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# Manufacturing Managers' Leadership Efficacy in the Context of Reduced Union Influence

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

James R Wright

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2017

Abstract

Manufacturing Managers' Leadership Efficacy in the Context of Reduced Union

Influence

by

James Wright

MA, University of Phoenix, 2004

BS, Park University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2017

## Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore whether manufacturing managers had the skills needed to lead union members whose unions have less influence than in the past. Leaders of manufacturing firms can strengthen the relationship between manufacturing managers and union members through positive and effective leadership. Providing union members with leadership can improve cooperation, reduce problem-solving time, and increase productivity through efficiency. The conceptual framework for this study was transformational leadership theory. Data collection involved conducting 20 semi structured interviews with participants affiliated with the United Auto Workers (UAW) in the Toledo, Ohio, area. The participants (9 manufacturing managers, 9 UAW members, and 2 management consultants) shared their views of how manufacturing managers apply leadership to affect individuals and organizations. Moustakas's 5-step process was used to identify themes and patterns. Analysis of the data revealed that younger managers are not providing leadership to union members and that the size of the facility directly affects the ability of manufacturing managers to apply leadership skills. These findings indicate that organizational leaders do not define leadership expectations well and that young managers may lack leader legitimacy. With insights from the study, manufacturing and union leaders may be able to improve managers' leadership of union employees, resulting, potentially, in a less adversarial work environment as well as an improved societal view of labor unions.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my children and grandchildren. Education increases opportunity through knowledge. We need to go farther than those before us.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the facilities and the personnel of the facilities that I visited. The willingness of the management and UAW personnel to support and assist me in my research was outstanding.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Private sector union membership throughout the United States decreased to 11.8% of private sector employees in 2011 (Warner, 2013). Business research into employee benefits exists because the decline of union positions has reduced the size and influence of unions in companies (Schatzel, Strandholm, & Callahan, 2012). In addition, business leaders struggle with embedded employees who lack the motivation to increase human capital to increase productivity (Marasi, Cox, & Bennett, 2016). These challenges, and a greater need to compete on a global level, mean that labor relations remain as important as ever.

Management practices associated with the interaction between union members and leaders play an important role in developing labor relations and have a positive impact on a business's success (Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, & Gatenby, 2013). The cost of operating with a union can be 35% higher than operations that are nonunion. The experiences of union workers and managers are important because of the reduction in unions' size and influence. Learning about the experiences of union workers and managers may lead to an understanding of past labor relations and research to improve future relations between unions and management.

### **Background of the Problem**

Employee performance and behaviors have a significant effect on a company's ability to survive (Ahmad, Rizvi, & Bokhari, 2017). Leadership skills of manufacturing managers in auto plants may be more important as union membership declined due to barriers such as constant struggles for occupational jurisdiction, lack of clarity about the

role of unions within organizations and a perception that this role was threatened (Duffy, Blair, Colthart, & Whyte, 2014). Studying managers' ability to apply their leadership skills may provide an opportunity to gather information concerning their role at work as union membership fluctuates.

Successful change in a work environment involves developing communication networks and depends on the power of the relationship between union and management (Murshed, Uddin, & Hossain, 2015). Career gumption refers to a desire to engage in individual professional development. Employees who are fearful, reactive, or waiting for changes (e.g., further declines in union presence) have less career gumption. Employees who disengage from the individual development of their roles by becoming resistant to communication can stifle efforts to change an organizations work environment (Murshed, Uddin, & Hossain, 2015). This can also happen when there is a strained relationship between union members and managers.

The decline of union membership in the private sector has been steady since the 1960s, and nearly half of all U.S. states have right-to-work (RTW) legislation (Warner, 2013). RTW legislation prohibits employers and unions from including union shop provisions into a contract, this includes requiring all employees covered by the union to pay union dues (Warner, 2013). The recent failure of United Auto Workers (UAW) union leaders in April 2014 to unionize a Toyota plant in Tennessee (Holger, 2016) may indicate that the decline could continue and that more states may adopt RTW laws.

### **Problem Statement**

The sharp drop in industrial manufacturing union density since the 1960s has reduced labor's collective bargaining power, ended the use of strikes as a weapon, and provided management with greater power and advantage over workers (Devinatz, 2013). UAW membership has declined by 75% since 1979 and is less than 400,000 in 2013 (Phillips, Curtiss, & Lundskow, 2014). At one time, 30% of United States the labor force was in a union; however, in 2012, only 7% of workers carried union membership cards, which limited union power in the workplace and during negotiations (Rachieff, 2012). The general business problem was that an organization's business success depends on management's interactions with union leaders and union members. The specific business problem was that some manufacturing managers lack the skills needed to lead union members whose unions have less influence than in the past.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore whether manufacturing managers have the skills needed to lead union members supported by unions with less influence. Nine manufacturing managers, nine union members, and two management consultants, all of whom were located in the Toledo, Ohio, area, participated in interviews, the purpose of which was to provide insight concerning the power of manufacturing managers and whether these managers had the ability to improve or maintain production levels. With this knowledge, manufacturing managers may be better able to promote a shared vision with union workers, which might lead to greater

competitiveness among U.S. companies and a favorable public perception of union workers, as potential contributions to positive social change.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study included a qualitative approach to gain knowledge of participants' experiences regarding how manufacturing managers lead union members supported by unions with less influence. A qualitative method is appropriate for studies requiring the flexibility to understand information pertinent to a phenomenon, and based on personal stories and experiences (Javalgi, Granot, & Brashear, 2011; Kapoulas & Mitic, 2012; Khan, 2014). Researchers using quantitative or mixed methods produce data that will be analyzed and generalized to a broad population using statistical methods, denying the flexibility needed to collect and analyze data obtained with a qualitative approach (Khan, 2014; Smith, 2014; Wester, Borders, Boul, & Horton, 2013). I chose the qualitative method to facilitate learning about the topic through the described experiences of the participants.

I used a phenomenological research design to attain insight into the experiences of union members and manufacturing managers, particularly within the context of reduced union density which has had an effect on how much control managers have on production issues. A phenomenological approach was suitable for interacting with participants and having them share their experiences on a one-to-one basis. Interactions between researchers and participants provide an opportunity to capture feelings, memories, and interpretations not previously observed or discovered through other means (Lawlor, 2013). The phenomenological approach to research focuses on learning through the

personal experiences of the participants, versus applying statistical analysis for generalizing information for a broad group (Simonsen, 2013; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013; Wester et al., 2013).

### **Research Questions**

The primary objective of this research was to investigate how manufacturing managers lead union members who are supported by unions with less influence than in the past. The interview questions aligned with the research question, which was the following: Do manufacturing managers have the skills needed to lead union members supported by unions with less influence?

### **Interview Questions**

The interview questions were, as follows:

1. How has decreased union influence changed the managers' role?
2. What leadership strategies can manufacturing managers utilize with union members, supported by a union with less influence, to improve productivity?
3. Describe a time when a manufacturing manager provided leadership to union members to resolve a production problem?
4. What challenges do manufacturing managers with union employees face today that they did not face when union density and influence was high?
5. Describe a time when a manufacturing manager missed an opportunity to provide leadership to union employees to improve productivity?

## Conceptual Framework

Exploring an organizational relationship provides an understanding of conflict and leads to better communication through a shared vision rather than through a command-and-control situation (Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2013). Use of a transformational leadership conceptual framework provided me with a lens to probe the leadership manufacturing managers apply with their union employees (Jyoti & Dev, 2015). This examination enabled me to understand how leadership provided by manufacturing managers is transforming both units and individuals in organizations. The key concept of the transformational leadership conceptual framework is twofold. Unit-focused transformational leadership refers to leaders' influence on the unit through inspirational motivation that unites the workforce to achieve performance goals (Carter et al., 2014). Individual-focused transformational leadership influences individual union workers' behavior to achieve a balance between efficiency adaptations (Carter et al., 2014).

Burns conceived of transformational leadership and defined its characteristics in 1978 (Jyoti & Dev, 2015). The application of transformational leadership to my study aligns responsibility of legitimate leadership with the power of management; leaders without legitimacy fail, but legitimate leaders establish a passion in their workers to carry out their vision (Bednarz, 2012). Transformational leadership at the unit level provides unions with a shared ownership of organizational objectives (Carter et al., 2014). The shared ownership includes a cooperative contract agreement between the UAW and the Big Three automakers, which would enhance the competitiveness of the automakers while protecting jobs for union membership (El-Khalil & El-Kassar, 2016). The new

contracts served as an opportunity for managers to provide leadership that empowers and motivates employees at the individual level (Carter et al., 2014). Transformational leaders seek to unite workers, and look beyond self-interest to achieve organizational goals and interest (Jyoti & Dev, 2015).

### **Operational Definitions**

The following definitions of two frequently used terms in the study are provided to ensure a clear understanding by readers.

*Embedded employee:* Embedded employees are employees with continued involvement in an organization relating to commitment and job retention (Khattak et al., 2012).

*Labor relations:* Labor relations refer to the relationship between management and labor during day-to-day operations, with a union formed for collective bargaining (Warner, 2013).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Maintaining transparency includes stating the common assumptions of the results in the absence of mathematical and scientific verification (Sarma, 2015). There were two assumptions in this research. The first assumption was that union membership has declined or at best stagnated during brief periods of employment growth, which has led to membership among only 7% of employees (Fiorito & Jarley, 2012). Following Tomkins & Eatough, 2013, the second assumption was that the changes that have occurred and

affected participants' roles at work were significant enough that the participants were conscious of their occurrence and included it as part of their life experience.

### **Limitations**

The study included four limitations, which Bernard (2013) defined as predetermined weaknesses which are identified before conducting a study to maintain credibility. The first limitation pertained to influences that I did not explore or discuss which might have affected the management–labor relationship. Some factors that can influence research involving union members are gender and race, union density, wages, working conditions, and workplace policies (Bryant-Anderson, & Roby, 2012). The second limitation was that the sample did not represent all industrial manufacturing organizations. I chose to focus on the automotive industry. This affected my research because manufacturing managers have union employees in large and small facilities, as well as assembly plants and parts suppliers. The third limitation was that it was possible that union and management communication networks of the facilities hosting my study varied on leadership practices and level of cooperation between managers and union members. To prevent limiting the participants open discussion, I asked participants to describe their experiences as it relates to the effect of reduced union density on the organization and the individual. The fourth limitation was the results might have varied from facility to facility, depending on the recent strength of the union and the ability of the managing organization to remain competitive.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations define the boundaries of a study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). There are three delimitations in this study. The first delimitation is only U.S. industrial manufacturing managers, union members, and management consultants were participants in this study. The second delimitation is all managers and union representatives came from firms with UAW union representation. The third delimitation is this study was conducted in only one location.

## **Significance of the Study**

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Globalization has created competition for talent and demands that has forced chief executive officers to place greater value on a skilled workforce (Dobbs, Lund, & Madgavkar, 2012). Management may be able to use greater power to forge a lasting relationship with labor that benefits the interests of both sides. A greater understanding of the balance of power between labor and management may simplify organizational change and provide business leaders with the ability to change and adapt quickly, which may result in change without loss of production. Human resources professionals might use the results of this study to create effective management training that improves efficiency and reduces turnover. The management training created by the human resources will need to appeal to the managers and union employees. The perceptions of employees affect the success of change management (Maheshwari & Vohra, 2015). This study may be of value to business leaders. Using study findings and conclusions, managers may be able to

provide unit-focused transformational leadership while facilitating the adaptation of union employees through individual-focused transformational leadership.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Union members' perceptions of their current situation can serve as a guide for management to provide a workplace supportive of job satisfaction and employee development. The issue of psychological well-being in the workplace is important, as work provides focus, income, and the opportunity to socialize and interact with other human beings (Oladapo & Banks, 2013). The economic growth and stability of manufacturing communities can contribute to positive social change by raising the standard of living in the communities. In addition, strengthening the workforce by improving a manager's ability to increase productivity may create competition for workers and provide long-term social stability in the community. Job satisfaction is important to employee's well-being; poor job satisfaction impacts personal dimensions such as stress levels and substance abuse (Deery & Jago, 2015).

