Member checking confirms the accuracy, creditability, and validity of what the participants said during a research interview (Harper & Cole, 2012). I conducted the interviews in the private offices or conference rooms at the participants' workplace during non-working hours to ensure their privacy. To protect the privacy of each participant, a number from 1 to 15 replaced their name to protect their identity.

Audiotaped semistructured face-to-face interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study. After the interviews, I listened to the recordings and interpreted what each participant shared. A one-hour meeting was set up to conduct member checking. Each participant reviewed their interview summaries to ensure their accounts documented accurately.

At the end of each interview, I requested participants to provide public company documents related to the topic of study. Reviewing company documents was the secondary source of data collection for this study. I compared data from the interviews to relevant company documents such as employee performance records, leadership reviews, and business goals and policies. The public company documents supported and supplemented evidence from other sources of data.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization is an important function during the data collection process. Properly organizing data enables the researcher to access data when needed (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). All collected data for this study is stored in electronic recordings, transcribed notes, a reflection journal, and on notecards and charts. I listened to the interview recordings and wrote them down verbatim. Fortunate researchers that have interview participants comfortable with tape recordings have the participants spoken words recorded on tapes making it easier to make clear clarifications of the interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Then, I began analyzing the data to determine the themes by using the research questions as a base. Turner (2010) pointed out providing codes to the themes assists the researcher in comparing interviews.

According to Yin (2014), a qualitative data analysis program provides a single location for storage that enables the researcher easy access to material and the ability to address large amounts of data with consistent coding schemes. However, Castleberry (2014) explained NVivo software does not perform the analysis but provides an efficient interface to code data and extrapolate meaning out of a richer organization of analyzed data. Zamawe (2015) explained that NVivo has features such as character-based coding, rich text capabilities, and multimedia functions crucial for qualitative data management. I decided not to use NVivo software for organizing and coding the data for this study. The reason for this decision was that I was unable to conceptualize the data on the computer screen and found myself printing the transcripts and reverting to manually coding the text using a thematic approach.

Once I completed the interviews and began the data analysis for this study, I created a reflection journal. I wrote detailed records of initial patterns, themes, and concepts that emerged from the interview transcriptions. The reflection journal served as a reference tool that enabled me to become familiar with my research. Marshall and Rossman (2016) pointed out that a researcher should understand their research by reading and rereading through the data to become intimate with the material.

The cataloging process for this study consisted of labeling all research materials with an identification number. A qualitative researcher assigns numbers to each participant to protect their identity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I provided each participant with a number from 1 to 15. By assigning identification numbers, I distinguished between participants and labeled data accurately.

I stored research data such as recordings, transcribed notes, other sources of data, and the personal information about each participant secure. A researcher is responsible for storing confidential data about participants for their protection (Yin, 2012). Consent forms and all written data are stored in my locked office safe, and electronic data is stored on my password-protected computer and password-protected external hard drive.

All research documentation and raw data will be stored for the allotted period of five years, and then destroyed by shredding documents and erasing the computer data and external hard drive.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process begins when the researcher works through data to determine meaningful themes, patterns, and descriptions that will answer the central research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Bernard (2013) pointed out the process of data analysis is the most important step in qualitative research. The analysis for this study included (a) gathering data, (b) grouping the data, (c) generating themes, (d) accessing the data, and (d) using a thematic approach to understand the strategies SME business leaders use to manage change successfully. This study involved the use of semistructured interviews, recordings, transcribed notes, a reflection journal, notecards and charts, and document review.

The appropriate data analysis process for this study was methodological triangulation. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) noted methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple methods to collect data as well as the analysis of the data. Denzin and Lincoln suggested case study findings are more convincing and accurate if based on multiple sources because multiple sources of evidence allow for data triangulation and the development of converging lines of inquiry. The primary purpose of triangulation is to eliminate or reduce biases and increase the reliability and validity of the study (Cope, 2014). Triangulation is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained that triangulation is not so much about getting the truth; it is about discovering the multiple perspectives to understand a social world. Methodological triangulation guided this study because no single method will adequately answer the research question (See Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Cope (2014) pointed out that triangulation is the process that occurs when researchers use multiple sources to draw conclusions. Triangulation of data involved analysis of all primary data collected from the semistructured interview questions, and secondary data from public company documents, and various business reports.

The following were key components of data analysis: (a) organizing the data set, (b) acquainting yourself with the data, (c) classifying, coding, and interpreting the data, and (d) presenting and writing up the data (Rowley, 2012). Thematic analysis assisted me in identifying themes, organizing and coding themes, analyzing the data, and answering the central research question. I discovered the key themes related to leadership behaviors and strategies. Rowley (2012) suggested keeping the number of main themes to six to eight, but it is possible to develop sub-themes within each theme. Then, I compared the themes to the transformational leadership theory that guided this study. The expectations for this study was to collect data that would provide insight into the strategies leaders of SMEs use to manage change successfully. I used transformational leadership as the lens through which I analyzed and coded the data.

Rowley (2012) explained that codes are names provided to represent the themes in the words of the interview participants. The codes identify similar themes in different interviews, and the researcher can achieve an understanding of the answers provided by the interview participants (Rowley, 2012). At this point, the researcher should find similar themes in different interviews, or within different parts of the same interview making it possible to make comparisons and interpret the data (Rowley, 2012). Constant comparison enables the researcher to identify emerging themes within the participant interviews (Zapata-Sepulveda et al., 2012). Comparing the data from interviews together and not considered on its own enables the researcher to analyze data simultaneously instead of dividing it (Scales, 2013).

Data Analysis Process

I decided to use a thematic approach of analyzing the data. Thematic analysis is a process of coding in six phases to create established, meaningful patterns. The six phases are as follows: Familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing empirically based findings (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015). Thematic analysis emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns within data (Crowe et al., 2015).

