

2019

## The Role of Strategic Leadership in the Profitability of Large Organizations

Bernard Yaw Owusu-Boadi  
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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Bernard Yaw Owusu-Boadi

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2019

Abstract

The Role of Strategic Leadership in the Profitability of Large Organizations

by

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MBA, University of Maryland University College, 2013

Msc, University of East London, 2009

BA (Hons), University of East London, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2019

## Abstract

Large organizations in the United States endure a 30%-50% failure to achieve profitability. Senior executives' lack of strategies to ensure profitability diminish performance and economic growth. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies senior executives use to ensure profitability in large tax preparation organizations. The conceptual framework for this study was the resource-based view theory. The sample consisted of 2 board members and 3 senior leaders from a large tax preparation organization located in the United States. Study site participants had at least 15 years of experience in enhancing organizational profitability and 5 years of experience using strategies to ensure profitability in tax preparation organizations. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and organizational documents. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis. Five themes emerged, including effective planning, risk management, the use of unique resources, development of training and skill for strategic leaders, and organizational performance. Findings derived from this study may contribute to social change as senior executives use efficient strategies to increase economic viability and employment opportunities through improved business growth while ensuring profitability.

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## Dedication

By thine unerring spirit led; we shall not in the desert stray; we shall not full direction need; nor miss our providential way; as far from danger, as far from fear; while love, almighty love is near (Methodist Hymn Book 608 v. 2). I dedicate this dissertation to my children Giovanni and Jarvaris Owusu-Boadi. The joy we share each day gives me the desire to go this mile to make sure you have something to look forward to when you grow older. I will never forget the questions you come to my office to ask about my school when you get home from school. To my parents (Mr. & Rev. Mrs. Owusu-Boadi), who stood by me and supported both in difficult and good times and never left my side. To my amazing and wonderful friend Sheba Frempong, I cannot thank you enough for all the selfless things you did for me throughout this journey. I cannot thank you enough for all you did for me, and I pray God to reward you abundantly. To my sisters Bernice and Paulina and my brother Prince, thank you for your words of encouragement and support at all times when I needed you.

To my first mentor in life, the late Very Rev. Daniel Ogbamey Tetteh, your guidance and discipline have brought me thus far. Sadly, you are not here to witness what you did for me, but I will forever be grateful for all you did for me; keep resting peacefully in the bosom of our Lord and master, Jesus Christ. Finally, to my wife (Maj. Eunice Owusu-Boadi) for your unwavering support and giving me the peace and time to complete this doctorate. You supported me in diverse ways, and I am grateful to you for making sure our sons were taken care of throughout this period; God bless you abundantly.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The importance of strategic leadership and role in the profitability of large organizations is not new (Alsamydai & Alensour, 2016). Oftentimes, senior executives of organizations encounter undue pressure from stakeholders to maximize their wealth through profitability without consideration of critical success factors such as strategic leadership (Davis, 2016). Consideration and focus on strategic leadership may contribute to effective decision making, a framework for organizational learning which may positively affect the performance of the organization. After examining the impact of competitive strategies on innovation, Fathali (2016) discovered a positive and significant influence on corporate innovation. Alsamydai and Alensour (2016) asserted that strategic leadership creates innovation and competitive advantage for organizations. Successful organizations use frameworks such as to show how strategic leaders enhance profitability through innovation and creating a competitive advantage.

The resource-based view theory is used to analyze the financial performance of organizations based on market competition (Patidar, Gupta, Azbik, Weech-Maldonado, & Finan, 2016). According to the RBV, organizations may achieve higher performance and sustainability by applying their high-classed resources and capabilities such as strategic leadership. According to Child (1972), leaders who possess power within the organization at any given time make strategic decisions. Additionally, senior executives continue to make decisions such as capital allocation, performance management, and much more. The focus of leaders regarding what information needs

more attention and how they interpret the information is what drives organizational performance and culture (Gupta, Chen, & Gupta, 2016).

### **Background of the Problem**

The performance of an organization can effectively be affected by a small group of people at the top (Banzato & Sierra, 2016). Strategic leadership refers to the ability of leaders to predict and coordinate the activities of the organization to successfully achieve the goals and objectives (Banzato & Sierra, 2016). Strategic leadership goes beyond deciding and providing directions; it is about alleviating mediocrity through mental toughness, the desire to pursue greatness, and creating a culture of achievement (Fibuch & Arif, 2016). According to Fibuch and Ahmed (2016), successful leaders sometimes derail from the strategies set by their organizations, which are a result of the complex set of internal and external circumstances. The lack of adequate training and orientation of senior executives results in low profitability of organizations (Bansal & Desjardine, 2014).

The conceptual framework chosen for this study is the RBV theory of strategic management. RBV is a strategic management approach to achieving competitive advantage and elevate profitability (Barney, 1991). Additionally, Barney asserted that organizations must seek from the inside of their companies to identify determinants of competitive advantage rather than examining the external competitive environment. Strategic leadership in this study is about the creation of value through competitive advantage and performance enhancement. Strategic leadership does not only improve the profitability of organizations but further contributes to the development of the economy

through job creation and the stability of the society within which it operates (Oladele & Akeke, 2016). The findings of this qualitative single case study may be used to identify failures in organizations to improve profitability, increase employment creation, and positively contribute to social change and economic development (Oladele & Akeke, 2016).

### **Problem Statement**

Many leaders in tax preparation organizations fail to achieve profitability targets (Davis, 2016). A recent survey conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership revealed that 30-50% of leaders in the tax preparation industry fail to achieve profitability targets (Sejeli & Mansor, 2015). The general business problem is some senior executives in large organizations assume the role of strategic leadership with no exposure and inadequate training to execute the role resulting in over \$100 billion loss to organizations in 2016 (Seijts, 2016). The specific business problem is that some senior executives in tax preparation organizations lack the required strategies to ensure profitability.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies senior executives in tax preparation organizations use to ensure profitability. The participants selected for this study were five senior executives including directors, vice presidents, a senior vice president, and members of the board from a large tax preparation organization in the United States who implemented strategic leadership strategies leading to profitability.

Results from this study may help senior executives to adequately prepare for strategic leadership roles by making strategic decisions that will improve profitability and create jobs to improve the standard of living of the local individuals in their communities. Stakeholders and academia may benefit from an improved understanding of the contribution strategic leadership have on organizational profitability. The implications for social change may include job creation and improvement in the standard of living for local individuals and their communities.

### **Nature of the Study**

Qualitative research is a qualitative phenomenon which includes subjective assessment opinions, feelings, experiences, and behaviors (Santha, Sudheer, Saxena, & Tiwari, 2015). Koch, Niesz, and McCarthy (2014) posited that a qualitative methodology was appropriate for exploring the how, what, and why of the research question. I explored the how, what, and why of my research question with a qualitative methodology. According to Santa et al. (2015), the purpose of qualitative research is to design a valid theory that guides the development of knowledge within a discipline. A qualitative research design is appropriate for my doctoral study because, according to Santha et al. (2015), some research problems may be studied using a qualitative research design in cases where the topic is broad and poorly understood with limited literature to review. Qualitative research may be useful for bridging the gap between scientific evidence and practice (Delost & Nadder, 2014). In quantitative studies, researchers seek to determine if a relationship and a testable hypothesis exist between two or more variables (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). Thus, a quantitative method was not appropriate for

my study because I did not analyze theories, numerical data, or hypotheses to answer the questions.

Researchers use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to understand a phenomenon in mixed methods. My study involved the collection of qualitative data using semistructured interview and open-ended questions to understand the role of strategic leadership in large organizations. Therefore, I did not use a mixed methods approach because the study does not involve quantitative data (see Fàbregues & Molina-azorín, 2017 ).

Qualitative research designs include phenomenology, ethnography, narrative research, single case study, and multiple case study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used the case study approach because it enabled me to explore a bounded system from multiple perspectives (Kruth, 2014; Yin, 2014). The single case study was ideal for my study because it involves a single organization whereas a multiple case study will involve more than one organization. The bounded system refers to a single case that can be differentiated easily from other cases (Kruth, 2014). I focused on a single case study, bounded, and differentiated from other events. The case study approach revealed a detailed understanding of the role of strategic leadership and the impact on the profitability of large organizations. I did not select other qualitative methods such as narrative, phenomenology, or ethnographic designs because they were not suitable for my detailed exploratory study. The narrative study highlights the stories of individuals (Qiao, 2015). The objective of my study is not to highlight the story of the participants; therefore, the narrative approach was not suitable. Phenomenology is appropriate when



the researcher seeks to explore the lived experiences of participants (Yin, 2014). The purpose of my study was to explore strategies senior executives use to enhance profitability; thus, the phenomenology approach was not appropriate. Ethnography design is suitable for the study of the cultures of individuals or a group of people over an identified period (Bamkin, Maynard, & Goulding, 2016). My study was not about the culture of the participants; therefore, it would not be appropriate.

### **Research Question and Interview Questions**

#### **Research Question**

What strategies do senior executives in tax preparation organizations use to ensure profitability?

#### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies do you use to ensure profitability in your organization?
2. What unique strategies provide your senior executives with a competitive advantage to ensure profitability within your organization?
3. What are the strategic leadership skills required to enhance profitability in your organization?
4. What are some of the successful new strategies undertaken in your organization within the last 5 years that impact profitability?
5. What training do you provide your senior executives that afford them with strategies to enhance profitability?
6. What criteria do you use to select senior executives with strategies to ensure profitability?

7. What strategies do your senior executives use to manage risk while ensuring profitability?
8. What is the effectiveness of strategic leadership initiatives regarding enhancing profitability in your organization?
9. What role does the board of directors play in the organization's strategic planning to enhance profitability?
10. What other strategies do your senior executives use to elevate performance and ensure profitability?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Conceptual framework refers to a visual or written output which demonstrates essential features of a topic (Rogers, 2016). In this study, I used the RBV theory to focus on and link the study together. The RBV is a strategic management approach to achieving competitive advantage and elevating profitability which will help in the determination on ways to identify strategies for senior executives when making decisions regarding how to enhance the profitability of their organization (Barney, 2001). Furthermore, Barney (2001) asserted that organizations must examine the infrastructure of the organization to identify determinants of competitive advantage rather than investigating the competitive environment. Birger (1995) postulated the RBV theory in 1984 and asserted that the theory could contribute to organizational competitiveness and profitability significantly. RBV consists of three tenets. First, Barney (2001) posited the distinctive characteristics of an organization to determine the competitive advantage, which is difficult to replicate. Second, there is a positive correlation between the performance of an organization and

competitive advantage (citation). Thus, when organizations possess a competitive advantage, they tend to improve profitability (Barney, 2001). Senior leaders in tax preparation organizations can use the RBV to optimize the utilization of resources and develop a superior business strategy (Leonidou, Christodulides, Kyrgidou, & Palihawadan, 2017). My goal was to focus on value creation through competitive advantage and improved performance. Additionally, the RBV conceptual framework formed the foundation of my study and helped to understand the role of strategic leadership in the profitability of large organizations. I used the RBV to explore how senior executives and members of the board in the tax preparation industry use unique resources in their organization to achieve a competitive advantage and ensure profitability.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Competitive advantage:* Competitive advantage refers to the act of seeking a favorable position to have a sustainable profit over competitors in the industry (Sigalas, 2015).

*Entrepreneurial capability:* The entrepreneurial capability is the proclivity to execute an obligation or action that champions the awareness of organizational operations (Sedlan-König, 2016).

*Organizational profitability:* Organizational profitability is the ability to generate more revenue than the cost of operating the organization's operations (Appelbaum, Calcagno, Magarelli, & Saliba, 2016).

*Organizational competitiveness:* Organizational competitiveness refers to a strategic plan for achieving organizational goals through tactics and actions that provide organizations a competitive advantage over their competitors (Ugoani, 2016).

*Organizational sustainability:* Organizational sustainability refers to the maxim of increasing environmental, social and economic systems, as well as performance within which the organization operates (Tam & Gray, 2016).

*Strategic leadership:* Strategic leadership refers to top management teams' potential to create and express a strategic vision and mission for their organization while motivating and persuading their teams to acquire that vision and create sustainable competitiveness (Peterlin, Pearse, & Dimovski, 2015).

*The resource-based view:* The resource-based view is a model that helps leaders analyze and interpret the internal resources of organizations and create a competitive advantage to increase the profitability of organizations (Barney, 2001).

*Top management teams:* Top management teams refers to individuals or a group of individuals responsible for creating, directing, and controlling the affairs of organizations and formulate strategic decisions to ensure sustainable growth for organizations (Mousa, Kim, & Rutherford, 2016).

*Transformational leadership:* Transformational leadership is when the leader motivates and present a clear organizational vision to their followers while inspiring them to transcend their self-interests to achieve organizational goals (Salem, 2015).

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

An assumption in research refers to a realistic expectation believed to be true by a researcher in which the researcher cannot support by tangible evidence (Yin, 2014). Limitations are factors or influences a researcher have no control over and may affect the validity of a study (Staller, 2014). Delimitations refer to the preferences a researcher makes for a study under their control to minimize the scope of the study (Dutra, Ripoll-Feliu, Fillol, Ensslin, & Ensslin, 2015).

#### **Assumptions**

Yin (2014) posited that assumptions are substances that a scientist cannot bolster with a substantial confirmation. Assumptions incorporated into this study enhanced a better understanding of the phenomenon. Researchers must consolidate certain assumptions before they can play out the subjective examination (Yin, 2014). The first assumption was that participants would respond transparently and sincerely. Second, the reserved interviewed participants would be employed holding their present positions until the date of the interview and answer authentically. Third, I assumed that information gathered amid the interviews would speak to a reasonable perspective of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon of the role of strategic leadership in the profitability of large organizations. Fourth, strategic leadership practices identified would underpin what exists within large organizations, and the perspectives of the five interviewees would be an extensive portrayal of the perspectives of large organizations.

**Limitations**

Steller (2014) asserted that impediments are factors outside the control of a researcher that may obstruct the legitimacy of a study. Many components may have limited the accomplishment of the expected consequences of the qualitative case study. First, I gathered information only from five senior executives and board members who engaged in strategic leadership activities and subsequently relied on reactions from the five respondents. Second, the sample size may not have been a presentable portrayal of senior executives. Third, some participants may have refused to answer some questions because they may not be in the role of a strategic leader. Fourth, in the improbable occasion that participants neglect to show up for the interview, I may not have possessed the capacity to locate their identical substitution promptly. Fifth, the insufficient time allotted for interviews and limited geographical scope may have affected the nature of responses by the participants. Sixth, the experience of interviewees selected with the media may likewise have influenced the nature of responses. Seventh, the members may have given misdirecting responses that may endanger the legitimacy and dependability of the study. Eighth, responses to the in-depth interviews conducted may have lacked substance and failed to address the role of strategic leadership in the profitability of large organizations. Ninth, a researcher cannot generalize the findings of the study to a larger populace.

**Delimitation**

Dutra et al. (2015) asserted that delimitations refer to the preferences a researcher makes for a study under their control to minimize the scope of the study.

To delimit the impacts of five members' absence of experience and susceptibility to strategic leadership, the organization of the participants included people with more than 15 years of involvement in strategic leadership and organizational profitability and 10 years in the top management team. Dutra et al. asserted that delimitations affect the external legitimacy of the study. Five senior executives and board members with senior executive and strategic leadership experience improved the legitimacy, reliability, and credibility of the study. The geographical scope chosen for this study may have been a delimitation because the findings of the study may not have applied to other geographic regions.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Value to Business**

Large organizations fail because of senior executives' lack of strategic leadership skills and tactics to enhance profitability and sustainability (Cândido & Santos, 2015). According to Boshkov and Drakulevski (2017), Brower and Rowe (2017), and Hebbar and Matthew (2017), senior executives who use research conducted on business and strategic leadership, experience growth and enhance the profitability of their organizations. Leaders who develop effective and fitting strategies in their organizations procure positive outcomes in profitability performance, and engagement of their employees (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2016).

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

Top management teams should determine how constrained strategic leadership procedures can obstruct organizational profitability and how competent strategic

leadership can impel organizational profitability. Common themes that emanate from the span of the study may enable present and future strategic leaders to build, develop, and operate profitable organizations. Furthermore, the board of directors of organizations will benefit from the results of the study because they will understand the desirable skills of top management teams, especially, the chief executive officer (CEO) to elevate organizational profitability through competition and sustainability. Essentially, top management teams must possess the capability to ascertain the ability of and cognitive frames of the administration of the organization (Tucker & Schaltegger, 2016).

### **Implications for Social Change**

Results from this study may create jobs to improve the standard of living of the local individuals in their communities through organizational profitability. Stakeholders and academia may benefit from an improved understanding of the contribution strategic leadership have on organizational profitability. The creation of jobs will enhance transformative and cultural changes. A progressive and efficient financial related framework is fundamental to help support higher budgetary reserve funds, extend financial intermediation, and in the long-term, create dynamic local capital, and budgetary venture activities (Mitchell, Madill, & Chreim, 2015).

