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# Leadership Strategies to Improve Volunteer Retention

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify the doctoral study by

Rudene P. Glass

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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2018

Abstract

Leadership Strategies to Improve Volunteer Retention

by

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2002

BS, Wilberforce University, 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2018

## Abstract

Nonprofit leaders face challenges retaining volunteers to support their organizations' human resources. The shortage of volunteers threatens nonprofit sustainability with increasing personnel cost for maintaining quality services. Grounded by Burns's transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies nonprofit leaders from southeastern Michigan used to improve volunteer retention. Data were collected through face-to-face semistructured interviews with 3 nonprofit leaders and a review of organizational documents such as volunteer implementation plans, strategic plans, and volunteer committee notes. Data were analyzed using a methodological triangulation process of sorting comments, which involved a chronological review of the interview transcripts and a descriptive coding for emerging themes. Three distinct themes emerged from the data analysis: collaborative relationships improved volunteer retention, team motivations improved volunteer retention, and strategic communication improved volunteer retention. The findings from this study may contribute to positive social change by providing nonprofit leaders with a better understanding of the need to improve volunteer retention and leadership strategies as methods to continue building viable communities for those in need. Furthermore, the implications for positive social change could include improvements of other nonprofit organizations and the well-being of volunteers in the organization.

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## Dedication

I give thanks to my Heavenly Father for my strength and it is from blessings and grace; I continue to give recognition in remembrance of the wonders and miracles for those watching from above. Thank you for sending guiding angels to protect me.

Especially, I dedicate this doctoral research to my family who supported me throughout this journey. For that, I am eternally grateful. To my husband, Ken, I thank you for your steadfast determination to see me through, your encouragement, endless support, and care for the family. My son, Ed, and my daughters Anna and Alana, who at all times offered a helping hand, kept me motivated, and believed in me. For my granddaughter, Mina, thank you for your laughter and who reminded me to stay full of joy.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Challenging economic times and demands on services can result in instability and ineffectiveness for many nonprofit organizations. Leadership is a central concern for most nonprofit agencies that rely on practical strategies that attract and retain volunteer labor (Ho & O'Donohoe, 2014; Meier & O'Toole, 2017). The volunteer workforce is significant to nonprofit organizations as many use unpaid laborers to build quality services. Retaining professional volunteers have placed rigorous requirements on nonprofit organization intended for leaders to implement engagement strategies to accomplish social missions (Malinen & Harju, 2017). Therefore, leadership strategies are necessary for ensuring an organization's viability. The use of volunteer labor in nonprofit organizations is vital for the existence of many organizations (Bittschi, Pennerstorfer, & Schneider, 2015). Despite challenges within nonprofit organizations (Smith & Phillips, 2016), and concerns about meeting governmental performance requirements (Meier & O'Toole, 2017), leaders struggle to execute an improved volunteer retention application. A focus on learning and development strategies as opportunities for retaining volunteers is yet to take place (Newton, Becker, & Bell, 2014). Therefore, I focused on the effective leadership strategies nonprofit executive leaders use to improve retention of a volunteer workforce.

### **Background of the Problem**

In the United States, nearly 2.4 million nonprofit organizations are in operation and approximately 1.6 million organizations are recognized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as being tax-exempt organizations (National Center for Charitable

Statistics, 2015). The number of tax-exempt organizations increased in 2015 by 8.6%. Nonprofit organizations help to generate employment opportunities, ease poverty, and enhance the quality of life. In 2014, the number of nonprofit organizations contributed nearly \$887.3 billion to the U.S. economy accounting for 9.2% of wages (Center on Nonprofit & Philanthropy, 2014). Although, nonprofit organizations contribute to the economic growth; the volunteer rate continues to decline. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) reported that Americans spent an average of 52 hours volunteering annually. By understanding the need for volunteers, organizational leaders can develop strategies to increase retention.

Despite the increase in the number of nonprofit organizations, some leaders struggle with finding volunteers to increase client numbers and performance levels that sustain organizations. The economic decline made achieving goals difficult resulting in many leaders implementing new organizational strategies (Posner, 2015). Challenges of retaining qualified volunteers threatened the existence of nonprofit organizations (Hu, Kapucu, & O'Byrne, 2014). According to Blackwood, Dietz, and Pollak (2014) and Malinen and Harju (2017), retaining qualified volunteers depends on a leader's ability to develop volunteer engagement strategies that promote sustainability. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to explore leadership strategies to improve volunteer retention.

### **Problem Statement**

A shortage of volunteers threatens the sustainability of nonprofit organizations in the United States (Kolar, Skilton, & Judge, 2016). An estimated 64.5 million individuals volunteered in 2012, and the volunteer numbers fell to 62.6 million in 2015, a reduction

of 1.9 million volunteers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). The general business problem is that a shortage of volunteers negatively affects nonprofit executive leaders' ability to accomplish the organization's mission. The specific business problem is that some nonprofit executive leaders lack leadership strategies to improve volunteer retention.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention. The specific population consisted of nonprofit executive leaders employed by three registered 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organizations in the southeastern region of Michigan who implemented leadership strategies to improve volunteer retention in their organizations. The results of this study might have a positive social impact on leaders by supporting discussions of volunteer retention. The findings may contribute to social change through the identification of strategies that may encourage nonprofit leaders to implement retention practices. The applied strategies could potentially benefit communities by improving social conditions, promote human dignity and self-worth, and prepare organizations for a sustainable future.

### **Nature of the Study**

The method used for this study was the qualitative method. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that qualitative research involves collecting data based on lived experiences. Qualitative researchers advocate various analytical methods to demonstrate multifaceted social insight that may include answering a single and suitable research

question (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Qualitative researchers include a primary interest in addressing existing problems related to solvable issues by using information gleaned from participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In contrast, using quantitative methodologies involves testing hypotheses by measuring relationships between variables (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Quantitative researchers seek to quantify information by using statistics; for that reason, a quantitative method was not a suitable selection for this study. Researchers refer to mixed method research as integrating both a qualitative and quantitative method in the same research to understand a theme without using one approach (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Molina-Azorin, 2016). Incorporating a mixed method design was not relevant for in research because the focus of this qualitative study was to identify, explore, and understand information collected from participants during an interview process.

Case study designs consist of interpreting a participant's experiences within the boundaries of their environment (Yin, 2014). Qualitative researchers conducting case studies investigate and collect data over a period of time from several sources (Yin, 2014). However, researchers conducting a phenomenological approach include identification of small groups to understand patterns of behavior and relationships (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers using a phenomenological design connect events and situations through personal lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In contrast, using an ethnographic design consists of behavioral observation and collection of interview data (Hoolachan, 2016). Researchers following an ethnographic design may study cultural groups over a prolonged period (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using a case

study allows for exploring logical problems, investigating programs, events, individuals, groups and other related phenomena (Singh, 2014; Yin, 2014). For this study, I used a case study design to explore leadership strategies for volunteer retention by collecting and recording data based on experiences of nonprofit executive leaders.

### **Research Question**

What leadership strategies do nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What leadership strategies did you use to address volunteer retention?
2. How did you inspire and motivate volunteers to go beyond their duties?
3. What strategies did you use to attract volunteers as leaders in the organizations?
4. What strategies did you use to raise the level of expectation and value of volunteers?
5. What strategies did you use to address organizational goals related to volunteers?
6. How did you evaluate volunteer performance over the last 5 years?
7. What strategies did you find worked best for you?
8. How did you address barriers or challenges in implementing your leadership strategies?
9. What performance index did you use to gauge the success of the strategies you used to improve retention?



10. What additional information would you like to share about volunteer retention?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The transformational leadership theory was the conceptual framework for the study. Burns (1978) first introduced the transformational leadership theory as an ongoing process through which leaders encourage followers to think innovatively to solve organizational problems. Transformational leaders offer followers opportunities to raise commitment towards change thereby assisting to increase their self-actualization and achievement (Rowold, 2014). Inspiration, motivation, influence, and individualized attention are the most recognizable concepts of transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). Bass and Avolio (1990) extended the work of Burns to include principles of the leadership theory to include inspirational motivation, and leaders' influence on followers. Chapleo, Ko, Liu, and Ngugi (2015) asserted that transformational leaders not only influence followers; they develop planning processes that change the trajectory, direction, and the image of an organization's services. Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory allowed for exploring leadership strategies nonprofit executive leaders might use to improve retention of volunteers.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Nonprofit organization:* A nonprofit organization is referred to as a business granted tax- exempt status by the U. S. federal and state government under section 501(c)3 tax code for charitable purposes (Internal Revenue Service [IRS], 2016).

*Strategic plan:* A strategic plan is a broad plan that helps lead the direction of an organization's long-term plan and guides needed resources to accomplish sustainable goals (Amagoh, 2015; Brown, McNermey, Perri, & Reid, 2014).

*Transformational leadership:* The transformational leadership term refers to innovative leaders that inspire and motivate followers to embrace new organizational policies (Mittal & Dhar, 2015).

*Volunteers:* Volunteers are unpaid workers who, except for reimbursed expenses, have no formal obligation and gain no direct, tangible benefits or compensations for donated time (Kang, 2016).

*Volunteer retention:* Volunteer retention consists of organizational activities to engage unpaid workers for a period of time (Butali, Wesang'ula, & Mamuli, 2014).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are considered suitable statements believed to be genuine without proof (Duberley, 2015). Three assumptions influence the reliability and credibility of this study. The first assumption was that participants would provide a truthful and honest response when questioned. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), researchers should ensure a comfortable environment that promotes plausible and believable responses. Moreover, truthful information is valuable in capturing experiences of each participant and thereby enhancing consistency of the results. The second assumption was data obtained from participants would serve as a full representation of the population included in this research. Participants in this study consisted of individuals in leadership positions

with experiences and knowledge about nonprofit institutions and access to relevant and valuable organizational data. Another assumption was that participants would understand the directed interview questions and follow through with well-informed responses. Participants might eliminate or withhold pertinent information to avoid exposing confidential information.

### **Limitations**

Limitations exist in qualitative research. According to Guise, Hansen, Lambert, and O'Brien (2017), limitations are decisions that influence the interpretation of a study outcome when seeking to understand complex problems. The primary limitation of this study was the selection of southeastern Michigan as the geographic location. Data collection restricted to one district may reduce opportunities for transferability of the findings (Bean, Harlow, & Kendellen, 2016). The findings from cases studied in southeastern Michigan may not apply to organizations in other areas. The second limitation of this study included the possibility of participants unwilling to share information on leadership strategies used to improve volunteer retention.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the parameters or boundaries of a study within the researcher's control that provide a detailed description of the research scope (Bilbo, Bigelow, Escamilla, & Lockwood, 2015). Researchers use delimitations to establish the parameter and outline of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first delimitation was the identification of participants with a nonprofit leadership status who used successful strategies for improving volunteer retention. The second delimitation was the

geographical location of nonprofit organizations in southeastern Michigan. Nonprofit leaders outside of southeastern Michigan did not participate in the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The findings from this study may be of value to business practice because the implementation of strategies could offer insight into barriers leaders encounter in volunteer retention. Additionally, the contribution to business practice might include the potential to improve existing strategies and develop new strategies to create an efficient volunteer retention plan that improve an organization's performance. Retention strategies are critical to an organization's ability to increase performance and enhance volunteer satisfaction (Duffield, Roche, Homer, Buchan, & Dimitrelis, (2014). Transformational leaders should exhibit visionary skills to motivate followers in promoting new ways of achieving solutions (Mittal & Dhar, 2015). Improving retention might allow nonprofit leaders to implement more programs, sustain existing programs, and broaden the organization's funding base. A study involving the identification of strategies to improve volunteer retention may be of interest to practitioners and expand upon existing literature.

#### **Implications for Social Change**

Business leaders may use the results of this study to identify and support volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. Volunteers are a critical component to nonprofit organizations. Successful nonprofit organizations provide program planning and training for recruiting and training volunteers to improve the organization's work environment (Kang, 2016). Identifying leadership strategies used by successful nonprofit

organizations could provide leaders with the necessary skills to continue building viable communities for those in need.

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

The purpose of this review was to document current and previous sources regarding strategies leaders used to improve volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. This section includes the organization of the literature research strategy and summary of peer-reviewed articles. In developing the literature review, using various sources gives readers a sense of what academic communities learned about nonprofit organizations. The literature review was an essential requirement in documenting qualitative multiple case studies that relate to strategies that nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteerism. The purpose of the review was to explore published works associated with the doctoral research question: What leadership strategies do nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention?

The literature research strategy included identifying peer-reviewed journals, U. S. government reports, qualitative case study articles, books published between 2014 and 2018, and seminal works available from 1959 through 1999. I used multiple databases located in the Walden University Library to access articles from ABI/INFORM; EBSCOhost, Google Scholar; ProQuest; Emerald Management, SAGE Premier, and Business Source Complete. Additionally, I collected literature from traditional libraries located in southeastern Michigan.

In researching this topic, I conducted a large number of searches to address leadership styles. The literature review outlined in this study includes the conceptual

framework, supporting and contrasting theories, and emerging themes. Table 1 presents a summary of my search for previous sources. Older sources included theory and originating researchers or seminal sources. Walden University recommends that majority of references are peer-reviewed and 85% published within 5 years of the anticipated graduation. For this doctoral study, I reviewed 168 peer-reviewed sources out of 188 total sources that fall within 5 years of graduation. Peer-reviewed sources included journal articles, U.S. government sources, and seminal and scholarly books. The key search words for the study included: organizational culture, organizational commitment, change management, and volunteer retention strategies.

Table 1  
*Summary of Total Search Sources*

Resources	Total	<5 years of 2018	>5 years of 2018
Books/Seminal works	12	6	6
Government reports	4	4	0
Peer-reviewed articles	168	168	0
Websites and magazines	4	4	0
Totals	188	182	6

The purpose of this study was to explore leadership strategies that nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention. The review of transformational leadership principles may offer a better understanding of strategies needed to sustain nonprofit organizations. I focused on the principles of transformational leadership by researching seminal and current peer-reviewed sources to complete the literature review process. To deepen the review and to ensure relevant content regarding leadership strategies, the literature search of the study also included research about workplace environments and the impact these strategies have on volunteer retention.

### **Conceptual Framework: Transformational Leadership Theory**

Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as a set of ongoing and specific behaviors in leaders and followers that raise their level of motivation and morality. Burns explained that by appealing to a follower's high ideals and values, over time, a follower might model the behavior of their leader. Transformational leaders not only promote change and achievable outcomes within an organization, leaders may encourage their followers take actions to better themselves (Burns, 1978). The research question for this qualitative multiple case study is: What leadership strategies do nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention?