In the first stage of data analysis, I reviewed all the data. Yin (2014) explained analyzing case study evidence is difficult because the techniques are not well defined. I began listening to the recorded interviews and interpreted what the participants shared. After I summarized the data, I set up member checking interviews with each participant to review a copy of their summaries for feedback on my interpretation. Harper and Cole (2012) defined member checking as a quality control process by which researchers seek to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of what recorded during a research interview.

In the next step of data analysis, I read and re-read the interview transcripts until I began to determine similarities. I highlighted the words with similar meanings. I made notecards with the various words and attached them to a chart to display the evidence. I searched for patterns and concepts by placing the notecards in chronological order by similarities. I discovered patterns and identified relationships between the categories. I identified five themes from the data. The themes were (a) managing employee's needs, (b) mentoring/training programs, (c) motivation, (d) influence, and (e) communication. At that point, I compared the themes to validate data and determine if a correlation existed with managing change and participant interview responses.

In the final step, I used the comparison method. I compared the emerging themes and interview responses to the public company documents gathered from the participants. I reviewed the notes I took from the document reviews, similar themes emerged from the documents, and at that point, I understood I had reached data saturation. Data saturation occurs when enough information has been gathered reaching the point of no new themes (Fusch, & Ness, 2015).

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research requires a creative approach to assessing its quality (Houghton et al., 2013). The basis for evaluating the quality of a research design relies on the concepts of reliability and validity. These concepts include five criteria commonly used in qualitative research: (a) dependability, (b) creditability, (c) transferability, (d) confirmability, and (e) data saturation (Houghton et al., 2013). A major challenge for researchers is striving for the highest possible quality when conducting and reporting research (Cope, 2014).

Reliability

Reliability is mainly concerned with whether a study can repeat itself (Yin, 2014). To avoid random errors affecting the reliability of a study a researcher should document research procedures in detail so that another researcher can reproduce the same results (Yin, 2014). Detailed data presentations that make minimal conclusions are preferable to researcher's presentations of their summaries of their data (Rowley, 2012). Researchers explained while conducting interviews there are some ways for increasing reliability, such as tape recording all face-to-face interviews, carefully transcribing these tapes and performing reliability checks on the coding of answers to open-ended questions (Bernard, 2013; Rowley, 2012).

Dependability. Dependability considers changes during research, and how these changes affect the way research is conducted (Wahyuni, 2012). To ensure dependability, a researcher provides details about selected research design and process to allow future researchers to follow a similar framework (Wahyuni, 2012). I presented a detailed account of my step-by-step research processes and provided a list of interview questions used to gather the empirical data. Researchers explained that dependability and confirmability are similar in that the processes for establishing both are alike (Houghton et al., 2013).

A pilot study enhanced the dependability of this study. The goal of a pilot study is to assess the feasibility of the proposed study and to determine important components critical to the development of the main study (Morin, 2013). A preliminary pilot study will check to ensure interview questions make sense, and any necessary changes made before the interviews with research participants (Rowley, 2012). Pilot studies are smaller versions of the main study to test whether the components of the main study work well together (Lancaster, 2015). I conducted a pilot study to assess my readiness, ability, and commitment as a researcher.

Validity

Validity refers to how well the research method investigates what it intends to, and how the researcher gains access to the participants' knowledge and meaning (Lub, 2015). The important issue in qualitative research is achieving a similarity of understanding between the participant and the researcher, and ensuring the research is credible (Lub, 2015). Demonstrating validity requires the research design accurately identifies and describes the phenomenon under investigation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Houghton et al. (2013) explained the validity of a study occurs through triangulation and participant validation. Marshall and Rossman (2016) insisted validity of data is concerned with how appropriate a specific research method is for answering the research questions and providing explanations.

Credibility. Credibility is concerned with the accuracy of data to ensure the study tests the intended social phenomena (Wahyuni, 2012). A researcher can enhance the creditability of their study by using data triangulation (Cope, 2014). Triangulation involves collecting data from multiple sources (Cope, 2014). Examples of multiple sources are participant research interviews, observations, and recordings. The purpose of triangulation is to gain an understanding by collecting an array of data on the same topic with the aim of gathering multiple views that produce a stronger account of the lived experiences of the research participants (Cope, 2014). Researchers explained the two main purposes of triangulation are to confirm data and ensure data are complete (Houghton et al., 2013). I used methodological triangulation to ensure creditability. Data triangulation assisted in collecting comprehensive, relevant information, and enabled me to validate the reliability of this study, therefore, enhancing the credibility.

Member checking. Member checking, an additional technique for establishing creditability allows participants to read the summaries of their interviews to ensure their accounts are accurate (Houghton et al., 2013). Harper and Cole (2012) defined member checking as a quality control process by which researchers seek to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of what recorded during a research interview. Listening carefully to the participants provides the researcher a chance to clarify or develop their thoughts, which will strengthen the findings of the study (Reilly, 2013). Member checking ensured the documented accounts of the participants were accurate. Additional feedback gathered through member checking assisted in the interpretation of the participant's experiences.

Transferability. Transferability refers to whether the findings of a study transfer to another similar situation while preserving the meaning of the completed study (Houghton et al., 2013). According to Houghton et al. (2013), a thick description of the original context of research must adequately describe the research to determine transferability. Researchers confirmed the necessity of rich, thick descriptions, and detailed accounts of a study to ensure transferability allowing readers to evaluate relatedness to their individual contexts (Black, Palombaro, & Dole, 2013). To establish transferability, a researcher focuses on careful, detailed descriptions of samples, settings, and results of research, so others who read the study can make well-informed decisions about whether the results are likely to transfer to a new setting with a different set of participants (Cope, 2014). I provided detailed-rich descriptions of the findings of this study so that readers and researchers can see opportunities for transferability of the findings to future research. A researcher needs to provide detailed descriptions of context and phenomena to enable others to assess the finding's transferability (Houghton et al., 2013). The aim of research is to produce information that a researcher can share and apply beyond the study setting (Cope, 2014).