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

The objective of the qualitative study is to examine the role of strategic leadership in the profitability of large organizations. The central research question was as follows: What strategies do senior executives use to ensure the profitability of their organizations? The question is relevant to the study because strategic leadership enhances organizational



profitability which results in sustainable growth. I conducted a thorough analysis of academic literature to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon of profitability in large organizations and to determine the strategies senior executives need to ensure profitability. The information in this section includes a thorough review of the current and seminal peer-reviewed literature that pertains to the research topic. The focus of the review of the academic literature is on strategic leadership in the business organization and the performance of organizations consisting of the impact of a CEO and executive aptitude on organizational performance. The research is extended to include organizational competitiveness, characteristics of effective leadership, organizational change, and transformation. I also reviewed the literature on the role of strategic leadership regarding technology and innovation, change management and agents, transformational and global leadership including sustainability of organizations.

### **Overview**

During the period of writing this study, I researched peer-reviewed journal articles from different databases published after 2014 but not limited to, ScienceDirect, ABI/INFORM, Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, and Sage Journals. I used the Walden University online library and obtained course books from the Walden University bookshop. The keywords used in search of the database include a combination of words and phrases such as *leadership*, *competitiveness*, *strategic*, *profitability*, and *RBV theory* to uncover relevant journal articles for further investigation and interpretation. The scholarly peer-reviewed journals consisted of *Journal of Management*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *Journal of Business Research*, *International Journal of*

*Productivity and Performance Management, Journal of Social Marketing, Journal of leadership & Organization Studies, Strategy and Leadership, Strategic Direction, and Journal of Business Research.* Out of the 184 journal articles, 98 are in the review of academic literature section, while 86 are in different areas of sections 1 and 2. Eighty-six percent, or 159, of the journal articles are less than 5 years from my anticipated date of graduation.

Additionally, 159 or 86% of the journal articles are from scholarly and peer-reviewed sources. Dutra et al. (2015) asserted that delimitations are the preferences a researcher makes for a study under their control to minimize the scope of the study. The results of this study may be generalizable to strategic leaders in a tax preparation industry located in the north-east part of the United States and have more than 10 ten years' experience of making strategic decisions.

### **Resource-Based View**

Barney (2001) asserted the RBV is an essential aspect of strategic leadership, organizational competitiveness, sustainability, and performance that helps senior executives to utilize internal resources efficiently. Birger (1995) coined the RBV theory in 1984 and argued that the theory could contribute to organizational competitiveness and profitability significantly. Competitive advantage refers to the attributes an organization possesses, which gives them an edge of providing value profitably than their competitors (Sigalas, 2015). Therefore, competitive advantage is the ability of an organization to create exceptional value for customers through cost leadership, differentiation, and focus (Porter, 1985 as cited in Sigalas, 2015).

The conceptual framework is a cogent component of research design that affords qualitative researchers a focal point to review the likely explanations of a business issue (citation). I used the RBV conceptual framework theory to characterize how strategic leaders in organizations control the use of accessible resources to accomplish and conserve profitability, sustainability, and competitiveness. The top management teams in organizations may optimize the use of resources and establish exceptional business strategies by using the RBV conceptual framework theory. The RBV conceptual framework theory consists of the following recommendations: Barney (2001) asserted that an organization's competitiveness stems from a plethora of exceptional, important, and unmatched resources. Second, there is a positive relationship between profitability and competitive advantage (citation). Third, Porter (1985) and Ansoff (1965) asserted that a competitive advantage occurs when organizations create exceptional value for their clients by offering lower prices than their competitors for the same benefits or providing exclusive benefits that equalize a higher price. Adaptation of strategic and executive leadership with the assimilation of the RBV theory may result in organizational profitability. The top management teams of organizations may use the RBV theory to establish how they utilize strategic leadership skills to enhance the profitability of their organizations (Hoermann, Hlavka, Schermann, & Kremer, 2015).

Strategic leadership skills may enable organizations to enhance profitability, sustainability, and develop a competitive advantage that comes from strategic, different, and organization-specific resources difficult to replicate (Meyer, Niemann, Mackenzie, & Lombaard, 2017). The exclusive resources characterize the performance of organizations

which have a significant impact on profitability, sustainability, and competitiveness. Barney (2001) argued that organizational-specific idiosyncrasies in the integration of scarce and specialized resources could create a sustainable competitive advantage by using the RBV conceptual framework theory. Barney and Wright (2001) posited a positive link between the resources of an organization and competitive success. Thus, the authors argued that the organization that possesses the most valuable and rare resources would gain a competitive advantage in the industry. The RBV conceptual framework shaped the premise of the study and integrated the role of strategic leadership in the profitability of large organizations.

#### **Porter's competitive strategy and the resource-based view framework**

Salavou (2015) asserted that strategy was thought of in two facets such as corporate and functional until 1980. Corporate strategy is concerned with long-term goals and tactics of achieving them (citation). The functional strategy is concerned with the short-term goals of each distinct business function such as sales and marketing and techniques for achieving them (citation). Porter's (year) competitive strategy is the divergent conceptual framework to the RBV because it focuses on how organizations position itself to gain a competitive advantage in the industry. Barney (2001) argued that competitiveness is the result of the exclusive resources and leadership capabilities of an organization that is difficult for competitors to replicate. The divergence between RBV and Porter's competitive strategy conceptual frameworks hinges on the measurement of organizational competitiveness between positioning in the industry and the organization-specific resources. Gibbons, Scott, and Mac Fhionnlaioich (2015) argued that both

frameworks are different but are significant in influencing the profitability of organizations. Porter's competitive strategy reveals how organizations position themselves in the industry whereas the RBV reveals how organizations achieve competitive advantage to enhance profitability.

Barney (2001) asserted that organizations gain a competitive advantage when they possess resources specific to them that competitors cannot imitate. According to Bangchokdee and Mia (2016), decisions management make and the conditions of the industry have no direct impact on the performance of the organization. Despite Bangchokdee and Mia's assertion, their argument is only true in the premise that industry does not differ from the organization when the performance measurement focus is about the organization and not the industry. The decision of top management teams to select Porter's competitive strategy of differentiation or cost leadership may affect organizational performance. Porter (year), however, contended elements such as strategy, organization, and industry are likely to influence the performance of an organization because they complement each other. Gould and Desjardins (2015) critiqued Porter for failing to highlight the important effect of industrial conditions on the performance of the organization. Add summary and synthesis to fully conclude the paragraph and connect back to your study.

Studies regarding the performance of organizations and sustainable competitive advantage emphasize strategy and conditions of the industry, while some researchers focus on the unique resources of organizations and their capabilities (Al Serhan, Julian, & Ahmed, 2015). The rise of the RBV approach in the 1990s resulted in a shift from

industry to organization-specific effects regarding sources of sustainable competitive (Al Serhan et al. 2015). Porter (1980) argued that organizations create a competitive advantage within particular industries when they allow the performance of activities specific to their unimitable resources outside their control. Additionally, the features of the industry in which the organization competes determines the performance of the organization. According to the RBV framework, the fundamental determinants of competitive advantage are on the resources of the organization (Barney, 2001). Despite the disparity of views between the RBV theory and Porter's competitive strategy, both agree the performance of organizations rely on the unique resources, capabilities, and conditions in the industry (Radut, 2015). Add summary and synthesis to fully conclude the section and connect back to your study.

### **Training of Strategic Leaders and Skills Development**

Andersen (2015) asserted that it is imperative to invest in leadership development because it is a process that provides organizations a competitive advantage to achieve organizational goals. Many organizations and researchers view leadership capability and intellectual ability as an inherent trait in which developing leadership competencies may have a narrow focus. However, leadership scholars such as Maslow and Fayol argued the effectiveness of experimental methods of learning in the development of leadership skills and capabilities to ensure profitability (Carroll, Levy & Richmond, 2008; Hollenbeck, McCall & Selzer, 2006). Peterlin (2016) posited that comprehensive leadership development models are necessary to sustain and improve leadership competencies that will enhance the profitability of organizations because leadership development is the least

developed area within the leadership structure concept. Add summary and synthesis to connect back to your study.

In the last 2 decades, strategic leaders have focused on optimizing the competitiveness of organizations, primarily maximizing the wealth of their shareholders (Parakhina, Godina, Boris, & Ushvitsky, 2017). However, Agyemang, Ansong, and Kyeraa (2016) argued that organizations have a broader responsibility in society than just focusing on shareholders. Strategic leaders make decisions which vary depending on the environment in which they operate (Peterlin, Pearse, & Dimocski, 2015). Peterlin et al. (2015) argued the need to move from individual leadership achievement to a collective leadership achievement. Thus, some may argue that when a CEO makes a strategic decision versus top management teams, strategic decisions reflect top management teams to a larger extent. Additionally, strategic decisions encounter criticisms and may not work because of the process that led to the decision or the decision itself because senior executives sometimes focus their decisions on personal interpretations, experiences, and preferences (Wulffers, Bussin, & Hewitt, 2016).

Norzailan, Othman, and Ishizaki (2016) argued that increasing leadership development may enhance the skills and capabilities of strategic leaders but needs to start by mastering personal leadership. Wong (2017) asserted by mastering personal leadership; top management teams can lead their organizations as the complexity level increases at each level. Additionally, top management teams need to explore the internal identity that will provide them with the drive to incorporate life experiences into a relevant situation. The ability to lead oneself and others to realization and credibility

requires a transformational journey (Keikha, Hoveida, & Nour, 2017). Tawadros (2015) stated that top management teams might use tutoring, rotation of jobs, training, and designing learning conditions to create key skills for strategic leaders. Learning is an important component of strategic leadership structure that should be a part of the culture of the organization. Strategic leaders demonstrate specific behaviors they incorporate into their actions when making decisions. The strategic actions and behaviors naturally become idiosyncratic through positive feedback given, practice, and reinforcement (Goldman & Scott, 2016). Top management teams are said to be strategic when team members understand the bigger picture, explain trends both within and outside the organization, think through the impact of their decisions on the organization, and continuously think strategically (Ekinci, 2015). Add summary to fully conclude the paragraph and connect back to your problem statement.

Strategic leaders need to make effective decisions in a timely competitive environment in response to the continuous changes in the environment to gain a time advantage. Top management teams perform a vital role in speeding the decision-making process because they control the entire decision-making process (Cervone, 2015). Strategic leaders influence decision-making through either team differentiating factors or team process factors. Recent research reveals that the quality of relational network between strategic leaders and interpersonal relationships depends on the effectiveness of strategic decision-making (Gu, Xie, & Wang, 2016). Effective strategic leaders inspire their followers and ensure courage, confidence, hope, reward, and recognition are paramount to expect high performance from their teams (Caro, 2016). Additionally,



strategic leaders motivate their followers by setting ambitious performance objectives, honesty, transparency, set challenging goals, while expressing care for their teams, which will likely lead to highly motivated teams and generate exceptional results for the organization (Mączyński, & Sułkowski, 2017). Add summary and synthesis to fully conclude the section and transition to the next.

### **Strategic Leadership in Organizations**

Strategic leaders control the organization by coordinating culture, systems, and structure of the organization to ensure they align with the overall strategy (Simon et al., 2015). Strategic leadership is the ability to express the strategic vision and purpose for the organization while motivating and influencing others to acquire that vision to achieve organizational goals (Marx, 2015). Additionally, strategic leadership involves the ability to use strategy in managing others within an organization. According to Hristov and Zehrer (2015), strategic leaders have a role or duty to perform in the success of the organization. Some of these roles are (a) the ability to determine strategic direction, (b) how to exploit and maintain unique competencies, (c) the ability to select and develop human capital, (d) building and sustaining organizational culture, (e) emphasize ethical practices; and (f) establish strategic controls. White and Ivanov (2017) asserted that strategic leadership focuses on top management teams. Short-term decision making has long-term viability of the organization. The short- and long-term shared values of an organization generate many outcomes because of the presence of a strategic leader (Witek-Crabb, 2016). Top management teams focus on capabilities, competencies, and unique resources of the organization to gain sustainable competitive advantage. Strategic

leaders believe organizations may fail if they focus on the short-term and ignore the core competencies in an ever-changing and turbulent competitive environment.

Organizations driven by strategic leadership tend to be successful at learning both at the individual and team level. Research reveals that both leadership and visionary parts of authority are fundamental to the achievement of the organization-wide learning activities. The approach of strategic leaders assists in spreading and reinforcing the current learning initiatives of the organization (Purushothaman, 2015). Top management teams' articulation of vision helps change the traditional learning structure of the organization. Strategic leaders in organizations need to learn new things and innovate while institutionalizing innovative ways of discovery learning (Awwad & Akroush, 2016). An organization led by a strategic leader supports learning, creation, and sharing of knowledge essential for the long-term viability of the organization. Strategic leaders influence the strategic flexibility and competitive advantage of the organization through key initiatives such as developing organization-specific competencies, effective use of modern technology, and building and maintaining organizational culture and structures (Vecchiato, 2015). Top management teams, alongside the CEO, should be exercising the strategic flexibility because they are the most notable members and key decision-makers of the organization (Srour, Baird, & Schoch, 2016). Research has revealed organizations that integrate and align vision, purpose, and objectives outperform their competitors in the industry because of their unique resources and strategic leadership which provides them with a competitive advantage and ensure profitability (Yousaf & Majid, 2016). The competitive advantage derived from strategic alignment is significant to the operational

effectiveness and financial performance of the organization. Making the change to build a strategic leadership culture begins with shifting organizational and individual mindsets to the deep realization that strategic leadership is a process rather than a position which requires a collective involvement from many and calls for a commitment to learning (Baird, & Schoch, & Srour, 2016). When teams and individuals enact strategic leadership, while it may not be easy, the result is sustainable competitive advantage for the organization.

Organizations cannot overlook the importance of strategic alignment when building a strong relationship between organizational networks and strategic performance. Gerow, Thatcher, and Grover (2015) argued that strategic alignment involves outlining business strategies to obtain high strategic performance and articulating for organizational competitiveness. Despite the predominance of research supporting the positive relationship between strategic alignment and performance, Gerow et al. did not elaborate on the influence of the external environment they purported was essential to strategic alignment (Tallon, 2007). Additionally, Chen (2010) argued that strategic alignment does not respond to changes in the environment because it creates rigidity that leads to torpidity, inflexibility, and competitive disadvantage.

The study of leadership has experienced both restoration and transformation since the 1970s. According to House (1977), the study of leadership reached an impasse in the late 1970s and early 1980s because researchers failed in the field of developing new theories, and scholars of leadership were challenged not on the future of leadership, rather if leadership matters. Despite the challenges in the study of leadership, some

researchers developed exceptional theories such as charismatic leadership by House (1977) and implicit theories of leadership by Lord (1977). There has been a plethora of literature on the study of leadership; however, there is no clear definition of what constitutes leadership. The study of strategic leadership started in the mid-1980s because of the transition from the study of leadership (House & Aditya, 1997). Many organizations are increasingly developing an interest in the study of leadership rather than management (Offord, Gill, & Kendal, 2016). Additionally, both practitioners and scholars agree on the need for strategic leadership in every organization because it contributes to the enhancement of sustainability, performance, and profitability (Appelbaum et al. 2016).

Yadav and Sagar (2015) asserted that organizations could assess and interpret the performance of strategic management through the measurement of strategic management components. Strategic management involves how leaders of organizations aim to fit into their external environments in their quest for survival, growth, and competitive advantage (Abreu Pederzini, 2016). The strategic management phenomenon is still in the early stages because it is not common among scholars and management (Bao, 2015). However, Witek-Crabb (2016) argued the usefulness and importance of the strategic management construct. Additionally, organizations achieve validity and credibility by using a plethora of measurement tools in measuring strategic management (Rajnoha & Lorincová, 2015).

Leadership is the bedrock of every organization because it provides leaders with strategic skills that enhance profitability (Muthia & Krishnan, 2015). The focus of the study was on the daily operations or large organizations and the relationship on how

leaders influence their followers to obtain the synergy that enhances profitability. Muthia and Krishnan (2015) posited leadership impacts the effective and normative commitment of followers through interpersonal influence, organizing, and processes.

Strategic delegation refers to the appointment of agents who carry out decision-making responsibilities with the autonomy of promoting the agenda of the organization which may lead to rewarding outcomes for the organization (Shin, Shin, Yoo, Song, & Kim (2015). Efficient delegation occurs when the interests of shareholders, top management teams, strategic leaders, operational managers, and employees are aligned. Strategic leaders in business organization employ delegation as part of situational leadership to develop their teams and execute operations beyond their control (Perna, 2016). Organizations can maintain their competitiveness if they can measure the impact delegation has on their profitability. Delegation mechanisms such as an effective system of governance, selection, and appointment of strategic leaders, employee motivation and empowerment influence the profitability of organizations (Jansen, van Lier, & van Witteloostuijn, 2015).