Burns (1978) used the transformational leadership theory to explain how leaders establish partnerships between leaders and followers. Several additional theorists, Alatawi (2017), Bass and Avolio (1990), Bass (1999), Dimitrov (2015), and Taylor, Cornelius, and Colvin (2014), expanded the theory to explore ways that leaders influence followers to work in partnership and promote organizational transformation. Burns viewed transformational leaders as individuals who raise the awareness level of followers by appealing to their values and ideals that are necessary attributes for reaching achievable organizational goals. Bass and Avolio extended Burns's transformational leadership theory to include levels that go beyond raising the responsive expectations of followers. The four concepts that describe transformational leadership theory include (a) inspirational motivation, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) individual consideration, and (d) idealized influence.

**Inspirational motivation.** Inspirational motivation refers to the degree in which leaders can articulate and communicate shared visions (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Leaders who encourage volunteers to develop high standards provide lasting ideas and meaningful objectives for the organization. Sefora and Mihaela (2016) used motivation to describe how volunteers that rely on their leaders' to work in collaboration have lasting confidence in the organization's mission who are then likely to remain throughout their task. Leaders who fail to recognize the importance of motivating volunteering often abandon valuable experiences, which translate into long-term deficiencies in retention (Bean et al., 2016).

Reasons for volunteering vary by individual levels of motivation. Kolar et al. (2016) posited that motivation, fostering retention, and recognition can be used to improve the quality of nonprofit organizations. However, Jensen and McKeage (2015) identified that volunteer satisfaction, organization's environment, and interaction with staff are the primary criteria for measuring success in organizations. In a study of transformational leadership and volunteers, Posner (2015) explored the significance of a leader's behavior on volunteer leadership and contributions ultimately enhances the quality of team relationships. Findings of Kang's (2016) study surveyed 590 active volunteers indicated that satisfaction, volunteer engagement, and commitment aid in a leader's understanding about volunteering.

Kramer and Danielson (2016) argued that when volunteers are satisfied and motivated they are likely to continue their committed occupations. Kang (2016) stated, that a nonprofit's financial support increases when volunteering becomes a critical



element in enhancing their economic base. Therefore, it is necessary for leaders to understand the importance of systemically retaining volunteers, which is the foundation of my study.

Transformational leaders connect with followers who demonstrate similar values to achieve their organization's goal. Burns (1978) was influenced by Abraham Maslow's theory of human needs and recognized that followers have needs and are willing to perform their duties efficiently in the workplace to the extent of personal satisfaction. Bass (1999), a scholar of Burns, later defined transformational leaders as leading by example. In 1999, Bass established that trust, admiration, and respect are considered a hierarchy of leadership traits. Leaders who interact with volunteers are more likely to transform people and bring about organizational changes. Bass and Avolio (1990) found that followers could work in teams that motivate, inspire, influence, and foster respects encircling the organizational goals.

The transformational leadership theory developed by Burns (1978) and later extended by Bass (1999) provided a leadership model that assist followers in reaching their highest potential. Burns theorized that leaders, by themselves, cannot transform an organization's culture. Leaders do not influence a volunteer's attitude or behavior; leaders influence an individual's feeling about their work behavior (Tse & Chiu, 2014). Most people look for meaningful, fulfilling, and motivating opportunities (Tse & Chiu, 2014). In many nonprofit organizations, meaningful work engagement may apply to finding purpose in a prescribed assignment.

Transformational leaders should promote change and develop strategies that include inspiration, motivation, stimulation, and influence (Taylor et al., 2014). Burns (1978) speculated that transformational leaders have abilities to transform volunteers from self-absolve interest to self-actualization, and aid in improving the organization's direction. Dong, Bartol, Zhang, and Li (2016) concurred that transformational leaders inspire followers to challenge the status quo first by empowering individuals to explore their potential. Furthermore, transformational leaders may interact with followers by using motivational strategies to enhance their performance levels. Tse and Chiu (2014) found that transformational leaders devoted to their followers are likely to build a set of creative behaviors similar to the organization's mission and purpose.

Inspiration and motivation are sufficient for understanding volunteers in the nonprofit culture (Tse & Chiu, 2014). Leaders should express new paradigm for interacting with followers (Rowold, 2014). Allen et al. (2016) argued that trust, respect, and commitment toward followers demonstrate the behavior and traits of a transformational leader. Overall, volunteer motivation is vital to an organization's prolonged existence.

**Intellectual stimulation.** Leaders use intellectual stimulation to promote trust, respect, and commitment (Stinglhamber, Marique, Caesens, Hanin, & Zanet, 2015). The research findings of Stinglhamber et al. (2015) supported explorations that intellectual stimulation improves volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. Through intellectual stimulation, Posner (2015) found that a leaders' commitment plays a vital role in motivating volunteers. Burns (1978) asserted that transformational leaders use intellectual

stimulation essentially to establish a sense of vision that a volunteer exhibit based on the leader's performance level and traits.

Trust, intellectual stimulation, and commitment amongst leaders and volunteers are paramount when transforming nonperforming organizations into successful organizations (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Nencini, Romaioli, and Meneghini (2016) investigated factors influencing retention, and concluded that intellectual stimulation may encourage the intention to remain in an organization. Peng et al. (2016) found that by examining the influence of chief executive officer's (CEO) and their behavior toward their followers, intellectual stimulation is the connection that develops between the CEO and a follower's view of work meaningfulness.

The ability to shift an organization's direction is due in part to dedicated volunteers. Posner (2015) argued that a leader's commitment play a significant role in stimulating volunteers regardless of the demographics, structures, and rules of the organization. Furthermore, nonprofit leaders who encourage and stimulate volunteers are more likely to achieve transformational skills more than those who do not engage in the growing challenges of an organization (Posner, 2015). A leader's capability to attract committed volunteers to stay in their organization often aligns with the organization's mission of promoting trust and commitment (Posner, 2015).

**Individual consideration.** Individual consideration occurs when the leader recognizes the importance of a volunteer. Transformational leaders' strategies are significant in planning and decision-making processes in nonprofit organizations. Osula and Ng (2014) stated that leaders should recognize the importance of volunteers when

involving them in organizational activities such as decision-making and program visioning. Transformational leaders identify individual consideration as building value within a nonprofit organization (Gebert, Heinitz, & Buengeler, 2016). According to Dong et al. (2016), transformational leaders inspire followers to do their best and support the organization's goals. Transformational leader's attributes are that of challenging the status quo and using individual consideration for empowering volunteer (Alatawi, 2017; Dong et al., 2016). Mataira, Morelli, Matsuoka, and Uehara-McDonald (2014), and Osula and Ng (2014) argued that when using individual consideration to motivate volunteers, many leaders should adopt qualities to equip volunteers to meet growing organizational challenges that may impact a follower's performance level. Transformational leaders use individual consideration to exhibit high moral character, deliver strong visions, encourages forward-thinking, and for recognizing their follower's individual needs (Jin, Seo, & Shapiro, 2015).

**Idealized influence.** Leaders use idealized influence to identify admiration toward followers (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Copeland (2016) used the transformational leadership theory to describe widespread leadership failures among leaders when respect is absent. For example, Copeland found that leaders who exhibit ethical and authentic behavior develop associations in the workplace that persuade and influence followers. Additionally, Willenbrock, Meinecke, Rowold, and Kauffeld (2015) used the transformational leadership principle idealize influence to research the link between leader-follower communications during team interactions.

Solution-focused leaders are those who communicate clear visions, analyze solutions, and influence the relationship between leaders and followers (Willenbrock et al., 2015). Bai, Lin, and Li (2016) researched the link between transformational leadership and volunteer creativity; concluded that transformational leaders manage conflict, facilitate knowledge sharing, and promote idealize influence within a team environment. In using the idealized influence aspect, Bai et al. asserted that transformational leaders could influence a follower's creativity. In addition, Yildiz and Simsek (2016) asserted that transformational leaders, who recognize the ability of a volunteer, influence their direction toward rewarding job satisfaction.

Criticisms exist among many scholars regarding transformational leaders' influencing leader-follower relationships and organizational performance. Alatawi (2017) posited that transformational leaders should go beyond the mechanism of influencing a follower's work engagement and challenged Burns's transformational behaviors of motivate, stimulate, influence, and consideration that support performance satisfaction. Taylor et al. (2014) expanded Burns's (1978) theory that integrated different perspectives of a leader's behavior as a role model for implementing organizational effectiveness. Conversely, McCleskey (2014) suggested that despite criticisms, transformational leaders could produce successful organizations and improve a followers' performance through goals that gives individual consideration.

### **Supporting Theory: Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory**

In 1959, Herzberg developed a two-factor theory to promote job satisfaction in the workplace. Herzberg's two-factor theory resulted from an interest in finding what

made people satisfied and dissatisfaction in the workplace. Following countless hours interviewing employees to describe work situation, Herzberg developed a theory of motivation and concluded two factors influenced motivation in the workplace. The characteristic associated with dissatisfaction were called the hygiene factor that linked to (a) work conditions, (b) supervision relations, (c) relationship with peers, and (d) compensation (Herzberg, 1959). According to Herzberg, these factors do not exclusively motivate; however, lacking creativity would erupt into an employee's discomfort and uneasiness. The motivation factor emphasizes satisfaction that link with (a) recognized growth, (b) achievement and responsibility, (c) job satisfaction, and (d) advancement; which results supports Herzberg's conclusion that job satisfaction motivates followers.

Herzberg (1959) suggested that to increase job satisfaction would be to decrease the elements of dissatisfaction. However, Herzberg further argued that the remedy for causes of dissatisfaction does not produce satisfaction. Employees will continue to experience dissatisfaction until these factors are eliminated. Herzberg's findings suggested that specific characteristics, of the job, relate to satisfaction and other factors consistent with dissatisfaction. Bassous (2015) offered that the Herzberg's two-factor motivational model is prevalent in every organization.

Organizational leaders should work to improve the hygiene factor through job enrichment and satisfaction (Bassous, 2015). Similarly, Lacey, Hensel, and Manolis (2015) conducted a study in response to concerns of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices related to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In developing a consumer response model to determine if CSR practices aligned with the Herzberg two-factor

theory, the findings revealed that marketers should avoid dissatisfaction factors that could potentially harm their brand identity (Lacey et al., 2015). According to the Herzberg's factors, sources of satisfaction are separate and distinct from dissatisfaction. Herzberg concluded job satisfaction and enrichment factors motivate employees and that the opposite of dissatisfaction is not satisfaction rather, no satisfaction.

### **Contrasting Theories: Transactional Leadership and Servant Relationship Theory**

The contrasting theories reviewed before deciding to use transformational leadership theory included the transactional leadership theory and the servant relationship theory. Transactional leaders seek to motivate followers by appealing to their self-interest. Transactional leaders focus on incorporating bureaucratic standards for handling followers. Burns (1978) conceptualized transactional leadership based on transactions or exchanges between leaders and followers, whereby followers rewarded for exceptional goals. Transactional leaders use reward and punishment to gain compliance from their subordinates (Burns, 1978). Girma (2016) posited that leaders who recognize communication exchange could influence good performance and discipline. To maintain the reward system, followers might operate within a set of predetermined goals and objectives to receive continuous incentives.

Greenleaf (1998) defined servant relationship theory as a leader's desire to guide followers by using caring and understanding experiences. A sense of responsibility, respect, and inspiration characterizes the traits of a servant leader. Greenleaf proposed two guiding themes for inspiring followers to grow, namely, ethical behavior and concern for subordinates. Using the Greenleaf's principles offer leaders involvement opportunities

into the lives of followers. Commitment and trust are paramount and essential behavioral qualities for leaders to improve their interaction with followers. For the literature review, transformational leadership theory is the guiding theory to understand: (a) inspirational motivation, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) individual consideration, and (d) idealized influence. Burns (1978) developed the transformational leadership principles that describe how leaders might influence exchange between leaders and followers and improve an organization's performances. Applying inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and idealized influence to the study aids in exploring the strategies associated with improving volunteer retention.

### **Themes and Phenomena**

Applying the transformational leadership theory to this study aided in exploring themes and phenomena associated with leadership strategies to improve volunteer retention. Using the transformational leadership theory provides a conceptual lens to view the topic and recognize behaviors that influence, inspire, and motivate volunteers. The key search words provided a background to broaden an understanding of the topic and previous studies that could help answer the research question. The themes outlined include (a) organizational culture, (b) organizational commitment, (c) change management, and (c) volunteer retention strategies.

**Organizational culture.** Organizational culture has a direct impact on the viability of a nonprofit organization. Nonprofit organizations play a significant role in supporting communities. Societal conditions placed anxiety on nonprofit organizations and leaders, forcing leaders to endorse new strategies to safe guard organizations during



difficult times. The nonprofit sector is often driven by their organizational culture and repeatedly a multitude of economic challenges (Jaskyte, 2015).

Preserving an organization's culture might include actions that exhibit change and incorporating commitments to strengthen the need for a volunteer workforce (Valero, Jung, & Andrew, 2015). Further, Valero et al. (2015) asserted that a leader's ability to motivate followers, and maintain the organizational culture is characteristic of an organization built on resilience. Critical decisions to retain volunteers are essential to many organization's mission and culture. Organizational culture has a direct impact on a volunteer's mental and physical health such as self-esteem, social connectedness, and well-being (Stukas, Hoye, Nicholson, Brown, & Aisbett, 2016).

Organizational culture has an absolute influence on a volunteer's job satisfaction. As leaders struggle to keep nonprofit services, technological shifts have signaled the need for volunteers to assist in navigating a nonprofit organization's culture (Jaskyte, 2015). Gilstrap, White, and Spradlin (2015) explained that highly qualified leaders center their attention on volunteers who are motivated and committed to the organization. However, inspiring change within nonprofit organizations might include encouraging volunteers to understand the organization's mission and support a cultural change to sustain services (Jaskyte, 2015). Valero et al. (2015) asserted that nonprofit agencies as human service systems often lack clear lines of accountability because of handling multiple stakeholder's (employees, donors, volunteers, clients) concerns, which make operational predictions difficult. The culture of an organization influences the attitude of volunteers and other stakeholders (MacIndoe & Sullivan, 2014).

An active organizational culture may result in increase job satisfaction and commitment. MacIndoe and Sullivan (2014) found that an aggressive organizational culture endorses new strategies for safeguarding the organization during difficult economic times. Nonprofit organizations must implement new tactics for executive leadership to achieve at the volunteer governance level that retain volunteers. Nonprofit leaders also must consider themselves as a critical part of an organization that builds and maintain a capacity for stabilizing programs (MacIndoe & Sullivan, 2014). Stukas et al. (2016) asserted that volunteer engagement link to volunteer retention. Conversely, a lack of organizational culture in nonprofit organizations can significantly impact volunteer engagement, which can lead to turnover and decrease productivity (Stukas et al., 2016).

