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The Role of Strategic Leadership in Healthcare Profitability

Joyce Collette Conner-Boyd
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Joyce Conner-Boyd

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Review Committee
Dr. Jamiel Vadell, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Carol-Anne Faint, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Mary Dereshiwsky, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2019

Abstract

The Role of Strategic Leadership in Healthcare Profitability

by

Joyce Conner-Boyd

MS, Walden University, 2012

BS, Walden University, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2019

Abstract

The failure rate of leadership achieving profitability targets is estimated to be as high as 60%. Many organizations fail to meet profitability targets due to a lack of expertise and insight into strategic leadership skills. The objective of this single case study was to explore the role of strategic leadership in healthcare organization profitability in the United States. Five senior healthcare executives from Georgia with at least 15 years of expertise in the healthcare sector and 10 years in senior leadership were chosen to participate in the study. Purposeful sampling was used to identify the participants. The resource-based view framed the discussion on strategic leadership skills needed to stimulate healthcare profitability. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to elicit in-depth responses from the study participants. Social media and company websites were also reviewed as additional data sources. Thematic analysis was used in the data analysis. Seven themes emerged from the analysis of data: leadership factor, human capital development, flexibility, managing financial resources, market expansion, customer satisfaction, and standardization. These findings may benefit senior healthcare leaders in Georgia and be the catalyst to social change by improving healthcare profitability in the United States, stimulating a growth in employment, and creating employment opportunities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctorate to my husband, Ralph Dean Boyd, the man who has always supported me, stood by me, and is by far the wisest man I have ever known. Ralph, you have guided me through my life lessons, and I am a better person. The love, respect and commitment to one-another is resilient. To my brothers; Dave Conner, Ray Conner, Tim Conner, Terry Conner, Nick Conner, and Phil Conner, you always were there to guide and support me as I was growing up. To my sisters; Colleen Conner-Ziegler and Kelly Conner, you have paved the way for me, showing me how to be a strong and successful woman. To my parents, you raised a riser. I was taught to get up, work hard, and fight for what I wanted. To my nieces and nephews, know that whatever path you choose in life that you have a family that loves and supports you no matter what. You can do whatever you set your mind to and it is never too late in life to accomplish your dreams.

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I owe many thanks to my husband, Ralph Dean Boyd. His encouragement to follow my dreams, his sacrifice in allowing me to pursue my dreams and his outspoken pride when my dream was accomplished. Ralph you are the greatest man I know, by far the smartest person I have ever been graced with the presence of; I will always love you.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Organizational leadership is an essential element in the public and private sector as it can determine growth, prosperity, competitive advantage, employee output, and customer satisfaction (Akeke, 2016). Due to the influence that leadership can have within an organization, scholars have focused on studying types of leadership (Akeke, 2016). The study of leadership is broad in scope, with numerous elements variously applied across industries, organizations, and institutions. Because of the wide latitude of the topic, practitioners must understand how various aspects of leadership might apply to markets like the healthcare industry. The study of strategic leadership focuses on leaders at the top of the organization who can map and plan long-term goals to ensure success, making it a worthwhile topic to study (Akeke, 2016; Gupta, 2018). This section presents an overview of the research project, providing context for the problem and the purpose, as well as to detailing relevant literature and explaining how the conceptual framework was applied.

Background of the Problem

The ability to recognize and guide the actions of an organization toward successful attainment of initiatives reflects strong strategic leadership (Carter & Greer, 2013). Many organization leaders fail to meet or exceed profitability targets due to a lack of expertise in strategic leadership skills (Carmeli, Tishler, & Edmondson, 2011). The demands from shareholders and stakeholders have increased throughout the years. These demands now require senior executives to have an in-depth knowledge of strategic leadership (Carter & Greer, 2013). Lack of skillset in strategic leadership may have an

undesirable effect on the attainment of profitability targets. In general, the lack of strategic leadership may endanger performance, managerial success, profitability, and future sustainability (Bansal & Desjardine, 2014).

Based on the upper echelon theory, strategic leadership focuses on the individuals at the top of the organization guiding long term planning to maximize outcomes (Akeke, 2016). Organization leaders face issues with management, bureaucracy, autocratic leadership, lack of planning, and vision (Gupta, 2018). The concept of strategic leadership focuses on a mixture of leadership styles, places a weight on ethics and value orientated decision making, plans for long term goals, executes plans to achieve those goals, provides a positive and supportive environment for employees, has hands-on knowledge of finance and the organization itself, and can provide linear and nonlinear thinking (Gupta, 2018).

Healthcare leadership is at a pivotal period with an uncertain industry landscape such as the ever-changing fate of the Affordable Care Act (ACA; Delmatoff & Lazarus, 2014). Recent researchers have examined the qualities of leadership in a successful organization, focusing on emotional and behavioral intelligence or critical thinking (Delmatoff & Lazarus, 2014; Hargett et al., 2017). The role of strategic leadership in the healthcare industry remains an underexplored area.

Problem Statement

Some leaders in organizations are failing to meet and exceed profitability targets (Kaufman, 2017). The failure rate of leadership hitting profitability targets is estimated to be as high as 60% (Gilliland, 2017). The general business problem was that senior leaders

fail to develop strategies to improve, increase, and sustain profitability. The specific business problem was that some leaders in healthcare fail to develop and implement strategies for improving their organization profitability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies healthcare leaders used to improve profitability. The population for this study consisted of five senior executive leaders in Atlanta, Georgia, who successfully implemented strategic leadership initiatives to improve profitability. The contribution to social change could include the creation of localized employment and an overall reduction of healthcare costs by capitalizing on strategic initiatives to increase healthcare organization profitability.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the current study was to discover strategies leadership in healthcare use to improve profitability. I used a qualitative approach to explore participants' experiences with strategic leadership for achieving healthcare profitability in Georgia. The qualitative method is suitable for an exploratory study and may be helpful when the researcher does not have defined variables to explore (Yin, 2014). I did not use the quantitative method in this study because examining variables' relationships or groups' differences was not the desired goal. I did not search for a testable hypothesis between two or more variables (see Lamb, 2013). Mixed methods employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I did not choose to use the mixed method approach because the study's purpose only required

collecting qualitative data, not quantitative data. I used a qualitative semistructured

interview process with open-ended questions to explore strategies used in the healthcare

field to improve profitability.

I selected a single case study design to conduct the research. A case study is a

research strategy that involves investigation of a phenomenon in a real-life context

(Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015). Because I used an in-depth exploratory study,

qualitative designs such as narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography

were not appropriate. Using the narrative design approach captures the stories of

participants, which is not suitable for an in-depth exploratory study (Marshall &

Rossman, 2016). A narrative researcher seeks to explain business decisions from

participants' historical life experiences through exploring their personal stories (Marshall

& Rossman, 2016). I did not intend to explore how an individual's historic decisions

impacted leadership strategies; thus, the narrative approach was not appropriate for the

study. Phenomenology is used to explore the meanings of experiences of the participants

in the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology was not suitable for the current

study because researchers use this design to explore the lived experiences of the

participants in the phenomenon. Grounded theory design is used to develop a new theory

based on data (Smith, Leslie, & Wynaden, 2015) and was not suitable for the current

study. Ethnographic researchers explore business problems within a cultural or unique

scope distinct from business norms. I did not seek to identify any cultural uniqueness in

the population criteria for the study, and therefore the ethnographic approach was not

appropriate. I selected the case study design to conduct an in-depth exploration of

healthcare leaders' strategies in improving profitability. Qualitative researchers use data from multiple sources to increase validity, reliability, and credibility of studies (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Question

The main question in this study was the following:

RQ: What strategies do leaders in healthcare use to improve profitability?

Interview Questions

The seven open-ended questions for the healthcare leaders were as follows:

1. What role has strategic leadership played in your organization?

2. What successful strategies have you implemented to increase profitability?

3. How did your organization assess the effectiveness of the strategies to improve profitability.?

4. How have you mitigated risks while sustaining and growing profitability?

5. How effective have your strategic leadership initiatives been in terms of increasing profitability?

6. What were the key challenges to implementing your organization's strategies for improving profitability?

7. What additional information would you like to share in improving profitability in the healthcare field?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework consists of a system of written concepts supporting theorization on a defined topic (Sum & Chorlian, 2014). I used the resource-based view

(RBV) conceptual framework to structure the study. The RBV is a common strategic leadership approach focused on achieving the sustainable competitive advantage for a firm (Sum & Chorlian, 2014). In 1984, Birger invented the RBV theory and argued it might contribute to organizational competitiveness and have a positive effect on profitability. Leadership teams may utilize theory to create a competitive advantage positively impacting overall profitability (Sum & Chorlian, 2014).

The principal constructs of the RBV theory include (a) the firm's ability to identify capital resources and the analysis of strengths and weaknesses in comparison to competitors, resulting in the creation of inimitability (Barney, 2001); (b) a direct correlation between competitive advantage and the organizational process and performance (Barney, 2001); and (c) a competitive advantage that exists when a firm is able to develop dynamic capabilities exceeding those of its rivals (Barney, 2001).

The RBV theory is utilized by healthcare leaders to capitalize on the resources to develop and sustain competitive advantage in a business strategy (Barney, 2001). Top leaders in healthcare can use the RBV view to maximize use of resources to increase profitability. I used the conceptual framework to explore how healthcare executives could leverage organizational strategic and operational resources to create unique value and competitive advantage to increase profitability.

Operational Definitions

Case study: Case study refers to an empirical review that examines a current phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context (Yin, 2014).

Capabilities: Capabilities include the procedures, processes, and routines firms employ in their activities (Dyer, Godfrey, Jensen, & Bryce, 2016).

Effective leader: An effective leader is one who aids subordinates to reach peak productivity, such as raising quality and satisfaction (DuBrin, 2015).

Leadership: Leadership refers to a mechanism of coordinating effective functions of internal organizational processes (Kivipõld & Vadi, 2013).

Organizational competitiveness: Organizational competitiveness is the competitive advantage that differentiates it from its competitors (Hernaus, Aleksie, & Klindzie, 2013).

Profitability: Profitability is the act in which an entity yields a profit or financial gain (Crane, 2017).

Resource-based view (RBV): The resource-based view refers to the grounds by which managers produce competitive advantage and increased cost-effectiveness (Barney, 2001).

Strategic decisions: Strategic decisions refer to a task that involves the integration of diverse perceptions, judgements, and orientations to develop a set of specific strategic actions (Carmeli et al., 2011).

Strategic leadership: Strategic leadership is the ability for the top management team to generate long-term goals and objectives, think and act strategically, and foster organizational competitiveness sustainably (Carter & Greer, 2013).

Transformational leadership: Transformational leadership involves leading based on change in strategies, culture, and structures to fit with the surrounding environments of the modern organization (Riwo-Abudho, Njanja, & Ochieng, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Recognizing the differences between assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are essential to identify any potential threats that may impact the validity of the research design. To mitigate any potential confusion among readers of a study, the researcher must provide a clear definition of assumptions, limitations, and delimitations (Harvey, 2015).

Assumptions

Assumptions are realities that researchers accept as factual without tangible proof of evidence (Yin, 2014). The primary assumption of this qualitative study was that participants would maintain a definitive level of expertise and experience with the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). The second assumption was that the participants would participate voluntarily, not necessarily due to a mandate from executive leadership. The third assumption was that the participants would be forthcoming and honest with their responses. The assumptions of the participants were a good representation of the study and of the healthcare industry.

Limitations

Limitations are factors in a study over which the researcher has no definitive control or influence but that may bring into question the internal validity of a study (Denscombe, 2013). The first limitation of the study was the limited number of senior executives who were available for this study on strategic leadership. Second, the

participant's availability and willingness to participate in the study due to time constraints was a limitation. Third, another limitation was the experience within the field and the potential for bias regarding the study of strategic leadership.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the boundaries that researchers set on the research study that may decrease the scope of the study (Denscombe, 2013). The first delimitation was the validity and relevance to senior executives in multiple verticals of expertise. The second delimitation was that all the participants were in Atlanta, Georgia. The third delimitation was that all the participants worked with a single corporate entity.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study was dependent upon the accuracy of the findings for supporting increased business performance and positive social change. Research from this study may be the catalyst for current and future strategic leaders to define, nurture, and lead successful and profitable healthcare organizations. The findings of this research could influence leaders to develop and execute strategies for sustainable and profitable healthcare organizations.

Contribution to Business Practice

Senior management teams could discover managerial development strategies to maximize profitability in the healthcare sector. The findings from this study might influence leaders to engage in managerial development strategies to establish and grow profitable organizations for the future. The findings could also assist in promoting strategic leadership for catalyzing scalable and sustainable healthcare organizations.

Implications for Social Change

The outcome of this study might help to develop critical strategic leadership practices that support sustainable healthcare organizations. Sustainable, profitable organizations could positively impact social change by creating employment opportunities and an overall improvement in individual living standards. Profitable and sustainable organizations positively benefit society and could prove to be the catalyst for growing communities' tax revenues for the benefit of citizens (Marozva, 2015).

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

I explored the role of strategic leadership in healthcare profitability. The central research question was as follows: What strategies do leaders in healthcare use to improve profitability? I conducted a review of academic literature to enhance and support the understanding of the phenomenon. The focus of the literature review was on strategic leadership, organizational performance, the role of the entrepreneurial mindset on the performance of an organization, and the resource-based view theory.

The literature review included multiple data points for reference. I used peer-reviewed journal articles from multiple databases, such as Sage Premier, ScienceDirect, Business Source Complete, Emerald Management and ABI/INFORM, Deep Dyve, and Google Scholar. I also incorporated multiple sources from the Walden University online library and the Walden University bookstore. All articles gathered for the literature review were within the last 5 years, from 2015 to 2019. I utilized a combination of key search words, such as *strategy, leadership, organizational performance, RBV theory, transformational leadership, strategic decisions, profitability,* and *organizational*

competitiveness to locate scholarly peer-reviewed journals for further evaluation on the

phenomenon. The search resulted in 145 articles. Of those 145 121 (85%) were between

2014 and 2019. There were 23 articles dated before the year 2014.

Resource-Based View

The framework for this study was RBV, a popular business theory. RBV refers to

a strategic management approach in which firms will gain competitive advantage by

controlling the scarce and valuable resources at their disposal, or ideally, their inimitable

assets (Van Alstyne, Parker, & Choudary, 2016). Resources in RBV have a value that is

often applied to lowering costs or increasing consumer worth, are limited in their

availability making them a competitive supply, and are challenging to replicate

(Kellermanns, Walter, Crook, Kemmerer, & Narayanan, 2016). Researchers have used

the RBV with resources to maintain a competitive advantage (Hoskisson, Gambeta,

Green, & Li, 2018). For instance, a firm may develop internal opportunities through

existing resources in new ways rather than trying to acquire new skills for opportunities

that arise (Pee & Kankanhalli, 2016). In the RBV model, resources are critical to

achieving higher organizational performance.

Four main concepts in the RBV framework may be applicable concerning

healthcare firms. These include core (distinctive) competence, dynamic capabilities,

absorptive capacity, and organizational ambidexterity (Stone, 2016). The four dynamic

concepts aid in explaining the strengths of RBV.

Firstly, core competencies refer to the critical resources within the firm that, when

effectively developed and exploited, can allow firms to produce unanticipated products,

which then give them a competitive advantage (Stone, 2016). Ferlie et al. (2015) provided a precedent for RBV in the healthcare industry by applying core competencies to conduct a consultation process with a U.K. healthcare unit to develop a modernized business model for the public sector. The consultation process developed core competencies that could be bundled together into a self-reinforcing process and emphasized areas where new competencies required development (Ferlie et al., 2015). Within this context, core competencies may be viewed as shared learning in the consulting unit emanating from the synchronization of networks and skills (Ferlie et al., 2015).

Another concept of RBV that applied to the healthcare industry is dynamic capabilities. Although there is no clear-cut characterization of dynamic capabilities, the concept refers to the tactical procedures by which leaders at firms realign their resources to respond when the market ruptures, develops, expires, or merges (Ferlie et al., 2015). Dynamic capabilities contribute to RBV by acknowledging the external environment as a tool to enable firms to attain sustainable competitive advantage (Ferlie et al., 2015). The application to the medical field of dynamic capabilities has suggested opportunities for success for many healthcare entities. For instance, in 2010, in Alberta, Canada, researchers explored organizational restructuring within primary care firms under stringent new management reforms and financial limitations (Ferlie et al., 2015). When applied to healthcare, leaders of firms can use the RBV to provide an opportunity to redistribute their internal resources to adjust to new processes based on business environmental circumstances and a limited budget to improve business outcomes (Ferlie

et al., 2015). Leaders can use the RBV to ignore competitive market conditions in favor of focusing on strategic activities of public entities that are facing performance crises (Ferlie et al., 2015).

Dynamic competence is a form of the learning process. The trial and error learning process aids healthcare firms to operate through performance pressures to elevate primary care capacity and reduce pressure (Ferlie et al., 2015). Dynamic competence can be nurtured by classifying learning as a concealed genuine aptitude and adopting a strategy for leadership to build participation and trust through the system (Ferlie et al., 2015). The third characteristic of RBV applicable to the healthcare industry is absorptive capacity.

Absorptive capacity is the process of diffusion and presentation of knowledge (Ferlie et al., 2015). More specifically, absorptive capacity is when a healthcare organization identifies, integrates, and applies pertinent data for increased profit (Ferlie et al., 2015). Harvey et al. (as cited in Ferlie et al., 2015) uncovered that some of U.K. healthcare firms were weak in absorptive capacity by studying how poorly performing public healthcare firms were exposed to externally-imposed change by being unwilling to apply technology and publicly available information to correct their poor performance (Ferlie et al., 2015). Organizational ambidexterity is the final component of RBV that is relevant to healthcare firms.

Organizational ambidexterity permits firms to manage modern-day industry demands and adapt to variations in their environment (Kusumastuti, Kasim, & Hardjosoekarto, 2018). Rather than focus on acquiring outside resources for

organizational use, organizational ambidexterity maintains that businesses are capable of simultaneously exploring and exploiting resources (Kusumastuti et al., 2018). Therefore, organizations with ambidexterity will typically outperform firms that solely focus on one aspect of managing resources (Kusumastuti et al., 2018).

RBV recognizes that, for the short-term, available resources are externally determined while acknowledging that managers have a role in identifying opportunities and matching them, within limits, to the available resources (Stone, 2016). RBV recognizes that managers may strategically exploit market imperfection to improve their firms' performance, as it does not relinquish a significant role to the managers but connects internal and external environments in which they operate (Stone, 2016). With RBV, managers may be viewed as both proactive and adaptive to market changes (Stone, 2016). In this manner, it differentiates the academic study of strategic management from that of industrial organization economics.

