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The Office of the Provost

Walden University
2019

Abstract

Strategies for Implementing Workplace Violence Prevention Policies in Small Businesses

by

Anthony J. Fleming

MA, American Military University, 2011

BA, American Military University, 2006

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2019

Abstract

Workplace violence can produce adverse financial outcomes for organizational shareholders, harms employees, and might create long-lasting mental health issues for survivors. Leaders of small businesses might lack the tools available to larger organizations to effectively address the growing incidence of violence in the workplace. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies some leaders of small businesses used to prevent workplace violence. The targeted population consisted of 3 leaders of small businesses from 3 different organizations in the government consulting industry in northern Virginia who successfully implemented workplace violence prevention programs. The general systems theory was the conceptual framework for this research. Data were collected from applicable company documents and semistructured interviews. The data were analyzed through a 5-phase qualitative analysis cycle. Emergent themes included effective workplace violence prevention policies and procedures and leaders' role in creating a positive working environment. The implications of this study for positive social change include the potential to reduce work-related stress so that employees are healthy members of society. Leaders of small business who promote a positive work environment and understand the importance of an effective workplace violence prevention policy might be able to increase the performance of their businesses, which could allow them to be more involved in their communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents, who have both transitioned. Their love and service as teachers inspired me educationally. There, but for the grace of God, go I.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

An organization, such as a small business, is composed of many parts. If one of those parts is not functioning optimally, it is probable that the organization will not be able to achieve maximum efficiency, or in the case of a small business, the highest level of profitability. When the affected part is the employee, there is also a likely impact to society, as there can be negative health repercussions or familial implications. One contributor to poor employee performance is deviant conduct in the workplace. Such conduct, which includes incivility, aggression, and bullying, according to Yang, Caughlin, Gazica, Truxillo, and Spector (2014), hurts employees and produces negative financial outcomes for businesses (Wall, Smith, & Nodoushani, 2017). The Workplace Bullying Institute (2014) reported that approximately 35% of the American workforce has experienced some form of psychological or physical abuse in the office. Leaders of small businesses can implement policies, procedures, and training to reduce occurrences of these harmful behaviors and effect positive organizational change (Becton, Gilstrap, & Forsyth, 2017).

Background of the Problem

Most companies in the United States are small businesses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). However, U.S. government occupational safety mandates generally pertain to large businesses, and leaders of small businesses typically lack awareness, training, and staff to focus on workplace safety issues (Keller & Cunningham, 2016). Although effective workplace violence prevention models exist, the low use by leaders of small businesses limits the overall efficacy of such models (Bruening, Strazza, Nocera, Peek-

Asa, & Casteel, 2015). Inattention to workplace violence in small businesses is problematic because bullying, harassment, and violence create a hostile working environment, according to researchers (Nielsen, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2017). Employees who face aggression on the job become disengaged, which lowers their productivity and reduces organizational profitability (Ford, Myrden, & Kelloway, 2016). Employees who have been victims of aggression on the job or who work in an environment tainted by violence may experience long-term physical and psychological problems associated with anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, and poor sleeping habits (Qureshi, Rasli, & Zaman, 2014). These problems can result in harmful societal outcomes through lost productivity and associated health care costs (Kocakülâh, Bryan, & Lynch, 2018). Effectively addressing workplace violence, therefore, may have beneficial outcomes for small businesses and society.

Problem Statement

In 2016, two million employees were victims of workplace violence in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Bullying and other forms of workplace violence negatively affects employees and costs organizations up to $100,000 per employee victim per year (Branch & Murray, 2015). The general business problem was that employees suffer and costs rise when organizations do not prevent workplace violence. The specific business problem was that some leaders of small businesses in northern Virginia lack strategies to prevent workplace violence.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some leaders of small businesses used to prevent workplace violence. The targeted population consisted of three leaders of small businesses from three different northern Virginia organizations in the government consulting industry who have successfully implemented workplace violence prevention programs. The implications for positive social change include benefits for residents through safer workplace environments that enable residents to increase their contributions to communal betterment.

Nature of the Study

I used the qualitative methodology for this study. Scholars use the qualitative method of research to answer how or why questions about describable data through an interpretive and nonnumerical approach (Barnham, 2015). Researchers use quantitative inquiry to measure variables and test hypotheses about variables' relationships or groups' differences to address the research question (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). As my study did not require statistical data due to the use of descriptive data obtained mainly from answers to *how* or *why* questions in interviews with participants, the quantitative method was not the best choice. Research conducted using the mixed-methods approach combines the qualitative and quantitative methods and therefore requires the collection of numerical data (Landrum & Garza, 2015). My study did not rely on numerical data, making the mixed-methods approach not suitable. The qualitative method was the most appropriate to develop themes from the analysis of descriptive data.

I selected the case study design because this design best aligned with my study. Yin (2018) defined a case as a real-life, contemporary phenomenon and explained that case-study researchers pose *how*, *what,* or *why* questions in their empirical investigations. I used a multiple case study design for this study. Scholars use the multiple case approach to facilitate the exploration of two or more cases to best answer the research question (Yin, 2014). In addition, scholarly investigation conducted via the multiple case design can improve academic rigor and enrich conclusions by increasing the researcher's overall understanding, which can improve the credibility of results (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014; Morse, 2015).

I considered but opted against using the ethnographic and phenomenological designs. The use of ethnographic investigation by scholars typically entails the immersion of a researcher in the culture or environment of participants to directly observe their interactions over an extended period (Kassan et al., 2018). The observation of behaviors of study participants over the long-term made the ethnographic approach inappropriate for this study. Scholars conduct phenomenological research to produce a descriptive understanding of the participant's perspectives and insights on a lived experience (Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, & Cohen, 2016). The objectives of this study did not entail gaining a descriptive understanding of the participants' lived experiences, making the phenomenological approach unsuitable. As I explored a contemporary phenomenon by asking study participants *how*, *what*, or *why* questions, the case study design was optimal for my study.

Research Question

The overarching research question in this study was, What workplace violence prevention strategies do some leaders of small businesses use?

Interview Questions

1. What workplace violence prevention strategies do you employ?
2. What barriers did you experience when implementing your workplace violence prevention strategies?
3. How did you overcome any barriers to implementing your workplace violence strategies?
4. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of workplace violence prevention strategies?
5. What is leadership's role in implementing workplace violence prevention strategies?
6. What additional information would you like to share regarding workplace violence prevention strategies used by some leaders of small businesses?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this study was the general systems theory promulgated by von Bertalanffy in 1968. A key proposition underlying this theory of management is that the organization is a system with various inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes composed of linked parts, and that their positive interconnectivity is necessary for the success of the overall organization (von Bertalanffy, 1968). This holistic approach to understanding organizational intricacies has as its basis that no one

part can function unilaterally and that no system can operate efficiently without its complete set of parts. Senge (1990) furthered the general systems theory, describing the entity as a *learning organization* with five disciplines: (a) personal mastery, (b) mental models, (c) shared vision, (d) team learning, and (e) systems thinking. An aspect of general systems theories is the so-called *butterfly effect*, which means that small inputs or changes to the system can produce significant outcomes over time (Teece, 2018). Aligned with this study, the central concept is that a small business is a system. Negative inputs to this system, such as workplace violence, may cause employees to not function at their optimal level, likely prohibiting the organization from performing as effectively as possible.

Operational Definitions

Active shooter: An individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area (Doherty, 2016). Active shooter scenarios can also include any form of targeted violence where an attacker preselects the location or individual(s) upon whom they intend to inflict harm (Doherty, 2016).

Hostile working environment: A work environment that is the result of offensive conduct in the workplace, which can include bullying, harassment, slurs, racial epithets, and verbal or physical intimidation (Civil Rights Act of 1964).

Transformational leadership: Individuals who can charismatically inspire and stimulate followers or organizations through their creative vision (Banks, McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016).

Workplace stress: Conditions on the job that produce high turnover and absenteeism, while also causing emotional conditions, such as irritability or depression, or negative physical outcomes (e.g., fatigue) in employees (Gilstrap & Bernier, 2017).

Workplace violence: A broad and imprecise term that encompasses any type of violence that affects a company employee and often is in the form of acts and threats of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, bullying, and other disruptive behaviors (Hart & Heybrock, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts that a researcher assumes to be true but cannot verify (Yin, 2014). There were three assumptions in this study. The first was that the workplace violence prevention strategies employed by the leaders of small businesses I interviewed were effective. The second assumption was that the responses given by the leaders of the small businesses were truthful and honest. The final assumption was that the findings may be of value to other organizations and leaders of small businesses outside of northern Virginia.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses within the study that are outside the control of the researcher and that could affect the academic rigor and integrity of the results (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). One limitation of this study was the potential for the participants to misrepresent the efficacy of their workplace violence prevention strategies out of personal interest. Another limitation of this study was that the focus on northern Virginia

businesses in the government consulting industry may mean that findings are not transferrable to other geographical areas or businesses in other industries. An additional limitation within this study was the emphasis on small businesses, which may make any results inapplicable for other types of organizations.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries established by a researcher to narrow the scope of the study in order to efficiently obtain usable and valid results (Yin, 2014). One delimitation of this study was that, for logistical reasons, my research focused only on northern Virginia. Leaders of small businesses in other areas may encounter different employment conditions; therefore, other strategies to prevent workplace violence may exist. As my research was solely on small businesses in the government consulting industry, another delimitation was the possibility that study findings might not encompass workplace violence prevention strategies used by small business owners in other industries. An additional delimitation was the sample size. I chose to limit interviews to three leaders of small businesses and not any other applicable staff. The use of a larger sample size could have produced a greater quantity of data that might have yielded improved results.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Exploring strategies used by some leaders of small businesses to prevent workplace violence may help to inform methodological implementation practices and improve the overall economy. An office setting tainted by incidents of bullying,

harassment, or violence can create a hostile working environment (Berlingieri, 2015). Negative job satisfaction from difficult working conditions impedes productivity (Zhou, Marchand, & Guay, 2017). Reduced output from employees disengaged by the adverse effects of workplace aggression generally means less profitability and decreased organizational performance (Ford et al., 2016). Small business owners have limited time, resources, and training, and financial constraints may challenge their ability to invest in appropriate workplace violence prevention programs (Bruening et al., 2015). This study may benefit small business organizational practices by giving leaders tools to reduce deviant behaviors on the job and improve financial outcomes. The strategies explored may inform best practices and offer insight about policies, programs, and methodologies that may successfully mitigate the risk of workplace violence.

Implications for Social Change

This study may foster positive social change by clarifying strategies that business leaders can use to reduce stress from workplace violence, which can negatively affect employees on the job and in their personal lives. Workplace harassment creates a toxic working environment and can increase incidence rates of mental and physical disease (Xu et al., 2018). Qureshi et al. (2014) found that the failure to control workplace bullying by organizations may similarly produce serious long-term physical and psychological effects on employees and can contribute to unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking, drug abuse, and sleep disorders. Effective workplace violence prevention strategies may enable staff to feel safer at work, which can transfer to the home environment and the broader community. Less tension at work may equate to a decrease in stress at home and in the

community, according to Ram (2015). A presumed diminution in anxiety levels may also reduce the need for associated medical services (Xu et al., 2018). By helping to lower their employees' stress while at work, leaders of small businesses may therefore be able to contribute to positive health outcomes in the broader community.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore workplace violence prevention strategies used by some leaders of small businesses. Small businesses comprise most companies in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Yet, researchers studying workplace violence often overlook smaller organizations (Bruening et al., 2015). Harassment, which can include bullying, hostility, and violence, creates a hostile working environment with higher employee turnover and lower profitability (Ram, 2015). Employees who work under such conditions suffer from poorer health and increased stress (Ram, 2015). I sought to address the gap in the literature and provide insight on strategies some small business owners use to effectively address violence in their workplaces.

My strategy for the literature review began with targeted searches within common scholarly databases, including ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, Sage Premier, and Science Direct. Key words used within the databases included *workplace violence*, *workplace violence prevention strategies*, *violence and small business profitability*, *bullying's impact on the workplace*, *violence and the employee*, *active shooter in the workplace, hostile work environment*, and *organizational violence and leadership*. I filtered results based on relevancy, selecting publications from 2015 onward and

excluded non-peer-reviewed journals. I organized the literature review according to common topics identified while researching how workplace violence affects businesses; topics included the impact to employee health, human resource procedures, bullying, absenteeism, gender, intimate partner violence, occupational differences, legal considerations, and the role of leadership. The 123 references in the literature review include 117 scholarly, peer-reviewed articles representing approximately 95% of the total references. Of the 123 references, 113 (approximately 92%) were published within the past 5 years.