**Organizational commitment.** Organizational commitment is a connection that volunteers experience in an organization. Gilstrap et al. (2015) suggested expert leaders are likely to center their attention on committed volunteers to serve in the organization. Leadership is essential for building commitment in nonprofit organizations that face challenge of accountability and volunteer retention in workplaces. Nonprofit organizations rely on service candidates (volunteers) to maintain the organization's performance. However, Freiwirth (2017) posited that organizational commitment places demands on leaders and guide them to seek volunteer candidates. Transformational leaders often influence organizational performance, achieve goal, and promote change regardless of the complexity of the organization (Bottomley, Burgess, & Fox, 2014). Hu et al. (2014) offered that leaders who help volunteers develop organizational loyalty are likely to experiences increase in volunteers. The discussion of commitment remain

relevant as nonprofit organizations expand and experience challenges. However, nonprofit organizations continue to grow despite a decline in volunteers (MacIndoe & Sullivan, 2014).

Gilstrap & Morris (2015) suggested that a lack of organizational commitment, the workplace would experience volunteer turnover. Rathgeb and Phillips (2016) concluded that service delivery programs in nonprofit organizations play a significant role for individuals in need of essential human services. Not only are nonprofit organizations urged to collaborate with other nonprofits and for-profit corporations to stretch donor dollars; nonprofits are also encouraged to generate synergy and organizational commitment around programs to deliver high-quality services hence, circumventing the shortage of human resources (Osula & Ng, 2014). Many individuals and families come to rely on delivery systems and many nonprofit organizations rely heavily on the professional skills offered by the commitment of volunteers to implement quality programs.

Attracting the best and committed people and fostering an environment that promotes value and authenticity enriches the nonprofit organization (Freeman & Auster, 2015). Derrick-Mills (2015) opined operating differences between for-profit and nonprofits are that for-profit organizations maximize financial returns to stakeholders; nonprofit organizations set goals to meet their customers' needs driven by mission. Unlike for-profit organizations, which have goals to operate a profit, nonprofit's decisions influences communities. Nonprofit leaders handle similar financial management issues as their counterparts in the for-profit sector (Routhieaux, 2015).

Generating budgets, managing cash flows, and assessing the overall financial health lead to a financial conclusion of profitability (MacIndoe & Sullivan, 2014). Therefore, nonprofit organizations exist to serve the public good, and to do so; nonprofits must maintain a constant healthy program that attracts and incorporates committed volunteers.

Leaders, who learn to connect leadership to commitment, often strengthen the lives of people implementing change and efficiency of their organization (Bottomley et al., 2014; McCleskey, 2014; Nica, 2014). Routhieaux (2015) found that leaders who adopt volunteer job satisfaction equip themselves to meet challenges of a changing organization. Carson (2016) asserted that organizational commitment and job satisfaction significantly impact change and that change is an essential influence on an individual's commitment to remain with the organization. Therefore, leaders may lower the turnover rate by understanding factors that encourage organizational commitment.

**Change management.** Change management remain increasingly popular in transforming ways nonprofit organizations embrace differences. Lukka and Partanen (2014) stated that change management practices increase economic development within organizations. Change depends on a leader's ability to align mission and vision to a volunteer's commitment. Alfes, Antunes, and Shantz (2017) confirmed leaders who focus on development often acknowledges the importance of volunteers who perform duties and committed to the organization. However, Bowser (2017) suggested change is more than altering an organization's operational manuals or updating flowcharts, change is managing people. Active leaders recognize that change is unattainable in a single moment. Without modifications, over time, organizations may cease to exist. Change

management plays a significant role in the progression of nonprofit organizations.

Conversely, Kramer and Danielson (2016) stated that volunteers who voice their opinions about change are satisfied with the organization, therefore, reduces turnover.

Many nonprofit organizations continue to resist change and thereby jeopardize the organization's mission and the ability to recruit experienced volunteers. Leaders of nonprofit organizations found volunteers to be an invaluable resource. However, resistance to change is a primary obstacle affecting change proposals (Myer, Hopkins, Shera, & Peters, 2014). Leadership is an ability to inspire volunteers onward and to accomplish the task for the overall good of the organization. Osula and Ng (2014) explained leadership strategies are no longer considered a series of activities such as decision-making and visioning. Conversely, leadership strategies remain increasingly important in ensuring that nonprofit leaders seek to change the direction in which the organization moves.

For nonprofit organizations to cultivate volunteers, leaders must embrace change and introduce strategies to capture new demographics. Change management refers to modifying and altering current circumstances. Alfes et al. (2017) suggested improperly orchestrated change processes produce barriers that may cause a lack of motivation in volunteers. Obstacles hindering change might include (a) absence of a replacement plan that focuses on volunteers, (b) deficiency in training to promote the organization's mission, and (c) conflicting values about the role a volunteer play in an organization. Therefore, to improve volunteer retention might contribute to organizational stability and increase performance.

Many barriers hinder change and growth in nonprofit organizations. A shortage of formal guidelines could prohibit leaders from foreseeing emerging trends and make changes within the organization's operation (Alfes et al., 2017). Abrell-Vogel and Rowold (2014) referred to change management as a tool for small nonprofit organizations when considering new strategies for building a volunteer's commitment in the organization. Nonprofit leaders need processes for managing change and the necessary skills to gain a competitive advantage that focuses on cutting-edge strategies to retain volunteers (Alfes et al., 2017). Therefore, for a nonprofit to embrace change, the organization's performances hinge on leading in a direction gratifying to volunteer's retention.

**Volunteer retention strategies.** Retaining volunteers is a critical challenge for nonprofit organizations regardless of the number of volunteers. Volunteer retention is a recurring challenge for many nonprofit organizations (Milman & Dickson, 2014). Volunteers is an indispensable service for many organizations. Many organizations rely on professionally skilled volunteers who influence the organization's culture and add financial support. Kang (2016) confirmed that volunteers are a vital source for attracting and retaining other professional talents. When a volunteer voluntarily or involuntarily leaves an organization, the cost to replace or include a staff can be significant (Duffield et al., 2014). Piatak (2016) found that many nonprofit organizations face volunteer decline resulting in individuals serving for shorter periods of time. Further, Piatak (2016) suggested with high unemployment and declining volunteer rates; leaders should consider recruiting from untapped and unrepresented groups.

Nonprofit organizations must find alternative methods of filling vacant positions by using an unemployment pool for a necessary supply of volunteers. Piatak's (2016) study indicated that participants are inclined to volunteer if program sites include methods that focus on the unemployed population. Volunteers are more likely to devote time if management programs offer training benefits. Hager and Brudney (2015) presented an argument suggesting that leaders develop best practices that aligned with the operational environment to include strategies for recruiting and retaining volunteers. Adopting a volunteer management practice and practical supervisory activities become effective when volunteers are involved in the process (Hager & Brudney, 2015). Kolar et al. (2016) established guidelines for implementing volunteer programs. Furthermore, Kolar et al. suggested that organizations first establish written policies consistent with answering requirements for long-term volunteerism. Therefore the central argument is that leaders must maintain high job satisfaction to accomplish the organization's mission and retain volunteers.

For leaders to move an organization forward, they should understand the relationship of volunteer retention. Ulsperger, McElroy, Robertson, and Ulsperger (2015) presented several implications for motivation and argued that leaders using a volunteer workforce need to consider specific criteria for retention. After examining experiences of elderly volunteers, Ulsperger et al. reported that volunteers tend to be happier, more satisfied, healthier, and reduce turnover as a result of having close interaction with staff, leaders, and an overall need to contribute. Ulsperger et al. identified several factors that stimulate consistency in elderly volunteering (a) repetitiveness or frequency that the

elderly volunteer, (b) volunteers view their everyday activities as necessary, (c) share similar functions, and (d) appropriate resources and material to participate in a given activity. People volunteer with different motives and maintaining volunteering opportunities demonstrates commitment and compassion on the part of leadership (Ulsperger et al., 2015). Therefore, volunteer retention is the functional approaches to decreasing turnover and increasing workplace satisfaction.

With growing numbers of nonprofit organizations and demands for supplementary services, the need remain high for volunteers. Allred, King, and Valentin (2014) conducted a study to identify commonality between volunteers, donors and why individuals join a nonprofit organization. Allred et al.'s (2014) survey of 175 respondents indicated factors affecting motivation, age, gender, and demographics were likely to influence recruitment and retention. McDonald, Weerawardena, Madhavaram, and Mort (2015) used an integrated approach to identifying common threads in volunteers and donors. McDonald et al.'s survey maintain that nonprofits continue to rely on experienced volunteers to sustain the organization simultaneously balancing funds, mission, and employees. However, Omura and Forster (2014) argued that building sustainable nonprofits mandate that leaders understand structure and volunteer base; matching the organization's vision, and mission. Conversely, leaders need to focus on developing strategies that include volunteers in retention strategies, which may reduce negativity, dissatisfaction, and turnover.

Volunteering is one of the fastest growing concerns in nonprofit organizations (Bang, 2015). Additional challenges in nonprofits include managing and maintaining



operational cost (Myer et al., 2014). However, nonprofit leaders have a profound effect on competency. Many organizations discontinue because of a shortage of unpaid workers. Moreover, closures often occur because of a lack of adequate training and a work environment that discourages the volunteer workforce.

Nonprofit leaders need satisfied volunteers and consider assigning volunteer responsibilities that relate directly to the organization's mission (Bang, 2015). As the number of nonprofit organizations increases, leaders continue to face challenges of accountability. Accountability might mean overseeing the political, technological, and environmental issues that may cause an organization's instability (Grizzle & Sloan, 2016). Mallum (2016) identified several challenges that may affect a nonprofit organization's inability to retain volunteers. Coordinating and monitoring volunteers could drive the cost beyond an organization's budget (Bittschi et al., 2015). Accordingly, nonprofit organizations must maintain active programs to improve volunteer retention.

Volunteer retention is an escalating unease for nonprofit executives. The interchangeable use of the terms (recruitment and retention) has confused those in administrative roles. Hager and Brudney (2015) studied the adoption of volunteer management practices of 2,993 organizations that use volunteers to recruit other volunteers by identifying value in allowing volunteers to formulate recruitment strategies beneficial for an organization. In contrast, Lee (2015) suggested that nonprofit organizations partner or collaborate to achieve effectiveness and address shared volunteer resources. Volunteer retention may increase, if leaders identify value in the growing need for unpaid workers.

As most executives focus on the daily operations, Kolar et al. (2016) found that many leaders cannot attract and retain volunteers and maintain the organizational operations. Jensen (2017) established that organizational sustainability led many nonprofit organizations to adopt for-profit corporation innovations, hence, drawing on business-like trends to maintain operations. Therefore, demands for producing best practices, such as volunteer recognition, hinge on extraordinary leaders promoting ethics, governance, and community involvement (Hager & Brudney, 2015). Stecker (2014) contended as nonprofit organizations serve communities in significant ways, many depend on U.S. government and philanthropic funding to improve or enhance mission success. Moreover, Arik, Clark, and Raffo (2016) found that many nonprofit organizations emerged during economic times and developed strategies needed to retain volunteers. Park and Mosley (2017) asserted while some organizations prosper, others fail because of a decline in experienced workers. Therefore, most volunteers will remain with an organization, if the organization implements best practices and goals that focus on retention.

Volunteer retention allows leaders to expand services and recruitment ease. Dong (2015) found that serving as a volunteer is rewarding; however, risk propensity may come from a lack of training and protection from the organization. Harrison, Xiao, Ott, and Bortree (2017) confirmed that involvement strengthen relationships with volunteers mainly if organizations influences the volunteer contribution. Volunteer participation contributes to trust, satisfaction, and commitment (Harrison et al., 2017). Many nonprofit leaders should consider stewardship strategies to retain volunteers thereby strengthening

the nonprofit sustainability. (Harrison et al., 2017). Curran, Taheri, MacIntosh, and O’Gorman (2016) suggested that organizations use private sector branding strategies for influencing volunteer retention. Further, Curran et al. (2016) indicated that by elevating the level of volunteers’ engagement and management styles, this strategy could unlock means to retain satisfied volunteers and impact branding strategies of the experiences of volunteering in nonprofit organizations. Promoting volunteer retention no longer operates independently within an organization. The critical points argued in this discussion on volunteer retention might help nonprofit leaders recognize that the benefit of developing strategies and improving existing methods might enhance the organization’s operation and increase volunteer retention.

### **Transition**

Section 1 included the background, problem statement, purpose statement, and nature of the study. Section 1 also included the research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, and significance of the study. In the professional and academic literature review, I explained the need for nonprofit leaders to identify strategies including concise ideas that future leaders may use in developing strategies to retain volunteers. In Section 2, I provided the purpose of the study and details of the participant selection process, protocol, and ethical obligations. Section 3 includes an introduction, presentation of the study findings, an application for professional practice, and implication of the study’s findings on social change, recommendations for action, reflections, and conclusion.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes an overview of the research method and design for this study. In this section, I outline the procedure for participant recruitment, population and sampling, data collection technique, and data analysis. Section 2 also includes a restated purpose statement, a review of the role of the researcher, and an overview ensuring ethical research. Additionally, this section includes a detailed discussion about the data collection instrument, data collection technique, data organization technique, description of reliability, validity, transition, and a summary.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention. The specific population consisted of nonprofit executive leaders employed by three registered 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organizations in the southeastern region of Michigan who implemented leadership strategies to improve volunteer retention in their organizations. The results of this study might have a positive social impact on leaders by supporting discussions of volunteer retention. The findings may contribute to social change through the identification of strategies that might encourage nonprofit leaders to implement retention practices. Further, identified strategies may improve social conditions, promoting human dignity and self-worth, and prepare organizations for a sustainable future.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this qualitative case study, I was the primary data collection instrument. Koch, Niesz, and McCarthy (2014), and Rossetto (2014) suggested that the role of the researcher includes analyzing and interpreting data. As the researcher, the goal was to collect content-rich information about strategies leaders used to improve volunteer retention. As a trainer in nonprofit management with 20 years of experience in nonprofit leadership, including 10 years overseeing an organization's financial operation, and the design and implementation of programs and services for community stakeholders, I led teams and worked closely with leaders to ensure that nonprofit organizations remain a viable community source.

*The Belmont Report*, established by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1978), provided a set of principles for researchers to follow when researching human subjects. The report included basic ethical practices regarding respect for persons; minimize harm to individuals, and treating people fairly (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). The study followed the fundamental principles described in *The Belmont Report* to respect and treat all participants as independent agents and to value shared information as confidential.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) reported that a researcher's role is to prepare for data collection, guide all participants through the interview process, and remain objective and intentional when collecting data. Chamberlain (2016) noted that

personal biases in research might lead to errors in findings, judgment, and decision-making. A researcher's role is to identify and eliminate personal bias in the research process, as described by Marshall and Rossman. Another strategy that might lessen bias in qualitative research includes openness and a willingness to understand opposite or opposing point of views (Parkhurst, 2017; Singh, 2014; Yin, 2014). A tool for minimizing bias as a researcher is member checking. Member checking include interpretation of the collected data and sharing the validated synthesis with participants (Harvey, 2015). Further, member checking involve transcribing each interview response followed by a summary of each participant's reply. This study included member checking to help minimize bias and avoid personal interpretation, misinterpretation, and personal perspectives.