Porter's Competitive Strategy and the Resource-Based View Frameworks

Porter (1980) created generic competitive strategies to understand how a company practices competitive advantage within their marketplace. Porter's competitive strategy has been a focus of both practical and academic research and application. While decision-making styles of different managers vary, Porter's generic competitive strategies classified three styles applied to businesses across all spectrums. These styles include focus, cost leadership, and product differentiation.

Focus strategy. Focus strategy is the view that firms should serve a few unique segments or markets in a geographical zone (Lotayif, 2015). Lotayif (2015) professed

that resources should be directed into these segments to take up a substantial portion of the market, which could result in long-term profitability. Advocates of focus strategy hold that economy of scale, market specialization, more excellent knowledge of the market, a high degree of control, and improved profitability by concentrating on a select customer base willing to pay a premium for an organization's services or products are beneficial outcomes from implementing a focus strategy (Lotayif, 2015). According to Elbrese (as cited in Lotayif, 2015), tailoring a product or service to customers has an increased likelihood of positive outcome when compared to companies that use diversification strategy.

Differentiation should not be confused with focus strategies. The differences between focus and differentiation strategy are the number of pursued markets that each strategy indicates leaders should plan to attend to (Lotayif, 2015). Focus strategy is aimed at smaller markets, while differentiation strategy is designed to serve multiple markets (Lotayif, 2015). Therefore, fewer resources are needed when an organization's leaders rely on focus strategy rather than differentiation strategy (Lotayif, 2015). While cost leadership and differentiation strategies are concentrated on competition methods, focus strategy emphasizes the market's location (Lotayif, 2015). Thus, pricing tends to vary across the three strategies.

Pulaj, Kume, and Cipi (2015) isolated some critical features of focus strategy. The first was that the pursued market should be large to be lucrative and enable the organization's progression (Pulaj et al., 2015). Secondly, organizational directors are blind to the potential within the growing market (Pulaj et al., 2015). Third, it is expensive

and time consuming for business competitors to meet the needs of the niche market, as well as provide the needed attention to the general customer population (Pulaj et al., 2015). Lastly, as any industry is multifaceted, focus strategy permits the allocation of resources to reach the specific needs of the niche market (Pulaj et al., 2015). While similar, differentiation strategy also needs to be discussed.

Differentiation strategy. The second strategy in Porter's (1980) competitive theory is differentiation. Rather than rely on merely separating a product or service by cost, differentiation relies on providing customers unique features that draw the customer in, thereby increasing competitive advantage (Lotayif, 2015). An example of this is online shopping, as it may offer benefits such as increased market reach rather than merely reduced pricing (Lotayif, 2015). Differentiation, sometimes referred to as market diversification, is defined as distribution throughout varying markets to diminish the threat of condensed resource allocation and expand the firm's elasticity (Lotayif, 2015). Differentiation is aimed at attracting consumers through an enhanced focus on company image, customer service, product quality, expanded market, and integration (Lotayif, 2015). Therefore, the company is selling its brand and image for a premium price rather than just relying on the goods and services (Lotayif, 2015). Differentiation strategy allows for sales to multiple customer bases by adequately analyzing and marketing to a variety of targeted customers (Lotayif, 2015).

Organization leaders who use differentiation to increase competitive advantage do so by focusing on the development of unrivaled products and services that demand a superior value (Leonidou, Fotiadis, Christodoulides, Spyropoulou, & Katsikeas, 2015).

Additionally, differentiation can aid businesses in sustainable cost-effectiveness when compared to cost leadership strategy (Lotayif, 2015). Differentiation strategy alone can cause an increased risk. Therefore it is vital to use it in conjunction with cost leadership (Lotayif, 2015). While differentiation may give an organization an edge in competitive advantage, it is also essential to focus on cost leadership.

Cost leadership. The third among Porter's (1980) generic strategies is cost leadership. Cost leadership addresses a competitive advantage by offering unrivaled low prices (Argyres & McGahan, 2017). Porter (1980) specified that only one organization could be the cost leader (Argyres & McGahan, 2017). Multiple ways to achieve cost leadership include but are not limited to mass production, organizational adeptness, minimizing costs and maximizing output, targeted advertising, total quality management (TQM), reducing overhead prices, and benchmarking (Kurt & Zehir, 2016).

Block, Kohn, Miller, and Ullrich (2015) asserted that cost leadership strategy focused on performance and efficiency rather than specialization or increased quality, as found in focus or differentiation. When using cost leadership, organization leaders focus on reducing costs through reducing overheads and production costs while increasing productivity to give businesses the best chance at widening their customer base (Bertozzi, Ali, & Gul, 2017). Further, cost leadership approach is successfully carried out when a firm outperforms its competitors in design, production, and marketing of comparable products (Bertozzi et al., 2017). There are multiple ways to implement cost leadership. Focusing on innovation and design, acquiring material at low cost, minimizing manufacturing cost and time, outsourcing, adapting to new technology, and continually

reassessing and altering an organization's business processes can all lead to cost leadership within the market (Bertozzi et al., 2017). Cost leadership depends on securely reducing costs through efficient resource allocation while maintaining market domination (Bertozzi et al., 2017). In the following section I discuss how Porter's (1980) competitive strategy and RBV relate to or differentiate from one another.

Comparison and Contrast Between Porter's Competitive Strategy and Resource-Based View

Porter's (1980) competitive strategy explains an organization's strategy by focusing on the products its aimed market (Ouma & Oloko, 2017). This strategy gives prominence to the external influence on the development of strategy and suggests that a firm is supposed to evaluate forces in the industry that either present opportunities or pose threats to its survival (Ouma & Oloko, 2017). The dominant strategy of Porter's (1980) competitive strategy deals with the choice of the appropriate industry and firm positioning according to those forces (Ouma & Oloko, 2017). By contrast, RBV maintains competitive advantage through, its acquisition of unique, scarce, incomparable, non-substitutable resources, and the organization's aptitude (Ouma & Oloko, 2017). RBV does not focus on those products and services developed from those resources and capabilities (Ouma & Oloko, 2017). The RBV strategy is to leverage resources and capabilities across several markets and products rather than focusing on products or markets. RBV is inward-looking or an inside-outside framework, while Porter's (1980) competitive strategies in an outward-looking or outward-inside framework (Ouma & Oloko, 2017).

A notable difference between Porter's (1980) competitive strategies framework and RBV is that these have different units of analysis. One can use Porter's framework to consider the industry as a unit, while one can use RBV to consider the firm as a unit of analysis (Ouma & Oloko, 2017). Nonetheless, both are prescriptive and based on the assumption that managers are rational beings. For instance, in Porter's (1980) competitive strategies framework, managers have the role of taking the right decisions and choosing the strategy that most improves the firm's position (Ouma & Oloko, 2017). Equally, the RBV framework is not just about the perceptive abilities of the leaders coupled with the capacity to make appropriate decisions (Ouma & Oloko, 2017). RBV also entails the capacity to utilize the resources available to their firms innovatively to seize timely opportunities and form decisions and procedures that permit firms to respond to settings adaptively (Ouma & Oloko, 2017). Consequently, under the RBV framework, leadership is wholly tasked with identifying, developing, and deploying critical resources to maximize outcomes (Ouma & Oloko, 2017).

Lastly, while these two frameworks indicate alignment that firms aim to attain a competitive advantage, these sharply differ on how achievement was possible. Porter's (1980) competitive strategies framework focuses on above-average returns in the long-run, while the RBV framework focuses on rendering a competitor's advantage obsolete (Ouma & Oloko, 2017). Both theories may be obsolete if leadership is lacking.

Attributes of Effective Strategic Leadership

Strategic leaders are known for their inspirational leadership quality. Leaders motivate others to reveal their flexible potential necessary to align with the strategic

agenda forward (Centre Management & Organization Effectiveness [CMOE], 2017).

Inspiration is only imaginable in an atmosphere where leaders and their subordinates

communicate liberally (CMOE, 2017). According to Mayfield, Mayfield, and Sharbrough

(2015), a strong relationship between the leaders and employees can improve an

organization's outcomes. However, this relationship is reliant on the performance of the

leaders. For instance, a robust interpersonal association between leaders and workers has

a significant influence on workplace coherence and consequently organizational output

(Mayfield et al., 2015). In an extensive literature review by Coleman and Bourne (2018)

which focused on leadership skills, behaviors, knowledge, and values, the author has

uncovered essential characteristics necessary for successful leadership. The first aspect

was that leaders should be able to anticipate any upcoming challenges (Coleman &

Bourne, 2018). Leaders should be able to make immediate decisions with partial

knowledge while being able to see the entire scope of the organization's goals. Leaders

should grow and support their employee's confidence and capabilities.

Additionally, it is essential to be aware of how to interact within the

organization's environment and be able to learn and adapt to the needs of their team

(Coleman & Bourne, 2018). Lastly, leaders must be able to settle employee disputes,

while cultivating a culture for them to succeed. These eight components can lead to better

organizational outcomes (Coleman & Bourne, 2018).

The second attribute that has been found to lead to high organizational

performance is charisma. According to Boehm, Dwertmann, Bruch, and Shamir (2015)

charisma increase organizational success by creating a strong sense of organizational

identity. As leadership can account for 45% of organizational success, it is vital to understand the relationship between charisma and organizational output. Existing literature has found a mixed relationship between leadership charisma and organizational performance. However, Boehm et al. (2015) in a study of 150 German companies found that charisma has a positive effect on organizational identity which can increase employee and organizational outcome. According to Witts (2016), individual leader's attributes have a minimal no in leadership effectiveness leadership itself encompasses a set of behaviors. Effectiveness of any leadership included attributes that can influence the behavior of the leadership and have a significant impact on organizational performance (Jing & Avery, 2016). Additionally, situational and environmental factors can also influence leadership. As such, not all leaders are competent in all situations and one leader can be useful in one situation and not in another.

The third attribute of strategic leaders is insightfulness. Strategic leaders tend to possess the ability to assess the environment and recognize contextual clues regarding that may reveal prospects or dangers (CMOE, 2017). Leaders should be the first to spot new trends and advancements, as they measure the softest signs of opportunities and initial indicators of future trouble (CMOE, 2017). Instead, successful leaders rely on effective sources concerning their profession and industry, technological advancements, and social atmosphere to guide the organization forward (CMOE, 2017).

Lastly, effective strategic leaders are collaborative and have a clear perspective. Efficient strategic leaders are proactive, future-thinking, and foster a team atmosphere and communicate a direction toward organizational objectives (CMOE, 2017). Moreover,

leaders know how to preserve the precision of purpose through vision and determination (CMOE, 2017). Leaders guide their teams through trouble by making appropriate choices (CMOE, 2017). Leadership has a vital role in training and skills development.

Strategic Leadership Training and Skills Development

Within their website, the CMOE (2017) proclaimed that business leaders should be capable of providing motivation, guidance, and encouragement to increase profitability and outcomes. Employees rely on their leaders for strategic guidance for instruction to improve company realization and output (CMOE, 2017). Strategic leadership is not limited to the understanding of the newest strategic models and tools but asks for awareness of one's leadership skills and influence, as well as streamlining processes (CMOE, 2017). Strategic leaders placed with high responsibility make decisions that determine the success or failure of a project (CMOE, 2017). With strategic leadership cultivated and embraced, an organization experiences continued growth, greater customer satisfaction, high employee retention and great overall performance (CMOE, 2017). Strategic leadership depends on the formulation, implementation, and sharing of a clear plan of success which could motivate and persuade employees to follow the leader's vision (CMOE, 2017).

Schoemaker, Krupp, and Howland (2013) identified six specific skills in strategic leadership. Many organizations have leaders who cannot identify abstruse hazards and unseen prospects (Schoemaker et al., 2013). Strategic leaders are observant of their market segments and related environment and sharpen their capacity to anticipate any signs of change (Schoemaker et al., 2013). Anticipation extends beyond predicting the

competitions is future but also the development of one's leadership skills, such as active

listening (Schoemaker et al., 2013). Anticipation should become second nature to easily

anticipate and plan strategic actions possible conflict resolution (Schoemaker et al.,

2013).

The second skill of a strategic leader is the ability to defy the industry standard

(Schoemaker et al., 2013). These leaders challenge their own beliefs and those of others

by creating an open environment of differing thought (Schoemaker et al., 2013). Strategic

leaders should not decide and implement a plan before they have been in deliberation and

reflected on the issue through a variety of lenses (Schoemaker et al., 2013). Therefore,

strategic leadership depends on perseverance, resolution, and tolerance (Schoemaker et

al., 2013).

Thirdly, a strategic leader should possess the ability to interpret. After a leader

anticipates the market and challenges industry norms, they may have complex and

conflicting data (Schoemaker et al., 2013). As such, before a leader decides on a strategic

plan, they must be adept at interpretation (Schoemaker et al., 2013). Whether it is

statistics and figures or employee and customer satisfaction, strategic leaders must strive

for meaningful intuitions through murky information (Schoemaker et al., 2013).

Therefore, a leader must identify facts and decipher any unnoticed, hidden repercussions

(Schoemaker et al., 2013).

The fourth skill of a strategic leader is the capacity to make decisions. Leaders are

often called on to make quick, difficult decisions based on limited data (Schoemaker et

al., 2013). To contend with that challenge, a strategic leader rarely commits to simplistic

conclusions; instead, they focus on available options (Schoemaker et al., 2013). Strategic

leaders invariably consider the implications involved, considering short- and long-term

objectives (Schoemaker et al., 2013). Strategic leaders must have the bravery to commit

to their plans through a rigorous decision-making process (Schoemaker et al., 2013).

The fifth skill of a strategic leader is the ability to align different process or

people's activities toward the achievement of their organization's common goal. Strategic

alignment of people calls for a pre-emptive approach to the interaction between

subordinates (Schoemaker et al., 2013). A trusting relationship and trustworthiness are

essential between the leader and their employees (Schoemaker et al., 2013). No matter

how good one is at anticipating, challenging, interpreting, and deciding on a strategy,

aligning one's people can make it difficult for the achievement of a vision.

Lastly, a strategic leader must have the ability to allow for an opportunity to learn

and develop within the organization (Schoemaker et al., 2013). A strategic leader should

be able to promote a culture of self-reflection and may often find answers from success

and failure (Schoemaker et al., 2013). Strategic leaders review their teams' failures in an

unrestricted and productive way to maximize outcomes (Schoemaker et al., 2013). These

are no inherent skills as strategic leadership requires training and skills development.

Kaiser and Curphy stated that U.S. firms had invested $14 billion in improving the

managers' aptitudes or nurturing new ones through leadership training (as cited in

Schroeder, 2018, p.1). When asked to rank their top three human-capital priorities, more

than 500 executives identified leadership as both present and future priority with 2/3 of

respondents identifying leadership development as their priority number one.

Leadership at firms could use different ways to train and develop their leader's strategic skills by recognizing that an organization had emerged, yet unnoticed or muted skills (Leitch, Lancefield, & Dawson, 2016). Leaders tend to exhibit excellent performance, consistent determination, and capacity to provide solutions to organizational obstacles (Leitch et al., 2016). Unfortunately, while these are treasured qualities, these are not necessarily the skills of a strategic leader (Leitch et al., 2016).

Leadership at a firm can use five principles to train its managers to become strategic leaders, and these include a combination of individual capabilities and organizational systems (Leitch et al., 2016). The first among such principles is the distribution of responsibilities (Leitch et al., 2016). Practice, which requires a substantial amount of autonomy, is one of the ways through which strategic leaders can gain the skills required for a strategic leader (Leitch et al., 2016). Leaders at the top hierarchy are supposed to push the power to those in the lower hierarchies in an organization so that they too can be empowered to make decisions (Leitch et al., 2016). Sharing of responsibilities accord would-be strategic leaders a chance to observe what happens when they take risks (Leitch et al., 2016). Also, it increases the combined intelligence, adaptableness, and resilience of the organization over time when the intelligence of those external to the old-style decision-making hierarchy is harnessed (Leitch et al., 2016).

The second principle is the principle of honesty and openness about the information (Leitch et al., 2016). In most organizations, the management structure adopts the military model in which the flow of information is usually restricted since, in this model, the same information is equivalent to power (Leitch et al., 2016). The tragedy

about this kind of management structure is selectively dispensed; some people end up making uninformed decisions. Usually, such people have little or no knowledge about essential factors that are crucial to the organization's strategy (Leitch et al., 2016). Leaders can struggle to make the right decisions when one is not encouraged to comprehend the bigger picture to make appropriate inquiries about the information that one stumbles across. Some competitive secrets, such as information regarding the products under progress, may need to be concealed; therefore, employees require a broader informational base for them to develop into strategic leaders (Leitch et al., 2016). For instance, if an organization's productivity plummets suddenly, an opportunity to institute a change may occur (Leitch et al., 2016). Understanding such a problem occurs only f there is a candid conversation, and where it is hidden, it may engender temptations to change data to look better (Leitch et al., 2016). In this case, the loss of an opportunity for strategic leadership happens.

The third principle is created for multiple paths for testing ideas (Leitch et al., 2016). Development and presentation of ideas is a critical skill for a strategic leader. Strategic leaders must connect ideas in ways that create value to the organization (Leitch et al., 2016). Organizations can train strategic leadership within their ranks by setting up structures through which people can bring their innovative thinking to use, eventually making them able to learn how to leverage their creativeness (Leitch et al., 2016). This approach contrasts markedly with the outmoded cultures, whereby the commonly used channel for ideas is limited to one's line manager. Individual managers may opt to value the idea or ignore it, thus blocking it from moving forward. As an alternative, leader of

organizations can also create multiple channels of innovative thinking, some of which can be cross-functional meetings, wherein people can exchange ideas between like-minded peers and test these against each other's cognition (Leitch et al., 2016). Alternatively, apprenticeship, where potential strategic leaders sign up for mentorship with leaders who are well equipped to assist them in developing their skills, can be adopted (Leitch et al., 2016).

The fourth principle is the provision of access to other strategic leaders (Leitch et al., 2016). A firm can allow its budding strategic leaders to interact and work with their peers across the organization (Leitch et al., 2016). Isolation may harm strategic leadership, but once people discover there are others in the organization with whom they share certain predispositions, leaders develop openness and adeptness in improving the strategic value of their actions (Leitch et al., 2016).

The last principle is the development of opportunities for experienced-based learning. According to Leitch et al. (2016), a vast majority of strategic leadership development programs are informative rather than experiential. Ordinarily, classroom-based training is cheaper to implement (Leitch et al., 2016). Although outmoded leadership training can grow good managerial skills, strategic leaders need the experience to realize their full potential. Understanding such skills must be recognized in how a business uses them.

