

2019

Strategies Small Business Leaders Use to Reduce Employees' Resistance to Change

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Mary E. Tombiri

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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The Office of the Provost

Walden University
2019

Abstract

Strategies Small Business Leaders Use to Reduce Employees' Resistance to Change

by

Mary E. Tombiri

MS, University of Phoenix, 2008

BS, Abilene Christian University, 1997

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2019

Abstract

Small business operations contribute to economic growth and account for 110 million new jobs in the United States. Despite the increase in the number of businesses created in the United States, some business leaders fail to manage change effectively. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some leaders of small businesses used to reduce employees' resistance to change. Lewin's 3-phase change theory served as the conceptual framework. The target population consisted of 3 successful leaders of small businesses in the central and southern region of Texas. Each participant had more than 5 years of experience and successfully used strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change in the workplace. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, review of company documents, and observations. Thematic coding, text/word queries, and a cross-case analysis revealed three central themes: communication, support, and evaluation. The implications of this study for positive social change include engaging employees in the change process, which might enhance the work environment and reduce employee stress and resistance to change. An improvement in a business leader's change management initiatives may generate beneficial outcomes for the businesses that may improve community growth through increased local employment rates.

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Dedication

First, I give God Almighty all the glory for empowering me to complete the process of my doctoral degree. Acknowledge Him in all paths, and He will keep your ways straight (Proverb 3:6). It has been a great journey. I dedicate this study to my father, Rtd. Capt. Jesse Felix Tombiri. He instilled the value of education in me and inspired me to take on this great journey. He always believed that I would achieve whatever I purposed in my heart. To my mother, Mrs. Nancy Tombiri, a girl child, denied formal education but made sure all her children (male and female) were college graduates. My super Mama, you taught me to strive for the highest and work hard to achieve my goals. For you, I am grateful. To my husband, Prince Paul Ero, who was there to pick up the many responsibilities that I was unable to complete and talked me out of my uncertainty. Thank you, I could not have done it without your love and support. To my three loving children, Panebi, Eghosa, and Tari thank you for your love, support, and patience during my countless late nights on the computer. To my siblings, you encouraged me to settle for nothing less than excellence and to never give up on my dreams. I thank you for the luxury in unconditional love, support, and prayers that I will forever cherish. With God, anything is possible.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge God Almighty for granting me the mercy to complete this DBA journey. I wish to recognize my committee chair, Dr. Beverly Muhammad, who was relentless in providing me guidance, courage, and showed excitement in my success in the study. I want to let you know that I appreciate your guidance, support, and thoughtfulness in leading me to finish this study. I want to acknowledge my second committee member, Dr. Simmons and to my URR, Dr. Timothy Malone, I want to thank you for helping me achieve this goal. Dr. Tamika Haynes from the Scholars Professional Editing Group LLC and Dr. Judy Blando – thank you for your guidance and escorting me to the finish line. I am deeply grateful to the participants' acceptance to share information that generated the study findings.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small business operations contribute to the economic growth of the United States. Change is transformational at all levels of a business including the business structure, culture, resources, processes, and technology needed to maintain a competitive edge among a change in the markets (Imran, Rehman, Aslam, & Bilal, 2016). Change management is a core business process and new requirement for business success. Despite the need for change, some business leaders fail to implement established goals. Leaders may fail to manage change effectively, particularly in regard to employees' resistance to change. Such resistance has an adverse impact on productivity initiatives (Stegaroiu & Talmaciu, 2016). The fundamental aspect of change within any organization is for employees to overcome resistance to opportunities for change (Ali & Ivanov, 2015). Findings from this study may provide strategies small business leaders can use to reduce employee resistance to change.

Background of the Problem

In the competitive business world, business leaders establish goals directly related to profitability. Small businesses within the United States are essential to continue economic growth (U.S Small Business Administration, 2017). The rate of change increases as organizations strive to achieve economic growth and maintain a competitive advantage. Change is necessary for organizations to achieve business growth. At the time a change occurs, organizations undergo pressure including employees' resistance to change (Stegaroiu & Talmaciu, 2016). Resistance to change impedes the business leader's ability to implement change initiatives. Resistance to change is like a barricade

that leaders must remove to achieve successful change implementations (Appelbaum, Karelis, Le Henaff, & McLaughlin, 2017).

Employing effective strategies continues to be a challenge for organizational leaders. Organizations that implement change initiatives are successful when employees overcome resistance to change (Umble & Umble, 2014). Employees' resistance to change persists when business leaders fail to work with employees in the same direction on change efforts (Johannsdottir, Olafsson, & Davidsdottir, 2015). Some business leaders cannot evade the difficulties in implementing necessary changes that cause employees resistance to change. I intended to explore strategies small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change.

Problem Statement

Organizational leaders have difficulty in efficiently implementing and monitoring organizational change to improve employees' performance (Schmitt & Klarner, 2015). Resistance to change contributes to a 70% failure rate for organizational change efforts (Adams, 2016; Hughes, 2016). The general business problem was that some small businesses experience a reduction in employee performance because of resistance to change. The specific business problem was that some small business leaders lack the strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. I interviewed three business leaders from three companies in the central and southern

regions of Texas. These leaders had successfully implemented strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change. Small business leaders in any sector may use the results of this study and contribute to positive social change by using similar strategies to successfully implement change initiatives that might reduce resistance to change, enhance the work environment, and reduce employees' stress. Additionally, small business leaders using the results of this study could improve community growth through increased local employment rates.

Nature of the Study

There are three conventional research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The qualitative method allows researchers to explore different behaviors, perspectives, and individual life experiences to understand the specific phenomenon (Reinecke, Arnold, & Palazzo, 2016). Among the three options, I chose the qualitative method as the most appropriate approach. I planned for this study to explore the strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. Researchers use the qualitative method to generate open-ended interview questions that allow for the collection of rich, in-depth responses.

The objective of this study was not to test a hypothesis; the quantitative and mixed methods were thus not appropriate for my research because these methods require researchers to conduct hypothesis testing and examine relationships or differences among variables (Adkin, 2016; Annansingh & Howell, 2016; Hughes, 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). Yin (2018) noted that the mixed method requires more resources and extended time.

I considered three qualitative research designs: ethnographic, phenomenological, and case study. I concluded that ethnography and phenomenology were not appropriate for this study. Researchers use an ethnographic design to observe, interact, and interview participants over some time to understand the culture of one or more groups (Kruth, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Wilson (2015) noted that researchers use the phenomenological design to capture and explore the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences. The ethnographic and phenomenological design options were not appropriate for this study because I did not intend to explore a culture or meaning of the lived experiences of the participants. Yin (2018) asserted that researchers use the case study design to explore a bounded system using interviews, observations, and archival records to answer the research question. Thus, case study was the most appropriate design for this study.

Research Question

The overarching research question was: What strategies do some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to reduce employees' resistance to change?
2. What strategies worked the best for your organization to reduce employees' resistance to change?
3. What actions have hindered your employees from embracing strategies to minimize change resistance?

4. What were the key barriers to implement the strategies you used to reduce employees' resistance to change?
5. How did you overcome the key challenges to implement your strategies for reducing employees' resistance to change?
6. What additional information would you like to share concerning your design, deployment, and improving your strategies for reducing your employees' resistance to change?

Conceptual Framework

Lewin (1947) developed the change management theory as a theoretical foundation for the planned change process and group dynamics. According to Lewin's change theory, the appropriate application of a structured organization change process can ensure change success (Lewin, 1947). It is important for leaders to understand the change process so that they can manage change effectively throughout the implementation (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). Lewin's (1947) change theory was the conceptual framework suitable to explore the leadership strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change.

Researchers have used the Lewin change theory as an operational framework for understanding organizational adaptation to change (Marks & Mirvis, 2011). According to Lewin (1947), the change theory involves the three-phase model that includes unfreezing, implementing the change, and refreezing. Lewin (1947) conceptualized the three-stage model for a planned approach to change management. The first phase of Lewin's (1947) change model of unfreezing includes preparation for the organizational change. The

second stage is the transition phase of managing the change, where members are already open to the new stage of the process (Lewin, 1947). The third phase, refreezing, is when the change is ready for permanent acceptance (Lewin, 1947). To add to organizational leaders understanding of the change theory process, Hussain et al. (2018) emphasized that the change theory embodies the appropriate application of a structured organizational change process to ensure change success. By understanding the change theory, business leaders could apply the principles when the opportunity arises to plan, monitor, and evaluate changes, which can enable them to respond better to their specific problems. Lewin's (1947) three-phase change model was the basis of the conceptual framework for this study because it provided a platform to explore strategies that some small business leaders used to explore employees' resistance to change.

Operational Definitions

Business leader: A business leader is one who runs an implementation of change, improves support, achieves a higher level of trust and fairness, and serves as a cornerstone of effective implementation of business change (Westerberg & Tafvelin, 2015).

Change agent: A change agent is one who assigns responsibility, guides the process of change, and makes organizational leaders accountable for change success (Lines, Sullivan, Smithwick, & Mischung, 2015).

Change management: Change management is an organizational process that targets employee empowerment to accept and embrace changes in their environment (Alasadi & Askary, 2014).

Commitment to change: Commitment to change is a mindset that binds an individual to a course of action that necessarily fits the success of the implementation of change initiative (Nasir, Abbas, & Zafar, 2014).

Employee empowerment: Employee empowerment is the involvement of employees in an organization's business processes to meet motivational needs and develop the sense of belonging to achieve the set goals and objectives of the organization (Alasadi & Askary, 2014).

Employee engagement: Employee engagement is the connection between the emotional health of the employee and organizational commitment (Nasomboon, 2014). Engaged employees attach themselves to their task by entirely devoting their heads, hearts, and hands in accomplishing their responsibility (Keating & Heslin, 2015).

Resistance to change: Resistance to change is a psychological state that hinders the progress of organizational change efforts (Garcia-Cabrera & Garcia-Barba Hernandez, 2014).

Small business: Small business is a pursuit, line of work, or venture rolled out by a small group of 50 or fewer employees, and operated by one owner (SBA, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions reflects possible weaknesses in a study that is beyond the control of the researcher (Guzys, Dickson-Swift, Kenny, & Threlkeld, 2015). The invalidity of the findings is the absence of assumptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this study, I had four assumptions. The first assumption was that participants were trustworthy, accurately

recalled related events, were open, and answered honestly. The second assumption was that the responses collected were without bias regarding the interview questions. The third assumption was that multiple case study was a suitable design for the research study. The fourth assumption was that the result of the research study would be transferable and applicable across industries.

Limitations

Limitations represent unseen potential weaknesses in the study that could hinder the validity of the research (Babbie, 2015; Silverman, 2016). Limitations are factors beyond the control of the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This study had four limitations. The first limitation was the short time I had available to conduct this research study. The second limitation was that change continually progresses within organizations regarding leadership and organizational change management. The third limitation was that the participants were limited to only three small business leaders with over 5 years of experience leading three successful companies to implement strategies to help employees adapt to change. Fourth, the strategies of the selected participants may not truly represent effective strategies for all small business leaders or owners in Texas. Inaccuracies may have been introduced if the participants provided biased responses to interview questions.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the researcher's self-imposed restrictions for the study (Nelms, 2015; Yin, 2018). The delimitations of a study guide the researcher in maintaining necessary bounds for the effective management of the study (Namey & Trotter, 2015). The delimitation of this included the targeted geographic location of the central and

southern region of Texas. This geographical area of Texas may not represent the nation of small business leaders who reduced their employees' resistance to change.

Participation was delimited to small business leaders who had over 5 years' experience leading successful companies to implement strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change. I excluded employees and leaders from unsuccessful small business outside the targeted geographic location.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this qualitative multiple case study will be of value to organizations whose business leaders implement change. According to Johannsdottir et al. (2015), as change continually occurs in organizations, effective leadership strategies remain a crucial factor for the mitigation of employees' resistance to change and the success of the business. Effective change implementation strategies could reduce employees' resistance to change and create productive work environments to improve organizations' performance.

This study fills gaps in scholarly understanding of the effective practice associated with business change. Understanding the strategies some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change may be beneficial. Small business leaders may use the findings of this study to contribute to positive social change by improving employees' work morale and the management of change practices. Such improvements could lead to a more positive work environments, and employees could transfer the positive energy they gain to their families and communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A literature review is a systematic method of evaluating and synthesizing existing literature most pertinent to the researcher's topic of study (Galvan, 2015; Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The literature review includes information acquired from previously published scholarly work applied to set a direction for the primary topic of study (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2017). Researchers add to the body of knowledge and generate awareness of their research by reviewing the literature on the study topic (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2017).

My objective for conducting this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. According to Alasadi and Askary (2014), resistance to change contributes to the 70% failure rate of organizational change efforts.

Search Strategy

To acquire academic and professional literature for my research, I performed several queries in the Walden University online library, searching business and management databases. I searched for scholarly, peer-reviewed journals and articles using EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ProQuest, SAGE, and other related databases. The keywords I used for the searches were *changed management*, *resistance to change*, *barriers of organizational change*, *change management theory*, *strategies to reduce resistance to change*, *capable change agent*, *effective communication*, *commitment to change*, *organizational culture*, *employee engagement*, *employee empowerment*, *building and sustaining a culture of employee assessment*, and *qualitative method*.

I referenced 209 sources in this literature review, of which 91% are peer-reviewed and published within 5 years of my August 2019 anticipated graduation date. Other sources include books, websites, reports, and papers, which covered 9% of the references. Table 1 shows the number count, type, total, and percent of the references used in the literature review.

Table 1

Type, Total, and Percent of References

Reference type	Total	% of references	Sources published between 2015-2019	Sources older than 5 years of anticipated graduation
Scholarly and peer-reviewed articles	190	91%	161	29
Other sources (i.e., seminal books, reports, papers, and international websites)	19	9%	16	3
Total	209	100%	177	32

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. Resistance to change contributes to the 70% failure rate of organizational change efforts (Adams, 2016; Hughes, 2016). My review of the professional and academic literature includes an exhaustive search with in-depth analysis and synthesis of the information explored. The 5 main sections include: (a) Kurt Lewin's (1947) change theory, Kotter's eight-step model, and contrasting theories; (b) research studies relevant to Lewin's change theory; (c)

factors that affect change; (d) barriers that lead to resistance to change; and (e) summary of existing strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change.

Conceptual Framework: The Change Theory

Lewin (1947), a 20th century social and organizational psychologist, generated the roots of change theory in the early 1940s. As a psychologist, Lewin studied group behavior and change, which led to the origination of the field theory. Lewin recognized that external forces instigate organizational members' behaviors, which affect the structure of the organization and individual reactions. Burnes and Cooke (2013) studied Lewin's change theory, observing that Lewin used group behavior to create the theory of group dynamics. Burnes and Cooke explained that Lewin further directed the focus of the change initiative process on groups rather than individuals.

Based on the initial force field approach, Lewin (1947) proposed a sophisticated conception of the growing and dynamic nature of various forces in social situations. To develop a useful framework of change to evaluate and determine business or organizational problems and conflicts, Lewin created action research (Burnes & Cooke, 2013). Lewin considered individual psychological factors as part of group dynamics using unfreeze–change–refreeze as foundational phases for change management (Burnes & Cooke, 2013).

Business leaders who appropriately implement the organizational change process and structure may increase the chances of change success. Hussain et al. (2018) focused on (a) how Lewin's change model granulates change, (b) how knowledge sharing affects the change implementation process, and (c) how employees and leadership styles affect

the organizational change process. Hussain et al. (2018) performed a review of change management using Lewin's three-phase change model as a conceptual lens and denotes the step by step phases as instructed by leaders, which allows employees to become involved in the planned change of the organization. Findings from the study showed that in using the Lewin's model of the three-phase change process, leaders and employees create one unit as they shift to and from one phase to the next. Hussain et al. found the change model helpful because the application of organizational change processes and structures can ensure change success. Likewise, Schein (1999) used Lewin's change theory as a theoretical foundation, which serves as the basis for many change models. Lewin's three-phase change model was an appropriate framework for my exploration of strategies that business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change and to succeed to implement change initiatives.