Additionally, when studying the constructs of leadership, a critical overlay exists between new and existing leadership theories (Offord et al., 2016). Initiating structure leadership theories applied at full-range may help to examine the impact and influence of the relationship amongst the leadership constructs. Failures on the part of leadership researchers is a result of their inability to conduct an in-depth review of literature of previous findings from other researchers because they conclude with results identical to what already exists (Borgmann, Rowold, & Bormann, 2016). Consideration and initiating

structure are dimensions of leadership behaviors in an organization. Initiating structure refers to the degree to which a leader defines and executes their role and motivate the people they lead to achieve organizational goals (Hussain & Hassan, 2016). Effective decision-making occurs when leaders and subordinates work together and perform an active role to manage the activities of the organization through planning, effective communication, information sharing, and innovation (Osunrinde & Tiamiyu, 2017). Consideration refers to the relationship leaders develop that constitute mutual trust, respecting the ideas of subordinates and demonstrate concern for the welfare (Hong, Cho, Froese, & Shin, 2016). An effective working environment is an indication of high consideration in which there is a compelling rapport between leaders and subordinates (Asencio, 2016).

According to traditional leadership researchers, leadership impacts and influences the conditions within which leaders operate significantly (Aleksic, 2016). Keikha, Hoveida, and Nour (2017) asserted leadership is the result which manifests in a context that affects organizational leadership. Strategic leaders obtain a valuable understanding of how the conditions and contextualization blend and rely on each other through leadership concepts. Executing leadership roles and practices within a knowledge-based organization setting such as medical is proving challenging because leaders find it difficult to transfer knowledge bases that support how they make decisions (Chu, 2016).

Top management teams can articulate their failures in achieving organizational profitability in many ways (Purves, Niblock, & Sloan, 2016). Additionally, researchers have yet to establish the myth that leadership is a universal remedy to the difficulties

humanity encounter (Jallow, 2015). Most leadership failures in organizations stem from autocratic leadership styles (Hussain & Hassan, 2016). Eradicating workplace challenges depends on thorough research on different leadership styles and how to apply them in contemporary organizations. Successful organizations are moving from the traditional style toward a collective style of leadership that will improve teamwork, improve rapport and respect between leaders and subordinates (Peterlin, Pearse, & Dimovski, 2015).

### **Organizational Performance and Strategic Leadership**

Pradabwong, Braziotis, Tannock, and Pawar (2017) asserted that there is a positive relationship between organizational performance and competitive advantage. According to Barney (2001), the success of the RBV theory relies on the optimal gathering and the effective and efficient application of particular internal resources to enhance organizational performance. Organizations contribute to the development of a country's economy through strategic leadership and corporate social responsibility. A sustainable organization is one that experiences growth and makes profits (Romanelli, 2017). Ramish and Aslam (2017) asserted that profitability is among the key performance indicators in organizations. Some of the key drivers of organizational profitability include vision, strategic leadership, internal quality, competitive advantage, value creation, employee engagement, and satisfaction (Tuominen, Hirvonen, Reijonen, & Laukkanen, 2016).

Mendes et al. (2016) provided an in-depth insight into understanding how complexity leadership can benefit organizations and make leaders effective. They suggested that organizations must apply complexity leadership as an alternative to

integrating different forms of influence and control. The aim of the study by Mendes et al. was to explore how learning and innovation may help organizations understand the impact on their performance through complexity leadership. Practicing leadership as an organizational process rather than individual practices will enhance organizational performance (Amar & Hlupic, 2016). The interpretation and characterization of management and leadership contribute to influencing the execution of leadership responsibilities effectively (Edwards, Schedlitzki, Turnbull, & Gill, 2015).

Top management teams and the board have a responsibility to ensure costs incurred in generating revenue does not exceed income through the development of robust strategic and operational processes (Cote, 2017). An organization is profitable when the cost it incurs in generating revenue is less than income (De Toni, Milan, Saciloto, & Larentis, 2017). There may be a disparity in the understanding of the impact of strategic leadership in the profitability of organizations (Brandt, Laitinen, & Laitinen, 2016).

The performance of organizations depends on the ability of managers to develop an effective workplace and culture that promotes employee engagement, as well as growth while achieving organizational goals and objectives (Brito & Sauan, 2016). Dynamic managerial competencies influence organizational strategy through various managerial capabilities that enhance profitability (Smutny, Prochazka, & Vaculik, 2016). The creation and development of social processing skills, technical skills, and knowledge are essential managerial capabilities that enhance organizational profitability (Smutny, Prochazka, & Vaculik, 2016). Performance drivers aim to build an environment in which



organizations can plan, communicate effectively, and measure strategies in their business environment (Baird, 2017). Dynamic decision-making, efficient feedback mechanism, including internal and external market analysis are essential drivers of organizational performance (Hwang & Min, 2015).

According to Kshatriya, Dharmadhikari, Srivastava, and Basak (2017), organizations can use a balanced scorecard as a strategic planning and management system to communicate goals, objectives, daily operations, projects, products, and services. Organizational performance refers to how organizations successfully combine strategic and operational performance to achieve stated goals (Cheng, & Humphreys, 2016). Total organizational performance occurs when all functions of an organization work together to achieve goals that can be measured using a balanced scorecard. Therefore, it is imperative to view strategic performance exclusively from operational performance to determine whether an organization realizes the strategic objectives to enhance profitability (Oyewobi, Windapo, & Rotimi, 2015).

Barney (2001) asserted that organizations possess unique resources that allow them to achieve a competitive advantage and improved performance. The RBV conceptual framework, according to Barney (2001), helps senior executives to enhance their knowledge and understand the components that can impact organizational performance. Cullen and Parker (2015) asserted it is important to distinguish strategic from operational performance because organizational performance hinges on the effective and efficient execution of strategic goals.

Berkovich (2016) described the study of leadership in the last 60 years as scathingly confusing, discrepant, disorganized, and not integrated. In the last six decades, researchers have explored many leadership theories such as behavioral, contingency, transactional, and transformational. Tong and Arvey (2015) asserted behavioral scientists made efforts to identify the traits, abilities, sources of power, or aspects of situations, which reveals how a leader can influence subordinates to achieve organization goals. The two most popular behavioral theories are two studies conducted at both Ohio State University and the University of Michigan. The studies from Ohio State University and the University of Michigan are similar because both focus on people and task leadership. The ability of leaders to significantly impact and influence their teams to channel personal goals to organizational goals enhances the performance of the organization (Mittal & Dhar, 2015). Scholars who emerged after the behavioral study criticized the theory for not finding the right balance between people and task leadership.

The importance of understanding leadership models and techniques is important because of the increase in complexity, diversity, and continuous transformation in modern organizations (Kinnear & Ortlepp, 2016). Because of the complex and diverse nature of organizations, it is important for leaders to focus on strategies that ensure profitability. Understanding the various leadership styles is imperative to ascertain which leadership model to apply to an organization (Kapasi, Sang, & Sitko, 2016). Many scholars in the past have explored the theories and techniques to understand different styles of leadership. However, the theories and techniques continue to change over time because of the complex, diverse, and continuous changes in organizations. Conventional

leadership theories include behavioral, situational, and trait leadership models (Foziaa, Rehmana, & Farooq, 2016). Contemporary leadership model includes transactional, transformational, and charismatic leadership (Eisner, 2016). Contemporary leadership models scholars asserted that effective leaders make decisions regarding complex, challenging, and diverse situations (Alvesson & Blom, 2015). Emerging leadership models such as systems thinking, emotional intelligence, and boundary spanning enhances the skills of contemporary leaders, which allows them to develop strategies to ensure profitability. (Fiaz, Su, Ikram, & Saqib, 2017).

### **The influence of CEOs on the Performance of Organizations**

The role of CEOs and their transformational leadership have a direct impact on the effectiveness and competency of top management teams and organizational performance (Hasija, Ellstrand, Worrell, Dixon-Fowler, 2017). According to Lin, Dang, Ha, and Liu (2016), transformational leaders possess the ability to influence individuals and groups of people they lead to change their goals into organizational goals. However, there is minimal information on how top management teams influence their teams to enhance organizational performance. Zhang, Zhang, Liang, and Ren (2017) asserted the importance of the relationship between the CEO and instrumental members of the senior leadership team. Such relationships are paramount to the success of organizations because it enhances organizational performance. The enhancement of the performance of organizations hinges on the interpersonal relationships between top management teams and the board (Zhang et al., 2017). Individual performance of top management teams who work in silos does not have a significant impact on the performance of the

organization. Although Zhang et al. asserted the significance of the CEO, they did not discuss how the educational background and tenure of CEOs affect organizational performance.

Most organizations use educational qualification and work experience when selecting CEOs because of the absence of universal accepted hiring criteria (Kalaiselvan & Naachimuthu, 2016). Kalaiselvan and Naachimuthu (2016) explored the impact of the CEO and board top management teams, including board members' education qualifications on the profitability of organizations. Other factors such as strategic leadership and entrepreneurial leadership positively affect the performance of organizations in addition to educational qualification (Wiengarten, Lo, Lam, & K, 2017). According to Kalaiselvan and Naachimuthu (2016), highly educated CEOs demonstrate personal leadership behaviors such as resilience and adaptability by seeking new experiences and feedback to develop and enhance their capabilities to ensure the profitability of the organization. The educational background of CEOs and board members have a significant impact on the profitability of organizations (Wiengarten, Lo, Lam, & K, 2017). However, Kalaiselvan and Naachimuthu (2016) failed to develop a model that allows shareholders of both private and public corporations to use to determine the suitability of a CEO and board members.

Organizations use different variables to measure the importance of CEOs and board members on organizational performance (Haas & Speckbacher, 2017). Haas and Speckbacher (2017) made attempts to develop a construct to measure the influence of CEOs on the performance of organizations. However, the study was inconclusive

regarding performance measurement of CEOs and board members. The methods and performance measurement constructs to ascertain the CEO's influence on organizations tend to impede the scope of CEO and board member's constructs. Haas and Speckbacher (2017) argued that other inhibitors include limitations of statistical technology on confounding effects of the organization, time, and over-reliance of the incumbent CEO's performance on the predecessor. However, Haas and Speckbacher (2017) did not state entrepreneurial leadership as a determinant of the performance of CEOs and board members.

Wang, Ma, and Wang (2015) discussed the influence of the different facets of CEO and top management teams including the board member's functional roles in both short-term and long-term performance. The study revealed that social classification theory could explain the influence of CEOs and top management teams on organizational performance. Wang et al. posited functional heterogeneity does not enhance organizational performance and reveals a significant adverse impact on the performance of organizations in the short-term, particularly innovation. According to Wang et al., CEOs and top management teams exhibit throughput functional backgrounds which reveal significant positive influence on organizational performance in the short-term, long-term, innovation, and overseas. Top executives who possess an overseas background tend to have a significant impact on short-term, long-term, and innovation performances. Executives hired externally will, however, inhibit the organizational innovation development while those with government background will promote the overseas performance of organizations.

The primary role of a newly appointed CEO is to develop and implement new strategic initiatives for the organization (Meeks, 2015). These responsibilities are arguably the most important and influential to the success of the organization. Prior work experience and a CEO's ability to utilize their network connections can be vital to the success of their leadership. Meeks (2015) asserted organizations seeking to recruit CEOs externally consider experiences and positions held in relevant organizations. The connection between a new CEO's previous organization, the current organization, and the industry may help in the implementation of strategic change initiatives (Meeks, 2015). Organizations can source the proper candidates for CEOs and top management teams when they understand the influence of tenure, background, and experiences that may enhance organizational performance.

### **The Effect of Entrepreneurial Leadership on Organizational Performance**

Entrepreneurial leadership is an important concept in the theory of entrepreneurship. Different styles of leadership affect the effectiveness and performance of organizations. According to Gross (2016), there are two types of entrepreneurial leadership, notably entrepreneurial leaders and entrepreneurs in leadership positions. A typical example of entrepreneurial leadership is family owned enterprises in which leaders possess the ability to operate with limited resources. While some entrepreneurial leadership is dependent on position, strategic entrepreneurial leadership tends to be independent of a person's position in the organization (Kunnanatt, 2016).

Pereira and Naguib (2016) asserted that a positive relationship exists between organizational performance and leadership capability. The primary role of leadership in

any organization is to set a clear vision, motivating and inspiring the people they lead to achieving organizational goals. The performance of organizations depends on the attributes of entrepreneurial leadership inherent in the employees (Zhou, Zhang, & Shen, 2017). The central responsibility of strategic leadership is to determine and synchronize the internal and external market opportunities and organization capabilities to ensure the positive performance of the organization (Zhou, Zhang, & Shen, 2017). Entrepreneurial leaders can create and sustain a competitive advantage for the organization. However, some entrepreneurial activities may create designful changes in the competitive landscape of the organization (Cowden, Tang, & Bendickson, 2016).

Grandy and Sliwa (2017) argued that leaders in entrepreneurship encounter the perception of ethical responsibility which can impact the effectiveness and sustainability of the organization. As leaders in organizations, entrepreneurs have a responsibility to make ethical decisions while focusing on activities that will make the organization successful. Educational institutions such as business schools encounter inherent conflicting considerations of organizational permanence and profitability (Harrison, Paul, & Burnard, 2016). Baldegger and Gast (2016) posited there is a link between a forgone initiative or cost and the desire of junior entrepreneurs to explore into sustainability education.

### **The Role of Strategic Leadership in Organizational Change**

Strategic leadership refers to top management teams' potential to create and express a strategic vision and mission for their organization while motivating and persuading their teams to acquire that vision and create sustainable competitiveness

(Peterlin, Pearse, & Dimovski, 2015). Organizational change refers to the adoption of new strategies by organizations regarding how they carry out their activities (Maheshwari & Vohra, 2015). Organizational change may occur when the organization experiences growth (Haque, TitiAmayah, & Liu, 2016). Senior executives, top management teams, and board members are instrumental in organizational change. Strategic leadership is paramount in the process of organizational change because of the support they provide to embrace change in a positive and rewarding manner while intercepting any negative impact on the organization (Mohammad, Golmohammadi, Nekoezadeh, & Mansouri, 2017). Strategic leaders encounter challenging tasks to achieve a successful and important change.

Sofat, Kiran, and Kaushik (2015) asserted that organizational change occurs for many reasons such as management, natural disaster, and acts of terrorism. Some strategic leaders experience success in change management while others fail. Strategic leaders such as charismatic, transformational, and instrumental leaders experience more success in change management (Brown, Rose, & Gordon, 2016). During the change management process, strategic leaders impact and influence their employees to adopt the changes within the organization to ensure profitability. Strategic leaders can change the values, goals, and aspirations of their employees and channel these values, goals, and aspirations to align with the organization (Kivipõld, 2015). Charismatic leaders possess three major traits such as envisioning, energizing, and empowerment essential to the success of organizational change (Koprulu, Aksoy, & Oznacar, 2017). Successful change management through strategic leadership gives organizations a positive outlook such as



the provision of direction and focus on employees, the formation of basic strategies and objectives, the generation of positive sentiments regarding the organization, and the provision of assistance to resolve conflicting opinions among employees (Arif, Zahid, Kashif, & Muzammal, 2017).

### **The Role of Strategic Leadership in Innovation and Technology**

The role of strategic leaders in innovation and technology is to create and maintain innovative ideas and strategies that produce high-quality products. Because of the growing need for technology and the fast-paced nature of the landscape of their business, organizations encounter challenges that hinder success. Savic, Ograjensek, and Buhovac (2016) argued that innovation and technology had become a fundamental source to achieve competitive advantage. Organizations can compete in the industry and abroad promptly if they innovate and bring in new products to the market. According to Taneja, Pryor, and Hayek (2016), a clear relationship exists between leadership and strategy because strategic leaders such as CEOs and top management teams can either impede or promote the development of effective competencies of an organization.

While traditional methods to the study of leadership did not reveal the distinctive features for senior executives, strategic leaders create an environment that allows or impedes innovation (Matsuo, 2016). Strategic leaders can promote innovation through basic research by creating positions for well-paid fellows and encouraging collaboration with universities to promote further research and testing. For innovation to be successful, it will require an effective strategic leader who will provide direction on invention,

development, and marketing of new products and services (Chen, Zheng, Yang, & Bai, 2016).