Strategic Leadership in Business Organization

Every business organization should have a business strategy for all the market segments it serves, as it improves the organization's competitive position in an industry

or market (Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, & Bamford, 2015). The onus of strategic thinking and decision-making or effective strategic leadership rests with the top management (Redmond, n.d.). Notably, the chief executive officers (CEOs) and senior management must make a strategic decision and create an organizational context that guarantees long-term profitability of the firm and its eventual success (Redmond, n.d.). From this perspective, strategic leaders can make a competitive difference within an organization.

Thompson et al. (as cited in Tapera, 2014) stated two fundamental reasons why strategic leadership is imperative. First, organizations' leadership needs to vigorously cultivate configurations for long term business planning (Tapera, 2014). An unambiguous strategy is the management's prescription for doing business, its path to competitiveness and its means of attracting customers and improving profitability (Tapera, 2014). Second is that a strategically-focused organization has a higher likelihood of being profitable than another, which prioritize other things arguing that strategy is secondary. An effective strategy formulation and implementation have a positive impact on the growth of revenues, earnings, and the return on investment (Tapera, 2014).

Generally, an organization's senior management impacts on all the stages in the management process (Redmond, n.d.). It sets the organization's direction, revitalizes the creation of innovative strategies, and the energy to push through the effective implementation of those strategies. Strategic leadership influences the firm's strategic process, as shown in Figure 1.

Effective Strategic Leadership

Shapes the Formulation of
and

Strategic intent

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Influences

Strategic Mission

Successful Strategic Actions

Formulation of Strategies

Implementation of Strategies

Strategic Competitiveness
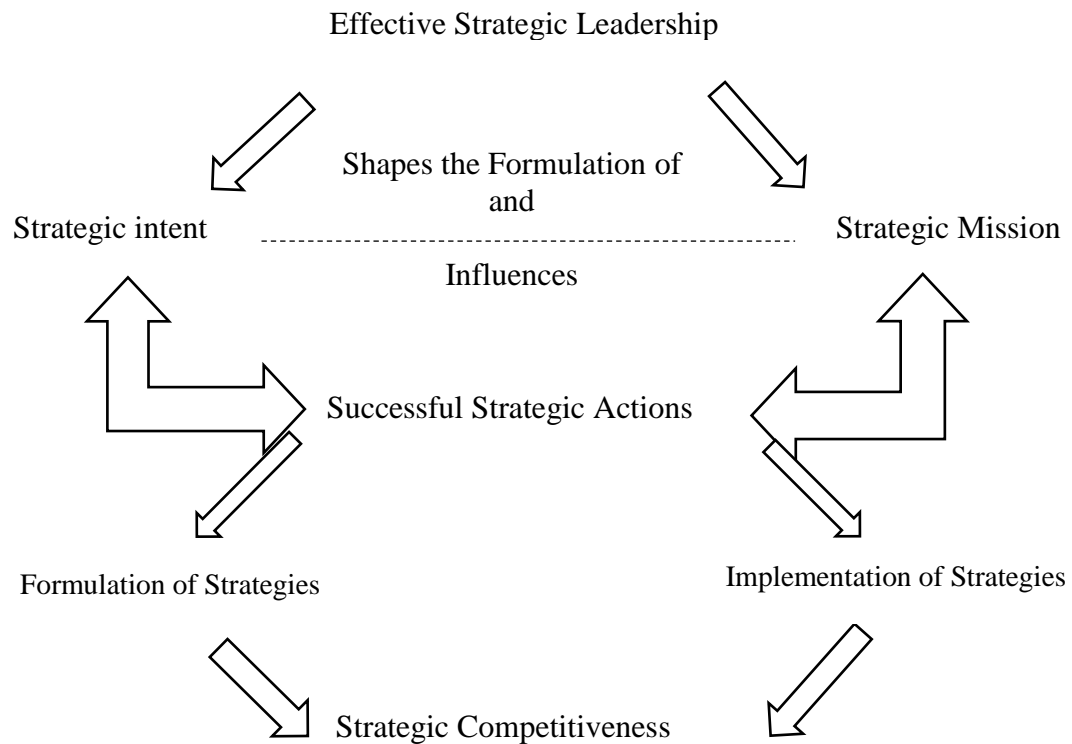
Figure 1. Effective strategic leadership.

      Strategic leadership focuses on several overlapping and interlinked strategic leadership actions to contribute to the firm's overall performance (Redmond, n.d.). The first set of these strategic actions are those aimed at determining the organization's strategic direction. Strategic leaders develop, articulate, and communicate a clear vision for the organization. (Redmond, n.d.). For example, leaders should paint a picture of where the organization wants to be in the following 5-10 years to encourage other employees of the organization to buy into that vision. The vision serves as the destination for the organization, and hence a guide for the designing and implementation of the strategies (Redmond, n.d.).

The second set of strategic actions is those meant for the exploitation and maintenance of core competencies. Core competencies are those resources and capabilities at an organization's disposal, which it can exploit to gain a competitive advantage over its rivals (Redmond, n.d.). The organization's senior management must ensure that its core competencies are maintained and developed over time, so these remain relevant. Leaders must ensure an organization's competencies form part of its competitive strategy's basic units and are effectively leveraged in the implementation of that strategy (Redmond, n.d.).

The third set of strategies is those meant for the development of human capital. From the perspective of the development of human capital, an organization's employees are a resource that are found invested (Redmond, n.d.). In the modern-day competitive and dynamic business world, people may be the only truly sustainable source of competitive advantages. Strategic leadership formulates strategies through which the human capital found trained and developed.

Generally, strategic leaders can connect with the people around them and have a strong influence over them. Strategic leaders can strike a balance between the short-term and the long-term strategic organizational goals and can steer their organizations to profitability in the long-run (Redmond, n.d.). For instance, Steve Jobs of Apple regularly is cited as a strategic leader who steered his organization to success. Strategic leadership is also related to organizational performance.

Strategic Leadership, Organizational Performance, and Sustainability

According to RBV, the sustainability of an organization's success is contingent on creation, development, and implementation of unique resources and capabilities. López-Cabarcos, Göttling-Oliveira-Monteiro, and Vázquez-Rodríguez (2015) stated that a strong relationship existed between business strategy, organizational capabilities, and profitability. Witts (2016) mentioned that a positive association occurred between organizational performance and competitiveness. As such, the choice of business strategy and organizational capabilities are the main factor in determining the performance of an organization. One way to assess organizational performance is through management capabilities.

Ahmed (2017) stated that managerial capabilities related to a manager's skill and knowledge. These capabilities are necessary for organizational growth. When a manager is capable, they can articulate the company's objectives and produce managerial methods to guide their employees for maximum organizational output. Organizational success is dependent upon a manager's capabilities to utilize the right leadership style and personal qualities to create competitive advantage (Ahmed, 2017). In a study by Ahmed (2017), the author sought to assess the relationship between organizational performance and managerial capabilities in a developing country while accounting for organizational size. The author found that managerial capabilities led to organizational success regardless of company size or location. One way a manager can assess their capabilities is with a balanced scorecard. A balanced scorecard, which is an assessment tool and a criticism

structure, facilitated management to direct their effort toward attainment of strategic success (Akkermans & Van Oorschot, 2018).

Overall, the organization's performance consists of both operational performance and strategic performance. However, total organization performance may not be an optimal yardstick of strategic or operational performance (Witts, 2016). Consequently, one must separate operational performance from strategic performance to ascertain whether an organization has achieved its strategic goals.

Using RBV strategic performance measurement necessitates an understanding of the variables that can control organizational performance. Organizational performance can affect human resources, marketing, strategy, and internal systems (Singh, Darwish, & Potočnik, 2016). The organizational performance aims to improve output and achieve organizational goals. Organizational performance does not only assess a market or financial performance, but also customer satisfaction, corporate social responsibilities, and leadership effectiveness (Singh et al., 2016). Mastrangelo, Eddy, and Lorenzet (2014) found that organizational performance was the fundamental responsibility of strategic leaders and Samukange (2014) proclaimed that strategic productivity and development of an atmosphere in which employees forecasted the organization's needs in the context of their jobs was also the responsibility of strategic leadership.

Through the encouragement of employees to pursue their ideas, strategic leaders use rewards and incentive systems to encourage productivity and improve overall organizational performance (Samukange, 2014). An individual employee's inclination to work together and personal and professional leadership were both elements of long-term

leadership model to achieve organizational performance goals (Mastrangelo et al., 2014).

Further, employee's cooperation depends on personal qualities and character of the

leaders, and it has a substantial influence on the overall performance of an organization

(Mastrangelo et al., 2014). While all leaders influence an organization's output, senior

leadership is often in a position to augment change the most. Strategic leadership,

sustainability, and organizational performance are all interrelated.

Sustainable leadership advocates a comprehensive approach to leading an

organization to balance between people, profits, and sustainability of the organization

through evidenced-based management practices due to an ever-changing business

environment characterized by more complexity. These practices include globalization,

declining resources, social media, and technological developments (Suriyankietkaew &

Avery, 2016). Strategic corporate leaders must be able to adapt to an evolving business

environment to reach organizational goals (Simsek, Jansen, Minichilli, & Escriba-Esteve,

2015).

Sustainability is a long-term journey and a direction that calls for sustainable

leadership, responsible decision making, an awareness of sustainability principles, and

commitments to the organization's vision (Peterlin, Pearse, & Dimovski, 2015). As such,

it is a process that does need critical strategic decisions and the adoption of operational

decisions and a framework to effect strategic decisions. Peterlin et al. (2015) opined that

the journey toward sustainability required four organizational objectives. First, is

strategic sustainability defined as realistic vision and goals (Peterlin et al., 2015). The

second is program and product sustainability, such as high-quality products and services

(Peterlin et al., 2015). Third is personnel sustainability which is valid and reliable workers' performance, and the final is financial sustainability, the financial reserve and contingency planning (Peterlin et al., 2015). Consequently, the achievement of organizational sustainability requires leaders to ask themselves what systemic changes necessary and what attributes may characterize sustainability.

A few implications may arise when considering the strategic decision making of strategic leadership in organizations aiming to become sustainable. Values and priorities of leaders must align with organizational sustainability considerations. Arguments abounded that sustainable leadership offered perspective for leadership regarding the process of strategic leadership decision making, which promoted alignment with organizational sustainability considerations (Peterlin et al., 2015).

According to Hiller et al. (as cited in Witts, 2016), clarity of vision is of great strategic significance since it helps leaders to focus on organizational performance. A clear vision is needed for leadership throughout all levels as the plan communicates organizational goals and strategies to employees (Ateş, Tarakci, Porck, van Knippenberg, & Groenen, 2018). When employees are aware of the organization's strategy, they work better together and reduce self-serving actions (Ateş et al., 2018). Palladan, Abdulkadir, and Chong (2016) concluded that strategic leadership could improve organizational innovativeness, performance, and sustainability.

Strategic Leadership and Organizational Competitiveness

Markides (2014) acknowledged that despite multiple definitions of strategy, there was a broad agreement among organizational leaders that it was an essential element of

business supervision. The difference between definitions occurs in the approach used by different organizations in the preparation, implementation, and assessment of strategies which require clarification (Markides, 2014). Detection and endorsement of new concepts should align with market dynamics so that strategic leaders apply their strategy to settle present and future business trials (Markides, 2014). Thus, such strategies assist leaders to clarify various means to investigate and utilize the short and long-term potential of an organization's resources making an effective strategy essential to reach a competitive advantage (Markides, 2014).

Pelser (2014) held the view that to realize and maintain competitiveness; organization leaders must foster creativity, innovation, and marketing within their strategic planning. Other factors that support organizational competitiveness include a highly experienced workforce and an internal and external knowledge base (Pelser, 2014). Over time, the creation of aptitude for organizational profitability should be the sole goal of resource optimization and strategic leadership (Pelser, 2014). Vargas (2015) found that transactional leaders are unable to achieve innovation and competitiveness, instead, leaders must be ambidextrous to create an environment for organizational learning and success.

The capacity of an organization's strategic leadership to competently inspire significant organizational conversions, such as processes, products, and services, are imperative as leadership judgments have a significant stimulus on the organization and its success (Nyamu, 2017). Strategic leadership can influence organizational success as it supports any needed change necessary for long term competitiveness of the firm. Barney

and Hesterly (as cited in Nyamu, 2017) asserted that there is two types of organizational

competitiveness namely temporary and sustainable competitiveness. Besides, the authors

stated that organizational competitiveness could form increased profitability (Nyamu,

2017). However, this success strengthens competition which restricts the period of

competitiveness causing organizational competitiveness to be passing (Nyamu, 2017).

Similarly, competitiveness is maintainable if the competitors are unable to duplicate the

causes or if other competitors cannot come up with competing ideas (Nyamu, 2017).

Strategic leadership is necessary for long term organizational health as it can

solve customer needs and concerns through innovation (Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016).

This type of leadership emphasizes internal aspects of the organization such as resources,

planning, and employee duties. Strategic leadership can balance both internal and

external environmental factors, offset short-term and long-term difficulties, and combine

multiple leadership methods (Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016). Therefore, it is vital for the

CEO's to provide strategic leadership throughout all levels of the organization.

Despite the apparent significance of competitiveness in impacting organizational

performance, most senior management teams lack the adequate abilities to conceive and

implement an optimal competitive strategy (Witts, 2016). Senior leadership teams focus

on sustainability to improve effectiveness. Kim, Khan, Wood, and Mahmood (2016)

noted that the social aspect of sustainability, such as employee engagement, is often

overlooked. Witts (2016) found that successful sustainability coincided with positive

organizational development when employee engagement was central to the sustainability

strategy. Kim et al. (2016) stated that one way to increase employee engagement was to have the organization take part in corporate social responsibility.

The Role of Strategic Leadership in Decision Making and Risk Management

In any organization, senior management must provide strategic leadership (Witts, 2016). The main objective of strategic decisions is to enhance the organization's competitiveness and sustainability. Ashby, Bryce, and Ring (2018) posited one of the most significant roles that an organization's leadership could play was to declare itself open to conversations about the risk that could foster the risk management process. Risk management is an internal action, such as guarding against events (e.g., fire, industrial unrest, and scandals; Ashby et al., 2018). Therefore, risk management can only be tolerated to the extent that it is an inevitable part of "core" activities, such as manufacturing processes, marketing, and service delivery (Ashby et al., 2018).

According to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICEAW, n.d.), one of the most critical opportunities for risk management is when big decisions coordinate with people searching for information, inquiring about the future, and assessing alternative courses of actions. From the perspective of strategic decision-making for risk management, risk plays a vital role in human behavior when faced with uncertainty (Çelik, Özkul, & Tuna, 2016). There are three categories of leadership for the management of risk: risk-averse leaders, risk neutral leaders, and risk-takers (Çelik et al., 2016). Risk is an element of decision-making and demonstrates uncertainty in outcomes and causing decisions which can result in disappointment (Çelik et al., 2016). Potential

losses and uncertainty are fundamental components of risk and fluctuations alter the uncertainty of potential losses (Çelik et al., 2016).

Witts (2016) opined a significant relationship existed between job satisfaction and unsatisfactory organizational performance. Therefore, leadership and job satisfaction must offer a positive emotional experience to improve employees' wellbeing and competitiveness and performance of the business (Witts, 2016). Implementing a risk management system can determine the success of an organization as it mitigates bloated budgets, diminished returns, missed performance goals, and time negligence (Cagliano, Grimaldi, & Rafele, 2015). An organization's senior leadership could integrate business with risk management strategies to the organization's performance (Witts, 2016). Bailey (2015) stated that risk management is a complex process which comprises the development of risk governance framework, a process for application, and monitoring to confirm suitable business protection, concluding that risk management is a strategic management function and prime responsibility of the senior leadership and the board of directors.

The ability of the strategic leadership to foresee and control risk is reliant upon the availability of the appropriate human resource, organizational culture, and systems (Bailey, 2015). A dynamic risk management system is necessary to enable the assessment of risk to strategic leadership. Further, organizations must take some risks in order to take advantage of market opportunities, become competitive, and achieve sustainability (Bailey, 2015). Thus, organizational leadership should define its risk profile to guide the subordinates in the daily operations of the business whereas it is the role of leadership to

ensure that their organization has suitable risk protection (Bailey, 2015). Bailey (2015)

added that the daily management of risks was the responsibility of every employee in the

organization; therefore, leadership should encourage employees to attend risk

management training programs to hone their aptitude. An integrated approach to risk

management should have management and employees aid in achieving organizational

goals while mitigating risk (Vladušić, Rebić, & Hršum, 2016). Risk training aligns with

organizational learning and performance.

The Role of Leadership in Organization Change and Transformation

Sharma (2016) stated that organizational transformation was the most challenging

process within the business. Furthermore, it is increasingly challenging as competition

and the business environment brands most organizations. For continued growth and

success to continue, a business converts to adjust to arising crises transforming a

necessary process (Sharma, 2016). Change is dependent on leaders as they possess the

power to formulate plans and influence the direction (Sharma, 2016). Organizational

change and transformation compel leaders not just to create a structure but to implement

it. Transformations are conceptual shifts by distinguishing the company's vision, mission,

values, and beliefs (Sharma, 2016). Therefore, the preferred transformation relies on an

organization's leadership, culture, and qualitative organization strategy that can alter and

adjust its systems, processes, and structure (Sharma, 2016).

The process of transformation is a complex one and does not occur

instantaneously instead of at uneven rates infrequent intervals (Sharma, 2016). An

organization's transformation is unpredictable often leading to unintended consequences

(Sharma, 2016). Therefore, leadership must be reliable, adaptable, and able to quell employee concerns (Sharma, 2016). People in the organization must understand the transformation process entirely, as the vantage point of the leadership may be different from employees (Sharma, 2016).

However, the responsibility of a leader can be taxing as they need to clarify the organization's changing objectives and handle this emotional repercussion (Sharma, 2016). The second role of leaders is to focus on the technical aspect of establishing and implementing systems, processes, structures, and necessary technologies. Sharma (2016) stated that every leader should utilize different approaches to control the technical and emotional characteristics of the transformation process.

Aside from tackling the challenges that touch on an organization's workforce, leadership must also conduct a stakeholders' examination and practical application of a framework of analysis for the developed operation of the organization (Witts, 2016). From the point of view of project management, stakeholders are all those people who may influence the project (Witts, 2016). Therefore, to understand stakeholders, a detailed analysis of the dynamic relationship between the organization and the stakeholders must be continuously revised (Witts, 2016). Leaders are also involved with the sustainability of an organization.