General Systems Theory

The basal framework used for this study was the general system theory developed by von Bertalanffy in 1968. Senge (1990) expanded upon von Bertalanffy's general systems theory by identifying certain deleterious practices, such as the *boiling frog*, which Senge metaphorically equated to management's inability to identify threats that rise gradually. Aligned with von Bertalanffy's (1968) conceptualization of a small business as a system, actual acts of workplace violence may not always be one-off incidents but the culmination of smaller problems left to fester. The failure of a small business leader to address the verbal harassment of an employee by another worker, could possibly cause the victim to lash out violently against the aggressor in the future. The central presumption of this study was that a small business is a system and negative inputs, such as deviant workplace behaviors, may make employees not function at their optimal level, likely prohibiting the firm from performing as effectively as possible.

An aspect of the general systems theory is the so-called butterfly effect, which means that small inputs or changes to the system can have significant outcomes over time (Teece, 2018). Fair and orderly behavior within a system that receives linear inputs creates equilibrium, but disorder results when chaotic and nonlinear forces act upon a system (Mingers, 2017). von Bertalanffy's work concurs with a tenet espoused by Plato and Aristotle, which is that it is not possible to study parts of a whole alone; the system is the fundamental source and greater than its parts (Corning, 2014).

Drawing from the natural sciences, researchers have applied systems thinking in an attempt to understand human science problems (Caws, 2015). Mingers (2017) provided a history of systems thinking, highlighting how the systems science field is so broad that the fundamental concepts of systems thinking have continually morphed over time. Mingers detailed how the traditional systems approach fails to account for the role of the observer, while also noting that the real world is ever changing and unpredictable and behavior may depend upon the context or environment at the time. Left uncontrolled from a systemic organizational perspective, bullying and violence create a poor working environment and increase depressive symptoms within employees (Theorell et al., 2015).

Despite human beings interpreting observed behavior differently and systems thinking not being an empirical science, researchers can incorporate this approach to tackle complex phenomena (Demetis & Lee, 2016). Workplace violence, when evaluated from a systems thinking perspective, likely has an unpredictable influence on the working environment. Furthermore, the individual victim's behavior or reaction to experiencing

such a phenomenon may depend upon the context of the act or the conditions in which the person experienced the event.

The general systems theory is an open systems philosophy as compared to a closed systems philosophy (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Principle differences between open and closed systems include how open systems interact with their environment while closed systems typically do not, and how open systems seek continuous improvement, whereas closed systems desire or attempt to return to a predetermined state (Chikere & Nwoka, 2015). Despite empirical difficulties or lack of definitive evidence, key aspects of the general systems theory, especially as applied to organizational studies, make the concept relevant for modern research (Robey & Mikhaeil, 2016). The results of research conducted by academics using the general systems theory as part of their investigative approach have informed many management scholars in their search for organizational success through the maximization of internal efficiencies (Teece, 2018). The use of a systems thinking approach in the field of management adds additional support for its use in the present study.

The general systems theory, as a theoretical foundation, helps theoreticians understand the behavior of systems through its widespread applicability (Caws, 2015). One application includes the concept of talent management, where the value of individual employee activities and competencies positively affects or creates potential vulnerabilities in the successful accomplishment of an organization's objectives (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014). McMahon and Patton (2018) explored how the general systems theory is applicable to the human science field by applying this framework to

career development. Systemic thinking aligns with career development if one conceptualizes the employee as the system and the individual's career as the part (McMahon & Patton, 2018). The discipline-agnostic foundational framework afforded by the general systems theory has enabled researchers to apply and build upon von Bertalanffy's original work leading to the recognition of systems as characterized by a set of axioms in a multitude of ways (Caws, 2015). Such evidence furthers the use of the general systems theory as the lens through which a small business is viewed in my research.

Systems sciences include the concept of synergy as a basis (Corning, 2014). In living systems, there must by synergy between all aspects of an organism for it to function properly (Corning, 2014). It may be possible to equate a business to a living system. A business itself is obviously not alive, but certain U.S. laws (e.g., for banking and tax purposes) do recognize corporations as entities. Human beings comprise small businesses, and a person is a living organism. A small business leader may utilize von Bertalanffy's general systems theory and the concept of synergy detailed by Corning (2014) to build a harmonious work environment.

Researchers use the systems thinking approach to explore relationships and perspectives between elements (Cabrera, Cabrera, & Powers, 2015). Identifying and applying ethical practices to the different elements or parts of a system can include not making assumptions or applying stereotypes to a specific group (Cabrera et al., 2015). Despite any ethnic, racial, religious, or political belongings, employees, as a part of the overall system (the business), remain individuals and ought to deserve fair treatment.

When a small business leader is considering strategies to address workplace violence or design policies to lessen the likelihood of deviant behaviors occurring in the workplace, it is in the interest of all to ensure ethical practices exist. When applied to the career development theory originally developed by McMahon and Patton (1995), the systems theory framework (STF) similarly recognizes the importance of interrelationships when exploring how an employee can grow professionally (McMahon & Patton, 2018). Leaders of small businesses can also use the STF approach when exploring educational options to build employee growth and provide the individual, as part of the system (the business), with the right skills to succeed (Welsh, Tullar, & Nemati, 2016).

The companies or businesses developed by entrepreneurs are complex adaptive systems comprised of a multitude of parts influenced by inputs (Roundy, Bradshaw, & Brockman, 2018). The various levels of entrepreneurial activity--from innovative ideas and founding, to business development and value creation--have as their basis an interconnected and symbiotic relationship with one another (Roundy et al., 2018). From a systems perspective, managing inputs to control variables and future outcomes is an important consideration for the small business leader (Cowan & Wright, 2016). Anything that runs counter to the harmonious relationship of each part will likely be of detriment to a positive, profitable, and productive entrepreneurial end state.

Comparative and Contrasting Theories

The behavior engineering model (BEM) developed by Gilbert in 1978 may be comparable to von Bertalanffy's general systems theory. Gilbert (1978) posited that antecedents create behaviors that lead to consequences, which Gilbert abbreviated as

ABC. Related to employee performance, Gilbert classified six factors needed to stimulate workers: capacity, incentives, information, knowledge, motives, and resources. Using the ABC paradigm, Gilbert theorized that the support an organization provides its staff is the most important element to creating an outcome of exemplarily performing employees. Leaders wishing to realize positive performance changes, such as implementing successful workplace violence prevention strategies, must also appreciate the *diffusion of effects*, or how changing one behavior may influence another, and should use feedback or incentives to evaluate the efficacy of each action instituted prior to commencing another (Gilbert, 1978).

Another similar concept is Miller's living systems theory (LST), which was first promulgated in 1978 (Miller, 1978). The LST is a hierarchal approach to systems and the natural world where each part interacts and has a relationship with the other (Corning, 2014). Miller (1978) posited that natural relationships that start at the smallest, cellular level and that are necessary for the overall function of the body are analogous to how minor functions within an organization are just as critical to its general, overall success (Corning, 2014). Miller equated the survival of the system to its ability to adapt efficiently and quickly to a stressor in a manner that produced the least impact to the system as a whole. Conversely stated, a system or organization that does not take immediate action to rectify a threat to its existence will likely not survive long-term.

A concept that may contrast von Bertalanffy's general systems theory is the organizational culture and leadership model promulgated by Schein (2016). The guiding premise of Schein's organizational culture and leadership model is that the leader of an

organization is the principal influencer in determining its culture. Schein hypothesized that the philosophy of the business owner, how the founders formed a company, as well as the learned experiences of employees, are what create and constitute organizational values and beliefs. In the organizational culture and leadership model, the leader is the key driving force who creates a progressive learning environment oriented towards the future, uses diversity as a resource, proficiently manages cultural change, and effectively institutes an organizational culture of positive success (Schein, 2016). From a conceptual perspective, Schein's model places a higher weight on the influence of the leader, whereas von Bertalanffy's general systems theory stresses the importance of each part of an organization.

The behavioral theory of the firm concept first theorized by Cyert and March in 1963 also speaks to the culture of an organization. Cyert and March (1963) postulated that organizations develop routines and tend to respond to matters in previously learned ways. However, these routines do not account for differences that may have materialized over time (Cyert & March, 1963). Cyert and March hypothesized that developing effective procedures for changing routines recognizes the need for an organization to adapt to developing threats.

Resilient organizations are generally able to better withstand disasters through the application of appropriate risk management strategies (Aldunce, Beilin, Howden, & Handmer, 2015). Aligned with this study and the general systems theory, disasters within an organization, which could include an incident of workplace violence, may reduce the efficacy of one part of the organization, potentially limiting the overall functionality of

the entire organization. Coetzee, Van Niekerk, and Raju (2016) explored resilience through the lens of the complex adaptive systems theory (CAS). CAS theory is a type of systems theory used more by researchers in natural science fields, but it may be applicable in organizational research, given that one aspect of CAS is how small decisions or actions can affect, either negatively or positively, a larger entity (Coetzee et al., 2016). Coetzee et al. applied CAS in their detailed literature review on disaster resilience from a systems science approach. They concluded that the use of a CAS approach as a theoretical tool can assist practitioners in exploring ways to make their organization more resilient (Coetzee et al., 2016).

Workplace Violence

Triplett, Payne, Collins, and Tapp (2016) determined that how people define violence and what they consider violent behaviors to be can vary. The researchers found that many individuals use the word *violent* when viewing forceful acts that they deem to be bad (Triplett et al., 2016), thus creating a correlation between the two terms, *workplace* and *violence*. However, there is no internationally accepted definition of workplace violence (Boyle & Wallis, 2016). The general systems theory supports systems research that furthers the collaboration and development of a knowledge basis that blends the philosophical with the practical through more effective scientific research (Rousseau, 2015). As the basal framework of this study, the general systems theory may assist in defining workplace violence, which could help leaders of small businesses in their efforts to implement workplace violence prevention strategies.

Behaviors that may be acceptable to some individuals or in some companies may not be for other persons or organizations. Yang et al. (2014) described workplace mistreatment as three distinct forms: incivility, aggression, and bullying. The approach taken by these researchers was that any deviant behavior in the office can create a hostile working environment--one where the consequences can range from decreased employee health and performance to financial implications related to compensation claims or even the potential for loss of life. Yang et al. determined that there was a significant relationship between the organization's climate of mistreatment and the negative effects victims of deviant behaviors expressed, to include emotional and physical strains, poor commitment and job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates. Similarly, Miner, and Cortina (2016) found that nonvictims who observe workplace incivility increasingly lose trust in the organization, and their amplified perception of interpersonal injustice lowers their job satisfaction and leads to higher employee turnover. Montgomery and Oladapo (2014) confirmed the results of Miner and Cortina and Yang et al. Conceptualizing talent management through the general systems framework, Montgomery and Oladapo determined that work-related stress, low wages, little room for advancement, and a poor work climate create vulnerabilities throughout an organization and weaken its ability to operate effectively.

Impact of Workplace Violence on Society

Wong and Kelloway (2016) determined that there was a correlation between stress from work and higher blood pressure both on the job and at home. Patton et al. (2016) utilized the general systems theory to equate the family unit as the whole and the

individual members as the parts. An employee, as the member of a family unit who was suffering from the impact of having experienced violence at work, likely would not be able to contribute fully and positively as part of the family unit. The negative input by the employee victim would probably limit the family unit's ability to contribute 100% positively to the community, which would likely have a detrimental impact on society overall.

A business environment unsettled by workplace violence does not just affect the victim but also disrupts coworkers and their ability to function at their highest levels (Rockett, Fan, Dwyer, & Foy, 2017). As Rockett et al. (2017) noted, there is also the negative cost to human capital when organizational leaders fail to properly address the problem of workplace incivility. Organizations and their leaders have an ability to develop activities and establish practices to improve the cordiality of interactions and quality life of employees (Wong & Kelloway, 2016). Wong and Kelloway (2016) examined the impact of workplace stress, measuring blood pressure outcomes to determine if negative social interactions on the job affected the health of employees at home. Wong and Kelloway focused on negative supervisory interactions, but future researchers could also examine relations between peers or subordinates to reveal greater outcomes. Wong and Kelloway found a correlation between stress from work and higher blood pressure both on the job and at home. These findings indicate that affirmative implementation of preventative programs by company leaders may have a positive social impact.

Effects of Workplace Violence on Employee Health

Workplace violence negatively affects the health of employees (Qureshi et al., 2014). Bullying, violence, or other deviant behaviors in the workplace can damage the work environment (Rockett et al., 2017). The negative comportment of others may affect the health of employees who bear the burden of working in a challenged environment. Qureshi et al. (2014) examined this phenomenon. The researchers found that management must provide support to employees and develop a positive organizational climate that promotes respect. Results from Qureshi et al. (2014) indicated that workplace violence negatively affects employee health. Their findings suggested that some employees may develop depression and seek mental health medication to cope. The negative comportment of others can even have a detrimental effect on the health of non-victim employees who bear the burden of working in a challenged environment (Qureshi et al., 2014). Employees who are suffering from mental health issues might not be as productive as possible, which could reduce company profits. When examined through the lens of the general systems theory, if the system is a company and employees are the parts, the findings from Qureshi et al. (2014) suggested that negative inputs to the employee reduce the profitability and productivity of the company.