Lewin's Three-Phase Change Theory

The process of designing change starts when business leaders recognize the need for change within the organization. How organizations manage change depends on the type of business, the planned change, and the persons involved (Inokuchi et al., 2014). Organizations that succeed with planned change exhibit their capability of managing change (Fritz, Tilahun, & Dugas, 2015). Preparing organizational employees for business change involves effective planning, but barrier such as change resistance behaviors may arise to hinder the change initiatives (Hornstein, 2015). The primary construct of any organization's change process starts with employees' acceptance and readiness for change (Guidetti, 2018). The goal of organizational leaders may include creating an

acceptable change process to achieve employees' total buy-in of the planned change.

The Lewin three-phase change model consists of (a) unfreezing, (b) actual change, and (c) re-freezing (Burnes, 2004; Eden et al., 2016; Lewin, 1947). Lewin created the three-phase change model in an attempt to explain the implementation of organizational change as a gradual process. The Lewin change model has unfreeze, actual change and refreeze phases that business leaders can use to implement change.

The first phase unfreezes the status quo by creating employee's perception and awareness of change. The status quo refers to the equilibrium state, indicating the balanced level of opposing forces (Eden et al., 2016). The prime focus of the unfreezing phase is to create structures and processes to support the new change initiatives (Lewin, 1947). The intended purpose of the unfreezing stage is to raise awareness of change and destabilize the environment within an organization (Burnes, 2004). During the change process, organizations must stay prepared and expect resistance, as every effort may attract negative response to the proposed change.

Stegaroiu and Talmaciu (2016) outlined the main strategies needed to implement changes. They purported that creating awareness of change accentuates the differences between the actual behavior of the organization and the behaviors considered. As a result, employees are motivated to change. Business leaders should redirect employees' beliefs, values, and practices away from the status quo to change the environment (Kotter, 1996; Lewin, 1947). Medley and Akan (2008) advocated that business leaders implement the unfreeze phase to reduce change barriers by introducing incentives to stimulate change, and appropriately create rewards for new behavior. In this stage, employees unfreeze old

behaviors and attitudes, welcome new ideas, and experience the usefulness of the new approaches (Medley & Akan, 2008). The second phase, which is the actual move, change, or transition stage, involves acting and moving to the desired state. The second stage consists of a new functional level that includes the implementation of the desired change. Organizations institute a new vision, new strategies to execute work, new models to support skills, and operational structures to help and change (Medley & Akan, 2008). Change agents develop new behaviors, implement change, and follow-up for stabilization. Lewin (1947) asserted that business leaders would battle uncertainties and welcome innovative ideas in developing new processes for achieving change desires of the organization. The actual change phase relies on employees embracing the original vision and understanding the direction of the organization, affecting the desired changes (Medley & Akan, 2008).

The third phase entails refreezing equilibrium to ensure new structures or deeds. Lewin (1947) noted that at this stage, employees accepted the new processes already implemented. Medley and Akan (2008) recognized that Lewin's third phase of refreezing primarily refreezes the state of equilibrium to ensure new behaviors. Once the employees break the habits and switch further away from the existing situation, leaders refreeze the change outcome and temporarily replace restraining forces with permanent reinforcement (Lewin, 1947). The refreezing phase primarily concerns change agents consolidating and stabilizing the new level of change in the workplace to anchor new behavior (Burke, 1987).

As the foundational theory of change management, Lewin's three-phase change theory to plan, monitor, and evaluate changes, empowers organizational leaders to respond to change resistance. Lewin's three-phase change is part of a culture that helps future changes (Lewin, 1958; Shirey, 2013). The Lewin's three-phases are like a melting block of ice that refreezes into a new desired shape. Shirey (2013) and Lewin (1958) described the effectiveness of the modification of strategies. Lewin's goal for the three-phase change model included enabling organizational members to become willing to accept and integrate new practices to reinforce the planned change (Medley & Akin, 2008).

Lewin's three-phase change model can help stabilize the direction of an organization's planned change. Cummings, Bridgman, and Brown (2015) recognized that Lewin in the three-phase model expects that organizations remain stable after necessary changes succeed. Kritsonis (2005) explored differences between the Lewin's three-phase model, social, cognitive, Lippit's phases of change, Prochaska and DiClemente's change theory, and self-efficacy change theory. Kritsonis (2005) indicated that the Lewin's change theory addressed motivation, implementation, and acceptance of the change effort, which makes rational sense. Whereas the social cognitive theory proposes that change is affected by internal and external environmental influences. Lippit's theory of change is an extension of the Lewin's three-phase model but aims at the external change agent to generate plan instead of the change process, and not to implement the actual change (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). The Lewin three-phase model is rational, goal and plan oriented, the Prochaska and DiClemente's change theory involve general process

and less specific spiral stages, which takes relapse to convert to the desired change (Kritsonis, 2005).

Demand for change models continued to increase as organizations struggle to remain relevant in the business, where failure to change has distressing consequences. The Lewin's three-phase change theory descriptions of concepts and strategies used the change process and group or organizational dynamics (Lewin, 1947). Scheuer (2015) applied the three-phase planned change process to organize organizational change. Scheuer (2015) asserted that Lewin's three-phase change model constitutes an operational framework that business leaders may use to predict employees' resistance to change and provide a solution to ensure a successful change process. The Lewin three-phase change model is conceptualized to balance the direction of planned change and can be a lens for interpreting my study findings.

As the founding father of change theory, Lewin (1947) assumed that organizations successfully remained stable after succeeding necessary changes (Cummings et al.). The three-phase change model is coherent, goal, and plan oriented. Business leaders can deploy the use of Lewin three-phase change theory to implement strategies to reduce employee's resistance to change. Developing a flexible approach and an understanding of the varying forms of change allows business leaders to respond effectively to a transformational state of change.

Supporting Theory: Kotter's Eight-Steps Change Management Model

When discussing supporting theories of Lewin's change model, the most well-known approaches are Kotter's eight-step model (Kotter, 1996). Kotter (1996) expanded

Lewin's change theory by generating the eight-step model of leading change. Kotter introduced the eight-step change model in 1996 as a guide for organizing and managing a process for execution of the change initiative. Kotter (1996) used the model to create significant change as the conventional wisdom for leading change, and the most compelling formula for success in change management. Kotter's eight-step change theory complements Lewin's three-phase change model with more steps to achieve a successful change management process to eliminate resistance. Kotter's eight-step change model has a clear direction of strategies that business leaders use to create, sustain employee's involvement, and continue growth within an organization (Calegari, Sibley, & Turner, 2015).

In a study of leading change for a successful change effort, Kotter (2012) encouraged organizational leaders to avoid shortcuts and apply all eight steps of the change process in progressive conduct to achieve the purpose of the change program and increase work performance. Employees benefit when organizations succeed in change efforts, but change as a failure is a loss of both employees and the organizations that fail. Kotter (1996) expanded Lewin's three-phase change model to be instrumental in explaining the change management process. Kotter's eight-step model includes the following: (a) establish a sense of urgency, (b) creates a guiding coalition, (c) develop a vision, (d) communicates the vision, (e) empowers action to the concept, (f) generate short-term wins, (g) consolidate gains and produce more change, and (h) incorporate change in the work culture.

Kotter highlights steps to develop a sense of urgency throughout the organization. Kotter described step seven as applying additional efforts toward the change by hiring, promoting, and developing employees who can implement the vision, thereby reinvigorating the process (Kotter, 1996). Adhering to the first step, change agents communicate the necessity of change in a manner encourages employees to act swiftly to the change. The second step, which involves the creation of a guiding force, is established through the building a team with sufficient and delegated powers to create and implement change. The third step requires a specific vision for the impending change and developing plans to ensure the accomplishment of the vision. The fourth step of Kotter's change model involves communicating the change vision in a manner that is understandable to solicit acceptance of the change. Kotter's fifth step of the change model requires change agents to identify hurdles that would undermine the implementation of the change efforts (Kotter, 1996). Kotter explained step six as creating achievable short-term goals, acknowledging the achievement and rewarding people involved to encourage improvements. The final and eight stages in Kotter's change model include promoting a culture that cultivates an environment that is suitable for change.

Kotter's recommended developing a second operating system to complement the traditional hierarchy. Building on the eight-step change approach, Kotter (1996) further applied the procedure in a volatile and ambiguous environment of modern competition. Kotter's suggested that managing a flexible, network-based, alternative system continuously monitored the environment and proposed, implement, and design change

strategies to improve the organization's adaptability, and competitiveness. Engaging to support the change process includes three phases: (a) creating climate for change in steps one, two, and three; (b) engaging and enabling the entire organization, which involves steps four, five and six; and (c) implementing and sustaining the change include steps seven and eight (Hornstein, 2015). Kotter's eight-step change model aligns with Lewin's three-stage model. Kotter (1996) asserted that the Lewin unfreeze phase links to stages one through three of the Kotter model. The phase supports environments suitable for change, and skipping this process could lead to total change failure (Kotter, 1996). The Lewin's transition phase aligns with stages four, five through six of Kotter's model. Lewin's phase enables members to take steps to make the change, whereas the Lewin's refreeze phase refers to stages seven and eight of Kotter's eight-stage change model and reflects a culture of sustaining permanent change (Hornstein, 2015).

Kotter's eight-step for leading change provides a framework for the change processes carried out by leaders within an organization. Organizational leaders can use the change processes offered by Kotter (1996) to generate a vision for organizations to advance to the next level. Kotter identified the importance to follow sequences and not skipping steps or getting too far ahead without implementing a solid base. Calegari et al. (2015) recognized that the development of strategies sustains employee's involvement and continuous organizational improvements. Kotter eight-step change model expanded the Lewin's three-stage model and aided business leaders with the approach to implement and maintain corporate change efforts, the content and predictor is time-consuming and differs in several phases and steps. Both Lewin (1947) and Kotter (1996) noted that

achieving organizational change requires applying the planned approach in sequential steps. Not all theorists such as Beer and Nohria (2000) agreed that the procedure was the only approach.

Contrasting Theories: Beer and Nohria's Theory E and Theory O of Change

Lewin's three-phase change model is two generalized distinctions of change strategies, the Beer and Nohria's theory E and theory O of change. Beer and Nohria (2000) developed the theory E and theory O in 2000. The framework, Beer, and Nohria used the theory E to concentrate on the economic value of change and the theory E to focus on an organization's long-term capability of change. Beer and Nohria developed the theories by the priority of the financial interest of the organization and its self-developing system that links change with culture, employee motives, and objectives. Guided differently by two values and assumptions, researchers using the theory E and theory O may attract challenges for organizational changes, success, such as the tension between the financial performance or interest of organizations and internal dynamics of the peoples' capabilities of organizations.

The purpose of the study was to use Beer and Nohria's framework of Theory E and Theory O to explore ways in which healthcare organizations can improve their organizational readiness for change. Steinke, Dastmalchian, Blyton, and Hasselback (2013) conducted a research study on corporate change strategies within Healthcare organizations. Steinke et al. (2013) gathered data from senior leaders and medical directors from health regions in Alberta. In applying theory E and theory O, Steinke et al. (2013) advocated that the best way to apply the theories include using one approach at a

time before the other. Steinke et al. (2013) indicated that even though there is a tendency for reliance on Theory E change strategies, the respondents demonstrated different preferred approaches to change. The theory E includes a programmatic process used to maximize the economic value of a business and theory O is unplanned and emergent and used to develop the capabilities of employees, the Lewin three-phase model is rational, goal and plan oriented, whereas the theory E and theory O methods contrast with the other, and does not support each other. Beer and Nohria (2000) posited that neither of the two theories on its own could achieve the objectives of the organization. This discrepancy is why the theorists cannot isolate the theory E and theory O for best practice, which contrasts with Lewin's (1947) three-phase planned approach of change. Integrating the two methods in a mutually beneficial way poses difficulty with achieving fundamental and successful change.

The seminal works of Lewin's three-phase planned change approach remain significant in managing organizational change initiatives. Lewin (1947) asserted that by using sequential phases, business leaders would achieve effective change management. Burnes and Cooke (2013) echoed that Lewin's three-stage change model has the purpose of use and operates under the premise that change proceeds reasonably in a linear fashion. Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2013) indicated that Lewin's three-phase change model constitutes an operational framework that can be used to predict human behavior relating to change resistance and provide strategies that ensured successful change implementation. In contrast, Kippenberger (2000) posited that the viable way to achieve change involves placing the theory E followed by theory O. A

business leader with an attractive vision can show responsibility for employees and the results they produce. Lewin's classical change theory remains the unique approach in strategizing ways to reduce resistance to change.

Studies Relevant to Lewin Three-Phase Change Model. Small business leaders may add research to their knowledge-base to increase success. Upon my review of the studies relevant to Lewin change theory, I found many researchers (Meltz, Herman, & Pillay, 2014; Riddley, 2018 & Trinidad, 2016) have used Lewin's three-phase change model in their studies of organizational change management. Researchers (Meltz, Herman, & Pillay, 2014; Riddley, 2018 & Trinidad, 2016) involved different participants in their studies and found Lewin's three-phase change model helpful as a lens for their studies.

In the context of inclusive education and change management, Meltz, Herman, and Pillay (2014) used Lewin three-phase change model as a conceptual lens to study how learners are experiencing barriers to learning, understand the implementation of policy on inclusive education at a Jewish community school. To gather data, Meltz et al. explored insider interview, personal accounts, and document analysis. Meltz et al. conducted semistructured interviews with four stakeholder groups, which entailed teachers, parents, middle managers, and top managers. The outcome of the interviews and other data collected include four belief systems, which include (a) special education, (b) pragmatism, (c) social justice, and (d) community. Meltz et al. (2014) advocated for the recognition of the different belief systems in the implementation of inclusion in South Africa. Meltz et al. (2014) established that success in belief systems influenced the

understanding and practice of inclusive education at a Jewish community. Giving these findings, Meltz et al. (2014) recognized the Lewin's three-phase change model as the most appropriate change model for the study. Researchers who explore the occurrence of change using the Lewin's three-phase change model yield similar findings (Cummings et al., 2015). Using the Lewin's change model, the researchers can provide insights relevant to all aspects of organizational change management.

Ridley (2018) used the Lewin three-phase change model as a conceptual lens to study strategies healthcare executives use to develop and implement information technology systems for processing electronic health records (EHRs). Riddley (2018) identified three themes from observations, semistructured interviews, and organizational documents. Riddley (2018) asserted that communication and management were plans for EHR implementation, information technology EHR vendor selection, and EHR implementation technical support strategy. The findings of the study are linked and consistent with the Lewin's three-phase planned change model, where the unfreeze phase evolved at the first theme of communication and management plan explaining the change process.

Lewin change model aligned with the acceptance of information technology EHR vendor selection process. The third phase of refreezing (Lewin, 1947) linked with the evaluation process for stabilizing the new change and creating more change opportunities to uplift technology for the organization. The report of the findings influenced both the patients and clinicians, which confirmed that the EHR implementation is complex and challenging, but with the right organizational strategic alignment and the right EHR

vendor, the process could be less challenging for the leaders to manage. Lewin's three-phase change model of unfreezing, moving, and freezing imply the presence of driving forces that leaders may use to reduce complexity in the change process (By et al., 2015; Lines et al., 2015; Longenecker & Longenecker, 2014). The use of Lewin's approach could assist with the quicker EHR implementation process and decreased complexity in the process.