### **The Effect of Strategic Leadership in Decision-Making and Risk Management**

Strategic decision-making is far-reaching and crucial for the organization because it requires the commitment of extensive resources (Abdel-Maksoud, Elbanna, Mahama, & Pollanen). Strategic leaders make decisions within the context of their long-term vision for the organizations (Peterlin, Pearse, & Dimovski, 2015). Effective decision-making can enhance the profitability of organizations. The strategic environment leaders operate is far different from the climate at lower levels within the organization (Abu-Rahman & Jaleel, 2017). Strategic leaders make consequential decisions that may have a significant impact on the organization (Chng, Ming, Shih, Rodgers, & Song, 2015). Strategic leaders typically plan before making decisions, long-term, exorbitant, and abstruse. Strategic leaders can be successful in the decisions they make if they possess competencies such as vision that allows them to focus and build for the future (Norzailan, Othman, & Ishizaki, 2016). Caro (2016) asserted that strategic leaders must become transformational to inspire and motivate their followers to achieve organizational goals and shared values. Leaders who make strategic decisions must prevision change, lead the change, and most important champion a mindset of change within the organization (Srour, Baird, & Schoch, 2016).

Many organizations encounter challenges in responding to the growing changes in their day-to-day operations because of the rapid changes in the environment and inescapable global risks. Strategic leaders strive to mitigate these risks through the

development of risk management programs that incorporate all facets of the organizational culture (Stavrinoudis & Chrysanthopoulou, 2017). An integrated management system will provide strategic leaders with an absolute view of risks that shows a competitive edge and enhance performance (Apostolopoulos, Halikias, Maroukian, & Tsaramirsis, 2016). Risk management encompasses the process of identifying, assessing, and controlling risks that may impact the capital and earnings of an organization (Apostolopoulos, Halikias, Maroukian, & Tsaramirsis, 2016). Risks can stem from a plethora of sources such as financial, environmental, legal, strategic management mistakes, natural disasters, and accidents (Vig, Dumičić, & Klopotan, 2017). Senior executives have a responsibility to ensure the organization has an integrated risk management program to identify and mitigate risks. The responsibility of managing the day-to-day risks in the organization rests on all employees. Top management teams have a responsibility to educate employees through risk management training and briefings to increase awareness of risk management practices (deClercy & Ferguson, 2016).

### **Relationship Between Strategic Leadership, Sustainability, and Organizational Performance**

The interface between strategic leadership and organizational sustainability in a distinct manner have become attractive because of the development of top management team positions with committed organizational sustainability obligations (Peterlin, 2016). Senior executive positions such as the CEO and board members have risen into the higher positions of many of the large organizations in the world parallel to more

traditional top management positions (Peters, Romi, & Sanchez, 2018). The absence of sustainable business practices and strategies may prevent organizations from effectively competing. Organizations may impact performance in the long-run and capitalize on competitive advantage by surviving global and aggressive competition through flexibility and sustainable business practices (Meng, Xue, Liu, & Fang, 2015).

Clear organizational vision and mission statements are strategic initiatives that have a cogent impact on senior executives when focusing on organizational performance (Masa'deh et al., 2016). Most leaders have lost the fundamentals of business strategies attempting to match increasing competition in the wake of recent dynamic innovations (Yang, 2015). According to (Kivipõld, 2015), the absence of exclusive strategic positioning can impact the performance of organizations negatively. Porter (1980) asserted that organizations enhance profitability through the creation of competitive advantage. The ability of organizations to create a value proposition meaningful to their clients may influence performance. Effective leaders' abilities to create a vision and mission statement help to position organizations while strategy assists in actualizing and controlling sustainability, competitiveness, and differentiation (Kivipõld, 2015).

### **Transformational Leadership**

Every organization must fulfill specific goals and objectives, and in the quest to fulfill these goals, we cannot overemphasize the importance of the human aspect (Cote, 2017). In 1978, Burns coined the theory of transformational leadership. According to Bass (1985), transformational leadership is how the leader motivates and presents a clear

organizational vision to their followers while inspiring them to transcend their self-interest to achieve organizational goals (Salem, 2015). Transformational leadership is concerned with improving the performance of followers and developing followers to their full potential (Mesu, Sanders, & Riemsdijk, 2015). Transformational leadership comprises four lucid factors such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Gyanchandani, 2017).

Idealized influence represents transformational leaders who act as role models in which followers seek to emulate their behavior (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). The key behaviors include demonstrating high levels of competence and the effective use of power to enhance the performance of the group which reveals the attitude of the leader and the behavior of the followers. The Inspirational motivation factor occurs when the leader communicates high expectations that lead to energizing and motivating their followers, such as communicating a vision and making emotional appeals that enable their followers to work assiduously in achieving future goals (Kim & Shin, 2017). Some of the behaviors associated with inspirational motivation include presenting optimistic visions for the future to create a coherent sense of purpose and mission (Berkovich, 2016). The intellectual stimulation factor focuses on encouraging followers to examine their values and beliefs critically. The individualized consideration focuses on the behaviors of the leader that leads to understanding the needs of individual followers and encouraging them to develop to their potential amidst their challenging goals (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016).

Transformational leaders create an inspiring vision for the organization that provides employees a compelling reason to follow their lead (Syaifuddin, 2016). Creating a vision sets out the purpose of the organization that results in the development of a coherent business strategy to enhance performance (Bilgin, Bilgin, & Kilinc, 2017). Strategic leaders possess the ability to motivate their followers to recognize and deliver the vision created by top management teams. Transformational leaders achieve this by adapting and executing their mission statement to appeal to the values of their followers and inspire them with where they are leading them and why (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leaders manage the delivery of their vision because the vision needs to become a reality. Change management is important to manage the delivery of an organization's vision to enhance performance. Strategic leaders understand the importance of effective working relationships in the organization. Therefore, they tend to build an ever-stronger and trust-based relationship with their followers. Northouse (2016) asserted that transformational leaders who focus on how they will benefit from their followers are called pseudo-transformational leaders.

### **Transition**

In completing the foundation of the study section, I presented an outline of the background of the problem that pertains to applied business research. Strategic leadership contributes to organizational performance and helps create the vision, mission, competitive advantage, and sustainability which enhance organizational profitability. The fundamental objective of the study was to explore the strategic leadership skills senior executives and members of the board in a tax preparation organization use to ensure

profitability. In section 1, an academic and professional review of literature augmented and supported the foundation of the study to center the study within the frame of intellectual genealogy. The qualitative single-case study was the most suitable design to explore strategic leadership and organizational profitability.

In section 2 of the study, I included an analysis of the essential facets of the research which included a purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method, and design. Additionally, there was an inclusion of a discussion regarding the population and sampling, data collection mechanisms, ethical research, and organizational techniques such as data analysis, reliability, and validity. Strategic leadership refers to top management teams' potentials to create and express a strategic vision and mission for their organization while motivating and persuading their teams to acquire that vision and create sustainable competitiveness (Peterlin, Pearse, & Dimovski, 2015). Agarwal (2017) concluded that strategic leadership extends to decision-making by top management teams and individuals and the performance of roles in an organization.

Within the doctoral study, there was an exploration of the role of strategic leadership in large organizations to understand the strategies senior executives in tax preparation organizations use to ensure profitability. A further discussion included the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method, and design to include population and ethical considerations. I discussed the instruments and methods for collecting data, data analysis, validity, and reliability and closed with the transition and summary section.

## Section 2: The Project

Strategic leadership refers to a top management team's potential to create and express a strategic vision and mission for their organization while motivating and persuading their teams to acquire that vision and sustainably create competitiveness (Peterlin et al., 2015). Strategic leadership includes the development of skills and knowledge to handle the competitive external environment and respond to opportunities quickly (Norzailan et al., 2016). Strategic leaders work daily to balance operations with visionary planning that allows them to think and act appropriately to sustain competitive advantage (Tarigan, 2016). Throughout the study, I explored the role of strategic leadership in the profitability of large organizations. I sought to understand the strategies senior executives use to ensure profitability in tax preparation organizations. Section 2 of the study includes a discussion on the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population, and ethical consideration. I discussed the instruments and techniques for data collection, data analysis, reliability, validity, and end with the transition and summary section. I used Mayring's qualitative content analysis to analyze the information.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies senior executives in tax preparation organizations use to ensure profitability. The participants selected for this study were five senior executives including directors, vice presidents, a senior vice president, and members of the board from a large tax preparation organization



located in the United States who implemented strategic leadership strategies leading to profitability.

Results from this study may help senior executives to adequately prepare for strategic leadership roles by making strategic decisions that will improve profitability and create jobs to improve the standard of living of the local individuals in their communities. Stakeholders and academia may benefit from an improved understanding of the contribution strategic leadership have on organizational profitability. The implications for social change may include job creation and improvement in the standard of living for local individuals and their communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I served as the primary data collection instrument for this study, collecting data through personal in-depth interviews. According to Nico (2016), the researcher is the primary data collection instrument. English was the primary language for conducting interviews. My experience in conducting similar in-depth interviews helped facilitate and complete the interviews with senior executives and board members of the tax organization. I lead a team of 20 office managers and over 400 tax professionals who prepare individual and corporate business returns for over 40,000 clients within the Washington District of Columbia metro area. I possess the necessary detachment that goes with the increased responsibility for strategic leadership. In my previous employment, I worked as an investigator with the county police department addressing theft and fraud. In this role, I conducted many in-depth interviews to ascertain the cause of theft and fraud. The participants selected for the study were senior executives I have

observed during leadership training or conferences. I selected them because of the success stories they have shared in the role of strategic leaders. The application of a semistructured interview format to collect data from the participants reinforced validity and reliability of the study because researchers use a coding system on interview transcripts to develop an explanation to the research propositions in which open coding can be used to identify underlying concepts and themes (citation). Before conducting the interviews, I sent an email to all participants selected to keep them informed of the research and set expectations on the format of the interview to make them comfortable and get them prepared by answering any questions they may have had.

Additionally, all conversations with the participants were recorded to enhance transcription, interpretation, and analysis (see Yin, 2014). A tape recorder was used as a backup during the in-depth interviews to prevent loss of information from the interview. Yin (2014) asserted that interview mechanisms are useful to qualitative researchers because it facilitates the collection of comprehensive information regarding a phenomenon. Interview mechanisms, semistructured interviews, and follow-up questions were used to gain an understanding of the strategies senior leaders in tax preparation organizations use to ensure profitability during the interview.

To avoid biases, I selected senior executives and board members with over 15 years' experience of implementing strategic leadership strategies leading to profitability (see Alonso-Almeida, Bremser, & Llach, 2015). Member checking was used to share the findings of the interview with the participants to help confirm and validate the data collected. All participants in the study received a summary of their interview transcribed

on to a word document to confirm and verify that the data is accurate. Respondent validation is a qualitative research technique used by researchers to enhance the accuracy, validity, and verification of the study (Yin, 2014). A methodical triangulation mechanism was used to collect data from various sources including company websites, annual reports, and social media to ensure validity and bias. Bentahar and Cameron (2015) asserted that triangulation is the utilization of multiple sources to enhance the validation of data through cross verification. To gain an in-depth understanding of strategic leadership, I asked at least three follow-up questions for every question I asked the participants. After the interviews, I made follow-up telephone calls to the participants to help clarify my understanding of their responses to my questions to enhance data verification and validity.

### **Participants**

The focus of the study was on a tax preparation industry in the United States, which the internal revenue service (IRS) regulates. The IRS classifies the tax preparation industry into small, medium, and large depending on the volume of tax returns completed, profitability, and size (citation). I targeted one of the largest profit-making tax preparation organizations for my study.

Some of the criteria I considered in the selection of participants for my study hinged on their level of authority in their organization, level of exposure in strategic leadership and experience within a top management team, and success in enhancing organizational profitability. Purposive or purposeful sampling was a key factor in selecting the participants for the qualitative case-study (see Lysaght, Kranenburg,

Armstrong, & Krupa, 2016).). According to Abrahams (2017), skills and expertise form the basis of selecting participants in qualitative research. Participant selection for the study focused on strategic leaders who possessed the skills, requisite training, expertise and have demonstrated success in organizational profitability. Additionally, the participants had to have at least 10 years of work experience in organizational profitability and 5 years experience of working with top management teams. The participants had served in the role of either a senior executive or a member of the board of directors in an organization that has experienced profitability.

After identifying the participants who meet the criteria, I wrote a letter to the CEO of the organization to seek permission and obtain access to the participants, and conduct my study. I requested the purposefully selected participants to respond through email and sign the consent forms to indicate their willingness to engage in the study. Hoerber et al. (2016)) asserted that it is essential for participants to discern the dangers and their right to disengage at any time. Colleagues within my social and professional network assisted in securing CEO approval and appointment confirmation from participants. To obtain five participants, I sent letters to seven senior executives, and five purposely identified board members. Educating participants of their right to engage or disengage in a study helps in enhancing the relationship and rapport between the researcher and the participants (Rishi & Joshi, 2016). In a quest to establish an honest and transparent working relationship with the participants, I provided them with a copy of the approval letter from the CEO which gave me the right to conduct the study and permission to work with the participants during the initial introductory meeting.

## **Research Method and Design**

Yin (2014) asserted selecting a research method hinges on the central research question and applicable method for collecting data. Additionally, Ridder (2017) argued that the choice of research method depends on the researchers' profound viewpoints and the phenomenon they are seeking to explore. According to Gaus (2017), researchers use qualitative methods when they seek to understand the experiences, meanings, and beliefs of participants. Research questions, the ontological, and epistemological objectives determine the choice of appropriate research design (Dasgupta, 2015). Larrinaga (2017) asserted that the case study design infuses the exploration of the life experiences of participants and allows researchers to study the complex relationship between phenomena, context, and participants. Add summary and synthesis throughout the paragraph.

### **Research Method**

Some research methods are more conducive to addressing specific research questions than others (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2014). Researchers employ the qualitative research method to develop more in-depth responses from participants (Gaus, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies senior executives in tax preparation organizations use to ensure profitability. My goal was to use a qualitative method to explore and comprehend senior executives and board members' experiences with the phenomenon of organizational profitability. Other methods, such as quantitative and mixed methods, were not suitable for my study. Quantitative methods are useful when the researcher wants to examine the relationship between variables through

objective research using standardized measurement tools (Zyphur & Pierides, 2017). Researchers use mixed methods when they seek to converge, corroborate, or validate findings from different methods (Bazeley, 2016). A mixed method is suitable when researchers seek to enhance their knowledge of a phenomenon. Add more summary and synthesis to fully develop the paragraph and create a solid conclusion for it.

Additionally, mixed methods help researchers to use one method to develop the other method. Thus, a mixed method may help researchers who seek to identify discrepancies and new perspectives (Venkatesh, Brown, & Sullivan, 2016). Researchers use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to understand a phenomenon in mixed methods. My study involved the collection of qualitative data using semi-structured interview and open-ended questions to understand the role of strategic leadership in large organizations. Therefore, I did not use a mixed methods approach because the study does not involve quantitative data (Fàbregues & Molina-azorín, 2017).

### **Research Design**

Research design refers to plans and procedures for research that permits the decisions from expansive assumptions to comprehensive methods of collecting data and analysis (Ridder, 2017). I used a single case study design to explore elements about the profitability of large organizations by collecting data and information from senior executives and board members. Other research designs such as narrative, phenomenology, and ethnography were explored and concluded not suitable for this study.

A case study is a comprehensive experiential exploration of specific issues within the scope of a specific environment or organization (Yin, 2014). According to Gaus (2017), qualitative researchers use the case study design when the limits between phenomenon and perspectives are not apparent. Qualitative researchers conduct personal, in-depth interviews employing open-ended questions that begin with why, what, or how to elicit information from participants under the case study design (Sarma, 2015). Yin (2014) suggested the development of theory to predict the outcome of a study that involves the collection of data and analysis in case study research. Case study designs encompass a thorough assessment of single or multiple cases in a single or group of organizations at one- or varying-time intervals (Gaus, 2017; Yin, 2014). The exploratory study design helped me to understand the experiences of senior executives and board members regarding organizational profitability.

The purpose of a phenomenology approach is to explore a participant's experience with the phenomenon in which little information is available about a phenomenon (Humble & Green, 2016). In a phenomenological study, researchers use a combination of methods, such as conducting interviews, reading documents, watching videos, or visiting places and events to understand the meaning participants place on what they are examining (citation). Researchers rely on participants' perspectives to provide insight into their motivations (Humble & Green, 2016). In ethnography study, researchers work within the environment where their participants operate to understand the goals, cultures, challenges, motivations, and themes that appear. Ethnography stems from cultural anthropology in which researchers immerse themselves in culture, often for

years. Rather than relying on interviews or surveys, researchers experience the environment firsthand, and periodically as a participant observer (Bamkin, Maynard, & Goulding, 2016).