Uncivil acts in the workplace, such as harassment, bullying, or violence, make employees experience depression and severe mental health issues (Verkuil, Atasayi, & Molendijk, 2015). The negative effects of mistreatment by company colleagues may be immediate and possibly limited in duration, but there is also a chance that victims can suffer from various symptoms for years following an incident. Einarsen and Nielsen

(2014) assessed the relationship between exposure to bullying in the workplace and any lasting mental health concerns for victims. Einarsen and Nielsen (2014) found that exposure to workplace bullying had a positive relationship with increased stress levels and mental health symptoms of anxiety and depression five years later.

Aggression between colleagues in a small business will typically constrain the ability of employees to be as productive as possible given that such mannerisms can lead to low morale and absenteeism (Howard, Johnston, Wech, & Stout, 2015). Individuals who become angry from exposure to a dysfunctional work environment and have difficulty regulating their emotions, may also have a greater risk of suicidality (Ammerman, Kleiman, Uyeji, Knorr, & McCloskey, 2015). Lavender, Ramirez-Irizarry, Bayakly, Koplan, and Bryan (2016) found mental health problems to be the primary catalyst and precipitating factor for violence.

Developing a culture of positive psychological health with a focus on emotional well-being can improve workforce morale and increase employee engagement (Hart & Heybrock, 2017). Bullying or exposure to other negative acts can create sleep difficulties (Magee et al., 2015). Exposure to bullying creates stress, which in turn can produce negative sleeping issues (Magee et al., 2015). Disruption to sleep can yield compounding, cyclical, and worsening patterns of unrest (Magee et al., 2015). Evidence also exists showing an increased risk of diabetes for workers who experience bullying or violence on the job (Xu et al., 2018). According to Senge (1990), stress produces sleep and health problems and ignoring these issues will, over time, negatively impact productivity.

Stress. Violence at work and its impact to the organization can go beyond the incident. There are psychological factors that can create extended periods of stress within the organization or the employee(s) (Malik, Schat, Shahzad, Raziq, & Faiz, 2018). Stress has a negative effect on employee performance (Rees, Breen, Cusack, & Hegney, 2015). Job strain and limited organizational support were predictors of deviant behaviors within the workplace, and there is a link between violence and stress (Magnavita, 2016). Magnavita (2016) explored symptoms of workplace violence, with a focus on work-related stress. Results indicated that job strain and limited organizational social support were predictors of deviant behaviors within the workplace. A way deviant behavior in the workplace can manifest is through mobbing, which is bullying or psychological aggression by a group or a clique of coworkers against another that creates stress and can lead to long-term health problems for the victim (Qureshi et al., 2015). To counter such behaviors, Qureshi et al. (2015) recommended that organizations create clear policies that define the problem and provide guidelines. Rees et al. (2015) developed a testable theoretical model of individual resilience. The proposed model hypothesizes that psychological resilience mediates the relationship between neuroticism, mindfulness, self-efficacy, coping, and psychological adjustment. Rees et al. (2015) concluded that psychological resilience mediates stress. Positive treatment of employees lowers stress levels, improves mental health levels, and reduces organizational turnover (Lutgen-Sandvik, Hood, & Jacobson, 2016). Leaders of small businesses may analyze these results from a general systems perspective to guide the design of organizational policies, as adaptive learning organizations provide a more supportive working environment.

Human Resources and Workplace Violence

Workplace bullying can be a pernicious and damaging aspect of any organization, with the human resources department of firms most often being the section assigned responsibility for handling claims (Harrington, Warren, & Rayner, 2015). To investigate the relationship between workplace bullying and human resource management, Harrington et al. (2015) studied the behavioral reactions of human resource practitioners (HRPs) in response to claims of bullying by employees against their supervisors. A significant finding of Harrington et al. (2015) was that all HRPs involved in the study interpreted the claim of bullying in a performance management sense, with data showing HRPs assumed the root of the problem to be poor management or interpersonal skills on the part of the supervisor related to an organizational culture of expectations of high performance to be the underlying factor for complaining employees. These results indicate a systemic pattern of failures on the HRPs in this study and may speak to a cyclical pattern that leaves the employee feeling as if management does not listen to them. Harrington et al. (2015) recommended that HRPs not be the determinant for how an employee feels or what they believe to be bullying, and that organizations may wish to consider creating a position with a role solely to handle incidents of bullying. Leaders of small businesses should monitor how their human resource staff handle claims of abuse, as there is a potential for a future violent reaction on the part of the employee if they have no recourse to address bullying from a supervisor.

Wall et al. (2017) added to the results of Harrington et al. (2015) by finding that clear human resource (HR) policies that define and prohibit inappropriate behaviors

could reduce negative outcomes. While a primary motivating factor for reducing workplace bullying from a human resources perspective is to improve productivity and reduce costs, having formalized anti-bullying polices in place is a preferred approach to reducing occurrences (Salin et al., 2018). Managers can reduce incidences of bullying by creating a supportive working environment with a positive atmosphere reinforced by appropriate HR policies (Ariza-Montes, Arjona-Fuentes, Law, & Han, 2017).

Shin and Konrad (2016a) substantiated that HR practices, known as high-performance work systems (HPWS), aid organizational productivity by quantifying performance outcomes. Shin and Konrad (2016b) applied the general systems theory as a framework in their examination of the causal associations between HPWS and organizational performance measurements. Shin and Konrad (2016a) also found that positive feedback and HPWS increase employee productivity by empowering and motivating employees to improve. Retaining employees, otherwise known as talent management, is another area of the field of human resources where the general systems theory applies. Montgomery and Oladapo (2014) examined vulnerabilities to talent management and talent acquisition through the lens of the general systems theory. The authors found that the successful application of HR functions increased when an employee viewed an organization as a positive place to work.

Bullying and Violence in the Workplace

Samnani and Singh (2012) examined bullying as a significant aspect of violence in the workplace. In a comprehensive study exploring the prevalence, antecedents, and outcomes of bullying in the workplace, the consequences of bullying impacts individuals,

group, organization, and at a societal level. Samnani and Singh (2012) defined workplace bullying to be harassing, offending, socially excluding someone, or negatively affecting a person's work tasks. In comparison, Escartin (2016) defined bullying similarly, generalizing the phenomenon as negative behaviors directed against a work colleague routinely and over an extended period. Escartin (2016) utilized a textual narrative synthesis comprised of four elements to assess findings across empirical studies. Assessing the dangers of workplace bullying, Devonish (2017) found that bullying in the workplace has the potential to create a hostile work environment. When workers are not performing, organizational productivity will typically suffer (Escartin, 2016). Devonish (2017) found that performance decreases when employees suffer from bullying. Devonish noted how the encouragement by organizational practitioners of a positive working climate and culture that promote employee development was a method to discourage bullying and other similar practices from permeating the workplace. These findings align with the general systems theory and the *boiling frog* concept promulgated by Senge (1990), as small problems not identified by management left to fester over time, can create larger issues in the future for the organization.

Victims of bullying in the workplace suffer, which can create poor performance. A system cannot reach its maximum potential when its parts are not able to function at their optimum (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The self-perceptions of victims of their own competency may be a critical factor in the degree of their suffering. McDaniel, Ngala, and Leonard (2015) found that victims of bullying who perceive themselves as equal as or more competent than the bully, tend to take positive steps to rectify the problem. The

results from McDaniel et al. (2015) indicated that managers must not only be aware of inappropriate behaviors in the workplace but need to also recognize key determinants of how an environment of bullying developed and comprehend the negative affect on performance. The results of McDaniel et al. (2015) showed that organizational programs designed to improve an employee's self-perception may empower the individual and lessen their chances of becoming a victim.

Bullying has the potential to spiral into acts of physical violence, and the line of separation between supervisory responsibility, a security team's response, and the action required of HR personnel, can often be blurry (Fox & Cowan, 2015). Managers and business leaders must recognize the signs of bullying and address incidents immediately in conjunction with the human resources department (Samnani & Singh, 2012). Business leaders should empower HRPs to assess workplace bullying or violence within the context of the specific organization to manage better victims and bullies (Fox & Cowan, 2015). One way to ensure HRPs have a more authoritative and enabled voice is to further their understanding of workplace bullying through checklists designed to clarify and define these types of adverse comportments from an HR perspective (Fox & Cowan, 2015). Leaders of small businesses may be able to obtain a competitive advantage if they view human resource management as an adaptive process through the lens of the general systems theory (Shin & Konrad, 2016b).

Absenteeism and Workplace Violence

Deviant behavior negatively affects the workplace on multiple levels. Aligned with systems theory, relationships between parts must be optimal for the system to

function effectively, and in the case of small business, prime functionality equates to productivity and profitability (Chikere & Nwoka, 2015). Experiencing violence at work results in absenteeism and increased employee turnover (Salin & Notelaers, 2017). Bullying produces negative feelings within the victim and frequently creates high employee turnover rates and low profitability (Ram, 2015). Bullying in the workplace is becoming increasingly common, and its negative outcomes result in absenteeism, presenteeism, turnover, litigation expenses, and potential damage to the organizational brand and its reputation (Wall et al., 2017).

Senge (1990) described how small, negative inputs can, over time, present as large problems for an organization. Absenteeism related to bullying can have a detrimental impact to company profits, with estimates ranging anywhere from $200 to $500 billion annually in losses due to lost productivity or related medical costs (Kocakülâh et al., 2018). Branch and Murray (2015) estimated that individual victim losses associated with bullying could amount to approximately $100,000 per employee per year. Bullying can have a long-lasting impact, as the psychological damage experienced by the victim lessens their engagement and dedication at work (Trépanier, Fernet, & Austin, 2016). From a general systems theory perspective, the small business leader should seek to implement strategies that address bullying and other forms of violence in the workplace to potentially reduce the negative financial impact from these deviant behaviors related to absenteeism.

Gender and Workplace Violence

Gender-based violence, both at home and in the workplace, has negative economic outcomes for businesses (Hameed et al., 2016). The perception of violence one has when viewing a situation can also depend upon their gender (Triplett et al., 2016). The Workplace Bullying Institute (2014) reported that approximately 35% of the American workforce has experienced some form of psychological or physical abuse in the office, with women more often than men being the target. In addition, females observing occurrences of workplace incivility against other females magnifies their perception of inequality in the office and is directly related lowered job satisfaction (Miner & Cortina, 2016). Guay, Goncalves and Jarvis (2015) examined workplace violence across different fields to ascertain any statistical differences between men and women. Guay et al. (2015) also found that men committed acts of violence more frequently than women, and that men were more often the victims in certain industries. These statistics are job field-dependent, with the results of multi-sector studies showing women more often as victims overall (Guay et al., 2015).

Both males and females demonstrate negative reactions to experiencing workplace incivility, to include withdrawing from work and sometimes acting out, such as purposely coming in late or not completing assignments on time (Loi, Loh, & Hine, 2015). Men are generally less fearful of confronting the perpetrator or voicing their dissatisfaction to colleagues (Loi et al., 2015). Female victims may be more motivated by financial factors and the risk of losing their jobs, which is one reason they may hesitate to report an incident (Loi et al., 2015). As expounded upon by Senge (1990), and in the

context of systems thinking, minor problems left to fester will eventually become larger issues.

Attell, Kummerow Brown, and Treiber (2017) determined that the issue of workplace violence is one that negatively affects women in higher numbers than men. While women are more often the victim of workplace violence compared to men, social factors influence incidents such as: if the supervisor, victim, or perpetrator was a male or female (Wang & Hsieh, 2016). McCord, Joseph, Dhanani, and Beus (2018) identified that women and men perceive mistreatment in the workplace differently. McCord et al. (2018) recommended leadership review organizational policies, examine their climate of diversity, and endeavor to develop effective ways to counter all forms of mistreatment in the workplace. This recommendation aligns with the general systems theory and Schein (2016), who suggested that leadership seek to use diversity as a resource in their effort to build an organization based on a positive cultural environment.

Occupational Differences and Workplace Violence

There is a higher frequency of violence in blue-collar professions – especially those based in more rural, lower-income areas in non-urban areas experiencing economic challenges (Lavender et al., 2016). Lavender et al. (2016) determined that farming, fishing, and forestry occupations had the highest rate of violent deaths, with construction and extraction occupations following. Personnel in high-risk occupations, such as nursing or law enforcement, inherently face an increased risk of exposure to incidents of violence on the job – especially employees who work night shifts (Sguera, Bagozzi, Huy, Boss, & Boss, 2016). Leaders of small businesses in high risk occupational fields should

recognize the inherently greater risks for incidences of violence and be especially proactive in the implementation of mitigation measures.