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how manufacturing managers leverage greater power gained through diminished union density to maintain or improve productivity. This literature review includes information and statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Commerce. The review also includes articles from journals associated with management or labor relations and existing labor relations research. The literature review includes peer-reviewed works from published materials available in online databases, professional organizations'

websites, and online research databases that include ABI/INFORM, BSC/Premier, EBSCOhost, Emerald, Google Scholar, ProQuest, SAGE, and Science Direct. Of the peer-reviewed academic journal articles included in the review, 85% published between 2012 and 2017.

I found the research supported the need to understand the perception of union members and manufacturing managers. The perception of the new role of manufacturing managers based on reduced union density provides organization management with greater power. This research questions whether manufacturing managers are able to use increased power with their union workers based on reduced union density. It was equally important to document the history of labor relations and articles written about the present and future challenges of labor relations that face leaders of manufacturing firms. This review of the literature provided support for my interest in the possibility that the decrease in union density has affected productivity. It also supported my consideration of whether managers are able to leverage greater power from reduced union density, in order to maintain or improve productivity. This literature review includes sections on the following topics: human resources, unions, politics, psychology, and management.

### **Human Resources Literature**

The focus of the human resources literature I reviewed was management practices and their effect on labor relations, which included the shift from a command-down structure to top-to-bottom leadership. My examination of the partnership between human resources professionals and managers included research on the benefits and missing elements in this relationship. Union members' perceptions, the effect of employees on

competitiveness and organizational performance, and the impact of union decline on human resources professional's ability to strategically collaborate with production managers were vital to my study.

Manufacturing in the United States has suffered greatly in recent years, with 3 million jobs lost after the dot-com bust in 2000 (Lawrence & Edwards, 2012). Researchers at the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that union membership in the private sector was at 12% and was declining; in 2011, membership was at 11.8% (Warner, 2013). Engaged employees contribute to improved organization performance, and a company's ability to compete is dependent on the effort of its employees (Sharma & Tolani, 2014). Leveraging power may require managers to reach out to human resources professionals and human resources professionals to collaborate with managers. Such partnerships improve organizational competitiveness through the creation of a motivational work environment that promotes job satisfaction and commitment (Kapoor & Sherif, 2012). Existing research has linked the partnership between managers and human resource professionals as an important collaboration for organizational development in that acquiring, developing, and retaining a workforce supports organization competitiveness (Eneh & Awara, 2016; Kapoor & Sherif, 2012).

The decline of union density might create an opportunity for managers to learn to leverage greater power; it also requires human resources professionals to conduct research into employee benefits (Schatzel et al., 2012). The existing literature supports the importance of the role of human resources, not only on employee well-being but also on management practices. Developing a workplace supportive of employee job

satisfaction (Kapoor & Sherif, 2012) requires human resources professionals to understand that past union strength does not always equate to a strong voice for individual union members (Ahmad, Rizvi, Bokhari, 2017). Not meeting employee expectations results in poor performance and inappropriate job behavior that does not meet the standards needed to attain organizational goals (Singh & Twalo, 2015).

The past may be important to remember when developing a new workplace that is dependent on employees for competitiveness (Sharma & Tolani, 2014). Researchers have shown that it is important for human resources professionals to become strategic partners with managers to develop management practices that support labor relations with a positive effect on the business opportunity (Alfes et al., 2013; Eneh & Awara, 2016). Conducting training for existing managers using the frequency or intensity of behaviors that promote dysfunction as a benchmark for improvements may identify positive leadership opportunities and practices may have benefits (Leary et al., 2013).

Knowledge and values of employees ensure commitment to customer needs. Peak productivity developed through management practices that have a positive effect on opportunities for success (Alfes et al., 2013). In addition, a partnership between frontline managers and human resources professionals may lead to the development of a workforce committed to organizational success (Kapoor & Sherif, 2012). Research reviewed for this study supported the role that human resources professionals have played in collaborating with managers to develop management practices that enable managers to leverage greater power based on reduced union density. Leveraging this greater power may help managers to maintain or improve production.

## **Unions**

Based on the research cited in this study concerning union density, a transformation of unions has occurred. The research indicates that this transformation may have occurred due to the sharp decline in union density. Nearly half of all U.S. states have RTW legislation (Warner, 2013), which means employees have the option to join or not join a union when they gain employment at a location where a union exists (Warner, 2013). The decline of union membership in the private sector has been steady since the 1960s (Warner, 2013). The steady decline in union density resulted in union membership dropping to 11.8% of private sector employees, and the decline continued even through brief periods of employment growth in the United States (Fiorito & Jarley, 2012). The union decline was the result of external factors as well, including a weakened infrastructure, higher taxes on domestic businesses, and fair trade agreements that have reduced manufacturing in the United States (Dunn, 2012).

The effect of this continued decline of union membership is far reaching, but for this study, the importance was that the loss of union density resulted in reduced collective bargaining power, which provided management with greater power and a greater advantage in labor relations and negotiations (Devinatz, 2013). Unions represent a means to apply pressure on management to uphold psychological or contractual promises and expectations (Braekkan, 2013). Management's increased power and advantage gained through reduced union density may provide the opportunity to alter labor relations. A better relationship between manufacturing managers and union members can occur by providing workers with leadership in the absence of union leadership.

Union members' ability to communicate internally within the union was vital to the unions' strength and effectiveness (Gahan, 2012). However, union members and union leaders perceived this strength and effectiveness differently; influencing factors included members' gender, race, wages, working conditions, and workplace policies (Bryant-Anderson & Roby, 2012). Union leaders need to know where their members turn for resolution of poor workplace practices (Braekkan, 2013). If members turn toward management for resolution of unfulfilled expectations, their members are experiencing an active commitment toward management, because a strong bond between a union and its members reflects a commitment that is more substantial as members become aware of unfulfilled promises or expectations (Braekkan, 2013). Employees turning to management could also reflect management's ability to block the supply of services that unions offer members, which limits workers' need to demand representation (Fiorito & Jarley, 2012). Research cited in this study also supported the fact that changes in union members' work life can create issues in their personal life; these changes not only result from changes in union density and leadership but also from management (Bryant-Anderson & Roby, 2012). External influences include a middle-class perception that union members are unproductive (Devinatz, 2013). The perception of unproductive membership, the effect of reduced union density, and the threat of RTW legislation have led to a loss of union power, which supported the purpose of Devinatz's (2013) research that management now has greater power. The question I studied was whether manufacturing managers have the ability to leverage this power to maintain or increase productivity.

Researchers have supported the attempt to protect union rights while protecting organizations' right and ability to compete, which was evident in the recent UAW contract with the Big Three automakers; the contract enhanced the automakers' competitiveness while protecting jobs for union membership (El-Khalil & El-Kassar, 2016). The creation of unions occurred to ensure the protection of union members' rights during day-to-day operations. Collective bargaining defined past relationships between management and labor (Warner, 2013). Union members strengthened ties with their unions if they perceived a psychological or contractual breach of promises or expectations by management (Braekkan, 2013). Employers do have some advantages to fight off union organizing, such as a 38-day mandatory waiting period from petition to voting, which allows organizational leaders to launch an antiunion campaign (Warner, 2013). I reviewed the literature in support of the current trend of a union membership decline. The growth of states adopting RTW legislation, and the ability to fight off unionization, provide management with greater power over day-to-day operations and greater control of employee activity during day-to-day operations.

Researchers have sufficiently described the union shop as a place that should support psychological well-being through positive interaction, which results in positive outcomes (Oladapo & Banks, 2013). Positive interaction is important to union members, because the workplace promotes well-being through the opportunity to focus on a task, an income opportunity, and human interaction (Oladapo & Banks, 2013). Equally important is the fact that researchers validated external influences affecting the psychological well-being of union workers, including a middle-class perception that union workers are

unproductive (Devinatz, 2013). In addition to the reputation of being unproductive, researchers have clearly documented the history of union corruption. Union corruption could thrive again as union density has decreased, as regular members have limited control over union officers' activity, and external monitoring of union officers is weak (Jacobs, 2013). This perception, along with reduced union density and the threat of RTW legislation, has resulted in a loss of union power (Devinatz, 2013). The sharp decline in union density also diminished the effectiveness of union strikes and collective bargaining power, which provided management with greater power (Devinatz, 2013).

Researchers have adequately addressed the fact that the loss of union density has resulted in the loss of union power (Devinatz, 2013). Union members' perception of lacking protection against unfair labor practices may provide an opportunity for management to lead union members away from union leadership. If management tries to move union members away from their union leadership and fails, the consequences could be severe. The emotional damage to union workers brought about by broken promises or expectations by management supports an adversarial relationship and may drive union workers back to union commitment (Braekkan, 2013). Also researched effectively was the fact that competition has become global, which requires greater value on a skilled workforce (Dobbs et al., 2012) versus an organized workforce that operates collectively and not based on the skills of the individual. A shift from a collective workforce to a skilled workforce may be evident in the fact that workers in union states were more likely to possess college degrees than workers in RTW states (Surfield, 2014), which may indicate that reduced union density could reveal a skilled workforce. Competition drives

innovation and degrades the labor of the past through reduced pay, reduced unionization, and an uncertain workplace direction for union workers (Dobbins, 2013).

There is adequate research and documentation of legislation affecting labor rights to unionization. The Employee Free Choice Act provided the means for unionization in small and large organizations (Newkirk, 2013). However, research supports that it was not enough to defend against union avoidance because the National Labor Relations Board's appeal system allows for an extension of time between union petition and actual certification, which provides employers greater opportunity to appeal to workers to block union leaders' effort to penetrate their workplace (Farmer, 2015).

This study took place in the Toledo, Ohio, area. Therefore, it was important to mention legislation that can influence unionization and union members in this geographical area. Documentation of research exists into the establishment of RTW legislation in the neighboring states of Michigan and Indiana. The adoption of RTW legislation in these states has created additional losses of union density in Ohio because research indicates that workers migrated to states with RTW legislation, and RTW legislation attracts investment capital to the states with that legislation (Hicks, LaFaive, & Devaraj, 2016). In addition to the migration problem, employers in states that do not have RTW legislation in place use temporary employees 18% more frequently than employers in states with RTW legislation (Surfield, 2014). Based on this research, union members in the Toledo, Ohio, area may feel threatened by the possibility of worker migration, temporary employees, or the possibility that Ohio legislators could adopt RTW

legislation with a predicted loss of an additional 5 to 8% of an already reduced union density (Devinatz, 2013).

In the wake of the adequately researched decline of union density and power, some documentation exists about the consequences. Management established representation systems have begun to appear. These systems exist to take the place of unionization, and they may be a precursor to the end of unionization (Goddard & Frege, 2013). The research conducted on the decline of union density was far reaching, and it represents the loss of collective bargaining power, which results in management acquiring increased power and advantage regarding labor relations and contract negotiations (Devinatz, 2013). The issue that remains inadequately documented through research revolves around management's acquisition of greater power.

### **Politics**

Battles over RTW legislation in Indiana in 2012 provided insight into how the erosion of worker security affects the ability of workers to defend their rights at work and in politics (Suzanne & John, 2014). States that have adopted RTW legislation provide employers with a more flexible workforce (Surfield, 2014), and existing research shows that RTW continues to grow; Indiana and Michigan are the most recent states to adopt RTW legislation. Suzanne and John (2014) indicated that, over decades, RTW supporters worked to erode workers' rights by diminishing worker strength through political means. The implication exists that political party affiliation has also contributed to the decline of union density. For example, in states with a conservative government, rather than a liberal government, antiworker legislation may reduce union density (Kim, 2014).