Confirmability. Confirmability refers to the neutrality and accuracy of the data (Houghton et al., 2013). Research by Cope (2014) explains that confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to demonstrate the data represent the participants' responses and not the researchers' biases or viewpoints. Asking probing questions during the interview process and conducting member checking will ensure confirmability of the study. Reporting qualitative research, the researcher can demonstrate confirmability by providing rich quotes from the participants that depict each emerging theme (Cope, 2014). I established confirmability of my study by using a thematic approach to research. Thematic analysis of data confirmed that many participants held the same opinion resulting in common themes across the interviews. Case study research should also triangulate the evidence from multiple sources to confirm and corroborate the findings (Yin, 2014).

Data saturation. Failure to reach data saturation affects the quality of the research and impedes content validity. Researchers suggested students conducting qualitative research have a difficult time achieving data saturation when interviewing study participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Qualitative research aims to gather sufficient data to describe the phenomenon or topic of study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Data saturation occurs when enough information has been gathered reaching the point of no new themes (Fusch, & Ness, 2015). Reaching saturation occurs when the experiences and perspectives of the research participants are recurring, and no new themes emerge (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014). Researchers agreed that to determine if a study has reached saturation researchers analyze data while still collecting data to ensure themes sufficiently repeat and no new insights emerge (Ando et al., 2014). Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that additional interviews might be required until the researcher achieves data saturation. As previously stated, I continued interviewing until data saturation occurred. I achieved saturation by using a purposeful sample of 15 SME business leaders.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 of the doctoral study included the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, and population and sampling. I discussed ethical research, data collection, data analysis, and reliability and validity. Section 3 presents the findings of the study and discusses how the findings are relevant to improve change strategies used by business leaders within SMEs. I discussed the implications of social change, provided suggestions for future research, and included a reflection of my experiences as a DBA Doctoral student.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies SME business leaders use to manage change successfully. Data collection included semistructured interviews with SME business leaders and an exploration of employee performance records, leadership reviews, and business goals and policies. Five main themes emerged from data: managing employee's needs, mentoring and training programs, motivation, influence, and communication. Participants related change management to addressing employee's needs and developing mentoring and training programs. Data showed that business leaders' use of motivation, influence, and communication helped them initiate and implement change.

I recruited a diverse group of 15 SME business leaders from a range of professions including commercial real estate, legal practice, lending, and retail who had experience using leadership strategies to manage change successfully. A pilot study ensured all research questions were relevant to the research topic. Based on the collected data and the emergent themes, I found that the initial findings of this research matched the fundamental concepts of the transformational leadership theory identified by Bass and Avolio (1997). In the following sections, I describe the resulting themes in detail and provide transcript citations to support the findings.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do SME business leaders use to manage change successfully? The data analysis revealed five major themes: managing employee's needs, mentoring and training programs, motivation, influence, and communication. These themes related to the fundamental concepts of transformational leadership.

Theme 1: Managing Employees' Needs

The first theme that emerged from the data was employees' needs. The participants' responses to Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 indicated ongoing efforts to make sure the welfare of their employees comes first. All 15 participants believed it was necessary to address the needs of their employees to make their jobs easier. These needs included personal days off for unexpected family issues. All participants in the study noted the importance for leaders to recognize and provide personal attention to the needs of all employees. A study by Deschamps et al. (2016) showed that when transformational leaders pay attention to their followers' needs, treat them respectfully, and show they care, they foster a climate of justice.

Interview responses and review of performance records, leadership reviews, and business goals and policies revealed that leaders implement successful change by recognizing the needs of their employees. Various participants stated they made changes relating to paid sick days, the number of paid vacation days per year, and personal days off to meet their employees' needs. Transformational leaders have tremendous influence, and their style of leadership enables them to initiate and implement change (Singh, 2013). Transformational leaders build strong relationships with their employees and understand their individual needs, skills, and aspirations (Ilsever, 2014).

In a study on transformational leadership, Svendsen and Joensson (2016) explored voice during the change-planning process. With a sample size of 124 employees, the researchers collected survey responses. Svendsen and Joensson used a quantitative approach to analyze the data. The results indicated that transformational leadership had no effect on change-related voice by itself. However, there was an indirect effect through affective commitment to change. The researchers noted this effect was conditional on the employees' level of perceived change impact. Many employees choose not to speak up because of the fear of negative consequences from business leaders (Svendsen & Joensson, 2016).

The responses to Interview Question 2 indicated that participants emphasized the importance of business leaders meeting the needs of their employees by listening to them and addressing their specific needs. Participant 2 explained, "Through trial and error, I found that the best way to get employees on board with change is to make sure that they feel like they have a voice in the matter." Participant 3 stated, "It is necessary to always keep everyone informed. Employees that feel they really matter to the business will almost always allow change to happen." Participant 13 explained:

> Every week I hold a luncheon/meeting where I not only talk about business issues, I make it a point to give credit to the employees that surpassed what was expected of them. We are like one big happy family, and I make sure to address all issues any of my employees might be facing.

Transformational leadership is one of the most effective leadership styles, and researchers have attempted to explain its effectiveness and the mediating mechanisms that underlie the effect of transformational leadership on employees' needs (Kovjanic et al., 2013). The behaviors and strategies of a leader directly affect the level of certainty and adaptability among employees (McKnight, 2013). The use of the transformational leadership style leads to empowered leaders and employees through the development of meaningful relationships (Burns, 1978). A transformational leader who takes the feelings of others into consideration initiates and sustains successful change within the organization (Vyas, 2013). In response to Interview Question 4, Participant 15 pointed out:

> I always consider how my employees could be affected by a change, and if the change would really be beneficial or not. Over the years, I have implemented several changes that proved not to be beneficial to my business. Time and money were lost, so, I tend to involve everyone within my business to get several opinions before initiating change. Don't get me wrong, every business must make changes to stay successful, but I make informed decisions before diving right in.

Participant 7 agreed and stated, "I have made several poor decisions that made my business lose money. I have learned the hard way that the best practice is to get everyone involved in the decision making to implement successful change."