Employees of higher risk occupations, such as nursing, law enforcement, or within the security sector, can face an increased risk of exposure to incidents of violence on the job. Issues may include not just violence but verbal mistreatment. Edwards, Meyer, and Clapham (2015) noted that employees who handle cash or work in the realm of law enforcement or security, are more frequently victims of workplace violence. Spector, Yang, and Zhou (2015) examined the causalities of exposure to such behaviors and the health of employees and that organizations may be able to advance employee health by focusing on actions that improve the workplace climate. A method for organizations to address violence for higher risk occupations is to tailor health and safety protocols, while ensuring compliance with safety measures (El-Menyar, Mekkodathil, & Al-Thani, 2016). The small business owner could consider the type of service or product offered, the typical clientele, hours of operation, and location, amongst other things, when designing appropriate methods to counter the risk of abusive behaviors at work. Senge (1990) promulgated the concept of the learning organization, and Pokharel and Ok Choi (2015) determined that this type of system approach at an organizational level mediates the effects of relationships amongst employees and customers, while positively improving organizational performance.

Active Shooter Events in U.S. Workplaces

Most homicides at work in the United States take place in small businesses, but small businesses are less likely to have appropriate workplace violence prevention

measures to protect the safety of their employees (Bruening et al., 2015). Active shooter scenarios typically have deadly outcomes, and the frequency of active shooter events are increasing (Silva & Capellan, 2018). One false reoccurring theme is that it is the disgruntled employee who is generally responsible for committing these deadly acts (Silva & Capellan, 2018).

Organizations often direct employees to follow lockdown procedures; run, hide, and call 911 when facing an active shooter scenario (Doherty, 2016). Doherty (2016) viewed radicalization within the workplace as one of the greatest threats facing American society. Doherty (2016) suggested that through organizational commitment and a proactive approach by leadership in establishing and maintaining a safe working environment, employees will have a higher morale and be more productive. However, active shooter events annually account for just 2% of all firearms-related fatalities in the United States (Webster, 2017). Martaindale, Sandel, and Blair (2017) found that proactive training programs, and implementing physical security features, could reduce the likelihood of an active shooter event. From a general systems theory perspective, organizations that identify and assimilate new knowledge can improve existing processes (Rafique, Hameed, & Agha, 2018).

Legal Considerations for Addressing Workplace Safety

U.S. states that force companies to utilize and comply with nondiscrimination orders is a positive step in the right direction for all businesses (Weeks, 2015). The ability to attract a completely participative workforce who can further innovation within a business starts with the executive ensuring that their organization is as welcoming to all

as possible (Weeks, 2015). Not all city or state governments in the United States have ordnances mandating safety and security programs for convenience stores or other small businesses, and even cities with these requirements generally have low enforcement (Chaumont Menéndez, Amandus, Wu, & Hendricks, 2015). The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of 1970 affects multiple measures designed to protect employees at work. With small numbers of OSHA staff compared to the millions of workers in the United States, relatively minor penalties for violations, and with a maximum criminal penalty of 6 months of jail, this federal act is not well enforced (Haynes, 2013). OSHA recommends other states use the existing legal frameworks of states with OSHA-approved plans as models to develop a baseline (U.S. Occupational Health Administration, 2015). Small businesses bear a large burden of injury and death and are difficult to reach with occupational safety and health (OSH) information (Keller & Cunningham, 2016). To improve the dissemination of OSH information, one solution attempted by The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) was for fire departments to distribute OSH information to small businesses during fire inspections (Keller & Cunningham, 2016).

All states in the United States have provisions for arming their citizens through concealed carry regulations (Ghent & Grant, 2015). Small business owners, or the given state and any applicable legislation, determine whether to permit firearms on the premise(s) or in the working environment (Ghent & Grant, 2015). Examples of relevant ideas include arming certain teachers who have had specific training; that they are already in the building greatly reduces the time needed to wait for a law enforcement

response (Rogers et al., 2018). Business leaders, their employees, and the company would benefit by deciding and enacting clear policies either permitting or prohibiting firearms in the workplace (Sanders, Pattison, & Ross, 2015). Aligned with the general systems theory, leaders of small businesses could use the Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire to measure quantitatively opinions and preferences of employees to inform organizational practices related to firearms in the workplace (Kim, Egan, & Tolson, 2015).

Training and Making Workplaces Safer

Corporate bullying intervention training programs generally focus on preventing incidents by providing information to the employee population through educational workshops (Escartin, 2016). Interventions that raise awareness and develop supervisory skills to identify patterns or other systemic factors have positive organizational outcomes in combating psychological violence in the workplace (Schindeler & Reynald, 2017). Specialized training may include security staff, which can help others to understand organizational procedures (Copeland & Henry, 2017). Conducting appropriate crisis management training, as well as liaising with law enforcement, fire, and medical personnel as part of a holistic workplace violence prevention program are effective ways for businesses to reduce potentially negative future outcomes (Doherty, 2016).

Online courses can increase awareness and improve prevention, making this educational format a viable option to train staff (Brann & Hartley, 2017). Any internal act that harms a company's economic wherewithal or jeopardizes an organization's ability to meet its objectives is an insider threat (Gelles & Mitchell, 2015). Training designed to

counter specific or known issues, such as intimate partner violence, can improve awareness, assist victims, and potentially mitigate future risk (Laharnar, Perrin, Hanson, Anger, & Glass, 2015). Business leaders should not only make employees aware of training programs, but employees should also be their own advocate by working with management to reduce incidents (Martinez, 2016).

Leaders of small businesses can take steps to increase incident reporting, to include adapting new technologies, such as smartphone applications to report incidents (Nazli, Sipon, Ali, & Omar, 2017). Crisis management should be an integral part of any organization (Alpaslan & Mitroff, 2018). A critical aspect of workplace violence prevention preparation begins with recognizing precursors that an individual might exhibit, which could potentially give clues to their likelihood to react violently (Samnani & Singh, 2015). With clients perpetrating most threats, supervisors play an integral preventing a hostile work environment (Gadegaard, Andersen, & Hogh, 2015). Organizational learning, which is a component to the general systems theory, includes identifying and recognizing threats and implementing improvements to process defects (Edwards, 2016).

Barriers to Implementing Workplace Violence Prevention Strategies

Deviant behaviors in the workplace can damage the financial survival of a small businesses (Turyakira, 2018). Financial restrictions can be significant barriers for leaders of small businesses trying to implement workplace violence prevention strategies (Blando, Ridenour, Marilyn, Hartley, & Casteel, 2015). Limited time and resources, as well as a lack of knowledge, combined with no governmental requirements for workplace

violence prevention programs, are barriers to implementation of workplace violence prevention programs (Bruening et al., 2015). When experts conduct workplace violence prevention training, there are generally positive outcomes (Adams, Knowles, Irons, Roddy, & Ashworth, 2017). Adams et al. (2017) identified the time necessary to train staff as a challenge for the success of workplace violence prevention programs. Conducting localized threat assessments and adapting training tailored to the environment can improve the implementation of a workplace violence prevention program (Hutton, Vance, Burgard, Grace, & Van Male, 2018).

Scholars use the general systems theory approach to view organizations as a system of connected components that are interdependent (Dahlgaard-Park, Reyes, & Chen, 2018). Poor communication, non-compliance with policies, and unsupportive leadership are all barriers to the success of a workplace violence prevention program (Wyatt, Anderson-Drevs, & Van Male, 2016). Clear policies that explicitly define incivility and detail prohibited behaviors increase programmatic implementation (Becton et al., 2017). These policies should also detail how to report incidents, as a lack of knowledge on how to file a complaint can also be a barrier to an effective workplace violence prevention program (Copeland & Henry, 2017).

Organizational Leadership and Workplace Violence

Workplace violence often goes underreported, but leaders who recognize the threat can use this unfortunate phenomenon as a baseline for planning to ensure organizational resilience (Morley, Axtell, Schoenfeldt, & Guerrero, 2017). Morley et al. (2017) linked organizational resilience and active assailant(s) threats to the critical

infrastructure sector, such as public utilities. From a systems perspective, the term resilience can refer to an entity's ability to return to its normal operating state following any event that disrupts its normal condition of functionality (Hosseini, Barker, & Ramirez-Marquez, 2016). While security planning and the protection of key corporate or public assets is certainly important, it would also behoove the small business leader to develop appropriate security plans to ensure their organization is as resilient as possible, which can include workplace violence prevention programs. Leaders of small businesses can integrate business continuity and risk management to improve organizational resilience (Sahebjamnia, Torabi, & Mansouri, 2015). Aligned with this study and interpreted through the general systems theory, organizational resilience can also include ensuring protocols are in place that prepare the employee (the part) so that they can handle crises in a way that enables them to quickly return to their most optimal state of productivity, which can enable the company (the system) to swiftly return to its most optimal state of profitability.

Supervisors play a crucial role in moderating workplace violence and creating a positive environment within the workplace (Yang & Caughlin, 2017). The supervisor being the perpetrator can compound and magnify the negative impact of incivility between members of a team (Sharifirad, 2016). Given the detrimental impact to team performance and the potential for the rise of counterproductive work behaviors related to stress from ill-mannered individuals, organizational processes should exist to correctly address incivility on the part of a supervisor (Sharifirad, 2016). Sharifirad (2016) also noted how some supervisors or managers can solely be in their positions based on

seniority or longevity. Analyzing these findings through the general systems theory identifies similarities in the outcomes of Senge (1990), which described an aspect of systems thinking as team learning.

Leaders who ignore ethics and morality, particularly concerning deviant behaviors within the workplace, create an environment ripe with emotional stress (Lindebaum, Geddes, & Gabriel, 2016). Rose, Shuck, Twyford, and Bergman (2015) conducted an integrative literature review project to explore and highlight dysfunctional leadership through the examination of corresponding behaviors and their respective short and long-term effects to the working environment. Rose et al., (2015) found that the systematic categorization of behaviors exhibited by dysfunctional leaders, as well as how employees exhibit inappropriate behaviors that could potentially lead to inefficiency or violence within the workplace when forced to cope with a supervisor displaying dysfunctional mannerisms. Evidence from Rose et al. (2015) potentially relates to this study's conceptual framework, in that the deviant behaviors exhibited by the leader negatively affect the self-esteem of employees, who are also individually systems. Another substantial finding from Rose et al. (2015) for leaders of small businesses related to the negative impact to both the personal and professional livelihood of employees who work under the defeating guidance of a supervisor who exhibits irrational behaviors and other negative demeanors. Results from Rose et al. (2015) showed that the psychological climate of an organization could have a considerable impact on mission accomplishment.

The many different types of conflict; typically commencing with an argument or disagreement, can often be the impetus for bullying. Baillien et al. (2015) hypothesized

that there was an indirect relationship between task conflicts and bullying through relational conflicts. Baillien et al. (2015) examined how work-related disputes introduce conflict into what should be professional relationships. Baillien et al. (2015) showed that task conflicts were related to incidents of bullying in the workplace as hypothesized. Indications were that this negative affect on work relationships held true for both the victim and the perpetrator of bullying. The results are applicable for business leaders, as they can monitor both vertical and horizontal relationships for strife. When supervisors are involved and supportive, the employee's perception of a positive work-home culture and their engagement on the job increases, while turnover decreases (Straub, Vinkenburg, van Kleef, & Hofmans, 2018).

An individual's perception of self, or how a person perceives another, is an important aspect of psychology, and most psychologists agree that personality is a system (Mayer, 2015). It might then be possible to align this reality with general systems theory thinking; even the employee is a system, and an employee who must confront or is exposed to violence will not be able to do their part to maximize the efficiency of the whole (the system or company), as they themselves are unable to operate effectively. Mayer (2015) presented a holistic vision of personality through the general systems theory framework, positing that people who can understand one another better, and those who can more readily recognize personality clues, can better resolve problems as they arise.

Transformational Leadership and Workplace Violence

Workplace harassment and other forms of misbehavior, to include grievous or even deadly acts of violence, is an issue that has the potential to affect almost any organization. Astrauskaite, Notelaers, Medisauskaite, and Kern (2015) examined a supervisor's transformational leadership style is related negatively to perceived work harassment and there are three core job characteristics. Astrauskaite et al. (2015) determined that autonomy, task identity, and feedback impact the relationship between transformational leadership and work harassment. Results from Astrauskaite et al. (2015) showed a negative relationship between transformational leadership and work harassment. One aspect of transformational leadership that might explain these findings is that employees generally view leaders who exemplify these stylistic characteristics as trustworthy, as they tend to support ethical ways to resolve conflict and reduce workplace stress. These findings are significant in their potential to guide programmatic leadership policies within organizations. Astrauskaite et al. (2015) supported transformational leadership as the right style to teach. Results from Bass et al. (2016) also showed transformational leadership to be an effective buffer against workplace violence. The findings from Bass et al. (2016) demonstrated the damaging consequences of a working environment tainted by violence, as well as how the transformational leadership style may counter these negative effects.