Using data collected from interviews, and a review of organizational documents, Trinidad revealed whether Lewin three-phase change model and Kotter's 8-steps change process influenced the successful execution of the planned change. Trinidad (2016) used the Lewin three-phase and Kotter's eight-steps change model as a conceptual lens to explore strategies for successful implementation of change initiatives in health care organizations. Change values in the business entity come from a carefully planned adaptation and reinterpretation of existing values (Van Der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Planning change helps reduce resistance and assist in comprehending the change in a meaningful approach (Dunican & Keaster, 2015). Trinidad (2016) centered the findings of the study around the Lewin's three-phase change model and Kotter's eight steps planned change model. Trinidad posited that some organizational leaders successfully implement change through effective communication, adequate training, and employee involvement strategies during change initiatives. Garcia-Cabrera and Garcia-Barba Hernandez (2014) noted that because each aspect of change resistance has its specific set of antecedents, organizational leaders could act on each separate facet, and make use of

appropriate mechanisms. The use of these approaches can assist the researcher with an insight into the study.

Factors Affecting Change

Managing change to achieve an organization's objectives has become a challenge for business leaders. Single actions such as resistance to change have hindered employees from embracing change initiatives. Goodridge, Westhorp, Rotter, Dobson, and Bath (2015) posited that most organization's effort to achieve change fail because of resistance to change. The single most significant barrier leading to change failure is employee resistance. A single employee's resistance can divert project progress (Goodridge et al., 2015). Business leaders may experience a strong resistance to change when no agreement regarding goals exists (Burmester, 2017). Employees' resistance to change can complicate the organizations' change progress (Nilsen, Dugstad, Eide, Gullslett, & Eide, 2016). Resistance to change is inevitable and may force business leaders to adjust the planned change process.

Resistance to Change. Lewin (1947) defined resistance to change as an opposing force that works together with competing effects of different intensities to reach the consolidation of new balance after any disturbance in the system. Lewin further posited that resistance to change persists when no agreement exists between leadership and employees to achieve the end goal. Nilsen et al. (2016) asserted that resistance to change is an important phenomenon often associated with the most significant barrier that complicates planned change process of organizations. Resistance to change is inevitable and a natural way of employees' showing disapproval of change initiatives (Johannsdottir

et al., 2015; Nilsen et al., 2016). Pakdil and Leonard (2015) posited that resistance to change behavior shows when employees, stakeholders, and shareholders fail to comprehend the change process. In the unfreeze stage of Lewin's change management theory, Lewin (1947) noted that organizational leaders could develop strategies and even expect undesired hurdles to arise during the planned change. To reduce the resistance to change, corporate leaders can identify barriers responsible for employees' change resistive behaviors.

Barriers that Lead to Resistance to Change

Barriers are usually aspects of the change process. Kotter (1996) indicated that the change process has obstacles that can block a new vision of an organization. The most significant obstacle to organizational planned change efforts includes employees' resistance to change. The review of the literature regarding resistance to change in the implementation of corporate change plan applies to the foundations of the change. As used by Lines et al. (2015), Lewin's three phases of unfreezing, moving, and freezing change model imply the presence of driving forces of change or resistance to change behaviors. Some barriers leading to employees' resistant to change practices include the culture and change capacity of an organization, readiness for change (Besliu, 2018), and the competence of business leaders communicate and facilitate the need for change effectively (Akan et al., 2016).

Kotter's (1996) eight steps approach to handling planned change highlights numerous elements that lead to resistance to change, which includes: employee intolerance for change, self-interest, poor perception, complacency, and lack of trust.

These factors corroborate Lines et al. (2015), which highlights twelve barriers that lead to resistance to change that include (a) lack of transparency in planned change, (b) restrictive education, (c) reluctant complain, (d) arguing and open criticism, (e) obstructive and subverting, (f) spreading the negative word; (g) termination, (h) reversion, (i) misguiding application (j) forcing the change to happen, (k) external influence, and (l) delay. Likewise, Akan et al. (2016) posited that employees' resistance to change result from sociological, economic, psychological, and rational reasons that hinder the organization's planned. Lines et al. (2015) indicated that the resistance to change behaviors is directly associated with dimensions of change failure within employees.

Kansal and Chandani (2014) presented eight similar factors that affect change effort, which include (a) lack of communication, (b) confusion and frustration, (c) force of habit or comfort of existing routines, (d) lack of confidence in management, (e) insecurity, (f) fear of the unknown, (g) loss of competency, and (h) lack of management support. Basu (2015) detailed barriers to change efforts, which include (a), lack of awareness, (b) fear of job loss, (c) fear of the unknown and comfort with the status quo, (d) organizational history and culture, and (e) opposition to new technologies, requirements, and processes. Change does not happen by itself; the need to understand the rational reasons behind employees' resistance to change may enable allocation of resources for the change.

Even with a well-organized change management program, resistance to change may develop for a multitude of reasons. Implementation of change fails the majority of

the time and documented approximately 70% failure rate (Adams, 2016). Nilsen et al. (2016) asserted that resistance to change is inevitable and evident at the employees, organizational, and institutional level. Lewin (1947) stated that resistance to change persists when no agreement exists between corporate leaders and their employees to achieve the end goal. Change initiative fails when business leaders and their employees decline to work alongside in the same direction (Johannsdottir et al., 2015). Employees may develop negative attitudes and resist accepting change initiatives when they observe leaders as ineffective in communicating the reason for the change, misleading, unpleasant, or different from their characters. Change does not happen by itself; the need to understand the rational reasons behind employees' resistance to change may enable allocation of resources for the change. Small business leaders could use the above-listed perspectives such as lack of communication, fear of the unknown, ineffective organization's culture, lack of knowledge and understanding the need for change, combined to provide a broad view and the reasons behind employees' resistance to organizational change initiatives.

Lack of communication is the number one barrier that limit organizational change process or reason for employees' resistance to change within an organization. Ali and Ivanov (2015) detailed that communication is an aspect of change management. Communication is a core process through which information exchange of change program is achieved (Lewin, 1947). A lack of effective communication may pose a challenge for management or business leaders that seek to increase employees' understanding of the change. Failing to provide useful feedback can lead to wasted

efforts, increase error rates, diminished organizational commitment, and lower job performance. Researchers such as Appelbaum et al. (2017) posited that communication entails a two-way process that requires the organization to understand. The lack of two-way communication between leaders and employees explains the rational reasons for employees' resistance to change. Appelbaum et al. (2017) confirmed that not all forms of communications are equal. A business leader that have intuitive ideas to increase efficiency and productivity may fail to deliver the ideas if there is a lack of communication of the new leadership's vision for change. Ineffective communicating reason for change initiatives may cause employees to distrust the administration and pull away out of fear of the unknown.

Fear of the unknown is one numerous reason leading employees to resist organizational change initiative. Canning and Found (2015) observed that some employees resist organizational change initiatives because of fear of the unknown, job insecurity, habit, or because it makes them step out of their comfort zone, and failure to plan to carry out functions properly because of a fast-forward in the abundance of new resources. The emotional element of responses to change addresses the emotions and experiences individuals experience during the change (Malik & Masood, 2015). When employees are unclear about the change actions or efforts that business leader makes, they fear the unknown ideas and pull away. In several cases, change actions begin without the knowledge of the employees, causing employees' resistive behavior. Attempting to reduce resistance to change without understanding the causes, may potentially develop into a strong resistance (Canning & Found, 2015).

The culture of an occupational entity may affect planned change implementations if the process does not align with the culture of the organization. Culture refers to occupational groups shared values and beliefs of an organization (Giorgi, Lockwood, Glynn, 2015; Willis et al., 2016). Communicating an organization's culture is an attribute to the business's success or failure, and transforming the culture of an organization and manage change can take time. Kotter (1996) indicated that the planned change adopted in the culture of an entire organization might take 3 to 10 years to achieve complete transformation or success. In a study of culturally diverse environment case, Frahm (2016) asserted that employees with epochs of gainful employment within an organization tend to exhibit resistance to change initiatives, retain old routines, and fail to recognize the need for change. Change process might create a negative correlation, so even if the groups develop methods, new habits may need to replace old routines (Frahm, 2016).

Ineffective handling of the reason for change generates an experience of uncertainty. Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) explained that when employees do not comprehend the need for change, it creates ambiguity within the organization. A lack of knowledge and understanding of the need for change is a significant problem that could cause demanding workload and stressful work environments. Even as numerous factors affecting change, growth, organizational leaders can seek ways to overcome resistance to change initiative and to increase the need for effective organizational change and improvement (Longenecker & Longenecker, 2014). Change does not happen by itself; the need to understand the rational reasons behind employees' resistance to change may

enable allocation of resources for the change. Numerous approaches shape the change efforts of organizations.

Reducing Employees' Resistance to Change

Managing change is a core competence at any level of a business. Implementation of strategies to overcome resistance to change has increasingly widespread. A strategic plan entails a roadmap that leads an organization from one position to where it would like to be in the future (Kariuki, 2015). Business leaders may evolve strategies to reduce their employees' resistance to change and to improve organizational change initiatives.

Overcoming resistance to change may create a unified organization where all employees work together to achieve a notable change. Al-Haddad and Kutnour (2015) suggested the need for business leaders could plan organizational change that improved the internal structure, business processes, strategy, culture, and job stability and attitudes of employees. The factors considered in leading successful planned change may vary in different organization's level, position, and activities (Packard, McCrae, Phillips, & Scannapieco, 2015). Some significant factors discussed in the section include effective communication, culture, training, and continuous learning, employee engagement, and empowerment, commitment to change, and building a culture (By, Armenakis, & Burnes, 2015; Rao, 2015).

Effective communication. A starting place for successful change management process includes effective communication. Communication remains a tool for managing employees' resistance regarding planning, procedures, and rationale for organizational change (Akan et al., 2016; Luo et al., 2016). Effective communication is a determinant of

the planned change process. Communication before, during, and after the change is established to create a positive organizational response. Kotter (1996) and Lewin (1947) described effective and clear communication as an element in the success of any corporate change program.

Appelbaum et al. (2017) indicated that communication has different levels. Employees will respond positively or negatively based on how the information about the change is received. Business leaders who communicate the purpose of change initiatives to employees clearly and effectively may reduce resistance to change and promote growth (Rao, 2015). Adams (2016) posited that effective communication from business leaders to employees results in 12.4 times more successful change than usual. Business leaders who communicate richly express their vision and strategic intent of the change (Bourne, 2015).

The level of communication needs to vary in magnitude. Besliu (2018) debated that to overcome the insecurity of employees who resist planned change, intense and multi-point communication is necessary to transmit in all directions and media of the organization, which entails from top to bottom, from bottom to top, horizontally and diagonally. Ali and Ivanov (2015) found communication as a role in engaging employees, active interaction between leaders and employees bridge the gap between a disengaged or engaged workplace, which influences the organization by increasing optimism and productivity. A proper leader-employees' communication may reduce change process adaptation and resistance to change (Besliu, 2018). Change requires all members to embrace the new change, but not all employees comfortably accept change. The need for

business leaders is recommended to maintain accuracy and consistency with communicating change in the workplace (Ionescu & Bolcas, 2015).

The use of Internet communication channels such as social media and mobile platform is a new means of communicating change targeted within the organization and with stakeholders. The pressure on organizational leaders to determine effective methods to communicate target change increases, but the use of social media may aid communications (Eisenberg, Johnson, & Pieteron, 2015). Several organizations use Facebook, organization's Intranet, and more others communicate target change. The shift in communication through social media sources focused on social purposes. Most organizations brace the use of social media for business (Levy, 2013). Caliskan and Isik (2016) posited that communication creates a collective mindset, which would enhance readiness for global change in the organization.

Success or failure begins with the ability of leadership to communicate effectively in any organization when planning change. Kotter (1996) and Lewin (1947) described effective and clear communication as an element that contributes to the success of any organizational change program. Communication between leaders and employees should address the initial resistance. Change within an organization entails straightforward, clear, and communicated before implementation begins (Dunican & Keaster, 2015). Kotter's eight steps change model for leading change when combined with strategic planning helps to overcome change resistance and allows employees to comprehend the change in a meaningful way (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). In most cases, change begins

without employees, even knowing a change is taking place; this action causes employees to resist as a response citation.

Communication is a situational component shown to influence reactions to change. Will (2015) postulated that organizational change often fails or, at the very least, experience employee resistance to change because of dysfunctional interactions within the company. Effective communication between leaders and employees may increase employee's ability to make meaning of change and determines the positive consequences of change initiatives (van den Heuvel, Schalk, & Van Assen, 2015). Communication could generate a win-win or lose-lose situation, but Will (2015) asserted that effective communication creates inter-organizational cooperation, increase acceptance of change, and benefit the purpose of the change initiative. Kotter (1996) recommended leaders to use multiple forums to communicate an organizational vision and change through training sessions, memos, meetings, performance appraisals, newsletters, and company intranet. Leaders identify with resistance to change by adapting to individual behaviors (Andersson, 2015). Kaiser, El Arbi, and Ahlemann (2015) asserted effective communication contributes to a successful change outcome. The transition periods of organizational planned change initiatives may create insecurity and crises because it starts from the known to the unknown. Business leaders may prevent, explain uncertainties, instability, and resistance to change during the transition periods through open, trust-based, active, and continuous communication (Besliu, 2018). Effective communication of a planned change process may provide employees with the necessary information to reconcile the reason for the change and establish trust in the leadership.

Culture. Organizational culture may help to achieve employees' commitment to change. Business leaders who communicate effectively may increase acceptance of change initiatives and enhance the establishment of organizational culture. Qubaisi et al. (2015) posited that organizations have a distinctive culture and subcultures in internal departments that consist of different professions and geographical regions with different values, meanings, manners, and histories. Lewin (1947) associated developing a culture of change in the unfreezing stage of Lewin's change theory. Business leaders may use the culture of the organization to drive the values of the organization. Christensen, Mackey, and Whetten (2014) advocated the responsibilities of organizational leaders include elevating corporate values and culture in change initiatives.

Culture influences society along with individual values in the case of organization and other agencies operating in the area. Organizational culture consists of shared values, beliefs, and assumptions that exist between employees within a company that help guide and coordinate behavior (Cravens, Goad Oliver, Shigehiro, & Stewart, 2015). The success of change initiatives requires change strategies to align with the organizational culture (Schuller, Kash, & Gamm, 2015). Business leaders may use corporate culture to play a role in an organization's ability to manage the change plan (Pakdil & Leonard, 2015). Frahm (2016) conducted a case study to explore organizations based on the company's production subsidiary in Indonesia and handling cultural challenges when seeking to obtain efficient organization. Using the supportive change model of Kotter's eight-steps, Frahm revealed that culture affects the organization's change management. Employees with decades of gainful employment within an organization may tend to resist

change initiatives, retain old routines, and fail to recognize the need for change (Frahm, 2016). Culture in an organization includes employee involvement, creativity, problem-solving, risk-taking, control, productivity, and continued success (Mouhamadou, Jeanie, & Rosa, 2017; Pakdil & Leonard, 2015). Within an organization, clear communication of the needs of culture is necessary to assist employees with being cooperative with project changes (Pakdil & Leonard, 2015). According to Frahm (2016), culture impacts the society along with individual values in the case organization and other agencies operating in the area.

Employees who encourage a positive work environment may influence other employees in supporting change and building organizational cultures and can transition positively to the community. When developing a culture in a multicultural setting of organizations, Rao (2015) indicated that a positive attitude toward cultural differences would aid organizations in leveraging diversity, strength, reducing resistance to change, and decreasing hostility in the study of cultural differences. Leadership and employee acceptance of beliefs and core values of the organization may generate an influential culture (Mouhamadou, Jeanie, & Rosa, 2017). Organizations may actively contribute to societal well-being through stimulating transformational processes beyond their boundaries (Stephan, Patterson, Kelly, & Mair, 2016).

Training and continuous learning. The focus on business change program insights and knowledge could be a strategy for reducing employees' resistance to change. A perspective of proper management of change involves continuous training of employees on the change process to reduce employees resisting change (Dickens, 2015).

