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Effective Leadership Strategies, Employee Performance, and Organizational Sustainability in the Boxing Industry

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Rita Ali

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Effective Leadership Strategies, Employee Performance, and Organizational

Sustainability in the Boxing Industry

by

Rita Williams-Ali

MBA, Ashford University, 2013

BS, Ashford University, 2011

Final Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2018

Abstract

Ineffective leadership impedes employee performance and threatens organizational sustainability, which causes U.S. businesses to spend billions of dollars.

Correspondingly, boxing promotion companies are challenged as some leaders lack strategies to improve employee performance. This single case study was focused on leadership strategies utilized in the boxing promotion industry to improve employee performance. Transformational and charismatic leadership theories were the conceptual framework for this study. The data consisted of semistructured interviews with 8 participants from 1 organization (4 leaders and 4 subordinates), as well as document reviews of company training materials. The 6-step model for thematic analysis coding procedure was used for data analysis. Five themes/strategies emerged: leading by example, inspiring/fostering teamwork, honest communication, people-driven actions, innovative/adaptive organizational change, and providing rewards were each associated with effective transactional leadership for increasing performance and sustainability. The consensus among participants was that effective leadership is a significant driver for improving employee performance, maintaining constructive leader-subordinate relationships, and increasing organizational sustainability. The social change implications include community economic enhancement. When organizational performance increases, contributions to local economies and communities can provide additional resources for community services for all citizens.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my love ones starting with my husband, my children, grandchildren and my late parents. To my devoted husband, Shamsud-Din, I dedicate this study to you, for your love, your patience, and your encouragement. To my daughters, Lakiha and Jaharia, Sons Mike and Azim your inspiration is duly noted. To my siblings Donald, Delores, Mitchell, Mikal, Zaynah and Sammy, thanks for your contributions to my growth and development.

This study is also dedicated to my grandchildren, Gina, Ruqayyah, Mikey, Saeedah, Rayna, Amir, Antonio, Miquel, Zaki, Rafi, Laila, Aleenah, Milan, and Morocco who continue to amaze me. Embarking upon this academic journey, of obtaining my doctorate degree, is in part to demonstrate the relevance of higher learning. Hopefully, the commitment to advancing my educational and professional growth will inspire each of you to never stop learning.

In addition, this is dedicated to my loving and devoted parents who are witnessing my accomplishment from heaven. All that I am, or ever hope to be, is owed to you for all the love, nurturing, and guidance and values you instilled in me. Though you're no longer here to physically embrace, I feel your spiritual embrace in every aspect of my being.

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To my colleagues and future doctors: I greatly appreciate the privilege of participating in the 9000 classes with such a distinguished group of individuals. We have shared a phenomenal experience, applauded each other's accomplishments and supported each other during times of difficulty.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

In the United States, organizational leaders spend billions of dollars in leadership training, each year, to enhance leadership, employee performance, and organizational sustainability (Winsborough, 2015). However, ineffective leadership impedes employee job performance and organizational sustainability (Dunn, Dastoor, & Sims, 2012; Muthuveloo, Kathamuthu, & Ping, 2014; Vidyarathi, Anand, & Linen, 2014). A majority of employees continue to identify their immediate supervisor as the primary reason for reduced performance (Leary et al., 2013). Conversely, effective leadership has been shown to improve employee morale and organizational sustainability (Schaap, 2012). Like other industries, some leaders in the boxing promotion industry lack strategies to improve employee performance. The goal of this qualitative case study was to explore leadership strategies in the boxing industry and identify strategies that help to improve employee performance.

Background of the Problem

Concerns for organizational sustainability have increased among organizational leaders (Merriman, Sen, Felo, & Litzky, 2016). According to a survey sponsored by the McKinsey & Company (Bonini, Gorner, & Jones 2010), more than 50% of organizations now claim organizational sustainability is one of their most important goals and initiatives. Over 50% of the companies surveyed claimed that they have undertaken significant changes in their business models in an attempt to seize opportunities associated with organizational sustainability. However, even though organizational leaders value organizational sustainability, nonmanagerial employees do not necessarily

view organizational sustainability as being as important as organizational leaders do (Bonini, Gorner, & Jones 2010).

According to Merriman et al. (2016), most employees do not prioritize corporate sustainability efforts because their immediate goals and objectives differ greatly from those of organizational leaders. Most of the employees perceive their work obligations and tasks as more important than pursuing organization-wide sustainability goals (Merriman et al., 2016). More often than not, researchers found that employees lack an understanding of the strategic effects of organizational stability and did not have sufficient exposure to corporate discourse that communicated the benefits of organizational stability (Merriman et al., 2016). For employees to perform according to organizational sustainability goals, and to be engaged in organizational sustainability efforts, performance management systems must be in place to support this process. Despite such studies as the one conducted by the McKinsey and Company (Bonini, Gorner, & Jones 2010), researchers and practitioners do not always know how leaders can influence the employees to address these goals and objectives (Merriman et al., 2016).

Fundamentally, companies need effective leaders within their specific industries.. Regardless of the nature of business, leadership influence on employees is a serious concern for corporations (Leavy, 2016; Yukl, 2012). Numerous theories on leadership continue to be studied by researchers seeking to determine the best practices for effective leadership, employee performance, and organizational sustainability. The complexities of

what actually constitutes effective leadership versus ineffective leadership are also a focus of scholarly research (Leavy, 2016; Yukl, 2012).

Consequently, scholarly researchers differ in opinions as to the fundamental question of what defines an effective leader (Leavy, 2016; Yukl, 2012). Despite no consensus of scholarly research on this phenomenon, there is agreement that a direct correlation exists between leadership influences and employees' performance. Thus, the relationship between employees' performance and organizational sustainability is vital to the overall success of the company. Organizations rely on effective leadership to encourage, promote, and maintain a productive work environment (Van, 2014). Simply stated, wherein the influence of effective leadership is evident, employee morale and performance is high, promoting organizational sustainability, while the opposite results occur from ineffective leadership (Van, 2014).

Problem Statement

Effective leadership increases job performance and organizational sustainability (Epstein & Roy, 2001). Despite this positive association between effective leadership and performance, ineffective leadership continues to impede employee job performance and organizational sustainability (Dunn, Dastoor, & Sims, 2012; Muthuveloo, Kathamuthu, & Ping, 2014; Vidyarthi, Anand, & Linen, 2014). Seventy-five percent of employees identify their immediate supervisor as the primary reason for reduced workplace performance (Leary et al., 2013). Effective leadership motivates workers, increases employee morale, and supports organizational sustainability (Parvadavardini, Vivek, & Devadasan, 2016). The general business problem is that some organizations do not

provide adequate training and implementation of leadership strategies to enable their leaders to enhance employee performance. The specific business problem is that some leaders in the boxing promotion industry lack leadership strategies to improve employee performance.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore leadership strategies that leaders in the boxing promotion industry use to improve employee performance. Through data collected from leaders, subordinates, and a review of documents in a successful boxing promotional company operating in Las Vegas, Nevada, I obtained information on strategies and practices that leaders use to improve employee performance. Implementation of these strategies may help to improve the work environment for employees by potentially increasing morale (see Parvadavardini et al., 2016; Schaap, 2012), as well as helping similar companies to thrive and contribute to the local economy and community. The results of this study may contribute to social change, as the boxing promotion industry both directly and indirectly affects the lives of youth in impoverished neighborhoods, where revenue from boxing events may benefit members of the community (Ford, 2015).

Nature of the Study

A qualitative, single case study was an appropriate strategy for exploring the effective leadership strategies to improve employee performance. Qualitative research was an effective means to study strategies for improving corporate productivity (Birdi et al., 1998). Conducting a qualitative study provided an opportunity for me to collect data

from participants within their work environment (Lewis, 2015). In qualitative research designs, researchers use document analysis, face-to-face interviews, and observations of interactions of individuals (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). A quantitative research method was not appropriate for this particular study. Researchers use the quantitative approach to test theories through the process of examining quantitative relationships and differences among variables (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The mixed-method approach was also not appropriate for this study as this approach was a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. As the quantitative method was not applicable to this research question, neither was the mixed-method approach.

Researchers used qualitative studies to explore, analyze, and evaluate circumstances in real-time (Lund, 2012; Yin, 2014). Conducting a qualitative, single case study also enabled participants to openly express their experiences and thoughts on specific matters and provides the researcher with vital information on the topic under study (Winsborough, 2015). Following Yin (2014), I conducted interviews and document reviews to explore and develop an understanding of the operation and execution of effective leadership strategies to improve employee performance.

Other qualitative designs did not fit well with the goal of this study. The narrative design was not an appropriate design because narrative researchers focus on the stories that enable people to understand their lives and experiences (see LeCompte & Schensul, 2013), not primarily on one element and the related outcomes (i.e., strategies). Similarly, the goal of an ethnographic study was to understand the experiences and characteristics of cultural groups (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). An ethnographic design did not fit well

with this study because my purpose was to understand leadership strategies, specifically, within a particular field, not the business culture or norms. Finally, phenomenology, a study of the lived experiences of individuals experiencing a phenomenon, was also not appropriate for this study because my goal is not to explore the meanings of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The case study design (Yin, 2014) is expected to enable me to address my study's goal of exploring what strategies leaders use to improve employees' performance.

Research Question

The research question for this study was: What strategies do leaders in the boxing promotion industry use to improve employee performance?

Interview Questions

My study consisted of interviews with leaders in the boxing industry (as well as document review), and I asked the following series of questions regarding leadership strategies the leaders have used to improve employee performance:

1. What leadership strategies have you used to improve employee performance?
2. In your experience, what is it about these strategies that helps to improve employee performance?
3. What experiences and knowledge do you have that have helped you more effectively motivate employees?
4. Based upon your experience, how has your leadership style also been an element in developing or implementing these strategies?

5. How do you know these strategies are effective? Please give me some examples of how these strategies have helped to improve performance and motivation.
6. What other relevant information you would like to include that was not part of our discussion?

Conceptual Framework

For this study, my conceptual framework consisted of the transformational leadership and charismatic leadership theories. Both of these theories provided insights for characterizing effective leaders (see Yukl, 1999).

Transformational Leadership Theory

According to Burns (1978), the concept of transformational leadership is evident in leaders and subordinates' relationships wherein morality and motivation are collectively elevated to greater heights. Bass (1985) updated the theory of transformational leadership. According to Bass, leaders of this sort are models of individuals that have integrity and demonstrate fairness. In addition, they clearly identify objectives, positively influence subordinates, are supportive, and have high expectations (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders are also visionaries and consistently seek the most effective strategies for maintaining, as well as improving, methods of operations (Bass, 1985). After decades of Bass's depiction of transformational leaders, scholars typically refer to this phenomenon as the most relevant type of business leadership (Van & Wart, 2014).

Charismatic Leadership Theory

Charismatic leadership parallels transformational leadership. Weber (1947), founder of the original charismatic leadership theory, defined charismatic leaders as having exceptional abilities. Accordingly, these individuals have qualities that set them apart from leaders who are devoid of charisma. Weber's description of charismatic leaders was redefined by scholars (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; House, 1977; Shamir and associates 1993). These two theories informed my research by providing a framework to explain how these leaders developed their strategies and/or why they were effective.

Operational Definitions

Employee performance: Employee performance is the measure of output in relation to the input. The higher effectiveness and efficiency of the employee, the better the employee performance (Saeed & Asghar, 2012). Employee performance is shaped by factors such as performance appraisals, motivation, satisfaction, salary, leadership and others (Saeed & Asghar, 2012).

Organizational commitment: Organizational commitment refers to “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 2013, p. 27).

Organizational leadership: Organizational leadership consists of "an organization’s ability to integrate four interdependent forces: vision, knowledge, trust, and power” (Ramasubramanian, 2004, p. 173).

Organizational sustainability: Organizational sustainability refers to "a concept of the holistic perspective of development integrated with organizational goals, internal

incentives and evaluation systems, and organizational decision support systems” (Radomska, 2015, p. 1).

Transformational leadership: Transformational leadership is the leadership process “when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 20).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are essential aspects of the research process (Ellis & Levy, 2009). Regardless of the type of research, these characteristics are underlying components of analysis of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). They are relevant in explaining and framing the purposed contents of the study. Ellis and Levy (2009) argued that no study is complete if it excludes or omits discussions of assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Assumptions

Assumptions, in a research study, are defined as what is believed to be true by the researcher, but cannot be proven (Ellis & Levy, 2009). The common belief regarding the study of the population, pertaining to a particular a phenomenon, is to assume a belief that is not provable (Cameron, 2012). Assumptions are the central components of a research project and necessary in comprising the study (Ellis & Levy, 2009).

Several assumptions existed within the context of this study. My first assumption was that there are specific reasons, outside of the scope of this study, why some boxing promotional companies succeed and why others fail. My second assumption was that

effective leadership positively affects employee performance. The third assumption was that, through a structured process of interview inquiries, interviewees will give truthful answers. My fourth assumption was that each participant will provide accurate responses describing the real life phenomena of their work related experiences.

Limitations

Potential weaknesses within or affiliated with the study are defined as limitations (Ellis & Levy, 2009). The geographical location of this study focuses on a single successful boxing promotion company located in Las Vegas, Nevada, Therefore, this study contains limitations as the research does not take into account data for boxing promotional companies operating in other geographic areas. Though this study can reveal the efficacious leadership practices of an organization in a specific location, results may differ in companies operating in other parts of the country.

An additional potential limitation is that I was the only responsible person collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data collection. As the researcher, I was the data collection instrument and, though I took measures to mitigate bias, I was not certain that I completely removed my own experiences from my lens of analysis. However, I conducted data collection and analysis using appropriate methods for reducing or limiting personal bias of the researcher (Ellis & Levy, 2009).

Delimitations

Delimitations, within the research process, pertain to the scope of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The term *delimitation* represents the description of boundaries within the scope of the study, as well as boundaries beyond the scope of the study (Ellis

& Levy, 2009). As it relates to this study, the scope is inclusive of a single boxing promotional companies located in Las Vegas, Nevada. A total of eight individuals from the organization were the participants for research study. Four leaders and four subordinates were interviewed.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore strategies that leaders in the boxing promotion industry use to improve employee performance. Through data collected from leaders, subordinates, and document review in a successful boxing promotional company operating in Las Vegas, Nevada, I obtained information on strategies that can improve employee performance. Organizational success requires competent leaders who possess the ability to maintain proficient job performance from employees. Leaders must positively influence subordinates to perform at levels consistently, which meet and/or exceed corporate objectives.