Researchers often use interview protocols to ensure that interview processes operate smoothly, and the richest form of experiences are recorded (Dasgupta, 2015; Goicolea et al., 2016; Neuert & Lenzner, 2016; Singh, 2014). Designing and using an interview protocol is an acceptable practice for guiding the interviews, thereby counteracting unintentional researcher biases (Parkhurst, 2017). Parkhurst (2017) noted the significance of using an interview protocol in that doing so guards against interviewer bias, which leads to predetermined conclusions and errors in the responses. To avoid accidental bias in this qualitative study, a standard interview protocol template designed for facilitating each interview session ensured the accurate collection of a participant's response (Appendix A).

## **Participants**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention. Selection of participants included an established criterion to ensure that responses address the research question (Dasgupta, 2015; Koch et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). The predetermined eligibility criteria for this study included participants from a network of registered 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organizations in the southeastern region of Michigan and employed as nonprofit executive leaders. Recruitment included executive leaders who had worked in the nonprofit industry and had a minimum of 5 years of experience leading an organization in improving their volunteer retention strategies.

Gaining access to eligible participants included first establishing a networking association and then seeking permission to enter an organization to conduct research (Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016; Newington & Metcalfe, 2014; Peticca-Harris, deGama, & Elias, 2016). I gained access to participants by identifying experienced nonprofit executive leaders through an established working relationship with other nonprofit organizations and professional networks. A second strategy for gaining access to nonprofit executive leaders entailed searching LinkedIn to source and contact potential participants. Additionally, to gain access to qualified and interested participants involved contacting chief executive officers of Michigan nonprofit organizations and current members in databases of professional nonprofit associations. The success of a study depends on gaining access to qualified participants. Following Maramwidze-Merrison's (2016) advice, I established a relationship to connect interested participants to the study

before facilitating open communication for data collection. Each participant received a site agreement for DBA case study that outlined the study requirements.

Building a trusted and respected working relationship with participants involves (a) establishing rapport, (b) sharing the research goal, and (c) demonstrating transparency through follow-up contact (Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016; Peticca-Harris et al., 2016). Once developing and establishing a working relationship with the participants, I scheduled an informal meeting with each participant to explain the business leader interview consent process and the research protocol. Next, follow up included telephone calls to further build a working relationship and to determine if each participant met the study criteria before extending a formal invitation to participate. From a willing participant pool, I selected qualified executive leaders who have the required information to provide comprehensive responses that align with the principal research question: What leadership strategies do nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention?

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

I used a qualitative method for the study. By using a qualitative method, researchers may develop a comprehensive understanding of a specific phenomenon (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Koch et al., 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Qualitative methods allow researchers to investigate a phenomenon by asking *what* and *why* open-ended interview questions (Barnham, 2015). Another significant reason for using qualitative methods was the use of semistructured interview questions that allow participants to respond in their own words. A semistructured



interview is the most valuable tool in qualitative research for understanding human experiences and exploring in-depth experiences (Carter et al., 2014; Humphrey, 2014). Unforeseen and unknown factors stimulate researchers to probe in-depth questions to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Humphrey, 2014). The benefit of a qualitative method was the accumulation of full and rich descriptions of new experiences and phenomena.

In contrast to a qualitative method, quantitative methods involve researchers focusing their attention on the identification of variables within the context of relations and causality (Barnham, 2015; Park & Park, 2016). Mukhopadhyay and Gupta (2014) suggested quantitative methods often allowed researchers to use data collection via surveying participants and using secondary sources to build cases of similarities. Given the research purpose and central research question, I did not use a quantitative method because it would fail to gather the right information from participants.

Finally, a mixed-method approach covers diverse sets of practices that include a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Biber, 2015; Oliver, 2017; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) found using mixed methods prohibited researchers from addressing complex research questions and collecting rich data. The central research question dictated the necessity of studying rich, layered data, and obtaining a deeper understanding of a social topic. Therefore, the study did not include a use of mixed methods because the purpose of the study involves an in-depth exploration of a specific social phenomenon that does not include numerical data.

## Research Design

The specific research design for this study was a multiple case study. Yin (2014) suggested that case studies involve detailed investigations of more than one individual, group, or organization. Furthermore, multiple case studies in qualitative research consist of exploring one or more cases that answer *what* and *how* research questions to gain in-depth knowledge (Henry & Foss, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). The use of a case study design allows participants to provide insightful meaning on strategies used to improve volunteer retention.

In an ethnographic design, researchers study people's viewpoint, social behavior and cultural approaches (Hoolachan, 2016; Luborsky & Lysack, 2017; Sharp, Dittrich, & deSouza, 2016). Ethnographic researchers can methodically interpret ethnic and social groups by using observations (Hoolachan, 2016). Given features presented in an ethnographic plan that focus on how people interact in a social environment, the ethnographic blueprint did not address the type of data required to answer the central research question of this study. In contrast, the phenomenological design consists of asking participants their interpretation of their experiences (Luborsky & Lysack, 2017; Rodham, Fox, & Doran, 2015). Phenomenological research includes an analysis of lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The study of leadership strategies provided an opportunity to explore and uncover new themes and information some nonprofit leaders used to improve volunteer retention. Therefore, the features of a phenomenological design did not align with my goals for this study.

The purpose of this case study was to explore leadership strategies nonprofit leaders used to improve volunteer retention. The multiple case study design is a useful tool for gathering rich stories from a sampling of participants. Henry and Foss (2015), Mandrinos and Mahdi (2016), and Yin (2014), used a case study to uncover cross-case similarities or differences by asking follow-up questions until no new information collected. The use of a multiple case design to study the dynamics of volunteer retention from several perspectives might help predict future volunteering trends.

Data saturation in qualitative research occurs when the researcher receives no new themes or information to enhance the research discovery (Boddy, 2016; Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016; Nelson, 2016). During the initial interviews, participants provided introductory and preliminary information. By conducting continuous interviews, data saturation happens at the point when no new information achieved (Boddy, 2016). Researchers ensure data saturation when the analyzed interviews and organization's documents on volunteer retention, yield no new information (Nelson, 2016).

Data saturation in qualitative research occurs when there is sufficient information to replicate the study, and no emerging themes transpire during in-depth and uninterrupted interviews (Nelson, 2016). In reaching data saturation, a minimum sample size of three nonprofit executive leaders who solved the problem of volunteer retention was sufficient to answer the research question. As recommended by Fusch and Ness (2015), to determine adequate data, transcribing and synthesizing the interview responses and sharing the summaries with each participant involves member checking. Further, confirming saturation through member checking validates that the synthesized

transcription corroborated with the interview responses. All participants in this study indicated verbally that the transcripts were accurate. Transcribing the recordings ensured the accuracy of what participants stated during the interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Each participant had an opportunity to make corrections, thereby enhancing reliability and validity of the findings. Thomas (2016) confirmed that member checking is a useful technique when identifying specific quotations. Further, Thomas described member checking as a practical method for synthesizing particular themes. In contrast, Harvey (2015) defined member checking as a process of validating, summarizing, and confirming responses. Using member checking confirmed interview responses and improved the validity and creditability of the recordings (Kornbluh, 2015; Thomas, 2016). Through member checking, all participants agreed with the analysis and verified that the interview transcript reflected their views. Therefore, by eliminating transcription review, the focused of the study on member checking validated the collected data.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population in this multiple case study design included executive leaders from nonprofit organizations who met the participant eligibility criteria outlined in this research. The eligibility requirements for the study participants included (a) nonprofit executive leaders, (b) work full time within the scope of registered 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organizations in the southeastern region of Michigan, and (c) implemented successful strategies to improve volunteer retention. Therefore, the target research population consisted of nonprofit executive leaders who successfully improved an organization's volunteer retention strategies. Three nonprofit executive leaders

participated in the interview process. Each leader represented one organization.

Researchers determined that purposeful sampling ensure selecting participants who can provide information-rich and insightful responses (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016; Goldberg, LaRossa, Roy, Sharp, & Zvonkovic, 2015; Wang, Duan, & Yu, 2016).

Therefore, selecting participants by accessing a purposeful sample approach supported this multiple case study research because of the contribution the chosen individuals communicated. Data-rich cases are cases from which a researcher can learn more about the phenomenon from a leader's detailed descriptions (Elo, Kaariainen, Polkki, Utrianen, & Kyngas, 2014; Koch et al., 2014; Robinson, 2014). Further, a purposeful sampling method deemed appropriate for sourcing eligible participants for a multiple case research (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015). I used a purposeful sampling method to select information-rich cases and identify eligible executive nonprofit leaders who agreed to participate in this study.

From the total estimated membership of the Michigan Nonprofit Association, a sample size of three experienced nonprofit executive leaders produced the data needed to answer the central research question. Boddy (2016) opined that a single case could be of importance and generate significant insight. Furthermore, Gentles et al. (2015) found that a sample size of one is sufficient to meet sampling criteria. The more information a sample holds, the lower the sample size needed to produce quality data relevant to the study (Boddy, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Identifying a small sample size of three executive leaders was a viable size for reaching saturation for the study (Boddy, 2016). Saturation occurred when there was (a) no new information added to the discussion, (b)

no new codes required, and (c) no new emergent data themes arise, resulting in data redundancy (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Malterud et al., 2016; Nelson, 2016). During the initial interviews, eligible participants tend to provide surface-level responses to the research question (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To ensure data saturation, follow up interviews continued until no new theme emerge. Throughout the interviewing process, I listened for repeat themes and noted critical comments to ensure data saturation.

The criteria for selecting participants included identifying participants from a network of registered 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organizations in the southeastern region of Michigan who met the definition of a nonprofit executive leader. Further, each nonprofit executive leader had the minimum of 5 years of experiences in improving volunteer retention and recruitment. As noted by Hume and Hume (2016), Malterud et al. (2016), and Singh (2014), a small selection of eligible participants have the required knowledge to provide content-rich information.

Following the recommended advice of Hume and Hume (2016), Malterud et al. (2016), and Singh (2014), I gathered rich and insightful data from three knowledgeable nonprofit leaders with expert management experiences. Scheibe, Reichelt, Bellmann, and Kirch (2015), and Moltu, Stefansen, Notnes, Skjolberg, and Veseth (2016) noted that interviewing should take place in a setting that allows for participant's safety and their ability to respond spontaneously and freely. The interview settings took place in each participant's place of employment.

### **Ethical Research**

Ethical guidelines in this study focused on establishing and protecting the integrity of both the participant and researcher. Accordingly, I followed the ethical guidelines outlined by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) by providing each participant with a full explanation of the study before involvement. Voluntary informed consent demonstrated an understanding of the purpose, potential risk, and benefits of an individual's participation in research (Yin, 2014). Therefore, I provided sufficient information to enable each participant to make an informed consent about participation. Before joining the research, each participant received an opportunity to return the business leaders interview consent form that outlined requirements and contact information.

Following the Walden IRB protocol, participation in the study was of a voluntary nature. Therefore, individuals selected could withdraw from the study without penalty; withdrawal notice may occur by telephone, electronic communication, or in person. As recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2016), each person has the opportunity to withdraw from the study. The confidentiality of participants and all related information are important principles in research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Qualitative researchers may use incentives to encourage and motivate individuals to participate in a research study (Du Can, Leventis, Phadke, & Gopal, 2014; Giebelhausen, Chun, Cronin, & Jult, 2016; Merriman, Sen, Felo, & Litzky, 2016). Participants in the study did not receive incentives or compensation in exchange for participating voluntarily. Upon IRB approval, I adhered to Walden University's

recommendations and demonstrated thoughtful, ethical consideration to protect participants and the nonprofit community. After achieving the approval certification number from Walden University, interviews took place. As part of the IRB process, I developed an ethical protocol that outlined the purpose of the study, benefits, and risks associated with a participant's security.

Ensuring ethical protection of each participant was paramount in the study. The ethical protocol defined in The Belmont Report established basic principles to safeguard and protect participants and all those associated with research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). Following the principles outlined in *The Belmont Report*, I guarded the identity of each and did not use names or organizations in the final study transcription. Additionally, I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) certification course on protecting the rights of human participants (Appendix C). A case study protocol set forth the necessary perimeters to conduct scholarly research (Gaya & Smith, 2016; Yin, 2014). To safeguard participants, Zayour and Hamdar (2015) suggested researchers substitute coding as an added protection against possible misrepresentation. Replacing codes, such as Case 1, Case 2, and Case 3 protected the anonymity and participant's identity. As recommended by Gaya and Smith (2016) and Yin (2014) protecting the privacy of those who participated in the study and not disclose personal identification ensured confidentiality.

As required by Walden University, and for the privacy and protection of each participant, all handwritten notes, audio recordings, transcribed responses and related data are stored in a locked file cabinet and password-protection computer in my home



office for 5 years from the date of the study approval. Participation in the study involved a voluntary consent. After the approval from Walden University, participants had an opportunity to review the findings and to ensure their identity is protected. In advance of conducting any interviews, I contacted each participant and offered a site agreement for DBA case study. Moreover, Pitt, Narayanasamy, and Plant (2016) emphasized well-developed consent forms entail an explanation of the research purpose, risk and benefits, compensation, and confidentiality statements to adequately inform participants and reduce the likelihood of miscommunication. In the qualitative study, nonprofit leaders who understood ethical practice in scholarly research served as participants to provide insightful responses to the interview questions. All participants consisted of individuals employed by nonprofit organizations in southeastern Michigan. The IRB approval number for this study is 03-01-18-0013835.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). As the primary data collection instrument in this study, I (a) obtained responses from experienced participants, (b) used a semistructured interview process, and (c) reviewed an annual implementation plan, volunteer handbooks and committee notes provided by three nonprofit executive leaders. Peterson, Hahn, Lee, Madison, and Atri (2016) used semistructured interviews to collect data and explore a participant's thoughts on relationships and behavior patterns. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated data collection involves orchestrating semistructured interviews that yield favorable sources and answers to the research question. Dasgupta

(2015) and Singh (2014) recognized the benefits of semistructured interview questions guarantees effective interviews. A semistructured interview may allow the researcher to adjust the questions during an interview process.

Researchers use semistructured interviews to enhance the reliability of the data collection instrument. Semistructured interview questions are the most widely used method of data inquiry (Brinkman, 2016). The interview questions, in this study, ensured alignment with the problem, purpose, and research questions. Accomplishing semistructured interviews, in qualitative research, adds to trustworthy research results (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, & Docent, 2016). Additionally, having well-documented interviews validated the data collection practice. Given the advice presented by Kallio et al. (2016) and Brinkman (2016), as the primary data instrument, I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews with nonprofit executive leaders by using an open-ended questioning format to explore leadership strategies for improving retention of volunteers. Face-to-face interviews allowed for personal communication.