Business leaders use employee training to alter the change process and generate a new organizational system and workflow (Schuller, Kash, & Gamm, 2015). During the initial stages of training, the planned change process may be slower. Providing training to employees in different disciplines of work may challenge employees to build confidence, desire, and trust between the parties involved in change.

The speed of change implementation within an organization could be challenging. Business leaders can institute a vigorous program of education and training for employees' continuous learning of the change program of the organization, which would create a structure and better understanding of the purpose of the change. Proper management of employees' resistance to change determines the organization's change success or failure (Jabbarian & Chegini, 2017). Building organizational behavior to succeed change in the working environment requires leaders to generate and share knowledge of change initiatives. Ferincz (2016) proposed company education and training that involves a process of change in cognition and behavior, using single- and double-loop learning processes, based on learning at the individual and organizational levels and leading to adapt to external and internal challenges. Fritz et al. (2015) noted acquiring new skills for training, communication, and enhancing knowledge for the planned change process to be efficient. Employees' acceptance of change is dependent upon the readiness of change established within the organization. Business leaders could implement necessary internal changes to enhance employees' acceptance of the planned change.

Employee engagement. The level of employee engagement desired by business

leaders depends upon the planned change of the organization. Employee engagement is a method used to create opportunities for organizational development and to enhance employee happiness (Aktar, 2017; Cesário & Chambel, 2017). Employee engagement entails leadership dedicating more time for employees to avoid disengagement or resistant behaviors (Bourne, 2015).

An ideal state of a planned organizational change reflects employee engagement. Alasadi and Askary (2014) explored employee engagement and the barriers to organizational change and posited that the effectiveness of change initiatives is dependent upon the state of the organization's affairs. Employee engagement entails unique roles in the change process and provides a smooth transitioning from one program to another (Kumah, Ankomah, & Antwi, 2016). Employee engagement can affect and increase the satisfaction of employees. Business leaders use employee engagement as a tool to inspire employees as partners and support to sustain successful change implementation (Guidetti et al., 2018). Through employee engagement, business leaders can generate insights on the dimensions of resistance, identify reasons for resistance to change, and promote resistance management to stimulate employees' change acceptance (Alasadi & Askary, 2014). Business leaders may choose to retain consistency in striving to develop and sustain the competencies of their employees.

Employees are fundamental to the business growth of any organization. Researchers have found that employee performance suffers when leaders do not provide adequate time to engage their employees. A Gallup Poll in the U.S. reflected 32% of workers participate in the work environment, 50.8% of employees were "not engaged,"

whereas, 17.2 % noted, “actively disengaged,” which means that the disengaged employees did not adhere to the organization’s change efforts (Adkin, 2016). Disengaged and the discontent employee might lead to low productivity (Babalola, 2016). Lewin (1947) posited that organizational leaders own the responsibility of engaging employees actively and genuinely.

Employee engagement can improve resilience and dedication, which can lead to future growth opportunities and increased responsibility. Nieberding (2014) explored employee engagement and other bonding forces in organizations and described employees’ involvement in the workforce. Engaged employees expand their roles in the workplace, stay persistent, exhibit proactive response to emerging threats and challenges, and expect to handle and adapt to the change of any kind in the organization (Nieberding, 2014). Nieberding further explained that with employee engagement, leaders could focus on (a) organizational productivity, (b) work specialization, c) departmentalization, (d) chain of command, (e) span of control, (f) centralization and decentralization, and (g) formalization. Some leaders use fear, such as a consequence of job loss to engage employees. Change does not have to represent the fear factor (Besliu, 2018). Nieberding asserted that business leaders might balance employees’ work distribution by implementing broad-scale employee engagement and achieve operational excellence by creating an efficient and effective performance program, practice, and a reward program. Engaging employees call for accountability rather than imposing consequences. Employees’ expressed accountability within an organization may serve as the adhesive that holds social systems together (Aktar, 2017; Nieberding, 2014).

Increasing employee engagement helps to develop a company's culture that supports and encourage sustainability. Ionescu and Bolcas (2015), asserted that through employee engagement, employees understand their role in the success of the change implementation efforts and its benefits in reducing resistance to change. Engaged employees attach themselves to their task by entirely devoting their heads, hearts, and hands in accomplishing their responsibility (Keating & Heslin, 2015). Business leaders engage their employees in the change plan as a method to provide opportunities for organizational development and added employee happiness (Aktar, 2017; Cesário & Chambel, 2017). Guided encouragement can provide business leaders with the ability to implement best practices to reduce employee's resistance to change.

Employee empowerment. To reduce resistance to change within an organization, business leaders take several approaches, including empowering employees. Jernigan, Beggs, and Kohut (2016) accepted that empowering employees invokes dedication. Employee empowerment entails sharing information, knowledge, and creating work relationship to enhance job productivity and satisfaction. Researchers like Khan and Rasli (2015) defined employee empowerment as the transfer of power from organizational leaders to employees in decision making and the ability to manage, assign and improve the functions of the assigned tasks. Khan and Rasli (2015) indicated that employee empowerment in the workplace enable business leaders, to build a strong working relationship with employees. In turn, stronger working relationships increase employees buy-in to change efforts.

Employees are less likely to exhibit resistance to change behaviors when empowered to oversee tasks within their assignment. Through employee empowerment, business leaders may promote positive work environment behavior and practices to achieve effectiveness in business change (Guidetti et al., 2018). Pollack and Pollack (2015) noted that engaging the different levels of the organization during planning reduces employees resistance to change and develop more business sustainable efforts. Changes in the structure of a project must align with changes to other components. Business leaders may reduce employees' resistance to change by empowering employees or project teams through training programs (Dickens, 2015). Also, employees may remain loyal to employers when allowed to engage and contribute to the decision-making process (Jernigan, Beggs, & Kohut, 2016).

When empowering employees, business leaders can build relationships with their employees and reduce resistance to change. The impact of organizational change on social relations may be beneficial for individuals, communities, organizations, society, and or the environment (Stephan et al., 2016). Stephan et al., (2016) found that when business leaders make an effort to develop productive relationships with their employees, employees' trust, and loyalty towards leadership increases to reduce employee resistance to change. Jernigan, Beggs, and Kohut (2016) asserted that business leaders use employee empowerment to increase the commitment level of employees to accept and contribute to the planned change, employees' level of commitment to change and job satisfaction could be responsible for reducing resistance to change.

According to Lewin's (1947) three-phase change model, business leaders own the responsibility of dealing with and decreasing the degree of employees' resistance to change. According to Burnes (2004), Lewin encouraged the participation and empowerment of employees in all three phases of the change model process. Kotter (1996) proposed the eight-step model for organizational change that businesses leaders can employ to develop strategies for encouraging employees' participation and commitment to the change process.

Commitment to change. Employee commitment to change is a factor that contributes to organizational effectiveness at the time of change implementation. Building commitment to change is a significant aspect of change management that leads to the implementation of the change and increases organizational trust and productivity (Mangundjaya, 2015). Mangundiaya identified commitment to change as a significant factor that psychologically empowers employees and builds organizational trust. Nasir et al. (2014) defined commitment to change as a mindset that binds an individual to a course of action that necessarily fits the success of the implementation of the change initiative. Commitment to change enables managers and employees to learn how to deal with organizational change successfully.

A committed employee is the one who shares the value and dedicated to staying with the organization during change implementation and ready to accomplish the organizational change goal. Commitment to change entails the change agent and their respective team not only garner executive support but the support of employees as well. Gupta, Agarwal, and Khatri (2016) posited that affective commitment mediates the

positive relationships between perceived corporate support and work outcomes. Useful commitment to change within an organization facilitates change acceptance among employees (Westerberg & Tafvelin, 2015). Nasir et al. (2014) concluded that commitment to change increases when all the factors remain controlled. Engaged employees not only commit to the organization but also commit to the betterment of the community in which the organization operates. Most companies are aware of the need for change, but the challenge remains with the implementation of strategies that work. Commitment to change may likely be a strategy to reduce resistance to change. Nasir et al. (2014) found that business leaders employ commitment to change to reflect on readiness for change, openness to change, and coping with the change process. Successful business leaders encourage employees to establish the mindfulness to accept change and be committed to the organization's planned change (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Commitment to change reflects on readiness for change, openness to change, and coping with change process (Nasir et al., 2014).

Business leaders who promote a positive work environment, behavior, and practices may achieve success in business change. As indicated by Johannsdottir et al. (2015), organizational support is necessary when initiating new change process to ensure employees' awareness, attitude, and commitment. A different diameter of change may develop over time. Mercurio (2015) assert that leaders use commitment to change to identify the nature of attitudinal commitment in the workplace. Business leaders may achieve employees' commitment to change when all the factors of the change remain guided (Johannsdottir et al., 2015). Westerberg and Tafvelin (2015) explained that

leaders are mostly the change agents in organizations that implement a change initiative, so improving support, achieving a higher level of trust and fairness can serve as a cornerstone of effective implementation of change. Employee commitment to change may influence the positive perception of the organization planned change (Westerberg & Tafvelin, 2015). Engaged and empowered employees may indicate a commitment to the organizational change and the betterment of the community in which the organization operates.

Building a culture of assessment. Leaders willing to move their business in new directions may signify sustaining the implemented change. Kotter (1996) posited that anchoring new change requires incorporating a culture of assessment into the organizational culture. Ceptureanu (2015) advocated that assessing the outcome of the change implemented entails comparing the employees to the change strategies, analyzing the sources of information, and using the change model to introduce measures that build and sustain a culture of employee assessment. Monitoring, feedback, and intervention are necessary for a period after the changes have occurred (Kotter, 1996). Creating a culture of assessment would necessitate feedback on changes implemented for future change success. Business leaders have the power to institute cultures that resonate with employees.

Business leaders may use the Lewin (1947) three-phase change theory to plan, monitor, and evaluate changes, which could enhance employees' positive response to change. Based on a solid foundation of communication, empowerment, and focus, Kotter (1996) suggested that for change to be successful, about 75% of an organization's

management needs to buy into the change. Business leaders may focus on changing the business and any aspect of behaviors that may prevent change implementation and its eventual success (Atkinson & Mackenzie, 2015). Change can produce positive outcomes; resistance to change is universal among all organizations, large, medium, or small; business leaders need to emphasize adaptability (Ceptureanu, 2015).

Methodology Considerations

I selected a qualitative research method to understand some strategies that small business use to reduce employee's resistance to change. The review of the professional and academic literature supports the chosen qualitative research method and design. The selected research method and design align with other research studies, which successfully explores similar prodigy. In this section, I gathered literature review from several fields of studies that assert information that pertains to case-based qualitative methodological consideration.

Chandler, Rycroft-Malone, Hawkes, and Noyes (2016) conducted a qualitative case study to explore strategies to reduce surgical fasting times. Chandler et al. (2016) used semistructured interviews with patients and focused groups on collecting and analyzing data. In the finding of the study, Chandler et al. (2016) asserted that the practice of surgical fasting times was deeply rooted in the culture of the healthcare system and is difficult to change. Yeh and Sur (2016) conducted qualitative method research using a case study design to explore innovative strategies used by small business leaders. In using a semistructured interview style, Yeh, and Sur (2016) collected data and identified data to reach findings. Organizations could benefit from collecting data to

determine the relative strength of each factor that caused resistance to change (Vedenik & Leber, 2015).

Similarly, Yeh and Sur (2016) used the qualitative case study approach to explore strategic innovation in microfilms to overcome resistance to change. Researchers such as Roulston and Shelton (2015) used the qualitative research method to meticulously highlight and identify reliable and valid data for creative interpretation. I used the qualitative research method to collect data from selected small business leaders in Central and Southern Region of Texas to explore strategies used to reduce employees' resistance to change.

Transition

The goal of Section 1 was to introduce the foundation and background of the study, the problem and purpose statements, the nature of the study, and research questions. The section contained the conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and the delimitations of the research. The significance of the study contributes to business practices and implications for social changes. I discussed the interview questions and concluded the section with a review of the professional and academic literature.

I begin Section 2 with a restatement of the purpose of the study and discuss the role of the researcher, the participants, and the research method and design of the study. Next, I describe the components that include population and sampling, ethical research procedures, follow with data collection that entailed techniques, instruments, and organization and data analysis. I conclude the section with the explanation of how I

would ensure reliability and validity in the research study process. In Section 3, I present the findings of the study, application of professional practice, implication for social change and based on the study findings, recommendations, reflections on the research experience, and conclusion of the study.

Section 2: The Project

The objective of this doctoral study was to explore strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employee's resistance to change. The lack of leaders' strategies impedes the successful implementation of change initiatives. Section 2 includes elements relevant to the research study that I used to answer the overarching research question. This section includes the purpose statement, an explanation of the role of the researcher, participant selection, justification of research method and design, and population and sampling. I also discuss ethical research practices and describe the data collection instrument, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. I interviewed three business leaders from three companies in the central and southern regions of Texas. These leaders had successfully implemented strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change. Small business leaders in any sector may use the results of this study and contribute to positive social change by using similar strategies to successfully implement change initiatives that might reduce resistance to change, enhance the work environment, and reduce employees' stress. Additionally, small business leaders using the results of this study could improve community growth through increased local employment rates.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the qualitative researcher includes communicating, cooperating with their participants, and capturing a variety of perspectives to understand the social phenomena, situations, and processes of the study (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2017). Researchers attain insight into the experiences and behaviors of the participants in the research (Corti & Van den Eynden, 2015). My role as the primary researcher for this study was to establish the eligibility criteria for selecting potential participants and collecting and analyzing information obtained from three small business leaders in the central and southwest region of Texas. A qualitative researcher engages participants to gather information, analyzes it, and then reports the findings (Kawar, Pugh, & Scruth, 2016). I used a qualitative multiple case study and triangulated the data collected from the participants' responses to the semistructured, open-ended interview questions. I used various sources including company documents, observation notes from participant interviews, reflective notes, and member checking. One significant role of qualitative researchers is gathering reliable and valid data for the study.

In the quest to gain a better understanding of the professional experience of the chosen participants, a researcher develops a relationship with the participants in the selected geographical location (Berger, 2015). Researchers acquaint themselves with the research location to develop compelling study (Bryman, 2015). I am familiar with the location of my research because I have lived in both areas for at least 15 years. The research topic was of interest to me because I have worked as a management analyst and observed distraction and frustration from leaders when employees resist change

initiatives. Researchers are susceptible to bias when they rely on cultural assumptions or allow prior relationships to influence interviews (Ibrahim & Edgley, 2015). I had no prior relationship with the participants, I am not a business leader, and have no previous experience conducting qualitative studies on the topic of resistance to change.

The data collection process requires researchers to behave ethically (Yin, 2018). Researchers may encounter potential risks in their relationship with the participants if they fail to maintain integrity and uprightness throughout the process of data collection (Ibrahim & Edgley, 2015). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017) provided the *Belmont Report* of ethical principles, which includes guidance against biased assumptions or conclusions during the interview and data collection processes. The *Belmont Report* includes three fundamental ethical principles: (a) respect, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (Miracle, 2016). As indicated by Miracle, researchers apply the *Belmont Report* principles to treat participants as autonomous agents. When dealing with the participants, I adopted these three ethical principles. I respected the participants' decisions, protected their identities, treated each participant with dignity, and avoided favoritism to build trust with each participant and to ensure a proper researcher-participant working relationship.

Evers, Hilingsmann, and Adarkwah (2015) indicated that bias deviates the researcher from the outlined structure of the study. Personal assumptions, predispositions, and values affect the validity of data collection and analysis (Yin, 2018). Researchers need to be open and honest to avoid bias in the study (Ibrahim & Edgley, 2015). Yazan (2015) posited that researcher recognition of bias increases the validity of a study.