Sustainable management practices can create long-term value (Pivoda, 2014). The creation of long-term value is vital to remain competitive, but if a reduction of the union role occurs, it remains unknown whether managers can capitalize on this new power and convert it into long-term value (Pivoda, 2014). Reduced union density may shift power. This shift may translate into union and management working together for a common goal. The history of labor and management was rich with conflict, and members of each side have done their part in working with a shared vision, but they have done this while wondering if the other side was fronting cooperation while working angles behind the scenes (Kaufman, 2012). I tried to understand this possible coexistence from a manager's perspective and to determine whether managers have what they need to operate under a new cooperative.

Managers need to lead through this transformation and provide the perception of trust and a shared vision that leads to long-term value creation, because to a union member, perception is everything (Jacobs & Glass, 2015). Management needs to remain aware that union perceptions influence society and political activity. Due to the tainted perception of union members, the decline in union density meant there was a smaller union presence in the workplace. In addition, recent comparisons between public- and private-sector unions provided public-sector unions with advantages, with education being the main difference (Lewin, Keefe, & Kochan, 2012).

An association exists between unions and greater manufacturing costs (Yanochik, & King, 2015). However, higher labor costs created by unions are not the only challenge management and unions face. Manufacturing has been on a steady decline in the United

States for some time (Dunn, 2012). Based on a history of labor conflicts, increased cost, and a probable negative perception of union strength, managers have had an uphill struggle throughout this transformation. The effect unions have had on political power in the United States and the ongoing struggle for RTW legislation do not make management's struggle any easier. The literature reviewed in this section included topics such as political influence, the union's effect on political efforts, and the union's struggle with reduced union density as it relates to conducting this study.

### **Psychology**

The psychological effect of legislation, union pressure, union and management leadership jousting for power, high unemployment, and reduced union density and power on union members is important (Devinatz, 2013). Equally important is the documentation of the need to create a shared vision between management and unions, inclusive of union members, on production issues and management's attempts to create a perception of a workplace that supports a positive work and social influence (Kapoor & Sherif, 2012). A review of the current literature indicated what needs to happen and how management is attempting to create a perception that leads to a positive, productive workforce that benefit from the shared vision (Kapoor & Sherif, 2012). No documentation exists to show whether manufacturing managers are capable of achieving this perception or whether they have the skills to sustain this perception for long-term maintenance or increased productivity. As union density declined, the same managers who worked daily with a rivaling union workforce faced the opportunity to empower their work teams through a leadership decision that could inspire team ownership and cohesiveness (Kaslow,

Falender, & Grus, 2012). Recent literature supports the idea that manufacturing managers need to work aggressively with human resources to establish and sustain this perception if achieved. Each failure to provide positive leadership to achieve a perception of a shared vision may have a longer lasting effect than leadership successes. The positive effects of constructive leadership are evident quickly but are not sustainable. The effect of negative leadership may be apparent quickly as well, but the duration of the negative effect on employees was significantly longer (Skogstad et al., 2014). If managers can acquire the leadership skills to affect productivity positively, review processes should maximize and sustain their success. Recent literature indicated mid-level managers can promote a sustained perception with employees and influence organizational goal attainment while supporting employee well-being and promoting employee engagement (Godkin, 2015).

The history of conflict between union and management could have created a barrier to effective persuasion through the union members' historical ability to resist persuasion from management (Blankenship, Webener, & Murray, 2012). During this time of reduced union density, it was possible for leaders in management, or leaders in the union, to have gained the loyalty of employees through demonstration of behaviors that exemplified a common goal (Conchie, 2013). If management wanted to lead their workforce to a shared vision by changing behavior, they first needed to look at their past management practices and how those practices affected culture and engagement (Berens, 2013). The better relationships managers could develop with union members, the more flexible union members were likely to become with their job description duties and the

employees could feel more empowered (Stout, Awad, & Guzman, 2013). Managers model behaviors that create collaboration and affect positive, long-term change (Kaslow et al., 2012), which was vital because the reduced union density may require an expanded scope of responsibilities to remain competitive. Remaining competitive requires workforce flexibility and empowerment. Creating shared values and vision is essential to maintaining a cohesive climate that leads to higher performance (Rupprecht, Waldrop, & Grawitch, 2013). Recent research indicated that both contempt and compassion displayed by leaders provides a perception of authority and control of resources (Melwani, Mueller, & Overbeck, 2012). Union employees may follow whomever they feel controls the direst consequences (Fagerstrom & Arntzen, 2013). The issue of management being capable of providing strong leadership compelling enough for union members to recognize and follow could change if union members believe that their true supervisors are union leadership. Union members' perception of their own perceived work ability could become unclear as their union density and strength continues its decline. The definition of perceived work ability is employees' perception of their own ability to continue in their job and supervisors' support ties to this perception (McGonagle, Fisher, Barnes-Farrell, & Grosch, 2015). The continuous jousting between management and union leadership through the years may make the source of this support unclear; in turn, the perception of the ability to carry on may be negative, which may increase turnover, retirement, and disengagement.

Management's ability to control day-to-day operations may appear aggressive in this state of powerlessness and may undermine employee productivity and destroy

productive behaviors (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2012). Task conflict may occur between management and union members as disagreements on assigned work or contract adherence; relationship conflict may signal a loss of respect that threatens the foundation of a union or a common workgroup by denying a sense of belonging or maintaining good relationships (Meier, Gross, Specter, & Semmer, 2013). Current literature indicated that management and unions could reach decisions on contract issues and that union leaders found a way to hold management to those contracts through strikes. The question that remains unanswered by research is whether manufacturing managers possess the skills to provide leadership beyond contract adherence that minimizes and resolves relationship conflicts to support a shared vision and positively affect sustainable production. Reduced union density has provided an opportunity for mid-level managers to lead beyond contract adherence, but if they fail to capture this opportunity, union members seek out leaders, and if permitted to attach themselves to antimanagement leaders, union members are likely to embrace their negative values (Godkin, 2015).

The cost and resources needed to achieve employers' desired skill levels are high because embedded employees, like long-time union members, may feel secure enough to dismiss the need to increase their value to their organization (Marasi, Cox, & Bennett, 2016). Entrenched employees lack the motivation to increase human capital to increase productivity (Marasi, Cox, & Bennett, 2016). A weak economy and high unemployment can have an immediate and delayed negative effect on workers (Shoss & Penney, 2012). Employers may not be able to maintain competitiveness if employees refuse to exercise a positive influence in their workplace by denying their voice on frontline issues that

directly affect customer demand or internal cost controls (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012). A positive passion for work can lead to job satisfaction, while a work life with consistent conflict can lead to a negative work experience (Marasi, Cox, & Bennett, 2016). The documentation supports the importance of establishing a shared vision, but neglects to establish if manufacturing managers, who work with union members every day, can capture this newfound power acquired through reduced union density and persuade employees to coexist with a shared vision by focusing on the long-term competitiveness of the organization.

As of 2015, nearly half of the states in the United States have RTW laws, which signify a pro-business climate (Warner, 2013). The phenomenon of reduced union density may signify to workers that management has greater control, which may diminish the usefulness of union representation (Stinglhamber, Gillis, Teixeira, & Demoulin, 2013). This change may provide an opportunity for managers to demonstrate leadership that empowers and motivates employees. The perception of the workforce may be that their factors deemed important are satisfied. The workforce engagement may become meaningful, productive, and support worker retention (Arogundade & Arogundade, 2015). Management attempts to provide training that includes union members in production issues by using training methods that may provide education in a real-life setting (Mettala, 2015). Proactive employees can focus on change that influences current and future developments in a positive manner (Crossley, Cooper, & Wernsing, 2013).

Frontline production managers may not react positively to including union members in decision-making processes. The conflict exist between managing a

workforce represented by a tradition union, and expecting production managers to provide leadership that supports a shared vision to increase production and solve production issues. The psychological well-being and perception of union members are resistant to management's attempts to persuade them toward this shared vision. The historical division may have produced resistant behavior or instability based on reduced union density and perceived power gained by management. Considerable documentation on these issues exists, but a question remains about the ability of production managers to use this perceived power to maintain or increase productivity.

### **Management**

Management must deal with change, and for the purpose of this study, the change was the phenomenon of reduced union density. The perception of the employees regarding their work life and how they respond to leadership was essential to understanding how management needed to be inclusive of the entire organization to capitalize on the greater power gained through reduced union density.

Adequate information exists to guide leaders through change management by displaying the behaviors that influence employees' behavior and performance (Caldwell et al., 2012). The research conducted on change management is vast compared to research on reduced union density. Management may require an understanding of exactly what behaviors and performance they want or can influence. Mid-level managers may lack awareness, but the emotions displayed by managers could affect the mood of the union members they are attempting to lead (Godkin, 2015). To build an invested, engaged workforce, management needs to create a connection between individual union

members, the greater cause, and the purpose of the organization, as well as a clear vision of success (Berens, 2013). Leaders with a sense of superiority can be successful if they can practice humility as well (Owens, Wallace, & Waldman, 2015). This is important because the perception of union members are initially unpredictable, but making the connection between union members and an organization's purpose requires leaders to show humility through the admission of limits and mistakes to establish positive leadership versus an authoritative approach (Owens et al., 2015). Management's approach to providing positive leadership is vital because management practices may have a greater effect on diffusing union organizing than intense antiunion efforts (Campolieti, Gomez, & Gunderson, 2013).

Limiting studies to one area does not take into account the difference in management capabilities from region to region. Labor laws in different states in the United States have an effect on factory productivity (Kahn, 2012). In addition to management's ability to capitalize on an initial change based on greater power due to reduced union density, the continued quality of the relationship between management and labor is an opportunity for further research. This new era of the greater power of management may alter how workers respond to management on many issues, and creating a shared vision is challenging, but establishing a reliable communication network will not only support successful change but also may lead to the sustainability of these changes (Murshed, Uddin, & Hossain 2015).

As management moves beyond contract compliance with union employees to an increased use of labor to improve productivity, it is important to note that the history of

resistance to management from union members exists (McGrath, 2013). Accepting change is usually difficult, but change this significant to normal routines and the established relationship between management and labor may have created challenges beyond what management has had to face (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). This new opportunity for management requires a significant change in command and control. The worst thing that could happen is that the management practices used to capitalize on this greater power fail and the impact on an organization's ability to succeed and compete is negative, which may limit future attempts to capitalize on greater power (Canato, Ravasi, & Phillips 2013). Management opportunity exists based on the phenomenon of reduced union density. Company leaders need to influence employee performance and behaviors because positive management practices affect the ability to survive the economic climate (Harsasi, Muzammil, & Radeswandri, 2017). Management also needs to focus on the practices used to capitalize on the greater power gained through reduced union density for immediate change management for the long-term survival of the organization (Harsasi, Muzammil, & Radeswandri, 2017).

A change in union strength may create adjustment problems for union members, as work role changes often lead to adjustment issues (John & Joseph, 2013). Management's ability to deploy effective practices to navigate change successfully depends on management's ability to address the adjustment issues of employees. Embedded employees provide continuous involvement in an organization with regard to commitment and job retention (Khattak et al., 2012). The management practices deployed must address the needs and importance of getting embedded employees through the

adjustment issues, because if the practices fail, the uncertainty and the reduced union density may result in embedded employees uniting in a manner that expresses common themes of past union resistance to management (McGrath, 2013). The perception of workers affects the success of change management, and the perception of union members directly affects the success or failure of organizational change management (Maheshwari & Vohra, 2015). The ability of management to capitalize on this greater power based on reduced union density is important. If the change process fails to account for employee expectations, the result can be poor performance and inappropriate job behavior that does not meet the standards needed to attain organizational goals (Singh & Twalo, 2015).