The culture of an organization can be a determining factor in the level of employee stress. Chronic stress has a negative effect on human health and productivity (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2016). Dissatisfaction from stress and other factors may

potentially lead to the exhibition of counterproductive behaviors within the workplace, to include violence. The leader and their leadership style can promote organizational learning by building group consensus through the furtherance of an organizational culture that promotes innovation (Vargas, 2015). Transformational leaders motivate and inspire employees through their idealized influence and positive emotional considerations of others (Lenka, Gupta, & Sahoo, 2016). Mehta and Maheshwari (2016) found a high correlation between the transformational style of leadership and effective change management that minimizes stress and promotes a positive working environment.

The societal culture, or even the culture of the given organization, may dictate what victims perceive to be workplace harassment. The business environment in certain countries may be stereotypically more rigid than others, with Japan being a country where the corporate salaryman receives abusive organizational pressures (Alexander, 2015). Characterized by collectivism, Japanese society expects the individual to harmonize with the group (Kumar, Boesso, & Yao, 2017). Tsuno and Kawakami (2015) found that a laissez-faire leadership approach was associated positively with new exposure to workplace bullying. A potential reason for this positive relationship is that workers may perceive the passivity of supervisors as indifference towards them. Dussault and Frenette (2015) confirmed the results of Tsuno and Kawakami (2015) by determining that the transformational leadership style has a negative relationship with workplace bullying, while a supervisor's laissez-faire type of leadership relates positively to intimidation within the working environment.

The organization's leader plays an important role in creating the workplace environment. Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, Shea, Walcott, and Ward (2016) found that leaders who (a) promote safety, (b) a calm work environment, (c) a sense of self-efficacy within employees, (d) connectedness, and (e) hope could improve the resilience of the workforce. Results from Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016) also showed that transformational leaders and their positive charisma or mannerisms could be an integral factor in better firm performance. The positive and thoughtful nature of a transformational leader may parallel one specific discipline within a learning organization as promulgated by Senge (1990). A transformational leader can set the vision of a positive working environment to possibly reduce negative inputs to their system or organization.

Transition

Section 1 provided an overview of the background of the problem, the problem and purpose statements, nature of the study, and research questions. Presented were how workplace violence prevention strategies can contribute to business practice and affect positive social change. A review of existing academic literature investigates the impact workplace violence has on business and profitability, how such behaviors affect the victim's health and society, organizational factors, and the role of leadership.

Section 2 reiterates the purpose of the study and outlines how I scholarly examined the problem, which principally compromises the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, participants, methodology, and research design. Also included is an evaluation of the reliability and validity of the data captured. Section 3 concludes the study with a discussion on how the results are applicable to professional business practice

and implications for social change. The study closes with recommendations for future action and further research and a reflective analysis.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies leaders of small businesses use to prevent workplace violence. The targeted population consisted of 3 leaders of small businesses from 3 different northern Virginia organizations in the government consulting industry who have successfully implemented workplace violence prevention programs. The implications for positive social change include benefits for residents through safer workplace environments that enable residents to increase their contributions to communal betterment.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher and primary instrument of data collection in this qualitative study was to recognize and mitigate inherent limitations and challenges to enhance the reliability and validity of the results. I collected data for this study through interviews with participants who met the relevant eligibility criteria. In qualitative studies, the researcher must be aware of his or her integral role and personal perspective, while also being able self-question and self-understand (Yates & Leggett, 2016). As the researcher and principal instrument for data collection, I needed to stay neutral to minimize any biases. I avoided viewing data from a personal perspective by being cognizant of my own predispositions and using an emotionally intelligent approach to data interpretation. Researchers can reduce bias by recognizing any personal predispositions and being reflexive throughout the research process (Probst, 2015). Researchers who focus on assimilating emotional intelligence into every aspect of the

research process for increased empathy can improve their understanding with greater flexibility when responding to participants and can obtain more intuitive results through self-regulation and self-awareness (Collins & Cooper, 2014). Researchers must remain aware of their own emotional response to sensitive topics and be cognizant of any personal reaction(s) to reduce impartiality (Ashton, 2014). Adhering to these principles enabled me to further the ethical reliability and validity of the results of my study.

Interviews are one of the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). The use of semistructured interviews by researchers improves versatility and flexibility within the interview process (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). The interview protocol for this study consisted of semistructured questions to facilitate a more natural flow to the conversation. Researchers can maintain some control over the interview process while providing the participant a level of flexibility by using a semistructured interview protocol and open-ended questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

In my role as the researcher, I strove to avoid any issues related to confidentiality, informed consent, or other ethical dilemmas that could have compromised the research outcomes (see Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). I did not have a relationship with any of the participants, nor was I familiar professionally with the topic or research area. The *Belmont Report* (1979), which outlines ethical principles and guidelines to protect human research subjects, promotes three fundamental principles: respect for persons through informed consent and anonymity; beneficence, or minimizing risk for subjects; and justice, which refers to treating each subject fairly and equally

(National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I mitigated any relational risks with study participants or other ethical concerns by adhering to guidelines promulgated in the *Belmont Report*. I advised all participants orally and in the written consent form of any potential risks associated with this study and informed them that their participation was voluntary. I provided all participants an informed consent form prior to commencing the interview. The process of informed consent protects human subjects by enhancing their understanding of the research process to ensure that their participation is voluntary (Kue, Szalacha, Happ, Crisp, & Menon, 2017).

Participants

Establishing proper eligibility criteria can help researchers collect relevant data and ensure the transferability of any results (Elo et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). Eligibility criteria for study participants was being a northern Virginia small business leader in the government consulting industry with successful workplace violence prevention strategies. The U.S. Small Business Association (2018) generally defines small businesses as companies with fewer than 500 employees. I only selected participants who met this criterion to assure alignment with the study's research question.

My strategies for gaining access to the participants started with contacting relevant Northern Virginia Chambers of Commerce--specifically within Arlington, Fairfax, and Loudon counties. I worked with the various Chambers of Commerce, who are familiar with the area's business community, to help me identify prospective participants that met the study's eligibility criteria. I also explored the Small Business

Administration's Dynamic Small Business Search (DSBS) database, which lists contact information for contractors in various categories of small businesses, for example, veteran- or women-owned, available for upcoming government contracts (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018). I initiated contact with the leaders of potential companies via e-mail and phone to determine their interest by explaining the purpose of the study. I forwarded via e-mail a formal letter of invitation to interested participants (see Appendix A). The formal letter of invitation also included a consent form for their review and signature requesting that they return the form to me via e-mail prior to my commencing the interview process. Continued contact via phone and e-mail helped to build a constructive working relationship with study participants, which is an imperative factor when conducting qualitative research (Beskow, Check, & Ammarell, 2014). I sought to create a positive connection with all participants by being polite and remaining open and responsive to any subsequent communication. Researchers can ensure the well-being of the participants and build rapport by remaining unbiased and emotionally intelligent in all interactions (Collins & Cooper, 2014). By using a respectful approach, being empathetic, and remaining nonjudgmental, researchers can build trust with the participants and improve collected interview data (Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2015).

Research Method and Design

Research Method

I collected data from the participants by asking open-ended questions in semistructured interviews. Qualitative interviews in case studies are a scholastically valid

method of data collection, and the semistructured interview format affords the researcher flexibility and more freedom during the actual interview process (Dikko, 2016). There are three research methods available to scholars: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method (Yin, 2014). The qualitative method facilitates the scholarly study of observable or describable data through an interpretive and nonnumerical approach (Barnham, 2015). The quantitative methodology is ideal for the statistical examination of data collected through closed-ended questions (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The mixed-methods approach combines the different aspects of both the qualitative and quantitative methodologies in one study (Landrum & Garza, 2015). The qualitative methodology is best suited for the collection of data via questions in interview settings (Upjohn, Attwood, Lerotholi, Pfeiffer, & Verheyen, 2013). Scholars use the qualitative method of research to answer how or why questions about describable data through an interpretive and non-numerical approach (Barnham, 2015). As I used interviews and asked *how* or *why* questions of participants as the primary data collection method, the qualitative methodology was most appropriate for this study.

Research Design

A case study is the scholastic investigation of *how* or *why* questions regarding a contemporary, real-life phenomenon (Yin, 2014). I used a multiple case study design for this study. Use of a multiple case design facilitates the comparison of elicited responses to posed interview questions (Yin, 2014). Other qualitative research designs available to applied business researchers include ethnographic and phenomenological. The ethnographic design often entails the interaction by a researcher with study participants in

social settings to observe group or societal behaviors to better understand cultural nuances (Percy et al., 2015). Researchers use the phenomenological design to study the lived experiences of a person or persons, for example, how they feel, or what they understand now reflecting on a previous event (Wilson, 2015). My focus in this study was on exploring strategies used by leaders of small businesses to successfully implement workplace violence prevention programs. As such, neither observed group behaviors of the participants nor personal reflections of past events were desired outcomes, making a case study the most appropriate design for this study.

A researcher can achieve data saturation when there is enough data so that further questions posed to participants do not elicit any new material, any new themes, or any prospective coding (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Weller et al., 2018). One way in which I ensured data saturation was through the collection of a rich quantity of information in the interview process from participants until I gained no new information from their responses to my questions. If responses to additional questions are redundant and produce no new concepts, ideas, or themes, a researcher will know they have achieved data saturation (Weller et al., 2018). Achieving data saturation may happen faster when researchers obtain data from a smaller population (Mandal, 2018). As the design of this study was smaller in nature, I was able to achieve data saturation sooner as compared to a larger study. Data saturation can also depend upon the context of the interview, cultural nuances, and societal issues (Kasim & Al-Gahuri, 2015). I recognized that I was an outsider in the government consulting field. I furthered the effort to achieve data saturation by enhancing trustworthiness throughout the actual interview process by

striving to remain fair and managing my own subjectivity through reflexivity (Gabriel, 2015).

Population and Sampling

Researchers should use an appropriate strategy to select a sampling size adequate to meet the given objectives of the multiple case study design, which generally ought to be two or more participants (Guetterman, 2015). Researchers use purposeful sampling in qualitative research to select participants who can provide a rich quantity of information to ensure data saturation (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). Using the purposeful sampling method, I targeted a specific population with the applicable expertise and knowledge to answer the research questions. I purposefully selected the leaders of three small businesses from within the government consulting industry in northern Virginia who had successful workplace violence prevention strategies as the population for this study.

Interviews were the primary method of data collection, with a review of applicable company policies or procedures related to workplace violence prevention being secondary. I requested participants provide their respective workplace violence prevention related policies or procedures to me via email in advance of the interviews. Multiple data sets can improve the richness and quality of any outcomes and improve transferability. Collecting data from two or more sources can increase a researcher's understanding through comparison and contrast to improve data credibility (DeMassis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Building trust to further the transferability of credible data is an important consideration for qualitative researchers (Elo et al., 2014). Where researchers conduct interviews can influence the data collected (Ranney et al., 2015). Interviewees may feel more comfortable and further the likelihood of rich data collection if the researcher solicits their input on the interview location (Hoover & Morrow, 2015). I conducted the semistructured interviews using open-ended questions telephonically. Telephonic interviews are a valid data collection method that can give interviewees a higher level of control, which may improve the validity of the collected data (Oltmann, 2016).

Data Saturation

A researcher will achieve data saturation when they have obtained enough information so that further questions posed to participants do not elicit any new material, any new themes, or any prospective coding (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Weller et al., 2018). Data saturation is dependent upon the sample size, research methodology, and study design, and there is no one specific method for a researcher to ensure that they have achieved data saturation (Mandal, 2018). I used the semistructured interview format to ask specific questions of the three participants. Semistructured interviews are a common data collection method that can afford the researcher a level of structure for focused data collection, while also enabling some flexibility and a more natural flow to the interview conversation (Kallio et al., 2016). Given the design of this study, I was able to achieve data saturation sooner given the smaller number of participants and specific research question. One way that I ensured the collection of a rich quantity of data was to ask the participants for clarification in their responses. I also asked the participants to explain or

reiterate certain points. I knew that I had achieved data saturation when these follow-up questions and a review of any available company policies on workplace violence prevention produced no new material, themes, or ideas.