Leadership development is essential to expanding a leader's knowledge and the ability to increase workforce performance. As such, effective leadership has the propensity to increase company profits (Low & Ang, 2012). Ineffective leadership impedes the leader's ability to effectively motivate subordinates (Lindebaum & Zundel, 2013). Observation and exploration of effective leadership, employee performance, and organizational sustainability for small businesses, specifically in the boxing promotion industry, can provide these companies with a greater understanding of such situations and strategies for improvements. As a result of leaders implementing proficient strategies,

organizations can achieve profitability and successful outcomes (Ulrich, Zenger, & Smallwood, 2013).

The results of this study could also contribute to social change, as the boxing promotion industry both directly and indirectly affects the lives of youth in impoverished neighborhoods, where revenue from boxing events can benefit those who are less fortunate (Ford, 2015). Implementation of certain successful strategies can improve the work environment for employees by potentially increasing morale (Parvadavardini et al., 2016; Schaap, 2012), as well as helping the company to thrive and contribute to the local economy and community.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

By 2015, \$15 billion had been spent by organizations to implement strategies for promoting job performance, organizational sustainability, and effective leadership (Winsborough, 2015). Ineffective leadership remains an impediment to job performance and organizational sustainability (Leary et al., 2013). Leary et al. found that 75% of employees identified their superiors as the main cause of lower levels of performance at their respective workplaces. Effective leadership can motivate employees, increase morale, and support the sustainability of an organization (Schaap, 2012).

To develop this literature review, I used the following online databases and search engines: GoogleScholar, EBSCOHost, and ScienceDirect. The key search terms and combination of search terms that I used included the following: *leadership styles, effective leadership, sports management, boxing promotion management styles, leadership training, employee performance, organizational sustainability, ineffective*

leadership, organizational leadership, training, leadership training strategies, positive leadership, management leadership development, and sport promotion management training strategies. All key terms produced studies relevant to the problem and research question. Because of the notable lack of scholarship specifically focused on leadership, sustainability, and employee performance in the boxing promotion industry, I included sources related to these themes in the areas of sport management, human resources, and organizational psychology. In this study, I reference 140 total sources. Among the total 140 sources referenced in the study, 118 were peer reviewed (85%), and 124 (86%) were published within 5 years of CAO approval (from 2013 to 2018). In this literature review. Among the 118 sources included in this literature review, 118 (100%) were peer-reviewed. In addition, 100 (85%) of the sources included in this literature review were published within 5 years of 2018.

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore leadership strategies that leaders in the boxing promotion industry use to improve employee performance. Therefore, for this review of related literature, I first discuss the conceptual framework of the present study, followed by discussions of findings from relevant studies dealing with each subject, five major related areas related to my conceptual framework: (a) leadership styles, (b) employee job performance, (c) organizational sustainability, (d) leadership strategies, and (e) leadership in sports industries. Finally, the summary and transition heading includes the overall conclusions from completing the literature review.

In the following subheadings, I critically analyzed and synthesized the available scholarship dealing with employee performance and organizational sustainability, and

then examined the current literature on leadership strategies employed by a diverse range of organizational types. With the present study in mind, a review of literature specific to leadership strategies in sport management and boxing promotion is presented, as well as an analysis of the dominant methodologies used by researchers of leadership strategies. Finally, I concluded with a review, and an explanation of the need for my current study.

Conceptual Framework

To properly explore leadership strategies used by leaders in the boxing promotion industry, it was necessary to establish a framework for understanding the leadership styles, employee performance, and organizational sustainability and previous research on their relationships. Specifically, charismatic leadership and transformational leadership comprise the framework for this study. Both of these elements, compartmentalized and generalized by this framework, are similar across multiple types of organizations and corporate entities, regardless of their specific market or customer base. Therefore, I discussed the potential of this composite framework for organizing and explaining these elements needed to enhance their use and exploration by both researchers and industry leaders.

Charismatic leadership. Charismatic leadership, which parallels transformational leadership, was first presented by Weber (1947). Charismatic leaders have been defined as leaders with exceptional abilities, and those whose followers attribute extraordinary qualities to them (Weber, 1947; Yukl, 1999). Drawing from the biblical and theological history of the term, which came to signify the basis of ecclesiastical organization of the Christian Church, Weber (1947), a sociologist,

expanded the concept to include any authority that derived from normative patterns of order and the exemplary character revealed by an individual (see also Conger & Kanungo, 1998). According to Weber (1947), charismatic leaders have qualities that set them apart from leaders that are devoid of charisma. Since its inception, Weber's description of charismatic leaders has been refined by other scholars (Avolio & Yammarino 1990; Caldwell et al., 2012; Conger & Kanungo 1998, 2012; Hunt & Fitzgerald, 2013). Still, despite the variations of Weber's (1947) original work, the theoretical development provided by these authors has been based on the level of persuasion leaders have over followers and the kind of relationships that develop between such leaders and their followers.

Theoretical variations of charismatic leadership are also apparent among theorists. Conger and Kanungo (1998) emphasized leadership sensitivity for subordinates' needs, and recognizing external and internal threats in conjunction with opportunities for advancement. The authors also included leaders who willingly engaged in calculated risk and their version of charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). Charismatic leaders have been described as individuals who effectively articulate progressive vision, express ideological concepts relative to performance, convey clarified expectations for completing assignments, and who encourage subordinates through expressing confidence that subordinates can achieve, and even exceed expectations (Yukl, 1999).

Conceptual weaknesses in charismatic leadership theory have also been addressed by scholars of leadership theory. Yukl (1999) noted that the meaning of charismatic leadership has been notoriously ambiguous, and that more clarity and consistency is

needed with respect to the specific definition of the term. Moreover, Yukl (1999) noted the disagreement among theorists about, (a) the importance of the fundamental processes of influence in charismatic leadership and follower behavior, (b) that there has been an overemphasis on dyadic processes, and (c) that theories have been notably weak in explaining how charisma is institutionalized (Yukl, 1999). Since the inception of charismatic leadership theory, researchers have developed and expanded the theory in multiple arenas and contexts. In my study, I contribute to the development of this theory by exploring the main elements as they exist in the neglected context of boxing promotional organizations (Antonakis & House, 2013; Avolio & Yammarino, 1990; Meuser et al., 2016).

Researchers have used charismatic leadership theory to explore the interactions between leaders and followers in organizational settings (Antonakis & House, 2013; Avolio & Yammarino, 1990; Meuser et al., 2016). There is a general contention among scholars that research dealing with charismatic leadership is being consolidated, and many meta-analyses researchers have explored the influence of charismatic leadership on outcomes, notable predictors, and the ways in which the theory has developed over time (Antonakis & House, 2013). For example, Meuser et al. (2016) reviewed 14 years of research dealing with charismatic leadership theory (Meuser et al., 2016). Along with meta-analyses, past researchers have focused on individuals and groups within organizations (Avolio & Yammarino, 1990; Conger et al., 1998; Jackson et al., 2013; Waldman & Javidan, 2013). As such, charismatic leadership theory is appropriate for this study, considering the extensive development of the theory to date for multiple types of

organizations and the connection to the development and implementation of strategies related to employee performance.

Transformational leadership. Unlike Weber's (1947) theory of charismatic leadership, the core definition of transformational leadership how change in social systems is affected by leaders, creating valuable, positive change in followers within an organization with the ultimate goal of developing subordinates into leaders (Burns, 1978). Burns (1978) introduced the term *transforming* leadership through his research dealing with political elites and leaders, though the term and concept are now widely used by scholars of various disciplines who deal with organizational behavior and management, such as organizational psychology and public administration (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978).

The difference between leadership and management is often understood by differentiating between transforming leadership and transactional leadership, respectively (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). According to Burns (1978), transforming leadership is evident in leaders and subordinates' relationships, wherein morality and motivation are collectively elevated to greater heights to change perceptions and values and subsequently, the lives of people and organizations. (Bass, 1985; Caldwell et al., 2012). Ultimately, Burns (1978) constructed mutually exclusive concepts of leadership (e.g., transformational and transactional), which have facilitated researchers' conducting studies of leadership.

The bulk of the development of transformational leadership theory can be credited to Bass (1985), whose research extended the theory into the psychology arena. Bass

(1985) explained the psychological mechanisms underpinning transformational and transactional leadership and coined the term *transformational* (Bass, 1985; Caldwell et al., 2012). The majority of Bass et al.'s (1985) contributions lie in his work dealing with the measurement of concepts and dimensions of transformational leadership and the effect of transformational leadership on the performance and motivation of followers in an organization (Bass, et al., 1985, 96; Caldwell et al., 2012). Bass (1985) contended that transformational leaders are models of individuals who have integrity and demonstrate fairness. In addition, they clearly identify objectives, positively influence subordinates, are supportive and have high expectations (Bass, et al., 1985).

Among the qualities of transformational leaders are the ability to encourage followers, and evoke emotions in individuals and groups. Transformational leaders are also visionaries and consistently seek the most effective strategies for maintaining as well as improving methods of operations (Bass, et al., 1985). Decades after Bass's depiction of transformational leaders, other scholars have concluded that this phenomenon is the most relevant type of business leadership (Van & Wart, 2014).

Bass and his colleagues are credited with providing the most comprehensive data to support their version of transformational leadership. They describe transformational leaders as possessing the ability to affect the behavior of subordinates and influence them to achieve organizational objectives. Under this scenario, followers exhibited regard, devotion and loyalty for their leaders as well as each other. In addition, such relationships produce highly motivated subordinates that perform beyond expectations. Part of transformational leadership is to provide clarity to subordinates and the necessity for

accomplishing a particular task. Consequently, this results in subordinates placing the overall good of the company above their personal aspirations (Bass, et al., 1985).

The dimensions of transformational leadership have been refined after decades of research and meta-analysis supporting transformational leadership predicting positive group, individual, and organizational outcomes (Bass, 1985; Caldwell et al., 2012). These dimensions include:

- *Individualized Consideration*, or the degree to which a leader pays attention to the needs of his or her followers and the extent to which he or she empathizes and supports them by listening to their concerns (Bass, 1985). This in turn affects followers' ambition, catalyzes self-development and internal motivation (Jackson et al., 2013).
- *Intellectual Stimulation*, which refers to the degree to which a leader challenges what is assumed, takes risks, and asks for input and ideas from his or her followers (Bass, 1985), as well as the degree to which a leader urges followers to question assumptions and be creative in problem solving (Jackson et al., 2013).
- *Inspirational Motivation*, which is the extent to which a leader encourages followers to work toward difficult goals and exhibits confidence in followers' ability to achieve those goals (Jackson et al., 2013).
- *Idealized Influence*, which is attributed to the leader by the follower in such a way that reflects followers' perceptions of a leaders' power, confidence, and vision (Jackson et al., 2013). This dimension also includes behaviors expressed by the

leaders who exhibit their values, beliefs, resolve, purpose, and ethical orientation (Jackson et al., 2013).

Transformational leadership has been employed by researchers in the areas of organizational psychology, human resources management, public administration, and business administration (see Bass, 1985; Caldwell et al., 2012). Early researchers who focused on transformational leadership focused on the development of reliable measurement of constructs and theory development, and sought to develop an understanding of the key elements and how variables in organizational contexts can mediate them (Braun, 2013; Carter, 2013, Deinart, 2015).

Researchers have identified significant correlations between transformational and charismatic leadership (Belle, 2014; Jackson et al., 2013). As such, due to the notable similarities between transformational leadership and charismatic leadership discovered in empirical research, these theories are treated here as a single framework by which to explain and organize the present study. The underlying logic of for designing and conducting this study is to explore the skills and knowledge leaders use to promote performance effectively, as well as the requisite tools and knowledge needed by leaders to ensure long-term, effective organizational sustainability in the boxing promotional industry.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, although the components of the leadership, organizational sustainability, and employee performance in the boxing promotion industry are distinct insofar as the sport being promoted, the variable elements compartmentalized and generalized by this framework are arguably similar across many

types of organizations and corporate entities, regardless of their specific market or customer base. As such, I expect to be able to use the transformational leadership framework to organize and explain these elements as they are explored in the present study to address my research question.

Employee Performance

Employee performance has been linked to multiple performance issues across industries and sectors (Hsieh, 2016; Piccolo et al., 2016). Psychological, cultural, and organizational characteristics have been the subjects of numerous studies on employee performance, as well as the direct and indirect interactions between leaders and followers that influence outcomes such as affective commitment, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and burnout (Piccolo et al., 2012). Researchers have demonstrated that these constructs can be significant mediators of both leadership styles and employee performance across business sectors (Hsieh, 2016; Piccolo et al., 2012).

Since researchers have become interested in job performance, they have measured the concept in many different ways, given the ever-changing roles, requirements, and environments of globalized, tech-driven industry (Hsieh, 2016; Piccolo et al., 2012). However, in recent decades, researchers have agreed on valid measurements of job performance across industries and sectors. Furthermore, researchers have described job performance as consisting of several characteristics of both task-specific and nontask specific behavior, communication tasks, productivity, effort, individual discipline, and helping coworkers (Hsieh, 2016; Piccolo et al., 2012).

With respect to leadership and employee performance, researchers have done extensive work on antecedents of job performance (Hsieh, 2016; Piccolo et al., 2012). As previously noted, job performance has a relationship with variables such as leader-member-exchanges (LMX), person/organization fit, goal-ambiguity, motivation, and the service-climate of organizations (Hsieh, 2016). In a cross-sectional study of employees from various industries, Hsieh (2016) concluded that while job performance and satisfaction influenced one another significantly, the influence of job satisfaction on job performance was stronger than the influence of job performance on job satisfaction across all sectors in the study (Hsieh, 2016).

Moreover, Hsieh (2016) noted that certain variables carried more influence in certain sectors. For instance, goal ambiguity had a stronger effect on job satisfaction in the private sector than others, and that employees from the three sectors studied perceived that LMX led to improved performance (Hsieh, 2016). Piccolo (2011) also highlighted the importance of investigating the importance of certain leadership strategies on job performance in specific industries such as the boxing promotional industry in this study

Leadership styles and employee performance. Leadership styles have a profound effect on employee performance, and it has been shown that dimensions of transformational leadership are significant predictors of employee outcomes (Feng-Hua et al., 2014; Piccolo et al., 2012; Tyssen, 2014). In a meta-analysis of the five-factor transformational/transactional models of leadership: *transformational leadership, contingent reward, laissez faire, initiating structure* and *consideration*—and a two-factor model of leadership developed by Ohio State University, Piccolo et al., (2012) concluded

that *consideration* and *transformational leadership* were the strongest predictors of performance (Piccolo et al., 2012). Furthermore, Piccolo et al., (2012) noted that the *consideration* and *initiating structure* dimensions were highly related to transactional leadership and predicted leader effectiveness. The results also suggested that *transformational leadership* was significant for predicting levels of job satisfaction (Piccolo et al., 2012).