Management practices are vital to success, as is evident based on the references cited above. The leadership provided to production managers, and from production managers to union members, determines the immediate and long-term success of an organization. I used several resources to discuss the importance of sound leadership within organizations. The phenomenon of reduced union density provides greater power to management, as well as an opportunity to provide leadership beyond contract adherence for union members.

Three million employees lost their jobs in manufacturing based on the dot-com bust in 2000 (Lawrence & Edwards, 2012). Researchers have provided overwhelmingly strong support for positive outcomes when the leader–follower relationship is of high quality (Geertshuis, Morrison, & Cooper-Thomas, 2015). The challenges for management to deploy practices that lead to success in navigating change may be difficult under the best circumstances. Capitalizing on greater power based on the loss of

union density means that union members may already feel vulnerable. Effective leadership provides a workplace that is motivational and supportive of job satisfaction, and the incivility of supervisors directly relates to worker turnover (Ghosh, Reio, & Bang, 2013). Managers who cannot, or will not, adjust from an era of contract adherence to one of sound leadership may hinder efforts to capitalize on this new power. Managers who have a negative opinion of union employees may have lower quality exchanges with employees and may have used leadership tactics that produce adverse outcomes (Geertshuis et al., 2015). Using the wrong leadership style in this new era may have resulted in promoting a negative perception among union members and inspiring them to return to an attitude of resistance and rivalry rather than building a shared vision with management (McGrath, 2013).

Sound leadership provides shared ownership of organizational objectives by developing employees to contribute to organizational goals (Singh & Twalo, 2015). Providing positive leadership brings out innovation in employees, which leads to enhanced innovation in other employees (Keller, 2012). As management and union members enter an era requiring a shared vision, they may encounter problems that demand collaboration. These problems may be nonroutine, but the more nonroutine the problem, the greater the innovation required to provide solutions (Keller, 2012). Moving forward, management needs to deploy sound leadership because reduced union density may provide an opportunity that presents them with new challenges.

Providing legitimate leadership is not the only hurdle leading to management's ability to capitalize on the greater power available, but it is a critical issue. Exploring

past, current, and future perceptions may provide a useful understanding of the rivaled existence management has had with union labor. Through the knowledge of past perceptions, opportunities may exist for future studies on the training required for manufacturing managers to advance their leadership skills. Legitimate leaders effectively communicate their vision and generate a passion for success (Bednarz, 2012) by reinforcing the need to develop strong communication networks between management and union members. The references cited provide support for the concept that manufacturing managers with union workers may not have the ability to capitalize on greater power based on the phenomenon of reduced union density. The references cited also support the concept that the managers may not be prepared to lead through this change process. The following distinctions about leadership is important to managing this leadership opportunity; leaders without legitimacy fail, and legitimate leaders created a passion in their workers to carry out their vision (Bednarz, 2012).

This study did not include public-sector unions because the literature reviewed provided fundamental differences in the way public-sector unions operate and the challenges they face compared to private-sector unions. Some of the differences identified in the literature were weaker resistance from management on unionization and union demands, underfunded public union pensions that strengthen bargaining power, and elected officials who can choose to delay issues until they are out of office (Osorio, 2015).

The literature reviewed showed a difference between public- and private-sector unions with regard to bargaining. Public-sector unions have the resources to support

political candidates and allow the union to elect their bosses (Krinsky, 2013; Osorio, 2015). In some states, programs referred to as *workfare* allow city and state governments to lower unemployment by placing the unemployed on the government payroll and into public-sector unions (Krinsky, 2013).

The differences in public-sector unions and private-sector unions are vast. In many ways, their differences allow union opponents to use the strengths and weaknesses of each against each other. For example, private-sector unions are at their lowest density levels in 80 years, while public-sector union density can be measured at over 40% of public employees (Cantin, 2012). The decline in private-sector union density includes an erosion of union member benefits and stagnant wages; however, as private-sector union members suffer, public-sector union density is strong, and the unions have enough resources and strength for collective bargaining, which leads to use of the term *privileged class* of worker (Cantin, 2012).

This study does not include a comparison of public- and private-sector unions. For the purpose of this study, public and private sectors, union members, and managers needed to reflect significant similarities in work, bargaining power, geography, and management practices to ensure inclusion (Findlay, Findlay, & Stewart, 2014). In addition to the exclusion of private-sector unions, the study also did not include other types of workers with unions (i.e., construction workers, teachers) because UAW members are manufacturing employees and other occupations are nonmanufacturing (Brown, 2015). The UAW workers suffered wage declines based on contract negotiations during the recession, and their salaries continued to fall even though auto production

rebounded (Brown, 2015). This information led to an opportunity to isolate UAW members and manufacturing managers for the purpose of this study. This information also led to the decision to conduct a qualitative study. Based on research conducted on public-sector unions, quantitative analysis would not be useful because it would fail to provide an in-depth understanding of the nuances of a particular occupation like UAW members (Findlay et al., 2014). The fact that this study was not comparative made standardized measures unsuitable for determining managers' ability to use new power to affect productivity (Chen, McLeod, Nelson, Williams, & Fehnel, 2014).

Manufacturing managers with a UAW workforce face many challenges, and it was important to isolate the challenges to identify the problem to investigate. The focus of the literature reviewed up to this point was the struggle that reduced union density has created for UAW members and the opportunity it has created for manufacturing managers. Many tools exist to help manufacturing managers improve employees' productivity (Trimble, Copeland, McIntyre, & Smith, 2013). Common reasons for the failure of productivity improvement tools are undervaluing incremental change by going for an immediate boost in productivity, failing to provide initial and continuous communication that reaches all affected employees, and poor training of management on desired outcomes and overall cost (Trimble, Copeland, McIntyre, & Smith, 2013). Reduced union density alters communication between managers and the union workforce. Implementing incremental change may require managers to understand how to communicate directly with union members rather than through union leadership. Training managers on desired outcomes may depend on how the managers can use the

increased power obtained through reduced union density. The gap in the literature exists between current successful methods for organizational change and the ways manufacturing managers use increased power with union members represented by unions with reduced density and influence.

Other types of employees who are having an effect on the U.S. labor force and leading to reduced union density for U.S. manufacturing union members are also an important topic. The most obvious alternative to U.S. union workers is illegal immigrants. Undocumented independent workers create unfair competition for genuine union workers (Hellman-Theurer, 2013). Illegal immigration creates an informal employment sector that evades employment costs and taxes (Stoll, 2015). This informal sector of employees can satisfy the drive for lower cost workers. Lower cost labor becomes available when workers become sufficiently desperate enough to accept lower wages (Stoll, 2015). This desperate labor force produces profits estimated to reach \$44 billion (LeBaron, 2014). The migration of workers from lower income countries to higher income countries creates desperation in workers as they adjust to higher living costs in higher income countries (Stoll, 2015). These desperate migrant workers can become the labor of subcontracted work, which allows employers to outsource work to independent overseas suppliers (LeBaron, 2014).

Subcontracting is not responsible for reduced union density in the United States; however, subcontracting does lead to lower labor standards and reduced rights for workers (LeBaron, 2014). The race to fill manufacturing orders under shorter contracts has forced Tier 1 suppliers to subcontract to labor-intensive firms (LeBaron, 2014), and

the subcontracting also satisfies the drive for lower labor costs (Stoll, 2015). Leaders of large U.S. firms have used this subcontracting scenario to eliminate their manufacturing component (Lebaron, 2014). The subcontracting did not cause the reduced union density in the United States, but it was important to research because the focus of this study was the changes involved with managing U.S. labor union members.

The references used included 137 different sources. The number of peer-reviewed journals included in the references was 133. All but 10 of the references had publication dates within the 5-year window between 2012 and 2017.

### **Transition and Summary**

The primary objective of this research was to investigate how manufacturing managers lead union members supported by unions with less influence. The loss of union density has been consistent since the 1960s, and almost half the states have adopted RTW laws (Warner, 2013). These developments have provided management with greater advantages in negotiations (Devinatz, 2013). Managers now have an opportunity to lead union members by demonstrating behaviors that exemplify leadership toward common goals (Conchie, 2013). Adequate research exists to guide managers through organizational change (Caldwell et al., 2012), but organizational change was necessary while the phenomenon of reduced union density was strong to provide management with leadership opportunities beyond adherence to labor contracts.

The literature reviewed for this study fit into five major areas. The five areas were human resources relating to management practices and leadership, unions' loss of influence following the growth of RTW legislation and reduced union member density,

political effects through RTW legislation eroding unions' ability to protect worker rights, a psychological impact of union pressure and reduced union influence, and management's ability to lead while unions have less influence. The details of the steps followed are in Section 2. The details appear in the following sections: Role of the Researcher, Participants, Research Method and Design, Population and Sampling, Ethical Research, Data Collection, Data Analysis Technique, and Reliability and Validity. Section 3 includes the Presentation of the Findings, Applications to Professional Practice, Implications for Social Change, Recommendations for Action, Recommendations for Further Studies, Reflections, and Study Conclusions.

## Section 2: The Project

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how manufacturing managers lead union members supported by unions with less influence to maintain or improve production in context where unions have less influence. Interviews, which took place with manufacturing managers, union members, and management consultants located in the Toledo, Ohio, area, may provide an understanding of the leadership strategies that manufacturing managers need to improve or maintain production levels. The contribution to social change may be that manufacturing managers are able to lead union members in a manner that supports a shared vision and leads to greater competitiveness in U.S. companies through increased productivity.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of a researcher is to conceive and design the study, create and apply guiding principles, and report the findings (Hofmeyer, Scott, & Lagendyk, 2012). My relationship with the topic of this study and with union members has existed throughout my life. I lived in a union manufacturing community until 1980, when imports of steel collapsed the local economy (MacKinnon, 2017). The collapse of the steel industry eliminated job opportunities (MacKinnon, 2017) and led to my enlistment in the U.S. Navy and the relocation of most of my family. I have lived and worked in Toledo, Ohio, for 20 years. The presence of the automotive industry and the UAW made this location ideal for conducting this study. I have worked with union members in shipyards, and as a director for the Red Cross.

I was the sole researcher in the study. Thus, it was important that I gather information without bias and understand participants' conviction to their stories (Heisler, Firmin, Firmin, & Hundley, 2015). The interview process involves interactions between researchers and participants that provide an opportunity to capture feelings, memories, and interpretations that other methods may not provide an opportunity to observe or discover (Lawlor, 2013). Member checking helps ensure that each interview accuracy is verified, information saturation is reached, and encourages participants to expand on detail (Awad, 2014; Bamberger, Coatsworth, Fosco, & Ram, 2014; Comi, Bischof, & Epplar, 2014). Member checking also provides an opportunity to explore each answer to the greatest extent (Awad, 2014; Bamberger, Coatsworth, Fosco, & Ram, 2014; Comi, Bischof, & Epplar, 2014). Researchers mitigate bias by gathering information from participants without influencing their responses and by maintaining a focus on participants' details of their life experiences (Gruber, 2011; Tyler, 2011), not the researcher's life experiences. I was diligent in my efforts to listen actively in order to maintain a focus on each participant. It is important to view research material through a personal lens by remaining grounded in skill and knowledge to protect the role of the researcher during data collection (Parker, 2014).

My employment history includes being a member of the U.S. Navy and being a sales representative. My education is in business administration, organization management, and human resources management. As part of my education requirements at Walden University, I completed an online course and certification to understand and comply with regulations to protect the rights of participants in research, as discussed in

the *Belmont Report* (Feder, 2015). Ensuring the safety of participants' identities and information and their comfort with their contributions are a key part of any research; not offering monetary or material benefit protects participants' voluntary participation (Getz, 2014). Reviewing the informed consent form with all participants helps provide assurance that they understood the steps taken to protect their rights and personal information and understood that they could withdraw their participation at any time to meet the requirements of the 1979 *Belmont Report*. An informed consent form contains information describing the processes for protecting personal information and the terms for participation. I have over 10 years of experience in interviewing applicants, and I am certified by the U.S. government as a vocational counselor, which involves communicating with individuals to understand their perceptions and views on past work experiences.