Two qualitative approaches that are not appropriate at the DBA level are narrative study and grounded theory methods. In the grounded theory approach, while a phenomenological study seeks to explicate the essence of an activity or event, grounded theory researchers seek to explain the theory behind the events (citation). Researchers apply interviews and actual documents to build a theory based on the data. One of the main disadvantages of this theory is that it fails to recognize the constraints of the researcher (Hense & McFerran, 2016). Additionally, grounded theory researchers produce an excessive amount of data difficult to manage or control (citation). Finally, the theory does not possess standard rules for researchers to follow for the identification of different categories. A narrative study is the description of the lives of individuals, the collection of individuals' stories of their experiences, and a discussion of the meaning of those experiences. (Mattern, Jeng, Lyon, & Brenner, 2015). The primary focus of the narrative study is to increase understanding of central issues related to teaching and learning through the telling and retelling of participants' stories (Kourti, 2016). A disadvantage of the narrative study is that it lacks a standard set of procedures. Another disadvantage in the text is the subjective nature, which makes it difficult to quantitatively access since it is subjective, that is personally meaningful to a person.

I used open-ended questions throughout the study to conduct a comprehensive interview until reaching the point of saturation. I conducted an in-depth interview with



five purposefully selected participants in the role of either senior executives or members of the board who had over 10 years' experience in a strategic leadership role. Data saturation refers to the point in a data collection when no more patterns or themes emerge that will not generate additional information related to the research questions (Boddy, 2016). While conducting interviews with the selected participants, I asked open-ended questions until I reached the point of receiving repetitive responses from the participants. Collection of data and analysis can take place simultaneously in a case study approach as themes arise from the significant statements (Rowlands, Waddell, & McKenna, 2015). In studying a case or cases, one requires different sources of data. Therefore, I used a case study design to explore the role of top management teams such as senior executives and members of the board on organizational profitability.

### **Population and Sampling**

Participants in this study were senior executives. I presented the objectives of my study and collected data from the purposefully selected senior executives and members of the board who have experience in profitability within the tax preparation industry a few days before the date of the interview. The selected tax preparation organization has 2,300 full-time employees and 87,500, including seasonal employees. The tenure for most of their top management teams is at least 15 years. Thus, a sample size of 10 senior executives and members of the board who meet the selection criteria is appropriate for comprehending a case.

According to Vale and Stabile (2016), researchers may use probabilistic or nonprobabilistic purposive sampling techniques to select their target population.

Probabilistic purposive sampling refers to the use of a random selection method in which the population has equal opportunities for being selected (Venkatesh et al., 2016).

However, the probabilistic method did not work for my study because it required top management teams with strategic leadership duties which have experience in organizational profitability. The selection of research participants is the most delicate activity in a qualitative study (Gaus, 2017). Boddy (2015) asserted that researchers must consider using purposeful selection as the most proficient method for choosing participants. In selecting the participants for my study, I used purposive sampling to select the five top management teams which consisted of senior executives and members of the board with experience in strategic leadership and organizational profitability. Conducting an in-depth interview using open-ended questions may assist in exploring the experiences of the participants with the phenomenon and a comprehension of how constrained strategic leadership might impact organizational profitability (Wan, Ip, & Cheng, 2016). According to Boddy, researchers should conduct interviews until a saturation point when they begin to receive similar responses from different participants. An increase or decrease in the sample size may impact the validity and credibility of the outcome of the study. Data saturation refers to the point in data analysis in which researchers discontinue collecting more data because no additional information from the participants is relevant to their research questions (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017).

Qualitative researchers prefer purposive sampling because they can focus on the participants with the applicable knowledge and expertise on the phenomenon (Venkatesh, Brown, & Sullivan, 2016). Unlike probabilistic sampling, nonprobabilistic sampling does

not focus on random selection (Belotti, 2015). Nonprobabilistic sampling may not represent the population because the probability of selecting participants cannot be calculated and may be difficult to ascertain how well the population is represented (Pilcher & Eade, 2016). The participants considered for my study have experience in organizational profitability and are performing strategic leadership duties in their respective roles within their organization.

I conducted interviews via WebEx and telephone. Investigative interviewers should select a site familiar to the interviewee in which to conduct the interview (Ahmed et al. 2018). Vashirbara Lerner et al. (2019) espoused that research interviewers should consider the potential interview site in an effort to enhance the collection of study data. Marshall and Rossman (2014) posited that researchers should ensure the interview site is appropriate, whereby, study participants feel comfortable in sharing study topic input.

### **Ethical Research**

Participants reserve the right to decide whether to participate in a research project or study (Greenwood, 2016). I obtained consent from the participants and had them sign an informed consent form which bears Walden's IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval number 03-14-19-0650374 which expires on 03-13-2020. Key information on the consent form included an expiration date and contact information for Walden University's representative. I began data collection after obtaining approval from Walden University's IRB to ensure compliance with ethical standards. To ensure I understood the ethical requirements and how to treat human participants with high respect throughout the study, I studied the ethics approval form of Walden University's IRB.

Additionally, I completed a web-based training course on the protection of human research participants. Additional contact information on the approval form included my name, mobile, and home telephone numbers. The consent form also included a concise description, objective, and purpose of the study and the criteria for the selection of participants for the study. Additionally, there was a space for participants and researcher to sign to authenticate the agreement; I provided a copy to the participants upon completion of signing the document for record-keeping.

Throughout the study, I made myself available and accessible to the participants to answer questions they may have or clarify any questions regarding the interview and their participation in the study. I informed the participants of their right to decline to answer any question they did not feel comfortable and their right to withdraw from the study at any given time. Furthermore, I communicated with the participants on what the study entails to mitigate any adverse events. The study did not include any experiment on human subjects. As part of complying with documentation and data security to mitigate any data leakages, I stored all documentation in a locked cabinet during the study and 5 years after that. I acted with integrity and professionally to prevent any potential leakage of information which will include the willful or unwilling destruction of data transcripts. To protect the identity of the participants, I used unique alphanumeric codes such as B1 and B2 to represent Board members and S1, S2, and S3 to represent other senior executives to hide their identity.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

To elicit responses from participants regarding their experiences with the phenomenon, I collected data by utilizing primary data collection instruments of a personal in-depth interview and open-ended questions. I explored the concept of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon of strategic leadership in the profitability of large organizations during the interviews. To comprehend the importance of the phenomenon, researchers use personal, in-depth, and open-ended questions to explore the experiences from a participant's perspective (Wan, Ip, & Cheng, 2016).

Researchers can combine data collection instruments such as face-to-face interviews, focus groups, observations, site visits, archived records, and documents to collect data (Farooq & Villiers, 2017). Iivari (2018) asserted that member checking in qualitative research refers to a technique researchers' use to help improve the accuracy, validity, credibility, and transferability of a study. I shared my interpretations of the interview responses with the participants to confirm and validate their responses. I employed member checking to ensure and enhance the validity, credibility, and reliability of the study. Triangulation is the process of using more than one method to explore data collected on the same topic (Bentahar & Cameron, 2015). Checking the integrity of inferences drawn from data collected may involve the use of multiple data sources, multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple investigators, and multiple methods (Mauceri, 2016). Triangulation methods help to improve the validity and reliability of data collected (Olivier, 2017). Qualitative researchers use the data triangulation method to collect data involving time, space, and people while investigator triangulation involves multiple

researchers in an investigation (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, & Gonzalez, 2018). In methodical triangulation, researchers use multiple options such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents to collect and interpret data while theoretical triangulation involves applying multiple theoretical schemes in the interpretation of the phenomenon (Annansingh & Howell, 2016).

### **Data Collection Technique**

Qualitative researchers can obtain more responses from participants if they use open-ended questions and personal in-depth interviews (Wardale, Cameron, & Li, 2015). Face-to-face (F2F) interviewing is one of the most widely used and most popular tools used in primary research. Qualitative researchers gain deeper insight into distinct responses by treating questionnaires as a meaningful contention and understanding the validity of each response (Žmuk, 2017). The selection of the five participants included members of the board of directors, and senior executives depended on their job roles and responsibilities. I developed an interview protocol (Appendix A) to guide the discussions with the participants regarding the purpose of the study, their rights such as consent to participate or withdraw from the interviews at any given time, and their right to ask questions when they need clarification during the interview. The data saturation point refers to the point researchers reach in their analysis of data collection in which collecting more data will not lead to any additional information of relevance to their research questions (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017). To achieve saturation, I used the same interview questions for all the participants to ensure saturation and consistency

throughout the data collection. Failure to reach saturation in the data analysis process will impact the quality of the research conducted and impede content validity.

To keep a record of responses from participants and to have a backup, I used other data collection instruments such as a tape recorder and journal notes. However, I sought permission from the participants before tape recording the interviews. My preliminary discussions with the participants included circulation of the objectives of the study and different data collection techniques such as personal in-depth interviews using open-ended questions. The journal notes served as record-keeping in the unlikely event a participant opt to exercise their right by declining the tape recording.

Face-to-face interviews enhance accurate screening of interviewees. Qualitative researchers use face-to-face interviews to capture verbal and non-verbal cues from participants, including body language (Annink, 2017). Additionally, face-to-face interviews help to keep participants focused during interviews since researchers can capture emotions and behaviors (Burton & Nesbit, 2015). Personal in-depth interviews afford interviewers the flexibility to change and probe further by asking follow-up questions to gain more responses from participants (Boddy, 2016). Researchers tape record interviews to enhance the integrity of the data collected.

However, interfering with situations outside the control of participants may compromise research results. Listening to and answering questions concurrently during an interview may impair the quality of responses and findings (Patel, Jensen, & Lai, 2016). Researchers who fail to use journal notes to record interviews with participants may not have a backup plan should there be technical issues with the recorded interviews

(Annink, 2017). Transcription of tape-recorded interviews can be time-consuming, and long distance interviews are costly because of the travel involved (Burton & Nesbit, 2015). However, because of the small number of participants involved in face-to-face interviews, researchers cannot generalize their findings because the interview may be prone to interviewer biases (Boddy, 2016).

My goal was to begin the interview sessions by reviewing the purpose of the study and confirmation of the consent of participants. According to Kourti (2016), personal in-depth interviews and open-ended questions may be easy to conduct; however, they can be time-consuming because the research makes take several hours to conduct. Researchers may elicit more responses from participants if they use a well-structured interview guide. A well-structured interview guide may assist researchers in developing a warm and interactive environment with the participants (Van & Struwig, 2017). I coded the participants and the identity of their organization to ensure their privacy, confidentiality, and validity by using confirmatory procedures such as member checking. Qualitative researchers use member checking technique to improve the correctness, reliability, legitimacy, and transferability of the research (Pompeii, 2015). Member checking in qualitative research is a feedback tool from the respondents to the researcher aiming at validating the report (Bennett & McWhorter). Follow-up telephone calls assisted the participants in clarifying my understanding to ensure the data was reliable. I shared my interpretations of the interview responses to ensure I captured the participant's true meaning from company reports and website.



### **Data Organization Techniques**

During the interview, I used journal notes to record key points and observations. Additionally, I recorded the date of the interview, the names of the participants, their positions, and their responsibilities. Using journal notes contributed to a better organization of data collected in date order such as daily subfolders and the main folder for the entire study. Microsoft Word helps in the creation of files while Nvivo software helps in the organization and storage of data (Chandra & Shang, 2017). Qualitative researchers use content analysis to group important statements by making replicable and valid inferences through interpretation and coding of textual material in the writing of research findings (Badenhorst, 2018). I secured information obtained during the interviews in locked cabinets and store them for a minimum of 5 years as required by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Furthermore, to create a sense of order, qualitative researchers must establish a convention during interviews to collect similar types of data from all participants (Annink, 2017). Journal notes helped to capture details such as the names of participants, interview questions, dates of the interviews, responses from participants, and any other general observations.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis (QDA) includes the dimensions of processes and procedures of moving from qualitative data collected to the explanation, analysis, understanding, and interpretation of the participants and their situations (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017). To increase objectivity in the data analysis, I synthesized data from various sources to provide triangulation. Furthermore, I performed inductive within-case

and cross-case analyses in the next phase. The within-case analysis allowed theoretical constructs to emerge. Cross-case helped to search for similar constructs and relationships across cases (Hamilton, 2017). I performed a cross-case analysis after completing the within-case analysis to identify any similarities or differences in the responses from all participants from the data without any comparison of similarities and differences across cases (Maalouf & Gammelgaard, 2016).

Throughout the data analysis process, I grouped significant statements into larger units to form themes for the onward writing of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon of organizational profitability in the results section. During data analysis, qualitative researchers must describe only the experiences of the participants with the phenomenon to prevent the influence of personal bias (Mulleeya, Fourie, & Schlebusch, 2017). According to Van and Struwig (2017), qualitative researchers can use computers to store, organize, and retrieve data easily to present the results. Qualitative researchers can also use computers as an efficient means for language processing (Rose & Lennerholt, 2017). I used locked cabinets to secure data for the next 5 years, and access restricted to authorized persons only. I adhered to the requirements of Walden University's IRB and will dispose of such stored data after 5 years.

Researchers divide data into statements in a process referred to as horizontalization. The process of horizontalization allows researchers to categorize and develop data where responses are clustered together to create themes within the data (Park & Chae, 2017). Additionally, qualitative researchers use data from the transcripts to group the dominant statements from fewer dominant statements in the reduction and

elimination approach (Oguzcan, Kruopiene, & Dvarioniene, 2017). I kept the dominant and fewer dominant statements until the final identification of invariants before discarding or regrouping the fewer dominant statements with other themes. Mixed methods involve a qualitative and quantitative component because it combines a mixture of market research methods such as interviews, observation, questionnaires, and documents to increase the validity of the study (Daiser, Ysa, & Schmitt, 2017). I interviewed five participants at different time intervals to obtain independent opinions on the subject matter. I used annual reports, internal letters, marketing materials, company website, and social media to validate the accuracy of data and interpretation.

Grouping of themes with the occurrences assisted in establishing the main themes for the study. According to Acharya and Mishra (2017), the grouping of significant statements includes the review of continual components across the data, which are imperative to the description of a phenomenon. I performed a further study of the transcripts to group the invariants into themes and discard the invariant components from the analysis (Acharya & Mishra, 2017). Qualitative researchers use different coding and identification of the variant components to view data from different perspectives (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017). Furthermore, I used a construct for each co-researchers textural and structural descriptions and constructed of each research participant's textural and structural description to capture the in-depth experiences of the participants (Pisarik, Rowell, & Thompson, 2017). Constructs for co-researchers and participant's textural and structural descriptions are important elements of data analysis (Pisarik, Rowell, & Thompson, 2017).

The overarching research question must align with the results of the review of transcripts by the Nvivo software (Pomare & Berry). Additionally, the interview questions, coding, and significant statements must align with the overarching research question (Pomare & Berry, 2016). Qualitative data analysis (QDA) includes the dimensions of processes and procedures of moving from qualitative data collected to the explanation, analysis, understanding, and interpretation of the participants and their situations (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017). I conducted a qualitative data analysis simultaneously with gathering data, interpretations, and report writing. According to Bennett and McWhorter (2016), qualitative researchers can analyze data from interviews and notate sections to incorporate in the final report. Qualitative researchers who use the case study design opt for constructivist worldviews because of their education and professional experiences (Romm, 2015). The target audience for my research findings were top management teams, board members, and doctoral committee members, including the chair.

The conceptual framework of my study included common themes on the impact of strategic leadership on organizational profitability. The use of the RBV augmented and connected the study specifically to describe the effect of the competitiveness and the creation of value (Barney, 2001; Birger, 1995). The most dominant themes assisted in confirming the impact of strategic leadership and the theory of RBV leadership in organizational profitability.

## **Reliability and Validity**

In qualitative studies, the essence of reliability lies with consistency. I used different confirmatory procedures such as triangulation and member checking to ensure consistency, validity, and reliability of the study. Reliability refers to the extent to which findings are consistent over a period and an accurate representation of the total population (Gaus, 2017). To achieve reliability, researchers use measures to enhance the consistency of collecting data, coding, and analysis (Wan, Ip, and Cheng, 2016). Gaus (2017), asserted reliability tests encompass authenticating evidence emanating from different sources of data and perspectives. Qualitative researchers use validity checks to prevent internal and external threats to the data analysis, which may affect the credibility of findings (Samul, 2017). Internal and external validity includes measures and strategies researchers use to enhance the accuracy of research findings (Larrinnaga, 2017).

### **Reliability**

Reliability in qualitative research includes measures for assessing the quality data collection process, coding, and analysis (Gaus, 2017). Reliability tests include authenticating data and evidence from different sources and perspectives (Gaus, 2017). Member checking in qualitative research refers to a technique researchers use to help improve the accuracy, validity, credibility, dependability, and transferability of a study (Iivari, 2018). Dependability refers to the stability of data over time and the extent of the consistency and likelihood of different researchers obtaining similar results (Pompeii, 2015). Credibility refers to situations in which researchers articulate the findings of a

study with reality to demonstrate the accuracy of the research study findings (Pompeii, 2015).