In the same vein, Conger and Kanungo (1998) found that charismatic leadership influences affection and identification taking place between leaders and followers, which produces emotional attachment, trust, motivation, and higher levels of self-efficacy. However, the conceptual complexity of leadership and employee performance is notable, and indicators of employee outcomes and their relationship with the mediating variables previously mentioned have been debated extensively (Conger & Kanungo, 1998, 2012). A critical review of the previous analysis of these mediating variables will be synthesized with previous research using the charismatic and transformational leadership frameworks in the following headings.

Effective leadership. Effective leadership styles can positively influence affective commitment, normative commitment, and organizational commitment, which are important antecedents of employee performance (Feng-Hua et al., 2014; Jackson et al., 2013; Saboe et al., 2014). Transformational/charismatic leadership is positively associated with the affective (AC) and normative commitment (NC) of employees (Jackson et al., 2013). Moreover, *contingent reward* and *management-by-exception* styles of leadership are also positively correlated with AC (Jackson, et al., 2013). Employees

whose managers had used *transformational/charismatic leadership* reported greater loyalty and emotional attachment to their organization, while employees whose managers had used *contingent reward* and *management-by-exception* felt only an emotional attachment to the organization. These findings are notable insofar as they exemplify the importance of leadership styles and strategies.

Feng-Hua et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative study of employees of a Taiwanese automotive organization and concluded that charismatic leadership, as evidenced by behavioral integrity, had a positive influence on employees' AC to the leader and the organization. The more word/deed alignment a supervisor exhibited, the more employees' commitment to him or her, and the organization itself will increase (Feng-Hue et al., 2014). Furthermore, Saboe et al. (2014) concluded that transformational leadership behaviors can indirectly affect employees' AC to the supervisor and the organization. Leaders providing support can improve employees' AC to the supervisor. These results are notable not only in that they provide further empirical evidence of the importance of leadership styles in employee commitment, but also that they lend support to the proposition that leadership is not a top-down phenomenon that occurs in a vacuum, but is a part of a complex relationship between leaders and followers.

Similar to behavioral integrity, empowering leadership has been associated with higher job performance (Lorinkova et al., 2013). Examining longitudinal data collected from various industries, Lorinkova et al. (2013) noted that teams headed up by leaders who exhibited empowering leadership experienced improved performance because of higher levels of team-learning and team-coordination. Furthermore, teams led by

empowering leaders experienced a higher rate of improved performance over time, which was partly due to the mediating effect of empowering leadership on employees' performance (Lorinkova, et al., 2013).

Although the conclusions from the previous studies have provided valuable insights into the relationships between charismatic and transformational leadership and job performance, several of the studies were quantitative (Lorinkova, et al., 2013; Saboe et al., 2014). Thus, there is a need for more qualitative studies to identify and explore key leadership strategies, which can affect AC, behavioral integrity, NC, and organizational commitment (OC), (Lorinkova, et al., 2013; Saboe et al., 2014). With the changing business landscape (e.g., globalization, technological advancement, etc.), a more in-depth exploration of effective and ineffective leadership strategies and job performance outcome is necessary.

Ineffective leadership. Just as charismatic and transactional leadership styles are effective in positively influencing important antecedents of employee performance, certain leadership styles have been shown to have insignificant, negative, and—in many cases—deleterious influences on employee performance (Chen et al., 2014; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Identifying leadership strengths and dysfunctional dispositions that influence job performance such as satisfaction, engagement, and burnout are integral to positive organizational outcomes (Leary et al., 2013). Examining leadership through a strengths-only lens is misguided, and examining leadership weaknesses is an important lens through which to explore factors influencing job performance.

Ineffective leadership can subtly impact the trust of employees in their leaders, and this trust, like AC, NC, and OC, is a significant mediator of employee performance (Chen et al., 2013). Chen et al. (2014) found that authoritarian paternalistic leadership (PL) was negatively associated with performance. Similarly, Braun et al., (2013) found that perceptions of leadership and job satisfaction were partly mediated by affective trust (AT). Clearly trust plays a significant role in the ultimate viability of a given leadership style with regard to the commitment of employees and, ultimately, their job performance (Braun et al., 2013). These styles, however, are mediated still by inconsistencies in leader engagement and competence, which warrants an exploration of the ways in which managers' abilities or lack thereof influence commitment, trust, and performance.

Managerial incompetence is both an important byproduct and component of ineffective leadership (Leary et al., 2013). Managerial incompetence and ineffective leadership are not mutually exclusive. Dysfunctional dispositions that manifest as managerial incompetence can be very detrimental to engagement and job satisfaction (Leary et al., 2013). In support of Leary et al.'s (2013) contention, Schyns and Schilling (2013) found that destructive leadership styles (DL) and negative attitudes toward leaders were associated with counterproductive behavior in employees. Schyns and Schilling (2013) hypothesized that destructive leadership would affect relationships with positive concepts of employee behavior such as AT negatively. There is a significant relationship between DL and followers' attitudes toward leaders, with the next being between DL styles and counterproductive work behavior (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

The followership perspective. Followership has been shown to be an important perspective by which to examine leadership styles and their impact on employee performance (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Leadership is a process occurring in leader-follower interactions—an arguably intuitive finding, but neglected in the literature nonetheless (Li et al., 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Subsequently, Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) found a general acceptance of the notion that leadership cannot be wholly understood unless followers' roles in the leadership process are considered.

With respect to transformational leadership and follower perspective, it is important to consider the employee behaviors associated with both transformational and transactional leadership as indicators of employee performance. It has been shown that employee perspectives of leadership are important to overall performance, and that transactional leadership has a weak relationship with performance—particularly if employees perceive leaders to be prototypical (Li et al., 2013; Piccolo et al., 2013). Moreover, the relationship between followers' organizational citizenship and propensity to take charge is not significantly influenced by transformational leadership when followers perceived their leaders to be typical (Li et al., 2013). Li et al.'s (2013) work is relevant to the present study because it provides empirical evidence on the way in which employees' perceptions of leaders can mediate the effects leadership styles have on employee behaviors.

Similarly, follower appraisals of leadership can affect their performance in a number of ways. As such, it is important to consider followers' perceptions of stressors and responses to leadership. Leaders who are judged as charismatic are subsequently

more likely to respond with higher levels of performance (LePine et al., 2015). These findings exemplify the way in which perception is an important a mediator of job performance, and the way in which interaction between followers and leaders may affect perceived stress, which undoubtedly characterizes the boxing promotion industry.

Another mediator of employee commitment and performance is the leader-member-exchange LMX, employees' perceptions of leaders, and the various types of interactions and subsequent follower behaviors that can influence job performance (Epitropaki & Martin, 2013). For example, perceptions of transformational leadership influence the use of upward influence tactics on managers by employees (Epitropaki & Martin, 2013). Followers whose leaders exhibit transformational leadership are more likely to attempt to engage with and influence those leaders.

Epitropaki and Martin (2013) found that employee perceptions of transformational leadership were positively associated with the use of soft and rational (or pleasant and thoughtful) substantive influence tactics used by employees. Conversely, Epitropaki and Martin also suggested that transactional leadership was positively correlated with the use of soft and hard upward influence tactics (Epitropaki & Martin, 2013). The more an employee perceived their leaders' style to be transformational, the more likely employees were to attempt to influence the leaders in a reasonable, thoughtful manner.

Furthermore, Epitropaki and Martin (2013) also found evidence of a significant interaction among transformational and transactional leadership, relative leader member exchanges (RLMX), and the perceived organizational support (POS) of employees.

Essentially, the results of Epitropaki and Martin's study indicated that, in conditions that are resource-constrained, employees were more likely to use tactics which were considered to be more soft to influence leaders whom they considered more transformational more (Epitropaki & Martin, 2013). These findings are salient in that they provide evidence of employees' perceptions of their leaders, which could provide useful context for the present study. It is important to explore employee perceptions of other concepts that may be affected by leadership styles or that can affect employee commitment, and, in turn, influence employee performance.

The work environment. Just as follower perceptions of leaders and leadership styles are important mediators of performance and commitment, so too are employee perceptions of the environment in which they perform their duties. In order for organizations to thrive, organizational change is an inevitable necessity (Carter et al., 2013). Globalization and the digitization of workflow make the work environment a notable mediator of employee performance and leadership effectiveness.

More specifically, changing organizational elements can adversely affect employee performance, and the relationship quality between leaders and employees can be influenced by the effect of transformational leadership on the performance of tasks in an environment of ongoing, incremental organizational change (Carter et al., 2013). As such, it is important for the present study to consider the contexts in which leaders and followers interact, and the characteristics and specific issues that research has shown to relate to transformational and charismatic leadership and employee performance.

Tasks. Like leadership styles, specific workflow characteristics can also be mediators of both perceptions of leaders and employee commitment (Carter, et al., 2013; Gillet & Vandenberghe, 2014). For example, in an effort to investigate whether or not transformational leadership and organizational commitment (OC) were influenced by employees' perceptions of task characteristics, Gillet and Vandenberghe (2014) conducted a quantitative study of 488 employees from multiple organizations throughout France. The results suggested that transformational leadership and OC were mediated in part by employees' perceptions of tasks (Gillet & Vandenberghe, 2014). Further, Gillet and Vandenberghe argued that transformational leadership can affect OC by influencing followers' perceptions of feedback, task variety, and autonomy in decision making. These results are important to consider because they partially explain the relationship between tasks, transformational leadership, and OC, which are key components of employee performance.

Beneficiary contact. Among the tasks assigned to employees in many industries, some involve customer, or beneficiary contact, while many do not. In a 2012 quasi-experimental study of 71 new-hires from privately held company in the U.S., Grant (2012) examined the associations among transformational leadership and beneficiary contact (Grant, 2012). Grant hypothesized that customer interaction would increase the influence of transformational leadership on subordinate performance and found that contact with customers strengthened the impact of transformational leadership on sales and revenue (Grant, 2012). In the same study, Grant surveyed 418 government employees working in a wide range of jobs and leaders, and, using the same quasi-

experimental design, found results supporting the first study. Grant ultimately concluded that relational job design, in which employees have more contact with beneficiaries, can enhance the motivational impact of transformational leadership.

Teams. Teams have become a popular way of organizing and coordinating work, and transformational leadership has been shown to have a notable impact on the performance of teams (Srinivasa & Waheed, 2015). Ultimately, Srinivasa, and Waheed (2015) proposed a framework by which to understand motivation and support extended to individual employees that would influence team performance. This framework included psychological empowerment and support for innovation as influencing factors of transformational leadership on team performance (Srinivasa & Waheed, 2015). Similarly, Bai et al. (2016) found team conflict and knowledge sharing to be mediators of the relationship between the transformational behavior of team leaders and employee creativity within a team context. Further, according to Bai et al. (2016), enhancing employee creativity in a team context is largely underrepresented in the literature.

Literature on teams can also be connected to leader effectiveness. Typical forms of leadership such as *initiating structure* and *consideration* exhibited a weaker relationship than *new-genre* leadership (Wang et al., 2014). Moreover, the influence of shared leadership is stronger when the work performed within teams is more complex in nature (Wang et al., 2014).

With respect to team performance, it is also important to note that teams serve as micro-organizations in and of themselves, with their own emergent leaders who have their own leadership traits, and who may or may not have leadership training (Braun et

al., 2013). However, research has suggested transformational leadership to be effective at the team level (Braun et al., 2013). Transformational leadership and job satisfaction are positively related to one another, and that transformational leadership and objective team performance are also positively associated (Braun et al., 2012). However, followers' trust of their respective teams did not influence the association of perceptions of transformational leadership and team performance (Braun et al., 2012). These findings are important to note because of the likelihood that the boxing promotion organizations in the present study will likely have employees working in teams.

Virtual teams. Team environments are not exempt from the ever-advancing technological assimilation by the private, non-profit, and public sectors. Many agencies and organizations are taking advantage of remote technology and converting traditional employees to members of virtual teams, or lone telecommuters. The number of companies that use virtual teams has grown since 2000, with fewer than 50% of companies using them, but that number has risen since and continues to rise (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Given these changing contexts, the traditional leader-follower relationships and their influences on employee performance, which have been the subject of exploration, are also changing. Consequently, so must leadership scholarship. Some studies have concentrated on virtual teams specifically, and the mediating relationship of leadership styles.

Hierarchical leadership, for example, has been shown by researchers to be negatively related to team performance in the context of virtual teams (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Higher levels of team *virtuality* (e.g., geographic dispersion, electronic

communication, and differences in culture), structural supports are more strongly associated with team performance than hierarchical leadership (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Further, the association among shared team-leadership and performance was not influenced by the reported degree of team virtuality (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Given the current growth of team virtuality, it is only logical to consider this aspect of leader/follower interaction in the present study, given the nature of the boxing promotion industry.

The leader perspective. Along with the role of leadership styles, employee perceptions and behavior, and work environment, a review of the association among specific leadership behaviors and employee performance is also necessary to review in order to provide appropriate context for the present study. As discussed previously, leadership styles and management styles are not mutually exclusive, and individual styles of leadership manifest in different ways in different leaders in different management roles across different industries situated in different societal, geographical, or cultural contexts. Still, Todnem and Burnes (2013) suggested that many leaders are arguably no more than well-paid followers who lack courage, integrity, compassion, vision, contribution, and ethical stance (Todnem & Burnes, 2013). This contention highlights the need to consider and explore specific leadership behaviors and their influence on employee commitment.

Responsible leadership behaviors have been shown to increase performance outcomes (Doh & Quigley, 2014). Doh and Quigley (2014) investigated this question in a qualitative study in which they provided in-depth sketches of two separate avenues through which leaders and the organizations to which they belong project leadership

behaviors and actions: (a) psychological, and (b) knowledge-based (Doh & Quigley, 2014). Their findings supported their central argument: that psychological and knowledge-based pathways comprise mechanisms that both advance and disperse specific signals and messages from leaders to followers, which influence actions and outcomes (Doh & Quigley, 2014). The argument made by Doh and Quigley (2015) will provide depth and weight to the variables examined in the present study, such as mediators of leadership behavior, as well antecedents of effective and ineffective leadership styles.