Qualitative researchers use the interview protocol as a tool for limiting bias by remaining consistent and focused on the purpose of the study (Dikko, 2016; Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Yin (2018) indicated that researchers use the interview protocol as a guide to maintaining clarity, consistency, and follow unbiased steps with participants during the data collection process. Hernandez-Hernandez and Sancho-Gil (2015) asserted that the researcher's role involves mitigating bias throughout the data collection process. To eliminate research bias and potential risk, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to remain impartial and to ensure consistency, comfort, privacy, and confidentiality of the selected participants.

Participants

To select the most appropriate potential participants who will offer rich data, qualitative researchers establish eligibility criteria (Latiffi, Brahim, & Fathi, 2016; Yin, 2018). Potential participants who meet or surpass eligibility criteria possess a depth of comprehension of the fundamentals of the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). The eligibility criteria I used to select potential participants were that they must have been small business owners or leaders with over 5 years' experience in leadership who have implemented strategies to help employees adapt to change and were willing to participate in an audio-recorded interview. One method that researchers use to obtain access to potential participants includes recommendations from networks of professional colleagues (Hoyland, Hollund, & Olsen, 2015), also known as the snowball method. The snowball method increases the prospect of selecting the most suitable and valuable participants (Palinkas et al., 2015). Seeking permission from company's gatekeepers is

ethical and appropriate for researchers to gain access to potential participants for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A trusted relationship exists between gatekeepers and their contacts, which compels credible referrals (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I conducted multiple searches through online search engines such as LinkedIn and Google to enable me identify potential small businesses located in the central and southern regions of Texas, and had successfully implemented change initiatives.

I identified the participants by researching their social media platform and website to gauge their age and success of business and services. Once I confirmed their years of success in managing change and received Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number 04-29-19-0655629, I contacted the potential participants via email. I introduced myself and described the detailed information about the study, providing adequate knowledge about the study to gain acceptance and establish a rapport to develop a working relationship. One research tool used in the interview process is connecting to the participant by sending an email (James, 2017). Marshall and Rossman (2016) indicated that an invitation to participate includes the purpose and procedures of the research study. Researchers ensure that participation in the study is voluntary and the option for participants to withdraw their consent at any time improves trust and transparency (Cummings et al., 2015; Houghton et al., 2015; Kaye et al., 2015). I ensured that the participants volunteered for the study. No participant declined at any time. Each one volunteered and stayed engaged in the interview process.

The targeted population for this study consisted of three participants from three small business organizations who were leaders. Researchers who gain direct contact with

potential participants could build a working relationship to gain a better understanding. Likewise, the trust of the participants, maintaining confidentiality, and an effective process of data collection is recommended (Flurey, 2015). To build a working relationship with participants, I explained the purpose and significance of my study to the participants and discussed the importance of protecting their identity and ensuring confidentiality. One primary interest of researchers includes protecting the identity of participants (Morse & Coulehan, 2015). As Creswell and Poth (2017) indicated, establishing a working relationship with participants eliminates problems even before they arise and minimizes tension when gathering data.

Research Method and Design

Conducting academic research entails the appropriate application of a suitable research method with an influencing rationale that links the method to the research problem (Razali, Anwer, Rahman, & Ismail, 2016). A researcher must select a suitable research method and design. Three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method (Yin, 2018). Following Yin's work on the case study, I determined that the qualitative method was the most suitable approach to explore the strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employee's resistance to change. The most appropriate approach to answering my research question was a multiple case study design. Researchers use the qualitative case study design to acquire an in-depth comprehension of business problems through various data sources such as participants' interviews, document reviews, and observations (Xu, Attfield, Jankun-Kelly, Nguyen, & Selvaraj, 2015; Yin, 2018).

Research Method

I used qualitative research methods to explore the strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employee's resistance to change in central and southern Texas. The qualitative research method involves exploration and comprehension of the meanings interview participants ascribed to a social or human problem (Yin, 2018). The use of effective strategies to reduce resistance to change for success enables business leaders to continually explore ways to implement planned change process and maintain competitive advantage (Dobrovic & Timkova, 2017). A researcher uses the qualitative method to understand complex business problems (Cairney & St. Denny, 2015). Through the qualitative approach, researchers develop an in-depth understanding of the research questions and feedback from participants (Bristowe, Selman, & Murtagh, 2015). In this study, the qualitative research method was appropriate to answer the overarching research question and gather rich responses in face-to-face interviews with the participants.

Researchers use the qualitative method to gather information, identify, and interpret differently from the traditional quantitative approach (Babbie, 2015). A qualitative method allows a multipronged data collection strategy, which permits personal interviews with leaders (Singh, 2015). Likewise, the qualitative method permits researchers to record interview participants to gather and summarize data for gainful insights (Gergen, Josselson, & Freeman, 2015). The qualitative method was appropriate to adopt for this study, to gain insight from participants, and to evaluate and interpret research data.

The quantitative method entails experimental and statistical interaction processes of groups of problems or comparisons of variables (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Park & Park, 2015; Singh, 2015). A researcher may use the quantitative method to test hypotheses and mathematical models to achieve research goals (Babbie, 2015). The quantitative method was not appropriate because I was not testing the hypothesis, measure, or compare variables, to satisfy the objectives of this study. A mixed method is a rigorous approach that combines the quantitative and practical part of the qualitative approach into one data set of study (Fetters, 2016; Yin, 2018). Molina-Azorin (2016) asserted a mixed method researcher collects data, perform analysis, and mix open-ended qualitative and closed-ended quantitative data. Consequently, quantitative and mixed methods were not suitable for this study. I interacted with the participants using open-ended semistructured interviews for gainful insights and conducted a detailed analysis using the qualitative approach because it was the best-fit to conduct this study.

Research Design

To choose the research design appropriate for a study, a researcher must understand the research design relevant to draw an accurate conclusion from the study. Researchers apply a suitable research design to pay more significant attention to the relevance of their research (Dresch, Lacerda, & Miguel, 2015). Yazan (2015) found that researchers employ a research design to enhance the readers' understanding of the specific strategy. A researcher uses a research design to meet the research objectives and carry out the necessary methodological rigor (Dresch, Lacerda, & Miguel, 2015). The

case study design was appropriate to explore strategies some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change.

Before deciding on a case study, I considered the ethnographic, phenomenological, and case study designs. A possible design for this research topic was ethnographic design. Ethnographic design entails rigorous information gathering, including direct observation of participants and engaging the culture of the participants to understand and explain a specific problem (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The ethnographic design entails a clear understanding of the culture of the participants to address a problem (Hyland, 2016). Researchers use an ethnographic design to observe, interact, and interview participants over time to understand the culture of a group (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, 2016). The ethnographic researchers' emphasis on the culture of the participants does not align with my research study. My doctoral study topic was not about understanding the culture of the participants to explain a specific problem. Consequently, the ethnography, the design was not appropriate for this study.

The phenomenological research design involves first-hand information acquired from a participant's contextual experiences (Hailemariam, Fekadu, Prince, & Hanlon, 2017). Researchers use the phenomenological design when they want to capture the perceptions of participants' worldview or lived experiences (Percy, Kostere & Kostere, 2015). A phenomenological approach addresses the perspectives of participants lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I did not intend to explore a specific worldview or lived experiences of interview participants to satisfy the requirements for

the phenomenological approach. As a result, the phenomenological research design was not appropriate for this study.

The qualitative case study is a design that researchers use in an empirical study to provide an in-depth understanding of certain phenomena (Dresch, Lacerda, & Miguel, 2015). The case study design is appropriate when the researcher explores a bounded system using interviews, observations, and archival records to answer the research question (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). The case study design involves researchers addressing questions with the intent to improve the chances of handling the proposed problem (Dresch, Lacerda, & Miguel, 2015). Similarly, as explained by Yin (2018), the case study design is used by researchers of an empirical study to concentrate on contemporary problems to address *why* and *how* questions about the study. Hence, the case study design was suitable for this study.

The use of a multiple case study research design was to identify data saturation. Data saturation refers to the point when the interview participants restate the same information without the presentation of new data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation entails the researcher interviewing each participant and revealing no new data by member checking with data validation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Thomas, 2017). The failure of a researcher to attain data saturation hinders the dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I focused on three participants with the depth and breadth of knowledge and experience to address my research question. To ensure data saturation for my study, I gathered valuable details from participants until no new information emerges to allow redundancy of the interview responses.

Population and Sampling

The population for this multiple case study comprised small business leaders in the central and southern region of Texas. The chosen sampling method for this study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves the non-random selection of knowledgeable and experienced interview participants to provide ample and gainful information about the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Researchers use purposive sampling in qualitative research to gather the information that aligns with the purpose of the study. Purposive sampling involves the selecting of interview participants based on their availability and shows uncoerced willingness to communicate experiences and opinions in a well-articulated, meaningful and insightful manner (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015).

Robinson (2014) posited that qualitative case study researchers with an idiographic aim achieve a well-organized data collection by sampling between 3 and 16 participants until data saturation occurs. Hence, I selected a sample of three small business leaders with the supposition that they understood the topic of this research study and have valuable strategies to share. As indicated by Palinkas (2015) purposeful, sample access of targeted participants is a sampling method for a research study. There was no focus on any industry; the eligible participants comprised three small business leaders who have more than five years' experience and who successfully used strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change in the central, and southern region of Texas.

Researchers in a qualitative study justify purposive sampling by collecting rich information for in-depth research (Patton, 2015). According to Palinkas et al. (2015), the

principle-guiding source for sample size selection in a qualitative research study is data saturation. Data saturation occurs when the qualitative researcher confirms data collected from the participant are repetitive and have no additional information that adds relevance to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To ensure data saturation, qualitative researchers obtain pertinent information adequate to reach data satiety (Yin, 2018). For this study, I stopped gathering information when there was sufficient information to replicate the study, and when collecting information or coding did not yield any additional information.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions (see Appendix C). For this study, participants responded to each open-ended interview question. Bowden and Galindo-Gonzalez (2015) posited that the researcher uses the face-to-face interview process and audio-record communication session with each participant. I provided the interview participants options of the neutral, non-threatening, and comfortable environment to stimulate a free, and interaction with the participants to eliminate distractions. A neutral interview location may create a better atmosphere to augment comfortability and safeguard the privacy of participants.

Ethical Research

Ethical research practice is a call to action for researchers to maintain integrity, respecting, and protecting interview participants (Kendall & Halliday, 2014). Researchers use the ethical practice to enhance the interview protocol process, facilitate open dialogue, improve moral judgment, capture responses from interview questions, and mitigate personal biases (Morse & Coulehan, 2015; Yin, 2018). Morse and Coulehan

(2015) posited ethical research practice enable qualitative researchers to engage in using ethical practices throughout their research studies and provide intuitive, credible, and professional responses.

Researchers who provide an informed consent form to interview participants, accord respect, protection, and act equitably (Hammersley, 2015; Pletcher, Lo, & Grady, 2015). The process for acquiring informed consent from the interview participants' entails steps to withdraw and maintain confidentiality. To ensure ethical research for this study, I obtained the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number 04-29-19-0655629 before data collection. I provided participants the informed consent form to read and ensure adherence before the interviews. Upon receiving copies of the signed consent forms, I presented each participant with a copy and stored the original file copy for five years to safeguard the participants' privacy.

Participation in this study was voluntary, and the withdrawal procedure was stress-free. Interview participants have the freedom to decline participation in the research study anytime (Houghton et al., 2015). If participants selected to withdraw from the study, no penalty was assessed. No participants withdrew from the study. Greenwood (2016) advised researchers should refrain from offering incentives to entice study participants. In this study, the participants did not receive, nor were any incentives provided.

To ensure the ethical protection of the study participants, I intend to keep the identity of the participants private and secured. De-identification is the coding system that entails letter and a number combination code to protect participant's identity and

information (Lee, Jung, Park, Chung, & Cha, 2018). Researchers preserve the identity of the interview participants by assigning codes (Babbie, 2015; Lee et al., 2018). I used the letter-number combination code of P1, P2, and P3 to cover confidentiality of the three interview participants and their company documents. Participants are stakeholders to researchers (Cummings et al., 2015). I adhered to the participants' recommendation of a private environment to ensure ethical protection. Researchers use confidentiality and ethical principles to prevent any risks and uncertainty of data collected during a research study (Barazzetti, Hurst & Mauron, 2016). My goal was to prevent risks, negative consequences, and ethical uncertainty. Confidentiality of each participant remained private in the study.

I had the responsibility to ensure the privacy of the research data that I collect from the participants. I maintained confidentiality and privacy throughout the study, as presented in the informed consent. I saved and labeled interview recordings, notes, and transcription on a flash drive and store the data in a secure filing cabinet in my residence. I stored all data collected for five years and was the only person with access to the data gathered from the participants. As recommended by the Walden IRB policy, after five years of storing the data, I will delete all the electronic files and shred all documents.

Data Collection Instruments

A researcher in a qualitative research method is the primary data collection instrument (Yin, 2018). In my role as the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument in this study. As indicated by Yin (2018), in using a qualitative research method, the data collection responsibility belongs to the researcher. Also, Yin (2018)

identified six approaches for data collection and recommended qualitative researchers to apply a minimum of two of the methods in a case study, which include interviews, research documents, archived annals, direct observations of participants and physical objects. An organization can benefit from collecting data to identify the relative strength of each factor that causes resistance to change (Umble & Umble, 2014; Vedenik & Leber, 2015). I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews and used open-ended questions (see Appendix C) to gather information to explore strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. Yin (2018) postulated that researchers use semistructured interviews as a useful instrument to obtain a detailed and insightful response from interview participants.

As the primary instrument for my data collection, I used a semistructured interview process to explore strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. Marshall and Rossman (2016) postulated that qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews as a data collection instrument to obtain reliable information for their research study. Valentine, Nembhard, and Edmondson (2015) posited that researchers establish the interview duration. Likewise, assure the quality of the interview questions to validate the reliability of the data collection instrument and maintain flexibility during the interview process. The interview process took approximately 45 minutes. I listened attentively to the responses and engaged in deep and interactive conversations to gather rich and viable information. I observed and took notes from the participants' responses. With approval from participants, I captured every response by audio recording. The case study includes

sources of data beyond interviews. Yin (2018) stated that open-ended interview questions containing targeted follow-up questions are advantageous in providing in-depth answers from the participants and that a pilot study is not necessary.

Qualitative researchers adopt the use of methodological triangulation as a means of information sources to better comprehend the reliability and validity of the research study (Hussein, 2015). Triangulation is the use of alternative documentation to certify the reliability and validity of information collected (Modell, 2015). Methodological triangulation involves the use of different sources of data collection (Cope, 2014). For this study, I used the methodological triangulation and member checking to ensure reliability and validity in data collection.

Member checking is a form of quality control process that researchers use to validate and ensure reliable and detailed research findings, conclusions, and recommendations (Harvey, 2015). For this study, I used member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the data gathering process. Member checking occurs when the researcher provides participants with detailed research findings and asks the participants to confirm or correct the authenticity of their responses for accuracy. Göttfert (2015) indicated that qualitative researchers hold the responsibility of exploring more than one data collection approach, some of which include interviews, observations, and document reviews. I reviewed the relevant data for organizational change or operational documents, successful project reports, and other relevant sources to enrich the research quality.

As indicated by Yin (2018), qualitative researchers use an interview protocol to track and maintain consistency in the data collection process. Baskarada (2014)

postulated that the purpose of using an interview protocol is to ensure that researchers maintain consistency and do not deviate from the purpose study. Researchers use the interview protocol to formulate a background, summaries or sum-ups, build, and maintain the interview structure (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). In this study, I followed the interview protocol with each participant (see Appendix A) and ensured that I addressed the specific research questions and explored interview responses for new ideas. Conforming to the interview protocol reduces the omission of information occurrences during the interview process. In this study, I maintained consistency in collecting data to avoid deviation from the outlined structure.