In response to Interview Question 3, participants concluded that resistance to change occurs when employees refuse to cooperate with leaders. Participant 5 explained, "The only way to avoid resistance to change is to gradually introduce the change, and explain all the benefits." Participant 7 noted, "I usually start a conversation with my employees asking if there is anything I can do to make their jobs easier. I ask for suggestions, and then I offer mine. I have found this to be a useful strategy I use repeatedly to avoid resistance to change." McClellan (2014) suggested that communication between management and employees reduces resistance, minimizes uncertainty, and gains employee involvement for organizational change. Participant 9 emphasized, "If my employees feel they are valued and I go out of my way to assure them that the change will be beneficial to them, there will be no resistance to the change." Organizational change causes employees to either actively support or actively resist the change effort because they fear unpredictable outcomes (Luo & Jiang, 2014). Participant 11 stated, "On several occasions I have run head on with resistance to change. The way I handle resistance is to ask what I can do for them to make the transition easier. This works every time."

Eight of the 15 interview participants, when answering Interview Questions 1 and 4, responded with comments about making changes related to paid sick days, the number of paid vacation days per year, and personal days off to meet their employees' needs. Participant 11 stated:

> All my employees have families, and we have had several discussions on personal days off and whether these days can be paid days off. After several debates, it was decided that 8 days per year will be paid for regardless of the reason for the absence.

Participant 4 elaborated:

> My Company is family friendly. What I mean by that is I understand when something comes up that can't be missed, I always allow my employees personal

> days off. I make it a point to give 2 weeks paid vacation to every employee every year. A recent change my company made is that after working for me for three years paid vacations go up to three weeks.

Participant 7 agreed, “Employees at times need to take a day off to attend a family event. I found that if I give paid personal days off, my employees tend to use them sparingly.” In response to Interview Question 2, Participant 1 explained:

> The most successful strategy for me to bring about change is to give the employees what they want. What I mean by this is everyone always wants to make some extra money. By giving my employees paid sick days and paid vacations, they are always willing to accept whatever change is necessary to keep our doors open.

Business leaders in this study were willing to meet the needs of their employees by providing monetary supplements, whether it was a paid vacation or personal day off. Leadership is a phenomenon considered a positive force for change and focuses on the development of individuals, groups, and organizations by spending significant amounts of time and money in pursuit of increasing the quality of the organization (Waldman et al., 2013).

The strategies revealed in this study relating to managing employees’ needs will assist business leaders in managing change successfully. Giving employees a voice in the decision-making process makes them feel they matter. Keeping employees informed about change and asking for suggestions shows they are valued. Introducing change gradually and explaining all the benefits helps manage change. Giving examples of how employees' jobs will become easier will help with resistance to the change. Giving credit to employees who surpassed organizational expectations will show the leader cares.

The findings of this study showed strategies that aligned with the transformational leadership theory that guided this study. Managing the needs of employees is a behavioral characteristic of a transformational leader. Individualized consideration takes place when the transformational leader considers the individual needs, strengths, and aspirations of each follower to develop their capabilities (Kovjanic et al., 2012; Mokhber et al., 2015). Most of the business leaders in this study used this trait to develop strategies to manage change successfully.

Theme 2: Mentoring/Training Programs

The second theme that emerged from the data was mentoring/training programs. Participant responses to Interview Questions 1, 3, and 4 indicated a need for mentoring or training programs to assist employees in accepting change. Transformational leaders help employees achieve their true potential by providing them with a learning environment for their growth and development (Anderson & Sun, 2015). The goal of leadership is to minimize change impacts on all those involved to avoid interferences and resistance (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2013).

In a 2015 study, Laukhuf and Malone indicated a link between women entrepreneurs and the need for mentoring. Using a qualitative phenomenological study of 22 women entrepreneurs, Laukhuf and Malone found that women entrepreneurs who participate in mentoring relationship stress the importance of maintaining these relationships due to positive contributions reflected in their professional and personal growth and development. The researchers also noted successful mentoring helps women with decision making while reducing feelings of isolation, and can be a source of inspiration. Laukhuf and Malone (2015) conducted a study of 22 women entrepreneurs and discovered that the transformational leadership style helped women entrepreneurs grow their businesses and develop personally and professionally.

Responses to Interview Questions 1 and 4, and review of performance records, leadership reviews, and business goals and policies revealed those leaders who implement mentoring or training programs are more successful in managing change within their businesses. Leaders help employees make sense of the change and provide guidance and support when changes seem unclear (Vaccaro et al., 2012).

Participants emphasized the importance of mentoring and training programs because employees work together and stay informed with business procedures. In response to Interview Question 4, Participant 1 stated,

> I encourage my seasoned employees to mentor and train the newcomers. I have a large bulletin board in the meeting room where the office manager keeps track of sales and commissions. At the end of the month, seasoned employees receive a portion of the newcomer's commission as an incentive to mentor."

Participant 13 revealed,

> The mentoring system I recently put into place has been beneficial to both the mentor and the new employee. The mentor is happy to get an incentive for his or her assistance, and the new employee gains knowledge at a faster pace resulting in working on their own faster.

In response to Interview Question 1, participant 8 explained, “I recently incorporated a new computer training program. I require all my employees to log in and review all the training tutorials regardless of how long they have been working for me.” Participant 9 replied, “I upgraded all the software in my computers to include learning tools to assist my employees in staying up to date with all the latest office practices. I found that a refresher course does everyone some good.”

Participants explained that mentoring and training programs reduce resistance to change. The main problem associated with organizational change is to get employees to accept changes without resistance (Smollan, 2013). Smollan (2013) suggested that resistance to change is unavoidable, but anticipated, and to some degree managed. In response to Interview Question 3, participant 11 pointed out, “I am a true believer that providing training programs will ensure a smooth transition from an old process to a new and improved process.” Participant 8 noted, “Change will occur if employees are given the tools to show them that the change will not only benefit the company but them too.” Participant 5 explained, “When it comes to resistance to change the best way to avoid it is to provide the necessary learning tools to ensure a smooth transition.” Participant 3 agreed, “The only way to combat resistance is to make sure everyone is given the learning tools required to make sure the change runs smoothly.” The participation of organizational members in the implementation of change is critical to its acceptance (Penava & Sehic, 2014).