The Role of Leadership in Sustainability

Today, most organizations are operating in challenging times characterized by competition and complex situations. Companies must continually change to maintain their place within the business market (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015). Therefore, leadership

must consider and guide sustainability throughout an organizational change (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015). Aside from decision making, leadership must contend with external development by adjusting to these fluctuations (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015). Ordinarily, this is dependent on the ability, quality, and execution of leaders when addressing present organizational changes while accounting for the future (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015).

Leadership can create sustainability through organizational ethics. When a leader employs an ethical approach that aligns with participating parties, then an opportunity for sustainability and success is created (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015). When ethical behavior of the leadership coordinates with sustainability goals in critical times of business trials to the organization, organizations can endure such volatile times successfully (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015).

Leadership and sustainability also apply to its employees and interpersonal relationships within the organization (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015). For instance, a liberal approach by the leadership will encourage improvement in the work process from the innovative knowledge that employees offer in the organization (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015). Moreover, leadership has a role in the identification of the problems and the anticipation to offer solutions during difficult times (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015). In the current business world, the role of a leader is to provide results when confronted with challenges and to incorporate actions to maintain sustainability (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015).

Effectively, this contains two critical actions. Fundamental changes must be identified throughout the organization, as external pressures dictate a change in interpersonal relations and reduce the stability of organizational change (Zogjani & Raçi,

2015). Second, change has the potential for achieving sustainability through innovations and the contribution of all participants and stakeholders (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015).

The role of leadership to create sustainability vary depending on the attributes of their leaders and type of organization (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015). Leaders with those attributes are crucial in organizational change as their attributes guarantee organizational stability and sustainability in the future (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015). The future may be erratic and puzzling from possible continuous organizational changes making control of organizational advantages vital (Zogjani & Raçi, 2015).

According to Taylor (2015), other ways of creating sustainability include leading consciously as an executive, ensuring that all leaders are conscious and development of resonant teams. Through conscious executive leadership, an organization can enable a cultural shift through exhibiting resilient practices and leading by example (Taylor, 2015). As manifesting support is imperative, attention should focus on organizational and system enablers for sustainable performance, as well as the role of leadership and its style (Taylor, 2015).

Secondly, ensuring that all leaders are conscious is something that nurtures tranquility, and healthy and sustainable performance ethos (Taylor, 2015). Consciousness has a significant positive influence on organizational culture as when decision making is competent; there is increased positivity, originality, higher engagement in the workplace, and enhancement and elevated retention of employees (Taylor, 2015). Finally, because sustainability does not necessarily follow the high-performance individuals, the leadership of the organization must develop skills and relationships for optimal operation

within a state of resonance (Taylor, 2015). Resonant teams typically have shared goals

and socially invest in each other to focus on critical priorities (Taylor, 2015).

Organizational learning and performance also influence output.

Organizational Learning and Performance

Zgrzywa-Ziemak (2015) posited that functioning in a dynamic, unpredictable, and

complex environment resulted in search of competitive advantage that was not based on

unique products, technology, or resources but in the organization's capacity to develop

innovative knowledge. This argument claimed that the development and sustainability of

modern business organizations need learning at a faster rate and more effectively than

competitors. Organizational learning, which is defined by Namada (2017) as a process

that develops insights to influence organizational behavior, is considered a mechanism

which generates conditions for the development of the knowledge-based economy.

Tamayo-Torres, Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, Llorens-Montes, and Martínez-López

(2016) described how and to what degree a firm creates, circulates, and maintains internal

information and awareness. Organizational learning can include teaching, access to open

learning programs, e-learning methods, job cycling, participation in multi-disciplinary

teams, and occupational preparation. These processes can occur individually or

collectively (Tamayo-Torres et al., 2016). Within organizational learning, employees

should be exposed to innovative learning while disseminating their existing knowledge

with the rest of the firm. Organizational learning is often associated with achievement,

enhancement, formation, and application of new knowledge (Tamayo-Torres et al.,

2016). Tamayo-Torres et al. (2016) analyzed how organizational learning guides

advancement. The authors found that organizational learning positively shaped managers' choices when implementing change within an organization's fluctuating atmosphere while enabling innovate products or services. Knowledge management is another feature of organizational learning and performance.

Knowledge management recognizes, characterizes, and dispenses data and proficiency within the organization. Knowledge management can help encourage the advancement of human capital, create new methods to distribute that knowledge, and adjust to a turbulent market that is often at the whim of competition and technology (Jain & Moreno, 2015). Jain and Moreno (2015) uncovered that elements of organizational learning like teamwork, supervision, motivations, and appreciation could all increase knowledge management techniques.

Jain and Moreno (2015) examined organizational learning and knowledge management. Speed is essential when circulating knowledge as organizational learning can achieve progress through the production of original and advanced abilities. Organizational learning can inspire and enable employees for continued development that assists goal attainment (Jain & Moreno, 2015). However, a conducive atmosphere for learning must exist at the individual, group, organizational, and inter-organizational stations. Additionally, organizational learning must rely upon sustained education, investigation, dialogue, team knowledge, an entrenched system, system association, and strategic leadership (Jain & Moreno, 2015).

Chung, Yang, and Huang (2015) reiterated the importance of knowledge to maintain market control and competitive advantage. The authors stated that

organizational learning occurs through exploratory or exploitative methods. Exploratory learning is when data comes from external customer and competitor boundaries, while exploitative learning relies upon market data within customer and competitor boundaries (Chung et al., 2015). However, quanxi, the networking of business and political ties, can also influence organizational learning and performance. When comparing both exploitative and exploratory learning to quanxi, the authors found that it positively improves exploitative learning and strategic performance while diminishing explorative learning and strategic performance. Therefore, businesses should focus on exploitative learning to enhance organizational learning (Chung et al., 2015). However, Heslin and Keating (2017) asserted that experiential learning is a vital aspect of leadership. Personal knowledge and trial and error could provide leaders with increased knowledge of successful practices, thereby assisting personal self-improvement for more significant organizational outcomes (Heslin & Keating, 2017).

Vargas (2015) agreed that organizational learning could aid in achieving competitive advantage. Organizational learning creates innovation and improved performance across firms of all sizes. Organizational learning influenced by leadership style found with transformational or transactional (Vargas, 2015). Transactional leadership suggests that deterrents and incentives attain organizational goals. However, it does not promote an environment conducive to informational communications thereby limiting innovation. Transformational leadership requires leaders to have a vision capable of changing the organization. Transformational leadership is much more supportive for organizational learning as it encourages employees to think beyond their station (Vargas,

2015). Organizational learning works best when leaders can offer adaptive and innovative flexibility, support employee courage and openness to offer new ideas, maintain their values, foster an environment for learning, adjust to changing and complex scenarios, and offer a vision to guide the organization (Vargas, 2015).

Namada (2017) observed that performance offered important feedback regarding the efficiency of the learning process, and ultimately influences how an organization continues to learn. Moreover, Namada indicated that organizational learning produced originality and innovation, which in turn backs the development of new products. Managers learning ability enables an organization to become responsive to the changes in the market making it instrumental particularly to organizations that are operating in vibrant and multifaceted settings (Namada, 2017).

The Effect of Senior Leadership on the Organizational Performance

According to Kraus and Insurance (2016), senior leadership is critical to organizational performance. Senior leadership has a collective purpose, maintaining a corporation's environment, inculcating of values, and planning strategically. In a previous study, Mackey (as cited in Kraus & Insurance, 2016) found that CEOs accounted for 29% of the overall variance in organizational performance. Danişman, Tosuntaş, and Karadağ (2015) also concluded that there was a significant association between leadership and organizational performance, and the magnitude of the effect stood at 32%.

Kraus and Insurance (2016) noted that although CEOs are critical to organizational performance, research shows that top management teams have much more

stimulus than the CEOs. Moreover, research has also found that organizations can increase the likelihood of strong performance by assessing the performance, qualities, and management styles of its senior management (Kraus & Insurance, 2016) Behavioral flexibility, leadership styles, and senior management's cohesion have an uneven effect on organizational accomplishment but improved through targeted expansion (Kraus & Insurance, 2016).

Behavioral flexibility is the aptitude to adjust or modify one's leadership approach as demanded by the requirements and stresses of their employees (Kraus & Insurance, 2016). Senior management must communicate with diverse internal and external stakeholders (Kraus & Insurance, 2016). Given the multifaceted quality of their responsibilities, strategic leaders should show behavioral pliability through adaptation to improve the likelihood of resilient operation across the different units of the organization (Kraus & Insurance, 2016). Moreover, Eisenbeiss (as cited in Kraus & Insurance, 2016) stated senior management must saturate the entire organization for awareness, improvement, and efficiency.

Different leadership styles have also linked to organizational performance (Kraus & Insurance, 2016; Nguyen, Mia, Winata, & Chong, 2017). Zhang, Li, Ullrich, and van Dick (2015) found that chief executive officer's transformational leadership held significant sway over the effectiveness of senior management, and subsequently organizational performance. This type of leadership has a propensity to sway group behavior toward a high interpersonal relationship, and definite followership. Kraus and Insurance (2016) noted that charismatic and transformational leaders are also likely to

surpass other styles of management. These types of leaders can effectually convey knowledge, earn the loyalty of employees, develop an optimal business strategy, and are for organizations dealing with difficult times (Kraus & Insurance, 2016). However, whereas transformational leadership guarantees an organization's realization, it is less successful when expressing duties and anticipations. This aspect highlights the prominence of behavioral flexibility and different leadership skills as created by situational indications (Kraus & Insurance, 2016).

The other element of senior leadership related to organizational output is cohesion (Kraus & Insurance, 2016). Rather than competing against each other, cohesive senior management team members should work in harmony for the enlargement of organizational performance (Kraus & Insurance, 2016). Moreover, organizations with consistent shared leadership have a higher probability of commencing and committing to essential strategic fluctuations in comparison to lacking unified senior supervision (Kraus & Insurance, 2016). However, not all types of business management are the same. Therefore entrepreneurial leadership should also be examined in the context of organizational performance.

Entrepreneurial Leadership and Organizational Performance

Strategic leadership symbolizes prospective and beneficial leadership that demands the capability to make conclusions appropriately and be malleable and agreeable to the market-driven changes (Witts, 2016). Witts (2016) found two types of entrepreneurial leadership: entrepreneurial leaders and entrepreneurs in leadership positions. Lisak and Erez (2015) added that the aptitude to employ insufficient resources

was a distinguishing attribute of entrepreneurial leadership. Further, strategic

entrepreneurial leadership is not reliant on an individual's position in the organizational

pyramid. Other elements of entrepreneurial leadership include supervision,

uncompromising commitment, multitasking, and flexibility to lead people separately or in

teams (Lisak & Erez, 2015).

Kesidou and Carter (2014) stated that business operations and development

included continuous redefinition and adjustment of business paradigms and stratagems to

offer new products and organizational routines for improved operation and development.

Kesidou and Carter defined this concept as corporate entrepreneurship and closely related

it to the Schumpeterian concept of acting entrepreneurially to attain competitive

advantage. Rahim, Zainal Abidin, Mohtar, and Ramli (2015) specified that corporate

entrepreneurship was created to explain and delineate organizational practices structure to

encourage entrepreneurship as a policy for increased practicality, operation, and

evolution

Corporate entrepreneurship entails strict and straightforward actions that are

intended to form new business previously recognized organizations using procedures,

product advancement, and market expansion (Kesidou & Carter, 2014). All these

activities may occur at strategic stages within the organizational configurations with the

shared objective of refining organizational competitiveness and execution. Kesidou and

Carter (2014) found that continuous research has detailed corporate entrepreneurship as

an idealistic strategy that fosters entrepreneurial culture through investigation and

utilization of prospects to attain competitive advantage.

Another concept able to identify and reflect a corporate entrepreneurial strategy is entrepreneurial orientation (Kesidou & Carter, 2014). This concept encapsulates facets of decision-making styles, approaches, and systems. Entrepreneurial orientation is an amalgamation of three different strategies: innovativeness, pro-activeness, and risk-taking (Kesidou & Carter, 2014). Both corporate entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation linked to organizational performance growth and performance.

So far, scholarship has concentrated on explaining structural formations that determine development and function to connect to leadership (Kesidou & Carter, 2014). Kuratko et al. (as cited in Kesidou & Carter, 2014) suggested that an entrepreneur of the 21st century is one who acknowledges the significance of the organization's entrepreneurial direction to institute maintainable competitive advantages thereby ensuring maximum performance outcomes. Essentially, this suggestion places the obligation of developing a corporation's structure on the leader (Kesidou & Carter, 2014). Therefore, the rudimentary facet of the entrepreneurial leadership process suggests a visioning, opportunity seeking, and strategic management of resources (Kesidou & Carter, 2014).

Hartnell, Kinicki, Lambert, Fugate, and Doyle Corner (2016) professed that leadership style and organizational culture are inter-linked as leadership should be composed of an organization's environmental and cultural deficiencies. The authors determined that leaders should be prepared to identify an organization's weaknesses (Hartnell et al., 2016). One way to improve leadership is through training and development. Day and Dragoni (2015) noted that leadership development programs

should be implemented across all levels of management to achieve organizational goals.

Witts (2016) termed organizational leadership as the fundamental principle which unites

organizational performance, while Tetteh and Brenyah (2016) acknowledged that in order

for organizational leadership achieved, employees must have short and long term

incentives to initiate change and encourage performance beyond what the expectations of

the organization. Both transactional and transformational leadership styles attribute to

organizational performance, yet it is only transformational leadership that inspires

innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit (Kang, Solomon, & Choi, 2015). Entrepreneurial

capabilities guarantee that organizations generate competitive advantage, achieved

through entrepreneurial actions positioned to intentionally alter the organization's

competitive landscape (Witts, 2016).

A popular view about business prospects is that due to information asymmetries,

different, individuals cultivate diverse sensitivities about the relative value and potential

of specific resources utilized as contributions to production and output skilled at

generating economic payment (Kesidou & Carter, 2014). Entrepreneurship explained as

the pursuit of realizing, investigating and utilizing opportunities to achieve goals

(Kesidou & Carter, 2014). Nonetheless, the process of identifying opportunities entails

practical abilities and originality, team building, problem-solving skills, and leadership

(Kesidou & Carter, 2014). However, entrepreneurial alertness may be the most precise

notion that describes palpable and nontangible talents and capabilities (Kesidou & Carter,

2014).

Furthermore, the results of an entrepreneurial process are viable, as the aim of entrepreneurship is to appropriate economic fees by manipulating a prospect that has yet to be exploited by rivals (Kesidou & Carter, 2014). Alertness is necessary to uncover opportunities and subsequently employ them. The alternative to alertness would be the effectuation approach, where opportunity pursuit and exploitation by using the available resources rather than the scrutiny of the industry and the competition (Kesidou & Carter, 2014). Instructively, RBV stresses that stratagem commences from the analysis of the organizational resources rather than the analysis of the industry. To summarize entrepreneurial leaders, act as the engineers of consistency between their abstract future and entrepreneurial exploits of external and internal stakeholders who achieve this vision (Kesidou & Carter, 2014). Therefore, performance is consistent with RBV and reliant on policies and viable strategies of entrepreneurial firms. Strategic leadership also affects organizational competitiveness.

Transition and Summary

In Section 1, the literature review contained a brief overview of the background of the problem and the synthesis of applied business research. The section also included the foundation of the study, the background to the problem, problem statement, and the purpose statement. Section 1 contained the nature of the study, highlighting the preference for the qualitative research method and the single case study design. To explore the strategic elements applied by the participants, I utilized defined research questions. The conceptual framework and lens for this study was the RBV theory. To ensure reader comprehension of the study, I used the keywords element to help with

clarification and understanding. This element clarified the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study that influenced the overall results of the study. The significance of the study was that findings might reflect information about strategic leadership, business practices, and the implications for social change. The literature review elements contained topics relating to strategic leadership, RBV, competitive advantage, and profitability. The primary objective of the study was to explore the strategic leadership attributes that senior executives needed to increase profitability.

Section 2 presents a discussion on the importance of the research by readdressing the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, the participants involved in the study, the research method, and the design method. Additional sections include population and sampling, ensuring ethical research, data collection, and data collection instruments and technique. Section 2 further includes analysis, reliability, and validity.

Section 2: The Project

Strategic leadership is the ability of top management teams to develop a

sustainable competitive advantage and value creation for stakeholders (Carter & Greer,

2013). Strategic leadership can reflect a broad scope of responsibilities and decisions that

senior executives must execute to influence the sustainability of the firm. For this study, I

explored the role of strategic leadership in healthcare profitability. Section 2 includes a

rearticulating of the research method and design.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategic

leadership skills in healthcare profitability. The population for this study was executive

leaders in Atlanta, Georgia. The completion of this study might enhance the soft skillsets

of healthcare leaders by helping them understand the overall influences of strategic

leadership skills on healthcare profitability in Atlanta, Georgia. Scholar-practitioners

might benefit from more comprehension of the overall influence of strategic leadership

on profitability. The contribution to social change might include limiting the potential

failure of healthcare initiatives and improvement of the standard of living of individuals

in the United States.

Role of the Researcher

The primary role of the qualitative researcher is to collect, analyze, understand,

and interpret the data as these relate to the phenomenon (Kornhaber, de Jong, & McLean,

2015). Researchers may utilize a qualitative case study design to perform an in-depth

investigation of varying perspectives on a phenomenon (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014).

Qualitative case study design requires the researcher to be the data collection instrument (Yin, 2014). Qualitative researchers view data through their personal lens (Yin, 2014). I was the primary data collection instrument, collecting data through conducting in-depth open-ended interviews with participants to discover the strategies that senior leadership executives in healthcare utilized to maximize profitability.

I followed standard research ethics and protocol for the current study and waited to begin data collection after having been given approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I adhered to the *Belmont Report*'s (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979) ethical principles and guidelines for research involving human subjects. The *Belmont Report* established guidelines for research involving human subjects (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). There were three ethical principles outlined in the *Belmont Report*: (a) respect of individuals, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. The *Belmont Report* also indicated boundaries between behavioral and biomedical research, as well as accepted and routine practices for research. The guidelines of the report also communicated the participants' rights to informed consent before participating in the study (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979).

To mitigate potential bias, I used healthcare executives with over 15 years of work experience in strategic leadership. For the current study, I used member checking by allowing participants to review the transcripts and confirm or challenge the data collected. I used this approach to mitigate any potential bias with the study. Member checking is the procedure of reviewing the study findings with the participants to validate the responses uncovered in the interviews (Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant, 2012; Yin, 2014).