Data Collection Technique

In my role as the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument in this study. A researcher in a qualitative research method is the primary data collection instrument (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) proposed that in using a qualitative research method, the data collection responsibility belongs to the researcher. Six approaches exist for data collection and recommended for qualitative researchers to apply a minimum of two of the methods in a case study. Including interviews, research documents, archived annals, direct observations of participants, and physical objects (Yin, 2018). An organization can benefit from collecting data to identify the relative strength of each factor that causes resistance to change (Umble & Umble, 2014; Vedenik & Leber, 2015). I employed methodological triangulation by including multiple sources of evidence to support the results of this study. Including face-to-face semistructured interviews, open-ended questions (see Appendix C), notes from participants' interview observations, and

company documents such as training materials to gather information to explore strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. Yin (2018) postulated that researchers use semistructured interviews as a useful instrument to obtain a detailed and insightful response from interview participants.

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award recognition letters, mission statements, PowerPoints, and any written material describing the purpose and objective of the business.

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Data Organization Technique

Researchers use data organization technique to plan the process of data analysis of a study (Yin, 2018). Researchers use data organization technique to enhance the readers' understanding of how the researcher concludes the findings. As posited by Soares et al. (2015), researchers use data organization as a technique to access, safeguard, identify and effectively communicate the findings. I used a Google calendar, NVivo Pro 12, removable storage device, locked file cabinet, Excel spreadsheet, and Word document to keep track of interview schedules.

I maintained files such as transcribed audio recording, and qualitative data on a password-protected computer, and removable storage device. I managed the files such as support documents, company records, and consent forms. Annink (2017) asserted that researchers use data organization technique to categorize and label. I assigned a pseudonymous code (P1, P2, and P3) for each participant and their company documents.

A code conceals identity and is intended to protect the identity of participants. I classified all data collected into themes to enhance useful data analysis and conclusion.

As the researcher and data collector, I am the only person who had access to data collected for this study. Hashem et al. (2015) recommended researchers secure confidential data collected from participants for up to 5 years. Researchers adhere to the core principles of research ethics by securing participant's information (Morse & Coulehan, 2015). I used a password protected USB flash drive to secure and keep track of data collected from participants. A component in data collection includes protecting information collected at all times. According to Morse (2015), securing participants information is a basic tenet of research ethics. I secured the flash drive and hard copies of all interview response documents, emails, and informed consent forms in a locked safe for a minimum of five years. Morse (2015) concluded that protecting participants' information is a core principle of research ethics. Five years after the approval of this study, I will delete data from my computer and shred all paper journals and documents.

Data Analysis

The appropriate data analysis process for this multiple case study was a thematic analysis of methodological triangulation. Data analysis consist of compiling and data transcription, thematic coding, cross-examination of multiple data sources including interview transcriptions, in-depth notes from interview observations of participant gestures and non-verbal clues, and company documentation. Qualitative data analysis entails compiling the data, evaluate the data, and identify to process the data for usage (Guo & Guo, 2016). The purpose of data analysis is to comprehend and interpret data

gathered to develop the findings (Mayer, 2015). Yin (2018) asserted that the data analysis process consists of five stages. Including the (a) collection of data, (b) extraction of information into groups, (c) regrouping the data into themes, (d) exploring the data, and (e) developing conclusions. Qualitative researchers adopt the use of methodological triangulation as a means of information sources to better comprehend the reliability and validity of the research study (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Hussein, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To explore the data, I employed the use of methodological triangulation to augment thoroughness.

Joslin and Müller (2016) described triangulation as the process of combining multiple data sources to gain a more vibrant and holistic comprehension of the research study. Mayer (2015) posited that the purpose of a qualitative researcher using triangulation for a study includes building up and demonstrating the reliability and validity of the findings. Hussein (2015) noted methodological triangulation involves four types, which consists of (a) secondary data sources, (b) interviews, (c) observation, and (c) notetaking. For this multiple case study, I performed methodological triangulation to enhance rigor. I gathered and explored the data through interviews, review of company documents, and observation notes, all of which increased the validity of my research study.

Coding as a data analysis process of qualitative case study is used by researchers to generate patterns with the phrase from the interview and to identify themes for the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) indicated that data analysis in a qualitative research study involves arranging and grouping of interview codes that emerged from the

interview participants' response. Qualitative researchers employ the use of arrangements to explore data collected, to interpret phenomena with valuable results (Mayer, 2015). Researchers use coding as a process to identify, organize, and arrange the data by logically defining and naming codes and incorporating meaningful categories (Thomas, 2015; Yin, 2018). After completing the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings into Microsoft Word documents and conducted the member checking process for accuracy. I then reviewed the company's records, observation notes, and assign pseudonymous (P1, P2, and P3) numeric values to each participant and their company documents. I used the NVivo Pro 12 software Windows application to organize the responses to enable the identification and creation of themes for coding. In section 3, I discuss and connect the central themes with existing literature and the conceptual framework. I adopted the use of member checking to increase the reliability of my research study.

Member checking involves participants, reviewing the interview interpretation, and agreeing with the analysis (Morse, 2015). Birt et al. (2016) referenced member checking as a method of returning interview summary to participants for review and clarification. I made the appropriate changes to all misinterpretations until the participants approve the interpretations. I transcribed the interview responses manually after I completed the process of member checking with each participant for accuracy. I uploaded the transcribed interview data and company documents into NVivo Pro 12 qualitative data management software program. I manually, and auto coded the data to discover insights and thematic themes and hierarchy from the data. The NVivo Pro 12 software application is one most used qualitative data analysis application by qualitative

researchers (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2015). The NVivo Pro 12 software is a computer-assisted application that helps researchers in coding interview responses and analyzing data collected. Woods et al. (2015) and Zamawe (2015) explained that the NVivo pro 12 software functions include (a) analysis of data by identifying themes, (b) gainful insights, (c) to reach a meaningful conclusion. I applied the ideas uncovered from the literature review section to explore and synthesize the primary and subthemes for the findings of my study. I recommend NVivo Pro 12 to other researchers for data organization and capabilities. I used the NVivo Pro 12 software to code and group comparable themes. I articulated the findings in a narrative summary layout to share insights.

Data analysis involves the phase of data reduction and interpretation in every stage of data processing. Data refining extricates any unrelated information that does not conform to the search criteria (Harvey, 2015). I explored the data through the conceptual framework of Lewin's (1947) three-phase change model and Kotter's (1996) eight-step change model. Lewin's change model is the conceptual framework of this study. I explored the literature review to generate potential themes associated with strategies to reduce resistance to change. Braun, Clarke, and Terry (2014) explained that themes identified by the researcher must align with the central research question. According to Thapa et al. (2017), assessing the data against the conceptual framework and previous literature should lead to significant findings for a research topic. The conceptual framework of Lewin's three-phase change model was used to assist in interpreting the data gathered and link the three and subthemes of this study. I identified the three central

themes and two subthemes and aligned the themes with the conceptual framework and literature.

Reliability and Validity

I used valid and reliable instruments to guarantee the findings of the study.

Evaluating the authenticity of a research study helps reach a meaningful conclusion (Noble & Smith, 2016). Qualitative researchers employ the use of dependable, credible, transferable, conformable, and data saturation strategies to ensure reliability and validity of a research study (Houghton et al., 2015; Yin, 2018).

Reliability

Reliability reflects the consistency of a research study. Qualitative researchers use the proper audit trail and operational notes or documents as tools to institute dependability of a research study (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015; Shirazian et al., 2016). Reliability involves verifying the findings of a research study to ensure consistency so that future researchers can conduct similar studies (Webster, Bowron, Mathew & Patterson, 2016). Likewise, researchers certify dependability to reduce making mistakes in their research (Roulston, 2017).

Member checking involves participants, reviewing the interview interpretation, and agreeing with the interpretation. Birt et al. (2016) stated that researchers use member checking to ensure the accuracy of data collected. Member checking substantiates trustworthiness of data collected (Houghton et al., 2015). To ensure dependability, as part of confirming the reliability in this study, I adopted member checking. I engaged participants in member checking as the means to ensure trustworthiness in my

interpretations of participants' interview responses and the data collected from the interview meetings. I ensured no new information is necessary, and my interpretations were accurate for data saturation. One milestone to achieve a quality case study includes data saturation (Constantinou, Georgiou & Perdikogianni, 2017). Reaching data saturation help confirm the dependability of the research study (Houghton et al., 2015). I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) as a process to reduce or eliminate bias and ensure consistency in the interview process with each participant.

Validity

Credibility. The validity of a study is proven when the researcher confirms data accuracy (Gonzalez, Rowson, & Yoxall, 2015). Houghton et al. (2015) recommended that qualitative researchers confirm the validity and ensure the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the research findings. Research experts encourage approaches such as purposeful sampling, peer review, methodological triangulation, member checking an interview protocol to augment the credibility of a study (Noble & Smith, 2015; Takyi, 2015; Yazan, 2015). I applied purposeful sampling, peer review, methodological triangulation, member checking, and interview protocol strategies within my study.

A researcher's ability to recognize the bias augments the credibility of the study (Yazan, 2015). The use of purposeful sampling increases credibility (Palinkas et al., 2015). Likewise, the application of peer-reviewed literature may improve credibility, promote transparency, and lead to the acceptance of other points of view. One method of ensuring increased credibility of a qualitative study involves member checking. Researchers use member checking to permit the participants to evaluate the intended

meaning through information collected, to gain feedback, validate a response, and check dependability (Caretta, 2016; Varpio et al., 2017). Also, in the member checking process, the researcher provides participants with a copy of their responses (Bartholomew, Pérez-Rojas, Lockard, & Locke, 2017). Methodological triangulation helps to improve the understanding and accuracy of a study finding (Yazan, 2015). I emailed each participant an attached Word document of an interpretation of the interview responses for accuracy.

Transferability. Transferability involves the context of the research results appropriately transferred to readers or relatable when directed to other settings (Connelly, 2016; Morse, 2015). Transferability refers to how thorough a researcher conducts a study to provide findings in a context meaningful to readers. The responsibility of the researcher is to be able to transfer the results of the study to a different context (Flick, 2018; Houghton et al., 2015). To enhance transferability, I harnessed the data collection and data analysis techniques by adhering to the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Qualitative researchers observe the interview protocol as a reason to remain consistent and focus on the purpose of the study (Baskarada, 2014). Also, I used methodological triangulation, member checking, and reached data saturation to qualify the findings appropriate for transfer or future research.

Confirmability. The representation of confirmability in a research study involves the pertinence of instruments, process, and data gathered in qualitative research (Leung, 2015). Confirmability includes neutral and direct information from data collected, excluding all personal viewpoints of the researcher (Cope, 2014). I considered different optional sources to validate data collection and alignment. Methodological triangulation

involves the use of multiple sources of evidence (Mayer, 2015). The use of multiple sources of evidence provides a high quality of the findings rather than a single source of evidence (Yin, 2018). I used the participants' interview responses as one source of data. Another source of evidence used in the study was the company's documents. I collected (a) completed projects, (b) business operations transformation, (c) website, and (c) training programs were used to explore what strategies small business leaders use to reduce employee resistance to change.

Data saturation. Researchers use data saturation to achieve transferability and confirmability of the study (Kristensen & Raven, 2015; Morse, 2015; Yin, 2018). Fugard and Potts (2015) and Roy, Zvonkovic, Sharp, and LaRossa (2015) posited that data saturation is the point at which no additional information emerges from the data collected. Data saturation enhances the research study quality and process of information evaluated. To achieve data saturation, I incorporated multiple data collection methods, such as semistructured face-to-face interviews, interview notes, member checking, and company document review. After the interview, I transcribed the interview responses. In the process of member checking, I sent an email to the participants for analysis and validation. One hundred percent of the participants acknowledged no corrections to make and ensure no information was missing in the study. Morse (2015) noted data saturation is a component of rigor in a qualitative research study. Researchers conclude data collection and reach data saturation when no new concepts are obtained to add any value to the study (Elsawah, Guillaume, Filatova, Rook, & Jakeman, 2015). I continued my

process until the participants confirmed the complete accuracy of my interpretation of their responses. As a result, no new themes, codes, information emerged.

Transition and Summary

I will provide a summary of the research project in section 3. I restated the purpose statement, provided an overview of the role of the researcher, description of the interview participants, detailed reasoning for the research method and multiple case design to reflect the specific research question, and population sampling. I explained how I would maintain ethical standards, data collection that entailed techniques, instruments, and organization. I concluded the section with the explanation of how I would ensure reliability and validity in the research process. Section 3 of this study includes findings on strategies that small business leaders use to reduce resistance to change. I started the section with an introduction to my research topic, beginning with the reinstatement of the research purpose statement; provide a summary of research findings, application to professional practice; and implication for social change. I discussed my recommendations for action and further research and presented a reflection on the experience of conducting the study. Last, I provided a summary and conclusion of the research study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. I interviewed three business leaders from three companies in the central and southern regions of Texas. These leaders had successful experience implementing strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change. The findings include strategies that some small business leaders used to reduce employees' resistance to change. Considering more effective management of change initiatives, business leaders using the conclusions of this study may contribute to positive social change by enhancing the work environment, reducing employee stress, and generating beneficial outcomes for the business, which could improve community growth through increased local employment rates.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change? Organizational leaders have difficulty in effectively implementing and monitoring organizational change to improve employees' performance (Schmitt & Klarner, 2015). The specific business problem was that some small business leaders lack the strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change. Three participants completed the consent process and answered the same six interview questions. Through the process of member checking, I transcribed each participant's interview responses manually, ensured authenticity, and achieved data saturation. The three central themes and two sub-themes aligned with my literature

review and the conceptual framework of Lewin's (1947) three-phase change model and Kotter's (1996) eight-steps change model. The three central themes and two sub-themes relate to the strategies some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. The three central themes were (a) communication, (b) support, and (c) evaluation. The two sub-themes were (a) training and (b) team development.

Central Themes

I employed methodological triangulation by collecting multiple sources of evidence to support the results of this study. The evidence consisted of interview transcriptions, in-depth notes from participant interview observations of gestures and non-verbal clues, and company documents such as training records. I collected these sources to gather information to help explore strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. The interpreted interview responses were written in a Microsoft Word document, providing each participant with the opportunity to edit if necessary, in an ongoing process called member checking. Birt et al. (2016) indicated referenced member checking as a method of returning interview summaries to participants for review and clarification. The data collected were uploaded, stored, coded, and explored in NVivo Pro 12 qualitative data software. I used thematic analysis to discover prominent word occurrences and frequency noted by the participants and within the collected data. NVivo Pro 12 was instrumental in assisting me with cross-tabulation of the developed themes and visualization of my data through tables and figures. Yin (2018) indicated that researchers use semistructured interviews as a useful instrument to obtain a detailed and insightful response from interview participants. I interviewed three

participants from three small businesses using semistructured interviews. I reached data saturation at the third interview, as no new codes, or information emerged. The member checking process helped me to achieve data saturation and confirm the accuracy of the participants' response.

Woods et al. (2015) and Zamawe (2015) explained that the NVivo Pro 12 software is instrumental in (a) analyzing the collected data, (b) identifying themes, and (c) gaining insights to reach a meaningful conclusion. I uploaded the transcribed interview data, notes from participant interview observations, and company documents into NVivo Pro 12. I manually and used NVivo Pro 12 auto coding features to discover new insights and theme hierarchy from the data and interview questions. The hierarchy of themes developed in NVivo Pro 12 reflected communication, support, and evaluation, followed by team development, and training. Researchers use the coding process to identify and name meaningful categories (Thomas, 2015; Yin, 2018). NVivo Pro 12 auto coding feature assisted me in identifying the top 13 themes referenced by participants throughout the total data sources collected. I labeled and categorized the themes with the highest frequency of words and phrases most used by participants into three central themes and two sub-themes.