Researchers use organizational or archival documents as secondary data collection to aid in exploring the research topic from a broader perspective and assist in triangulating the findings (Ellram & Tate, 2016). For this study, the organization's leaders supplied supporting documents (i.e., an annual implementation plan, volunteer handbooks, and committee notes) to understand a leader's views on the topic and answer the research question. After the interviews and reviewing documents, I transcribed the interviews and reviewed the organization's documents, to enhance reliability and validity of the data collected. Another step in the process included analyzing information by

conducting member checking to ensure the participant's interpretation truthfully documented.

According to Birt, Scott, and Cavers (2016) a member checking process increases the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Member checking ensures the accuracy of each interview recordings, validates interpretations, and avoids transmitting researcher bias into the study. To enhance reliability and validity of the findings, each participant in this study received a copy of the written synthesis retrieved from notes and audio recordings. By providing each participant with a final synthesis allowed for an opportunity to agree or disagree with the summary presentation (Harvey, 2015; Meredith, 2016). Member checking gave participants a chance to volunteer additional information and avoid misinterpretations. After sending the summaries to the nonprofit participants, I followed up via email asking each participant for their feedback regarding the synthesis.

Interview protocols consist of a prescribed script and instructions for participants and researchers to follow (Neuert & Lenzner, 2016). The interview protocol for this study consisted of (a) a written purpose of the study for each participant, (b) an outlined data collection procedure, and (c) the interview questions to aid in maintaining uniformity (Appendix A). A detailed interview protocol promotes consistency and continuity (Hurst et al., 2015; Neuert & Lenzner; Yin, 2014). Dasgupta (2015), Kramer and Danielson (2016), and Yin (2014) suggested a well-developed interview protocol can ensure interviews uniformly followed and the semistructured interview questions provide consistency and reliability in collecting quality data. Before I conducted any interviews,

each participant received a site agreement for DBA case study and a copy of the interview questions (Appendix B).

### **Data Collection Technique**

Data collection technique involved a systemic approach to gathering data. Data collection in this study entailed developing a list of interview questions for an accurate collection of information (Henry & Foss, 2015). Interviews are a significant and rich source of information for qualitative case studies (Pitt et al., 2016; Singh, 2014; Yin, 2014). A well-informed researcher garners insightful information using interview structures such as prolonged interviews, shorter interviews or survey interviews (Yin, 2014). Before conducting the semistructured interviews, experienced nonprofit executive leaders received information regarding the purpose of the research. Afterwards, each participant received a copy of the site agreement, informed consent, and a list of the interview questions prior to the formal interviews.

There are advantages and disadvantages in data collection. An advantage of conducting semistructured interviews is the usefulness in gathering insightful context on a particular topic (Kallio et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). As the primary data collection instrument, I controlled the direction of each interview, hence, keeping the conversation focused and on track. However, disadvantages might include excessive time constraints in completing each interview based on the participant's schedule. Scheibe et al. (2015) noted interviewing should occur in a setting that allows the participants to respond spontaneously and freely. Disadvantages associated with conducting semistructured interviews may include the potential for bias that could impact the findings (Yin, 2014).

Similarly, Hammarberg, Kirkman, and de Lacey (2016) suggested semistructured interviews have significant value in gaining an understanding of a person's perspective in an unbiased approach.

Following an agreement to participate in the study, arrangements included a formal meeting by sending the site agreement. An essential part of the data collection technique was to have questions that give participants an opportunity to provide rich descriptions of the research topic (Dasgupta, 2015). Another collection technique included transcribing each response without identifying names or organizations (Feldman, Shad, Chapman, & Amini, 2016; Mandrinos & Mahdi, 2016). Quality data collection practice involved coding, categorizing, and grouping interviews to determine the participant's potential meanings of a single event.

As the researcher in this qualitative study, I asked semistructured questions, noted questions, and recorded all responses. Secondly, conducting a member checking verified the exactness of the recorded interviews to ensure validity. After the initial transcription and analyzing responses, interviewing continued until no new themes appeared. The organization's annual implementation plan, volunteer handbooks, and committee notes each were examined to obtain new information about strategies nonprofit leaders used to improve volunteer retention.

Following the interviews, I converted the transcription to text using an audio recording device. According to Dasgupta (2015); Harvey (2015) and Meredith, (2016), transcribing involve recording a participant's responses and may include follow up questions and member checking. Member checking involves a second interview to share

the interpretation and ensure accurate responses to the interview questions. Yin (2014) suggested that the researcher's primary responsibilities include full disclosure of relevant data and transcribe all collected data.

To remain consistent, I followed an interview protocol (Appendix A) that described the approach to collecting data and procedure for each interview. Interview protocols typically include an outline of the interview questions and interview narrative (Gaya & Smith, 2016; Goicolea et al., 2016; Neuert & Lenzner, 2016). Further, the interview protocol allowed for staying on task while collecting data. Before carrying out interviews, each participant received a full explanation of the interview process and understood the importance of confidentiality. Each participant reviewed the interview protocol to ensure an understanding of the interview process: (a) audio recorded interviews using a digital voice recorder, (b) participation was voluntary, and withdrawal permitted at any time, (c) all names and organizations were confidential and did not appear in the transcription, (d) all records pertaining to the research, including copies of documents that participants shared stored on a password-protected computer for 5 years from date of the study's approval to protect privacy and safeguard the data collected. All copies of documents that participants supplied were available to the doctoral committee. Following each interview, next step in the data collection technique involved transcribing responses and replacing names and organizations with codes.

### **Data Organization Technique**

In preparation for analyzing sources, a well-developed chronological system for organizing participant responses is critical in case study research. Classifying data is vital

to evaluating and analyzing interviews (Mandrinios & Mahdi, 2016). According to Gaya and Smith (2016), accurate and systematic plans for organizing data improve the study in qualitative research (Gaya & Smith, 2016). Using identification codes protects confidentiality (Mandrinios & Mahdi, 2016). Throughout the interviews, I used an audio recorder to collect information and organize the interviews for this study.

A significant part of data organization in this study was the development of individual folders for each participant. Copies of all transcribed interviews securely documented and kept in the main folder entitled: Leadership Strategies Data. The use of a journal for relevant details organized individual responses, and phone conversations before the initial interview. Upon receipt of approval by Walden IRB, the process of recording experiences began. Additionally, storing and organizing all computer-generated information on a password protected home computer with encrypted and backup capabilities ensured security. Following the interviews, all documents, analysis, and transcripts are kept for 5 years and then discarded. Printed documents consisted of handwritten notes, interview questions, and transcriptions. As recommended by Gaya and Smith (2016), Marshall and Rossman (2016), and Rodham et al. (2015), by using a methodical approach to organize, track, and label, login dates of consent forms, written communications, scheduled interviews, locations, and other pertinent information as received aid in documenting accuracy and security.

Using individual codes ensured the accuracy of themes and patterns, and thereby reduced misrepresentation in organizing the data collection process (Feldman et al., 2016; Ulsperger et al., 2015). Each participant received a designated code for recordkeeping

purposes. The selected codes appeared as Case 1, Case 2, and Case 3. Transcribing participant's responses occurred within two weeks of the interview and organized into the appropriate file. As required by Walden University, all notes, recordings, and documents stored securely for 5 years in a locked cabinet in a central repository, my home. Data organization and a thoughtful security protocol protect each participant's identity.

### **Data Analysis**

This study included methodological triangulation as the primary data analysis process to triangulate interview responses from the participants and their organizational documents. According to Othman and Rahman (2014), methodological triangulation may include interviews, reports, and field notes providing evidence on a single topic. To incorporate different dimensions of the same phenomenon, Havenga, Poggenpoel, and Myburgh (2014), Osarenkhoe and Byarugaba (2016), and Yin (2014) reported that methodological triangulation involves using semistructured interviews and documents.

The logical analysis process for this study included preparing and organizing data, reducing data to themes, and presenting the final data. Data collected included face-to-face semistructured interviews, an annual implementation plan, volunteer handbooks, and other documents provided by nonprofit executive leaders. Yin (2014) noted that data analysis involves collecting and triangulating data to identify key themes relevant to the study. In qualitative research, data analysis requires triangulating multiple sources to achieve an accurate representation of each participant's experiences (Carter et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). If participants confirmed the accuracy of the interpretation, and no new themes emerged, then data saturation occurred. The purpose of implementing this data



analysis was to categorize themes and answer the research question: What leadership strategies do nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention?

The methodological triangulations involved identifying relevant themes by listening to the voice recordings then manually transcribing the content into a Microsoft Word document. Using a NVivo software instrument aided in analyzing and synthesizing pertinent data (Rush, 2014). For this analysis, importing the interview responses and documents received from the organization into the NVivo software program assist in recognizing related themes. Houghton et al. (2017) noted that qualitative researchers might use software programs for screening, extracting, coding, and managing each stage of the data analysis process.

Focusing on key themes entailed identifying and correlating keywords recognized in the literature. Rush (2014) used NVivo software to tag and code common trends. Additionally, St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) suggested using a computer-assisted data analysis system such as NVivo software for exploring themes. In compliance with the recommendations of St. Pierre and Jackson (2014), Houghton et al. (2017), and Rush (2014), I used the NVivo software to identify, code all themes, concepts, and ideas that consistently flowed throughout the literature. Following the identification of emerging themes, a process of correlating the themes with the literature and conceptual framework occurred in preparation for presenting the findings and identifying common themes to help answer the research question for improving volunteer retention.

## **Reliability and Validity**

### **Reliability**

Ensuring reliability of quantitative and qualitative research are immeasurably different concepts. Reliability focuses mainly on whether the study is replicable, and that researcher has not misrepresented the data (Anney, 2014). Quantitative researchers apply statistical methods for establishing the reliability of findings, while qualitative researchers aim to provide readers with narratives and methodological strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Reliability in qualitative study symbolizes the degree of gathering consistency from dependable participants, whereas quantitative researcher uses analytical procedures that may influence the findings (Cope, 2014).

Dependability refers to an evaluation of the quality of the data collection and analysis processes to ensure consistent findings (Cope, 2014). Qualitative research encompasses dependability, credibility, transferability, and conformability. According to Cope (2014), these criteria lack the ability to quantify and require that qualitative researchers use transcription review to increase dependability. Singh (2014) asserted that dependability relates to trustworthiness as it establishes consistency and reliability of the interpreted results. Harvey (2015), Rodham et al. (2015) and Thomas (2016) contended that member checking allows participants to examine data for accuracy of the interpretations and approve for the use quotes. Castillo-Montoya (2016), Neuert and Lenzner (2016) recommended that using a well-developed member checking process eliminates probing questions and improve reliability and validity. Another method to

enhance dependability is to follow a well-organized interview protocol (Appendix A). Following the final interview, each executive leader participated in member checking to confirm exactness of the interview recordings and their interpretation of the results. Therefore, to enhance dependability and ensure the accuracy of the study, I used member checking.

### **Validity**

The validity of qualitative research means the actual representation of a phenomenon is reliable (Khan, 2014). To establish validity in a qualitative study, most researchers incorporate strategies to enhance credibility, transferability and, confirmability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). In qualitative research, frequently used strategies recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2016), Koch et al. (2014), and Barnham,( 2015) involve triangulating different data sources and examining evidence to increase the validity of the study. Another recognizable strategy used by qualitative researchers to increase validity involve member checking which refers to sharing the final data analyses with participants to generate feedback on the interpreted report (Koch et al., 2014). An additional strategy to increase validity requires researchers to use rich and detailed descriptions of the themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As recommended by Barnham, Koch et al., and Marshall and Rossman, following a member checking strategy ensures credibility, transferability, and conformability for a valid study.

Credibility involves establishing trustworthiness, believability, and the actual meaning of the collected data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Building credibility involves

researchers conducting various inquiries and comparing data gleaned from multiple sources to formulate findings (Gaya & Smith, 2016; Patton, 2015). In the study, using member checking enhanced the validity of the findings by conducting follow-up interviews until no new information or themes emerge and no significant information is missing. As participants act as an active contributor, qualitative researchers determine if the richness of the data gathered reflects the phenomena studied (Patton, 2015).

Triangulation of sources refers to a technique for establishing credibility. Triangulation involves the cross-checking of information from multiple perspectives to ensure that a response is rich and comprehensive (Patton, 2015). Further, triangulation enhances the credibility of the study by combining and comparing multiple sources to obtain emerging themes (Patton, 2015). Following the expert advice of Patton (2015), Harvey (2015), and Marshall and Rossman (2016), to ensure credibility I used a methodological triangulation approach in the study by conducting semistructured interviews, analyzing organizational documents, and implementing member checking as an added means to augment the results. Further, examining and comparing sources until no new information emerges advanced the validity of this study.

Transferability in qualitative research ensures that researchers can transfer the findings to additional settings (Kornbluh, 2015). In qualitative studies, researchers are the primary data collecting instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Qualitative researchers must provide sufficient data to establish transferability to another similar situation or framework hence maintaining the steady meaning of the study (Cope, 2014). Strategies to ensure transferability begin with researchers providing rich descriptions and a data

collection process to demonstrate and permit transferability (Koch et al., 2014).

Following expert recommendations of Cope (2014), Koch et al. (2014), and Kornbluh, (2015), by using the data collection procedure, selection of participants, research method and design, data analysis process and the participant's rich descriptions enhance transferability of the research.

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to maintaining neutrality between participants to capture data truthfulness (Havenga et al., 2014). For this study, follow-up member checking served as the technique to address confirmability. During the member checking process, participants reviewed a copy of the researcher's interpretation to ensure their experiences reflected the research topic. Havenga et al. (2014) asserted that researchers must confirm research data to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations. By using member checking, participants accurately reviewed, confirmed, and provided additional information regarding the researcher's interpretation (Carter et al., 2014). Koch et al. (2014) argued to enhance confirmability is to follow a well-developed interview protocol that may discourage researcher bias in collecting data and aid in reflecting the participant's views. A variety of strategies ensure confirmability. Similarly, Carter et al. (2014) and Marshall and Rossman (2016) affirmed that member checking aid in increasing the validity of the research.