I ensured the credibility and thoroughness of the study through the participant's verification to correct any misrepresentations. Qualitative researchers use the member checking technique to improve the correctness, reliability, legitimacy, and transferability of the research (Pompeii, 2015). Member checking in qualitative research is a feedback tool from the respondents to the researcher whose aim is to validate the report interpretations (Bennett & McWhorter). I selected a purposive sample of 5 participants and asked them the same questions to ensure consistency of the responses and prevent leading questions. Data saturation refers to the point researchers reach in their analysis of data collection when sampling more data do not lead to any additional information or theme of relevance to their research questions (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017). I continued my efforts by continuously interviewing senior executives and members of the board of directors until no new themes or information emerged to ensure data saturation. I used the same interview protocol by asking the participants the same interview questions using open-ended questions to the point of obtaining repetitive responses to ensure saturation. I declared my biases to the readers of my report at the beginning of the report findings to minimize my influences and biases on the outcome of the study.

### **Validity**

Qualitative researchers apply validity checks to resolve internal and external threats to the data analysis that may endanger the credibility of the findings (Bennett & McWhorter, 2016). Internal and external validity methods include measures and

approaches researchers use to enhance the accuracy of research findings (Husbands et al., 2017). I used member checking, and triangulation to help improve the validity and reliability of data collected (Olivier, 2017). Qualitative researchers use the data triangulation method to collect data involving time, space, and people while investigator triangulation involves multiple researchers in an investigation (Abdalla et al., 2018). In methodical triangulation, researchers use multiple options such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents to collect and interpret data while theoretical triangulation involves applying multiple theoretical schemes in the interpretation of the phenomenon (Annansingh & Howell, 2016). To obtain wide-range views on the same subject matter, I interview 10 participants at different time intervals. Additionally, I validated the correctness of data and interpretation through the use of annual reports, marketing materials, internal letters, company websites, and social media.

Transferability refers to the degree to which findings of qualitative research may be generalized or applied to different perspectives (Parker & Northcott, 2016). Member checking is a technique by which qualitative researchers explore the credibility of results (Iilvari, 2018). I avoided the adverse effects of researcher bias and ensured confirmability to validate the interviews by sharing the draft report with the participants. I encouraged the participants to highlight any misrepresentations and advise on any changes to improve the report. Qualitative researchers reach data saturation when they receive similar answers to the same questions from different participants (Boddy, 2016). Eight participants answered the same interview questions until the point of saturation. I used the same interview protocol, asking the same open-ended questions to the five

participants until receiving repetitive responses which ensured data saturation.

Qualitative researchers reach the point of confirmability through the alignment between the findings recorded by the researcher and reviewed by the participants (Abdalla et al., 2018). I used the same interview questions for all participants to establish consistency and validation strategies such as member checking, elucidation of research biases, peer review, and triangulation to show my understanding of the phenomenon.

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the experiences of the participants who practice strategic leadership in tax preparation organizations. In section 2, I included a discussion of the purpose of the study and my role as a researcher, which includes how to gain access to the organization and work with all the participants. An argument regarding the research method and design, the sample population for the study, and ethical considerations formed part of this section. Other components I discussed in section 2 included instruments for collecting data, organization techniques, reliable and validity strategies. In section 3, I included the findings of the study and a discussion on how the results connect to the specific business problem, research question, and purpose statement. Additionally, the applicability of the research findings to professional practice, the implication for social change, and recommendations for action formed part of the discussion for section 3.



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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies senior executives in tax preparation organizations use to ensure profitability. I interviewed five senior leaders of a large tax preparation organization located in the United States with over 15 years of strategic leadership experience and over 5 years with strategic leadership responsibilities. I obtained the mission and purpose statements (physical document) of the organization for data triangulation.

The five themes that emerged as the role of strategic leadership in the profitability of large organizations were the performance of organizations, strategic planning, risk management, training and skills development, and change management. First, all five participants stated that change management is vital to the success of the organization. Second, four of the participants suggested that organizations need to perform to enhance sustainability and profitability. Third, all five study participants provided inputs on the role of strategic leadership to enhance profitability with a specific focus on unique resources. Fourth, four of the study participants suggested the importance of strategic leaders to understand the business environment to manage risks while ensuring profitability. Finally, all five study participants suggested the need for formal training and skills enhancement for strategic leaders.

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

The underlying research question used in this study was the following: *What strategies do senior executives in tax preparation organizations use to ensure*

*profitability?* I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions (Appendix A), and information obtained from my study's site, mission and purpose statement document, annual reports, and advertising materials (Appendix D) helped to complement the findings of the in-depth interviews. I analyzed data using NVivo 11. The five themes that emerged included (a) the need for organizations to perform and achieve stated goals and objectives to enhance profitability, (b) effective strategic planning to identify efficient implementation steps, (c) the ability of strategic leaders to identify risks to the business while enhancing profitability, (d) formal training and development of skills for strategic leaders, (e) identification of unique resources which provide strategic leaders the competitive edge to enhance profitability. In Tables 1 through 5, I show the number and frequency of participant's (designated B1, B2, S1, S2, & S3) responses to interview questions.

### **Theme 1: Performance of Organizations**

Strategic leadership helps organizational leaders to formulate ways that could assist the organization towards the achievement of business objectives (Sarfraz, 2017). According to Norzailan et al. (2016), effective communication is the most important required skill in strategic leadership. The ability of top management teams to set the direction and evaluate the organization's performance requires effective strategic leadership skills.

Developing sustainability strategy and creating and effectively communicating vision and mission statements are essential strategic leadership skills for senior executives and the board of directors to enhance profitability in large organizations

(Imran, Rehman, Aslam & Bilal, 2016). Successful organizations use external resource persons for in-house staff training, internships of employees to other large organizations or system vendors, and job rotations as strategic leadership resources that help to improve employees' and performance of the organization (Srivasta & Sushil, 2017). Senior executives of tax preparation organizations can also use cost and risk management processes to enhance profitability. All five participants stated the ability to create a vision for an organization is the most important skill a strategic leader must have to enhance profitability despite the need for desirable skills such as creativity, innovation, and sustainability. All board members agreed that the first role of a strategic leader is to set a clear vision. Participant B1 stated, "to be successful, you have to know the business and set clear objectives and a vision that is sustainable." Strategic leaders need to draw upon the knowledge, expertise, and insight of diverse stakeholders to address organizational challenges. While creating a vision for the organization, strategic leaders are thinking of new ways of understanding the challenges and opportunities ahead which will ensure profitability (Imran et al., 2016).

The performance of organizations as shown in Table 1 indicates the frequency of participants responses across questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. It can be inferred from Table 1 that there were 32 references to the performance of organizations in the workplace. In evaluating if the participants comprehended the concept of strategic leadership and the impact it has on the profitability of their organization, the first interview question was: What strategies do you use to ensure profitability in your organization? All respondents demonstrated an understanding of the concept of strategic

leadership. The participants stated that the central role of strategic leadership was the creation of a vision and mission for the organization.

Table 1

*Performance of Organizations (Frequency)*

Participant	Interview questions	Number of references
B1	1,2,3,4,8,9,10	7
B2	2,3,8,9,10	6
S1	1,2,3,4,5,6,8	7
S2	1,2,3,4,7,8	6
S3	1,2,3,4,7,8	6

In establishing if top management teams understood the influence senior executives have on the organization's competitiveness, and profitability, the responses to Question 2 were consistent with Theme 1 which stated, "What unique strategies provide your senior executives with a competitive advantage to ensure profitability within your organization? The purpose of this question was to help me establish if top management teams understood the influence senior executives have on the organization's competitiveness and profitability. All participants stated senior executives have the greatest impact on the organization's competitiveness and profitability in creating vision and mission statements, setting performance targets, sustainability strategy, and corporate governance systems, including risk management framework. Participant B1 stated that, as a large organization, some of the unique resources are their brand presence and the ability to provide services for all types of clientele none of their competitors can provide.

Additionally, participants B2 and S1 stated that identifying the unique resources is imperative for strategic leaders to identify the opportunities presented to them and how they can maximize the opportunities. Other approaches that senior executives can use to influence the competitiveness of the organization and profitability include the involvement of management in the decision-making process and the development of organizational culture and values which cherish creativity and innovation (Kamariah, Kadir, & Kadir, 2018). None of the participants demonstrated limited knowledge of the influence senior executives have on the organization's competitiveness and profitability.

There was a relationship between Theme 1 and the answers to Question 8: What is the effectiveness of strategic leadership initiatives regarding enhancing profitability in your organization? The aim was to establish senior executives' awareness of strategic leadership initiatives. Three participants (B1, S2, & S3) asserted that strategic initiatives such as creating a clear vision and mission statements and the ability to communicate effectively to all employees and develop a risk management framework were useful in increasing organizational profitability. The same respondents asserted strategic leadership initiatives such as strategic leadership development programs, creativity, and innovation, including technology that is sophisticated enough to meet the demands of clients in the changing environment, are effective in creating competitiveness and enhancing organizational profitability. However, two respondents (B2 & S1) demonstrated limited knowledge of the effectiveness of strategic leadership initiatives.

Additionally, Theme 1 aligned with responses to Question 3: What are the strategic leadership skills required to enhance profitability in your organization? Four

participants demonstrated awareness of the fundamental strategic leadership skills to enhance organizational profitability. Participants B1 and S3 stated that the strategic leadership skills senior executives need to enhance organizational profitability included effective communication skills, ability to develop a strategic vision, creativity and innovativeness, planning and monitoring, and risk management skills (see Ohlsson, & Larsson, 2017). Participant B2 stated that further coaching, industry experience, and motivational skills have a significant influence on the profitability of the organization. Four participants acknowledged the need for strategic leaders upon assumption of a strategic leadership role to possess the fundamental skills and expertise to enhance profitability. Three of the participants stated that setting a clear vision and the ability to communicate the vision are key to organizational performance. Add summary and synthesis.

**Physical Document Analysis.** My analysis of the physical document (Appendix D) revealed that the organization under study emphasized the importance of organizations to perform and achieve goals set by senior executives. Additionally, in the strategic pillars framework physical document, the organization highlighted the ability to invest for the long term is predicated on elevating talent and culture, owning a sustainable brand position, winning on customer experience, and building operational excellence. According to Jyoti and Rani (2017), strategic leadership plays an important role in performance or organizations. Jyoti and Rani asserted that organizations could enhance profitability through an effective implementation of strategic knowledge management. During the interview, all of the study participants demonstrated knowledge of the

organization's purpose, strategic pillars, and the seven behaviors which they believe will enhance the performance of the organization. Three participants stated that for an organization to achieve superior performance, strategic leaders must adopt processes to help the organization transform ideas into new products and services. This is reflective of Qasrawi, Almahamid, and Qasrawi's (2017) suggestion that organizations need to build a system sophisticated enough to help strategic leaders understand the needs of the organization and build processes to enhance performance.

### **Theme 2: Effective Strategic planning to Identify Efficient Implementation Steps**

One of the important strategic leadership skills required for senior leaders and board members in an organization is strategic planning (Kamariah et al., 2018). Strategic leadership skills help leaders set short-, medium-, and long-term strategic plans for the organization, including creating vision and mission statements. Participant B2 stated, "anyone with the authority of making strategic decisions should understand the business and set a strategic vision; the strategic leader must also communicate the vision to the entire workforce." Four of the participants echoed research by Keikha et al. (2017) stating that strategic leadership is about establishing the long-term outlook, sustainability, competitiveness, planning, and monitoring, including the ability to influence others to achieve common goals. According to Mohammad et al. (2017), some aspects of strategic planning include guiding, encouraging, and influencing employees to channel personal goals to organizational goals to achieve performance goals. In alignment with the key factors arguments established by Mohammad et al. (2017), one board member and three senior leaders provided indicators that successful strategic leaders set a vision for

organizations but most importantly impact and influence employees by explaining the why behind the vision and the benefits to the employees when implemented.

Succession planning also helps senior managers prepare middle managers for senior management positions. According to four participants, the use of a management development program helps senior executives and the board of directors to promote middle managers to senior management positions. All three senior leaders agreed that leaders must remain focused on strategic plans and refrain from deviating from the organization's vision and mission. Participant S1 stated, “as a strategic leader, you have to follow the 80/20 rule by spending 80% of your time putting plans together and 20% of your time executing the plan.” Four participants stated that the organization's ability to plan is one of the vital leadership skills that leaders need to succeed. Additionally, participant S2 asserted that quarterly business reviews of the strategic plans help the board of directors to focus management attention and realign expectations to achieve organizational profitability.

Participants B1 and B2 stated that the board of directors and senior executives are always there to support management toward the implementation of the strategic plans. Regularly, the board receives a comprehensive management report on the implementation of the fiscal year plans; management, however, indicates the areas of focus in the following year. All participants agreed that periodically reviewing strategic plans helps members of the board of directors to understand the challenges the organization is encountering in formulating strategic ideas and tactics the organization must incorporate into the following strategic plan. According to three participants, the board uses analysis



of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) as a strategic planning tool which guides senior executives to plan for future improvements (see Kashani, 2017). Two participants stated that the board of directors performs a significant role in planning and monitoring in the execution of strategic plans. The responses to Question 9 was consistent with Theme 2: What role do the board of directors play in the strategic planning of the organization to improve profitability? All board members demonstrated conscious awareness of the role of the board of directors in strategic planning. Participant B2 stated, “as a strategic leader, my role is to help set strategic goals for the company in the area of finance and assist senior executives in the execution of these strategic plans.” Table 2 shows that B1, B2, S1, S2, and S3 identified strategic planning in questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 as an essential contributor to strategic leadership and enhancing profit. The participants provided 27 references regarding strategic planning.

Table 2

*Effective Strategic Planning to Identify Efficient Implementation Steps (Frequency)*

Participant	Interview questions	Number of references
B1	1,2,4,8,9	5
B2	8,9,10	3
S1	2,4,5,10	4
S2	1,2,3,4,7,8,9,10	8
S3	1,2,3,4,5,7,8	7

**Physical document analysis.** The development of an effective strategic plan, as evidenced in the strategic pillars of the study organization (Appendix D), is essential to the success of the organization. Gratton (2018) discussed three stages of strategic planning: strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategy evaluation. Gratton asserted that most organizations lack strategic planning because most focus on the first phase of the process. Strategic leaders develop vision and mission statements for organizations but fail to develop an implementation plan and an evaluation mechanism. Participant B1 stated, “as a strategic leader, your ability to set a vision for the organization is imperative. However, it is essential on how you communicate the vision to the entire organization on how to execute.” In my analysis of the physical document and interviewing participants, all participants stated the need for standard operating procedures (SOP) to help build operational excellence. Four of the participants agreed that SOPs would improve quality and create consistency in execution. Three senior leaders and one board member stated that building operational excellence would help simplify work processes.

### **Theme 3: Development of Risk Management Process to Enhance Profitability**

All study participants agreed that senior executives and the board of directors manage business risks by setting acceptable risk levels for the organization and identifying areas in which the organization can or cannot do business because of the likelihood and impact of risks. According to all board member participants, the board has established an internal audit and risk management divisions within the organization to ensure effective execution of the risk management process. Three participants stated that

there is a risk management committee of the board that meets quarterly to identify and evaluate actual risks against approved risk targets. Participant B1 stated,

We meet as a senior leadership team regularly to assess the business and ways to enhance profitability; however, assessing the risks involved is a key component of our discussions. As senior leaders, it is important to know the business and identify the risks involved to set the risk acceptance level for the organization.

The objective was to establish if senior executives understands the concept and the importance of corporate governance. Strategic leaders are always seeking out for new risks that may impact the profitability of their organizations. The ability to identify risks and create a robust plan to mitigate the risks may enhance profitability.

Management of the organization sets risk and profitability targets concurrently and uses a risk management framework to ensure the organization is within the accepted risk levels. The ability to identify and measure organizational risks helps senior executives reduce the impact of potential business risks and enhance the chances of profit making. All (100%) agreed that top management teams need risk management skills to evaluate potential risks in tax preparation business to enhance profitability. According to participant B2, senior executives can manage operational costs and liability risks through the Integrated Management Reporting (IMR) system. Participant S1 stated that more than 45% of tax preparation risks are in liability claims filed by clients because of errors on tax returns. Thus, the mismanagement of liability claims may significantly jeopardize the profitability of an organization. One (50%) participant of the board stated that “there are risks involved when executing plans to enhance profitability.” Four (80%) participants

stated further that, the organization must build a culture of trust coupled with high ethical standards, and right decision-making to mitigate any risks. Participant S3 also stated that “strategic leaders should understand the business enough to identify the potential risks and ways to mitigate these risks.”