Table 2 lists central and sub-themes in order from the highest to lowest reference (i.e., number of times the central and sub-theme is mentioned). Additionally, document sources (four training guides, three PowerPoints presentations, and three interviews responses) total the 10 document sources listed in Table 2. I manually coded and employed NVivo Pro 12 auto coding features, to identify and connect concepts and ideas

represented from the sources collected. Significant information was captured from the sources and placed into containers (i.e., nodes). Each container was then sorted into “big containers” called parent nodes (i.e., themes) based on similarities and unique relationships. From the parent nodes, I categorized the nodes into the central themes and subthemes, as presented in Table 2. The three central themes and two subthemes are in alignment with the Lewin’s (1947) three-phase change model and Kotter’s (1996) eight-steps change model.

Table 2

List of Central and Sub-Themes

Central themes/sub-theme (S)	Sources	References
Communication	10	48
Support	10	40
(S) Training	10	26
(S) Team development	10	17
Evaluation	10	8

I conducted a cross-case comparison of the three central themes: communication, support, and evaluation. Qualitative researchers use arrangements to explore data collected, to interpret phenomena with valuable results (Mayer, 2015). Using NVivo Pro 12, I developed a classification called *years in business* based on the company documents, and participants’ responses from Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. I conducted a matrix coding query to generate a case classification and attribute node matrix. The cross-case analysis represented a unique perspective of differences and similarities among the three central strategies, participants used over time as a small business leader. The results from the cross-case noted by participants having 5-10 years

of experience as a small business leader referenced communication (63%) more than support (55%) and evaluation (55%). Conversely, cross-cases, participants in the business between 11-20 years, equally use support (45%) and evaluation (45%) strategies more than communication (35%).

Theme 1: Communication

Communication is necessary for business leaders when conveying the organizational mission, values, and influence. Akan, Er Ulker, and Unsar (2016), and Luo et al. (2016) purported that communication is an interaction between leadership, management, and employees. The first central theme highlighted the concept of communication as a strategy some small business leader uses to reduce employees' resistance to change. The theme communication was developed from participants' responses to Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, and had the highest participant coverage throughout the data. All participants acknowledged communication, among other themes, as a strategy they use to reduce employees' resistance to change (P1, P2, and P3). Participant 2 had the highest references to communication at 95%, noting that "all the strategies I used was to identify what is the cause of the resistance and having a frank dialogue of what and why people are opposing the change." When further asked about specific strategies used to reduce resistance to change, P1 stated, "What I have done in the past was to speak to them in small increments about the change; employees tend not to resist change when change is communicated in small increment."

Communication is very prominent throughout change implementation stage, by communicating the what, why and how of change plans to all employees in the

organization that need to know or that will be affected by the change. The most success factor of change initiative is communication (Umble & Umble 2014). P1 had the second highest references of the theme communication mentioned throughout the interview transcription, which was 87% of the transcribed data. P1 asked, “How can we help employees understand what the change is going to encompass, how the change is going to impact the employees in their daily life, work and how their day is structured, long-term- through communication?” Likewise, P2 stated that “Tell people about your plan for the change, so communication is important, tell people as soon as you can, not as soon as you know.” Although P3 had the lowest coverage (79%) of the theme communication mentioned throughout the interview transcription, P3 suggested key strategies they use within their business to reduce employee resistance to change. P3 shared that “the primary strategy we use is communication. We develop a communication plan, where we think through what are the key messages that we want to deliver about the change to the employees.”

Lack of communication is the primary barrier that limits organizational change processes and is a chief reason for employees’ resistance to change within an organization. P1 shared that “improper communication is the number one barrier that I’ve seen that limits the corporate change process and probably the reason for employees’ resistance to change within an organization.” P2 mentioned that as a business leader, “I try to communicate with much authenticity and transparency as possible. What the benefits and disadvantages of the company, and why we’re trying to initiate the change plan through a project, initiate strategies and so on.” P2 further described the transition

periods of planned organizational change as initiatives that may create insecurity and crises. Several strategies exist that offer business leaders the opportunity to prevent and explain uncertainties, instability, and resistance to change during transition periods. Strategies include employing open, trust-based, active, and continuous communication (Besliu, 2018). P1, P2, and P3 confirmed Umble and Umble's (2014) observation that effective communication is a success factor for reducing employee's resistance to change.

Effective communication is a starting place for a successful change management process. P1, P2, P3 expressed the significance of communication as a strategy used to implement change initiatives for the good of the organization. Effective communication is a contributor to a successful change outcome (Kaiser, El Arbi & Ahlemann, 2015). P1 shared that "communication is so critical to getting employees comfortable, and how you learn to get them to be more open to accepting the change." P3 addressed the strategy of effective communication in conjunction with leadership action and stated, "So far the communication has worked well for the organization. I have to make sure that my behavior and decision made towards the change is in alignment with whatever change is taking place within the organization."

As shown in Table 3, P1 referenced communication as a number one strategy to the success of small business leaders in reducing employee resistance to change. P1 communicated the coordination of measured structural steps for employees to understand the change process, with the new objective being the complete fulfillment change plan. P1 stated, "it is so important to explain the stages of the goals we're trying to achieve, measurable objectives, and ways to evaluate in the end." P2 shared a PowerPoint

document that showed ownership in communication strategies, change management, leadership, and influence. P2 further noted that when a small business leader adequately implements communication strategies in the workplace, the techniques may be transferred in different ways and forms. P2 explained leaders maintain transparency and gain employee support when the change plan is clear and often communicated. P3 opposed communication as an effective strategy when used independently, and stated, “I have to talk the talk, but also walk the walk. I cannot communicate with my employees one message, and my behavior contradict the organization's overall objectives.” Communication builds credibility with leaders who are consistent, precise and interact with their employees (Kaiser, El Arbi, & Ahlemann, 2015). According to all participants, the clarification of measured steps recommended for the readiness of new change involved communication.

A lack of effective communication may pose a challenge for management or business leaders that seek to increase employees’ understanding of the change. Effective communication is a determinant in the planned change process (Adams, 2016). P3 expressed that new ways to reduce employee’s resistance to change starts with designing communication levels. P3 shared “from a tactical standpoint, the CEO may communicate certain points or key messages with that initiative, my role as a leader is that I will reinforce and go into much more detail.” P3 emphasized that a communication level is purposed to achieve alignment with what the change is all about and priorities on overcoming change resistance. Honest and sincere communication fosters cooperation and trust between organizational leaders and employees, and as a result, reduces

resistance to change (P1, P2, and P3). When communicating change initiatives to employees, P3 shared that “people within the organization have been very open with asking questions and as a leader, I address those concerns without actually going to the CEO of the company.” Kotter’s (1996) work revealed that corporate leaders should communicate the vision using clear and uncomplicated languages and images. Kotter’s (1996) theory on communication supported P1, P2, and P3 statement and is an essential strategy in reducing employees’ resistance to change.

Communication was applied in each phase of Lewin’s change model. The findings that communication increase transparency of change plan and to reduce resistance to change is similar to the findings of Riddley (2018). The findings of the Riddley’s study were linked and consistent with the Lewin’s three-phase planned change model, where the unfreeze phase evolved at the first theme of communication and management plan explaining the change process. As shown in Table 3, P2 had the highest level of frequency of communication, meaning 95% of the data collected and grouped contained reference to the theme communication; followed by P1 with 87% and P3 with 79%.

Table 3

References and Frequency of Communication

Source	Reference	Frequency (%)
P1, Interview Questions/Notes/Documents	281	87
P2, Interview Questions/Notes/Documents	336	95
P3, Interview Questions/Notes/Documents	162	79

Findings related to the conceptual framework. Communication before, during, and after the change is established to create a positive organizational response. All participants reference communication as a factor to reduce employees' resistance to change. Communication as a theme is consistent with Lewin's (1947) three-phase planned change model. Communication as a management plan explains the change process in the unfreeze phase of Lewin's three-phases theory (Burnes, 2004; Eden et al., 2016; Lewin, 1947). Lewin's three-phase change model of unfreezing, moving, and freezing imply the presence of driving forces that leaders may use to reduce complexity in the change process (By et al., 2015; Lines et al., 2015; Longenecker & Longenecker, 2014). The use of Lewin's approach could assist business leaders with successful change implementation strategies and reduced resistance in the process.

The conceptual framework of this study aligned with the concept and ideas about planned change that developed from the findings. The Lewin three-phase change model and Kotter's 8-steps change process influenced the successful execution of planned change. The fundamental proposition supporting the Lewin's (1947) three-phase change model was the Kotter's (1996) 8-steps change model. Kotter's 8-steps change model was relative to this study as a conceptual lens to explore strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change. Change values in the business entity come from a carefully planned adaptation and reinterpretation of existing values (Van Der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Planning change helps reduce resistance and assist in comprehending the change in a meaningful approach (Dunican & Keaster, 2015). P1, P2, and P3 agreed that business leaders successfully implement change through effective communication, support with

adequate training, team development, and employee evaluation strategies during change initiatives. Garcia-Cabrera and Garcia-Barba Hernandez (2014) noted that because each aspect of change resistance has its specific set of antecedents, organizational leaders could act on each separate facet, and make use of appropriate mechanisms. The findings supported the Lewin's three-phase change model and Kotter's eight steps planned change model.

Theme 2: Support

Business leaders who promote a supportive, positive work environment and practices may achieve success in business change. P1 stated that, "If they know what to expect and know there will be challenges and have the support of the leader, then they will accept the change and operate more efficiently." The second theme to emerge from the data highlighted insights of participants' experiences with using support as a strategy to reduce employees' resistance to change. Hussain et al. (2016) noted leadership support help in sustaining employees' performance. One-hundred percent of participants emphasized support as a strategy, accompanied by sub-themes, training, and team development. P2 shared, "I think support takes you a long way. I think if you learn and can manage this transition properly with each event, you create more credibility with your employees." The theme support emerged from the data and participants' interview responses from questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6. Participants (P1, P2, and P3) acknowledged leadership support as a factor in reducing employee resistance to change.

Commitment to change entails the change agent and their respective team not only garner executive support but the support of peers as well. P1 stated, "I created a

group, mixed with top performing employees, and employees I knew had challenges. Once the first group learned and understood how to operate the electronic medical record system, they, in turn, helped others.” P2 has a similar response and shared that “intimidation factor reduces when you train everyone at different levels and get them all to a good competitive level. They can train their peers.” Likewise, P3 shared that, “the tenured team members assist other employees in implementing the new change, policy or plan because they know the process and know what is expected.” P1, P2, and P3 acknowledged support as a central strategy; small business leaders use to reduce employees’ resistance to change. Planning change with the inclusion of proper supports helps reduce resistance and assist in comprehending the difference in a meaningful approach (Dunican & Keaster, 2015). P1 had the highest occurrences of support at 44% references and P3 with the lowest coverage at 15% of occurrences of support referenced throughout the data. All participants noted that business leaders strategize change designs to reduce employees’ resistance to change. According to P1, P2, and P3 employees are satisfied with leadership support and decisions on the new change plan; they may be less likely to resist change. P1 emphasized that “as a leader, you will have to give them support. Without the support of experts or knowledge data experts, the staffs will feel incompetent because they are afraid and lack the tools they need to succeed.” P1 further noted “I like to forecast the challenge or need employees will experience that, and in turn, offer support to assist with the transition of change.” P2 specified that, “for any business to grow, there is always going to be competition for doing things better, smarter and faster, helping my staff along the way benefits the business.” P3 detailed that, “I manage

employee change with peer and group support. I combine both tenure or seasoned employee with a team member having difficulty with the change.” Likewise, P2 and P3 emphasized the need for support from internal team members and external data knowledge experts to assist with managing and ensuring successful transitions of change.

Enhancing leadership support, may help business leaders achieve a higher level of trust and fairness among their employees, and serve as a cornerstone of effective implementation of change. P1, P2, and P3 highly recommended internal and external support as a strategy to ensure successful change. Change values in the business entity come from a carefully planned adaptation and reinterpretation of existing values (Van Der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). P1, P2, and P3 referenced the central theme support as having a robust link to the sub-themes, training, and team development, as shown in Table 4. P1, P2, and P3 referenced support combined with the sub-themes, training, and team development as a factor in reducing employee resistance to change.

Training. Business leaders can institute a vigorous program of education and training for employees’ continuous learning of the change program of the organization, which would create a structure and better understanding of the purpose of the change. P1 stated, “there are people who are go-getters and want to learn and grow and who will take on the new task as long as you give them the appropriate training.” Likewise, P2 shared that, “To help your employees you must be willing to devote time and resources to training, testing, and figuring out how comfortable employees are with the new task, goal, and processes they are about to take encounter.” The concept of training as a sub-theme is supported by the author Fritz et al., (2015) and Ferincz (2016) and have a robust link to

employee support from leadership. Fritz et al. (2015) hypothesized that acquiring new skills for training, communication, and enhancing knowledge of the planning change process to be efficient. Business leaders use employee training to alter the change process and generate a new organizational system and workflow (Schuller, Kash, & Gamm, 2015). During the initial stages of training, the planned change process may be slower. Employee training is a sub-theme referenced by P1, P2, and P3 as a factor to small business leaders for reducing employee resistance to change. Employees' acceptance of change is dependent upon the readiness of change established within the organization (Ferincz, 2016). P1 stated that, "without the training, employees might experience incompetent and afraid to accept the new change plans of the organization, and as a result, resist by calling in sick to work." P1 further indicated that "if appropriate training is available; some employees are willing to take on a new task."

Conversely, when training is not available, the employee will seek out external training independently. P3 stated that, "retraining is a barrier because you spend more time and money again to train new staffs, however, employees are more responsive when the training content divided into multiple sessions for a natural flow of information and understanding." Individuals have the potential to capitalize on the skills upon preparation of education and training (Alasadi & Alsabbagh, 2015). P1, P2, and P3 agreed that employee training remains a factor business leader use to reduce employee's resistance to change.

Team Development. Business leaders who develop their employees individually and collectively may challenge employees to build confidence, desire, and trust between

leadership and peers. Team development is the second sub-theme referenced throughout the data as necessary for small business leaders to reduce employee resistance to change. Team development is the primary construct of any organization's change process with employees' acceptance and readiness for change (Guidetti, 2018). Team development was a sub-theme mentioned by all three of participants (P1, P2, P3) as having a robust link to the central support theme. P1 and P2 argued that before implementing active team development, understanding the employee's perception of the unknown is inevitable. P1 specified that "the goal of organizational leaders may include creating an acceptable change process to achieve a total buy-in for planned change from employees." P2 had the lowest frequency of references for team development and contrasted the team development concept implemented independently. P3 stated that, "the idea requires a longer devotion of time and resources over time team, but developing your employees, promotes equality and fairness and helps individuals not experience isolation." Both P2 and P3 noted that team development employed independently is an ineffective strategy. As shown in Table 4, the participants' responses reflected frequencies based on the percent of coverage throughout the data using a generalized text/word search query of support, training, and team development. P1's interview responses, notes and documents contained the highest number of references 18%, followed by P3 17% and P2 12%.

Table 4

References and Frequency of Support, Training, and Team Development

Source	Reference	Frequency (%)
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P1, Interview Questions/Notes/Documents	12	18
P2, Interview Questions/Notes/Documents	9	12
P3, Interview Questions/Notes/Documents	11	17

Findings related to the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework of this study supports team development as a theme. Lewin's (1947) and Kotter's (1996) asserted that the change theory is an operational framework of organizational adaptation to change. Having a three-stage model embodies principles appropriate for the application of a fundamental corporate change process that ensures change is successful (Marks & Mirvis, 2011). P1 emphasized managing employee change with peer and group support, which align with Lewin's (1947) and Kotter's (1996), the second stage refers to managing organizational change. The second phase of Lewin's change model aligned with the other theme support and sub-themes of training and team development strategies. The refreezing stage proposed by Lewin (1947) linked with the evaluation process for stabilizing the new change and creating more change opportunities to uplift business transformation for the organization.