Data saturation enhances the reliability and validity of qualitative research (Gentles et al., 2015). Data saturation remains vital in qualitative research because case studies may limit the number of participants engaged in the study that could dictate the reliability and validity of the study without contributing to saturation. In qualitative

research, data saturation occurs when no new information contributes to the study or a point of redundancy happens (Malterud et al., 2016). Gentles et al. (2015) recommended that in case studies a reasonable number of participants should range up to ten and may add to saturation. For the study, I collected data from an experienced group of nonprofit executive leaders that met the study criteria and ensure that data saturation occurred by performing member checking until no new information emerged.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I restated the purpose of the intended qualitative case study research that was to explore strategies successful leaders use to improve retention of volunteers. A detailed discussion of the role of the researcher, a systematic review of the criteria for recruiting and selecting participants, eligibility of participants, and the population sampling size outlined in this section to ensure scholarship. Further in section 2, a description of the data collection instrument, the process of organizing data, and the technique for collecting data was presented. Additionally in section 2, I concluded with describing the method to uphold reliability, validity, transferability, credibility and how each impact data collection.

Section 3, begins with an overview of the research findings, a description of the results, and a summary presentation based on using a qualitative method and multiple case study design. Further, section 3 includes a discussion of the application for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for further research and a conclusion with professional reflections.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies nonprofit executive leaders used to improve volunteer retention. The data came from conducting three interviews with nonprofit leaders located in southeastern Michigan. The study participants included those employed full time with leadership responsibilities and implementation of successful strategies to improve volunteer retention. Through the interviews, a plethora of data emerged as each participant shared his or her perspective on strategies that worked to retain volunteers. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) collaborative relationships improved volunteer retention, (b) team motivation improved volunteer retention, and (c) communication improved volunteer retention. The participants viewed retention strategies as best practices designed to strengthen the ability of nonprofit organizations to attract a quality volunteer workforce.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question of this study was: What leadership strategies do nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention? The primary source of data collection was in-depth semistructured interviews with three nonprofit leaders from three nonprofit organizations in southeastern Michigan. The interview findings included comparing organizational documents such as an annual implementation plan, volunteer handbook and committee notes found at the nonprofit organizations to gain an understanding of the retention strategies used by leaders. Following the interviews, I used

alphanumeric codes C1, C2, and C3 to identify participants and to safeguard the confidentiality of each participant. The data analysis resulted in the identification of three major themes: (a) collaborative relationships improved volunteer retention, (b) team motivation improved volunteer retention, and (c) strategic communication improved volunteer retention. Evidence from the literature review coincided with the themes that emerged from the data collection. Below is a discussion of the findings that relate to the emerging strategies and conceptual framework of transformational leadership.

### **Theme 1: Collaborative Relationships Improved Volunteer Retention**

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was the importance of collaborative relationship improved volunteer retention. All participants in this study confirmed that collaborative relationships in retaining volunteers were a critical component when launching successful retention strategies to increase satisfaction and reduce volunteer turnover. All participants defined aspects of leadership as being successful and collaborative. However, strategies for how leaders develop relationships with their volunteers differ; each expressed the benefits of building relationships to ensure that each volunteer felt valued. According to Bang (2015), an interactive connection is determined by the number of exchanges in building relationships between leaders and followers that focuses on people as the first premise for successful change.

Strategies presented during the interviews and how leaders handle relationships with volunteers differed with each nonprofit organization. However, all participants in this study confirmed that relationships with volunteers increased job satisfaction and eliminated the intent to leave. An analysis of the findings indicated that collaborative



relationships helped improve a volunteer's attitude about their work assignment, leaders and work associates. C1, C2, and C3 discussed ideas they used to build relationships and increase commitment. C1 asserted, "The best way to build relationships is to make certain that each volunteer understands that the organization is committed to their success." C3 explained that in their organization, staff members make every effort to know each volunteer and develop a trusting relationship with them, which contributed to their intention to stay in the nonprofit. C1 experienced that trust is a result of building personal relationships with volunteers from the top downward. All participants described how their values made a difference with peers, implying that tension lessens in organizations when the leader is a definite motivator and deviates from the norm.

These viewpoints aligned with the literature from Burns (1978), who found that relationships between leaders-followers impact job satisfaction and efficiently achieve goals, and decreases volunteer loss. Bass and Avolio (1990) extended Burns's transformational leadership theory and affirmed that idealized influence and individual consideration concepts of the transformational leadership theory have a direct connection with relationships that affect volunteer work and attitudes about staying involved. Bass and Avolio contended that transformational leaders use relationship building to inspire and motivate volunteers to go beyond their capabilities. Additionally, leaders use collaborative relationships to recognize a volunteer's potential and commitment, thereby, assisting others to achieve the organization's goals (Valeau, Willems, & Parak, 2016).

The findings from Theme 1 revealed that promoting collaborative relationships between leaders and volunteers was an effective strategy for improving volunteer

retention. Collaboration between volunteer and staff is central to an organization's sustainability (Valeau et al., 2016). C3 stated, "When leaders take time to welcome new volunteers it shows a level of respect infused from the top down." Additionally, C1 mentioned that staff might have concerns when working with volunteers, and volunteers might resist taking instructions from employees. However, C3 further emphasized that when volunteers understand that the organization is interested in their success, volunteers will value and therefore, act consistent with the organization's culture and are reluctant to leave. Quality interaction, knowledge about volunteering, and the requirements to volunteer promotes job satisfaction and the intention to stay (Nencini et al., 2016). As a leader of several volunteer sites, C3 stated, "It is important that actions of both volunteers and employees reinforce relationship building." C1 agreed, stating, "Encouraging a positive organizational culture promotes positive volunteering."

Supporting volunteers involves providing the necessary resources to become successful in their voluntary work. Aligned with the research of Kolar et al. (2016), C1 shared that collaborative leader-follower relationship in nonprofit organizations involve giving volunteers the resources they need and policies that will value a volunteer's accomplishments. C3 agreed that providing volunteers with the necessary education, training, job descriptions, and mentoring to complete their assignments assist in retaining volunteers. Moreover, C1, C2, and C3 aligned with the individualized consideration construct of Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory in that a leader who demonstrates consideration in the workplace create environments that support a volunteer's commitment to the organization's sustainability.

The findings of this study illustrated that collaborative relationships that improved retention were similar to the research completed by Bartram, Cavanagh, and Hoye, (2017) who emphasized that individualized consideration involves relationships that leaders develop because they focus their attention on the follower to assist them in fulfilling their volunteer capabilities. Bass and Avolio (1990) asserted that individualized consideration occurs when leaders recognize and support the needs of followers in accomplishing their goals. Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory supports the findings of this study that using an individualized consideration construct improves the collaborative relationship and creates an organizational culture that promotes and encourages best practices for retaining volunteers. Additionally, in alignment with Burns's description of a transformational leader, all participants agreed that nonprofit leaders who collaborate with followers and engage in a behavior that motivates the follower would see a consistent commitment and dedication to relationship building within the organization.

Each participant recognized that developing relationships is the foundation of their organization. C2 noted that leaders should ask volunteers for their input about how a volunteer program might improve relationships. Further, C2 stated, "If we listen to their ideas and possibly implant some of their ideas, they will probably stay longer." C1 shared that volunteers have passion, and the mission is to build relationships first and then design what their role will be in the organization." Additionally, C2 offered that using positive and affirmative statements were more effective strategies than money for

retaining volunteers. Additionally, C1 stated, “The more volunteer engagement, the more likely they are satisfied with their experiences and continue volunteering.”

Moreover, the findings of this study confirmed that collaborative relationships improved retention aligns with the research of Harp, Scherer, and Allen (2017), because engaging volunteers in open communication enhanced understanding of role responsibilities, maintained trust, and developed a long-term commitment to the organizations. C3 shared that openness and trust from the leader helped our volunteers feel comfortable about relationships in the organization and their willingness to share with people outside the organization. Maintaining relationships improved volunteer retention remained consistent with Mumford and Hemlin’s (2017) study that a leader’s behavior directly relates to a volunteer’s performance. When a leader’s response is inclusive, volunteers feel respected and ultimately make a difference in the organization (Senses-Ozyurt & Villicana-Reyna, 2016).

An analysis of the findings from Theme 1 indicated that a collaborative relationship between volunteers and leaders improved volunteer retention and satisfaction. For example, C3 explained that activities give volunteers an opportunity to interact with others and creates a sense of belonging. Results of the study indicated that maintaining a collaborative relationship at all staffing levels in all the organizations was significant in retaining volunteers and increasing work satisfaction among volunteers. Additionally, C3 stated, “Staff responsibility is to create a work environment that keep a volunteer engaged and willing to stay because most volunteers would like a long-term commitment.” In alignment with Rahbi, Khalid, and Khan (2017), C2 and C3’s stated

that, “Providing adequate leadership to volunteers will lead to an increase in satisfaction.” C1, C2, and C3’s comments align with Zbierowski’s (2016) statement regarding building positive relationships with volunteers because a well-developed collaborative work environment promotes volunteer retention.

The findings from the organization’s implementation plans, strategic plans, and volunteer committee notes confirmed that relationships among leaders and volunteers are a valuable connection for the organization. The documentation from C3 provided an overview of their volunteer implementation plan. The implementation plan outlined successful strategies such as information and an assistance system to answer questions that volunteers may have and identify team partners for each volunteer to help in achieving their personal goals. These strategies align with Burns’s (1978) transformational theory: leaders using the characteristics of the individualized consideration construct show concern, attention, and thoughtfulness to guide volunteers toward productivity in the organization. In alignment with Burns’s transformational leadership theory, Kang (2016) concluded that the individualized consideration principle emphasized leadership characteristics such as paying close attention to volunteer needs, coaching, and assisting volunteers in becoming fully actualized.

All participants maintained that a collaborative relationship increased volunteer commitment and added to an improved volunteer retention program. All participants summarized that volunteers typically respond to support. Additionally, C1’s comments aligned with Bartram et al. (2017), that a collaborative relationship between leaders and volunteers bring value to the organization. Summaries from the participants align with

the findings presented by York (2017), who concluded that net benefits exist for organizations, as a leader's behavior and practices positively affect volunteer relationships, trust, and overall organizational commitment. This study results indicated when leaders support volunteers, the result is improved volunteer retention.

### **Theme 2: Team Motivation Improved Volunteer Retention**

The second theme related to exploring strategies to improve volunteer retention was team motivation. According to Chin (2015), team motivation involved enhancing the performance of team members by encouraging participation in decision-making strategies to retain volunteers. An effective team strategy increase team pride and encourage collaboration (Hill & Bartal, 2016). All participants in this study confirmed that team motivation is an opportunity for a volunteer to receive training, education, and support. Additionally, all participants agreed that group leaders and facilitators aid teams to retain volunteers and improved the quality of the organization's programs. The participant's responses to interview questions identified specific strategies how leaders develop teams and motivate volunteers to maintain their commitment to the nonprofit organization.

C3 mentioned that encouragement from leaders and other employees improved the ability of volunteers to work within teams, stating, "Encouragement enhanced our volunteer team's spirit." I identified consistent messages from participants who used motivate and engagement to retain volunteers in teams. C2's comments aligned with Burns's (1978) transformational leadership principles of idealized influence and inspirational motivation because leaders that encourage team involvement overall influence volunteer performance and increased the levels of commitment. For example,

C1, C2, and C3 indicated that team unity and positive working relationships promote a volunteer's long-standing obligation. Both C1 and C2 mentioned that when nurturing teams, the directive should come from the executive director to all who work in partnership with the organization. C3 provided strategies that site leaders use to cultivate team activities in their organization such as providing all volunteers with access to online training to develop current skills and receive certification for new skills. Additionally, C3 stated, "Talented and qualified people want to work for people who care about their well-being and will do what it takes to motivate them," and, "In my organization, the site leader is responsible for all volunteer training," and, "The leader is responsible for making sure there are workable relationships that exist for building quality programs at each volunteer site." Additionally, C2 stated, "Trustworthiness is another essential component in navigating teams." Both C2 and C3 mentioned that leaders retain volunteers by making sure that all employees understand why volunteers support the organization and are willing to make a long-term commitment. Additionally, C2 mentioned, "We celebrate milestones for our volunteers and teams, in turn further motivates all those involved in the operation of the organization. C3 remarked that effective teams move volunteers toward growth and development. C3 also stated, "In our organization, we eliminated volunteer turnover, which stopped staff rotation that, caused inconsistency in the training, time, and cost."

All participants' responses aligned with Burns's (1978) transformational leadership principle of inspirational motivation. Leaders should demonstrate how to inspire followers, ensure constant motivation, enhance group dynamics that may occur in

the organization to retain volunteers (Burns, 1978). In regards to team motivation, all participants' remarks aligned with the research completed by Kolar et al. (2016), that motivating volunteers required leaders and paid workers to understand why individuals stay. Retaining volunteers involves influence and encouragement that can help in recruiting other volunteers to commit their service beyond expectation.

The findings of this study indicated that leaders and team motivation improved volunteer retention. When leaders promote volunteer engagement, a volunteer's responsibilities enhance the team, and volunteers are more likely to continue in their capacity. Additionally, this study's findings for Theme 2 aligned with the literature research of Zbierowski (2016) that team motivation improved retention and stimulated a followers' commitment to the team hence working in collaboration with other employees to achieve the organization's goals. All participants noted as part of the findings for Theme 2 that teams have a direct impact on the organization and the ability to help improve the quality of ongoing services. All participants' responses confirmed that effective partnership between volunteers and employees take resourcefulness in developing.

All participants' responses aligned with Yahaya and Ebrahim's (2015) study that a leader's influence on followers impacts the effectiveness of teams since an individual's commitment to the organization results in volunteer retention. Additionally, all participants' responses aligned with the findings of Valeau et al. (2016) who claimed that volunteers want commendations for their work, as well as belonging to a team because high performing teams promote a sense of intention and purpose within the organization.



All participants' responses were consistent with Burns's (1978) discussion of idealized influence and inspirational motivation in that transformational leaders motivate and inspire teams and that a leader should serve as role models for both employees and volunteers. The findings that team motivation improved volunteer retention align with research completed by Ruch, Gander, Platt, and Hofmann (2018) and York (2017) who found encouraging team participation improved retention, job satisfaction, and increased the probability that a work environment will continue to form teams to benefit all volunteers. Overall, team leader should demonstrate needed skills, clear directives, and have command of who influences the teams and how the organization will benefit from volunteer retention.

The analysis of the findings of Theme 2 indicated that employees, leaders, and volunteer teams are the foundation for successful nonprofit organizations. Kang (2016) cited encouraging teamwork as a necessity to facilitate volunteer retention and establish a mutually agreeable identification of a volunteer fostered continuous involvement. All participants supported the concept that using teams to motivate and inspire improved volunteer retention when planned appropriately. Furthermore, all participants' responses aligned with research completed by Manetti, Bellucci, Como, and Bagnoli (2015) who emphasized that nonprofit organizations rely heavily on volunteers for key human resource tasks. Overall, the need for precise training and development will increase the organization's return on investment (ROI) and reduce labor cost. The participants' (C1, C2, and C3) viewpoints aligned with the research of Senses-Ozyurt and Villicana-Reyna (2016) that teamwork produces job satisfaction, motivation, and work satisfaction

because long-term voluntary retention contributed to the efficiency of the organization. The fundamental tenets of the transformational leadership theory are that leaders will create a team-oriented environment to ensure followers are successfully trained to achieve their goals (Bass & Avolio, 1990).