Stress. It is also important to review from the leader perspective, since the effects of stress on leaders and the mediating role stress can play in leadership styles and behavior are consequential to employee performance. Situation-specific stress that involves heavier workloads and deadline pressure, mediates the effects of management who exhibit the traits of leaders will become lessened when compared to the same effects under less stressful conditions (Oreg & Berson, 2015). These relationships are significantly weaker when in high stress periods (Oreg & Berson, 2015). Approach-oriented demeanors and charismatic affects have weaker relationships when levels of stress were high (Oreg & Berson, 2015).

Although the research indicates that a notable gap exists with respect to employee performance in the boxing promotion industry, as well as a gap in qualitative research from the follower perspective and measures that do not rely on self-report, many important mediators of leadership style and its relationship to employee performance have been explored. The importance of affective, normative and organizational

commitment, along with leader and employee perceptions of tasks and organizational change and other environmental factors have been shown to be significant influencers of employee performance and mediators of leadership style. Further research into the relationships and interactions among variable leadership styles and strategies and organizational sustainability is needed.

Organizational Sustainability

More and more companies are beginning to include sustainability concerns into operations along with typical business goals (Thomas & Lamb, 2012). With the assumption that the complex nature of sustainability is the chief problem for understanding leadership as it relates to sustainability, Metcalf and Benn (2013) argued that organizations are intricate but adaptive systems that operate within even wider systems with the same characteristics. These processes ostensibly makes the problem of interpreting the ways in which organizations are to be sustainable a serious demand on organizational leadership (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). As such, leadership for sustainability requires leaders who can see and predict through the complexity of an organization, engage groups in processes which promote flexible change, and who have the emotional intelligence to solve complex problems (Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Metcalf and Benn (2013) argued that leadership offers important interpretations of how organizational sustainability is in relationship with the macro systems in which an organization happens to be situated, and that executing that link effectively demands atypical leaders and atypical leadership styles.

CEOs see sustainability as having become increasingly important (Peter et al., 2012), and few executives are *extremely satisfied* with their organization's performance (Rigby, 2015). Sustainability is growing more important to business strategy, which it impels newer models of business, and that sustainability is integral to long-term success (Rigby, 2015). Further, CEOs believed education to be the most critical issue for success in the long-term (Rigby, 2015). Important to note too is that respondents were drawn from 100 countries across more than 25 industries, which suggests the issues facing organizations and their sustainability efforts are not specific to one industry (Rigby, 2015).

Although CEOs and other leaders may agree that sustainability is more important than ever, researchers have suggested that lack of leadership is often blamed for organizational behavior issues leading to misguided organizational change (e.g., Orlando, 2014). Although American organizations have had success promoting change, unrealistic demands continue to entrench most organizations and the structural characteristics within them, which has led to misguided expectations leading ultimately to dysfunctional organizational behavior (Orlando, 2014). Moreover, studies have suggested that a general lack of leadership can be blamed for dysfunctional organizational behavior (Orlando, 2014), which can have negative consequences for long-term organizational stability. The question of organizational sustainability practices demands further exploration of the causes and conditions of both dysfunctional and functional organizational behavior.

Though organizational sustainability has become a priority, how to achieve it has proven a challenge, and there is a growing contention that management scholars should

pay attention to the role of implicit norms in organizations (Kimberly et al., 2016). Incentive effects are enhanced when the project offers complementary financial benefits, but not when organization values emphasized sustainability (Kimberly et al., 2016). Framing sustainability goals emphasize financial benefits consistent with an organization's financial goals may maximize employee engagement (Kimberly et al., 2016).

Scholars have noted the importance the drivers of social performance and how identifying and articulating them can impact organizational sustainability outcomes (Epstein & Roy, 2001). More and more senior managers recognize the crucial nature of creating strategies, which incorporate corporate social responsibility (CSR; Epstein & Roy, 2001). However, senior managers often find it difficult to transform strategies into executable action (Epstein & Roy, 2001). The literature dealing with the social sustainability of businesses focuses largely on plans for implementing sustainability strategies, which support sustainability goals (Thomas & Lamm, 2012). As such, it is important for researchers to examine the ways in which leadership interacts with and affects organizational sustainability. In short, the drivers and norms of organizational behavior are relative to organizational outcomes, as well as the leadership strategies developed and employed to support sustainability goals.

Leadership Strategies

Voegtlin (2015) argued that accountable leadership means actively involving stakeholders, and encouraging participation in decision-making and shared problem-solving. Likewise, transformational leaders utilize behavioral strategies like setting

visionary goals, lofty expectations, and providing autonomy by which followers organize their own pursuits (Hamstra et al., 2014). Similarly, transformational leaders do not shy at taking risks, nor do they shy at underscoring the importance of progress, change, and innovation within their organizations (Hamstra et al., 2014). Thus, in order to appropriately analyze the ways in which boxing promotional organizations gain the knowledge and skills to promote effective leadership, it is important to examine the existing literature dealing with leadership strategies in an organizational context.

According to Hamstra et al. (2014), arousing followers' willingness to learn and assume new perspectives can encourage trying out new strategies and processes, and transformational leaders' vision promotes these kinds of ideal working environments. Moreover, leaders who present an ideal vision can encourage a sense that the pursuit of goals should be toward ideal standards (Hamstra et al., 2014). Transformational leaders communicate with optimism about the future and express confidence and lofty expectations in followers' capability to reach goals (Hamstra et al., 2014). Further, transformational leaders take risks to change organizational norms (Hamstra et al., 2014).

With respect to leadership strategies, it is important to consider the way in which followers preferred leadership strategies relate to leadership strategies employed in an organization. In a series of studies examining when and why transformational and transactional leadership is thought of as effective, Hamstra et al. (2014) found that perceived effectiveness of leadership is influenced by the fit between strategies driven by style of leadership and the strategies preferred by followers. Hamstra et al. (2014) found

that transformational leadership largely encouraged promotional strategies and created a fit for followers who focused on promotion.

By comparison, a transactional style of leadership primarily encouraged strategies that focused on prevention, creating an appropriate fit for followers who were more focused on prevention (Hamstra et al., 2014). Hamstra et al. (2014) found that, as a consequence, leadership was perceived as more influential and predictive of greater effort on the part of followers. Hamstra et al.'s (2014) findings are important to note because they shed light on impact certain leadership strategies can have on employee performance when followers preferred leadership strategies are altogether different than that employed by leaders.

Ethics. Ethical and multicultural values within an organization are crucial for the planning an adoption of effective management practices and leadership strategies for organizational performance (Florea et al., 2013). Management practices are the basis for most efforts aimed at sustainability, and despite the important role of values in their design and adoption, few scholars have looked at the ways in which ethics relate to the management and leadership practices in organizations (Florea et al., 2013). The impact of ethical practices on leadership strategies is important to explore because although leadership strategies are ostensibly separate from ethics in an organizational context, it is arguable that ethical principles are a necessary foundation for effective leadership.

Corporate social responsibility. As mentioned previously, leaders serve as models for their followers who can passively allow, ignore, or unconsciously incentivize irresponsibility, and “[L]eaders, especially those at the upper echelons, act as legitimized

organizational agents who are in a position to essentially authorize irresponsibility” (Pearce, Wassenaar, & Manz, 2014, p. 278). Similarly, as mentioned previously, CSR has also been shown to be an important strategy by which organizational sustainability and employee performance are affected (Mirvis, 2012). Mirvis et al. (2012) explored ways in which companies engage their employees through CSR: the transactional approach, relational approach, and developmental approach, which intends to spur social responsibility and advance responsible corporate citizenship. It is important to highlight these approaches because, like ethics, CSR is a principle on which leadership styles rest. As such, in order to understand the associations among leadership strategies and job performance and organizational sustainability, it is first necessary to explore the driving forces behind leaders’ particular styles and the subsequent strategies employed.

Self-leadership. Among the leadership strategies employed by organizations are strategies focused on self-leadership. Self-leadership is positively associated with active leadership styles and negatively associated with passive leadership styles (Furtner et al., 2012). Leaders who exhibited more self-leadership were more likely to exhibit transformational and transactional leadership (Furtner et al., 2012).

Similarly, self-leadership behavioral-focused strategies have a significant and strong effect on entrepreneurial orientation, which enhances influences on creativity and productivity (Politis, 2015). Entrepreneurial orientation significantly affects creativity and productivity of employees employing self-leadership strategies. Politis (2015) suggested that organizations should train and hire employees who encompass strategies

which intend to strengthen goal setting, insight, reward, self-punishment, and self-practice.

Positive leadership strategies. Positive leadership strategies are seldom implemented in organizations (Cameron, 2012), but much work has been done by scholars to establish best practices for leadership strategies in organizations (Conger & Riggio, 2012). Within an organization, a key component of overall leadership learning is that which occurs through a combination of self-development and training provided by an organization (Scott, 2012). Moreover, fostering and growing organizational leaders involves promoting enhanced performance, improving their ability to lead effectively in mutable circumstances, and expanding their promotion capacity (Scott, 2012). Conger and Riggio (2012) argued that before selecting leaders, organizations should define what is expected, that leadership is moderated by myriad situational factors: level within the management structure, cultural context, and types of business challenges, to name a few.

Communication. Views of leadership vary accordingly, and leadership expands to all leadership actors within an organization who not only have the capacity to be transformative agents, but who also have the capacity to become passive receptors of meaning (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Leadership is performative, and, as a result, moral grounding is possible (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Leadership is also based on attributes, and is emergent in the responses of organizational actors whose views on leadership may or may not coincide (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Overall, leadership can be shifting, or it can be a simple role appointment that is interchangeable (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). However, it is a truism that the processes and results

of leadership are predicated and reliant on communication (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014).

Frequent communication ultimately affects job performance outcomes (Schaap, 2012). Schaap (2012) investigated the relationship between effective leadership actions and well-executed leadership-strategy adoption in the Nevada casino industry.

Communication taking place within the organizations' management and employees bolsters and fosters shared attitudes and values (Schaap, 2012). Schaap's (2012) study reaffirmed the concept that an organization which rewards the success of an employed leadership strategy is in turn rewarded with higher levels of performance within the organization. Further, Schaap (2012) argues that strategy implementation plans that highlight particular tasks with clear-cut time frames, and those which identify of the people responsible for the completion of the task should be developed within an organization.

Emotion. Emotions in the workplace influence information processing and decision-making (Thiel et al., 2012). Moreover, the influence of emotion on cognitive processes is often emotion-specific, and leaders may find utility in learning how to manage subordinates' actual emotions, as opposed to their affect (Thiel et al., 2012). Leader-facilitated regulation strategies moderate the relationships between anger and pessimism. Leaders would do well to understand the dynamic influences of emotions as they exist separately from affect and be prepared to assist employees in managing them accordingly (Thiel et al., 2012).

Leader interpersonal-emotional-management-strategies (IEMS) have also been shown to affect followers' citizenship behaviors and job satisfaction, as well as to strengthen LMX (Little et al., 2016). Responding to growing calls for examinations of IEMS, Little et al. (2016) developed and tested a model of behavior directed at dealing with the negative emotions of followers. The results also suggested that some leader IEMS promote the strength of LMX relationships (Little et al., 2016). Important to note too is the ways in which not only the emotional management of followers, but also the emotional intelligence of leaders is strategically utilized in leadership.

Further, emotional intelligence has been shown to be an effective decision-making tool (Hess & Bacigalupo, 2013; Little et al., 2016). Hess and Bacigalupo (2013) presented strategies by which organizations could implement emotional intelligence skills, as well as strategies by which to apply them to leaders' decision-making. Leaders reap rewards from the adoption and utilization of behaviors that have been attributed to emotional intelligence, and the consideration of emotional intelligence skills can become a strategy by which to develop a leader's ability to appraise the effect of decisions (Hess & Bacigalupo, 2013).

Training. Training is an important mechanism by which leaders and effective leadership strategies facilitate positive organizational outcomes (Salas et al., 2014). The extant work on training clearly shows the efficacy of training programs, as well as the general contention that the way training is formulated and implemented matters within an organization (Salas et al., 2014). Salas et al. (2014) examined extant literature on organizational training and explained the importance of training and how to use training

appropriately, providing recommendations for implementation. Specifically, Salas et al., argued that training is a systematic process, and that what matters before, during, and after training is important (Salas et al., 2014).

On-the-job training has been shown to be strongly related to job performance (Saks, 2014). The transfer of skills and behaviors from the learning environment to the work environment has been identified as a notable aspect of leadership development (Saks, 2014). The transfer of organizational training is associated with organizational performance and that it largely mediates the relationship between the training strategies employed and the subsequent performance of organizations (Saks, 2014). On-the-job training is the strongly associated with transfer of training and organizational performance (Saks, 2014). These results show the necessity of training within organizations and introduce the possibility that certain leadership styles' moderating and mediating affects, which demands a closer examination of the particular training methods employed by specific organizations.

Coaching. Managerial coaching has been shown to positively associate with work and job performance (Bozer, Sarros, & Santora, 2013 Kim et al., 2014). Role clarity mediates associations between coaching and employee attitudes and performance outcomes (Bozer, et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2014). It is important to explore the distinct aspects of both effective and ineffective leadership in order to provide adequate context for the present study, considering the lack of scholarship on leadership styles and their relationship to the employee performance in the boxing promotion industry.

In this same vein, managerial coaching has been shown to increase levels of self-efficacy and job performance in managers (Bozer, et al., 2013). Self-efficacy improves so job performance (Bozer et al., 2013). These findings are particularly important to consider with respect to the current study because it provides insight into the type of specific outcomes that leadership coaching should accomplish, as well as the conditions under which sustainability can be driven.

Important to note too is the mediating role that organizational commitment can play in leaders' engagement of leadership development processes such as managerial coaching. Studies have suggested that organizational commitment (OC) partially influence their transformational leadership skills (Bozer, et al., 2013; Jin et al., 2016). Leaders who experience congeniality and peace at work are perceived to have more transformational leadership qualities, and that this relationship was somewhat influenced by leaders' levels of affective organizational commitment (AOC; Jin et al., 2016). However, job satisfaction does not significantly influence the relationship between employees' experiences of pleasantness at work or their subordinates' ratings of their respective transformational leadership qualities. This information highlights the important role that organizational commitment plays in leadership effectiveness, and suggests that adequate organizational commitment may be a notable precursor to the adoption of effective leadership strategies by individual leaders.