### **Participants**

Eighteen participants were selected based on their union membership or management affiliation with a private industrial manufacturing firm. Two management consultants participated based on their experience with the auto industry. Through purposive sampling, I selected 20 participants. The purposive sampling method is a form of sampling used by researchers to help them engage participants who represent the target population for the investigation and could provide a detailed understanding based on their position or function (Ofori, 2013; Patton, 1990; Perry & Towers, 2013).

I solicited 20 participants by mailing and hand delivering a request for participation forms (see Appendix B) to UAW manufacturing firms in the Toledo, Ohio,

area. I asked for UAW members, both male and female, who had been members for 10 years or more and who had a work history that included manufacturing productions. Union member participants were not qualified or disqualified from study participation based on their holding a position of union leadership. I sought manufacturing managers who were either male or female and who had at least 10 years of manufacturing management experience that involved managing UAW members in production. I set the 10-year limit to so each participant had an appropriate length of time for their experiences. Not setting a time limit risks ignoring the intensity and the adaptive impact of individuals' experience (Goranitis, Coast, & Al-janabi, 2014; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013; Whiteley, Price, & Palmer, 2013). My request for management consultants was for consultants with at least 10 years of experience consulting on issues related to the relationship between UAW members and management in a manufacturing production function.

An informed consent form helps maintain respect for participants' personal information. The informed consent form for this study included information on participants' rights and the steps taken to protect their rights; it also was a means of ensuring their understanding and obtaining their consent to participate. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time by telling me of their decision. Information on participant withdrawal procedures appeared on the informed consent form; the date of the participant withdrawal will be documented on the consent form, and a line drawn through the consent form. Critical sections of the informed consent included the purpose of the study, a guarantee of confidentiality, and an assurance that participants could withdraw

from study participation. To minimize withdrawals, I attempted to establish a working relationship with the 20 participants, and I asked the participants to review the information they provided during their interview for accuracy. A review of information ensures accuracy and provides an opportunity for questions about slang or organizational phrases (Awad, 2014; Comi et al., 2014; Ratcliff, 2011).

### **Research Method and Design**

I conducted a qualitative study using a phenomenological design. I undertook the study in order to gather information and to explore the leadership strategies that manufacturing managers use with union members supported by unions with reduced influence.

### **Research Method**

I used a qualitative method to explore the interactions and interpersonal relationships between management and union employees concerning how manufacturing managers lead union members supported by unions with declining influence. Qualitative research is a method used to research a phenomenon (Javalgi et al., 2011; Kapoulas & Mitic, 2012; Khan 2014). Qualitative research is based on observing and interpreting participant perceptions and used as a diagnostic tool to develop concepts in evolving disciplines (Javalgi et al., 2011; Kapoulas & Mitic, 2012; Khan 2014). The phenomenon of reduced union density and influence has provided managers with greater power and has led to an evolving role for these managers. The question researched was whether manufacturing managers have the skills required to capitalize on this phenomenon. A qualitative method was appropriate for this study because the study required me to be

flexible as I explored the participants experiences to understand an issue that is pertinent to a phenomenon based on a social setting (i.e., union density) and influence (Javalgi et al., 2011; Kapoulas & Mitic, 2012; Khan, 2014).

I did not choose quantitative or mixed methods research because my intent was to explore the phenomenon. Quantitative and mixed methods research gather information to generalize the findings by applying logic and mathematics for the results (Javalgi et al., 2011; Smith, 2014; Wester et al., 2013). Researches can quantify information involved in quantitative research using statistical techniques (Javalgi et al., 2011; Smith, 2014; Wester et al., 2013). Quantitative and mixed methods research produce data for analysis and generalization by a researcher. The generalization of data lacks the flexibility needed to resolve the issues pertinent to social settings that researchers can satisfy with a qualitative approach (Khan, 2014; Smith, 2014; Wester et al., 2013). Mixed methods research may strengthen one method, but can exacerbate the weakness of the other method. Mixed methods reduce method bias by combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to produce better results. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods requires enough information to satisfy both methods (Abro, Khurshid, & Aamir, 2015; Cameron & Molina-Azorin, 2014; Golicic & Davis, 2012). This study included interviews to gather information from participants. The responses to the interview questions included common themes related to the phenomenon of reduced union density and to whether managers were capable of capitalizing on the power generated by this phenomenon. Collecting additional information to satisfy a quantitative approach would

have detracted from the purpose of understanding the phenomenon, and managers' response to the phenomenon, based solely on participants' experiences.

### **Research Design**

A phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because use of it allowed me to explore the effect of reduced union influence on the power available to manufacturing managers. The experiences of participants provided information on how they used this power to lead union members (Budd & Velasquez, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Simonsen, 2013). The phenomenological design maximized the amount of information collected. The focus was on the depth and quality of information versus the number of participants to ensure data saturation (Budd & Velasquez, 2014; Prendergast & Chan Hak, 2013). To ensure each interview had the depth needed to ensure saturation, the researcher used member checking to verify accuracy and gather as much information possible from each question. Member checking provided an opportunity for me to explore each answer to the greatest extent (Awad, 2014; Bamberger et al., 2014; Comi et al., 2014). The phenomenological approach to organizational research allows for the humanization of work and an approach that identifies how personal experiences go beyond generalizing data for research (Simonsen, 2013; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013; Wester et al., 2013).

This study did not include grounded or ethnography theories. Researchers conduct ethnographies to deal with cultural issues rather than an individual experience and can interpret shared patterns in a group by focusing on why conflicting views exist in organizations (Khan, 2014; Rouleau, de Rond, & Musca 2014; Simpson, Slutskaya,

Hughes, & Simpson, 2014). Ethnography was not appropriate for this study because documentation exist on the conflicting views among union members and manufacturing managers. During this study, my goal was to gather information through interviews to explore personal experiences. Grounded theory is appropriate when researchers seek to identify a social phenomenon through those involved in the study (Hoflund, 2013; Khan, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). A grounded theory study produces information for a researcher to develop a theory based on the views of the participants (Hoflund, 2013; S. N. Khan, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). This study did not provide information that would predict failure or develop a theory; the intent was to explore whether manufacturing managers can capitalize on greater power gained through reduced union density. Participants provided personal information on the phenomenon of reduced union density and the ways it has affected the power of managers.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population included 18 managers and union members of industrial manufacturing firms located in the Toledo, Ohio, area, whose employees had union representation at the time of the study. Recruiting this population involved hand delivering and mailing the request for participation (Appendix B) to as many manufacturing firms employing a UAW workforce in the Toledo area as possible. Two management consultants who had experience consulting with firms whose leaders employ UAW workers provided their experiences to show how their consulting has changed based on reduced union density. These 20 individuals provided the best opportunity to obtain information from individuals who have lived the experience of the

topic. Participants that can provide views from multiple positions provide credibility to a study (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Simonsen, 2013; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013).

I used the purposive sampling method to select participants, which allowed for the inclusion of a broad spectrum of experiences. I set the location as Toledo, Ohio, and located the desired manufacturing managers, management consultants, and UAW union members within this area. Selection of the location and defining the participants helped verify an existing network of union and management employees. The focus within interviews in phenomenological studies is to describe the experience based on the participant's memory (Moustakas, 2011; Simonsen, 2013; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Recording the memories allowed participants to express their views without judgment and supported frequent checks throughout for accuracy, fairness, and proper representation of their input (Awad, 2014; Comi et al., 2014; Ratcliff, 2011).

### **Ethical Research**

Strict adherence to the nondisclosure of identity; proper collection, storage, and access to data; and taking care when reporting the findings ensured the confidentiality of the participants and the protection of ethical research. Research intends to inform the business community without risking harm or discomfort to participants (Gallagher, McDonald, & McCormack, 2014). Notes and recordings of interviews referred to the respondents only by a randomly assigned code. No information that could potentially identify participants such as job assignment or work on specific equipment or projects existed in the study. Only I had access to any information obtained throughout this study

that could lead to the identity of a participant. All information obtained during the study will remain stored in a locked safe at my home for 5 years. After 5 years, I will take the study information to Lott Industries of Toledo, Ohio, for destruction. Lott Industries is a company that specializes in destroying sensitive information by shredding and burning documents.

The Institutional Review Board approval number for this study was 01-04-17-0161683 (see Appendix C). The informed consent form (see Appendix A) established participants' rights, steps taken to protect their rights, and their understanding and consent to participate prior to the interview process beginning. I reviewed the informed consent form with each potential participant to ensure an understanding and to gain commitment for participation (Getz, 2014). Participants could withdraw from the study at any time by telling me of their decision. An informed consent form with a line through it designated a participant withdrawal. The consent form included an introduction to the researcher, sponsoring institutions, participant selection, purpose of the research, benefits of participation, level of participant involvement, risk of participation, confidentiality guarantee, ability to withdraw, my contact information, and a signature section to indicate consent. Participants contribute to studies with the understanding that they were benefiting society (Gallagher et al., 2014). Participants signing a consent form for inclusion in research verify an agreement of adequate protection of personal information and an understanding of all rights associated with participation (Getz, 2014).

### **Data Collection Instruments**

NVivo Version 10 is suitable for organizing coded material (James, 2012; Lima, Namaci, & Fabiani, 2014; Melo & Serva, 2014). Recording information during research interviews is an acceptable way to gather information about lived experiences of participants, and separate information into clusters or themes (Budd & Velasquez, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Skiba & Disch, 2014). I will use a voice recorder during the interview, providing an opportunity to replay the entire interview or sections for clarity. NVivo 10 may identify themes after the interviews are complete to help identify themes.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Interviews with manufacturing managers, UAW union members, and management consultants from firms with UAW employees produced the data for the study. The interviews supported an exploration of the effect of the phenomenon based on the participants' perceptions and stories. The participants could have had the recording of their interview played back to verify accuracy. The interview questions appear in Appendix D.

The auto industry and the UAW are prevalent in the Toledo, Ohio, area. I hand delivered request for participation to firms meeting criteria (see Appendix B). Participating firms could receive a copy of the research findings as a benefit of participation.

The interviews followed the proven format of Moustakas (1994; see also Budd & Velasquez, 2014; Skiba & Disch, 2014). The interview began with an introduction and explanation of the purpose for the research. The participant viewed a copy of the

interview questions, the tape recorder, and the notepad used during the interview. The participant signed the informed consent form at the beginning of the interview. The expectation was that each interview might last 1 hour. Member checking allows participants to review their information, establishes their importance to the study, and provides an opportunity to keep participants engaged (Awad, 2014; Bamberger et al., 2014; Comi et al., 2014). After the interview was complete, I asked for permission to conduct a follow-up interview to clarify any information provided. An explanation of member checking to participants ensures they understand they must agree with the final information provided. Member checking engages participants and establishes their importance in the study (Awad, 2014; Bamberger et al., 2014; Comi et al., 2014). Follow-up interviews are sometimes necessary to achieve clarity on participants' statements. When all concerns were satisfactory to the participant and clear to the researcher, the interview process for each participant was complete.

### **Data Organization Techniques**

In face-to-face interviews, it is important to control the environmental issues of the interview, such as place, atmosphere, and other issues that can affect the comfort of participants. A modified van Kaam method (Budd & Velasquez, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Skiba & Disch, 2014) details how to code responses and identify themes by using the following seven steps:

1. Listing all details related to the experience.
2. Reducing and eliminating information.
3. Clustering themes

4. Identifying final themes by application.
5. Using relevant validated themes and descriptions of the experiences.
6. Developing individual descriptions of the experiences based on the textual descriptions and imaginative variations.
7. Creating a complete text version that describes the interview by incorporating the themes.