The strategies revealed in this study relating to mentoring and training programs will assist business leaders in managing change successfully. Providing a learning environment for the growth and development of employees will ensure a smooth transition from an old process to a new process. Providing learning tools to help employees learn new office practices will assist in managing change. Encouraging seasoned employees to mentor and train newcomers using incentives created a supportive work environment. Implementing mentoring and training programs ensures employees work together and stay informed with new business procedures and practices.

The findings of this study revealed strategies that aligned with the transformational leadership theory that guided this study. Providing mentoring and training programs is a behavioral characteristic of a transformational leader. Transformational leaders that focus on coaching and mentoring transform their employee’s skills and guide them to meet organizational objectives (Pongpearchan, 2016). Most of the business leaders in this study used strategies to develop and implement mentoring and training programs. The use of these programs enabled business leaders to manage change successfully.

Theme 3: Motivation

The third theme that emerged from the data was motivation. The responses to Interview Questions 1, 2, and 4 revealed that motivated employees accept change. Transformational behaviors transform employees and motivate them to surpass their self-interests for the good of the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Transformational leaders motivate their employees by giving meaning and challenge to their work (Anderson & Sun, 2015; Mokhber et al., 2015).

In a 2017 study on employee satisfaction in SMEs, Vlacsekova and Mura explored employee motivation. With a sample size of 300 employees, the researchers collected questionnaire responses. Vlacsekova and Mura used a quantitative approach to analyze the data. The results revealed motivation is very individual and managers have a difficult task motivating their employees. The researchers indicated that managers could motivate employees by giving them responsibilities and the authority to make basic decisions. Work motivation represents a set of energizing forces, both internal and external, that initiate work-related behavior and determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration (Deschamps et al., 2016).

Responses to Interview Questions 2 and 4, and review of performance records, leadership reviews, and business goals and policies identified motivation was the key to successful change. Transformational leaders motivate employees with feelings of trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect, so employees work voluntarily towards organizational goals rather than their interests (Song et al., 2012). The transformational leader's enthusiasm about the future of the organization is contagious, motivating employees to exert personal efforts in their jobs to accomplish the leader's vision (Burch & Guarana, 2014).

Participants clarified the importance of motivating employees to accept change. In response to Interview Question 4, participant 3 noted, "The biggest challenge I face when it comes to change is finding different ways to motivate my employees. Most of them have been working for me for over five years, and they are set in their own ways." The distinction between change and transition is important to gain an understanding of why employees have a difficult time relinquishing of what they are accustomed to than the change itself (Halm, 2014). Conversely, participant 5 disagreed,

> I motivate my employees by pointing out their expertise and value. This strategy works for me every time. I must say that I make small changes that for the most part is unnoticeable. For instance, six months ago, I changed all the computers in the office to Apple. Everyone had to attend workshops to learn how to use the new computers. At the same time, I had my IT people update the software to a better operating system. No one complained because the workshops did all the teaching.

Participant 9 stated, “I found that when I motivate my employees, they pretty much get on board with whatever I want. They are flexible and easily managed with very little persuasion.” In response to Interview Question 1, participant 8 explained,

> I motivate my employees every chance I get. I find that when I boost my employees up, they accept whatever I throw at them. A couple of months ago I upgraded all the computers to Apple. I thought it might be a problem for some of the older employees to get used to, but the motivated employees took it upon themselves to teach the few that were not familiar with Apple.

Participant 11 revealed, “Motivating my employees has proven to be the best strategy for ensuring change. I recently upgraded all the computer software within my business, and I had no problems with the transition because everyone was willing to lend a helping hand to those that had some trouble learning how to use the software.” Carter et al., (2013) stated transformational leaders encourage employees to critically contemplate change initiatives, enhance their confidence addressing adaption, and emphasize the importance of implementing change.

The strategies revealed in this study relating to motivation will assist business leaders in managing change successfully. Motivating employees by pointing out their expertise will ensure employees accept change. Motivating employees by showing they are valued will ensure a flexible and manageable workforce. A motivated employee will assist others in accepting organizational change.

The findings of this study revealed strategies that aligned with the transformational leadership theory that guided this study. Motivating employees is a behavioral characteristic of a transformational leader. Inspirational motivation refers to the way leaders motivate and inspire their employees to reach ambitious goals and view the future with optimism (Metwally et al., 2014). Most business leaders in this study used this trait to develop motivational strategies to initiate and implement organizational change.

Theme 4: Influence

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was influence. The responses to Interview Questions 2, 3 and 4 indicated unanimously influence was the most important aspect of successful change. All 15 participants implied that influence was the main strategy that assisted them in managing change. Transformational leadership, as defined by Bass (1985) is one that communicates to an individual at a personal and emotional level, appealing to not only the person’s intellect but also to their emotions at the psychological level (Vyas, 2013). Transformational leaders that focus on influencing specific behaviors will provide employees considerable clarification as to what leader's value, thereby enhancing employees' clarity (Robertson & Barling, 2013).

Participant responses to interview questions and review of performance records, leadership reviews, and business goals and policies indicated a leader's influence on employees ensures successful change. Organizational leaders have influence over a range of traditional organizational outcomes, such as employee attitudes, commitment, performance, and safety (Robertson & Barling, 2013). Transformational leaders have tremendous influence, and their style of leadership enables them to initiate and implement change (Singh, 2013).

Participants agreed influence had a major impact on successful change. In response to Interview Question 2, participant 15 explained, "I strategize implementing change by using my influence. I expect my employees to listen to my ideas, and carry out my wishes, but at the same time, I listen to their views." Participant 6 agreed:

> I have no problem using my influence to get my employees to accept change. I certainly am open to discussion, but the final decision is mine. That might sound harsh, but I have been in business for over 20 years, and I have made many changes throughout the years. Fortunately, I have been able to keep the doors open and remain relevant.