Leader traits. Just as follower perception has been shown to be a key factor in leader performance, so too is leaders' perceptions of their own leadership styles and capabilities. Brazilian Olympic Federation leaders were found to perceive themselves as

being competent, but considered the need for improvement of particular leadership competencies (de Freitas et al., 2016). However, although leadership strategies seek to transfer empirically sound strategies of leadership development aimed at enhancing leadership capacity, some characteristics of effective leaders are innate, with cognitive and metacognitive skills being at the center of leadership ability (Day et al., 2014; von Hippel et al., 2016; Dienart et al., 2015). Further, research has found specific personality traits to be predictive of effective leadership (Day et al., 2014; Dienart et al., 2015).

Personality. Among the mediating factors of leadership behavior, personality has been shown to have notable influence. For example, personality has been shown to be directly linked to transformational leadership. Certain personality traits were linked to sub-dimensions of transformational leadership theory (Dienart et al., 2015). Further, these personality traits to be indirectly linked to the performance of organizational leaders, but also that different combinations of traits were related to transformational behaviors in different ways (Dienart et al., 2015). This information will help organize and explain the findings of the present study and any links related to these concepts and ideas, which will add to the understanding of the nature of effective leadership behaviors in a context specific to the boxing promotion industry.

Certain elements of personality have been shown to increase predictive of positive leadership behaviors. Motivation to lead (MTL) of candidates for an elite unit would be predictive of teamwork behavior and their respective tendencies to ultimately emerge as leaders (Luria & Berson, 2013). MTL predicts formal leadership emergence (Luria & Berson, 2013). In the context of the present study, these findings highlight the need to

consider boxing promotional industry leaders' motivation to lead in relation to both their leadership style and the subsequent performance of their followers.

Leadership in Sport Management

That leadership is both new and old is a timeless concept which must reflect the current times but stay ahead of them at the same time, and doing so is not easy but worth pursuit in contemporary organizational life (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). With respect to leadership in sport organizations, the 1960s represented the beginning of sport management as its own field of scientific research, as well as its own field of academic and professional education (de Freitas, 2016), and research dealing with leadership strategies and their relationship to sport management and promotional organizations are both new and relatively lacking.

However, scholars have attempted to examine these relationships in the sport industry (de Freitas et al., 2016). de Freitas et al. (2016) explored the differences in the perception of behavior as reflective of both the real and ideal competency profiles of Brazilian Olympic Sport Federations, taking their respective time and experience in their roles into account. de Freitas et al.'s (2016) study was comprised two related studies, the first of which sampled 83 participants who filled out a managerial behavior survey instrument. In the second study, 10 presidents were interviewed and a subsequent content analysis suggested that all respondents reportedly felt they were competent, but did consider the likely need for the improvement of their own leadership (de Freitas et al., 2016). Furthermore, the results showed that, over time, various knowledge and

competencies had been acquired and developed, which allowed the participants to adjust their respective management practices (de Freitas et al., 2016).

Like any industry, leadership in sport organizations such as boxing promotion is susceptible to the managerial pitfalls and organizational issues (Tyssen et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). Further, with respect to leadership strategies, sport organizations have been relatively slow in embracing the dominant concepts and ways of understanding related to strategic management (Hoye, 2015). According to Hoye (2015), managers of sport organizations should have to be capable of influencing and empowering others, as well as be able and work with leaders of other sport organizations in order to build alliances and address conflicts (Hoye, 2015). As such, Hoye (2015) contended that an understanding of strategic leadership and management principles and their application to sport are imperative to future sport management.

Leadership is principally founded upon the ability to direct, promote alignment, promote motivation, and inspire followers, while management is more transactional in nature (Hoye, 2015). Although leadership styles have been shown to influence organizations across industries, research has suggested that leadership style is not associated with self-reported productivity among sport managers (Bahari et al., 2012). Bahari et al. (2012) investigated the association among leadership style and self-report productivity among managers of sport organizations in East Azarbayjan Province. There is no relationship between leadership styles and productivity among sport managers (Bahari, 2012). Moreover, a general lack of research dealing with organizations specific to boxing promotions continues to present a problem for scholars intending to research in

this area, specifically. As such, the present study seeks to address leadership and performance issues in the understudied context of boxing promotion.

Conclusions

The general business problem is that some organizations do not provide adequate training and implementation of leadership strategies to enable their leaders to enhance employee performance. The specific business problem is that some leaders in the boxing promotion industry lack leadership strategies to improve employee performance.

As such, through this review of the literature, I provided an overview of the relevant conceptual framework as a potential means to explicate and organize the findings of the present study.

This review included recent scholarship dealing with leadership strategies, employee performance, organizational sustainability, sport management and leadership. Throughout this review, the recent scholarship dealing with employee performance supported conclusions of early theorists of charismatic and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978 & Weber, 1947), as well as the findings of seminal research conducted in leadership literature (Avolio & Yammarino, 1990; Conger & Kanungo, 1998 & Yukl, 1999). The underlying logic that charismatic and transformational leadership have positive associations among employee performance was confirmed in numerous studies (Hsieh, 2016; Piccolo et al., 2012; Saboe, 2014 & Tyssen, 2014)

To place the present study in the appropriate context, I also conducted a search of the literature dealing with leadership styles and their interrelationships and discussed the results of evidence confirming the positive relationships among effective leadership,

employee performance, and key dimensions of organizational stability such as cost reduction, revenue growth and quality improvement (e.g, Metcalf & Benn, 2013; Peter et al., 2012; Thomas & Lamm, 2012 & Rigby, 2015). However, the review also revealed a relative dearth of research on organizational sustainability and leadership in sport promotion or management settings.

In this section, I explored the current literature dealing with leadership strategies and the ways in which leadership strategies are applied in the boxing promotion industry. However, I concluded that there is a need for additional scholarship on employee performance in the boxing promotion industry. While the literature review did yield research on the topic of sport management (Dowling, 2014; Hoye, 2015), a qualitative study dealing with leadership strategies, employee performance, and organizational sustainability, I did not locate any qualitative studies dealing with these concepts in the boxing promotional industry.

Sufficient evidence of the notable effects of charismatic and transformational leadership strategies on employee performance for supporting organizational sustainability exists to justify the present study of leadership strategies employed in the boxing promotion industry to effect employee performance. Addressing this specific business problem will contribute to the knowledge on the topic by providing empirical findings regarding leadership strategies employed by the boxing promotional industry.

Transition

I designed the study to explore leadership strategies that leaders in the boxing promotion industry use to improve employee performance. To explore the actual

phenomenon of occurrences of the participating companies, I concluded a single qualitative case study as being an appropriate design. Understanding the leadership strategies or improving employee performance and organizational sustainability for small businesses, specifically in the boxing promotion industry from demonstrated evidence, may enable these companies to increase employee performance and potentially further support organizations' sustainability.

In this section, I presented information on the specific business problem and purpose of the study. I also introduced the method, design, and interview questions. This section also included the review of the relevant professional and academic literature. In Section 2, I will discuss the methodology, design, and the procedures more specifically. Section 3 will include a presentation of the findings, recommendations, implications for effecting social change, and overall conclusions

Section 2: The Project

This section includes a discussion of the specific methods and procedures for completing the study. The purpose of this study was to explore strategies that leaders in the boxing promotion industry use to improve employee performance. In this section, I reiterate the purpose of the study and my role as the researcher. I then discuss the specifics of the project, including the participants, data collection procedures, analysis methods, and methods for meeting ethical standards. Included are also the processes for assuring the study's validity and reliability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore leadership strategies that leaders in the boxing promotion industry use to improve employee performance. Through data collected from leaders, subordinates, and document review in a successful boxing promotional company operating in Las Vegas, Nevada, I obtained information on strategies and practices that leaders use to improve employee performance. Implementation of these strategies can help to improve the work environment for employees by potentially increasing morale (Parvadavardini et al., 2016; Schaap, 2012), as well as helping similar companies to thrive and contribute to the local economy and community. The results of this study could also contribute to social change, as the boxing promotion industry both directly and indirectly affects the lives of youth in impoverished neighborhoods, where revenue from boxing events can benefit those who are less fortunate (Ford, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher has several key responsibilities and tasks, and serves as the principal data collection instrument. In this study, I collected and analyzed all data. For the current case study, I conducted interviews and document reviews to gain an understanding of the operation and execution of effective leadership strategies that boxing promoters use. I gathered data from interviews of four boxing promotion managers and four subordinates, totaling eight participants. In addition, to assure credibility I included an interview protocol such that asked the same questions of all participants (see Zikmund & Babin, 2012). Then, I performed methodological triangulation of data through gathering other types of relevant data (see Chua & Adams, 2014; e.g., documents germane to the research such as company documents and employee feedback forms).

As a columnist for a prominent newspaper and public relationship specialist, I covered numerous boxing fights. In addition, I have worked with top boxing promoters and world-class fighters. My career in the boxing industry evolved as a result of consulting for and promoting a tribute to *The Greatest*, Muhammad Ali. My professional relationship with the late Ali solidified me as a legitimate reporter, radio personality, and knowledgeable expert in the world of boxing. Thus, working on actual globalized championships fights positioned me to experience various aspects of the *fight game*. Aside from covering the sport as a journalist, I developed professional and personal relationships with promoters, boxers, and trainers in conjunction with countless behind the scene individuals whose contributions are unknown to the general public.

Consequently, I was considered an insider and therefore privy to an in-depth view of sport as well as the participants in the world of boxing. A unique position of this nature enabled me to not only witness the extraordinary optics associated with the business of boxing phenomenon, but also gain knowledge of specific deficiencies in the industry, some of which are noted in this document. While I had never worked for the company that is the focus of this study, I chose it because of its prominent status and success in the sport of boxing. Though operating out of Las Vegas, this business promotes worldwide boxing events.

Participants

In this qualitative case study, my goal was to explore strategies that leaders use to improve performance. According to Moustakas (1994), participants who have expert knowledge on a subject matter should be the basis for selection. Criterion sampling (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008), a type of purposive sampling (Marshall et al., 2013), assists the researcher in selecting specific individuals based on a set of established criteria. I used a set of criteria that were focused on the experiences and tenure of participants, as well as the successful performance of the company (see the Population and Sampling Heading for a list of specific criteria).

It was important to select participants based on the research question and design of a research study. In a qualitative study, researchers should focus on potential participants who can contribute specific knowledge for a determined reason (Moustakas, 1994). The leaders that I selected for this study had successful experiences in the industry and experience implementing strategies to increase employee performance.

Gaining access to participants occurred through the cooperation of the organization that has agreed to participate. The company verbally agreed to participate and signed a Letter of Participation. Upon approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board, I worked with the company to select a sample of participants who met the criteria. Using e-mails provided by the organization, I e-mailed selected individuals, introducing myself, the study, and the Consent Form.

Establishing a working relationship with participants was important to gathering rich data (Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009) and building trust (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Khoshnava, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). In order to establish a rapport and make participants comfortable (see Mellor, Ingram, Abrahams, & Beedell, 2014), I introduced myself, provided some background on myself as a professional and researcher, and introduced the purpose of the study. This information was included in the initial e-mail soliciting participation, as well as in my introduction, face-to-face, at the beginning of each interview. Introducing myself and my background made participants feel comfortable speaking with me and provided me with honest, candid responses to the interview questions and established trust (see Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Khoshnava, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). This emphasis on rapport and the relationship between the researcher and participants helped participants provide open, honest answers.

In addition to voluntarily agreeing to participate, participants had the option of voluntarily withdrawing from the study. There was no incentive given for participation, and there was no punishment for withdrawing. Participants had the right to withdraw at

any time simply by communicating with me via phone or e-mail, or by verbally indicating a desire to cease participation during the interview (see Caruthers, 2011).

I will store all data (electronic and any paper documents, researcher notes, etc.) in a locked cabinet for 5 years. The electronic data remained on my password protected computer during data collection and analysis, and was then moved to a flashdrive and stored in a locked cabinet, along with any paper documents obtained or created (see Harnish, 2012)..

Research Method and Design

Research Method

There are two different research approaches: the deductive approach and the inductive approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Under the deductive approach, the researcher develops the theory and hypothesis before designing a research strategy to demonstrate and test the theory and hypotheses. Under the inductive approach, the researcher collects data and analyzes it to formulate a theory based on those findings. Using the inductive approach enables researchers to change methodology and permits alternative explanations of different situations although there is also the possibility that no meaningful generalization results from the analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

In the case of this research, an inductive approach was more appropriate. Information came from interviews, which then underwent analysis and comparison to data gathered from the document review. Data were compared to the conceptual framework and other theories in the literature to understand how well the theories

matched the practice and whether there are concepts, which could be added to the theories to make them more accurate. One of the major returns of this specific tactic is that there was “less concern with the need to generalize” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003, p. 89).

Apart from being inductive, a qualitative methodology was more appropriate for the study. Such an approach is appropriate when there is a necessity to understand the social world (Bouma & Kamp-Roelands, 2000). A quantitative research method was not appropriate. My goal was to understand the experiences of participants, not to examine the relationships or difference among variables. My goal was to identify and understand successful strategies that managers have used and implemented. In addition, the mixed method approach was not necessary, because the mixed-method approach contains a quantitative element and is also partially focused on relationships or differences between variables. For the current case study, I conducted interviews and document reviews to gain an understanding of the operation and execution of effective leadership strategies.

Research Design

I chose the case study method over other qualitative designs such as ethnography, narrative inquiry, grounded theory, and phenomenology. I first considered ethnography, but that approach requires that the researcher become a participant of the study and this was not my intention (Patton, 2005). Narrative inquiry is best for studies designed to gather the stories of participants with experience of an event (see Webster & Mertova, 2007). The grounded theory design was also considered, but the goal of the study was not to develop a theory. Lastly, phenomenology was considered, especially since the goal is

to have an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. However, the phenomenology is the better method for studying the meanings of participants' lived experiences, and this is not the goal of the current study (see Patton, 2005). The case study design is the most appropriate for the purpose and objectives of the study. The case study was the most appropriate because the study design is appropriate for understanding real-life phenomenon within the boundaries and the case (Yin, 2013), which was the goal of the current study.