Ethical Research

I conducted this study with approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and in accordance with research guidelines promulgated in the *Belmont Report* (1979). I provided study participants with an informed consent form that they signed and returned to me via email to confirm agreement. Informed consent is a fundamental part ethical research (Sanjari et al., 2014). All study participants partook voluntarily, and I offered no incentives for their involvement. While incentives can increase response rates in qualitative research, there can also be negative aspects to monetarily encouraging participation (Kelly, Margolis, McCormack, LeBaron, & Chowdhury, 2017). Study participants should know that they may withdraw from a study at any time (Grady, 2015). The informed consent form contained language advising participants of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time, which they can do by informing me verbally, via email, or telephonically. I reiterated verbally the points contained within the informed consent form to the participants prior to commencing their respective interviews. To ensure confidentiality of the participants, I removed their names, company information, and any other sort of identifiable data from the future published study. I used an alphanumeric coding system for each participant in place of their individual and company names. For example, the first participant was P1; their company was C1; and I continued this process for all participants. Researchers should

limit access and protect the participants' information to ensure confidentiality by securely storing any data in a safe location (Gentles et al., 2015; Roberts & Allen, 2015; Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). I am storing the data securely via encrypted USB thumb drive for five years to protect the confidentiality of the participants. I am keeping the USB inside a locked safe in my home and will shred any papers and permanently delete the data from the USB thumb drive after five years in accordance with Walden University guidelines and per agreement documents in the appendices and Table of Contents. The IRB approval number for this study was 3-27-19-0482095.

Data Collection Instruments

When a researcher conducts research using study-specific questions, the researcher becomes the primary data collection instrument (Van den Berg & Struwig, 2017). The aim of qualitative research is to obtain answers to *how* or *why* questions (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The use of semistructured interviews allows the researcher to retain a level of control by limiting the dialogue to a set of questions, while also providing some flexibility to the participant in their responses (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014). I was the primary instrument for data collection and collected data from the three study participants by asking open-ended questions in semistructured interviews. My second source of data collection was the review of company policies or procedures related to workplace violence prevention, which I requested the participants provide to me via email prior to conducting their respective interviews. Interviews with participants were telephonic. I collected data in accordance with the interview protocol and questions form (see Appendix B).

Transcript review, where the participant confirms the correctness of the recorded interview transcripts, is a way to enhance reliability and validity in the data collection process (Thomas, 2016). I recorded audio during the interviews using the voice memo application on an iPhone and then transcribed the data. I emailed the transcripts for participants to review within one week of the interview date and requested that they confirm accuracy via email back to me within one week of receipt per the interview protocol and questions form (see Appendix B). During the interviews, I paraphrased or summarized the interviewee's replies to affirm the accuracy and completeness of my interpretation of their response. In addition, I utilized a hand-written reflective journal in each interview. Reflective journals can help researchers capture unique observed nuances that might not be plain in the other types of data (Majid, 2016).

Data Collection Technique

The principal technique used to collect data for this study was semistructured interviews using open-ended questions conducted telephonically. I collaborated with the participants to choose the time of the interviews. Interviewees may feel more comfortable and further the likelihood of rich data collection if the researcher affords them choice in the process (Hoover & Morrow, 2015). The collection of data was in accordance with the interview protocol and questions form (see Appendix B). Researchers must abide by ethical principles when conducting research, and they can do this in part by practicing integrity and being reflexive with respect to their own personal biases (Reid, Brown, Smith, Cope, & Jamieson, 2018). I adhered to ethical research protocols by remaining truthful in all dealings with study participants. In addition, I provided study participants

an informed consent form that they signed and returned to me via email to confirm agreement. I reiterated verbally the terms of the informed consent form immediately prior to commencing the interviews to again confirm consent and further ethical data collection.

The semistructured interview format creates a flexible environment for a natural flow to the conversation, while also allowing for standardization of data collection when exploring an experienced phenomenon (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). One advantage of the use of the semistructured interview format by researchers also include improved data analysis through the increased ability to compare participant responses to ordered questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Semistructured interviews using an electronic medium, such as Skype, can increase the comfort and safety of interviewees (Oates, 2015). A positive of semistructured interviews conducted telephonically is that such a format can offer interviewees more privacy that may enable them to feel unjudged and more able to express themselves fully (Ward, Gott, & Hoare, 2015). One disadvantage of the semistructured interview format is that the participant(s) must respond to a set of generally open-ended questions, which can limit the scope and reduce a researcher's ability to achieve data saturation. Other disadvantages of the semistructured interview format are that it is not suitable for long-term research, or if a researcher was utilizing the narrative or phenomenological approach and seeking more descriptive responses to how an interviewee felt about a lived experience (Percy et al., 2015).

Researchers can enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process through transcript review, which is having participants confirm the accuracy of recorded

transcripts after an interview (Thomas, 2016). I recorded audio during the interviews using the voice memo application on an iPhone and then transcribed the data. I emailed the transcripts to the respective participant to review and confirm accuracy. I asked that they return to me via email within one week of receipt per the interview protocol and questions form (Appendix B).

Data Organization Techniques

Novice researchers can improve the organization of their interviews by using an outline format that guides the interview process (Ranney et al., 2015). I followed the interview protocol and questions form (see Appendix B). The principal way I organized collected data was via an electronic filing system to categorize every interaction with each participant. Semistructured interviews using open-ended questions conducted telephonically were the primary data collection method. My first data organization action following the interviews was to transcribe the audio recordings from the interviews using Microsoft Word. Researchers should transcribe data from recordings and code collected information in a structured manner to protect the identity of participants (Ranney et al., 2015). To ensure confidentiality of the participants, I removed their names, company information, and any other identifiable data from the published study. I used codes assigned to each participant in place of their individual and company names. I also populated each respective interviewee's file through the collection of data recorded in a hand-written reflective journal. Reflective journals can help researchers capture unique observed nuances that might not be plain in the other types of data (Majid, 2016).

Researchers should limit access and protect participant information to ensure confidentiality by securely storing any data in a safe location (Gentles, et al., 2015; Roberts & Allen, 2015; Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). I am storing the data securely via encrypted USB thumb drive for five years to protect the confidentiality of the participants. I am keeping the USB inside a locked safe in my home and will shred any papers and permanently delete the data from the USB thumb drive after five years in accordance with Walden University guidelines.

Data Analysis

Researchers perform data analysis to codify, evaluate, and deduce information gathered in the data collection process (Yin, 2014). Researchers who utilize triangulation and explain how they will perform triangulation can further academic rigor and demonstrate to the study's readers that the technique utilized aligns with the study's research design (Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). I used methodological triangulation for this study. Methodological triangulation requires the researcher to collect and compare two or more sources of data, which improves trustworthiness and enables the researcher to achieve greater validity (Baillie, 2015; Morse, 2015). Semistructured interviews using open-ended questions conducted telephonically served as the primary source of data. The collection of data was in accordance with the interview protocol and questions form (see Appendix B). The three interviews and review of applicable company policies or procedures yielded multiple sets of data, which provided an opportunity for comparison. Scholars use the multiple case

approach to facilitate the exploration of two or more cases that may be literal replications to best answer the research question (Yin, 2014).

Coding Process

I followed a five-phased qualitative analysis cycle, which included (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and concluding (Yin, 2015). Following the collection of data through the interview process, the first step in the sequential process for data analysis was to code the data. Coding is a method to increase data organization so that any thematic results are clearer to the researcher (Noble & Smith, 2015). Researchers can code data through organization and sorting to categorize related clusters, which a researcher can pre-determine in a question-based qualitative study, while other codes can develop from the data (Stuckey, 2015). NVivo software scans inputted documentation, creating a clustered visualization of any commonly identified words, which can assist in the development of applicable themes (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). While not a perfect visual solution, NVivo software can improve data management and enhance qualitative analysis (Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, & de Eyto, 2018). Employing NVivo software functionalities, I utilized a displayed Word Cloud and assessed data through Word Frequency Queries to visualize any key terms, themes, or patterns from the transcribed interview data. I then conducted content analysis of the presented data to draw realistic conclusions. Content analysis is an effective method to analyze qualitative data (Bengtsson, 2016; Graneheim, Lindgren, & Lundman, 2017). Saldaña (2015) posited that qualitative researchers can use identified repetitive patterns to confirm descriptions and human affairs from data. I

assigned unique alphanumeric codes to the response to each interview question by each interviewee to facilitate the organization of collected data. For example, I recorded participant one's response to the first interview question as P1; R1.

Thematic Analysis

Extracting highlights from data sets to advance clear concepts from which to examine information and identify patterns is a key component of thematic analysis (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The thematic, step-by-step analysis of qualitative data can help researchers to focus on data related to the specific research question, while also facilitating the identification of data set clusters that can begin to show patterns (Percy et al., 2015). Saldaña (2015) noted the applicability of thematic analysis for qualitative, interview-based research, while highlighting the functionality of NVivo software to summarize ideas from the statements of study participants. I sought to identify data patterns using NVivo software to analyze and evaluate any developed themes. Themes developed from commonly used words in the interviews or similar responses by the respective participant to this study's interview questions. The conceptual framework chosen within a study is the principal instrument that connects context of practice and theory and aligns all key components of the research process (Antonenko, 2014). I correlated key themes with the literature and conceptual framework by focusing on the thematic analysis process. I minimized any biases during the analysis process by utilizing reflective and interpretive thinking when evaluating themes. Researchers should remain detached and objective as the primary data collection instrument to improve the reliability and validity of any results (Clark & Vealé, 2018).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability can refer to the consistency and adherence to procedures utilized by the researcher during the analytical process (Noble & Smith, 2015). Researchers can demonstrate that the data collected is dependable and transferable when there is such a high level of consistency at every stage of the research process that another researcher could replicate the results by following the same procedures (Morse, 2015). I addressed data dependability by transcript review following the interviews with participants. Having a participant confirm the accuracy of transcripts developed from recordings after an interview, otherwise known as transcript review, is another way to enhance reliability and validity in the data collection process (Thomas, 2016). Noble and Smith (2015) also posited that researchers can enhance reliability and validity in the data collection process by using transcript review.

Validity

Validity refers to the appropriateness of the overall research process, means of data collection, and the accuracy of the data collected (Leung, 2015). The principal technique used to collect data for this study was semistructured interviews using open-ended questions conducted telephonically. I recorded the interview with each participant, transcribed the content word-for-word, and then emailed the respective transcription to each participant for their review. I ensured the credibility of the data collected through the transcript review process. When the researcher has the interviewee confirm the

accuracy and completeness of interview transcripts, they can ensure the credibility and validity of the data (Elo et al., 2014).

Results from qualitative inquiry can be more trustworthy when a researcher ensures findings are applicable in other contexts or to other individuals (Morse, 2015). Transferability of data is a factor of rigor and validity that includes the extent that the results of a study are applicable to other contexts or settings (Maher, et al., 2018). A researcher can demonstrate the data collected is transferable when there is such a high level of consistency at every stage of the research process that another researcher could replicate the results by following the same procedures (Morse, 2015). I ensured any findings from this study were transferable by adhering to the strict data collection process as described in the included interview protocol and questions (Appendix B).

The level of confirmability of data relates to the extent by which others can corroborate or authenticate any results (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Another way to describe confirmability is the level of trustworthiness of any results, which specifically relates to how dependable and well saturated the data are during the collection and analysis process (Elo et al., 2014). A researcher will achieve data saturation when they have obtained enough information so that further questions posed to participants do not elicit any new material, any new themes, or any prospective coding (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Weller et al., 2018). Data saturation is dependent upon the sample size, research methodology, and study design, and there is no one specific method for a researcher to ensure they have achieved data saturation (Mandal, 2018). One way I ensured the collection of rich data was to ask the participants for clarification in their responses. I also

asked the participants to explain or reiterate certain points. I knew that I achieved data saturation when no new material, themes, or ideas emerged.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I discussed the purpose of this study, which was to explore strategies some leaders of small businesses used to prevent workplace violence. I did this by explaining my role as the researcher, ethical considerations, study participants, study methodology, and research design. I used telephonic semistructured interviews and reviewed applicable company documents to collect data in this qualitative multiple case study, which made me the primary data collection instrument. I used the purposeful sampling method to select the leaders of three small businesses who met the participant criteria for this study from within the government consulting industry in northern Virginia as the population. I conducted this study with approval from IRB and in accordance with research guidelines promulgated in the *Belmont Report* (1979). The final aspect of Section 2 was an evaluation of the reliability and validity of the data captured. Section 3 contains a presentation of the findings. Section 3 concludes the study with a discussion on how and why the results are applicable to professional business practice and implications for social change. The study closes with recommendations for future action and research, as well as a reflective analysis.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some leaders of small businesses used to prevent workplace violence. Data were from telephone interviews with the leaders of three different northern Virginia businesses in the government consulting industry who have successfully implemented workplace violence prevention strategies. Management policies containing language related to workplace violence prevention were an additional source of evidence.