Participant 5 stated, "Influencing my employees is the one strategy that seems to help me with implementing change. I explain all the benefits not only to the company but to them as well." Participant 3 revealed, "I influence my employees into believing that the change we are going to make will be most beneficial to them because their job will become easier to do. That's the truth, and at the same time the business will save money."

In a 2016 study, Jones and Van de Ven examined whether relationships between change resistance and its consequences strengthen or weaken over time during an extended duration of organizational change. The researcher's revealed resistance to change had increasingly negative relationships over time with two important consequences: employees' commitment to the organization and perceptions of organizational effectiveness. Jones and Van de Ven also found that over time supportive leadership was increasingly impactful in reducing change resistance. Some employees will support the change and others will be against it; a leader must minimize employee resistance by communicating, reducing anxiety, and providing support. In addition, Klonek et al. (2014) revealed that successful change management depends on effective communication with the employees whose work lives are affected.

Of the 15 participants in this study, most of them addressed some type of resistance to change. In response to Interview Question 3, participant 13 stated, "I influence my employees to accept change by pointing out how important they are to the business and how their cooperation ensures our survival. Everyone wants to stay employed, so, usually, there is no resistance." Participant 1 explained:

> The best way to avoid resistance to change is to implement small incremental changes. I found taking it slow allows employees to accept the change. For instance, I wanted my business to go green. So, I slowly, over a two-month period

> cut out paper waste by changing from using hard copies of invoices to emailed receipts.

Participant 11 agreed, “Taking it slow when it comes to change will help reduce resistance to change.” Participant 2 revealed, “At times no matter how influential I might be there still is resistance when it comes to change. When employees are set in their old ways, the only way to introduce change is slowly.” In most successful organizations, leadership encourages employees to accept change initiatives and provides them a voice in the decision-making process to prevent resistance (Tushman & OReilly, 2013).

The strategies revealed in this study relating to influence will assist business leaders in managing change successfully. Influencing employees to believe the change is beneficial to them will allow business leaders to initiate and implement change. Using influence to persuade employees change will make their jobs easier will help implement change. Influencing employees by revealing how important, they are, and how their cooperation ensures business survival will help business leaders manage change.

The findings of this study revealed strategies that aligned with the transformational leadership theory that guided this study. Influencing employees is a behavioral characteristic of a transformational leader. Idealized influence is related to the attributes given to the leader by their subordinates, and how the leader is perceived by the employee as being confident and powerful (Metwally et al., 2014). All the business leaders in this study used this trait to implement influential strategies to manage organizational change.

Theme 5: Communication

The fifth theme that emerged from the data was communication. The responses to Interview Questions 2, 3, and 4 revealed that communication is among one of the most important aspects of organizational change. All 15 participants determined that keeping the communication channels open would assist with managing change. McClellan (2014) suggested communication between management and employees reduces resistance, minimizes uncertainty, and gains employee involvement for organizational change. Klonek et al. (2014) revealed successful change management depends on effective communication with the employees whose work lives are affected.

Participant responses to Interview Questions 2, 3, and 4 and review of performance records, leadership reviews, and business goals and policies revealed leaders who communicate with their employees would successfully initiate and implement change. The main purpose of a transformational leader is to articulate a vision that helps employees focus attention on contributions to others and transcend their self-interests for the sake of their organization (Grant, 2012). Transformational leaders' focus employees' attention on a shared entity based on acceptance of a leader's message and values (Li et al., 2013). Transformational leaders must communicate a common vision inspiring and compelling organizational members to perform at higher than previous performance (Aga et al., 2016).

In a 2017 study, Appelbaum et al. explored the factors that affect the success of an organizational change within an organization under study. The researchers used a three-step process consisting of a literature review and field research through survey and interviews. Appelbaum et al. found employees commitment to change, in this organization, improved through increasing formal and informal communication, creating adaptive organizational systems and enhancing the role of transformational leaders during the change. Communication is vital to the effective implementation of organizational change.

Participants explained keeping the communication channels open with employees makes initiating and implementing change a smoother process. In response to Interview Question 2, participant 4 revealed, “I communicate daily with as many of my employees I can. I have a suggestion box, and every week we review suggestions at our weekly meeting that could improve our business processes.” Participant 10 explained:

> The best strategy I found to bring about change is communication. I tend to talk, talk about everything. I also listen to my employee’s suggestions, and on several occasions, I have either changed my mind about a specific change or used an idea of an employee to make an improvement.

In response to Interview Question 4, participant 6 replied, “Communication is at the top of my list when it comes to change. I always make sure that everyone who will be affected by the change knows exactly what to expect. I map it all out so that I can get everyone on board.” Participant 5 agreed, “Without communication, there is no way to implement change. The communication channel has to remain open during and after the change is implemented.” Transformational leaders must lead their team with a balance between drive and support and achieve organizational excellence while the organization transforms (Aga et al., 2016).

The strategies revealed in this study relating to communication will assist business leaders in managing change successfully. Communicating and listening to the suggestions from employees will help manage change. Keeping the communication channels open with all employees will enable change to occur. Communicating exactly what to anticipate from the change will assist business leaders in initiating and implementing change successfully.

The findings of this study revealed strategies that aligned with the transformational leadership theory that guided this study. Communication with employees is a behavioral characteristic of a transformational leader. Transformational leadership promotes interactive, caring, visionary, inspirational, and empowering communication (Men, 2014). All the business leaders in this study used this trait to implement communication strategies to manage change successfully.

Tie to the Conceptual Framework

Transformational leadership was the conceptual framework for this study. The transformational leadership theory involves a leadership style based on the premise that leaders can inspire followers to change their expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work towards common organizational goals (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Transformational leaders win the admiration of their employees through visualizing strategies that achieve organizational change (Groves & LaRocca, 2012). Understanding change and improving the ability to manage change is of fundamental importance because all change processes revolve around engaging in change, resisting change, or causing the change to occur

(Appelbaum et al., 2015). The transformational leader promotes change through qualities of enthusiasm, trust, and openness (Shanker et al., 2012).