It is important for the researcher to recognize when a study has reached data saturation. Failure to do so affects the quality of the research as well as hampers validity of the content (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Reaching data saturation is essential in conducting a thorough exploration of information contained in a study. Typically, smaller samples are sufficient in qualitative research. Samples that are too large should be avoided to make analysis more time effective. Obtaining as little as six interviews may reach data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). A sample of eight participants was thus expected to be sufficient to reach saturation. The researcher is responsible in determining when data collection is sufficient, and to know when replication is evident within the data sample.

Population and Sampling

The main participants of this study are leaders in a successful boxing promotional company operating in Las Vegas, Nevada. I obtained information on practices that enabled leaders in the boxing promotion industry to understand and implement strategies to improve employee performance. In choosing the participants of this qualitative case study, I employed a purposeful sampling method (see Marshall et al., 2013). I chose this

sampling method because focusing on participants who have experienced the phenomenon that I will be studying is the most appropriate means of sampling for this study. I sought participants who understood the goals of the research and who were willing to share their experiences with me (see Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000).

To determine who will participate in my study, I used criterion sampling (see Collingridge & Gantt, 2008). This method is called criterion sampling because participants will be determined through using specific criteria. Criterion sampling is a specific type of purposeful sampling. Criterion sampling is suitable for a qualitative study (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008). Using this approach, I first had a set of criteria as the basis for the individuals for inclusion in the study. For this study, the criteria were (a) 10 years of experience as the leader of the boxing promotion company, (b) 5 years of experience as a subordinate of the leader of the boxing promotion company, and (c) have successful experience implementing strategies to improve performance.

I chose this company due to its success in the industry, with over 20 years of operation and continued success. I first identified the potential participants for my study by working with company leadership that identified a pool of potential employees who met my criteria (managers and their employees): eight individuals from the selected case (boxing promotional company located in Las Vegas, Nevada). These eight individuals included four leaders and four subordinates who understood the nature of leadership and employee performance, and have developed and used strategies to improve employee performance.

I e-mailed participants a copy of the consent form and an introduction to the study as an invitation to participate. Once participants agreed to be interviewed, I arranged a time to meet with them at their workplace, in a private room, and during the workday—conducting these interviews during the time and at the workplace with the permission of the company. If participants' schedules did not allow for time during the day, I arranged to meet participants at a public location such as a coffee shop that was convenient for them and at a time that was also convenient. Making these interviews as convenient as possible (Cooper, 2013) and in an environment that is quiet and comfortable (Mellor, Ingram, Abrahams, & Beedell, 2014) were important considerations for the interview setting and assuring participants' comfort.

Buchanan and Hvizdak (2009) noted that it is important to establish a working relationship with participants. In order to do so, I introduced myself, provided some background on myself as a professional and researcher, and introduced the purpose of the study. This information was included in the initial e-mail soliciting participation, as well as in my introduction, face-to-face, at the beginning of the interview. I anticipated that introducing myself, including my experience in the profession and research goals in talking with them helped create a rapport with participants. This process made them feel comfortable speaking with me and providing me with honest, candid responses to the interview questions.

All participant data will be kept confidential and viewed only by me, the researcher. Data will be stored in a locked cabinet for 5 years, after which all data will be destroyed. Participants were assigned a pseudonym so that they are never referred to by

their real name in the data or data collection process. In the final write up of the results, I also used the pseudonym in an effort to protect the confidentiality of participants. In addition to the use of a pseudonym, no other potentially identifying information will be included.

Ethical Research

The study involved human participants and, as such, ethical considerations are necessary. Pursuant to receiving Walden IRB approval (IRB, approval number 08-30-17-0495223), I ensured that the participants' well-being was a top priority of this study. In addition, I made sure that all the participants understood their rights to voluntarily participate and to withdraw at any time. Potential participants were first given a consent form to return, which they signed and returned to me at the time of their interview. In the informed consent form, participant rights to participate and withdraw were detailed. I informed participants that they can withdraw from the course of research if they choose, without repercussions. They only had to inform me (via e-mail, phone, or in-person during the interview) of their decision to withdraw, and I respected the decision. They also understood that there were minimal risks involved for them when they participated in the study, as detailed in the informed consent form.

In this qualitative research, interviews of participants took place in a natural setting. Even though there were no apparent risks, there remained a chance for their lives to be affected simply because they participated in the study. This was detailed in the informed consent form (see Horner & Minifie, 2010). There were no monetary incentives for the participants; however, there are intangible benefits associated to the study. I kept

the names of participants confidential by assigning them codes (PLO1 or PSO2, etc.). Data were stored on a password-protected computer during data collection and analysis. After completion of the study, data were transferred to a flash drive and locked in a filing cabinet along with any paper documentation and will be stored for 5 years.

Data Collection Instrument

For the current case study, I carried out semistructured interviews and document reviews to explore effective leadership strategies improving employee performance. The in-depth interviews were the primary data collection method. As Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2002) argued, if the research involves one of the following three conditions, an interview is probably the best choice for obtaining valuable data: (a) research dealing with a large number of questions, (b) the questions are complicated or open-ended, or (c) there is the possibility for the order and the logic of the questioning to vary. For the latter two, semistructured interviews will be most appropriate (Saunders et al., 2003).

However, there are also some disadvantages to the interview technique. Disadvantages may include bias because of poorly assembled questions, response bias, factual errors or mistakes due to poor recollection and the threat of the interviewee answering what the interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 2013). Saunders et al. (2003) suggested that, because the research is concerned with the context in which the events take place, the study of a small sample would be more appropriate than a larger number. Therefore, I selected a sample of eight interviews.

When conducting interviews, I also used an interview protocol. Using an interview protocol can help researchers capture consistent data and improve the reliability

and validity of a study (De Ceunynck et al, 2013; Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). My interview protocol is included in Appendix A.

Apart from the interviews, I conducted document reviews (see Bowen, 2009). A document review is a valuable qualitative method in that it provides data that can either support or oppose interview findings, leading to findings with more rigor (Bowen, 2009). For the current study, I collected documents germane to the research before the interviews were carried out. The documents were the boxing promotional company's documents which included the employee hand and a training manual.

Data Collection Technique

A semi- or quasi-structured interview was considered the most advantageous approach for gathering data in this specific research (Fylan, 2005). Completely unstructured interviews have been considered inappropriate because of the risk that the interviewer will fail to collect the required information (Fylan, 2005). The usage of an inflexible or formal structure might prevent the emergence of practical and revealing insights by inhibiting the flow of information. Moreover, in interviews with an open-ended nature, the interviewer can ask for the opinion of the respondent about an event as well as the facts of a matter (Yin, 2013) and therefore with this method both flexibility and structure can be achieved, as the researcher is able to discuss freely the topics that capture the researcher's interest. The outline of the interview was carefully prepared in order to follow a logical path, which was the interview protocol (see Appendix A). I used the interview protocol to enhance the consistency of the interview process. As the

protocol shows, during the interviews, the order of the principal interview questions was identical for all participants.

I recorded the interviews in audio format and also used pen and paper to take notes as well. The notes were then compiled into a full report shortly after each interview to control bias and produce reliable data for analysis. All of the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis during face-to-face meetings I tried to avoid using any technical terminology and ensure that the participants did not feel that certain responses were expected. Furthermore, identity of the interviewees will be kept anonymous in the research in order to reduce the negative effect that might otherwise arise due to the sensitivity of the phenomenon.

Before the study was performed, I obtained authorization from the Walden University IRB (approval #08-30-17-0495223). The essential data for this qualitative study were the descriptions and responses of the interviewees (see Polkinghorne, 2005). I asked participants who returned their informed consent forms with their signatures to detail where and when they would like to be interviewed.

The interviews lasted from 15 to 30 minutes. I transcribed the interviews. Before the interviews as well, I conducted document reviews. For the current study, a review of documents from the company was carried out. Themes uncovered from the interviews were then compared to the findings or themes uncovered from the document review during analysis.

In addition to the above data collection techniques, I used member checking to ensure the accuracy of my data and results. According to Harper and Cole (2012), using

member checking reduces the possibilities of misunderstandings or misrepresenting of participant's information. The process of member checking involves the researcher completing a write up of the specific interview results for each participant, these results are then shared with the participant for feedback and accuracy (Harper & Cole, 2012). I engaged in this process as a means of correctly representing my participants' views and experiences (see Koelsch, 2013; Petty et al., 2012).

I executed the member checking process by e-mailing each participant my write up of their results. I provided participants with 1 week to reply with additions or changes to the discussion of their results. If a participant replied with changes or additions, I made the necessary revisions or clarifications in my representation of their results. If participants did not respond to the message within 1 week, I considered this as agreement with the representation of the results.

Data Organization Technique

In conducting this research, I sought to assure the integrity of the transcribed interviews, recordings, and all backup copies of data (see Anyan, 2013). I will maintain a journal that comprises the interview questions and participants' responses. Again, each of the participants were be assigned codes (e.g., P1, P2, P3, etc.) to keep their data in order and confidential (see Gibson, Benson, & Brand, 2013). In addition to the notes that I will made during the interviews, another journal will be maintained for notes on documents reviewed. I uploaded all transcribed interviews and data documents into NVivo 10. All raw data will be stored securely for 5 years after which I will delete the files from the flash drive and destroy the paper data.

Data Analysis

For this research, I used the six-step model for thematic analysis described by Braun, Clarke, and Terry (2014). Braun et al. (2014) outlined six phases of analysis, and offered concrete examples for the process to be followed closely. For the current research, I deemed the method of Braun et al. as appropriate for uncovering themes from the responses of the participants. According to Braun et al., the phases are not considered rules. Instead, they are guidelines that can be applied flexibly to qualitative analyses depending on the research questions and data. Through this thematic analysis, it must be noted that this was not a linear process, but a recursive process. I moved back and forth in the processes, as necessary, to revise and revisit codes and themes as I continued to conduct data analysis and as new themes potentially emerged. I created predetermined codes based on my problem and research question, that were informed by the literature. I also aligned the findings with my conceptual framework. In addition, I allowed for emergent codes related to trends that became evident in the data that were unexpected or not predicted by the literature.

Phase 1

The first phase of the data analysis under this thematic analysis method (see Braun et al., 2014), was the researcher familiarizing him or herself with the data, assuming the verbal data had already been transcribed. Under this phase, the researcher was called to immerse him or herself with the data so that he or she was familiar with how deep and how broad the data content is. To familiarize oneself with the data means the researcher had to read the interview transcripts over and over again actively. This

meant, as the researcher read, the goal is to look for meanings, patterns, and themes (Braun et al., 2014). Before coding can be done effectively, the researcher should have already read through the entire data set at least once, but ideally more than once, so that the codes to be formed are relatively accurate at the onset. The ideas from one reading can be honed as the researcher re-reads.

Reading and rereading can be time consuming but still necessary. This step was considered the bedrock for the subsequent phases of analysis. While reading, the researcher must take down notes and mark ideas for the coding stage. The formal coding process can be done faster if there are already marks to go back to. However, as the proponents said, this is not a linear analysis and the researcher would really have to go back and forth to shape and define the codes more accurately later.

Phase 2

The second phase of the thematic analysis was generating the initial codes from the data I became familiar with in the first phase. The researcher, armed with an initial list of ideas on the themes and codes generated from the data and why they are interesting, should be able to produce some preliminary codes already. According to Boyatzis (1998), codes refer to a feature of the data that looks interesting to the researcher because they imply something meaningful with regard the phenomenon. The process of coding includes organizing the data into meaningful categories. Coded data should not be misconstrued as units of analysis or themes, which are broader. The development of themes was done on the next phase. The process was be assisted by the NVivo software.

Phase 3

The third phase of the data analysis was the searching for themes. When I coded all data, I had a list of codes that had to be categorized into possible *umbrellas* of ideas, or the themes. Different codes had to be analyzed to form the overarching idea, which was the theme. To aid with the process, the researcher used tables and maps. At the end of this process, I had a collection of prospective themes as well as subthemes. Not all initial themes are presented in the end as the next processes will lead to more refinement. Some initial potential themes can still be separated or completely discarded (Braun et al., 2014).

Phase 4

The fourth phase of the process was to review the candidate themes. The candidate themes still needed to be sifted and refined so that more accurate themes could be presented. Some themes upon review revealed that there are not enough data to act as support or the data are too diverse (Braun et al., 2014). A careful review revealed that two or more themes are better combined to form one theme instead. I also returned to earlier phases to read again the coded data extracts to determine the accuracy of themes. If I was ready with a set of candidate themes deemed satisfactory already, I then created the thematic map. I then reviewed thematic map for accuracy. I also reread the data set and determined if I had missed other themes (Braun et al., 2014).

The problem is if the formulated thematic map does not work. If it does not work, I would have to repeat the second through the fourth phases. The researcher would have to reanalyze the data, recode, and review until a new thematic map was formed. While

this can be tedious, it is possible that the researcher can still find possible new codes and then new themes that can best answer the research questions (Braun et al., 2014).

Phase 5

The fifth phase of the thematic analysis was the defining and naming of themes. This only starts when the researcher already has a satisfactory thematic map of the data. On this phase, I had to identify the essence of each theme (Braun et al., 2014). The researcher determines what is vital and interesting with each theme and uses this determination for developing the theme's name. Once this was done, I had to prepare a detailed analysis of what the theme represent, means, and implies. From this, I determined how the themes answer the research questions and how they satisfy the purpose of the study. The last phase is to produce the report. Since fully developed themes were now available, I prepared the final analysis (Braun et al., 2014).

Phase 6

Through writing the analysis and presenting the write up, I made the complicated story of the data I was able to gather easier to understand for the reader (Braun et al., 2014). As such, I presented each of the themes' summaries in a concise and coherent manner. I made sure that the account of the data was given in a comprehensible, nonrepetitive manner. I supplemented the write-up with vivid examples from the participants' interview transcripts. The documents also underwent the same phases to identify either similar or different themes (Braun et al., 2014).

Reliability and Validity

According to Golafshani (2003), reliability and validity are rooted in positivism, and are necessary when preparing quantitative studies. However, the same considerations must be made for qualitative studies, though there is another set of alternative criteria that are more appropriate. According to Marshall and Rossman (2009), a qualitative study is instead judged for its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to the results being believable (Marshall & Rossman, 2009).

Transferability refers to how generalizable or applicable the findings are when transferred to other contexts or settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2009). *Dependability* is the qualitative analogue of quantitative studies' reliability. This involves the context in which the research was conducted and how the research can be used to account for a dynamic environment (Marshall & Rossman, 2009). Lastly, *confirmability* deals with whether the findings can be confirmed by other researchers if they carry out a relevant study (Marshall & Rossman, 2009).