I followed the interview protocol and asked the questions shown in Appendix B. I audio recorded the interviews and then transcribed the data. To ensure accuracy, I utilized transcript review with the participants. I used methodological triangulation to compare the multiple sources of evidence. To organize the collected data, I assigned unique alphanumeric codes to all interview responses. I then followed Yin's (2015) five-phase qualitative analysis cycle to compile, disassemble, reassemble, interpret, and analyze the collected data. Thematic analysis visualized through NVivo software enabled me to identify patterns and to develop themes.

Findings from the research indicated that a leader of a small businesses should promote a supportive working environment and institute affirmative workplace violence prevention policies. The three interviewees made statements indicating their recognition of the potential negative ramifications of workplace violence. The findings provided insight into strategies these leaders of small businesses used to prevent workplace violence.

Presentation of the Findings

I conducted a qualitative multiple case study to address the research question, What workplace violence prevention strategies do some leaders of small businesses use? Participants consisted of 3 leaders of small businesses in the government consulting industry in northern Virgninia with successful workplace violence prevention strategies. Four major themes emerged from the research: (a) defined rules and repercussions, (b) effective workplace violence prevention policies and procedures, (c) training staff, (d) and leadership's role in creating a positive working environment.

Theme 1: Defined Rules and Repercussions

The first strategy P1 employed in preventing workplace violence was to "define the problem and document applicable rules and repercussions." P1, P2, and P3 all stated that their companies had zero tolerance when it came to incidents of violence in the workplace. P1's policy on workplace violence included disciplinary language, which ranged from oral and written reprimands to suspension without pay. The terms of P1's policy also stated "or immediate termination" (from employment) depending upon the seriousness of the offense committed. P3's company policies also included a graded sequence of disciplinary action that varied by the gravity of the act committed. P2 did not have specific documentation on types of offenses and associated consequences, but P2 stated, "I would make a decision on firing or suspension depending upon the situation."

P3 spoke of concern regarding the risk posed by workplace violence or other issues that "might cause damage to the company." P3 noted how government contracts were the "sole source of revenue" for P3's company and that losing a contract for any

reason "could shut the company down." P3 said that active shooter incidents "seemed to be increasing" and commented that such an incident could close the company for a "long period of time or even indefinitely." When discussing the importance of codifying the problem of workplace violence and why the language in P2's company policies noted zero tolerance regarding any inappropriate workplace behaviors, P2 noted how "clear and concise policies" not only protect the employee but provide "legal coverage" for the company should an offender or victim pursue litigation against the company. P2 stated that the "potentially high cost of legal action could harm the company fiscally."

Theme 2: Effective Workplace Violence Prevention Policies and Procedures

Each of the participants and their respective businesses had specific policies regarding workplace violence and its prevention. P3 opined that the "backbone of any successful strategy" on preventing workplace violence starts with effective policies tailored to the business environment. P1 did not mention experiencing any barriers when implementing policies related to the prevention of workplace violence. P1 stated that every new employee must "sign and agree to follow all company policies as part of the onboarding process." P1 indicated that there was no exception to this rule and that "no to-be-hired employee had ever refused to sign." P2 and P3 also had a similar approach; both indicated that their implementation of a formal workplace violence prevention program started with having newly hired employees review and sign applicable policies upon the start of employment.

Only P3's organizational policies contained language regarding controlling access to the company office. P3 said limiting the ability of those who do not belong to gain

access to the company site or different parts of their corporate building was an "effective buffer to potential incidents of violence." P3 also noted that access control applied to preventing dismissed employees or those who had quit from reentering the facility. P3 stated that controlling access could limit an employee upset over firing from attempting to reenter the facility in an "active shooter type scenario." P3's emphasis on access control may relate to the type of consulting work conducted at the company.

P1 and P3 each employed background checks of various levels for newly hired employees. However, the type and degree varied between these two organizations. P2 did not mention background checks during the interview, nor did P2's company policies reference investigating employees as part of the hiring process. P1's policies indicated P1's company would conduct a credit check of the new employee. P3's policies stated that newly hired employees would be "subject to checks that included criminal history, credit, and drug use." P1 noted concern regarding discrimination and privacy protections but also expressed desire to "expand the types of checks conducted soon." P3 indicated belief that a more comprehensive approach reviewing multiple aspects of a prospective employee's background and history could "possibly limit future potential problems."

Theme 3: Training Staff

Further thematic analysis revealed training of employees to be a common aspect of each participant's workplace violence prevention strategies. Their inclusion of such training is uncommon, according to some researchers. Leaders of small businesses may lack the knowledge and resources to effectively train staff on the prevention of violence in the workplace (Keller & Cunningham, 2016). P2 overcame internal resource

limitations by requiring newly hired employees to complete free online training through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, while P1 and P3 utilized internal HR staff and organic company materials as part of their workplace violence prevention training programs. Each participant stressed the importance of ongoing training to promote awareness of policies and procedures related to workplace violence. P2's strategy for periodic training included quarterly reminders that P2 stated were "simple email messages designed to remind staff of their responsibilities" related to "treating others fairly reporting incidents in a timely manner." P1 required all staff to complete routine refresher training on a variety of topics at certain points during the year, to include workplace violence prevention, which HR tracked. P3 extended these strategies by also requiring the HR section to periodically conduct guided brown bag sessions over the lunch hour that P3 stated were "designed to allow employees to speak openly about interesting or sensitive topics." Table 1 illustrates the number of references made by participants to the different policies, procedures, and training protocols in their workplace violence prevention programs.

Table 1

Participants' References to Effective Policies, Procedures, and Training in Their Workplace Violence Prevention Programs

Theme	*n*	%
Access control	2	6.45%
Background checks	3	9.68%
Discipline	5	16.13%
Training	6	19.35%
Zero-tolerance	7	22.58%
Definitions	8	25.81%

Note. Percentage values total 100.

Theme 4: Leadership's Role in Creating a Positive Working Environment

Organizational leaders can effect progressive change to reduce employee stress and promote a positive working environment (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2016). P1 noted the importance of leadership "supporting employees" through what P1 termed an "atmosphere of respect." P1 spoke of concern for employees' well-being and emotional health, noting how it is "hard to measure the impact of stress," but that when there is "bullying or violence in the workplace, this creates a tense environment." Stress can negatively affect employee performance and is a likely cause of deviant workplace behaviors (Magnavita, 2016; Rees et al., 2015). P2 indicated that leaders should "empower both employees and managers through informational awareness and an organizational climate where every individual has a voice." P3 offered that the leader

"sets the tone and the buck stops with me" when it comes to ensuring a supportive organizational environment, which P3 believed to be the key factor in reducing the likelihood of violence in the workplace.

Subtheme 1: Transformational leadership. Each participant mentioned certain aspects of the ways in which they lead or manage that indicated they embodied some of the elements of the transformational style of leadership. Transformational leaders exemplify characteristics of trust and further ethical methods to resolve conflict in the workplace, which can reduce incidents of violence (Astrauskaite et al., 2015). P1 stated, "I want to inspire employees to achieve success." P2 noted, "I am continuously searching for ways to keep employees motivated." These sentiments were supported by P3, who expressed that leaders should "set the vision for the organization and model the positive behaviors they wished to see in employees." Table 2 illustrates the number of references made by participants to leaders' fostering of a positive work environment for their employees.

Table 2

Participants' References to Leaders' Role in Creating a Positive Work Environment

Theme	*n*	%
Empower	3	10.0%
Respect	4	13.34%
Climate	5	16.66%
Atmosphere	5	16.66%
Support	6	20.00%
Leadership	7	23.34%

Note. Percentage values total 100.

Pertinency to Current Literature

A review of findings from existing literature published in 2019 tied the results of this study to current scholarly guidance on effective business practices related to workplace violence prevention. Selvarajan, Singh, Cloninger, and Misra (2019) noted the high cost to business associated with the negative outcomes of counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWBs). Employees experiencing CWBs produces negative conflict in their home life; some employees may then purposely choose to act in malicious ways towards the organization out of contempt (Selvarajan et al., 2019). Sarwar, Bashir, and Karim Khan (2019) also found that workplace bullying created family incivility. The results of Marin et al. (2019) tied to the findings of this study related to the detrimental effects of stress from workplace violence on employee health. Marin et al. (2019) found

that post-traumatic stress disorder is a frequent result of exposure to violence in the workplace. Bortolon, Lopes, Capdevielle, Macioce, and Raffard (2019) confirmed that employees who suffer from abuse in the workplace can develop psychological disorders, to include depression and paranoia. The findings from this study related to the negative cost to business and damaging effects of workplace violence to employee health remain consistent with existing literature.

Additional findings from literature on workplace violence published in 2019 regarding effective business practices related to an organization and its leadership also tied to the results of this study. In my research, I discovered that a leader can improve organizational resilience by empowering supervisors and improving the working environment through team learning and ethical practices. Organizational justice and a positive work environment limit the negative effects workplace violence has on the health of employees (Hsu, Liu, & Tsaur, 2019). To address workplace violence, Toon, Weaver, Frasier, and Brown (2019) determined that organizational leadership should evaluate resources, develop policies, and train employees. My research revealed consistent findings related to preventing workplace violence by increasing awareness and organizational learning through ongoing training.

My research disclosed a potential link between progressive leadership and a supportive working environment. A review of findings from literature published since the writing of my proposal revealed consistent results. Kuenzi, Brown, Mayer, and Priesemuth (2019) determined that ethical leadership moderated deviance in the workplace. Nielsen, Indregard, Krane, and Knardahl (2019) found that bullying and

harassment can lead to increased rates of absenteeism, while determining that supportive managers and leaders empowered by organizations to intervene can reduce negative outcomes, such as absenteeism, of deviant workplace behaviors. Dhiman, Modi, and Kumar (2019) highlighted how organizations that embrace diversity and enforce policies related to equal treatment on the job can reduce stereotypes, prejudices, and harassment - all of which can lead to violence. D'Cruz, Mulder, Noronha, Beerepoot, and Magala (2019) not only determined that explicit and enforced governmental guidelines can mitigate workplace violence, but that organizational commitment to instituting appropriate policies is just as critical. The results of these studies align with my findings and may give credence to how individuals who exhibit the transformational style of leadership may be able to reduce negative inputs to their organizational system.

Relevancy to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this study was the general systems theory. A key aspect of this theory of management is that an organization is a system composed of interconnected parts, and if one of these linked parts is not functioning optimally, the organization cannot achieve maximum efficiency (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The developed themes of my research are relevant to this study's conceptual framework. Leaders of small businesses who identify and define prohibited behaviors, explicitly forbid certain actions, codify procedures through enforceable policies, and require all employees to complete periodic workplace violence prevention training can improve the functionality of their system's parts.

The first theme regarding the strategy for a small business leader to define the problem of workplace violence and document applicable rules and repercussions relates to the general systems theory. From a general systems perspective, a learning organization is partly one that implements systems thinking (Senge, 1990). Organizational learning includes the identification and recognition of threats to the system, as well as acting to improve processes and overcome deficiencies (Edwards, 2016). The strategic thinking by the participants in this study to define the problem of workplace violence and detail repercussions for not abiding by company policies is an example of systems thinking.

The second theme, which related to the strategy of having effective workplace violence prevention policies and procedures, also aligns with the general systems theory. From the lens of the general systems theory, small inputs or changes to the system can produce significant outcomes over time, whereas disorder results when chaotic and non-linear forces act upon a system (Mingers, 2017; Teece, 2018). The concept of synergy is a foundation of systems science (Caws, 2015). Establishing effective policies and procedures for how a small business leader manages a potentially disruptive input to their business (workplace violence) may improve the synergy of the organization.

A small business leader ensuring their staff receive appropriate training, which was the third theme, links directly to the learning organization aspect of the general systems theory. A principal facet of the general systems theory is the concept of a learning organization (Senge, 1990). Learning organizations can mediate relationships between parts of the system (Pokharel & Ok Choi, 2015). A system cannot achieve peak

efficiency without all its parts performing at their optimum (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Learning organizations that are adaptive are also more resilient (Coetzee et al., 2016). The strategies used by this study's participants to train staff on ways to prevent workplace violence likely enhanced organizational learning, improved relationships between employees, and increased the resilience of their businesses.

The final major theme, which focused on leadership's role in creating a positive work environment, is also relevant to the general systems theory. An organization's leader who promotes a calm working environment through their positive charisma can improve the resilience of the workforce and overall performance of the business (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016). From the general systems theory lens of interdependence of parts, when individuals (employees) can better relate to one another, they are able to resolve problems more readily (Mayer, 2015). Workplace violence is a threat to a small business (Wall et al., 2017). The risk posed by such an incident has the potential to lead to the eventual closure of the business. A small business leader who focuses on business continuity and risk management can increase organizational resilience, which is a key aspect of the general systems theory (Coetzee et al., 2016; Sahebjamnia et al., 2015).