I coded the data collected to identify the participant group represented, and the number interview conducted for each group. I entered each group's information into a separate research log, along with notes and comments I annotated about each interview. Audiotaping the interviews served as a backup of the interview, as well as a tool that allowed me to review data for clarity. After 5 years, I will take the study information to Lott Industries of Toledo, Ohio, for destruction.

### **Data Analysis**

I reviewed the interview recordings, categorized data by interview question, and searched for patterns. Analyzing the information involved searching for differences and commonalities in participants' perceptions relating to the phenomenon of reduced union power and management's leadership. The different perspectives, experiences, and personal thoughts of interviewees provided an understanding of the ongoing interaction between management and labor.

NVivo Version 10 is suitable for organizing coded material (James, 2012; Lima, Namaci, & Fabiani, 2014; Melo & Serva, 2014). Recording information during research interviews is an acceptable way to gather information about lived experiences of

participants, and separate information into clusters or themes (Budd & Velasquez, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Skiba & Disch, 2014). Personal stories and experiences produce vast amounts of material. To remain organized in thought and material, Moustakas's (1994) steps for data analysis serve as a proven framework for this phase of the research (see also Budd & Velasquez, 2014; Skiba & Disch, 2014). The steps included recording preconceived thoughts about the research topic, documenting participant statements on the research topic, clustering the topics based on similarity, and using the clusters to provide a view on the impact of reduced union power on labor relations:

Step 1: During this phase known as the epoché, I documented all preconceived thoughts on the topic. The documentation was a manner of identifying these thoughts to eliminate their effect on my conclusions.

Step 2: During the interviews, I listed each statement about the participants' description of their personal experience. Statements known as horizons have equal value. The statements form a structural description of each interview.

Step 3: The structural descriptions produce clusters of similar statements grouped together to identify common themes or experiences provided by the participants. At this point, I listed the clusters and prioritized them by level of importance as presented during the interviews.

Step 4: The clusters provided a view of the impact of the phenomenon of reduced union power on management leadership as it appears through the described experiences of the participants. Step 1 helped eliminate the views or preconceived thoughts I had from detracting from the descriptive experiences of the participants. Patterns of

statements provided by managers, union members, and consultants during the interviews produced categorized themes. I cross-referenced the information produced by each group and annotated conflicting information, thoughts, or descriptive language.

## **Reliability and Validity**

### **Dependability**

Reliability is the ability of other researchers to replicate research to obtain similar results (Oleinik, Popova, Kirdina, & Shatalova, 2014). Establishing reliability in this study ensured the dependability of the process and the information produced through member checking, transcript review, and adherence to the set interview protocol for data saturation. The focus of all researchers should remain on the depth and quality of information obtained during the interviews for data saturation (Pendergast & Chan Hak, 2013; Budd & Velasquez, 2014). The interview process is a useful form of data collection suitable for ensuring the coding of information occurs appropriately and consistently throughout a study (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013, Alase, 2017). To ensure each interview had the depth needed to ensure saturation, member checking provided accuracy and an opportunity to gather as much information from the responses each question. Member checking provides an opportunity for researchers to explore each answer to the greatest extent (Awad, 2014; Bamberger et al., 2014; Comi et al., 2014). A transcript review by participants ensures dependability, credibility, and confirmability of the information and the study (Awad, 2014; Bamberger et al., 2014; Comi et al., 2014).

Concern about past phenomenological research exists because of the influence of interpretation on the descriptive details. Researchers used a four-part criterion in past

phenomenological research. The parts are (a) vividness, or a researcher's ability to draw the reader in by generating a sense of reality; (b) accuracy, or the feeling of believability created by the interpretation; (c) richness, or the depth and quality of the description; and (d) elegance, or the ability to disclose the description of a phenomenon in a graceful manner (Seamon, 2000).

### **Credibility**

During the interview stages of this study, I used my experience conducting interviews to gather information. My qualifications to accomplish information gathering through interviews included a certification by the government as a counselor and training by the U.S. Navy to conduct interviews for gathering information during investigations. The informed consent form ensured participants were volunteering their information, and they felt comfortable with safeguards to protect their privacy.

Research participants should have an opportunity to verify their information for accuracy throughout their interview and after transcription for validation (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Member checking by participants ensures the credibility of the information and the study (Awad, 2014; Bamberger et al., 2014; Comi et al., 2014). Information collected during interviews provides the best opportunity to obtain information from individuals who have real life experience, and triangulating data from interviews is important to the credibility to a study (Moustakas, 1994; Simonsen, 2013; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). The individuals who participated in the research were from IRB approved Community Research Partner organizations (see Appendix E).

**Confirmability**

The focus during interviews to ensure data saturation was on the depth and quality of information rather than the quantity of participants (Budd & Velasquez, 2014; Prendergast & Chan Hak, 2013). It was important for each interview to have the depth needed to ensure saturation; member checking verifies accuracy and helps gather as much information from each question. Member checking provides an opportunity to explore each answer to the greatest extent (Awad, 2014; Bamberger et al., 2014; Comi et al., 2014).

**Transferability**

The transferability of information gathered during this study relies on an understanding of the leadership capabilities of manufacturing managers when leading union members supported by unions with declining influence. Transferability refers to the ability to transfer information produced in one context to another context (Kirchoff, Omar, & Fugate, 2016). Validity and transferability occurred in this study through adherence to study guidelines and through verification of the information produced through member checking, transcript review, and adherence to the set interview protocol for data saturation. The burden of transferability of this information was dependent on the researcher making the transfer.

**Transition and Summary**

Section 2 included information on the role of the researcher and ethical research. The use of the qualitative method and phenomenological design supported the goal of the study more than other methods and designs did. The researcher established criteria for

study participation and steps to protect participants' identity. Section 2 included the steps for data collection, data organization, and data analysis. Using proven research steps helps to ensure validity and reliability through collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. The section on reliability and validity included steps to protect integrity to ensure the creditability, confirmability, dependability, and transferability of the processes and the information gathered.

My role as the researcher, as defined in Section 2, included mitigating bias. The steps taken to protect an ethical approach included a clearly defined interview protocol and the informed consent form. Maintaining integrity and triangulation of information clearly defined the population and sample. Section 2 provided clearly stated guidelines followed while conducting the study. Section 3 includes the results of this study. Section 3 also includes recommendations for future research to call attention to the limitations of manufacturing managers' current training involving the management and leadership of unionized employees.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the ability of manufacturing managers to lead union members supported by unions with less influence to maintain or improve production in context where unions have less influence. A common theme in the interviews for this study was that younger managers fail to recognize leadership opportunities. The study also showed a correlation between younger managers and a reluctance to apply leadership at the production level. Younger managers

were fearful of the response from upper management and the effect it would have on their career progression.

Union members with the title team leader apply leadership to union team members. Manufacturing managers in smaller facilities have applied leadership toward their union employees. The reasons for applying such leadership were organizational survival and competitiveness as union density has decreased. Manufacturing has decreased as well as the union density, and management participants of smaller firms have increased competitiveness through a shared vision and cooperation.

I found several factors important to the power structure of both union and management that have an effect on leadership. First, participants stated that processes are quicker through automation, which allows for the faster identification of problems. Second, processes at larger facilities hosting this research move at a pace that may not provide an opportunity to identify leadership opportunities. Commitment to the union differs between older and younger union members. The facilities hosting me during this research set production pace as metric of importance above leadership, and participants stated that younger union members will go to management to solve problems before going to the union.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The ability of manufacturing managers to lead union members represented by unions with less influence is important because of the power it gives management to control the day to day activity and contract details. The idea that managers may have greater power at the present may indicate that an opportunity exists to enhance and

change labor relations in the auto industry. The focus of my research was on the U.S. auto industry, due to its large size.

The themes identified in this study provide an opportunity for discussion and improvement in the application of leadership. The first theme was that younger managers are not providing leadership to union employees represented by unions with less influence. The second theme was the size of the facility directly affected the ability of manufacturing managers to apply leadership. The UAW is present in large and small facilities, and younger and older managers with varying skills in management provide leadership in the facilities hosting my study. Younger managers are less likely to apply leadership for a number of reasons according to the participants. In large facilities, the pace of production is faster due to automation. Younger managers may feel intimidated by upper management to maintain the production pace, and they may use historic labor contracts to discipline union employees by documenting anything other than strict adherence to assigned tasks.

Participants identified leaders as managers with experience. They use their experience with production and the union to apply leadership by solving problems with union members' input. I identify management participants with an M and a number. During interviews, Manager 1 (M1) and M6 stated that union members seek direction from them rather than from the union, which makes it easier to solve problems at the lowest level. Furthermore, experienced managers were more likely to resolve problems with individual union members through leadership and example as opposed to documentation and referral for union-management review. M4 stated that union

leadership density suffered with membership density. Participants provide information that managers with seniority typically value their workers. The act of inclusion for problem solving and process improvement provides better performance through worker engagement.

All participants acknowledged that change has occurred based on the density of the union. All nine managers clearly noted that communication can now be between managers and union members. UAW1, UAW2, UAW3, UAW5, UAW6, and UAW7 stated that communication between managers and members had increased but could be negative. This change appeared to be different based on the size of the facility. Management in larger facilities appears to let this change occur without much input. Managers and union members might interact differently based on the experience level of the manager and union personnel, but the upper management did not seem to apply change management to facilitate or influence the change in any direction. Management and union participants reveal that animosity existed between labor and management.

Leaders of smaller facilities found more common ground between production managers and union employees. M6 stated that union leadership reduced as union member density decreased; the union leaders do not visit smaller facilities in this study often. In addition, M6 reported that union members sought direction from him and that he provided leadership based on the individual. Upper management in some small facilities questioned the leadership skills of manufacturing managers. Production managers in smaller facilities required additional leadership training. Leaders of smaller facilities identified competitiveness and industry survival as the pathway to a shared vision. The

union members and managers both saw the organization's success as a means to continued work. Their shared vision led to collaboration to ensure quality, competitiveness, and employment longevity.

Participant interviews revealed that employees of smaller firms embraced a shared vision out of necessity. Leadership provided by managers in the smaller firms was successful in engaging the union workers. M5 discussed the increased frequency of manager-provided leadership. M5 acknowledged that boundaries between management and union workers still exist to preserve the type of work done by each. M5 indicated that management and union workers cooperate for quality and competitiveness. The leadership provided by managers engages employees in an organization's metrics for success, which meets union members' expectation for continued employment and leads to work standards that attain organizational goals (Singh & Twalo, 2015). Engaged employees drive competitiveness and organizational success (Sharma & Tolani, 2014).

All but two participants agreed that union density has created change. M4 stated that union mentality has not changed in 20 years, and UAW7 stated that managers do not lead because they drive production. The instinct to change management does not guide managers in large facilities. Younger managers focus more on career advancement than leadership. Missed leadership opportunities fail to engage employees and connect the UAW with the organization toward a clear vision of success (Berens, 2013). Whether younger managers do not possess needed leadership skills, or they are simply afraid to provide leadership, they are maintaining an authoritative approach with their employees (Owens et al., 2015). The failure in management leadership practices could result in

driving embedded union personnel to an adversarial union as seen in the past (McGrath, 2013). This conflicts with the assessment that participants provided of smaller facilities, where participants discussed managers providing leadership to union members.

I came to the conclusion that younger managers lack the ability to apply leadership. The causes include lack of training and fear of upper management. They fear how upper management views their attempts at leadership with union members. Younger managers also fear that upper management's views could negatively influence their career progression. Their fear limits the number of quality exchanges, and, as Geertshuis et al. (2015) noted, lower quality exchanges result in negative leadership with adverse outcomes.