Reliability

There are several ways to ensure the reliability dependability of the findings. Because the main instrument of data collection is interviews, I relied on participants' responses and verification during member checking and through methodological triangulation. Some participants may also have given answers that they believe were the socially desirable (Verdugo, 1998; Zechmeister, Zechmeister, & Shaughnessy, 1997). For the current study, I did not only assume that data provided were honest and accurate, but also ensured that all data were reviewed by the participant first by using member

checking. In this study, I conducted member checking and methodological triangulation of the interview and document data (see Chua & Adams, 2014). With member checking, I presented to the members the interpretation and report of the transcripts for them to check the accuracy of my summaries (see Denzin, 2012). As necessary, changes were made accordingly (see Chua & Adams, 2014).

As I mentioned, I also conducted methodological triangulation. This means that, as the researcher, I obtained and analyzed additional types of data, so that information and findings were supported by more than one data type (see Chua & Adams, 2014). My findings were also compared with findings from other relevant studies. According to Dumangane (2013), researcher can facilitate determinations of transferability by giving a comprehensive and detailed description of the process undertaken in the study so that future researchers can assess my study's relevance to other research domains. I have therefore provided clear and detailed information on data collection procedures, as well as analysis methods.

Validity

To ensure creditability, a researcher must ensure the study is free from bias (Goldblatt, Karnielli-Miller, & Neumann, 2011; Zikmund & Babin, 2012). The researcher should be mindful of his or her personal biases and how these can affect the analysis. As the researcher, I sought to minimize these biases and reported the data as concisely and as truthfully as possible by not letting my own preconceptions of the issue affect my analysis and taking the responses at face-value (see Kolbe & Burnett, 1991).

Data saturation will occur at the point where no new knowledge is generated from participants' responses, or from documentation reviews.

In addition, to assure credibility I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) such that I asked the same principal interview questions of all participants (see Zikmund & Babin, 2012). Lastly, to ensure confirmability, an audit trail was used (see Zikmund & Babin, 2012). To develop an audit trail means the researcher should keep comprehensive journals, background data, and processes. All of these provided clear rationale for specific procedures that I used to assure the validity of my findings.

Transition and Summary

In this section, I have described how I will address the purpose of the study through a qualitative approach. I discussed why a case study method is the most appropriate among the different qualitative designs and why using interviews and records review as the main data sources is appropriate for addressing the study's research question. I also discussed the ethical considerations for assuring the participants' rights. The six-phase data analysis process was discussed in full detail. I also discussed the steps for ensuring *credibility*, to ensure my findings are accurate (Marshall & Rossman, 2009). I discussed the steps to ensure *transferability* or ensuring the determination of the applicability of the findings to other contexts or settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2009). I also discussed steps to ensure dependability and confirmability. In the, Section 3, I present the findings of the study, applications of these findings, recommendations for future research, and my final conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore leadership strategies that leaders in the boxing promotion industry use to improve employee performance. The previous section included a discussion of the methodology involving the data collection methods and the data analysis procedures. The purpose of this section is to include the presentation of the findings, which also contains a discussion of the results in which the research question is addressed. I present the overall themes that emerged (strategies), from the semistructured interviews and document review of company materials. In addition, I provide my overall conclusions to summarize the key study outcomes

Presentation of the Findings

The research question for this study was: What strategies do leaders in the boxing promotion industry use to improve employee performance? In this section, I present my analysis from case study data, which included semistructured interviews with managers as well as review of company documents (i.e., the employee handbook and training materials for managers). Based on my analyses of these data the five main themes/strategies emerged: leading by example, inspiring and fostering teamwork and honest communication, people-driven actions, implementing innovative and adaptive organizational changes, and providing rewards.

Strategy 1: Leading by Example

The first theme that emerged from data analysis was leading by example. Overall, the participants perceived that successful leaders generally lead by example, and focus on hands-on leadership. Participant PL01 perceived that, “Yes, definitely. I feel that you should be able to do any job that your team can do, and you can jump in there and do it and setting a good, positive example.” Similarly, participant PL03 stated that, “Also, just being a hands-on leader is really important. That way, you're showing all of your employees all the little steps that they may need to take, that may be forgotten. That way, you can have more success at the end of your projects.” Thus, leading by example gives employees practical instruction and boosts team morale, and by extension, can improve performance.

Specifically, one aspect of leading by example was to be an effective leader and being proactive. Participant PL02 emphasized being a proactive leader, indicating that, “It's probably one the most important lessons I learned in business ... is you have to be able execute and take action. You can't be dormant.” Similarly, the subordinates also perceived that leaders who were proactive and hands-on were helpful. Participant PS02 stated that their leaders made manuals that contained how the jobs were done. In addition to the manuals, participant PS02 also stated that their leaders showed them how things were done as opposed to just giving instructions. Participant PS02 shared:

Actually, one of our leaders ... We truly didn't understand the concept that we were dealing with, and so what they did is they actually worked side by side with us to resolve a particular job issue that we had. They got right in there, and they

showed us how to deal with it. And they dealt with the customer that we had to deal with, and they allowed us to see and start to finish that this the way we need to conduct ourselves in this situation.

In addition, all four leaders perceived that experience was significant in being a successful leader. Participant PL03 shared:

I would say definitely the skills, all the skills that a leader builds throughout the experiences that they've been with any company. Using those skills and being able to apply them, concepts and using the concepts that you learned, and putting them into action. Any new ideas that an employee has, and trying to put them into action, because then that shows that they know that you really are listening. If they see that they're giving you feedback and you're using it, they're like, "Okay. The leaders around me are listening to us."

These findings may be associated to the concept of idealized influence in transformational leadership theories (Jackson et al., 2013). In the concept of idealized influence, successful leaders were perceived to be role models who embodied values and ethics. Successful leaders led by example (Jackson et al., 2013). In this study, the participants perceived that leading by example was one of the effective strategies utilized by boxing promotion leaders in improving employee performance, as they became better equipped to handle the tasks of the job. This idea of leading by example is also supported by expectations laid out in the employee handbook. The employee handbook was the key document I utilized to supplement the interviews.

In reviewing and coding the employee handbook, I noted that the handbook encouraged leaders to engage directly with employees. The focus was to get on their level, and show them how to perform the necessary tasks of the job. This was intended to not only educate the employee, but build a connection between employee and superior, with the goal of helping establish a streamlined system of communication and execution.

Strategy 2: Inspiring and Fostering Teamwork and Honest Communication

A second theme that emerged from the data was working to inspire and foster teamwork. To motivate employees, the participants perceived that the leaders promoted teamwork through proper communication. As a leader, participant PL01 claimed that whenever they encountered problems, they tried to solve the problem “as a team.” Participant PL01 said that, “I have the employees with me, and we sit down and brainstorm. We write a list of positives and negatives and how we can get the job done more efficiently, depending on what the problem is.” Participant PL01 also believed in team-building activities “to sit down and take it out of the workplace.” Participant PL01 explained:

Take it somewhere fun, maybe a restaurant, a spa, anything, a gym. Whatever you feel your team would enjoy. Sit down and brainstorm and do some activities with them, just so you get to know your team and to make it fun. I think it's important for work, a lot of the times, to be fun. It empowers your team. It's empowering your team, because you're all sitting there. You're all at the same level when you do team-building activities. There's no right or wrong answer, and you're all at the

same level. You want them to take away as much as possible and be as motivated as possible going forward. I'm trying to think.

Participant PL02 provided an analogy of a basketball team in comparison with his team in the workplace. Participant PL02 said:

If you take a basketball team and you teach them how to win, the coach is training them and educating them how to work as a team ... because this one particular player might be a great offensive player. This player might be a great rebounder. This player right here might be a great power player. He's a great outside shooter. This guy is a masterful point guard. He's the play maker. So the coach is educating this team how to win as one unit. It's not about one person. It's about a unit altogether, and they take that particular craft... So the same type of training, from my perspective, goes into the workplace, goes into your promotional team. In the perspective of the subordinates, a good leader kept employees informed.

Participant PS02 stated:

While of course I can't speak for every leader in the boxing promotion industry but I feel comfortable to say that my boss keeps us informed. He is great at explaining work related responsibilities and making sure we have the tools and knowledge to get the job done. And that's really important.

Along with inspiring teamwork, honesty was valued by the subordinates and clearly emerged as one mechanism through which this strategy operated. Participant PS01 revealed that straightforward conversations with his leaders provided him with honest feedback regarding his work. The participant said that he appreciated his

supervisor “saying something to him” rather than being deceived. PS01 expressed, “You can never deceive a person. Honesty is a big part of leadership, you know life is not a bed of roses so everything is not always going to be sweet in every aspect of our life.” Overall these factors will ultimately contribute to a more positive work climate, thus enhancing employee performance. This is supported by the fact that a positive work climate allows employees to be more productive, which is a direct measure of one’s performance. According to the employee handbook, it is essential to “minimize negative distractions in order to boost productivity and performance.” Therefore, it is essential to build teamwork and honesty in an effort to increase performance.

For Strategy 2, concepts related to transformational leadership and charismatic leadership were verified through noting that inspirational motivation in transformational leadership is considered a central characteristic of charismatic leaders. As shown in the literature review, transformational leadership and charismatic leadership shared notable similarities (Jackson et al., 2013), and were treated as one in the conceptual framework. Nonetheless, the second theme denotes inspirational motivation and communication through honesty, clear vision, and inclusion (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Therefore, inspired and fostered team members, supported by honesty and clear communications, are strong positive influences in regards to performance, which is also discussed in the employees’ handbook. Furthermore, the employee handbook addressed communication directly. For example, the handbook states “transparent communication of ideas and concerns are the best way to ensure the success of new developments, and resolution of

potentially deleterious issues that may inhibit performance.” Therefore, Strategy 2 has a clear link to, and emphasis on, teamwork and communication.

Strategy 3: People-Driven Actions

The third theme/strategy was people-driven actions. Successful leadership strategies involved people-driven actions. The participants perceived that subordinates generally appreciated being valued and recognized as individuals, as well as being heard and respected. Participant PS03 shared:

What I've seen in the company I work in for, is more of an open door policy and the, our superior, our managers or whatever you want to refer to them as, they're always willing to have an open ear, open mind, and open door in anything that we bring to them. And you know, and again, it comes with the respect and the appreciation as well, the gratitude from their part of having employees who are knowledgeable and who are able to carry out and efficiently carry out and complete the tasks that are at hand.

Participant PS02 shared a similar perspective, and said that being able to approach their leaders made him feel heard as an individual, as well as being in ” a really great environment where you feel part of the job, and you're able to grow that way because they do want you to add your input on situations.” Participant PS02 also perceived that being heard was a sign of being respected. In support of participant PS02, participant PS01 also shared that being respected by their leaders helped improve employee performance, and was therefore an effective leadership strategy. Participant PS01 claimed:

Yeah I think if there is a person in charge of somebody and they have a personal relationship that they are trying to give the instructions to or tell them what to do, then that's one of ... the person that they giving instructions to listen to them.

Because then they see their worth.

In the leaders' perspective, participant PL03 shared that caring for employees, and valuing employees' needs tend to increase employees' performance, which in turn increase the success of the company. Participant PL03 also perceived that caring was equivalent to respecting employees. Participant PL03 highlighted:

Yes, because I believe caring is also, when you care, it's also a form of respect.

So, you give respect, you get respect. It's that whole concept of that, so people do, when they see that you really do care and you're really in it with them, they're not alone, it's a group effort, it's again, it's the caring approach. They succeed with that.

Caring for the employees was not limited to addressing their needs. Participant PL01 believed that caring for the employees included correcting their mistakes in order for them to grow, and help the company grow. This ultimately makes the employee a more efficient worker, thus increasing performance.

As indicated in the quote below, the bettering and expansion of an employee's abilities allows them to be more productive, which is a direct indicator of performance.

This is the product of both caring and mentoring. Participant PL01 said:

Yes. I think both of those, yeah. It's showing them how to do the job, how to do the job quickly, and caring about them because you want them to learn the correct

way to do something and showing them that you value them, that you care about them and that you value them. You're giving them a skill set that they might not have before. Really, you're pushing them along and motivating them to do something that they've never done before. When you care about your team, that's what you want to do. You want to develop them, and you want them to move forward.

The third strategy appears to also be associated with both transformational and charismatic leadership strategies. In terms of transformational leadership, the findings may be interpreted as individualized consideration, while in charismatic leadership, the theme may be linked to compassion and listening skills of leaders (Jackson et al., 2013). With the focus on respecting and valuing subordinates, successful leaders were perceived to empathize and support their employees (Jackson et al., 2013). In this study, the participants perceived that leaders valued and supported subordinates through listening to employees' concerns, and helping employees address and learn from issues.

According to the employee handbook, sympathy from superiors enhances employee morale and creates a more hospitable work environment, thereby improving performance. Specifically, the handbook states that, "Employee's that feel valued and acknowledged will be contented with work, work-related tasks, and their work environment. These are all positive contributors of performance." Clearly, again, there is a message and connection between being people-driven, leading, transformational or charismatic leadership, and performance.

Strategy 4: Implementing Innovative and Adaptive Organizational Changes

The fourth strategy was implementing innovative and adaptive organizational changes. The participants indicated that a successful leader was innovative in terms of adapting to changes, focusing on growth and progress, and allowing subordinates to grow with the company. In this context, a successful leader is one that not only meets company milestones, but also promotes employee performance with innovative and adaptive organizational changes. Participant PL04 commented that the industry of boxing promotion and promotion business was competitive; therefore, there was a need for a team of employees who could be leaders, who could adapt to the changing landscape of the business. The employees made the necessary changes, in real time, to be competitive in every era. An employee who contributes positively to the company in this manner is putting on display his/her adaptive and organizational skills, which are a direct indicator of performance. Participant PL04 shared:

The type of leaders I always liked and the reason why I implemented this into my platform when I had the ability acting as a chief operating officer was simply to empower the people that I had working underneath me. Like to get the freedom to go out, to create situations that come back to me and then take that information and apply it throughout the whole company. Because I don't believe ... I think a good leader should never be afraid of creating other strong leaders. You can always pay somebody a wage to do a job but they won't have the same feeling if they're being paid and they feel like they actually have a part of the job, they have

ownership. You're creating somebody that is going to bring up other people under them to have that leader mind state.