As a senior executive in global operations with over 20 years of experience in strategic leadership and global operations in the healthcare vertical, I was transparent about any potential bias. Some of the senior executives who participated in this study were former colleagues in the healthcare vertical; however, I did not select any senior executives with whom I had an intimate relationship. Therefore, colleagues such as my professional mentor or those with personal connections were not allowed to participate in the interviews. I engaged in a semistructured protocol for the interviews to collect the necessary data and increase the validity and reliability of the study. Subjectivity can dictate the topic of the study, the formulation of research questions, interpretation of the findings, and the structure and nature of the study itself (Yin, 2014). Researchers must pay attention to subjectivity. I addressed subjectivity in numerous ways.

To begin with, I was transparent about potential personal bias to the readers (see Yin, 2014). Another way to mitigate any bias through subjectivity was to be transparent when gathering and analyzing the data, in addition to describing the experience as the research continued (Yin, 2014). Being open and transparent throughout the research process diminished issues of my subjectivity in the results.

Participants

To ensure that research findings are applicable, researchers must determine the eligibility of research participants. A researcher must establish ethical criteria, which can define the eligibility of the participants (Lamb, 2013). Each study may have its own set of eligibility criteria (He, Carini, Sim, & Weng, 2015). The focus of the current study was on the healthcare sector in the United States. I selected one of the top 10 largest *Fortune*

500 companies. I selected participants from a successful healthcare organization in Atlanta, Georgia. Specifically, all the participants were senior executives with expertise in strategic leadership.

I selected participants based on the experience and level of exposure to strategic leadership and healthcare profitability. The criteria for participation in the study was dependent on the skills and experience of the participants with the phenomenon (see Cadman et al., 2014; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputong, 2012; Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2014). The proprietorship of strategic leadership skills, knowledge, and execution of the strategic leadership in healthcare profitability influenced the selection of the study participants. The chosen participants had 15 years of expertise in the healthcare sector and 10 years of senior leadership.

Gaining access to the firm and the research participants entailed a significant level of trust, which needed to be at the forefront of data collection to ensure that the participants were not at risk during the study research (see Denzin & Giardina, 2016). I ensured participants' privacy throughout the collection of data (see Ruivo, Santos, & Oliveira, 2014). Accessibility to participants supported a focused, collaborative, and comprehensive interview. To gain access to the participants of the study, I drafted a letter to the CEO of the organization to request permission to conduct this current doctoral study. Before the start of the study, I requested that the selected participants sign a consent form agreeing to participate in the study. Study participants understood the risks and their rights to participate or withdraw on demand (see Denzin & Giardina, 2016; Petrova et al., 2014). The chief operating officer and former colleague assisted in

obtaining final approval from the CEO, whereby I sent 15 letters of invitation to the

prospective participants through e-mail.

Communicating the right of the participants to abstain or participate at any point

in time in the study can significantly enhance the level of trust between a researcher and

the participants (Cadman et al., 2014; Dickson-Swift et al., 2012; Petrova et al., 2014).

To establish a level of trust and willingness to participate in the study, I showed the

participants a copy of the letter of cooperation, evidence of the CEO approval of the

study. Additionally, to establish trust further, I allowed the participants to pick the time

and location of the interview, giving the feeling of being contributors rather than merely

subjects (see Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2014). I told all participants they could opt out

of the project at any time. Each participant reviewed their interview to ensure their

answers were adequately reported and not misrepresented (see Corbin et al., 2014). I

provided personal contact information to the participants for them to contact me

throughout and after the process to establish a better working relationship (see Corbin et

al., 2014).

Research Method and Design

Selection of the research method is dependent on the research question and the

data collection method (Colquhoun et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014).

Philosophical perspectives and the phenomenon being studied have a correlation to the

research method choice (DeLyser & Sui, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014).

Researchers who are interested in studying the experiences and beliefs of the participant

will use a qualitative method of research. The research design choice may depend on the

research questions and objectives of the researcher (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). Researchers who desire to explore the real-life experiences of the participants with the phenomenon may choose a case study design (Leko, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

Research Method

Some research methods may be more aligned when addressing some research questions compared to others (DeLyser & Sui, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). To elicit more in-depth responses from participants, researchers can utilize the quantitative method of research (Dickson-Swift et al., 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant, 2012). I used a qualitative research method to explore the influence of strategic leadership on healthcare profitability and selected a qualitative research design to understand the experiences senior leadership members have with the phenomenon of healthcare profitability. Qualitative researchers seek unstructured or semistructured data to elicit in-depth conversation about the lived experiences of the participants. The use of quantitative or mixed method designs is not suitable for an exploratory study (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014; Leko, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). Researchers who use a quantitative research design test a theory or theories using variables when they cannot explore the personal experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Yin, 2014). If the researcher seeks to enhance knowledge and credibility of previous findings, then mixed methods would be a suitable research design (Moustakas, 1994; Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013; Yin, 2014). Mixed methods research design may provide similar and opposing views of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Venkatesh et al., 2013; Yin,

2014). Due to time constraints for the current study, I did not select the mixed methods design.

Research Design

I used a single case study design to explore the dynamics affecting the profitability of healthcare by obtaining data from senior healthcare executives. Choosing a research design may be influenced by the research method, research question, researcher's philosophical preference, and time (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014; DeLyser & Sui, 2014; Yin, 2014). The narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnographic designs were unsuitable for this study.

A case study is an in-depth experimental investigation that a researcher will use to study a phenomenon within the context of real-life (Venkatesh et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). When researchers recognize that limitations between the phenomenon and perspectives are not evident, they may choose a case study design (Venkatesh et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). Researchers who choose a case study design will conduct personal in-depth interviews using open-ended questions, such as *how, why,* or *what* (Grossoehme, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). Case study research begins with a decree of a theory to predict an outcome for a study and involves the collection of data and further analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Venkatesh et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). A case study design requires the researcher to assess a single case or multiple cases that may consist of a single or group of organizations all at once or at varying periods. Understanding senior healthcare executives required an exploratory study using the case study design to improve the overall findings.

The narrative approach is a design that tells the story of an event or an individual (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014; DeLyser & Sui, 2014; Yin, 2014). For a research study that was limited on time and focused on the exploration of participant experiences, the narrative approach is not a suitable study. Grounded theory design involves proving the findings of an existing theory or theories, which includes notes, explanations, and chronicles (Grossoehme, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). Grounded theory might require a significant amount of time to conduct; therefore, it was not suitable for a business study and an exploratory study that was time sensitive. The phenomenology approach is useful if the participants have experienced the phenomenon, but little data or information are available about the phenomenon (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014; DeLyser & Sui, 2014; Yin, 2014). Researchers rely on interviews as the primary source of data collection with the phenomenology design (Moustakas, 1994; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Sargeant, 2012). The phenomenology design was not suitable for an in-depth exploratory study on senior healthcare executives, which required a case study design. The ethnographic design is suitable for studies concentrating on an individual's culture or a group of individuals over an extended period (Grossoehme, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). The ethnographic approach was not suitable for a business study or an exploratory study that was time-bound.

I used the same open-ended questions consistently throughout to conduct in-depth interviews until reaching data saturation. I conducted personal in-depth interviews with five senior healthcare executives from the chosen organization with over 15 years of expertise, work experience, and strategic leadership responsibilities. I achieved data

saturation when redundant responses to the same questions from multiple participants occurred (see Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant, 2012). I asked the same open-ended questions to the point of receiving the same responses from the participants. Within the case study approach, data collection and analysis can occur at the same time, and themes may surface from the statements made by the participants (Colquhoun et al., 2014; Lamb, 2013; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). I utilized this case study design to explore the role of senior leadership in healthcare profitability.

Population and Sampling

The senior leadership individuals with strategic leadership responsibilities for the current research lived in Atlanta, GA. Before conducting the interviews, I shared a brief presentation to the participants about the goals of the current study. I collected data from a defined group of five senior healthcare executives with experience in strategic leadership and profitability. Several healthcare organizations maintained corporate offices in Atlanta, GA. The chosen organization had over 5000 employees; however, only a few of the senior management team met the selection criteria. The sample size consisted of five senior executives with experience in strategic leadership and profitability. The selection of five senior executives provided a rich enough sample to extrapolate pertinent data (Corbin et al., 2014). While small, a selection of five participants was aligned with previous standards of qualitative research (Corbin et al., 2014).

To select the sample population, researchers can utilize probabilistic or non-probabilistic purposive sampling methods (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015). Researchers who utilize a random selection method to pick the sample from a population with equal probability to be selected will use probabilistic sampling. The utilization of the random selection method might not lead to an appropriate sample for understanding the case of the study because the study would only require individuals with strategic leadership and experience in healthcare profitability.

Choosing the research participants can be the most critical step in a qualitative study (Ritchie et al., 2013; Sargeant, 2012). Purposeful selection may be the most efficient way for a researcher to choose the sample population (Moustakas, 1994; Ritchie et al., 2013; Sargeant, 2012). I used a purposively selected sample of five participants from a group of senior healthcare executives. I conducted personal, in-depth interviews with five senior healthcare executives with over 15 years of experience in strategic leadership and profitability. Researchers must make every attempt to conduct interviews up to the point of data saturation, which occurs when researchers start getting the same redundant responses from study participants (Cleary et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant, 2012).

To increase the credibility and validity of a study, I was cognizant of the sample size within the study and asked the same open-ended questions until reaching the point of data saturation. The interviews with the senior healthcare executives were the catalyst for further exploration of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon and how strategic leadership can positively influence healthcare profitability. These participants

were selected based on their role within the organization, their level of expertise, and the success achieved in strategic leadership to drive organizational profitability. Lastly, the participants chose the time and location for the interview. By letting the participants choose the selection, they felt less like subjects and more like active contributors, providing an atmosphere where they felt more comfortable answering questions (Corbin et al., 2014).

Ethical Research

In research studies, each participant has the right to make an informed decision as to the extent of their participation in a research project (Petrova et al., 2014). I requested that all participants sign an informed consent form containing the Walden University IRB approval number, (03-20-19-0200359, expiration date of 03/19/2020). The details on the consent form consisted of an expiration date and relevant contact details of a Walden University representative. Data collection did not begin until after all approval from the Walden University IRB was obtained so to remain compliant with all ethical standards. In preparation for IRB approval, I read the ethics approval application and completed the training course on the protection of human research participants, passed all the required quizzes, and received the certificate of completion by the National Institute of Health (NIH) No. 1204105 dated 06/18/2018 (Appendix F).

All participants had the option of dropping out of the study at any point and for any reason. This option was made clear to all participants and my contact information on the consent form included name, email address, and cell phone number in case the participants had any questions or concerns. A brief description and objective of the study,

the purpose of the study, and the selection criteria of the participants were also included within the consent form. Participants received coded names, such as Participant A, B, and C, and only I had access to their data, making identification of the participants impossible (Corbin et al., 2014).

Once data were gathered, I stored the personal data in a secure and kept at this location for 5 years. The gathered data contained both physical copies of the recorded data from the interviews, in addition to all digital transcriptions. The data were placed within a locked location where only the researcher had access (Corbin et al., 2014). All digited data and hard copies will be destroyed after the 5-year deadline has passed.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection instrument for this current doctoral study was in-depth interviews and open-ended questions to gather responses from the participants on their personal experiences with the phenomenon. Throughout the interview process, I explored the scope to which the participants had personal experiences within the phenomenon of the role of strategic leadership in healthcare profitability. Comprehension of the phenomenon from a participant's viewpoint was attained by utilizing personal in-depth interviews and open-ended questions (see Cleary et al., 2014; Petrova et al., 2014; Sargeant, 2012).

A qualitative researcher can utilize multiple techniques for data collection, such as focus groups, observations, archival records, face-to-face interviews, site visits, and multiple forms of documents (Cleary et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant, 2012). To ensure the validity, accuracy, and credibility of a study, qualitative researchers may use

member checking (Anney, 2014; Sargeant, 2012). The methods were utilized through member checking for consistency, validity, and reliability of the study.

I enlisted in triangulation to ensure credibility of the study. Researchers use triangulation to compare multiple data sources (Petrova et al., 2014; Sargeant, 2012). Triangulation is a process that qualitative researchers can use to validate the phenomenon (Anney, 2014; Petrova et al., 2014). A qualitative researcher may utilize multiple techniques to validate a phenomenon. These techniques consist of data gathering, investigator, theoretical, or methodological triangulation techniques, all of which may increase the reliability and validity of research data (Anney, 2014; Petrova et al., 2014).

The use of multiple theories to interpret data and multiple data collection methods by the researcher are referred to as the methodological triangulation technique (Petrova et al., 2014; Sargeant, 2012). To test data for validity, the researcher may use methodological triangulation (Randles, Overton, Galloway, & Wallace, 2018; Cho & Lee, 2014; MacPhail, Khoza, Abler, & Ranganathan, 2016). For the current study, I interviewed multiple senior executives at individual time slots to gather a broad scope of views about the phenomenon.

I created the interview protocol (Appendix E). Follow-up communications through phone calls and emails were conducted to enhance the understanding of the participant's response. A researcher may utilize various means of data, such as company websites, social media, and annual reports, to deepen the understanding and interpretation of the in-depth interview (Cleary et al., 2014).

Data Collection Technique

To gather more profound interview responses from the participants, I used open-ended questions and in-depth interviews (see Cleary et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant, 2012). Face-to-face interviews with senior leaders with strategic leadership skills assisted me in understanding the phenomenon of healthcare profitability. I created an interview protocol (Appendix E) as a roadmap for the discussion with the participants of the study. In their consents to participate, I discussed their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time and to ask questions openly during the interview process. To reach data saturation, I needed to receive the same responses to the same question from multiple participants (see Cleary et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant, 2012). To ensure data saturation and consistency in the data collection process, I used similar interview questions with all the study participants.

Before conducting the interviews, I drafted a personal e-mail invitation to the study participants. The interview conversations were recorded using a Philips Voice Tracer recorder for post interview transcription, interpretation, and analysis (Yin, 2014). As a backup, I used Audacity software to record the interview data captured. Qualitative researchers utilize an interview protocol to gather in-depth information about the phenomenon as a guide (Yin, 2014). For the current research, an interview protocol, with semistructured questions, and follow-up questions were developed and utilized during the interview process (Appendix E).

I used a tape recorder as the primary data collection instrument and backed this up with hand-written journal entries to ensure accurate documentation of the participant

responses. I sought all permissions from the participants to tape-record the responses to the interview questions. As part of the preliminary discussions with the study participants, I shared all objectives of the study and the utilized data collection techniques, such as open-ended interview questions and the tape-recording of responses. If for any reason, one or more of the study participants declined to be tape-recorded, handwritten journaling was used to capture the themes of the interview. I conducted a field test with the participants in an environment in which they were comfortable and would speak openly and without reservation. Such a method was utilized to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process. A field test enables the researcher and the participants to engage in observation and dialogue before the commencement of the actual study (Cleary et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014).

For qualitative data collection methods, face-to-face interviews have the highest rate of successful responses. The use of visual aids may be the catalyst to gather additional information (Cleary et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994). One can use face-to-face interviews for real-time spontaneous responses to the interview questions from the study participants (Cleary et al., 2014; Sargeant, 2012). Personal in-depth interviews may allow the researcher to ask follow-up questions and or elicit more detailed responses from the study participants (Cleary et al., 2014; Owen, 2014; Sargeant, 2012).

Complexities may influence or compromise research findings. Events outside of the control of the researcher or participants may have a negative impact on the reliability and validity of the research findings. Participants who listen and answer interview questions simultaneously can influence the quality of the responses and the overall

research findings (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). Researchers who do not utilize journal

notes as a backup to the tape-recorded interview may negatively impact the validity of the

study. Face-to-face interviews with a small number of participants are less likely to be

generalized (Cleary et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant, 2012). There was a higher

probability of researcher bias with face-to-face interviews that could influence research

findings.

     The beginning of the interview sessions included a review of the purpose of the

study and confirmation of the participants' consent. I used personal in-depth interviews

and open-ended questions but was also time-consuming (see Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant,

2012; Yin, 2014). The utilization of a well-defined interview guide helped me prompt

more in-depth responses from the participants. Creating an environment that was

interactive, friendly, and open also positively influenced the responses from the

participants (see Cleary et al., 2014; Doody & Noonan, 2016; Yin, 2014).

     I utilized the coding of the participants and member checking to ensure that the

confidentiality and validity of the participants was protected. Member checking was used

by the qualitative researcher to improve the validity, reliability, and transferability of data

interpretation of the research (see Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant, 2012; Yin, 2014). After the

initial interview sessions completed, I engaged in follow-up with the participants with a

one-on-one phone call to clarify interpretations of the findings and enhance data

reliability. I intended to share the draft report with the study participants, which enhanced

the validity and reliability of the research further.

Data Organization Technique

I used journal notes and observations to track critical points made by the participants during the interview process. To ensure accuracy throughout the interview process, I recorded the date of the interview, participant names, titles, and overall responsibilities within the organization in a journal. I then organized research data in computer files and subfolders in date order. Microsoft Word software assisted in file creation and NVivo software for organization and storage of the research data (Yin, 2014). The content analysis helped in the coding of themes and statements when writing the research findings (see Darawsheh, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). Per Walden University's IRB, all data collection information will be secured in a locked cabinet for 5 years before the destruction of the material. Developing an interview protocol provides a sense of order for the qualitative researcher (Doody & Noonan, 2016; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). The use of a journal assisted in capturing the details of the participants and their responses throughout the interview process.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis incorporates the collection, analysis, interpretations, and the meaning of data and reporting on those findings (Cleary et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). I utilized Word, Excel, and NVivo software to translate data received from the interviews and observations to comprehend the real-life experiences of the study participants holistically. The research design was a single case study, with several data sources. Constant comparison of data analysis was best suited for this research.

I used a thematic analysis to help investigate, understand, and classify the

participants' experiences and responses. Thematic analysis is a technique of classifying,

organizing, and analysis to find patterns and themes across a wide variety of data (Braun,

Clarke, & Terry, 2014; Robinson, 2014). Thematic analysis permitted me to understand

shared findings within the data. These meanings were then used to find unity among all

the responses (see Braun et al., 2014; Robinson, 2014).

I employed a thematic analysis, thereby increasing flexibility. There were six

steps to thematic analysis. The first was to familiarize oneself with the data; the second

was to begin creating initial coding. The third was to identify themes found within that

coding; the fourth was to review the prospective themes. The fifth step was to define and

name the themes, and the final step was to produce a report based upon the findings

(Braun et al., 2014; Robinson, 2014). I followed these six phases for analyzing and

interpreting the data to find themes and drew subsequent conclusions.