During my research, I also noted indications of a link between leadership style and an organization's culture, which might be relevant to this study's conceptual framework as well. Transformational leaders inspire employees and affect positive change through their encouraging attitude, acts, and words, which can increase the financial performance of a business by reducing instances of deviant workplace behaviors (Dussault & Frenette, 2015; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2016; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016).

A supportive, respectful organizational culture that empowers employees, managers, and leaders creates an atmosphere of trust where each part (employee, manager, or leader) can contribute at their maximum to the overall betterment of the whole (small business).

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of this study are applicable to leaders of small businesses who seek strategies to implement effective workplace violence prevention strategies. Most companies in the United States are small businesses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The results of this study may then inform professional practice for many leaders of small businesses. Bullying and other forms of workplace violence negatively affects employees and costs organizations up to $100,000 per employee victim per year (Branch & Murray, 2015). The U.S. Small Business Administration (2016) reported that approximately half of all new businesses last for five years and only one-third survive after 10 years. A business environment unsettled by workplace violence does not just affect the victim but also disrupts coworkers and their ability to function at their optimal (Rockett et al., 2017). Deviant behavior on the job also negatively affects employee performance and is costly to business (Branch & Murray, 2015). Leaders of small businesses who want to increase the likelihood of their organization's long-term survival could adhere to the findings of this study and act to implement effective workplace violence prevention strategies.

The findings of this study may advance current scholarly knowledge regarding how a small business leader can effectively implement workplace violence prevention strategies. Qureshi et al. (2015) recommended that organizations institute clear policies that define a problem and provide guidelines. Leaders of small businesses can create

guidelines for employees by developing human resource (HR) policies related to anti-violence, anti-bullying, or other inappropriate workplace behaviors (Fox & Cowan, 2015; Salin et al., 2018; Wall et al., 2017). HR policies that clearly define and prohibit unseemly behaviors in the working environment can reduce the occurrence of workplace violence and the associated negative outcomes of such incidents (Salin et al., 2018; Wall et al., 2017). P3's focus on instituting appropriate access control measures may also guide the strategic thinking of leaders of small businesses in determining who can enter what spaces of their business and when.

Leaders of small businesses could also use the findings of this study to improve their leadership practices. Organizational leaders have an ability to develop activities and establish practices to improve employees' cordiality of interactions and quality of life (Wong & Kelloway, 2016). Data show the transformational leadership style positively affects employees and an organization's culture of learning (Xie, 2019). Leaders of small businesses can learn to modify their behaviors to embody the characteristics of a transformational leader. Organizational learning, which is a component of the general systems theory, includes identifying and recognizing threats and implementing improvements to processes (Edwards, 2016). Through ongoing training programs to increase awareness and keep employees informed, leaders of small businesses can increase organizational learning and potentially mitigate the likelihood of a workplace violence incident.

Implications for Social Change

Implications for positive social change from this study include an improvement in employee health through the creation of a safer and a more supportive working environment, which could potentially better the individual's home atmosphere and the broader community. Harassment, bullying, and violence produce depression and other mental health issues in employees (Verkuil et al., 2015). Experiencing such negative treatment on the job reduces morale, increases absenteeism rates, and possibly leads to suicide (Ammerman et. al, 2015; Howard et al., 2015). Negative outcomes from exposure to a toxic working environment can increase stress and mental health issues in affected employees for five years following an event (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2014). Leaders of small businesses who are involved and supportive can improve employees' perception of a positive work-life balance, which can increase engagement and reduce turnover (Straub et al., 2018). The findings from this study suggest that effective workplace violence prevention policies promulgated by a small business leader who ensures a supportive working environment will impart positive social change through increased employment opportunities that enable residents to increase their contributions to communal betterment.

Recommendations for Action

Bullying, harassment, violence, and other inappropriate behaviors in the workplace harm employees and the organization (Wall et al., 2017; Wong & Kelloway, 2016). However, there is little enforcement or statutory mandates by the U.S. Government or U.S. states requiring small businesses to have a standing workplace

violence prevention program (Haynes, 2013). Leaders of small businesses could benefit from the results of this study by addressing workplace violence through the implementation of well-defined policies and procedures. One way to disseminate the results of this study is for the creation of an online repository of applicable information and standardized workplace violence prevention training programs, policies, and procedures that leaders of small businesses could access. Leaders of small businesses could then potentially access the site and associated material for free to use when developing a workplace violence prevention program tailored to their organization.

I recommend leaders of small businesses focus their strategy to prevent workplace violence by first developing and implementing appropriate policies and procedures. Leaders of small businesses should strive to institute enforceable guidelines to which they can hold employees accountable. Establishing clear rules with defined repercussions can help to inform employees as to what behaviors are permissible, or not, so that there is no question of awareness. Well-defined rules may also enhance a small business leader's ability to take disciplinary action, as it likely would not be possible for an employee to question a punitive decision.

Leaders of small businesses should then improve awareness of not just the policies but their organization's values – especially when it comes to inappropriate behavior. Leaders of small businesses can build workplace violence awareness by instituting an ongoing training program to continuously improve organizational learning. Senge (1990) built upon the general systems theory, defining the *learning organization* as one with five disciplines as (a) personal mastery, (b) mental models, (c) shared vision, (d)

team learning, and (e) systems thinking. P2's utilization of available online training through official sites may prove to be useful guidance for other leaders of small businesses. There likely are other free online training tools and materials that leaders of small businesses leaders could repurpose and tailor to meet their specific needs.

I further recommend leaders of small businesses focus on promoting a supportive and positive organizational culture. A supportive working culture improves the well-being and morale of employees, while increasing their engagement (Hart & Heybrock, 2017). A positive organizational culture can also decrease turnover, while improving an employee's perception of their work-home balance (Straub et al., 2018). An additional recommendation would be for leaders of small businesses to endeavor to adopt aspects of the transformational style of leadership based on the positive findings from my research. Leaders of small businesses should consider their leadership style and possibly seek to exhibit some of the characteristics of the transformational style of leadership. Transformational leaders improve the working environment, self-efficacy of employees, and performance of the business by promoting an atmosphere of positivity and safety through their affirmative charisma and mannerisms (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016).

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research related to improving business practices associated with workplace violence prevention include exploring if U.S. states with OSHA-approved workplace safety and health programs is a determinate of small businesses having effective workplace violence prevention policies and procedures. Only 22 U.S. states have OSHA-approved workplace safety and health programs that cover

private sector and state and local government workers, and there is no specific OSHA standard for workplace violence (U.S. Occupational Health Administration, 2015). Future research could use the quantitative method to determine the relationship between small business adherence to state or OSHA guidelines and incidents of workplace violence.

Revealed within the findings of this study was the use of background checks by two of the participating organizations. During my research, I found no studies on the relationship between a small business having a background investigation program and incidents of violence in the workplace. A recommendation for future research would be studying the frequency and effectiveness of small businesses utilizing some level of investigation into the backgrounds of potential new employees. I further recommend using the findings of this study to examine the frequency and percentages of small businesses with workplace violence policies or procedures based on geographical area.

Limitations of this study included the potential misrepresentation by participants of the efficacy of their workplace violence prevention programs, the focus on organizations solely in northern Virginia, and the emphasis only on small businesses. Future research could use the quantitative method to determine if having an effective workplace violence prevention program and a positive working environment have a positive impact on incidents compared to organizations without a program. Another way to address the limitations of this study in future research would be to expand the geographical region studied to other areas or to explore workplace violence prevention strategies in medium or large businesses.

Reflections

There are many motives for why individuals seek to earn a doctoral degree, to include personal and professional reasons. As I reflect on my experiences within Walden's DBA Doctoral Study process, I first give thanks to God for enabling me to see this journey through to its end. I am proud to have come this far in my educational journey. While I never thought obtaining a DBA would be easy, I also could not have imagined in the beginning the time and sacrifice it would take for me to achieve this objective. It was hard for me to appreciate initially the dedication, motivation, and self-discipline required to complete a doctoral degree online. But even knowing what I know now, I would not change the decision to pursue a DBA with Walden.

Upon commencing my study, I assumed that violence in the workplace likely was not positive for small businesses, but I did not realize the negative extent until completing my research. I hope that I had a positive effect on the participants, and that they continue to champion constructive workplace violence prevention strategies throughout their careers. The doctoral study process was an invaluable learning experience, and I am better for having gone through it. By God's grace and despite many challenges, I have achieved a goal I set for myself almost five years ago, which is a gratifying feeling.

Conclusion

Deviant behavior and violence in the workplace create a toxic working environment, harming the mental health of employees and producing negative financial outcomes for businesses (Nielsen et al., 2017; Verkuil et al., 2015; Wall et al., 2017). Revealed through the data collected in this study were themes regarding the importance

of a small business having and adhering to effective workplace violence prevention policies and procedures that define the problem and detail repercussions, the need for employee training, and the crucial role leadership has in creating a positive working environment. The findings of this study aligned directly with the conceptual framework, the general systems theory, in that linked parts comprise an organization; their inherent interconnectivity requires each to function optimally to achieve a positive output. The findings indicated that any form of workplace violence constitutes a negative input to the system. The data made it clear that employees suffer and costs rise when organizations do not prevent workplace violence. From a small business perspective, the long-term financial viability of the company, as well as the mental welfare of its employees and their ability to be positive members of society, are in doubt should the organization's leader fail to implement effective workplace violence strategies.

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Appendix A: Invitation E-mail to Participants

Email Invitation to Participate in Workplace Violence Prevention Research

Dear XXXXXXXX,

My name is Anthony Fleming and I am a student at Walden University conducting doctoral dissertation research to complete a Doctor of Business Administration degree. Thank you for expressing your interest in this study. As discussed, I am conducting this study to explore strategies leaders of small businesses use to prevent workplace violence. Your participation in this study will help to obtain insights into strategies to prevent workplace violence in small businesses.

I would like to formally invite you to participate in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you will not be compensated in any way. Please ensure your read the attached consent form and reply as requested if you are willing to participate.

I look forward to answering any questions or concerns that you may, and am open to discussing further details of my research. You can contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or via email at XXXXXXXX@waldenu.edu.

Thank you,

Anthony Fleming
Doctor of Business Administration Candidate
Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Questions

Participant Code: _____ Date of Interview: _____

Interview Format: Skype _____ Telephone _____

If other, describe: _____

Interview Introduction:

I would like to start by saying thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study. As you know, my name is Anthony Fleming and I am a student at Walden University conducting doctoral dissertation research to complete a Doctor of Business Administration degree. I am conducting this study to explore strategies leaders of small businesses use to prevent workplace violence. The potential positive outcomes of this study include the creation of a safer work environment with less occupational injuries where employees are healthier at home and in society through a reduction of job-related stress and injuries, as well as increased profitability through the creation of a better working environment.

Prior to commencing, I just wanted to confirm that you agree to the provided Informed Consent form and remain willing for me to interview you. Please also confirm that you consent to my audial recording of this interview. Do you have any questions before we start?

Setting the Interview Stage:

Before beginning the interview, I will ask that please tell me a little more about yourself by:

1. Please tell me about your professional background.
2. Please advise on how long you have been in your company.
3. Please let me know how long you have been in your current position.
4. Please express to me some of your interests outside of work.

Thank you for sharing your personal information.

I will then prepare to record audio and organize myself to begin taking notes.

Interview Question Portion:

Let us begin the interview portion. I will introduce the participant with their assigned code and note the date, time, and format of the interview.

I will then ask the pre-determined, open-ended research questions below, as well as appropriate follow-up or other exploratory questions to elicit an expanded response from the interviewee to increase the richness of the data collected. I will paraphrase or summarize the interviewee's replies to affirm the accuracy and completeness of my interpretation of their response.

1. What workplace violence prevention strategies do you employ?
2. What barriers did you experience when implementing your workplace violence prevention strategies?
3. How did you overcome any barriers to implementing your workplace violence strategies?
4. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of workplace violence prevention strategies?
5. What is leadership's role in implementing workplace violence prevention strategies?
6. What additional information would you like to share on this topic?

Interview Conclusion:

This is the end of my research questions. I will then thank the interviewee for their time and participation. I will stop audio recording at this point.

I will then describe to the interviewee how I will transcribe the interview based on the audio recording and any notes taken. I will reconfirm the willingness of the interviewee to permit me to email them the transcribed interview transcript for them to conduct a transcript review for accuracy to ensure validity of the data collected.

When I have consent, I will once again thank the interviewee for their participation. I will note my contact information and that I am available should they have any questions. I will let them know that I will contact them via email with the transcripts for their review within one week. I will request that they please confirm the accuracy of the transcripts by responding back to me via email within one week.

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