Transformational leadership theory is a collection of four dimensions, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Grant, 2012; Trmal et al., 2015). The five themes outlined in this study revealed a tie to the conceptual framework, (a) managing employee's needs, (b) mentoring/training programs, (c) motivation, (d) influence, and (e) communication. After further analyzing, the interview data and company documents it revealed these five themes would assist SME business leaders in initiating and implementing change within their businesses.

Applications to Professional Practice

This study is important to understanding the leadership strategies that assist employees in accepting change. New and existing SME business leaders can use the study findings as a basis for the development of leadership strategies to manage change. The results of this study provide suggestions to SME business leaders for which leadership strategies are effective in bringing about successful change. If SME business leaders consider these findings, the gap in business practices relating to change could improve.

The first theme to emerge was managing employee's needs. Participants revealed that listening to the needs of their employees and addressing those needs led to successful organizational change. The findings of this study discovered that when business leaders provided personal attention to the needs of their employees such as paid personal days off and paid vacations employees accepted change without resistance. SME business leaders should recognize the needs of their employees to implement successful change.

The second theme was mentoring/training programs. The study findings revealed that business leaders who implemented mentoring and training programs were more successful in managing change within their businesses. This study discovered the importance of mentoring and training programs because employees work together and stay informed with business procedures.

The third theme was motivation. The study findings identified that motivation was the key to successful change. This study discovered motivating employees by pointing out their expertise and value allowed business leaders to manage change successfully. Participants disclosed that motivating employees proved to be the best strategy for ensuring change.

The fourth theme was influence. The study findings indicated influence was the most important aspect of successful change. This study implied that influence was the participant's main strategy for managing change. Business leaders could influence their employees into believing that the change would be beneficial to them by making their jobs easier.

The fifth theme was communication. The study findings revealed keeping the communication channels open with employees makes initiating and implementing change a smoother process. This study discovered that without communication employees would resist change. Additionally, the study findings implied that managing change depends on effective communication with the employees whose work lives are affected.

Study results indicated leaders with appropriate leadership strategies are able to initiate and implement change without resistance from employees. An effective transformational leader gets employees to accept change initiatives and embrace change (Allen et al., 2013). Additionally, these results provide SME business leaders with implementable information to assist with organizational change. Effective leadership is vital to the success of all organizations and positively affects commitment to change (Tyssen et al., 2014).

The study findings are relevant to professional practice because this study identified practical solutions for SME business leaders to facilitate change. Furthermore, the findings provide a practical guide for SME business leaders to enhance their leadership strategies to motivate, influence, and communicate with their employees. Study findings added to the knowledge of organizational change through identifying the necessary leadership strategies required to facilitate successful change. Transformational leadership is important to organizational change, and effective change strategies and leadership could support business success (Carter et al., 2014).

Implications for Social Change

Implications of this study for social change involve providing SME business leaders with insight into strategies to facilitate successful organizational change. Organizational change is a necessity for businesses to survive and prosper (Carter et al., 2013). The main reason organizational change is unsuccessful is the inadequate leadership style used by business leaders (Penava & Sehic, 2014). This study is important to understanding how to improve leadership strategies when it pertains to managing organizational change. When leaders understand how to manage change successfully, they enable the organization to thrive.

The results of this study identified viable options to manage change through effective leadership strategies. Business leaders who recognize and provide personal attention to the needs of their employees manage organizational change. Those business leaders that implement mentoring and training programs provide guidance and support when changes seem unclear. Business leaders motivate their employees into believing the change will be beneficial. Influencing employees to accept change makes managing change a smoother process. Business leaders who keep the communication channels open with employees successfully manage change.

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies SME business leaders use to manage change successfully. The findings contribute to the understanding of effective leadership strategies that pertain to facilitating successful organizational change. The business leaders in this study provided useful strategies for initiating and implementing change. Giving employees a voice in the decision-making process and asking for suggestions will make them feel valued. Keeping employees informed about the benefits of the change will help facilitate change. Providing a learning environment with learning tools to learn new processes will help with implementing change. Mentoring and training programs will ensure a supportive work environment. Motivating employees by pointing out their expertise and value will create a flexible and manageable workforce. Using influence to persuade employees change will make their jobs easier will help with managing change. Keeping the communication channels open with all employees will enable change to occur.

The implication for positive social change included the potential to provide SME business leaders with strategies to implement change and survive in business, thereby contributing to job growth and employee prosperity in local communities. SMEs with less than 500 employees are the mainstay of the U.S. economy and employment (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2015). The findings of this study could provide prospective and existing business leaders with the necessary information to implement successful organizational change to ensure the survival of their businesses. Providing a work environment where business leaders listen to employee's suggestions, keep the communication channels open, provide a learning environment, and value their employees will help facilitate successful organizational change.

Recommendations for Action

The intent of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies SME business leaders use to manage change successfully. New and existing business leaders could use the findings from this study to gain insight into the successful strategies used to manage change. Using the information from successful SME business leaders as a resource may prove beneficial to assisting employees with accepting change. The participants in the study shared valuable insights into their experiences with managing employee's needs, mentoring/training programs, motivation, influence, and communication. The recommendations of this study are consistent with Burns (1978) concepts of transformational theory: power, purpose, and relationship. Transformational leaders are leaders who enhance organizational performance through empowering human resource and enabling change (Ghasabeh et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study was to discover strategies business leaders could use to manage change. The business leaders in this study revealed that meeting employee’s needs by making sure their welfare comes first and providing mentoring and training programs assisted employees to accept change. Additionally, business leaders in this study identified motivation as a useful strategy to manage change. The business leaders indicated unanimously that influence was the most important aspect of successful change. Lastly, it was determined communication was an effective strategy to manage change successfully.

The qualitative data obtained from this study provided SME business leaders insight into leadership strategies to manage change, and avoid resistance to change. The findings generated various conclusions regarding effective leadership strategies that could assist employees to accept change. The results of this study could also assist SME business leaders in the initiation and implementation of effective leadership strategies to facilitate successful organizational change. I would recommend SME business leaders use the strategies revealed in this study by giving employees a voice in the decision making process, creating a supportive work environment by implementing mentoring and training programs, creating a flexible and manageable workforce by showing employees their valued, influencing employees by showing their importance to business survival, and keeping the communication channels open.