I grouped the participant's critical statements to form themes during data analysis.

Qualitative researchers must be careful of influencing the experiences of the participants

with the phenomenon by introducing personally biased (Cho & Lee, 2014; Moustakas,

1994; Petrova et al., 2014). I pulled all data from the transcripts, tape-recorded interviews

of the participants, notes, and any company documents found shared during the study. By

coding the multiple data collection resources, I identified a series of themes and topics for

the research project. Utilizing an Excel spreadsheet helped to develop codes based on

these common themes and topics. I created codes for participants and interview data (e.g.,

P1, P2, et al.), and I followed the same process for any company documents gathered

(e.g., D1, D2, et al.). When additional themes or topics were found, I created new codes and included in the current doctoral research.

Researchers can utilize horizontalization data analysis to count the frequencies of the data and assign equal weight to the responses (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). The researcher can use the reduction and elimination approach to use data from the transcript to group dominant statements from most frequently used to less frequently used (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014).

I utilized data triangulation by collecting from multiple sources, such as company websites, annual reports, and social media sites (e.g., LinkedIn), to mitigate any potential risk of personal bias and to ensure the validity of the data. One can use the triangulation technique with multiple resources to test for data validity (Dickson-Swift et al., 2012). Follow-up interview questions with addition inquiries were elicited to ensure the understanding of participant responses. These additional inquiries helped to ensure the data are reliable and valid. Methodological triangulation uses multiple data sources for testing the validity of data (Randles et al., 2018; Cho & Lee, 2014; MacPhail et al., 2016). I interviewed five participants individually to gain a broad scope of views of the phenomenon and utilized company documents, company website, and social media sites to validate the interpretation of the data.

A researcher can use an Excel spreadsheet as a data analysis tool to code common themes and topics to identify relationships within the text (Saldaña, 2014). For this research, I transcribed the data, entered the findings into the Excel spreadsheet, and highlighted any similarities amongst the data. For the tape-recorded interviews, data were

transferred on the spreadsheet, scrubbed, and placed with universal themes and topics

into categories. Reaching data saturation occurred once the interview data and document

review data became repetitive (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

I used and enabled NVivo to perform coding data analysis, whereby identification

of key themes and word frequencies occurred. The research question aligned with the

outcome of the transcripts. The data analysis aligned with the research question

(Dickson-Swift et al., 2012; MacPhail et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). Data analysis assisted the

researcher to identify strategic leadership skills to increase and sustain profitability.

Through coding, I focused on common themes. Once these themes were categorized,

focus on performing research on current literature that was pertaining to these common

themes occurred.

The research for this study consisted of online resources, peer-reviewed articles,

and journals aligned with the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework of this

study comprised of common themes and topics that identified strategic leadership skills

and increased and sustained profitability. The use of the RBV theory helped to show the

correlation between strategic leadership and value creation (see Barney, 2001;

Wernerfelt, 1984; Yin, 2014).

Reliability and Validity

I achieved reliability when the data analysis tools produced redundant results

during several data analysis (Alshenqeeti, 2014). For the current research, several

procedures were used, such as member checking and triangulation, to ensure reliability

and validity of the study. Reliability measured the rigor and consistency in the collection

of data, coding of data, and analysis of the data (Cho & Lee, 2014; Cleary et al., 2014; MacPhail et al., 2016). Credible analysis of the data was imperative for the qualitative researcher. A researcher uses validity checks to recognize any threats that may negatively influence the credibility of the study (Cho & Lee, 2014; Dickson-Swift et al., 2012; Petrova et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers may utilize internal and external validity methods to check the accuracy of research findings (Moustakas, 1994; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Petrova et al., 2014).

Reliability

One can use reliability to measure the objectivity and consistency of the data collection, coding, and analysis (Cleary et al., 2014; Sargeant, 2012). To test the reliability of the data, I compared the results from different sources of data. To increase the dependability of the data in the current research, utilization of member checking by communicating with the participants to share and verify research findings, as suggested by researchers (Cleary et al., 2014; Grossoehme, 2014; Petrova et al., 2014). To reach dependability, a researcher must strive to get to a point in the research where different researchers come to similar findings in their research (Cleary et al., 2014; Grossoehme, 2014; Petrova et al., 2014).

Qualitative researchers may use the member checking technique to increase the validity and reliability of the research findings. Member checking is the process of sharing research findings with the participants. Then, the participants can qualify the findings of the research (Dickson-Swift et al., 2012; Petrova et al., 2014; Sargeant, 2012).

Validity

One can use validity checks to address internal and external threats that may negatively influence the credibility of the data analysis (Cho & Lee, 2014; Dickson-Swift et al., 2012; Petrova et al., 2014). To minimize the possibility of threats to the validity of the research findings, qualitative researchers will utilize internal and external validation methods. Internal and external validity methods are strategies that researchers use to increase the accuracy of the research findings (Moustakas, 1994; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Petrova et al., 2014). I utilized member checking and triangulation to test the validity and credibility of the data by comparing the findings from multiple resources.

Transferability refers to the ability to apply the findings in different perspectives (Anney, 2014). Member checking will allow a researcher to share the research findings with the participants to authenticate the interviews (Dickson-Swift et al., 2012; Petrova et al., 2014; Sargeant, 2012). To validate the interviews, I shared the draft findings with the participants. I avoided personal bias to ensure conformability. The participants had full authority to communicate misrepresentation of the research analysis and suggest any potential changes to the findings.

Data saturation occurs when the researcher receives similar responses to the same questions from the participants (Cleary et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Sargeant, 2012). The participants must answer the same questions in the interview to reach data saturation in the data collection process (Cleary et al., 2014; Sargeant, 2012; Yin, 2014). For the current research, I used the same interview protocol and asked the same five open-ended questions to the same five participants. Data saturation would occur only when the

participants within the study receive repetitive responses. Confirmability references the alignment of the findings by the researcher and what is reviewed by the participants (Cleary et al., 2014; Grossoehme, 2014; Petrova et al., 2014).

To ensure consistency and validation, I utilized member checking and triangulation to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon. Before performing the in-depth interviews, I conducted a field test with the participants. The field test occurred within their environment to increase the reliability and validity of the study.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore effective strategies healthcare leaders used to develop competent managers to increase profitability. In Section 2, I discussed the purpose of the study and the role of the researcher. This discussion included the plan to gain access to the organization and various participants. This section also included the research method and design, the sample population, and ethical considerations for the research study. Additional topics discussed in Section 2 included data collection instruments, data collection techniques, organizational techniques, data analysis, reliability, and validity strategies.

In the next section, all themes and subthemes are carefully and extensively elucidated and supported by participant quotes, as well as frequency tables that indicate the importance of each theme. In subsequent sections, the existing literature is used to reinforce specific findings, contest them, or further explain certain claims made by participants.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies healthcare leaders use to improve profitability. The overarching question was the following: What strategies do leaders in healthcare use to improve profitability? To answer the research question, I conducted face-to-face semistructured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions and made additional journal notes after each interview to inform and reinforce data analysis. This combination of interviews and journal notes helped me to meet triangulation requirements. The research population consisted of five senior executive leaders who successfully implemented strategic leadership initiatives to improve profitability at their organization. They all had over 15 years of experience in the industry and 10 years in senior leadership at the time of interviewing.

Presentation of the Findings

. I interviewed three male and two female participants. I leveraged the data from the firms' website, social media, and annual reports to enhance the findings from the in-depth interviews. To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, I replaced actual names with alphanumerical values such as P1, P2, through to P5 and kept the participant names under lock and key. The journal entries helped to connect the research question and the conceptual framework. The RBV conceptual framework helped as a guide to the interview questions.

Identification of Themes

Once completed, I imported the interview transcripts into NVivo after which the thematic analysis process commenced. I then identified themes using the RBV as the conceptual framework for the study, which posited that leaders should exploit the internal resources of an organization to gain a competitive advantage (see Sum & Chorlian, 2014). Also, I used Porter's (1980) competitive strategy theory to understand and analyze those themes that did not match with the RBV.

The analysis of five in-depth interviews and additional journal notes resulted in seven themes: (a) leadership factor, (b) human capital development, (c) flexibility, (d) managing financial resources, (e) market expansion, (f) customer satisfaction, and (g) standardization. Themes (a), (b), and (c) were major themes and mentioned by all participants, whereas the other themes were not. Most of the themes were also further divided into major and minor subthemes. Leadership factor included one major subtheme: (a) guidance (mentioned by 100% of participants), and three minor subthemes: (b) decision making (40%), (c) problem-spotting (20%), and (d) conflict mediator (20%). Under human capital development, two major subthemes emerged: (a) skill development (80%), and (b) involvement in decision making (80%). A third major theme was flexibility and included one major subtheme: (a) continuous innovation, which was mentioned by everyone (100%); and (b) flexibility to change approached (40%), a minor subtheme. As to managing financial resources, five subthemes emerged: (a) project investment (60%), (b) staff-project matching (20%), (c) accepting failure (20%), (d) strategic partnerships (20%), and (e) measuring financial progress (80%). In this regard,

(a) and (e) were major subthemes, whereas the others were minor subthemes. A fifth

theme, market expansion (80%), did not include any subthemes. The theme customer

satisfaction, on the contrary, did include two subthemes: one major subtheme (a)

identified ways to measure client satisfaction (80%), and one minor subtheme (b)

improved services (20%). Lastly, the theme standardization, two subthemes emerged: (a)

technology (60%), and (b) vocabulary. In the following sections I present and discuss all

themes and subthemes in detail supported with quotes from participants. Frequency tables

show which participants mentioned specific themes and subthemes, and which

participants did not, as well as about how often (sub)themes were mentioned throughout

the interview. I also draw on findings from previous studies to compare with the results

of this study and explain how the findings relate to the RBV, the conceptual framework

of this current research.

Emergent Theme 1: Leadership Factor

The first theme was leadership factor in which the participants described the

characteristics leaders should have to stimulate and maximize profitability. Out of all the

participants interviewed and the documents presented for review**,** all participants (100%)

identified at least one of two characteristics a successful strategic leader should have as

defined by the CMOE (2017) and Schoemaker et al. (2013). These characteristics were

guidance (100%) and decision making (40%) and respectively referred to the ability of

leaders to guide their team toward success and make critical decisions. Two other

subthemes were problem-spotting (20%) and conflict mediator (20%) Neither was

discussed in the initial literature review. Guidance was a significant subtheme and was

raised 19 times throughout the interviews. Participants raised the other subthemes less frequently.

Guidance. Guidance was the first subtheme. The participants discussed the importance for leaders to guide their employees and effectively communicate goals and strategies to them. All participants (100%) deemed this a crucial strategy to stimulate company growth and profitability. In this regard, Participant B said that "communication is key so we can minimize any confusion amongst the ranks" and that it is crucial to have "a clear plan of action that is communicated to all that may have a key role." Additionally, all participants believed that in companies where team members are aware of the short- and long-term goals and growth initiatives of the organization and given enough direction, profitability would be higher. This finding aligned with findings from the CMOE (2017). According to CMOE (2017), employees often rely on their leaders for strategic guidance instruction to improve company realization and output. Through their guidance and direction, targets would become more visible and more comfortable to achieve, and strategies would be more straightforward and understandable (CMOE, 2017).

All participants stressed that leaders should not only communicate these goals toward others but also inform team members about how they can achieve these goals. In this regard, Participant A found that "a company that follows or defines strategic leadership exhibits a roadmap that communicates growth initiatives, short and long-term goals, and communicates why, how, and defined timelines to achieve these goals." This participant also added that leaders should make sure that everyone understands what is

going on and knows what their specific role is because "communicating and understanding the overall strategy eliminates the unknown." Participant B added to this that "if communication is not shared and the team is not aligned, we are not going to be successful." In this regard, previous researchers have demonstrated that clarity often results in higher employee productivity and less self-serving actions (Ateş et al., 2018). Quirke (2017) found that efficient communication may lead to fewer mistakes in the workplace, positively impacting on a business' growth and profitability.

Participants C, D, and E (60%) said that they maintained excellent communication with employees by organizing regular staff meetings. These participants indeed deemed regular face-to-face meetings as an efficient way to keep track of where the team currently is on their roadmap and communicate what the eventual goal is. Participant D elucidated, "Our team has weekly meetings in which we continuously discuss our short-, mid- and long-term strategies and where we are at in achieving those metrics." This participant was also rather chatty and enthusiastic during the interview and seemed to be an easy-going and very approachable individual. Participant E appeared to have the same attitude and added that during staff meetings "we review our overall strategic roadmap" and that it is important that "the entire team understands the overall initiatives, and we communicate the plan effectively." Thus, this participant found that through such staff meetings, they were able to "highlight communication within all levels of the company." Additionally, Participant C stated that regular meetings helped to identify concerns and confusions and to resolve these in a time-efficient way: "We meet

regularly to communicate where we are on our roadmap and where we are going, any potential obstacles and how to remove those obstacles going forward."

Both Participants C and E (40%) mentioned going over a strategic roadmap during these meetings. A strategic roadmap is a time-based plan that defines where a business is, where leaders want a business to go, and how to get the business there (Jing & Avery, 2016). A strategic roadmap is a visual representation through which relevant information related to plans is presented (Jing & Avery, 2016).

In addition to the strategic roadmap, Participant C emphasized discussing and evaluating the company's balanced scorecard in meetings. These are strategic planning and management systems that teams use to balance financial and nonfinancial as well as short- and long-term measures (Banchieri, Campa Planas, & Sanchez Rebull, 2011). Leaders utilize them to display an organization's vision, the day-to-day activities, ongoing and future projects, and evaluations of progress toward strategic targets. To conclude, Banchieri et al. (2011) added that leaders usually make use of strategic roadmaps to manage and monitor strategy progress, especially when goals are rather complex (Banchieri et al., 2011).

Decision making. A second subtheme was decision making, which referred to the capacity of leaders to make crucial decisions. In this regard, Participants A and B (40%) recognized the importance of leaders' ability to make quick and well-considered decisions when necessary. Participant A said that this was important because "it is critical as a strategic leader to recognize the corporate landscape both internally and externally and make strategic and tactical decisions." Participant B added to this that these decisions

had to be "quick and decisive," and thus, leaders should make these in a minimal timeframe.

Participant B also stressed that decisions should always align with the organization its core strategy. This subtheme indicated that strategic leaders must make sure that their decisions can never hurt their company in any possible way but rather, as Participant A stressed, "have a defined outcome for the betterment of the organization.". This finding suggested the responsibility placed on strategic leaders. According to CMOE (2017), strategic leaders have a great responsibility as their decisions can determine the success or failure of a project. Strategic leaders should thus avoid the possibility of making the wrong decision as much as possible (Peterlin et al., 2015). Coleman and Bourne (2018) added to this that due to a time limit, leaders must often make decisions based on incomplete information, which increases the pressure on them even more.

According to Participant A, it was crucial that once decisions are made leaders communicate them to everyone involved. The decision should indeed not only make sense for the leader but also for everyone else involved. This participant found that "this approach has provided a sense of stability and direction within all levels of the organization."

Problem-spotting. A third subtheme was problem-spotting, which referred to—as the name suggests—the ability for leaders to identify and resolve problems within the organization. Only Participant A (20%) identified this subtheme and stated leaders must deal with difficulties by analyzing "a large amount of conflicting information." According to Basadur, Gelade, and Basadur (2014), leaders should endeavor to spot

problems as soon as they can. If not detected in time, they might become more

problematic and hurt an organization's profitability and growth (Basadur, et al., 2014).

Therefore, it is crucial for a good leader to be able to spot a problem as soon as it comes

about (Basadur, et al., 2014). By spotting it relatively early, leaders can potentially avoid

more significant damage.

Participant A also recognized that it is essential to "understand the root cause of

the problems." This participant said that this is crucial because only once a strategic

leader understands how and why a problem arose, can the leader "identify the feasible

and optimal solutions" to address the issue. Basadur, et al., (2014) added to this that

being informed correctly is critical as, without accurate information, leaders might

misinterpret the problem and experience difficulty resolving it (Basadur, et al., 2014).

Conflict mediator. A fourth and last subtheme was conflict mediation and

identified by Participant C (20%), who reported to experience internal team conflict as a

challenge. The participant said that stimulating growth opportunities for employees was

one of the fundamental values in his/her organization and that consequently, there had led

to quite some internal conflict within the company. Additionally, the participant said that

every company has its limit as to how big the budget is for investments, and as a result,

heated debates about which projects to finance and which ones to set on hold can easily

arise and lead to internal conflict. Though not directly mentioned, this suggested that a

leader who knows how to mediate and resolve the conflict was preferable to one who

does not. For these reasons, the biggest challenge according to Participant C was

"Internal conflicts within our teams. Everyone is fighting for internal growth and investment dollars, at times there can be some heated debates."

The RBV conceptual framework is a key element of strategic leadership that helps top leaders to optimize internal resources (Barney, 2001). Strategic leadership skills help leaders to define short and long term strategies for sustained growth initiatives. Table 1 gives an overview of the discussed subthemes and displays which participants mentioned which subtheme(s).

Table 1

Frequency Table Theme 1: Leadership Factor

Subtheme mentioned	Participant code	Percentage (%; $n = 5$)	Frequency
Guidance	PA, PB, PC, PD, PE	100%	19
Decision making	PA, PB	40%	2
Problem-spotting	PA	20%	1
Conflict mediator	PC	20%	1

Emergent Theme 2: Human Capital Development

A second theme was human capital development and referred to the empowerment of employees as a strategy to gain a competitive advantage in the market and maximize organizational profitability. Company documents, press releases and interviews helped to support the efforts in the development of employees by leaders within the organization. All participants (100%) raised this theme several times. Participants mutually agreed that employees who feel supported and recognized by their leader(s) are likely to be more productive and motivated than those who do not feel this way, which in turn would positively affect an organization. Several studies confirmed this

finding (e.g., Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016; Platis, Reklitis, & Zimeras, 2015; Witts, 2016).

Concerning this theme, the researcher identified two major subthemes: skill development

(80%) and involvement in decision making (80%).

Skill development. A first subtheme was the stimulation of skill development, a

strategy mentioned by all except Participant A (80%). These participants firmly believed

that organizations could strongly benefit from investing in employees' skills and personal

development. Indeed, according to Participant B, employees formed a critical basis of a

company its core intellectual property and as strategic leaders, he/she and his/her

colleagues "view the skill-set and knowledge of our team to be just as important as our

financials and our innovation." Participant C added to this that their team is essential to

the short- and long-term strategy for organizational growth and said that "we would be

remiss if we did not assess our efforts to grow the intangible skill-sets of the people in

our organization." Thus, this participant suggested that employees play an important role

in organizational growth and profitability. Participants B, D, and E (60%) confirmed this

idea. Participant E, for example, said the following: "In order for us to capitalize on the

full spectrum of leadership, our organization focuses on the development of our people."