A review of all the organization's implementation plans, strategic plans, and volunteer committee notes revealed written practices leaders used to improve volunteer retention. Based on the analysis of participants' perceptions on leader's strategies to improve volunteer retention and a review of documents from the nonprofit organization, the findings of encouraging teamwork aligned with Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory. Burns found that leaders can use the construct of idealized influence to serve as role models and inspirational motivation as a stimulus to promote teamwork in volunteers. Confirmation from the organization's documents regarding the importance of volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations aligned with the theme of team motivation. Conclusions derived from the participant's (C1, C2, and C3) comments revealed that volunteers are a valuable human resource for nonprofit organizations and without effective teamwork strategies; volunteers are difficult to retain long term. Overall, all participants indicated when leaders invest in motivating the team, retention levels of volunteers improve. Bass and Avolio (1990) extended Burns's transformational leadership theory and concluded that a leader's influence increased productivity through the effectiveness of motivation and teamwork.

### **Theme 3: Strategic Communication Improved Volunteer Retention**

The strategic communication strategy to improve volunteer retention was the third theme that emerged from the review of the organization's document and the participant's responses. All participants pointed out the importance of using communications to build confidence among their volunteers. Meng (2015) cited that leaders should articulate and communicate ideas clearly and set directions for the team and organization. In the previous theme, team motivation served as a strategy to deliver interaction between leaders and volunteers. In the third theme, the participants described how strategic communication encourages volunteers to retain their services. By engaging in ongoing conversations, all participants agreed strategic communication would prevent volunteers from leaving before achieving their personal goals. All participants' responses provided information to all questions.

In this study, all participants agreed that strategic communication to retain volunteer is critical to sustaining their organizations. For example, C3 noted in their organization each volunteer site has team leaders who function as a trainer and facilitator to ensure that information about the organizations forwarded to the volunteers. C2 stated, "As far as volunteer retention, I think all leaders should use a variety of communication tools such as regular meetings, display boards, and emails to pass along valuable information about the organization." C1 suggested one strategy to reach clients, volunteers, board members, and stakeholders are to involve each in the communications process. Additionally, C2 mentioned keeping the lines of communication open. C3 declared that their communications department use social media as a strategy to retain the

relationship with volunteers and assist in sharing information about volunteer opportunities. “Vital information, such as town hall meetings, forums, and workshops regarding volunteering is why our organization is successful in recruiting and retaining volunteers,” stated C2. Information from C1 indicated constant communications with board members, donors, clients, or volunteers work well in our organization to address evolving concerns as part of development and growth. Regarding communications, C3 shared when working with volunteers and using strategically targeted communication methods such as team meetings to build relationships assisted in retaining volunteers because all volunteers want to complete their assignments. C2 asserted, failing to communicate or to disseminate information leads to uncertainty among the volunteers, which could contribute to volunteer leaving the organization. C1 stated, “Leaders should change the way communication takes place in their organization because volunteers heavily support nonprofit organization programs.”

C3 shared their organizations have a communications plan for potential crises because it lessens the occurrence of repercussions and helps the leader manage crisis situations with volunteers. Regarding best practices, C1 shared one of the best ways to communicate with volunteers is to involve them in how the communication process can benefit volunteers. C1 further articulated a critical leadership strategy in the organization should address communication concerns related to retaining qualified volunteers because feedback to volunteers is an essential definitive for measuring performance. A volunteer should feel they can come with ideas and questions without imposed judgment.

All participants agreed that volunteers want constant feedback in a meaningful and uncomplicated manner. For example, C3 shared results from surveys conducted in their organization which outlined positive feedback received from employees and volunteers who indicated that engaging in open dialogue improved retention considerably. C3 also commented, “Our strategic plan detailed methods for recruiting, retaining, and training individuals to increase the workforce and assist in sustaining the organization’s client and funding resources.” C1 shared practices used in one-on-one communications with volunteers away from spreadsheets and printouts was significant because spending time discussing work-related concerns in a personal manner increased the volunteers’ comfort levels. C2 similarly described using mentoring as a means to support communications because at times volunteers are “very uncomfortable” when communicating personal or business issues with supervisors, managers, and the organization’s CEO individually. C1 stated, “Nonprofit organizations are value-driven and rooted in meeting the needs of the community.” In addition, C1 stated, “However, it is time that we look at technology as a means of communicating with volunteers more so than face-to-face.” Nonprofit leaders can use the results of this study regarding Theme 3 to implement strategic communications strategies to retain volunteers.

The findings of this case study for Theme 3 revealed that leaders valued the commitment of volunteers and the priority of keeping them even at the cost of more development investments. Evidence from literature reviews confirmed leader’s responses regarding strategic communication is a critical element that helps both managers and volunteers succeed. All participants’ responses aligned with Burns’s (1978)

transformational leadership concept of individual consideration that leaders should pay close attention to volunteers by using strategic communication because informal interaction allowed leaders to encourage and engage a volunteer's long-term commitment. Bass and Avolio (1990) suggested that leaders could use the constructs of the transformational leadership theory to promote communication and create an organizational culture to support volunteer engagement.

All participant's responses for Theme 3 aligned with literature by Gilstrap, Gilstrap, Holderby, and Valera (2016) that leaders should communicate carefully with volunteers, as to do so, broadens the understanding of why an individual dedicate time within an organization. In addition, using a communication protocol will further the exchange of information resulting in improved retention (Gilstrap et al., 2016). Additionally, all participants aligned with research conducted by Abeza and O'Reilly (2014) cited that two-way communications where two parties talk, listen, learn, reduce tension, maintain long-standing relationships, and create steps to retain volunteers. All participants' responses aligned with the findings completed by Gazzola, Ratti and Amelio (2017) in that communications give stakeholders useful information on the organization's quality performance to improve existing knowledge and make decisions about the organization's future. Additionally, each participant agreed that the role of strategic communications played a significant part in volunteer development activities as researched by Cho and Auger (2017). The use of multiple communications strategies not only engage volunteers but also, explores consistent messages to the community on social issues and how volunteer involvement ensures the sustainability of programs and

services. Also, all participants agreed that the leader-volunteer communication in the workplace was positive, respectful, and that most site managers allowed volunteers to be themselves. All participants' responses aligned with the tenet of the transformational leadership theory - individual consideration.

Documents reviewed in this study were organization specific regarding the language used to communicate information to both volunteers and other employees. Strategic planning documents received from C2 indicated that strategic communications supported inclusion without discriminating volunteer specific language during development activities. C3's volunteer communication documents were specific to their target population. The organization wanted to address openly and fairly volunteer concerns and not underemphasize communicating with other volunteers in the community. Data analyzed in this study led to identifying the need for leaders to communicate with volunteers strategically and thoughtfully.

Analysis of the findings in this study for Theme 3 indicated that leaders should possess attributes to influence, inspire, and motivate volunteers. Nonprofit leaders need to foster volunteer activities hence engaging in communications and consistent relationship cultivation. This analysis is compatible with Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory that leaders must acquire skills necessary for communicating effectively with volunteers in their organization. Extending the transformational theory, Bass and Avolio (1990) suggested that leaders could use the individualized consideration construct to communicate with followers to create a culture that would endorse team members and improve volunteer retention in the organization.

Additionally, the analysis of Theme 3 for this study confirmed that participant's organizational documents such as the implementation and annual assessment reports revealed that strategic communication improved volunteer retention. The significant findings of the study for Theme 3 presented by the participants was that investing in volunteering activities led to a positive impact on social relationships, skills, and overall satisfaction. Within the communication themes, each participant's responses broaden the understanding as to how leaders communicate in ways to encourage and create interaction between volunteers such as conducting monthly team meetings. Further, the analysis indicated that nonprofit leaders recommended increasing awareness, maximizing way to communicate with volunteers, and leveraging feedback improved the retention of volunteers. Additionally, participants recommended that leaders should invest in developing communication strategies, in doing, will significantly improve volunteer retention. Evidence from the literature review indicated that all participants' responses for Theme 3 aligned with the transformational leadership principle of inspirational motivation that leaders should demonstrate how to inspire followers given that ensuring constant motivation enhances group dynamics that occurs in the organization to retain volunteers.

### **Findings Related to Conceptual Framework**

Transformational leadership was the conceptual framework for the study. The theory involved leadership grounded in utilizing idealized influence, individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration to achieve common goals (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Burns, 1978). The leader-



follower relationship outlined by Burns (1978) was the primary aspect explored in this study. The strategy themes outlined in the study revealed a tie to the conceptual framework: (a) collaborative relationships improved volunteer retention, (b) team motivation improved volunteer retention, and (c) strategic communication improved volunteer retention aligned with Burns's transformational leadership theory. The findings aligned with the strategies leaders used to oversee volunteer retention with levels of expectation for establishing meaningful relationships, commitment to a common understanding with volunteers, and recognizing the importance of their work in achieving the organization's goal to produce quality work.

The findings from Theme 1 that collaborative relationships improved volunteer retention aligned with research finding of Rahbi et al. (2017) that by providing adequate leadership and volunteer's satisfaction, job performance would increase. The idealized influence principle outlined in the literature presented by Burns (1978) and extended by Bass and Avolio (1990) concluded leader's behaviors induce appreciation and high esteem from the followers. These behaviors involved building trust with volunteers and developing strong relationships. According to Bass and Avolio, transformational leaders used relationships to inspire and motivate followers to achieve common goals. If the expectations positively meet the purpose of the organization, volunteers in the organization should be satisfied and committed long-term. Building collaborative relationships and collaborative work environments promote volunteer retention (Zbierowski, 2016). In alignment with Burns's theory, the study results indicated that

when leaders invest in collaborative relationships, the results enhanced trust and long-term volunteer commitments.

Findings from this study regarding the importance of volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations aligned with Theme 2 team motivation improved volunteer retention. In alignment with Burns's (1978) description of individual consideration, Bass and Avolio (1990) extended Burns's transformational leadership theory and concluded that a leaders' influence increased productivity through the effectiveness of motivation and teamwork. Additionally, Burns's transformational leadership principle of individualized consideration focused on a leader's characteristic of paying attention to a follower's needs through mentoring and coaching to assist followers in identifiable goals within a team environment. If leaders do not commit to team motivation, a feeling of doubt begins to disrupt the relationship. Team motivation improved volunteer retention aligned with research completed by Ruch et al. (2018) that team participation increased the productivity of work environment and the continuation of team engagement. The study results indicated that when leaders support teams, it produce volunteer retention.

The findings of Theme 3, strategic communication, aligned with Burns's transformational leadership theory. Evidence from the literature review confirmed that a leader's response to strategic communication is critical and help volunteers succeed (Cho & Auger, 2017; Prentice & Brudney, 2018; Raina & Roebuck, 2016). In alignment with Burns's (1978) transformational leadership concepts of intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation, leaders should use these principles to pay close attention to volunteers and use strategic communications as a means to interactions and encourage a

volunteer's long-term commitment. Bass and Avolio (1990) suggested that leaders could use the constructs of the transformational leadership theory to enhance communication and create an organizational culture that supports volunteer engagement. The findings of this study corroborated that leaders valued the commitment of volunteers and the priority of keeping them even at the expense of developing additional training opportunities. Additionally, the components, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, included description of the development of a strong organizational culture that provided volunteers with work-related experiences that challenges them emotionally (Bass & Avolio, 1990). The study results of Theme 3 indicated that when a leader commits to engaging in ethical activities, the transformational leadership behaviors could affect the emotions and performances of the volunteer.

Significant benefits exist for nonprofit organizations when a leader's best practices positively affect volunteer relationships, trust, and overall organizational commitment (York, 2017). If leaders do not commit to volunteer retention, a feeling of doubt begins to disrupt the relationship. When leaders promote volunteer engagement, a volunteer's responsibilities enhance the team, and volunteers are more likely to continue in their capacity (McBey, Karakowsky, & Ng, 2017). All participants supported providing training and development opportunities to volunteers. Therefore, investing in the future of volunteers improve retention.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Volunteer retention remains costly for many nonprofit organizations. The findings of this study are significant to professional business practice for nonprofit leaders who

face challenges of volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. The purpose of the study was to explore strategies leaders used to improve volunteer retention. The strategies emphasized in this study might assist nonprofit leaders with volunteer actions to implement a broader range of service to retain volunteers. The results might help nonprofit executive leaders formulate a reflective analysis of their current strategies and determine how effective they are in improving volunteer retention. Failure to create a working environment that fosters retention results in an increased cost of recruiting and management of volunteers (Kolar et al., 2016).

The participants in this study shared their perspectives on the importance of having volunteers in their organizations and engagement strategies that improved volunteer retention. The findings of this study apply to business practices of nonprofit executive leaders who wish to develop a work environment that encourages volunteers to strive and complete their volunteer experience. The review of the literature revealed helpful themes in the exploration of retention strategies. Of the various approaches explored about the meaning of volunteer retention, the most agreed strategies that emerged from the data analysis included relationships, motivation and teamwork, and communications.

The nonprofit leaders in this study indicated that building relationships to improve retention is overall essential to organizational performance. The findings supported the importance of volunteers working in a creative environment may contribute to long-term mutual agreements and preservation. Leaders can explore strategies related to building relationships and improve volunteer retention and reduce turnover intended for continued

investment in program and services (Senses-Ozyurt & Villicana-Reyna, 2016). Many nonprofit organizations rely on volunteer services. As volunteers become increasingly satisfied with their work assignment, they grow progressively trusting in the leadership directions of the organization. Many volunteers seek meaningful opportunities that are satisfying and unique to their needs (Kang, 2016). Therefore, nonprofit leaders could use relationship building to support volunteers by implementing strategies that could lead to long-term involvement and retention. The results confirmed that investing in volunteer retention strategies leads to a positive impact on the organization's leaders, performance measurement, and other employees.

Applicable to nonprofit practice, the participants in this study suggested that teamwork improved retention; as connected volunteers feel involved, loyal, and will exhibit those feelings in the workplace. Al-Mehrzi and Singh (2016) urged leaders to institute formal standards that motivate and encourage teamwork because of the ability to enhance a worker's performance, increase job satisfaction, and ultimately lead the organization towards a wide-range of achievable goals. Instituting formal standards for retaining volunteers would provide a comprehensive support and maintain communication between volunteer and leadership because ultimately, the team activities increase volunteer engagement. Managers of teams may influence a volunteer's desire to stay longer, which in turn will bring value and purpose to the organization. The findings of this study suggested that a successful team environment and continuous encouragement of teamwork improved retention that centered on trust. Teamwork and motivation significantly influence volunteer involvement. Therefore, leaders executing

teamwork and motivation could use the results of this study to develop strategies to implement teams, engage volunteers in extra-role activities, and improve volunteer retention.