The participant stories and experiences clearly separated younger managers and experienced managers. UAW7 stated that younger managers who try to provide leadership are less likely to move forward in their careers. UAW7 also noted that younger managers are at a disadvantage due to the fast communication of their mistakes among union members. M1 discussed how vital legitimacy is for younger managers, but felt they missed coachable opportunities because of the production pace. Participants' descriptions did not provide leader legitimacy to younger managers', but leader legitimacy was apparent in in descriptions of experienced or older managers. The issue of leadership legitimacy discussed by Bednarz (2012) supports the failure or success of leaders in this study. Based on the participant interviews it was clear that younger managers lacked legitimacy needed from union employees and upper management. I drew the conclusion

of the participant interviews that this lack of legitimacy led to the leadership failures of younger managers.

Experienced or older production managers in larger facilities had legitimacy. Experience with production and upper management provided an advantage over younger managers. Familiarity with systems, union members, and upper management provides them greater latitude to provide leadership. Experienced production managers had less of a concern with career progression and had a higher skill level to maintain the pace of production. Union members saw experienced production managers as legitimate and noted they experienced high-quality exchanges. M1, M2, M3, M5, M8, and M9 all stated that experienced managers make it easier to keep the production pace and increase leadership exchanges. The perceptions of leadership exist when production managers and union members have quality exchanges (Geertshuis et al., 2015).

The other variable that emerged from the participant interviews was facility size. The larger the organization, the less participants implied that the organization was managing this change. Management Consultant 1 (C1) discussed that production managers in large facilities were vulnerable, lacked the security of upper management, and lacked the protection of a union. To manage the opportunity to provide leadership to union members represented by a union with reduced influence the organization and the union must communicate it clearly with desired outcomes. As presented in Trimble, Copeland, MacIntyre, and Smith (2013), failure to communicate in a continuous manner to all affected employees can lead to the failure of the effort. In addition, Trimble, Copeland, MacIntyre, and Smith (2013) discussed the importance of management

training as key to the success of any improvement process. Throughout the participant interviews, I found no evidence that production managers in larger facilities were receiving training to provide leadership, or that providing leadership was a desired outcome.

It is important to show the relationship between this study and recently published studies on leadership. The ability of manufacturing managers to provide leadership is important, but the environment that they lead in is challenging. The density of the UAW and its influence is different, but the pressures to maintain production pace allow negative leadership traits to remain and emerge (Lyubovnikova et al., 2017).

I found a distinct difference between larger and small facilities as they relate to manufacturing managers' leadership. Upper management in smaller facilities have grasped the opportunity presented by a less influencing UAW, and have moved toward a closer relationship between management and union employees. M6 stated that the chief executive officer shares profit and loss information with union employees to drive productivity and to maintain competitiveness and job security.

Participants associated with larger facilities do not feel that the gap between management and union has closed. The large facility participants did acknowledge that a change based on union density has occurred. The production pace seems to overshadow the need to adjust the managers' leadership. C1 noted that production-level managers might feel vulnerable because they lack the job security of upper management and the union protection of employees. The interviews also produced information that indicated larger facilities might shift some leadership responsibilities from manufacturing

managers to union employee team leaders. UAW6 and UAW 8 stated that communication flows from managers through team leaders for dissemination. M2 stated that union team leaders can become overzealous when applying leadership to other union members.

The issue of manufacturing managers having leadership skills with union employees represented by a union with less influence includes two points. Production managers and upper management in smaller facilities approach the issue consciously, recognize the change in density and influence, and apply logic to move from issue to opportunity. Production level managers and upper management in large facilities are approaching the issue more automatically, reacting to the change by matching the current situation to experience (Astor, Keiffer, & Repenning, 2017). Change can occur when upper management and production managers apply a conscious approach leading to increased positive interactions between management and union to further organization goals. The basis of the automatic approach is experience, which results in a failure to recognize an opportunity to change the production level and manage union employee interactions.

In comparison to recent studies on manufacturing leadership, manufacturing managers may not have the leadership skills needed to lead when union density and influence decreases. Even in smaller facilities where reduced union influence occurs and opportunities exist to join managers and union members on a shared vision, participants noted the lack of manager leadership training was an issue to address. UAW3 was the only participant who felt managers and union should share all responsibility for

production. Based on this research, manufacturing managers, union members, and upper management perceptions may not align. In this study, the reaction in larger facilities was an automatic response. Upper management focuses strictly on production pace. A strict focus on production pace blinds upper management toward leadership opportunities requiring the development of skills and a long-term approach.

The conceptual framework of this study was the transformation of leadership on a unit and individual basis. Questioning the ability of manufacturing managers to lead required an understanding of how their situation had changed. I restricted this study to manufacturing managers in the automotive industry with UAW employees. Two key statistics that are important to managers' role and that limit the influence of the UAW are the 75% decline in membership since 1979 (Phillips, Curtiss, & Lundskow, 2014) and the decrease in union labor from 30% of the U.S. workforce to 7% (Rachieff, 2012).

Through the interviews, I found that the legitimacy of leadership changed between large facilities and smaller facilities. Participants provided a comparison between younger and older managers. Leaders without legitimacy fail (Bednarz, 2012). Legitimacy may come from the organization itself or from UAW workers working for production managers. All participants acknowledged the transformation of leadership, but the transformation does not equate to applying leadership skills to improve or maintain production levels.

The identity of the union affects leader legitimacy. Union participants made comments that indicated the influence of unions was strong. UAW4 noted that managers are not dealing with unskilled labor. The smaller size of the union made communication

among workers quicker, which UAW5 noted was a disadvantage for managers. UAW6 felt that the union was much stronger than perceived. Power and control leadership do not work when leading skilled workers (Lund, 2016). The union workers felt that the union had power, and their skills were valuable and necessary for production. Union members collectively viewing themselves as skilled labor will conflict with a younger manager of limited experience using a power and control style of leadership.

Unit transformation provided an opportunity for a shared vision. Individual transformation provides an opportunity for leadership through empowerment and motivation (Carter et al., 2014). Managers in smaller facilities have acknowledged the transformation. In the smaller facilities I visited, production manager leadership training was a priority. Management in smaller facilities included the union workers in production meetings. Upper management in smaller facilities share contract, profit, and business discussions with union employees, which provides a sense of cooperation between managers and union workers to preserve jobs and increase the competitiveness of the organization. Boundaries still exist in smaller facilities, as management does not perform union tasks, and union representation is still present. Union leadership presence in smaller facilities is less frequent because the leadership decreased with the UAW membership. Smaller facilities also have experienced a more noticeable transformation through increased competitiveness and less job security.

Manufacturing managers do not have the skills to lead union members represented by unions with less influence. Upper management in organizations fails to provide leadership training, even in smaller facilities where competitive survival

increases a shared vision. Managers and union members in larger facilities acknowledge that union density and influence have changed the work environment. Leadership in large facilities will not change until leadership development becomes a production priority. Manager development depends on the need for quality exchanges between production managers and union members for production improvement.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings of the study were that manufacturing managers lack the skills needed to lead union members supported by unions with less influence. The contributing factors included the production pace of the facility, size of the facility, and priorities of leadership versus metrics. There was also a lack of change management related to the changes resulting from less union influence and density.

Throughout the participant interviews, participants agreed that a change occurred in managers' leadership opportunity. All groups of participants agreed that managers have a greater opportunity to provide unit and individual leadership. Smaller facilities managers are interacting with union members more and providing leadership on an individual basis. Although managers apply leadership, the outcomes are both positive and negative. Organizational leaders identified and scheduled leadership training for manufacturing managers. Managers in larger facility managers have the opportunity to provide leadership, but younger managers lack the legitimacy from upper management and their union workers. Leadership skills are lacking among younger managers due to a fear of upper management and the demand of production metrics. Metrics and a deferral

of leadership responsibility to union members designated team leaders also reduced leadership opportunities.

The usefulness of the findings in this study depends on the size of the facility. Only upper management in large facilities can clearly define the leadership role for manufacturing managers. Manager leadership training should clearly define the leadership role and the expected outcomes, which would involve change management efforts to ensure manufacturing managers feel comfortable in their role and to ensure upper management supports their legitimacy. Change agents can work with managers and union workers to help their roles evolve and produce positive outcomes.

Managers in smaller facilities struggle less with the opportunity to provide leadership to union members represented by a union with reduced influence. Transformational leadership is occurring on both unit and individual levels. There is an opportunity to use these results to define manufacturing managers' role of leadership. Manufacturing managers need to provide legitimacy and manage this change to evolve their roles, which may meet union members' needs for leadership, as their unions provide less influence.

Regardless of facility size or the experience level of production managers, the findings provide an opportunity for application. All participants acknowledged a change in their work environment based on reduced union density and influence. The benefit for professional practice is the opportunity to manage the change provided by reduced union influence to increase the quality of exchange between production managers and union

members. The development of leadership skills for production managers could lead to faster identification and correction of production problems.

Through quality exchanges supported by legitimate leaders, engaged union members can help with developing and implementing corrective action. Reduced union influence provides an opportunity to manage change through leadership development. Legitimate leaders can support production plans of any size facility, and production managers with strong leadership can maximize quality exchanges, which leads to greater cooperation and flexibility of the workforce.

Leader legitimacy is an important topic. Lund (2016) defined leader legitimacy as the perception of leader actions in accordance with norms, values, and beliefs. Although the education of UAW employees may be lacking, their skills remain specialized. The belief among UAW employees that they have highly specialized skills limits the effectiveness of a power- and control-type leadership (Lund, 2016). The production process is repetitive, and employees must maintain a pace that meets manufacturers' needs. The repetitive nature of the work, presence of union influence, and protection of union members eliminates the usefulness of servant-style leadership.

Leader legitimacy in participant interviews clearly identified leaders as manufacturing managers with years of experience with production and the union. Union members described managers as having knowledge of production systems that maintained production pace and allowed time for quality exchanges and coachable moments with union members. Union members perceived experienced managers as legitimate, which provided experienced managers with legitimacy and formal power.

Younger managers lack legitimacy because employees see themselves as highly specialized. Union workers do not respond to control by managers who lack experience. Lack of experience and legitimacy leaves younger managers relying on nothing more than their formal power base. The collective power of union members will overcome managers' formal power (Lund, 2016).

Application of this study is a matter of leadership development. One issue will be how production managers and the union employees see themselves. If union employees see themselves as specialized, and management views them as production labor, a problem exists. The legitimacy of a manager remains limited to formal power. Upper management in large facilities needs to understand the perception that exists in their workplace. This perception can lead to establishing legitimacy for managers or letting managers control the production pace and letting union leaders provide direction for union members. Management and union members in smaller facilities appear to have bridged the gap in the perception of the workforce. This provides them with an opportunity to manage leadership development to increase the quality exchanges and legitimacy provided by union members and formal organizational power.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Failing to make adjustments could leave union members without effective leadership. Union members may find leadership who can return them to an adversarial attitude toward management. Participants also showed concern that a lack of union commitment among younger members has led them to look for guidance and direction from management rather than from union leaders. Addressing the lack of leadership skills

of manufacturing managers can produce positive outcomes for both management and union members.

Management in manufacturing firms can strengthen the relationship between manufacturing managers and union members through positive and effective leadership. Providing union members with leadership can improve cooperation, reduce problem-solving times, and increase productivity through efficiency. Addressing the problem that manufacturing managers lack leadership skills will help to ensure members do not seek alternate leadership that leads to a negative, adversarial approach to management. Leadership development for manufacturing managers supports the engagement of union members to meet the production plans of an organization. The leadership development of manufacturing managers can lead to a shared vision and increased competitiveness for auto manufacturers. Social change can occur in the form of more positive attitude toward labor unions.

The interviews also showed that the perception of the union by its members provides strength. Union members viewed themselves as skilled workers. Leadership styles vary based on the skill level of the workforce (Lund, 2016). The opportunity exists for cooperation between union and management to define the identity of the union workforce and acceptable leadership supported by management. Managers and union members will benefit from a decrease in conflict and an increase in positive exchanges based on a defined identity.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The dissemination of the results of this research through literature reviewed by management and senior human resources professionals might lead to application. The study showed that size, pace, and upper management influenced the leadership of manufacturing managers with union workers. Facilities should use this information to see how this study applies to their situation.