This participant continued and stated that within his/her organization, the continuous

investment in employees and their skill development "has proven to be one of the

catalysts to increased profitability." Participants B and E (40%) further explained that the

exact reason for this increased profitability was that through continuous development,

employees acquired new skills that deemed essential for an organization to grow.

Participant B identified leadership as one such skill. Indeed, Participant B said that in

his/her organization, much emphasis lies on the development of individuals to "groom them to become leaders." This participant continued and said that "there is a difference between a manager and a leader" and organizations should invest in their people "to expedite their soft and hard skillsets to become leaders." Thus, according to this participant leaders should endeavor to prepare their employees to become future leaders in their firm through investing in their development.

Although Participant B did not explicitly say so, those above suggested the mutual advantage this strategy brought about for both employees and the organization. On the one hand, employees got the opportunity to enhance their skills, while on the other hand, leaders got to secure the future of their company. This opportunity turned it into a win-win situation and had a significant positive impact on an organization's profitability.

Accordingly, to the findings of this study, Leitch et al. (2016) concluded that successful strategic leaders at the top hierarchy are expected to push the power to those in the lower hierarchies in an organization to empower them and allow them to develop their skills further. Leitch et al. (2016) also found that through skill development, leaders can share more responsibilities with others. This development, in turn, would give future leaders hands-on experience and teach them how to take risks and what the consequences of such risks could be. Thus, this would give them the experience they need to become successful future leaders.

Involvement in decision making. A second subtheme explained the advantage of involving employees in the decision-making process for a company's growth. Indeed,

Participants A, B and C, and E (80%) said that leaders rarely make decisions based on one person's view. In this regard, Participant A said that "decisions are not made in a silo; at least they should not be." According to Participant B, this would be very advantageous to a company as it would allow others to speak up and voice their opinions. Indeed, Participant B stated that leaders in his/her organization encourage team members to bring ideas and propositions to the table themselves. In this respect, this participant said the following: "The leadership team here wants our people to take a risk, speak up, have a voice within the organization. Yes, men or woman reflect a stagnant organization; we want to see and hear vision and passion with our team."

Additionally, Participant B said that leaders in the organization he/she worked in had recruited very talented individuals over the past few years and that these individuals have, in his words, "driven a lot of the innovation here over the last five years." This participant found that these young, talented individuals had been responsible for "really creative ideas that sparked significant growth" within the organization, which he/she highly appreciated. This finding suggested that young, talented individuals can bring precious and fresh ideas to the table and that these ideas might have a significantly positive effect on an organization its growth.

Researchers have attributed a great deal of attention to the idea of stimulating organizational growth by involving employees in decision making. According to Nelson (2017), job engagement in companies where leaders allow employees to participate in decision making will likely be higher in comparison to organizations in which employees do not get these same opportunities. Nelson (2017) and Witts (2016) added that giving

employees space to express ideas and thoughts about certain things created a trusting

relationship between leaders and their employees. Various studies found that this robust

interpersonal association between leaders and workers has a significant influence on

workplace coherence and consequently organizational output (Mayfield et al., 2015;

Witts, 2016). This finding was also confirmed by Schoemaker et al. (2013), who added

that a leader who encouraged and valued his or her employees' opinions was more likely

to create an environment in which employees felt more valued. This finding was an

important finding as past researchers have demonstrated that feeling valued has positive

effects on the competitiveness and performance of a business (Witts, 2016). Thus,

companies have everything to gain from keeping their employees satisfied and happy

(Witts, 2016).

Taking the study results from the researchers above into account, it was not

surprising that all but Participant D stated to attach great value to employee satisfaction.

Overall, participants mentioned two methods to measure and evaluate their employees'

satisfaction: employee engagement surveys (40%) and retention rates (80%). Participants

B and E (40%) emphasized employee engagement surveys as one way to keep track of

their employees' satisfaction. Participant B stated that leaders in his/her organization

measure employee happiness through "bi-annual employee engagement surveys that

provide feedback related to employees." This participant added that these scores "are

utilized as a metric to measure the temperament of our employees if they are happy, do

they fill fulfilled, do they feel as if they are advancing their skill-sets." Besides surveys,

Participants A, C, D, and E (80%) noted another way to measure employee satisfaction:

employee retention rates. Although not explicitly mentioned, this finding suggested that

employees are unlikely to stay at an organization if unhappy. In alignment with this idea,

Participant A also stated that employee retention had led to a decrease in recruitment

fees, which he/she naturally evaluated positively. The constructs of the RBV conceptual

framework include the uniqueness of resources that are difficult to imitate (Birger, 1995).

These unique resources, such as human capital that are difficult to imitate, have a

significant influence on profitability, efficiency, and competitiveness of the organization.

Table 2 lists the subthemes and the different methods participants apply to

measure employee satisfaction and gives a clear overview of which participants

mentioned what subtheme or method.

Table 2

Frequency Table Theme 2: Human Capital Development

Subtheme mentioned	Participant code	Percentage (%; $n = 5$)	Frequency
Skill development	PB, PC, PD, PE	80%	14
Involvement in decision making	PA, PB, PC, PE	80%	5
Employee retention as a measurement for satisfaction	PA, PC, PD, PE	80%	4
Employee satisfaction surveys as a measurement for satisfaction	PB, PE	40%	3

Emergent Theme 3: Flexibility

Flexibility was the third theme and raised by all participants (100%). This theme

included one major and one minor subtheme: the need for continuous innovation (100%),

and the flexibility to change approaches when necessary - both in response to changes in

the external environment and internal environment (40%). Both subthemes implied

participants' openness toward organizational change. Document reviews and the

semistructured interviews supported the need for continuous innovation within the

organizational strategy.

Continuous innovation. A first and significant subtheme was the need for

continuous innovation. All five participants (100%) emphasized the importance of

innovation and understood innovation as a crucial element in maximizing organizational

profitability. Participants A, D, and E (60%) stressed the importance of investing in new

technologies as an effective way to gain a competitive advantage in the market. These

participants associated investing in new technologies with growth, performance, and

profitability. Participant E said the following about this: "We also invest to ensure that

we are competitive within the market so investing in business development and

technology helps to mitigate the risk of any negative impact to our growth strategies."

Although Participants D and E considered investing in new technologies an absolute

must, they both experienced convincing superiors and colleagues of the need for this

action as challenging. In this regard, Participant D said that "The key challenges are

ensuring that all levels of leadership understand the rationale for the need to invest in

initiatives that would promote long term growth and sustainability." This participant also

added that because the market is changing fast, investing in innovation was not a one-off

action, but rather a recurring event. This participant indeed said that companies must

constantly continue to invest in technology, even when a certain technology has been

proven to be successful. In this participant's words: "As an organization, we have to be willing to invest in our technology every year. It is not a onetime deal; it is continuous."

The findings mentioned above strongly corresponded with previous studies on the subject (e.g., Pelser, 2014; Zogjani & Raçi, 2015). Pelser (2014), for example, identified innovation as one appropriate way for a business to gain a competitive advantage. Kriger and Zhovtobryukh (2016) added to this that continuous development of new technologies is essential as it affects - likely in a positive way - the way a company would do business, communicated with its clients and managed its employees.

Flexibility to change approaches. Statements made by Participants B and D (40%) about the importance of being nimble and flexible in terms of strategy modification resulted in a second and minor subtheme. Participants B and D indeed recognized that in a continuously changing environment, adaptation to and the invention of new work strategies is a must. Both participants stressed that the ability to remain flexible would stimulate growth because it would give leaders the advantage to react fast to sudden changes, both internal and external. In the words of Participant D: "We recognize that there is a need to be nimble and we can modify strategic roadmaps to match the needs and the growth of our organization." Both participants B and D also mentioned that leaders should be able to "think outside of the box" and should be creative. In this regard, Participant B said that his/her team used creative problem-solving methods to address potential issues, implying a flexible approach in terms of how the team deals with certain things. This participant added that "there will always be uncertain or unpredictable work

situations," but that their ability to adapt both culturally and technology wise "affords us the ability to continue to grow, increase profit margins and remain a market leader."

These findings corresponded with results from Zogjani & Raçi (2015). They stated that in the ever-changing business world, companies can indeed be subject to external and internal changes at any moment and that a static attitude may lead to unforeseen problems and could potentially hurt a company its strength. For that reason, Zogjani & Raçi (2015) argue that strategic leaders must always prepare themselves to modify strategies when necessary.

The constructs of the RBV include the tenet that competitive advantage is an advantage that an organization acquires through superior products or services above their competition (Barney, 2001). The ability to continually adapt to changing market demands and to keep a degree of entrepreneurial innovation creates incremental value and sustainable competitiveness. Table 3 gives an overview of the subthemes and displays information regarding which participants mentioned which subtheme(s).

Table 3

Frequency Table Theme 3: Flexibility

Subtheme mentioned	Participant code	Percentage (%; $n = 5$)	Frequency
Continuous innovation	PA, PB, PC, PD, PE	100%	19
Flexibility to change approaches	PB, PD	40%	6

Emergent Theme 4: Managing Financial Resources

A fourth theme concerned managing financial resources and emerged from statements related to cost-reduction and effectiveness. Indeed, in order to stimulate

profitability, a strategic leader may consider implementing cost-effective strategies. Such strategies can be internal or external. Internally, efficiently connecting staff to projects, or making decisions regarding which projects to fund and which one to set on hold may effectively reduce. On an external level, leaders may consider establishing strategic partnerships. These strategies resulted in four subthemes: project investments (60%), staff-project matching (20%), accepting failure (20%), and strategic partnerships (20%). Apart from these, participants also named several methods to measure financial progress, which formed a fifth and last subtheme (80%). Project investments and measuring financial progress were the major subthemes; the other three were minor subthemes. Documents presented for review during this study supported the need to manage investments as it relates to financial success and organizational profitability.

Project investments. A first and significant subtheme elucidated the importance of investing in specific projects and convincing stakeholders to support initiatives. In this regard, Participants B, D, and E (60%) mentioned that projects are expensive, and both buy-ins from investors as well as organizational budgeting are essential. Especially participant E stressed the importance of "making sure we have stakeholder buy-in and that we have adequately ensured we have budgeted for the investment that it will require in order to execute a strategy." This statement suggests that without a enough budget, certain projects might fail. Participant B shared this idea and recognized that launching a new project needs funding and that if stakeholders deem a newly identified opportunity as not worth exploring, a negative decision will likely follow: "Kickstarting projects with limited internal funding is always a challenge. Approval by multiple levels of

stakeholders is usually required." Additionally, Participant B stated that in his/her

organization, convincing stakeholders could be quite a challenge "if as an organization

we do not have a clear strategic roadmap to get our initiatives approved." This statement

suggested the importance of short- and long-term planning (Gupta, 2018).

Previous literature confirmed the importance of buy-in from stakeholders. Witts

(2016) found that without a proper budget, leaders may have to cancel individual

projects. To avoid this, good leaders should therefore always make sure that there are

enough stakeholders involved. According to Witts (2016), getting their support is indeed

important as they play a significant financial and/or social role within a company and

they often have at least some control over initiatives and projects. Recognizing their

influence, Witts (2016) also emphasized the importance of constant revision of the

dynamic relationship between an organization and its stakeholders. In this regard, Carter

& Greer (2013) concluded that a positive relationship between an organization and its

stakeholders would increase the chance of the latter supporting and investing in a specific

project or initiative. According to these researchers' strategic leaders play an essential

role in this (Carter & Greer, 2013).

Staff-project matching. A second and minor subtheme was staff-project

matching and referred to the action of linking individual employees to specific projects as

a strategy to reduce costs. Participant C was the only one to mention this subtheme. This

participant believed that repositioning costly staff to higher prices jobs would work in an

organization its advantage. The logic behind this statement is that individuals differ in

skillset and experience, and some individuals might be more suitable for a specific task in

comparison to others. Strategic leaders may assign more skilled individuals to more

challenging, complicated, or intense jobs while matching less expensive staff - read:

those with less experience or a less extensive skill set - to easier or lower prices jobs. This

process of matching staff to projects can be time-consuming but may improve rate

margins and eventually a company's profitability. Participant C explained:

> We are in a commoditized market, we deployed stringent gross profit constraints
>
> and repositioned more expensive staff on higher priced jobs. With over 500
>
> employees, it took over six months of intra-project movement to accurately match
>
> the staff to the project. This while the market continued to soften, and prices
>
> dropped. This same methodology was deployed within HR and recruiting
>
> practices to improve rate margin on newly sold business.

They are accepting failure. Participant C (20%) briefly highlighted a third

subtheme: accepting failure. This subtheme denoted the capability of a leader to

recognize failure., In this regard, Participant C found that ethical leadership was not only

about trying to accomplish goals but also about accepting failure. This participant stated

that a person "must be disciplined and be willing to lose business" and that "Not all

projects are worth winning." This participant continued and said that sometimes it is

better to "Know your worth and be willing to stand on it." In other words, this participant

found that not every project will be a success, and sometimes it is better to accept a defeat

and move on rather than to waste further time and money on it. This finding

corresponded with earlier research done by Schoemaker et al. (2013). Schoemaker et al.

(2013) also added to this that leaders should view failure positively and use it

constructively. They emphasized that every negative outcome is a lesson and that these lessons are essential for future actions. Thus, by admitting failure and taking it as constructive criticism, leaders can indeed avoid future adverse outcomes (Schoemaker et al., 2013).

Strategic partnerships. A fourth subtheme emerged from a statement made by Participant C (20%), who found that strategic partnerships were an ideal and smart way to enhance growth and profitability within an organization. This participant stated that "Sometimes there are key partnerships that we need to engage in for us to meet aggressive growth initiatives." However, he/she found that "finding the right strategic partnerships can be a challenge," and that partnering up with others was often easier said than done as both sides would obviously have their terms and conditions, and if one of the parties would not agree, negotiations could be challenging, if not fail. Such failure would be an undesirable outcome, as Participant C stated that this would bring more financial responsibilities for their organization. Participant C explained: "If we cannot make these partnerships work or the negotiation stage is a challenge, we will need to get creative to meet fiscal responsibilities."

Previous literature on the subject confirmed the significance and usefulness of strategic partnerships (e.g., Bendell, 2017). Bendell (2017), for example, found that through strategic partnerships, healthcare businesses can work together to respond to specific challenges. Indeed, by combining financial resources, healthcare organizations may have a better chance to conduct meaningful research or develop successful new technologies or strategies. Further, by partnering up with other companies' businesses

also can split the costs of specific actions that would otherwise have fallen entirely on the shoulders of one company (Bendell, 2017). Bendell (2017) concluded that this strategy is especially useful in times of financial insecurity.

Measuring financial progress was a fifth and last subtheme and reported on the methods participants use to measure organizational progress. All but Participant A (80%) mentioned at least one way to manage organizational financial resources and keep track of organizational finances. Participants B and D (40%) mentioned EBITDA. This term stands for "Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization" and is an accounting measure calculated using a company's net earnings, before interest expenses, taxes, depreciation, and amortization are subtracted, as a proxy for a company's current operating profitability. Participant B stated to use this measurement for measuring "continuous improvement on profitability."

Participants C and E (40%) identified a second way to keep track of finances: KPIs. The term "KPIs" stands for Key Performance Indicators, and gauge - as the name gives away - a number of a company's performance. Most of these indicators are quantitative, though there also exist a few essential qualitative performance indicators. Participant E mentioned financial and sales key performance indicators as very important information for their profitability:

> We also have a robust dashboard that measures primary and secondary key performance indicators. The indicators have a direct effect on our overall profitability. By monitoring these KPI's, we can project positive and negative impacts on the overall profitability.

Top management teams can use the RBV theory to enhance profitability by managing overall costs of internal and external resources (Barney, 2001). There is a direct correlation between competitive advantage and organizational performance (Barney, 2001). Leaders can use the RBV theory to increase utilization of tangible and intangible resources to develop a superior business strategy. Table 4 presents the subthemes and gives an overview of which participants mentioned which theme(s).

Table 4

Frequency Table Theme 4: Managing Financial Resources

Subtheme mentioned	Participant Code	Percentage (%; $n = 5$)	Frequency
Project investment	PB, PD, PE	60%	6
Staff-project matching	PC	20%	1
Accepting failure	PC	20%	1
Strategic partnerships	PC	20%	1
Measuring financial progress	PB, PC, PD, PE	80%	5

Emergent Theme 5: Market Expansion

A fifth theme covered participants' statements concerning the importance of market expansion as a strategy to increase organizational profitability. Participants A, C, D, and E (80%) recognized that in an ever-changing market, identifying and exploiting new opportunities can highly benefit a company. In this respect, Participant C stated that especially when identified in an early stage, they can genuinely give a company a competitive advantage. Indeed, as Mattson (1985) emphasized, new markets with specific needs emerge regularly, and from the moment such opportunities are spotted, companies should respond to them as soon as they can (Mattson, 1985). This because others might not have identified this opportunity yet, which makes the company a pioneer in this new

market and gives them a temporary (semi-)monopoly (Mattson, 1985). Due to this

advantage, they can set higher prices and enjoy higher profit margins.

Participant C emphasized differentiation as one way to remain competitive.

Differentiation aligned with the second strategy within Porter's (1980) competitive theory

was called the differentiation strategy. Through differentiation or market diversification,

companies can expand their elasticity and minimize the threat of condensed resource

allocation (Lotayif, 2015). This differentiation, according to Lotayif (2015), then

provides them with a competitive market advantage. The researcher added that

identifying these emerging markets in their early phase gives companies the advantage of

enjoying higher profit margins - at least for a while. In this regard, Participant C said the

following:

> In order to remain competitive, and differentiate from the market, we must
>
> identify emerging market needs and prepare our sales and operations staff to
>
> deliver services into those needs . . . . Emerging markets demand is high, and the
>
> labor market is tight. Entering the market allowed us to take advantage of higher
>
> profit margins.

This participant identified market expansion as the essential strategy and seemed

to evaluate social themes, such as human capital development and customer satisfaction,

as less important. His/her attitude during the interview confirmed this idea, as this

participant seemed to be in a hurry and did not appear to be very interested in

participation. The RBV theory includes the following propositions: First, an

organizations competitiveness is dependent on various superior and unmatched resources

(Barney, 2001). Second, competitive advantage and profitability have a definitive

relationship (Barney, 2001). Third, competitive advantage is a benefit of superior

products or services that are greater than the competition resulting in market expansion

(Barney, 2001). The capability of an organization to capitalize on superior products

allows the opportunity to expand in to ancillary markets to gain a competitive advantage.