In managing volunteer retention, the participants suggested that communication of information be easily accessible and transparent. The findings apply to business practice because of the importance of leaders producing accurate information that outline achievements, services, and opportunities and readily available to the public by posting on websites. The study also validates the application of Kang's (2016) engagement in supportive communication can only be attained through encouraging and persuasive thoughts to improve a volunteer's commitment. In this study, participants (C1, C2, and C3) suggested that communication documents should give stakeholders an overview of the organization's performance and provide useful information about the organization's activities. According to Gazzola et al. (2017), it is necessary to provide volunteers with information about the organization's ethical obligation to stakeholders, the mission, activities, accomplishments, and organizational structure. Executing these actions may increase competitive advantages with other nonprofit organizations. The results of the study indicated that communication between leaders and volunteers was the common factor expressed by participants for the retention of volunteers.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The results of this study might contribute to positive social change by providing nonprofit leaders with strategies to improve volunteer retention. Nonprofit executive leaders may value the importance of appropriate strategies to promote organizational

growth, increase services to the community, and improve volunteer experiences. An organization with significant retention data can further enhance the organization's growth by creating more volunteer engagement opportunities within the nonprofit organization (Kang, 2016). By doing so, leaders recognize that volunteers are beneficial to the organization's performance. Leaders could use this insightful information to approach preparing volunteers with specific strategies as building relationships, cultivating teamwork, and useful communications planning to retain a work environment that enhances quality programs and services throughout the organization. Further, ensuring volunteers have meaningful experiences is critical to effecting social change for both volunteers and community. Organizations that experience a high volunteer turnover can experience reduction to the organization's human resources (Goble & Brudney, 2016). Additionally, a reduction in volunteers could prevent leaders from acquiring knowledge that is critical for surrounding communities and organizational effectiveness. Improvement in retention would possibly lead to cost savings for human resources, as the expenses of training new volunteers could represent considerable disadvantages to the organization (Manetti et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the implications for positive social change could also include improvement in communities, other nonprofit organizations, environments, and well-being of the volunteers in organizations. Bass and Avolio (1990) and Burns (1978) suggested that transformational leaders use various leadership traits to promote positive relationships between leaders, volunteers, and employees. The results could influence social change concerning building relationships, establishing teams and motivating

volunteers, and effectively communicating what leaders need to retain volunteers adequately. Positive relationships, teamwork, and communications within the organizations could potentially channel into communities thereby increasing the organization's volunteer database. From literature research, nonprofit leaders could use effective strategies to influence, inspire, stimulate, and motivate the volunteers in achieving their individual goals, which ultimately leads to improvement in the organizational culture.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The recommendations for action in this study may interest executive leaders in nonprofit organizations, especially those working directly with volunteer retention. Leaders may use the identified recommendations to transfer knowledge and reduce volunteer turnover. Implementing appropriate strategies is essential in connecting leaders to followers as volunteers are more likely to work at an organization long-term given their development and job satisfaction experiences (Manetti et al., 2015). Retaining volunteers can be the key to maintaining organizational growth and viability in the nonprofit sector (Kang, 2016).

The first recommendation for action involves building collaborative relationships in ways that resonate with volunteers and ensure a system of partnering to include volunteer preferences and activities. According to the participant's feedback, this approach will serve to develop plans that will build and sustain leader-follower relationships. Volunteers want to feel valued, appreciated, and supported by the organization's leader (Hager & Brudney, 2015). Over time, relationships will assist in



improving volunteer retention. Providing opportunities to optimize two-way conversations throughout the organization will allow volunteers to stay connected and engaged in a formal and informal interaction between leaders and employees (C3). Building relationships not only accomplishes organizational needs such as fundraising, grant writing, and community partnership; establishing relationships prepares the organizations for long-term sustainability (C1, C2, and C3). A commitment to growth, orchestrated by the leader became an opportunity for both leader and volunteer to cultivate relationship and promote the organization's mission (C1).

The second recommendation for action involves introducing constant motivation and teams in the organization. All participants suggested that teamwork was an essential practice contributing to the retention of volunteers in the organizations. Nonprofit organizations rely on volunteers for support and it is important to establish mutual agreeable assignments (C1). Jobs that nonprofit leaders rely on reduce the human resource cost by cutting expenses that can be used to implement training and management of volunteers (Manetti et al., 2015). Leaders should methodically and carefully cultivate existing volunteers for particular assignments in precise teams to retain their engagement, which in turn produce future opportunities for volunteering (Hager & Brudney, 2015).

A third recommendation is that leaders institute teams and select qualified team leaders whose primary responsibility merely to train individuals on vital organizational facets. All participants in this study asserted that active teams were another central practice contributing to retention in the organization; suggesting that the work

environment encouraged collaboration by engaging team building activities, such as discussing a specific learning topic related to volunteering. Valeau et al. (2016) found that encouraging volunteers and paid workers to participate in teams constitute added commitments to the organization and in turn counterbalance the negative resistance that plagues most nonprofit organizations. Developing organizational-wide strategies that emphasize the value of teams and the importance of collaborating opinions improved retention in the organization (C1, C2, and C3). Therefore, leaders could use a collaborative relationship to build teams and to assist in improving retention.

A final recommendation for action involved the use of strategic communication practices in the organization. Interacting with volunteers using open communication was a common retention strategy used by leaders to retain volunteers (C3). Communications across the organization could have a positive effect on all stakeholders as long as the information enhances the nonprofit organization's mission (Gilstrap et al., 2016). To ensure adequate communication, leaders should review current strategies and develop adequate policies that would enhance the flow of information between leaders-follower's interactions. Additionally, a need exists to use updated technology to bridge communications between all volunteers (C3). Online presence such as website and emails might offer opportunities for volunteers to share experiences, and provide feedback (C3). The results of this study may be beneficial for leaders interested in improving the nonprofit community using implementing strategies geared toward improving retention. Leadership strategies may, also, focus on providing reasons why volunteer work in a

nonprofit organization, together with, building relationships, strengthen communications and increased team engagement.

The results of this study may be used by nonprofit leaders to improve the volunteer community and the nonprofit sector through the implementation of effective strategies geared toward volunteer retention. Nonprofit professionals may find value in the results of this study as an educational and training tool for organizational growth, improve the surrounding communities, and by providing added volunteers opportunities. All participants will receive a summary of the findings to disseminate at the research sites. I will disseminate the results of this study to a broader audience by publishing in scholarly journals and presenting at nonprofit organizations and academic conferences. This study will be available through the ProQuest/UMI dissertation database.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore leadership strategies nonprofit executive leaders use to improve volunteer retention. One recommendation for future research is to expand the location and to involve nonprofit leaders from outside the southeastern Michigan region for greater diversification of strategies and responses. According to Bean et al. (2016), limiting the results to one region reduces the opportunity for contrasting findings. Therefore, exploring strategies to improve volunteer retention should be conducted on a broader scale to include communities across the state of Michigan. From an experienced group of contributors of social change, the results proved to be a rich source of information and revealed that volunteers are a critical component for many nonprofit organizations. Furthermore, the research data offered essential

strategies from the viewpoint of experiences leaders that highlighted volunteers are a significant source of human resources for organizations.

Several opportunities exist to broaden and deepen this research. As discussed previously, one potential limitation of this research was the participants derived from the same geographic location. A second limitation included the possibility that participants may not share all information about strategies used to improve volunteer retention. The incidence of these limitations cannot be eliminated. In further research, a second recommendation is to create questions that require increased explanation of experiences beyond the open-ended question to contribute further significant knowledge that may propel leaders to formulate plans that could increase organizational opportunities.

Future researchers may not produce similar results; however, the results could broaden the perspectives of this topic. Further study might conclude in investing into volunteer activities that may lead to positive impacts on the organizations regarding authority relationships and personal satisfaction to improve volunteer retention. Additional perspective on retention strategies could strengthen existing ones used by nonprofit leaders. Furthermore, understanding the specific conditions that promote retention is of a high standard and may be useful in the development of specific strategies to improve volunteer retention for most nonprofit organizations (Manetti et al., 2015). Future researchers may consider how retention strategies might change over time as leaders become established in leadership roles that influence relationships, teamwork, and communications.

## Reflections

My interest in researching volunteer retention arose from concerns of the reported closure rates of nonprofit organizations. Curiosity regarding the transformational leadership theory grew as my search continued and other conceptual frameworks were considered to answer the research question. Upon reflection of this journey, initially my concern was which method to use, a qualitative versus a quantitative method and secondly finding literature to support volunteer retention. However, following an extensive search, it became apparent that a qualitative case study was the right course of action to answer the question and solve my curiosity. The qualitative approach merely explored an individual's understanding and an appreciation of a social issue. Throughout the research, intentionality grew about finding participants who implemented successful strategies and could add experiences and knowledge to my research.

As the first semistructured interviews unfolded, my understanding of the process evolved and the data collection from several nonprofit organizations deepened my appreciation of the topic. However, during the research, preconceived ideas existed with thoughts about the selected topic, the literature, and where to find successful organizations. To ensure personal biases were not present, I carefully followed the established protocol to guide the process. Throughout the progression, the method was viewed through the lens of experienced leaders and gained a new perspective on volunteerism. The participants provided details regarding strategies used; each participant cited the need to have consistent practices. The goal was that the participants gained an appreciation for research from this experience and learn from this doctoral research. As a

result of my interview questions, one organization hired a volunteer strategist to coordinate all their volunteer sites to ensure their organization will maximize the experiences of volunteers.

Beginning as a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidate, and transitioning into a practitioner and research scholar helped gain an appreciation of the challenges nonprofit leaders experience in retaining volunteers. The DBA program has a rewarding and enriching platform that can leverage existing professional and business experiences. Going through this course allowed the ability to stretch and expand my thoughts about the need to find successful organizations willing to share what is possible for other struggling nonprofit organizations. Finally, this process challenged me to use my voice for advancing the discussion and conversation around having volunteers as a supporter of nonprofit organizations.

### **Conclusion**

Volunteer retention is an ongoing concern for many nonprofit organizations. The future of nonprofit organizations depends on leadership strategies, which include increased retention of volunteers that perform a broad number of administrative duties. Leaders must implement strategies which keep volunteers engaged and improve retention (Kang, 2016). The results of this qualitative case study confirmed that investing in retention strategies leads to a positive impact on volunteers regarding a collaborative relationship, team and motivation, and strategic communication. Nonprofit leaders could use these strategies to improve volunteer engagement, expand human resources, and influence job satisfaction. Identifying factors that cause a decline in volunteers may allow

leaders to implement strategies to retain volunteers. The data in this study resulted from conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational implementation plans and committee notes received from the participating organizations. Furthermore, the implementation of retention strategies is critical for many nonprofit organizations interested in maintaining their viability. Leaders must value the need for committed volunteers and actively involved them in the overall operations of the organization. A failure to try to improve volunteer retention could result in a loss of qualified individuals, loss of community recognition, a decrease in revenue, and potential closing of the organization.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

### Opening Script

Hello my name is Rudene Glass:

Again, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.

Before we begin, may I review the interview protocol once again to ensure you understand the order of the next 50 minutes and if there are any questions, perhaps I can answer them before the interview starts. The interview will be audio recorded to ensure that I capture the correct interpretation of your responses. Again, participation is voluntary, and withdrawal is permitted at any time. In the event you change your mind during the interview or wish to end the interview, please let me know and I will end the recording. Do you wish to be recorded? *{Wait for the participant's verbal agreement}*.

**Research purpose.** The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore leadership strategies nonprofit executives can use to recruit and retain volunteers. Should you decide to continue with the interview, you will be asked to accept the following: review the consent form, consent to a face-to-face interview, a review of the interview questions before agreeing to participate, and a review summary of the interview. No video recording devices will be allowed.

**Voluntary participation.** Participation in this research is voluntary. Should you decide to participate and later unable to continue, you may withdraw from the study. You may also decline responding to any question, as necessary.

**Risk, benefits of participation and compensation.** This type of research poses no risk in participating. The benefit is the identification of best practices for nonprofit leaders in

implicating social change. No financial compensation, thank you gifts or reimbursement of time will be offered.

**Confidentiality.** The policy of Walden University's Research Department is that professional information remains within the perimeter of this research to protect confidentiality. Professional information will not be used that could identify a participant. Following the doctoral approval, all documents will be destroyed. There are no foreseeable psychological, legal, economic, physical risks in participating. No financial or client related information will be discussed. Do you wish to be recorded? *{Wait for the participants' verbal agreement?}*

Following the interview, the next steps will be transcribing your response excluding your name and organization. My role is to ask open-ended interview questions and record your responses. To avoid conflict of interest, and for the record, I have no affiliation to the participant's organization and will not use undue pressure to recruit for this study. Before we begin, do you have any question about the consent to participate or about the research? *{Here I will answer any questions}*

**Interview Questions.**

What strategies did you used to address volunteer retention?

*Response*

How did you inspire and motivate volunteers to go beyond their duties?

*Response*

What strategies did you use to attract volunteers as leaders in the organizations?

*Response*

What strategies did you use to raise the level of expectation of volunteers?

*Response*

What leadership strategies did you use to address organizational goals related to volunteers?

*Response*

How did you evaluate volunteer performance over the last 5 years?

*Response*

What strategies did you find work best for you?

*Response*

How did you address barriers or challenges in implementing your leadership strategies?

*Response*

What performance index did you use to gauge the success of the strategies you used to improve volunteer retention?

*Response*

What additional information would you like to share about volunteer retention?

*Response*

This concludes the interview; your responses are the sort of information I am looking for.

*{Are there any additional questions?}*.

Once the interpretation process is complete, I will email you a copy and ask that you review the summary to confirm your responses. You will have two weeks to review and reply. If you find inaccuracies, please contact me. If I do not hear from you during that timeframe, I will assume the interpretation is accurate. If there is a need for further

interview, I will schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss the summary. At the follow-up meeting, I will review the interview responses.

Reminder, please keep a copy of the consent form for your records. This research is experimental. Thank you for your time.

**Contact information.**

### Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to address volunteer retention?
2. How did you inspire and motivate volunteers to go beyond their duties?
3. What strategies did you use to attract volunteers as leaders in your organization?
4. What strategies did you use to raise the level of expectation and value of volunteers?
5. What leadership strategies have you used to address organizational goals related to volunteers?
6. How did you evaluate volunteer performance over the last 5 years?
7. What strategies did you find work best for you?
8. How did you address barriers or challenges in implementing your leadership strategies?
9. What performance index have you used to gauge the success of the strategies you used to improve recruitment and retention?
10. What additional information would you like to share about volunteer retention?

## Appendix C: The National Institute of Health Certificate