The publication of this study may provide information researchers could include in future studies concerning leadership and organizational change. I will identify opportunities to present the study findings at relevant business-related events. I may distribute information regarding these results through training programs. Conferences are an effective way to communicate these results to scholars, business leaders, and owners. At these events, I would provide reading materials explaining the findings of my study.

Recommendations for Further Research

Opportunities for future research exist regarding transformational leadership and organizational change within SMEs. The findings indicated the leadership strategies that were important to facilitate successful organizational change. In this study, a limitation was selecting Los Angeles as the geographic location for the study. Yin (2014) explained limiting the geographic location to one specific area could limit the generalizability of the results. Further studies should include other geographical areas, a broader range of business leaders, and a larger number of participants. This study included 15 SME business leaders in Los Angeles. I would recommend further research to include a larger number of participants from more than one major city to gather data from a larger diverse population. I would also recommend future research to obtain data from both SME business leaders and employees because the data for this study was collected solely from SME business leaders. Including employees might reveal whether managing change is associated with transformational leadership strategies.

Use of an alternative research method could extend the study findings regarding transformational leadership and organizational change. I used a qualitative multiple case study focused on interview responses and document review to answer the central research question that guided this study. However, a quantitative method may identify important relationships or correlations between transformational leadership concepts, and managing change. Further research could study more than one leadership style because this study only focused on transformational leadership. Reviewing more than one style of leadership could provide opportunities for comparison of how differently they manage change within their business context.

Reflections

The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program and the doctoral study experience proved to be extremely rewarding at Walden University. I had the opportunity to interview SME business leaders managing change successfully within their businesses. This research project extended my knowledge about doctoral research. My knowledge and understanding of leadership strategies to facilitate change, and specifically in the business context, grew through this study. During the interview process, I spoke to intelligent, experienced business leaders who shared their ideas and strategies to manage organizational change. The study findings broadened my knowledge as to how to initiate and implement change within my own businesses.

Throughout the research process, I avoided any possible influence on the study participants. I noted all my personal beliefs and biases regarding managing change before beginning the interview process and remained aware of personal biases throughout the data analysis process. The research process allowed an examination of the diversity of leaders within the SME business context. The 15 study participants represented four industries within Los Angeles that had a variety of practices and strategies geared towards organizational change. This study provided me with different perspectives as to how different leaders manage change. I hope the participants in this study gained an appreciation for business research from this experience.

Conclusion

SMEs in the United States continue to flourish, even though some business leaders lack the leadership strategies required for successful organizational change (Penava & Sehic, 2014). Businesses must constantly change and managing change is a challenge for any business to adapt to and survive (Carter et al., 2013). Halm (2014) pointed out, 70% of change initiatives fail to achieve the intended outcomes.

SME business leaders from this study agreed about the importance for leaders to recognize and give personal attention to the needs of all employees, provide mentoring and training programs, motivate and influence employees, and communicate openly. Findings provided insight into the successful strategies used by the business leaders in this study. Listening to employees and giving them a voice in the decision-making process will help manage change. Informing employees of the benefits of change will lead to successful facilitation of the change. Providing a learning environment with mentors and training programs will build a supportive work environment. Showing employees, they are valued and important to the business will create a flexible and manageable workforce. Lastly, keeping the communication channels open with all employees will help initiate and implement change successfully. SME business leaders can guide employees to accept change through the committed use of transformational leadership principles and ultimately keep their businesses thriving by using the strategies revealed in this study.

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Appendix A: National Institute of Health Certificate of Completion

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Shahriar Nazari** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants.”

Date of completion: 05/09/2016.

Certification Number: 2071887

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview: Exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of Small to Medium Enterprise business owners/leaders in Southern, California.

(a) The interview will begin with introducing myself to the research participant, followed by explaining the research topic.

(b) I will thank the participant for agreeing to participate in my study.

(c) I will present a copy of the consent form for signing, and ask if the participant has any additional questions before proceeding.

(d) I will tape the interview, and take notes.

(e) The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

(f) I will follow the same interview protocol for each participant.

(g) I will inform each participant of the possible 30-minute follow-up meeting to conduct member checking and review questions that need further clarification.

(h) At the close of the interview, I will thank the participant for being part of my study.

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in the Study

<Date>

<Address Block>

Dear Sir/Madam,

As part of my doctoral study research at Walden University, I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting to explore the strategies leaders of small to medium enterprise's (SME) use to successfully manage and adapt to changes affecting their organizations. I contacted you because you are a SME business leader from Los Angeles, California. Your participation in the research study is voluntary, and will be confidential. Please ask any questions you may have before accepting the invitation to participate. To achieve the objectives of the research study, your participation depends on satisfying certain criteria in addition to being the owner/leader of an SME. They include (a) living in Los Angeles, (b) working in a leadership position for a minimum of 3 years, and (c) having made decisions that brought about change within your organization. If you satisfy these criteria and agree to participate in the study, please notify me via the contact information. I will contact you again to set up the interview. I will provide a copy of the consent form for your signing at the initial interview.

The time required for the initial interview will be one hour, and the follow up interview will last an additional hour. The interviews will be audio recorded and participants will have the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews for accuracy prior to inclusion in the study. I appreciate your valuable time.

Sincerely, Shahriar Nazari

Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation

[redacted]

Date March 14, 2017

Dear Shahriar Nazari,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Small to Medium Enterprise Business Leaders Managing Change within [redacted] business name. As part of this study, I authorize you to utilize our conference room to conduct interviews, collect documents, and conduct member checking. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include access to our conference room and coordination of conference room use. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official: [redacted]

Contact Information: [redacted]

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Appendix E: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What are some of the changes your business has made in the last two years?
2. What strategies are most effective in bringing about successful change within your business?
3. How did you address the implementation barriers to implementing the strategies for successfully managing changes affecting your business?
4. What additional information would you like to share about strategies for managing change successfully?