Participant PL04 added that employees with leadership skills “worked better” due to having initiative. The participant believed that having initiative was associated to employees taking ownership of their work. Consequently, participant PL04 said that, “They have ownership of the property, that's the mind state of ownership. To be creating other people with that mind space creates an environment of not just, ‘Okay, I'm working for you, but, we're working together to achieve this goal together. We achieved this goal together, we all get something great.” Working positively as a team, inspired by a respected leader, facilitates promoting performance.

Conversely, participant PL02 highlighted the benefits of training, namely training tools/strategies that adequately and completely prepare the employee for the tasks of the job. As this may vary from position to position, and person to person, an innovative approach may be used, tailored to each individual’s specific needs. Training, for participant PL02, comprised being guided, and the participant believed that the role of the leaders was to guide so that the employees can learn. Participant PL02 also believed that training helped the leaders become good leaders. The participant explained:

That's why I believe that training is one of the biggest forms of education because even the teacher will be in school. He is training these at the same time as ... educational component, and still training the mind to be in advanced, to be sharp, to be alert, all of that stuff. I think that's central component in guidance and education.

Participants PS03 and PL03 both perceived that successful leaders were innovative in adapting to changes, especially in the entertainment industry, as stated by participant PL03. Participant PL03 added that:

Yes, yes, yes. For instance, in entertainment, like I said earlier, things always do come up last minute. You have to be able to adjust and having your employees along and being able to adjust as well. For instance, one time we had a place where it actually did not work out and we had to jump and find another location literally within 48 to 72 hours we had to find another location. It was very important for us to meet with all of the vendors, whether they were previous vendors that we used, new vendors that we were just trying to build a relationship with. We had to pull everybody in. It was a group effort to get this event back on the right path.

The fourth strategy appears to be associated to the concept of intellectual stimulation in transformational leadership theories. Leaders who used intellectual stimulation were perceived to be innovative and creative, set goals, and challenged their subordinates to grow (Jackson et al., 2013). In this study, the participants emphasized how leaders adapted to change in the fast-paced world of the entertainment industry, and how the leaders challenged their subordinates by encouraging them to focus on their growth. The participants believed that the growth of the employees would contribute to the growth of the company.

In addition, the employee handbook also addressed adaptive change. According to the handbook, “employees focused on growth are set to do their job contently and

diligently, thus increasing performance.” Thus, the participants’ views were in line with the teachings of the employees’ handbook, and it may be concluded that employee growth will lead to an increase in employee performance.

Strategy 5: Providing Rewards

The fifth strategy was on transactional leadership style, and emphasized rewards and incentives for high performers. While the leaders emphasized transformational leadership strategies, reward systems were also used to motivate employees. Participant PL03 focused on recognition and rewards that employees enjoyed. The participant stated:

Employee of the month is definitely a biggie that we do, and employee of the month, along with that, we do where a person can leave half of the day. They get to choose any day and usually it'll be like Fridays, because Fridays, who wants to be at the workplace on Friday? It's great, because Fridays are more of an easy going, everybody is not paying attention what's going on at the work. So, everybody wants to keep thinking about what they're going to do that weekend, so Fridays seems to be a good day for people to leave on half a day. Then, I find that food, people love food.

In addition, participant PL03 also provided monetary rewards such as bonuses and annual raises in salary. Participant PL03 explained:

Some employees do lack a little bit and they need motivation, and need something, an end goal. So, with that situation, I actually had to use like a bonus. I ended up doing a bonus because, as an incentive, because it wasn't their fault

that the place didn't work out, so why would they take on the extra stress that they normally don't have? So, I had to use a bonus.

In support, the subordinates also generally perceived that rewards helped motivate employees to perform better. According to participant PS01, receiving raises and bonuses made him feel recognized as part of the company. Participant PS01 shared, "When you [receive] raises and bonuses and a pat on the back as you said or whatever all these things keep you going and you don't think about working at another place." In addition, participant PS02 shared that their leaders used raises and bonuses to help motivate employees in achieving goals. Participant PS02 claimed:

They allow us to set goals for ourselves so that we can meet, and if we do meet the goals, we're given bonuses. We also receive other kinds of recognition such as in the newsletter, or employee of the month, or bonuses, raises, promotions.

The final major theme also is associated with transactional leadership s. While transformational leaders tend to be proactive and implement changes to the organizational culture, transactional leaders tend to be responsive to situations, and work within the current organizational culture (Hamstra et al., 2014). Transactional leaders motivate their subordinates through rewarding correct actions, which may be observed in the participants' responses under this strategy. The employee handbook encourages such action as there is significant evidence of organizational benefit. Specifically, the organizations' employee handboook stated, "incentives in the form of tangible rewards for substantial effort and execution will further reinforce positive behavior, thus increasing overall performance, both in the short and long term."

Applications to Professional Practice

In this study, I explored five major themes/strategies regarding leadership which, based upon the participants' experiences, increased employee performance. The discovery of themes can provide the foundation for recommendations for strategic operational practices of boxing promotion leaders in Las Vegas, Nevada. Boxing promotion leaders may find the recommendations of this study instructive as they attempt to develop and apply certain leadership strategies to increase employee performance. Trainers and consultants may also find the findings in this study helpful in formulating training modules in developing efficacious leadership strategies for boxing promotion leaders.

The study findings indicated that successful leaders in the promotional boxing industry utilized a mix of transformational and transactional leadership strategies, as specified in the themes that emerged from the data. In testament to the findings, data revealed that employee performance was increased generally through meetings on setting goals and being rewarded for achieving goals. This company stressed the importance of the effectiveness of meetings and communication, as well as the importance of goalsetting and of rewarding performers who achieve their goals. Goal-setting and teamwork were generally associated with transformational leaders (Burns, 1978), while reward systems were generally attributed to transactional leaders (Chen, Eberly, Chiang, Farh, & Cheng, 2014).

This study may be of value to the boxing promotion industry if the findings could help leaders or trainers identify and utilize leadership strategies which improve employee

performance. While previous literature on sports management suggested that leadership strategies promoted teamwork and solved problems (Hoye, 2015), this study revealed that a mix of transformational, charismatic, and transactional leadership strategies helped increase productivity and reduced employee attrition.

Finally, this study may serve as a baseline useful to boxing promotion leaders who may choose to study the phenomenon of leadership strategies in association with employee performance. Furthermore, the discoveries of this study may contribute to the development of leadership skills among boxing promotion leaders. The findings may also help increase the quality of human resources in the boxing promotion industry.

Implications for Social Change

Positive social change may be realized from leaders applying strategies to improve employee performance for multiple reasons. With organizational production, local economies and communities have the potential to thrive. Employees who are efficient and content generate company revenue, and increased revenue enables increased charitable spending. More money being spent increases local spending and use of community resources, thereby stimulating the local economy, with the additional possibility of job creation (both by the organization itself, and/or local businesses needing to accommodate increases in sales volume). Effective leadership may also increase positive social change by applying proven strategies to succeed in developing and maintaining positive employee morale and improving the performance of all individuals involved. Finally, the underserved youth may also derive benefit in the form of community enhancement, job creation, and overall economical enrichment.

Recommendations for Action

Leaders in the boxing promotion industry are encouraged through the findings of this study to enlighten themselves on the plans for executing effective leadership strategies which help promote employee performance. Specifically, company leaders can lead by example, demonstrating to subordinates how to improve communications, teamwork, and performing the tasks they are expected to do. Rewards should be given for consistent and outstanding work, and incentives should be regularly offered. Leaders should emotionally support their employees, and be sure to actively listen and respond to concerns. Also, leaders should continually explore innovative approaches to increasing employee morale and efficiency, which can positively affect both employees' and organizations' performance.

I intend to share these results with the company that participated through a White Paper summary of the data and results. The company can distribute this to participants and any company employees. Also, as described in Section 2, I have a history of professional work in this area and intend to disseminate the results in relevant professional venues as well as within the academic community. As a researcher, I intend to pursue this research agenda further in my professional work, hopefully leading to publishing both professional and scholarly articles. In addition, I intend to seek out academic and professional conference venues for disseminating the results from this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The focus of this study was to explore the leadership strategies utilized by boxing promotion leaders to increase the performance of their employees. Specifically, the focus was on determining the relevance of transformational, charismatic, and transactional leadership strategies. In conducting the study, some limitations surfaced. In identifying these limitations, future researcher may be able to address them.

The first limitation of this study was the setting. The focus of the study was only on one geographical location, Las Vegas, Nevada. The study did not consider boxing promotional companies in other locations; therefore, the specific geographic domain associated with localities may limit the transferability of this study (Gioia et al., 2013). Consequently, I recommend that future researchers conduct a similar study with a different geographical location in order to reveal the efficacious leadership practices of a boxing promotion organization in other locations.

Another limitation was the nature of qualitative studies, and that I was the sole person responsible for data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. However, I attempted to minimize bias through conducting proper methods increasing credibility and dependability of this study (Ellis & Levy, 2009). An additional measure would be to use multiple individuals in the data collection process, not only to collect more data, but to acquire a larger variety of data as well. Individuals may also be questioned, by multiple individuals, so that data could be cross-analyzed for assuring precision and accuracy.

Reflections

Despite my exposure to the field of boxing as a legitimate reporter, radio personality, and knowledgeable expert, and professional and personal relationships with stakeholders in the world of boxing, I did my best to conduct the study with an impartial approach, and exclusively relied on the data to answer the research question. The participants, both leaders and subordinates, openly shared their perspectives on leadership strategies which promoted employee performance. I remained neutral and attentive throughout the interviews with the participants, and I attempted to minimize bias during data analysis and interpretation by using member checking and methodological triangulation.

I felt motivated by the findings of this study, as the findings may help improve employee performance, and in turn help improve the boxing promotion companies in Las Vegas, Nevada. As the participants shared their perspectives, I felt encouraged that the leaders were utilizing strategies which motivated their employees to perform better. I also felt encouraged that upon the conclusion of this study, other leaders may be informed of effective leadership strategies which may help their employees as well as their companies.

Conclusion

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on leadership strategies and employee performance in the field of sports management, specifically in boxing promotion. I identified and discussed five major strategies that emerged from this study. The first four major strategies: leading by example, inspiring and fostering teamwork,

people-driven actions, and implementing innovative and adaptive organizational changes appear to be linked to theories on transformational leadership and charismatic leadership, in which successful leaders were believed to be proactive (Bass, 1985) and caring (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). The fifth major strategy, providing timely and relevant rewards, is associated more with transactional leadership techniques, in which successful leaders were reactive, and used reward systems for motivating employees (Bass, 1985). The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change if leaders and trainers develop and utilize effective leadership strategies in improving employee performance. Both direct and indirect beneficial consequences can enable positive contributions to local economies and neighboring communities.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date _____

Time _____

Location _____

Participant _____

Participant Identifier _____

Position of Participant _____

Introduction:

Greetings. My name is Rita Ali and I will be conducting the interview with you today regarding leadership strategies and employee performance within your company. Thank you taking the time with me today. I will record this interview and take notes to ensure the accuracy of your information. I will ask you a few questions, please feel free to elaborate as much as you'd like.

Let me know if you need a break at any time. The interview is scheduled to take no longer than about 15-30 minutes.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Instructions:

Review the purpose of the study with participant.

Tell participant: The purpose of this qualitative, single case study is to explore leadership strategies that leaders in the boxing promotion industry use to improve employee performance. Please let me know if you have any question regarding this?

Review the informed consent form with participant and ensure the participant agrees to participant and signs the form.

If in person, complete two forms. One is for the researcher, the other is for the participant.

If conducting via phone or video: after reviewing the form and answering any questions, the respondent will reply to the e-mail with “I consent” if he or she agrees to participant.

Tell participant: This is the informed consent form that I sent to you by email (read with participant). Do you have any questions or concerns regarding this form? If you are in agreement please sign and date. One copy is for you.

Allocate a number (identifier) to participant and record on top of page. Participant will be identified as (P). The number will correspond to the order of interview.

Begin recording the interview.

Tell participant: If you are ready, I will now begin recording.

Begin interview by identifying the (P + number) according to interview order.

Follow the order of the questions, probing deeper as needed.

Tell participant: We are going to start the interview now, I will take notes during your answers when needed, please feel free to stop me at any time and ask questions. Feel free to ask questions at any time or refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Take notes next to questions as needed.

Make sure of the interview time.

Ask all questions.

Tell participant: That was my last question. This interview is now completed. Do you have any final questions or comments before I conclude the interview and stop recording?

Review contact information if participant has any future questions.

Tell participant: If you have any questions after this interview please feel free to contact me via the information on the consent form.

Thank the participant for their time and effort.

Tell participant: I truly appreciate you taking the time and effort to respond to my interview and assist me with this study.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Date ____, 2017

RE: Invitation to Participate in a Doctoral Research Study

Dear _____

Kindly accept this correspondence as an invitation to take part in a research study entitled: Effective Leadership Strategies, Employee Performance, and Organizational Sustainability. I am seeking organizational leaders and subordinates in the sport of boxing/fight promotion industry to be in the study. The purpose of the study is to explore how effective leadership strategies contribute to employee performance and maintaining organizational sustainability. As a leader or subordinate, you are in an excellent position to provide valuable first-hand knowledge, in real time, on this subject. The interview should take between 15 to 30 minutes. However, the responses you provide to the interview questions will remain confidential. Interviewees will be assigned a code that will mask their identity, as this ensures that no personal identifiers shall be revealed during the analysis process and transcription of the findings. While no monetary compensation and/or gifts are offered for participating in the research, there are benefits to be gained from the study. The information obtained from the findings can provide greater insight and understanding pursuant the implementation of strategies that produce successful outcomes in the workplace.

I am seeking to solicit 4 leaders and 4 subordinates to participate in this study. As a result of a limited number of interviewees, there is a possibility that not everyone who responds by stating "I consent" will be included in the study. Respondents will be accepted on a first come bases, in order, by date and time their consent form is received. I shall than contact you to set up an interview at a time that is convenient for you. If you are not selected, I will also notify you via email." In the event you, wish to participate in this study, kindly respond to this email by (date) with a simple "I consent" statement.

I have attached an Informed Consent document which contains additional information regarding your participation, how to withdraw from the study, and risks you may encounter by participating in the study. Please take some time to review this document. If have any questions regarding this document, your participation or the topic of the study in general, please feel free to email me at xxxxxx, and I will be happy to answer your questions.

I look forward to receiving your expeditious response.

Respectfully yours,

Rita Ali, Doctoral Candidate
Walden University