Senior executives and board of directors are always researching to identify new risks to minimize threats and increase profitability in all areas of the organization. The board of directors assists management in developing the business-wide risk management framework and in establishing the level of risk that management must always observe. There was a direct link between theme 3 and the responses to interview Questions 7; What strategies do your senior executives use to manage risk while ensuring profitability? Four participants (80%) who responded to Question 7 stated that senior executives and the board of directors had developed a risk management framework to manage systemic and non-systemic risks (Bogodistov & Wohlgemuth, 2017). None (0%) of the participants demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the risk management practices in the organization and contribution to profitability. Table 3 shows that B1, B2, S1, S2, and S3 identified risk management in questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 as an essential contributor to strategic leadership and enhancing profit. The participants provided 25 references regarding risk management.

Table 3

*Strategic Leadership and risk management (Frequency)*

Participant	Interview questions	Number of references
B1	7	1
B2	2,3,7,8,9,10	7
S1	3,4,5,6,8	5
S2	2,3,4,7	4
S3	1,2,3,4,7,8,9,10	8

**Physical document analysis.** The senior leaders contextualized taking risks while enhancing profitability as part of the daily operations, and it works based on my analysis of the physical documents (Appendix F, strategic framework). Oluwagbemiga, Isaiah, and Esiemogie (2016) contended that an organization might enhance profitability through the implementation of an adequate risk management system set forth by the board of directors. Additionally, risk management systems must include an annual risk limit, risk appetite, and a risk strategy to control excessive risk-taking of the leadership. In my analysis of the physical documents, the organization focuses on building operational excellence to “eliminate waste” by “creating better quality and consistency of execution” (Appendix F, strategic framework; strategic pillars). All (100%) participants referenced the strategic idea throughout the data collection process. For an organization to be profitable and sustainable, it is important to minimize risk through quality control and continuous improvement (Derenyiello & Joseph, 2018). Oluwagbemiga (2016) asserted

that the risk management system should be reviewed periodically to determine its adequacy, effectiveness, efficiency, and the compliance level of top management teams regarding the risk management system.

#### **Theme 4: Formal Training and Development of Skills for Strategic Leaders**

Training and development of skills for strategic leaders can take various forms, such as staffing other organizations or vendors, inviting resource people from outside to train on specific strategic leadership skills. Other types of training include rotation of jobs to different organization departments to enhance their skills. All participants (100%) who responded to question 5 which states what training do you provide your senior executives that provide them with strategies to ensure profitability; stated the company does not have a formalized training program. However, three (60%) participants stated that the organization had developed an internal training program such as leadership development programs for junior and middle-level management. The organization also has programs of mentorship to facilitate the organization's succession planning. Four (80%) participants stated that employees participate in in-house training, and sometimes the organization sends their employees to external high-rated colleges to learn best practices and develop skills in specific short-term courses.

The development of strategic leadership skills takes two forms: externally organized leadership development programs and training and mentoring on-the-job (Peterlin, Pearse & Dimovski, 2015). Internally, the organization has organized short, medium, and long - term development programs for leadership that cut across the organization. Theme 4 was consistent with the answers to Question 5; What training do

you provide your senior executives that affords them with strategies to enhance profitability? This question was consistent with evaluating the effectiveness of the organization's leadership training and development programs. All participants (100%) responded that the organization does not have a formal training program for senior executives; however, there is a talent management and development program to ensure the availability of different skills and capabilities in employees.

According to participants S1 and S2, the organization has established leadership development programs such as in-house leadership development training called starting and building blocks. Furthermore, the organization has succession planning, job rotation, executive coaching, and mentorship programs that have helped to ensure competitiveness and business continuity. Two (67%) of the senior leaders advocated for a training program that will provide top management teams with strategic leadership attributes such as courage to assist in executing their role effectively. Participant S2 promoted the use of external team building exercise, such as seminars to promote courage.

Participants B2, S1, and S2 acknowledged identifying an array of internal and external expertise as a proponent of providing knowledge to senior leaders to enhance profitability. Participant S2 stated, "I believe we need to respect and recognize the expertise of some of our middle-level management teams to help senior leaders build a robust execution plan to build operational excellence." Additionally, participant B2 suggested that the use of people outside the organization will be instrumental in reinforcing and strengthening strategic leadership. Table 4 depicts that B1, B2, S1, S2, and S3 identified leadership training and development of skills in questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,

6, 7, and 10 as an essential contributor to strategic leadership and enhancing profit. The participants provided 20 references regarding leadership training and development of skills.

Table 4

*Formal training and development of skills for strategic Leaders (Frequency)*

Participant	Interview questions	Number of references
B1	1,2,3,4,5	5
B2	3,5,10	3
S1	3,4,5,6	4
S2	1,2,3,5,7	5
S3	3,4,5	3

**Physical document analysis.** My analysis of the physical document (Appendix F, strategic framework) revealed that the organization under study emphasized teaching and training of employees for advocating complete workplace participation. Additionally, in the purpose and strategic pillars physical document, the organization highlighted ‘elevating talent’ as an element of assisting employees in providing superior services (Appendix F). Gurley, Peters, Collins, and Fifolt (2015) advocated that entities use a mission or goal statement to signify the shared purpose of the organization. Through training, employees can exhibit leadership characteristics to enhance profitability.



## **Theme 5: Identification of Unique Resources that Provides a Competitive**

### **Advantage**

According to Siglas (2015), competitive advantage refers to the act of seeking a favorable position to have a sustainable profit over competitors in the industry.

Participant S2 stated, “reliable technology (software) and experienced staff are the unique resources in this organization.” Four (80%) stated that the organization has the right human resources that can interpret the vision and mission statements and make it competitive in the market. According to participant B2, the unique resources the organization possess are the brand and the ability to serve all clients in six different segments. B2 stated further that “we have about 94% brand positioning which is part of our strategic pillars, and the ability to service all clients that fall within the six segments gives us the advantage to win market share and enhance profitability.”

Other unique resources include experienced senior executives and board of directors who have demonstrated success in their role as strategic leaders. All (100%) agreed that the organization has a large pool of tax professionals such as enrolled agents (EA) and certified public accountants (CPA), and well-trained staff the board believes can help the organization achieve the purpose and objectives as shown in the physical documents (Appendix F, strategic framework). Three (60%) of the participants referenced other unique resources such as the customer-centric culture, personalized products and services for clients, standard operating procedures, community partnerships, and great client skills and experience. In table 5, participants B1, B2, S1, S2, and S3 identified unique resources in questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 as essential

contributors to strategic leadership and enhancing profit. The participants provided 26 references regarding strategic leadership and unique resources.

Theme 5 was consistent with Question 2 of the interview questions; What unique strategies provide your senior executives with a competitive advantage to ensure profitability within your organization? All five participants (100%) asserted that the unique resources consist of the superior information technology (software), experienced staff, and client-centric culture including products and services that competitors cannot duplicate; although the respondents did not mention the conceptual framework of the RBV, answering and explaining their unique resources aligned with the components of the RBV conceptual framework.

None of the respondents (0%) demonstrated little understanding of the unique resources that make their organization competitive. Siglas (2015) asserted that competitive advantage is present when an organization is in a favorable position to be more profitable than competitors. Participant S1 stated, “because of our size and brand presence; we can venture into new areas looking for niche markets and penetrate to enhance profitability.” Organizations must demonstrate a greater comparative or differential value than their competitors within the industry and channel the information to their target market. Two (100%) board member participants stated that the competitive edge the study organization possesses over others in the industry is the ability to exceed the expectations of clients consistently.

Table 5

*Strategic Leadership and unique resources (Frequency)*

Participant	Interview questions	Number of references
B1	1,2,3	3
B2	1,2,3,10	4
S1	1,2,3,4	4
S2	1,2,3,4,7,8,9	7
S3	1,2,3,4,7,8,9,10	8

**Physical document analysis.** I reviewed and analyzed the purpose, strategic pillars, and behavioral documents of my study site (Appendix F, strategic framework) for content regarding unique resources. In my analysis of the documents, the phrase “own a sustainable brand position” and “win on customer experience” were used by all participants (100%) throughout the data collection process. Lalović and Koman (2018), contended that it is important for strategic leaders to have a clear understanding of the organization’s unique and core intangible resources which provides them with a sustainable competitive advantage that determines the performance of the organization. All (100%) participants referenced the importance of centralizing the needs of the client to help own a sustainable brand position. Luqman, Windapo, and Olabode (2017) contended that organizations could experience high performance and enhance profitability through the efficient combination of sustainable unique resources and strategy. For this reason, the mission and purpose of the organization were reimaged to

state “to provide help and inspire confidence in our clients and communities everywhere.”

### **Findings Aligned with Existing Literature**

Norzailan et al. (2015) argued that organizational leaders could use mentoring, job rotation, coaching, and creating an environment of learning to build strategic leadership skills. Development of leadership skills plays an essential role in building competitiveness and performance improvement in organizations (Sarfraz, 2017). There is a close link between the larger body of literature and findings of research on the importance of the development of leadership skills and performance of organizations. The competitive advantage of an organization emanates from the unique resources specific to the organization in which competitors cannot duplicate (Siglas, 2015). Three participants (60%) stated that senior leaders attend leadership programs at affiliated colleges, which provide them with the skills and strategies to enhance profitability.

Additionally, a close connection exists between the larger body of literature and research findings on the significance of unique resources to the competitiveness of an organization. Participant B2 stated, “our lasting brand position and the omnichannel allows us to service all types of clients which enhance market share and profitability. Possession of unique resources can improve the performance of the organization. Barney (2001) found that the competitiveness of an organization is an outcome of several unique and inimitable resources (Barney, 2001). There is a positive relationship between RBV theory, strategic leadership, and organization profitability (Birger, 1995).

A direct link exists between the literature and findings of the study of strategic leadership (Agarwal, 2017). Strategic leadership extends to the full range of functions performed and decisions made at the top of the organization by individuals or a group of people (Agarwal, 2017). Strategic leadership's role focuses on management's efforts to achieve organizational goals. Kunnanatt (2016) asserted that in building organizational culture and values, strategic leadership would form an essential part of success within an organization. All (100%) participants contended that senior executives and board of directors are responsible for organizational profitability. Participant S2 stated, "as a strategic leader, setting the right vision and building a culture of enhancing profitability is a major role because that is how stakeholders will measure your success." The board and top management team are responsible for developing strategic and operational plans with a vision to ensure that the costs incurred in generating revenue do not exceed revenue (Keeton, 20128). This was echoed by participant B1, who stated that "any strategic leader must be able to understand the business and set a strategic vision for the organization." All participants (100%) agreed that setting a strategic vision is key to success, but the ability to communicate the vision to the organization is another skill a strategic leader needs.

The key strategic leadership responsibilities repeatedly stated by the participants were to create and communicate vision and mission statements, develop a sustainable strategy, find new ways of solving problems, try new things and never rely on past success, and build a risk management framework. Strategic initiatives have a significant role to play in supporting the organization's mission and vision (Phan & Wright, 2016).

The ability of strategic leaders to communicate the vision and mission statements of the organization has a significant impact on organizational performance enhancement (Phan & Wright, 2016). Strategic planning is a management activity in an organization that is used to set priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, focus employees and stakeholders on achieving organizational goals, and conduct analysis to change the direction of the organization based on changes in the environment (Oschman, 2017). Participant B2 mentioned that most strategic leaders fail because of their inability to balance vision and execution. B2 stated, “applying the 80/20 rule is imperative because anyone can come up with a bright idea, but the lack of execution at a higher level may lead to failures.”

Strategic planning is one of the key strategic leadership skills involved in setting the short, medium, and long-term goals of the organization (Petkovic, Jasinskas, and Jeseviciuté-Ufartiené, 2016). Oschman (2017) asserted the role of strategic planning is to create a vision, organizational values, competitiveness, and profitability. To sustain competitiveness, Oschman (2017) claimed that organizations must integrate innovation, creativity, and marketing into strategic planning. Participant B1 echoed the sentiments of Oschman (2017) by stating, “strategic planning begins with knowing the business, the environment within which it operates, both internal and external customers.” The organization's ability to plan is one of the critical leadership skills that leaders need to succeed. In their respective markets, an effective strategy could help the organization become competitive (Barney, 2001). Buchanan, Wordsworth, Clifford, Robbe, Taylor,

Schuh, and Knight (2017) argued that leaders should be strategic planners setting the ground for achieving their followers' goals.

The research findings also yielded information that may assist the board of directors to understand management challenges and important issues they need to incorporate into subsequent strategic during the annual review of strategic plans. Barney (2001) argued that strategy helps explain how leaders can exploit their resource's current and future potential. Participants B1 and B2 contended that senior executives and the board of directors meet periodically to discuss the performance of the organization and identify variances between actual and forecast to ensure alignment with organizational objectives and take actions where necessary. Organizational leaders use business strategy to solve current and future business challenges (Neis, Pareira, & Maccari, 2017). Additionally, mentoring, job rotation, internships, and succession planning help senior executives to prepare middle managers for the leading leadership positions. Neis et al. (2017) contended that a potential future leader is willing and able to learn from experience, is ambitious and self-driven. Norzailan et al. (2016) argued that there are different approaches to strategic leadership skills development, including formal learning and self-initiated training. Seminars and executive leadership development programs are other methods for developing strategic leadership skills (Norzailan et al., 2016).

In extreme situations, planning and effective communication are essential features in strategic leadership that have a significant influence on the performance of employees and organizations (Iordanoglou, 2018). Top leaders use total quality management tools such as strategic planning to improve the quality of products, services,

and the performance of the organization (Megheirkouni, 2016). All participants (100%) asserted that the ability of strategic leaders to communicate the vision and tactics of execution to the organization is essential to organizational performance. The participants stated that, in a service organization, effective communication is the key driver to growth and sustainability.

There is a close relationship between research findings on strategic leadership and risk management and the larger body of literature (Pierce & Goldstein, 2018). The participants affirmed that risk management is a strategic leadership function that can be used by senior executives and board of directors to identify, assess, measure, and mitigate risks to prevent organization failures to enhance profitability. Pierce and Goldstein (2018) argued that the development of an integrated organizational risk management framework that provides senior leaders with a comprehensive view of risks could improve the competitiveness and performance of organizations. Participant B2 stated, “there are risks in any business but to be effective, you have to understand the business and the environment, build a culture where people act ethically and have a system of holding people accountable to deter others from unacceptable behavior that will put the organization at risk.” B2 stated further that “knowing the business and the risks will allow leaders to build a risk management strategy to mitigate the risks while enhancing profitability.

The board of directors has the overall responsibility for risk management and helping senior executives to develop risk management tools. Senior executives, however, are responsible for the day - to - day business risk management. Sugiyanto and Rahayu



(2018) argued that it is the responsibility of the board of directors to ensure that an organization has an effective risk management program. All the participants (100%) confirmed that the organization has a risk management framework which provides them the ability to identify and monitor risks.

The participants (B1, B2, S2, and S3) stated the organization does not have a formalized training program for senior executives according to the respondents. However, there are short-term courses in specified colleges which senior executives complete that provides an understanding, best practices, and how to manage risks effectively while enhancing profitability. Top management teams can rely on training in risk management to increase awareness of risk management practices among employees (Pierce & Goldstein, 2018). The board of directors approves risk levels beyond which management should not allow certain risks to exceed. Suriadi et al. (2015) found that business organizations must assume certain risks to seize market opportunities, to become competitive and sustainable.

Top management teams can better understand risk management by learning risk management practices, discourses, and strategies to identify, assess, measure, and mitigate risks (Bogodistov & Wohlgemuth, 2017). Top management teams can manage risk prospectively, retrospectively or in real-time; thus in certain instances, organizations may decide to apply risk management approaches such as risk avoidance, reduction, sharing, acceptance, or learning from past risk incidents (Bogodistov & Wohlgemuth, 2017). Leaders may use a risk management framework to reduce losses and enhance organization performance (Bogodistov & Wohlgemuth, 2017).

Development of leadership skills provides organizational leaders with a framework in the creation of organizational competitiveness and performance improvement (Iordanoglou, 2018). A fundamental expectation of senior executives is to develop strategic leadership skills to think and act strategically to navigate through the unfamiliar business environment (Iordanoglou, 2018). Participant B2 stated, “strategic leaders need to understand the business environment to know the key levers that drive change.” There are different approaches to developing strategic leadership skills, including formal learning and self - initiated training (Iordanoglou 2018). Learning is an important element of strategic leadership development. Other approaches include seminars and development programs for senior executive leadership (Elkington, Pearse, Moss, Van, & Martin, 2017). Strategic leaders possess effective communication, emotional and social intelligence skills, including trust and the capacity to synchronize the business and stakeholders’ objectives (Elkington et al., 2017).