The first suggested step for action is to review how the manager role has changed as it applies to the leadership of union members represented by less influential unions. The second step is to determine whether the union members view themselves as production employees or specialized tradespeople and to develop leadership training for managers with a clear understanding of when and how to apply leadership. The third step is to gain approval of all upper management and union leadership, to provide clarity on the role of management and union members and on acceptable leadership styles, and to agree on the implementation of training and expected outcomes to ensure manufacturing managers' leadership have legitimacy throughout the organization. The fourth step is to assign change management professionals to monitor the changes and to communicate with upper management and union leadership to ensure desired outcomes.

The results of this study showed that opportunity exists for changes in labor relations. The opportunity lies where management and union workers interact. The participant interviews revealed that a gap exists regarding how the union perceives itself and how managers' leadership legitimacy suffers. Maximizing the positive outcomes from this opportunity relies on all levels in the organization.

The upper management levels and union leadership must work to develop manufacturing managers' leadership. A shared vision on this development will ensure the desired outcomes are achievable and in the best interest of management and the union. The union members must define the union, and union leaders must support this definition with the members. Leadership development for manufacturing managers, supported by both management and union, will provide legitimacy to the leader.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings from this study include a broad view of the ability of manufacturing managers' leadership skills when working with union members with less influential union representation. The four limitations listed in this study were as follows: (a) all issues that affect the manager–labor relationship, (b) a small sample that could not represent all manufacturing facilities, (c) union and management communication varies in different facilities, and (d) union strength and organizational competitiveness varies in different facilities.

Researchers should explore how influence and density have changed manufacturing managers' role in a large, medium, and small organization. Union leaders must clearly define the union. Future researchers should use surveys for both union and management, with questions designed to assess the degree of change. Conducting a survey may provide statistical data to align manager leadership training with union identity supported by its members. Researchers who include the automotive industry as the subject should separate future studies into automotive production facilities (Big Three

automotive makers) and automotive part supplier firms. Leadership and communication differ in these two groups depending on the competitiveness of each type of organization.

A study of how the goals of the UAW and auto manufactures align would be interesting in the future. The reduced density and influence of the UAW and a resurgence of manufacturing provides an opportunity for such a study. Research can lead to alignment and therefore could have a positive effect on competitiveness and an improved attitude toward labor unions.

### **Reflections**

As I look back at the process throughout each phase, it is amazing to see how the idea for the study originated and how I aligned the idea with the doctorate in business administration process to achieve an outcome. I have grown in my attitude and appreciation for research in all disciplines. My personal and professional experiences involve union members and management within unionized organizations. The basis for my approach to this study was my interest in leadership. I had no bias and no preconceived ideas regarding the results of this research.

My effect on participants was positive. The participants from all groups (union member, management, and consultant) were open and appeared eager to acknowledge that a change had occurred. They described their experiences with emotion and provided detailed stories concerning how they viewed the changes in managers' role with regard to leadership. Participants acknowledged the change, but could not say a lot regarding how upper management in production facilities addressed the change. The doctorate in business administration process guided my development in research protocol. I believe

that the participants were comfortable and excited to participate because I stayed true to the research plan.

I discovered several points of interest throughout the research. The perception of the union members was that their union is strong, regardless of density. Older, more experienced union members feared that the commitment to the union by younger members is weak, which reduces union cohesiveness. Manager density has decreased as union density decreased. Frontline production managers may start aligning more with the union members, as they seem to feel controlled and lack the leader legitimacy needed from upper management. Finally, the perception and attitudes between younger and older managers and union members differ. The evolution of the roles in manufacturing requires monitoring.

### **Conclusions**

The research question was as follows: Do manufacturing managers lack the skills needed to lead union members supported by unions with less influence? My conclusion was that manufacturing manager's lack the skills needed to lead union members represented by unions with reduced influence. Two themes identified during the participant interviews were that (a) Union members did not consider younger managers to be legitimate leaders and younger managers are less likely exert leadership and (b) the size of the facility affected how much leadership opportunity exists.

The participants questioned the legitimacy of younger managers. The union participants stated that the skill level of union workers is high. A gap may exist between

the style of leadership used based on the perceived skill level of workers. This gap may lead to managers applying leadership that is unacceptable to the union employees.

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## Appendix A: Request for Participation

Date - MMDDYYYY

Human Resources Director/Manager

I am currently seeking automotive manufacturing union employees, with UAW representation to participate in the fulfillment of my Doctoral Degree in Business Administration. The sponsoring institution of my Doctoral program is Walden University of Minneapolis, MN.

### **The purpose of the research:**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore the experiences and opinions of union members, managers of union workforces, and management consultants, for a greater understanding of whether manufacturing managers have the skills to lead union members supported by unions with less influence. The phenomenological approach allows for multiple interpretations on the relationship between management and labor and the perception of change from various viewpoints. Interviews was conducted with participants directly involved with industrial manufacturing to gain an understanding of whether they perceive the current leadership skills are adequate to lead union members supported by unions with less influence, based on their comparison between present times, and times when they considered the union more powerful. The data gathered during these interviews was used to provide a view on the impact of reduced union power on production managers.

### **The research process:**

I conducted a total of 20 interviews, 9 management and 9 union members, allowing the 2 remaining interviews to be conducted with management consultants. The representative of the accepting firms was asked for recommendations for interviewing participants. Stipulations for union members were that they have at least 10 years of employment with union representation. The management participants were required to have 10 years of experience, with either daily contact with union members or responsibility for union contract compliance. The representative is asked to provide the two management consultants from a pool of consultants they have utilized.

After a significant number of responses to this letter are received they are prioritized based on size and length of time in business. At this point the researcher makes contact with the firm representative to ensure that purpose for the research is clear, and the type of information needed is understood. At this point interviews are scheduled with the Human Resources representative to identify time schedules for interviews and logistics of the interview accommodations if necessary.

A description of the requirements for confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was provided for review by the representative, adjustments was made at that time. At this point I ask that they help identify participants and schedule time for the interviews, and follow up interviews, as well as provide information about the researcher for security and access to their facility.

**Upon Acceptance of the Research by Walden University:**

After the research results have been accepted by Walden University, an appointment with the firms' representative was set. At this appointment, a copy of the final project was provided. The meeting includes time for discussion or presentation of the results.

**Responding:**

Please respond by contacting me, my contact information is listed below:

James Wright

Address: [Redacted]

Phone: [Redacted]

Email: [Redacted]

Thank you,

James Wright

## Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

Dear Mr. Wright,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "Manufacturing Managers Leadership and Reduced Union Influence," conditional upon the approval of the research partners, as documented in the partners signed letters of cooperation, which will need to be submitted to the Walden IRB when obtained. The researcher may not commence the study until the Walden IRB confirms receipt of those letters of cooperation.

Your approval # is 01-04-17-0161683. You will need to reference this number in your dissertation and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on January 3, 2018. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Please note that this letter indicates that the IRB has approved your research. You may **NOT** begin the research phase of your doctoral study, however, until you have received official notification from the IRB to do so. Once you have received this notification by email, you may begin your data collection. Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application materials that have been submitted as of this date. This includes maintaining your current status with the university. Your IRB approval is only valid while you are an actively enrolled student at Walden University. If you need to take a leave of absence or are otherwise unable to remain actively enrolled, your IRB approval is suspended. Absolutely NO participant recruitment or data collection may occur while a student is not actively enrolled.

If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work

that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the IRB section of the Walden website:  
<http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec>

Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period of time they retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d)

Sincerely,

Libby Munson

Research Ethics Support Specialist

Office of Research Ethics and Compliance

[irb@waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@waldenu.edu)

Fax: 626-605-0472

Phone: 612-312-1283

Office address for Walden University:

100 Washington Avenue South, Suite 900

Minneapolis, MN 55401

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Date:

Name:

Company Name:

Primary Research Area of Interest: The specific business problem is that manufacturing managers' lack the leadership strategies needed to lead union members who are supported by unions with less influence.

Research Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore how manufacturing managers' lead union members supported by unions with less influence.

**Research Question:**

Do manufacturing managers have the skills needed to lead union members supported by unions with less influence?

**Interview Questions:**

1. How has decreased union influence changed the managers' role?
2. What leadership strategies can manufacturing managers utilize with union members, supported by a union with less influence, to improve productivity?
3. Describe a time when a manufacturing manager provided leadership to union members, to resolve a production problem?
4. What challenges do manufacturing managers with union employees, face today, that they did not face when union density and influence was high?

5. Describe a time when a manufacturing manager missed an opportunity to provide leadership to union employees to improve productivity?

## Appendix D: IRB Approved Research Partners

Community Research Partner:

Research Partners Designated Representative and Contact Information:

Dear James Wright,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Manufacturing Managers Leadership and Reduced Union Influence within the GT Technologies Toledo Facility. As part of this study, I authorize you to:

Recruit for participants in the facility. Recruitment will consist of setting up a table in a common area or break area. You are permitted to greet employees, explain the reason for recruitment and the research, and schedule times for interviews if a participant is identified.

As participants are identified, you and the participants can schedule times to conduct the interviews. Each participant will be offered the choice of conducting the interview at (facility name) facility, or a location of their choice.

Once the interviews are conducted, and the research is completed, a copy of the research findings will be delivered to the person designated to receive it.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: Providing you the opportunity to recruit participants at GT Toledo facility. If employees want to participate, and chose to conduct the research interview at GT Toledo facility, a room that is quiet, private, and free of any safety hazards will be provided. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

You will be required to comply with our companies research policies and requirements. These policies and requirements include:

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.

Sincerely,

Authorizing Official,

Contact Information:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Community Research Partner:

Research Partners Designated Representative and Contact Information:

Dear James Wright,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Manufacturing Managers Leadership and Reduced Union Influence within the LOCAL 12, UAW Facility. As part of this study, I authorize you to:

Recruit for participants in the facility. Recruitment will consist of setting up a table in a common area or break area. You are permitted to greet employees, explain the reason for recruitment and the research, and schedule times for interviews if a participant is identified.

As participants are identified, you and the participants can schedule times to conduct the interviews. Each participant will be offered the choice of conducting the interview at (facility name) facility, or a location of their choice.

Once the interviews are conducted, and the research is completed, a copy of the research findings will be delivered to the person designated to receive it.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: Providing you the opportunity to recruit participants at LOCAL 12, UAW facility. If employees want to participate, and chose to conduct the research interview at LOCAL 12, UAW facility, a room that is quiet, private, and free of any safety hazards will be provided. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

You will be required to comply with our companies research policies and requirements. These policies and requirements include:

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.

Sincerely,

Authorizing Official,

[Redacted signature]

Contact Information:

[Redacted contact information]

[Redacted contact information]  
LOCAL 12, UAW

Community Research Partner:

Research Partners Designated Representative and Contact Information:

Dear James Wright,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Manufacturing Managers Leadership and Reduced Union Influence within the Lenfeldt Facility. As part of this study, I authorize you to:

Recruit for participants in the facility. Recruitment will consist of setting up a table in a common area or break area. You are permitted to greet employees, explain the reason for recruitment and the research, and schedule times for interviews if a participant is identified.

As participants are identified, you and the participants can schedule times to conduct the interviews. Each participant will be offered the choice of conducting the interview at (facility name) facility, or a location of their choice.

Once the interviews are conducted, and the research is completed, a copy of the research findings will be delivered to the person designated to receive it.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: Providing you the opportunity to recruit participants at Lenfeldt facility. If employees want to participate, and chose to conduct the research interview at Lenfeldt facility, a room that is quiet, private, and free of any safety hazards will be provided. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

You will be required to comply with our companies research policies and requirements. These policies and requirements include:

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.

Sincerely,

Authorizing Official

[Redacted Signature]

Contact Information:

[Redacted Contact Information]