Theme 3: Evaluation

Implementing an employee evaluation or assessment system within a business is a standard method for business leaders to measure staff performance. P1 specified that "meeting regularly and checking to see how they are progressing with the set goals are important, but getting feedback through evaluations, and listening to their criticism is important as well." Likewise, P2 stated, "I think asking questions and listening to the employee criticisms and being able to gather critical information can help address the problem, or reasons for the resistance to the change." P2 further explained that "A leader

has to give back a timely response to employee feedback. When employees sharing their concerns, getting back to them promptly with timely feedback with a plan making it better, is so important.” Shirey (2013) purported that effective evaluation is successful when organizational members successfully respond to change resistance. The final central theme highlighted the concept of business leaders employing evaluation practices as an effective strategy to reduce employee resistance to change. The final theme emerged from employing a matrix coding query within NVivo Pro 12. The final theme evolved from the participants’ interview responses, questions 1, 3, 5, and 6. Participant 1 and 2 indicated the highest frequencies of occurrences, concluding with P3 having no references of evaluation throughout the data as a strategy used by business leaders.

Implementing an employee evaluation and assessment system is an on-going process of researching information, analyzing, and recording information to improve employee performance. P1 stated that, “an evaluation system in place is a valuable tool to gather useful information to improve our company policies, and procedure, and change initiatives.” Conversely, P3 did not reference evaluation as a primary strategy for small business leaders to reduce employee resistance to change. As shown in Table 5, the participants’ responses reflected frequencies based on the percent of coverage throughout the data using a generalized text/word search query of evaluation. P1’s interview responses, notes and documents contained the highest number of references 6%, followed by P2 5% and P3 0%.

Table 5

References and Frequency of Evaluation

Source	Reference	Frequency (%)
P1, Interview Questions/Notes/Documents	133	6
P2, Interview Questions/Notes/Documents	87	5
P3, Interview Questions/Notes/Documents	0	0

Findings related to the conceptual framework. Evaluation as a theme aligned with the conceptual framework of this study. Shirey (2013) and Lewin (1958) noted that organizations that employ effective assessment practices generate successful responses to change resistance. The Lewin's (1947) three-phase change theory to plan, monitor, and evaluate changes confirmed evaluation practices as a strategy small business leader use to reduce employee resistance to change. The evaluation theme aligns with Lewin (1947) refreezing phase for stabilizing new change and creating more change opportunities to uplift performance for the organization. Lewin agreed with Hussain et al. (2018) and argued that effective evaluation strategies are consistent with ongoing change initiative and process modification. P1 stated that "adapting to the change you are encountering, overcoming those challenges and going back and evaluate what you did to be successful and what you could have done differently is how you get better." P2 contributed a similar statement and stated that, "we use an assessment tool or audit. It could be a competency checklist, or demonstration of competency. Gathering feedbacks give you measurable feedback." P3 specified, "an evaluation tool includes enabling organizational members to become willing to accept and integrate new practices to reinforce the planned change-very effective."

All strategies suggested in this research study supported the conceptual framework of this study and assisted in answering the research question: What strategies

do some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change? The strategies aligned with Lewin's (1947) three-phase change model, and Kotter's (1996) eight-steps change conceptual framework used for this research study. P3 referenced Kotter's change model as the absolute fundamental practice for small business leader's success to implement change initiatives. P1 and P2 recognized the Lewin's three-phase change model as the most appropriate change model for the study. Overall, the data analysis of this research study indicated strategies that business leaders use to reduce employee's resistance to change through communication, support, and evaluation. Researchers who explore the occurrence of change use the Lewin's three-phase change model and yield similar findings (Cummings et al., 2015). Using the Lewin's change model, researchers can provide insights relevant to all aspects of organizational change management.

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. The findings from this qualitative multiple case study are relevant to improve business practices and will be of value to organizations whose business leaders are implementing change. According to Johannsdottir et al. (2015), as change continually occurs in organizations, effective leadership strategies remain a crucial factor for the mitigation of employees' resistance to change and business success. Effective change implementation strategies could reduce employees' resistance to change and create productive work environments for improving organizations' performance.

The three central themes that emerged from the data analysis process were (a) communication, (b) support, and (c) evaluation. The two affiliated subthemes apply directly to the professional practice of business. Lewin's (1947) three-phase change model provided the conceptual framework for this research project, supported by Kotter's (1996) eight-steps change model. The use of Lewin's approach could assist with the quick change implementation process and decreased complexity in the process. Kotter emphasized the importance of strong leadership to effect change (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). The insights gained from the findings of this study added to the body of knowledge by identifying communication, support, and evaluation as a strategy for business leaders to use to reduce employees' resistance to change. As a result, this study is significant to help business leaders identify the best change management practices and process strategies to develop and implement change initiatives successfully

Implications for Social Change

The implication of social change is not the direct result of the findings, but rather insightful advantages for enhancing business leaders' change management process, initiatives, and practices within and outside the workplace. Improving business leaders' procedures and practices have tangible improvements and may impact society, individuals, local communities, and cultures. Positive social change within a single environment is not isolated and independent of itself, may impact business leaders, employees, families, and individuals associated and influenced by the business activities.

Exploring strategies that small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change may create a social impact on the necessary actions. The

contribution of this study may fill a gap in understanding workplace culture via comprehending change through a collaborative and meaningful approach. Change values in the business entity come from a carefully planned adaptation and reinterpretation of existing values (Van Der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Effectively planning change helps reduce resistance and may be helpful for comprehending a change initiative in a meaningful way (Dunican & Keaster, 2015). Lewin (1947) found developing a culture of change most effective during the unfreezing stage. Business leaders may use the culture of the organization to drive the values of the organization. Christensen, Mackey, and Whetten (2014) advocated organizational leaders accept the responsibilities for elevating corporate values and culture during change initiatives. Change in values must include careful consideration, planned adaptation, and reinterpretation to avoid disrupting the established values without confusion (Van Der Voet & Vermeeren, 2017). Al-Haddad and Kutnour (2015) noted the need for business leaders to plan organizational change that improves the internal structure, business processes, strategy, culture, and job stability and attitudes of employees.

Small business leaders in any sector may use the results of this study and contribute to positive social change by providing similar strategies to successfully implement change initiatives that might reduce resistance to change, enhance the work environment, and reduce employees' stress. Additionally, small business leaders using the results of this study could improve community growth through increased local employment rates. Likewise, new insights about strategies small business leaders use to reduce employee resistance to change may promote community growth through increased

local employment rates. Such improvements may lead to more positive work environments and business leaders may advance their socioeconomic conditions as well as their employees, and who in turn may transfer the positive energy they gain to their families and communities.

The findings of this study support continuing education and research for business leaders to develop and implement change initiatives successfully. Small business leaders may add research to their knowledgebase to increase successful strategies, methods, and operations. Taking action such as knowledge enhancement would help business leaders thrive.

Recommendations for Action

In a competitive business world, the ultimate goal of business leaders is to create a sustainable competitive advantage. Overcoming resistance to change is the primary element of attaining the success of an organizational change initiative (Umble & Umble, 2014). Participants: P1, P2, and P3 confirmed that a lack of communication, support, and evaluation strategies, and the importance of small business leaders employing the strategy to mitigate employee resistance to change. The results of this study may be helpful to the business community and business leaders. Based on the methodological triangulation of semistructured interviews, analysis of participant's interview responses, and company document review, the recommended actions support the themes identified from the findings in this study.

Communication Strategy

Communicating the change plans with team members and stakeholders throughout the change implementation process. Effective communication is a contributor to the successful change outcome (Kaiser, El Arbi & Ahlemann, 2015). Effectively communicating change plans may promote beneficial deliverables in preparing strategic alignment to establish and maintain transparency in implementing change initiatives. Kotter (1996) and Lewin (1947) described effective and clear communication as an element in the success of any corporate change program. Effective communication between leaders and employees may increase employee's ability to make meaning of change and determines the positive consequences of change initiatives (van den Heuvel, Schalk, & Van Assen, 2015).

Support Strategy

Support strategy is a factor in reducing employee resistance to change. After communicating the change plans to employees, business leaders need new model support skills and operational structures to help implement the change initiative. The change initiative fails when business leaders and their employees decline to work alongside in the same direction (Johannsdottir et al., 2015). Having internal and external support, combined with training and team development, is a factor in reducing employee resistance to change.

Training Strategy

Providing training to employees in different disciplines of work may encourage employees to build confidence, desire, and trust between the parties involved in change.

Individuals have the potential to capitalize on the skills upon preparation of education and training (Alasadi and Alsabbagh, 2015). The findings of this study may be presented at business leaders training to provide deep understanding of strategies to reduce resistance to change

Team Development Strategy

Team development is a crucial component when implementing a change initiative. Team development is used to help recognize the change initiative and generate purpose and metrics to use to track the change. Business leaders and employees are responsible for working together in the same direction to achieve the common goal (Johannsdottir et al., 2015). Participants in this study emphasized that team development increases effectiveness when implementing change initiatives. First, to increase an employee buy-in of the organizations planned change initiative, business leader may employ the process of developing trust through adopting an open-door policy. Second, resolving conflict within the team is a strategy to build cohesion among employees. Last, boost employee moral by creating an acceptable change process that empowers and values everyone's contribution to achieve the overall goal.

Evaluation Strategy

Employee engagement is an outcome of implementing effective evaluations and assessments and is recognized as an effective strategy necessary for business leaders to employ. Evaluating change performance entails several steps. First, identify the source of information and use the change model to introduce measures to build and sustain a culture of employee assessment. Participants agreed that a successful evaluation includes

enabling organizational members to become willing to accept and integrate new practices to reinforce the planned change. The third phase of refreezing (Lewin, 1947) linked with the evaluation process for stabilizing the new change and creating more change opportunities to uplift performance for the organization.

The fundamental aspect of change within any organization is overcoming employees' resistance to opportunities for change (Ali & Ivanov, 2015). Findings from this study may provide the strategies small business leaders have used to reduce resistance to change. Small business leaders and others interested in reducing employee resistance to change may find the results useful. The business groups include (a) the Small Business Administration, (b) Small Business Development Centers, (c) business consultants, (d) the American Management Association, (e) County, State, and Government entities, and (f) Service Corps of Retired Executives. Small business leaders may add research to their knowledgebase to increase success. I will disseminate the findings of this study as a resource, to utilize for business conferences, and training for business leaders, business schools, universities, and development centers. Small business leaders may use the strategies as a guide to successfully implement change initiatives in the organization.

Recommendations for Further Research

Small business leaders and others interested in reducing employees' resistance to change may find the suggestions useful. The contribution of this study fills gaps in the understanding and the active practice of business change and contain a better understanding of strategies some small business leaders use to reduce employees'

resistance to change. Change is necessary for organizations to achieve business growth. Small business leaders may use the strategies as a guide to successfully implement change initiatives in the organization. Small business leaders may add research to their knowledge-base to increase success. I intend to disseminate the study results to leadership conferences as a training resource for business leaders to implement within their perspective workplace. I anticipate publishing my research study through ProQuest to permit access to fellow scholars and researchers. I excluded collecting financial documentation because I did not need to identify organizational profit to implement change initiatives.

Future researchers may seek to explore the specific industry of small-medium size organizations. The study may incorporate residents from other geographic areas using a single case study approach. The strategies selected by participants may not truly represent effective strategies for all small business leaders or owners in Texas. The short time limit was a limitation of the study. Future researchers may seek to explore the same topic under investigation using a quantitative non-experimental correlational design. Researchers may choose to examine if a significant relationship exists between small business leadership style, active engagement (independent variable) and employee resistance to change initiatives (dependent variable) to achieve organizational goal.

Reflections

The purpose of this research study was to explore strategies small business leaders use to reduce employee resistance to change. My engagement with the DBA research study process has been challenging, time-consuming, and rewarding. My knowledge of

change management increased by conducting this study. I mitigated personal bias by bracketing my thoughts, perspectives, preconceived notions, and personal observations. I remained focused, objective, and relied on participants' responses to the interview questions and company documents to guide the outcome. I am deeply grateful for the participants' acceptance to share data that generated the study findings. During the process of literature reviews, data collection and analysis, my understanding increase as I learned more about change management, and practical strategies leaders use to reduce resistance to change. Sharing the study findings, business leaders can have the necessary tools to reinforce their insights on understanding the importance of communicating effectively, supporting the change plan with training and team development, and evaluation strategies.

Challenges

I became overwhelmed with my highly demanding job workload and those that doubted and tagged my quest to succeed as being envious or in competition with my peers. I re-affirmed my commitment to completing my study to become a Doctor of Business Administration, and preserved onward. I am profoundly proud to be a social change agent and have conducted a research study that others can apply to their professional business practices.

Conclusion

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. Resistance to change contributes to the 70% failure rate of change initiative (Adams, 2016; Hughes,

2016). The findings of this study may provide business leaders with the strategies to successfully reduce employees' resistance to change. To overcome resistance to change a primary element to attain the success of an organizational change initiative (Umble & Umble, 2014). The analysis has implications for proven strategies; business leaders used to reduce employees' resistance to change. Business leaders may implement change initiatives successfully because of communicating the change effectively. Providing support skills and operational structures through training, team development, and evaluation. Leaders using the findings from this study may contribute to positive social change by enhancing the work environment, reducing employee stress, and generating beneficial outcomes for the business, which could improve community growth through increased local employment rates.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview purpose: Data collection on strategies that small business leaders use to reduce employee's resistance to change.

1. I will be on time to conduct the interview. On the arrival of the interview participants, I will greet, introduce myself and thank him/her for accepting, and making time to participate in the interview. I will review the purpose of the interview and explain the terms listed below.
2. I will explain that participation is voluntary and withdrawal is the sole decision of the participant.
3. I will give participants the consent form and review the terms, and open for any question the participant may have before they consent to participate.
4. I will provide participants a copy of the consent form for record purpose.
5. I will review the interview procedures and seek permission to capture every response by audio recording all interviews I conduct.
6. I will strictly adhere to a 45minutes timeline to include responses to six open-ended questions.
7. I will inform participants that I will provide the interpretation of interview response by email to ensure accuracy in responses captured.
8. I will begin interview with question number 1 and follow through to the final question.
9. I will listen attentively to participants' responses and engage in deep and interactive conversations to gather rich and viable information.

10. I will observe and take notes of participants' responses, and request they share any relevant documentation.

11. At the close of the interview, I will thank the participants for their time and accept any question they may have.

I will reiterate contact information of participants and schedule follow-up member checking interview.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Date

Dear XXXX,

My name is Mary Tombiri and I am a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a doctoral study project to explore strategies that some small business leaders use to reduce employees' resistance to change. I am seeking face-to-face interviews with small business leaders in the central or southern region of Texas, who have over 5 years' experience in leadership of a company and who successfully implemented strategies to help employees adapt to change.

My research indicates your company may have been successful in using strategies to reduce employees' resistance to change. Based on your professional experience and expertise to implement change, I would like to conduct an interview with you. Please be assured that your participation is voluntary and confidential. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes to include responses to six open-ended questions.

I will send you an email with informed consent form, please review the consent form carefully and ask any question. My role as a researcher is to ensure all aspects of the research are clear to each participant before the participant consent. Please contact me with any questions that you may have concerning your participation at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or Mary.Tombiri2@Waldenu.edu. Thank you in advance and I look forward to your assistance and cooperation with my request.

Sincerely,

Mary Erekiye Tombiri

Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to reduce employee resistance to change?
2. What strategies worked the best for your organization to reduce resistance to change?
3. What actions have hindered your employees from embracing strategies to minimize change resistance?
4. What were the key barriers to implementing the strategies you implemented to reduce employees' resistance to change?
5. How did you overcome the key challenges to implementing your strategies for reducing employees' resistance to change?
6. What additional information would you like to share concerning your design, deployment and improving your strategies for reducing your employees' resistance to change?