Table 5

Frequency Table Theme 5: Market Expansion

Theme mentioned	Participant code	Percentage (%; $n = 5$)	Frequency
Market expansion	PA, PC, PD, PE	80%	7

Emergent Theme 6: Customer Satisfaction

Participants A, C, D, and E (80%) identified a sixth theme: customer satisfaction.

This theme elucidated how strategic leaders used customer satisfaction as a strategy to

increase organizational growth and profitability. Documents containing organizational

metrics were presented for review during this study. According to these participants,

satisfied customers may be more likely to repeat purchase, financially benefiting the

organization. Satisfaction indeed drives loyalty, which in turn drives business

performance (Hill & Brierley, 2017). For example, Hill and Alexander (2017) argued that

stimulating client retention is indeed far less costly than to try to win new clients. Sadly,

they continued, many organizations today have shifted their focus to winning over new

clients and seem to concentrate less on keeping the clients they already have satisfied.

Hill and Alexander (2017) continued and added that such an attitude inevitably creates a

"bucket with a hole" scenario, whereby leaders try to fix customer drain by devoting

resources to attracting new ones. This scenario is a costly and time-consuming process and eventually unsustainable. According to them, organizations should instead focus on the customers they already have and avoid customer turnover as much as possible, like Participants A, C and E stated to be doing. Concerning this theme, the researcher identified two subthemes: identified ways to measure client satisfaction (80%), and improved services to retain clients (20%) and will discuss both in further detail hereunder.

Identified ways to measure client satisfaction. A first and significant subtheme discussed the methods participants used to measure client satisfaction. Those participants (A, C, and E - 60%) who emphasized the importance of customer satisfaction, mentioned different ways to measure this. Participants A and E (40%) found customer feedback in the form of surveys or interviews to be convenient. Especially Participant E emphasized the use of various methods to gain information regarding client satisfaction: "The researcher's role demands to ensure clients are happy so, we monitor and measure client satisfaction regularly. We do this via questionnaires, 1:1 interview and phone calls and we also monitor the feedback from social media of our company."

Although this method might seem convenient (see Cook, 2017), measuring customer satisfaction can be rather difficult. Client satisfaction is, according to her, an intangible thing and individually dependent. To effectively measure satisfaction, an organization must possess high-quality survey/interview schedules to analyze results efficiently (Cook, 2017).

Many researchers have focused on the importance of client feedback to increase profitability (Cook, 2017; Goodman, 2019). Goodman (2019) explained that satisfied customers were also more likely to spread positive information about the organization through word of mouth. This information can be highly beneficial for an organization as it works as free publicity and increases the chances of attracting new customers with a limited investment of organizational resources (Goodman, 2019). However, none of the participants mentioned this aspect. Besides direct feedback from customers, Participants A, C, D, and E (80%) mentioned another way of measuring client satisfaction: client retention rates. When these were high, it meant that clients were repeating purchase and were loyal to the organization.

Improved services to retain clients. Participant A (20%) identified a second and minor subtheme that discussed how the improvement of customer service could help in the retainment of clients. This participant strongly emphasized the need for constant improvement of customer services as one way to keep clients happy. This participant was also exceptionally friendly and helpful during the interview. His/her attitude illustrated and confirmed the importance he/she attached to customer service. Participant A indeed found good customer service values and said that his/her organization had relatively recently implemented strategic changes to improve its customer service. Participant A gave the specific example of his/her company switching from a so-called "waterfall methodology" to an "agile methodology" to improve client satisfaction. The main difference between the two lies in time. Where a waterfall methodology implies a long process with one delivery, an agile methodology refers to a step-by-step process with

regular interim deliveries. In this way, leaders may avoid the risk of spending an extended period on a process that eventually fails or does not meet the client's expectations. Participant A explained the following:

> In layman's terms, waterfall development is done in very long stretches of development ultimately increasing the risk of a product or platform that does not perform everything the customer wants. Agile development is done in short sprints, typically two weeks at a time, ensuring the development team aligns with the customer.

Participant A found that the implementation of this new strategy had significantly led to increased customer satisfaction in his/her company. As the participant said, through agile methodology, the organization manages to "reduce defect rate by 80% and significantly improve customer satisfaction" and "improved customer communications and reduced critical defects by 90% within three months." This methodology demonstrated how vital customer satisfaction is as a strategy to increase organizational profitability and growth.

Though a successful strategy, Participant A did say that this change was not that self-evident. The participant said that the approval from senior management and the trust from the customer are crucial in this process and that getting these were challenging: "The biggest challenge was to convince customers and senior management that the strategies will work and produce a better product."

Gupta (2018) found that as a strategic leader, wanting to implement a change, support, and trust from others within the organization and the client need were critical.

When a strategic leader failed in gaining buy-in, both the company and client could miss

a potentially beneficial opportunity. According to Gupta (2018), leaders should have

personal selling skills to convince clients of the value of a strategy or approach. Table 6

displays information regarding both subthemes, as well as the methods participants, used

to measure customer satisfaction. Client retention is a manifestation of the organizations

ability to utilize internal resources for optimal exploitation of business opportunities to

create a competitive advantage, one of the resources of the RBV conceptual framework

of this study, (Birger, 2001).

Table 6

Frequency Table Theme 6: Customer Satisfaction

Subtheme mentioned	Participant code	Percentage (%; $n = 5$)	Frequency
Identified ways to measure client satisfaction	PA, PC, PD, PE	80%	10
Customer feedback	PA, PE	40%	4
Customer retention rates	PA, PC, PD, PE	80%	6
Improved service	PA	20%	5

Emergent Theme 7: Standardization

Standardization was a seventh and last identified theme and emerged from

statements made by Participants A, B, and D (60%). These participants raised the

convenience of standardization as a successful strategy to enhance an organization its

profitability. This convenience entailed both standardizations of vocabulary (mentioned

by Participant A - 20%) and technology (mentioned by Participants A, B, and D - 60%).

In terms of vocabulary, participant B said that "the creation of the common vocabulary

was critical in streamlining our communication." As a result, this would then lead to

more efficiency and profitability. In terms of standardization of technology, participant D found this to be most useful for streamlining processes and maximizing automation. In other words, Participant D suggested that technology standardization would avoid having to handle situations one by one and would instead put into place several logical systems that would speed up processes. Westerman and Bonnet (2015) confirmed this idea. An essential addition was that because of the standardization of such processes, leaders of companies can expand and redesign the way they operate (Westerman & Bonnet, 2015).

Besides standardization, Participant A also added the convenience of technology consolidation and said the following about this: "We had too many initiatives, from a technology perspective we were all over the place, there were no defined platforms. Technology consolidation allowed the company to consolidate on one platform and re-tool the developers." Regarding the previous comment, this participant stated that technology consolidation had two advantages. First, it "repurposed" the development team because the developers were now able "to work on projects that would directly impact the initiatives defined in our strategic roadmap ultimately driving profitability." Second, technology consolidation has given developers the ability to "re-energize" and allowed them "to begin working on new robust projects where they could see the positive impact on the overall growth of the organization instead of chasing after projects that ultimately may not have any impact on our overall growth." This participant closed his/her claim by stating that these benefits had "increased velocity, decreased turnover and improved the overall development process" and that technology consolidation had "made the entire process more predictable and reproducible." Table 7 displays

information regarding who mentioned what type of standardization, along with the frequently found throughout the interviews. Strategic leaders apply the RBV theory to create consolidation and standardization to create and maintain a competitive advantage.

Table 7

Frequency Table Theme 7: Standardization

Subtheme mentioned	Participant code	Percentage (%; $n = 5$)	Frequency
Standardized technology	PA, PB, PD	60%	7
Standardized vocabulary	PB	20%	2

Applications to Professional Practice

The themes that emerged from the data were in alignment with the conceptual framework. In 1984, Birger invented the RBV to state that a company's internal resources are the basis of competition and profitability. Considering that all but one theme (market expansion) concerned the use of internal resources, this study confirmed the power and validity of the RBV in stimulating organizational growth.

The results correlated with the four main principles as identified by Stone (2016) that drive the RBV. These principles are distinctive core competencies, dynamic capabilities, absorptive capacity, and organizational ambidexterity. All participants stressed the importance of distinctive core competencies. These are the critical resources that, when effectively developed and exploited, can lead to a competitive advantage for any organization (Stone, 2016). The most critical resources seemed to include human capital development initiatives, effective guidance, technology development, and customer relations. Participants exploited these resources in different ways, for example through stimulating employees' skill development by including them in decision making,

organizing regular meetings and creating a positive leader-employee relationship to stimulate productivity and limit obstacles, or asking regular feedback from clients to stimulate client satisfaction and client retention rates. These actions proved that participants knew where their strengths lie, and how they could exploit these in the best possible way to create a competitive advantage and increase profitability.

A second principle is dynamic capabilities and refers to the ability to restructure resources due to sudden changes in the external environment (Stone, 2016). In this regard, the interviewed leaders recognized the importance of being nimble and remaining flexible to change. Participant B also stressed the importance of being able to "think outside of the box." The results satisfied with this second principle.

A third principle, absorptive capacity, was very strongly emphasized. Absorptive capacity implies the recognition of new knowledge and the application of it (Stone, 2016). The importance of this tenet became very quickly apparent as all five participants stressed the importance of (constant) innovation. Especially Participant A stressed the importance of continuously applying new methodologies, technologies, and other information in an organization's strategy. Conversely, not investing in innovation could negatively impact a company's competitive advantage.

The last principle was organizational ambidexterity. This principle implies the must of simultaneously exploring and exploiting resources (Stone, 2016). This was, like the other three tenets, reflected in the results as well. Especially Participant C emphasized the importance of being always on the lookout for new opportunities, while at the same time maximizing exploitation of existing opportunities and resources.

The last theme, market expansion, was not associated with internal resources and could not be tied to the RBV. Instead, because of its focus on expanding the footprint within the market space to gain competitive advantage rather than exploiting internal resources (Porter, 1980), this theme was associated with Porter's Competitive Strategy.

Implications for Social Change

The contribution to social change could also include the creation of localized employment and an overall reduction of healthcare costs by capitalizing on strategic initiatives to increase healthcare organization profitability. In addition, the growth of localized employment and cost reduction from a healthcare standpoint may increase individual living standards within the community through economic growth. The results of this study may promote leadership strategies to improve profitability within the healthcare industry. The overarching research question was: "What strategies do leaders in healthcare utilize to improve profitability?" The research population consisted of five senior executive leaders who have successfully implemented strategic leadership initiatives to improve profitability. The study followed a single case study design, and the data gathered in the form of five individual in-depth interviews, which were semistructured, as well as journal notes made after the interview. These notes included a first impression of the interviewees and provided background information for later analysis. The combination of both interview transcripts and journal notes allowed for a deep and extensive understanding of the data and provided this case study additional credibility and quality.

Recommendations for Action

Future practices regarding the association of future strategies for healthcare leaders to improve profitability have the potential to provide means for expansion of the current healthcare business. The study of strategic leadership encompasses multiple functions performed and decisions executed on by people or groups of individuals, such as senior management within an organization. Leaders and leadership have a definitive impact on organizational performance (Hiller, DeChurch, Murase, & Doty, 2011). Findings from the study showed that strategic leadership skills that senior healthcare executives need to increase profitability include are the ability to enhance vision, human capital development, creativity, flexibility, innovativeness, skills development and awareness to manage the attainment of strategic initiatives. Additional strategic leadership skills include guidance, problem spotting, conflict resolution, risk management skills and the ability to measure overall performance. By establishing measures to help improvements in healthcare services, provisions can be established through strategic leadership initiatives.

Given the findings, I suggest that leaders incorporate the identified elements of strategic leadership skills to enhance leadership development. The development of strategic leadership skills should be part of human capital development within organizations and incorporated into succession planning. The study of strategic leadership should be incorporated into academic development programs. Leadership scholars should highlight the elements of strategic leadership skills in school curriculum

given the strong influence on organizational development and profitability within organizations.

The cultivation and development of strategic leadership skills may have a positive impact on human capital development, strategic decision-making, and performance (Carmeli et al., 2011). The purpose of this study is to help individuals develop and identify strategic leadership skills to increase profitability. Communication and awareness of my findings will be shared at organizational symposiums and seminars.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of strategic leadership in healthcare profitability. The search for means to observe strategic leadership and growth patterns is a continual objective in the world of business, particularly in the healthcare industry. The role of strategic leadership training and development play a critical role in the creation and definition of an organizations' competitiveness, market capitalization, profitability and sustainable growth. Although there are multiple theories and academic literature on strategic leadership suggesting best practices and principles, there exists a lack of definitive consensus on what encompasses strategic leadership (Allio, 2013). Within the business environment, there exists an increasingly developing interest in strategic leadership outside of the general scope of management.

The reason most organization leaders fail to meet and or exceed profitability targets is due to a lack of expertise in strategic leadership skills (Carmeli et. al., 2011). Some leaders in healthcare fail to develop strategies to improve, increase and sustain profitability. Specifically, some leaders in healthcare lack the skills to develop and

implement strategies for improving their organizations profitability. I used the qualitative

single case study to explore the role of strategic leadership in healthcare profitability.

Findings from similar research are aligned with the outcome of this study. I conducted

the at a medium sized healthcare organization located in Atlanta, Georgia. While related

to improved practices in business, and even with the suggested limitations identified in

Section 1, future research is recommended to focus on those methods that promotes

customer satisfaction, efficient organizational sustainability, and promotive methods to

increase both business productivity and positive and improved healthcare services.

Future researchers should consider utilization of different conceptual frameworks

or theories to permeate the generalization and to challenge the results of a single case

study design. The presence of generalization is heightened with a single case study and

the need to mitigate a lack of substance with a deeper, broader study to a larger

population may influence or even challenge historical findings.

Reflections

This doctoral journey has not been an easy one but, one that I will appreciate and

respect throughout my days. I have learned a lot about myself as well as others. My

philosophical viewpoint has been shaped by the research and my interpersonal leadership

development has matured. The degree to which leaders play a role in molding and

shaping organizations is undeniable. Leadership does start at the top, but by no means is

that the most crucial step. A shared vision is a critical aspect in organizational success,

competitiveness, profitability, and sustainability. The availability and inclusion of

internal and external resources that are unique to an organization are pillars for success and sustainable performance of the organization.

Throughout the study my philosophical presence was understated to elicit deeper responses from the participants. By engaging in this strategy, my knowledge and expertise in strategic leadership did not influence participant responses. The doctoral study has heightened my skills as a scholar practitioner. I have a keen ability to think, rationalize and act in a strategic mindset throughout all levels within the organization. Strategic leadership development is critical for all of management at all levels of the organization.

The demands of obtaining a DBA are stringent. There is a fine balance between the needs required from work, family, and studies. To succeed, sacrifices had to be made, most of which revolved around my immediate friends and family. I have evolved throughout the DBA program. I am more of a critical thinker rather than a reactionary thinker. I feel a sense of responsibility to share knowledge and contribute to the social development within my community. My takeaway from the DBA study is that a highly effective leader is committed to the greater good of the whole and not the individual. An effective leader is inspiring, tenacious, and infectious. These leaders are the mentors that lead in the development of their peers and believe in the output of organizational performance.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned themes clearly illustrated the importance of strategic leadership and its significance in increasing organizational growth and profitability. All

participants indeed agreed that strategic leadership is crucial for an organization its

growth, competitive advantage, employee output, and customer satisfaction. This

strongly corresponded with previous research on the subject (e.g., Akeke, 2016). The

findings from this qualitative research study also aligned to a rather great extent with

those of Gupta (2018). He emphasized that strategic leaders apply a mixture of leadership

styles, including ethics and value-oriented decision making, planning for long term goals,

executing plans to achieve those goals, providing a positive and supportive environment

for employees, having hands-on knowledge of finance and the organization itself, and

providing linear and nonlinear thinking. The study participants identified the same

strategies, which were reflected in the themes.

In addition to the strategic leadership styles identified by Gupta (2018), I also

found other elements associated with successful strategic leadership. These included—

amongst others—customer satisfaction and standardization of vocabulary and

technology. Because the initial literature study did not illuminate these themes, I used

other studies to provide more insights into these strategies and to compare the findings

from this study to those of previous studies. Regarding frequencies, the findings showed

leadership, human capital development, and flexibility as significant. Their most

important subthemes included guidance (100%), skill development (80%), and

innovation (100%), and these were respectively mentioned 19, 14, and 19 times

throughout the interviews.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interviewee: Time of Interview: Date:

Position of Interviewee:

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore the strategies healthcare leaders use to improve profitability. The interviewees will consist of senior executives that develop strategies to improve, increase and sustain profitability.

The questions I will ask include:

1. What role has strategic leadership played within your organization?

2. What successful strategies have you implemented to increase profitability?

3. How did your organization assess the effectiveness of the strategies to improve profitability.?

4. How have you mitigated risks while sustaining and growing profitability?

5. How effective have your strategic leadership initiatives been in terms of increasing profitability?

6. What were the key challenges to implementing your organization's strategies for improving profitability?

7. What additional information would you like to share in improving profitability in the healthcare field?

After each interview, I will thank the participants for the inclusion in this study and remind them again that there is no incentive associated with participating in this study; however, each participant will receive a summary of the findings at the first interpretational stage. A few weeks after the initial interview, I will contact each of the

participants with the findings of the interview after my analysis. The plan will consist of allowing each participant to comment on the analysis and then provide input on the accuracy of the analysis. The participants will have the option of clarifying any information they deem as misinterpreted.

During member checking, I will ask the participants about adding any further information to help with clarity, accuracy, and relevance to the analysis of the interviews. The questions I will ask include:

1. Based on the interpretation from the analysis, is everything correct?

2. Based on the interpretation from the analysis, do you see any errors or misinterpretations?

3. Would you challenge any of the interpretations from the analysis?

4. What aspects of the interpretation of the analysis do you believe are more adequate or accurate?

5. What additional information might clarity to the interpretations from the analysis?

I will thank each of the participants and remind them once again that there is no incentive with this study on small business subcontracting; however, all participants of this study will receive a summary of the final published findings.

Appendix B: National Institute of Health (NIH) Certification

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural

Research certifies that Joyce Conner-Boyd successfully completed the

NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research

Participants."

Date of Completion: 06/24/2018

Certification Number: 1204105