Following increasing complexities in the workplace and demand for innovative solutions, sustainable leadership training and development programs are needed to improve the performance of leaders and organizations (Hickman & Akdere, 2018). There are numerous leadership development programs in the public and private sectors aimed at developing the capacity of organizational leaders to improve organizational performance (Hickman & Akdere, 2018). Leadership development programs have a significant influence on organization performance based on the findings derived from the study. All participants (100%) contended that despite the absence of a formal training program for senior leaders, it is an expectation that when a leader assumes the role of strategic

leadership, they should have the skills required at that level to be successful.

Additionally, the participants stated that informal training and executive courses organized for the senior leaders and board of directors have a positive influence on the performance of the organization.

An organization is defined as a structured social system which consist of individuals and groups and a collection of unique resources to create a competitive advantage (Birger, 1995). Krzakiewicz and Cyfert (2017) asserted both organizational specific resources and competencies, including industry conditions, affords senior executives the ability to influence the performance of an organization. Porter (1980) contended performance is a return to the specific resources and capabilities of the organizations and to the conditions of an industry that is beyond the organization's control (Porter, 1980). In the RBV framework of Birger (1995), performance is a return to the unique resources and skills within the organization's control (Barney, 2001). Krzakiewicz and Cyfert (2017) argued that the performance of an organization is significantly independent of the decisions of senior management and conditions within the environment the organization operates. Participants (B1 & B2) of the board who answered question 2 stated that unique resources provide the organization with opportunities in the external environment.

An organization's unique resources, specialized products to a particular client base, and the provision of excellent client experience, provide strategic leaders strategies to enhance performance and create competitive advantage (Elshaer, & Augustyn, 2016). The ability to enhance homegrown innovations lies in the appropriate depth of internal

knowledge and skills an organization possesses. (Elshaer & Augustyn, 2016). Local innovation initiatives may complete innovation emerging from various geographical locations (Elshaer & Augustyn, 2016).

### **Findings Aligned with the Conceptual Framework Theory**

Senior executives and the board of directors can use the RBV conceptual framework to optimize the utilization of resources, innovating and developing sustainable organizational strategies. The RBV theory is an essential element of strategic leadership, competitiveness of the organization, sustainability, and performance which provides top management teams with strategies to optimize internal resources (Barney, 2001). The research findings were consistent with other unique resources such as experienced leaders who have been in the tax preparation industry for a long time including professional and well-trained staff who can help the organization achieve the stated objectives through the strategic pillars and behaviors.

In analyzing the physical documents (Appendix F, strategic framework) of my study site, I discovered that the organization has a unique customer-centric philosophy and standard operating procedures targeting a niche market. A review of the physical documents (Appendix F, strategic framework) show the strategic pillars of the organization which reveal how the organization capitalizes on their unique resources to enhance profitability. A firm can acquire a competitive advantage through innovation (Barney et al., 2001). Birger postulated the RBV theory in 1984 and asserted that the theory could contribute to organizational competitiveness and profitability significantly (Birger, 1995). Birger (1995) contended that the theory has a significant influence on the

long-term performance of an organization and competitiveness. The findings of the research were consistent with my analyses of the physical documents (Appendix F, strategic framework) of my study site regarding reliable technology, human resource, and experienced tax professionals as some of the unique resources of tax preparation organizations. Top management teams use insatiable customer needs and technology to position their products (Akdag & Zinedin, 2011). The presence of technological enhancements and well trained and experienced staffing in an organization may have a positive impact on performance and enhance profitability (Mahsud, Yukl, & Prussia, 2011).

### **Application to Professional Practice**

Identifying the best practices that senior executives in large organizations need to address increased business growth may prove instrumental for enhanced organizational performance. Senior executives may be able to cultivate strategic leadership behaviors as needed to necessitate increase business performance based on the research findings within this study. According to Peterlin et al., (2015), development of strategic leadership skills is a significant element to establish organizational competitiveness. To anticipate the future of the organization, leaders must effectively communicate the vision to include strategic initiatives and the development of enabling organizational values and culture require strategic leadership skills. Formal and informal learning such as mentorship, peer coaching, and training on-the-job, can enhance the strategic leadership skills of top management teams (Norzailan, Othman & Ishizaki, 2016).

The participants recommended that individuals with strategic leadership responsibilities attend strategic leadership training to enhance the quality of their decision-making. Mintzberg (1994) argued that a strategic leader requires the use of creativity and imagination to be successful. Organizational leaders, such as the board of directors, can enhance the development of strategic leadership through sponsorship of top management teams to executive development programs for leaders. The study results can help top management teams develop strategic leadership practices with strategic leadership responsibilities for future leaders and contribute to positive social change.

Additionally, successful senior executives and board members who make strategic decisions have exceptional job satisfaction, tenured experience, and close interaction based on the research findings derived from this study. Any individual with the responsibility of making a strategic decision must have the ability to deal with new challenges and threats (Mintzberg, 1994). The internal and external chain of a knowledge base, including a large number of experienced staff has a significant influence in creating organizational competitiveness. Organizations can supplement positioning strategies with appropriate technology, knowledgeable employees, and operational efficiency (standard operating procedures) to enhance profitability.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Society expects organizational leaders to manage business performance objectives and enhance profitability to contribute to social change (Mitchell, Madill, & Chreim, 2015). Society benefits from the sizeable economic impact of large organizations. Society's wellbeing is predicated upon the behaviors of senior executives in the

organization to improve economic outcomes (Mitchell, Madill, & Chreim, 2015). Neagu (2016) contended that the behavior of top management teams contributes to society's economic sustainability. Moreover, society benefits when business leaders engage in strategic leadership behaviors (Henry & Newth, 2017).

Despite a wide range of literature and leadership theories that recommend best practices and principles of leadership, there is still no agreement on what constitutes leadership (Goldman, Scott, & Follman, 2015). Despite the lack of an accepted standard definition of the term leadership, however, many people are becoming increasingly interested in leadership rather than management (Sarfraz, 2017). Sarfraz asserted that leadership scholars and practitioners still have to agree on what leadership is and what practices represent leadership or not. Developments in leaders and leadership, however, are two distinct, complementary phenomena (Wong, 2017).

Strategic leadership is a topical subject that is rapidly gaining importance among leadership scholars and practitioners as indicated in this study. The concept of strategic leadership extends beyond organizational vision and mission statements, however, but includes all leadership attributes that can enhance organizational performance such as organizations' innovation, creativity, sustainability, and competitiveness. Norzailan (2017) contended strategic leaders must possess the ability to see cognitively distant opportunities that are not obvious to others. Identifying such opportunities involves the ability to explore and see the unfamiliar. Norzailan argued beyond understanding the economics of competition, strategizing is also about the psychology of cognition.

Coulson-Thomas (2018) argued that organizations must integrate innovation, creativity, and sustainability in strategic planning to create sustainable competition. Creating the vision, integrating the purpose, articulating cultural imperatives and values to identify and synchronize internal and external market opportunities and organizational capacity to improve profitability are the central role of strategic leadership (Coulson-Thomas, 2018). Organizational performance is the primary concern of senior executives. However, developing task and people management skills is the central focus of leadership (Koohang, Paliszkievicz, & Goluchowski, 2017). Participants argued top management teams such as the board of directors can enhance organizational performance while reducing the number of organizational failures in the economy through the development of effective strategic leadership practices. The study findings may contribute to positive social change as tax payments by profit-making organizations may support governments in providing social services such as healthcare, education, water, and sanitation, and may generate employment and enhance society's livelihood.

### **Recommendation for Action**

Leaders that model strategic leadership characteristics may reduce ineffective behaviors and provide top management teams strategies to enhance profitability (Xi, Zhao, & Xu, 2017). Xi, Zhao, and Xu (2017) asserted that leaders, who engage in strategic leadership behaviors, seek to balance the needs of employees and organizational commitment to enhance profitability. Moreover, strategic leaders commit to principled standards to ensure the pursuit of such behaviors enhance organizational profitability (Goldman et al., 2017). The findings of this study might help organizational leaders to



model and promote strategic leadership behaviors as workplace characteristics required to enhance the profitability of organizations. The study of strategic leadership encompasses the entire range of functions executed by top management teams in an organization.

Sajfert, Nikolić, Vukonjanski, Terek, and Vulović (2017) argued that the role of strategic leadership in the creation of enabling organizational values is significant to the success of the organization. Top management teams have a direct impact on the performance of the organization (Tognazzo, Gubitta, & Gerli, 2017). Findings of the study were consistent with the participants' assertions that senior executives and members of the board on assumption of a strategic leadership role, should have the ability to create both vision and mission statements to enhance organizational profitability. Additionally, effective planning, creativity, innovativeness, and monitoring the path to achieve strategic goals are essential skills required to enhance the profitability of large organizations. Other skills in strategic leadership include effective skills in communication, motivation, coaching and mentoring, and risk management. Based on the findings, I recommend the following actions:

- Strategic leadership scholars incorporate the identified elements of strategic leadership skills in leadership training program curriculum to improve the development of leadership skills. Strategic leadership practitioners should integrate identified elements of strategic leadership skills into their respective organizations' strategic leadership development programs.

- Organizational leaders should have a formalized training program for senior executives who have the responsibility of making strategic decisions. By establishing a standard training program, potential leaders will assume the role of strategic leadership and have the requisite skills needed to enhance profitability.
- Organizational leaders should ensure whenever there is a change in the organization, management undertake training to provide them with skills on how to lead through change. Management needs to lead through change processes by explaining the “why” behind the change and how it is beneficial for customers, employees, and, the organization.
- Organizational leaders should understand the role of strategic leadership and how profitability is enhanced. By understanding this phenomenon, selecting and hiring senior leaders either through internal promotion or external hiring will help organizational leaders to hire senior executives who have the skills and strategies to enhance profitability.
- Organizational leaders should identify their unique resources and capitalize on these unique resources to provide them with a competitive advantage to enhance profitability. Unique resources provide organizations with opportunities in the external environment to enhance profitability.

Prasad and Junni (2016) argued that organizational learning, strategic decision-making, and performance could enhance profitability through the development of

strategic leadership skills. Strategic leadership skills can affect the efficiency of top management teams and the organization's profitability (Zhang et al., 2017). The purpose of this study is to assist individuals with strategic leadership responsibilities to develop strategic leadership skills to enhance organizational profitability. I will use different communication methods such as presentations during workshops and seminars organized by the National Society for Leadership and Success, the Institute of Directors, and other management conferences to communicate the findings of this study. Additionally, I will publish this study on ProQuest and in peer-reviewed journals to disseminate the findings of the study.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings as contextualized within my study may contribute to strategies business leaders may apply to promote strategic leadership behaviors to enhance the profitability of large organizations within the tax preparation industry. Strategic leadership has become a contemporary phenomenon that attracts people in and outside of leadership (Tarigan, 2016). Training and skills development in strategic leadership provides senior executives with the requisite skills to create organizational competitiveness, profitability, and sustainability. Multiple theories and literature on strategic leadership suggest best practices and principles of leadership. However, there is still no agreement on what strategic leadership is (Bhattacharyya & Jha, 2013). Innumerable controversies surround the definition of the term strategic leadership, including how senior leaders should apply and execute within the organization (Allio, 2013). Despite the importance of strategic leadership, there is no accepted standard

definition approved by leadership scholars and practitioners (Allio, 2013). Many people continue to develop an interest in strategic leadership rather than management despite the absence of a standard definition of leadership.

Many leaders fail to achieve profitability goals because of limited experience and exposure to strategic leadership (Davis, 2016). Some senior executives embark on strategic leadership work without training and orientation to strategic leadership work. Specifically, some senior executives lack vital leadership skills to improve profitability (Davis, 2016). I used a single qualitative case study strategy to explore the role of strategic leadership in organizational profitability. Davis (2016) contended in the past, findings from related research are consistent with the outcome of this study. I conducted the study at a large tax preparation organization located in Kansas City. The organization resembles other tax preparation organizations operating in the industry. In light of the analysis, I recommend further research on how organizations can leverage information technology to increase profitability and the role of strategic leadership in knowledge-based organizations. I also recommend further research on how organizations can incorporate sustainability and business strategies to improve performance and how a top management team can use Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) to enhance organizational innovation and creativity.

Future researchers should consider including leaders with a strong background in finance for studies involving organizations and restricting the selection of participants to those working and living in local communities. A few responses to the in-depth interviews lacked substance and failed to address the role of strategic leadership in

organization profitability. Researchers should use the mixed method to permeate the generalization of results to a larger population to address the weaknesses of the single case study design in which researchers are unable to generalize study results to a larger population.

### **Reflections**

The doctoral research has been a great journey and a significant step in my strategic leadership career development that has shaped my philosophical worldview. Through this study, I have realized that the top management teams play a significant role in shaping the organizations' competitiveness, profitability, and sustainability. I have also realized that unique resources provide an organization with a competitive advantage to improve and sustain the performance of the organization. During the study, I assumed a low profile so I could elicit more responses from the participants. The approach worked very well because I did not allow my knowledge of strategic leadership to interfere with the views of the interviewees. The doctoral study has broadened my ability to think, reason, and act strategically and heightened the importance and my motivation to lead effectively. I have also learned that strategic leadership skill is necessary at all levels of the organization. Hence, it is imperative that strategic leadership development programs cut across all levels of employees with management responsibilities. The DBA study is practical based training in which students practice all new knowledge that they come across.

Balancing the demands of time for work, studies, and family was a big challenge. To succeed in the doctoral study, I had to sacrifice certain relationships, including those

of the family. Since I joined the DBA program, I have witnessed improvements in my performance and that of my organization. I now feel a sense of responsibility and the duty to contribute towards the social development and the well-being of my community than before I joined the DBA program. My take away from the DBA study is that a highly effective leader is inspiring and committed to the personal development of followers and the performance of the organization.

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this study was to explore the role of strategic leadership in the profitability of large organizations. I used the qualitative single case study to understand the phenomenon. Strategic leadership has emerged to be an essential element of the organizations' profitability, competitiveness, and sustainability. The ability of senior executives and the board of directors to envision and direct the actions of the organization may significantly impact the competitiveness of the organization (Peterlin, Pearse & Dimovski, 2015). Most organizations fail to achieve the desired profitability due to limited experience and exposure to strategic leadership (Davis, 2016). The findings derived from this study indicated that top management teams can use the RBV conceptual framework to enhance organizations' performance. The efficient use of internal resources has a positive influence on the organizations' competitiveness, profitability, and sustainability (Barney, 2001).

I developed interview questions to elicit responses from the participants on their experiences in the organizations' profitability. I purposely selected participants who were either senior executives or members of the board of directors with the responsibility of

strategic leadership and decision-making to enhance profitability in large organizations. Out of five participants' who responded to the interview questions, four demonstrated the expected level of experience and exposure to the work of strategic leadership. I coded the manuscripts of the participants' responses to the interview questions, including data from social media, company websites, and annual reports and used Nvivo software to analyze the data. During the analysis, I grouped essential statements and established five themes that provided insight into the strategic leadership skills that senior executives and members of the board of directors need to enhance profitability in large organizations.

The overarching research question was as follows: What strategies do senior executives in tax preparation organizations use to ensure profitability? The outcome of the study, as summarized by five themes, provided satisfactory answers to the problem. It is important that stakeholders understand the impact strategic leadership skills have on the performance of organizations (Alsamydai & Alensour, 2016).

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## Appendix A: Sample Interview Protocol

**Interview Protocol**

Organization:

Interviewee:

Interviewer: Bernard Owusu-Boadi

Survey Section Used:

\_\_\_\_\_ A: Interview Background

\_\_\_\_\_ B: Organizational Perspective

\_\_\_\_\_ C: Measurement

\_\_\_\_\_ D: Department and Discipline

\_\_\_\_\_ E: Interview Questions

Other Topics Discussed: \_\_\_\_\_

Documents Obtained: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Interview Comments or Leads: \_\_\_\_\_

**Strategies, Profitability, and Measurement Interviews**

## Introductory Protocol

*To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for agreeing to participate.*

*I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.*

**Introduction**

I selected you to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about strategies senior executives use to enhance profitability in

this organization. My research project as a whole focuses on the role of strategic leadership in the profitability of large organizations, with a particular interest in strategies that enhance profitability. My study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about strategies senior executives use to enhance profitability,

### **A. Interviewee Background**

How long have you been ...?

\_\_\_\_\_ in your present position?

\_\_\_\_\_ at this organization?

Interesting background information on interviewee:

What is your highest degree? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your field of study? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Briefly describe your role as it relates to strategies to enhance profitability?

Probes: How are you involved in enhancing profitability in this organization?

How did you get involved?

2. What motivates you to use innovative strategies in your role?

### **B. Organizational Perspective**

1. What is the strategy at this organization for enhancing profitability?

Probes: Is it working – why or why not?

Purpose, development, administration, recent initiatives

2. What resources are available to senior executives in enhancing organizational profitability?

3. What rewards do senior executives receive from the organization for enhancing profitability?

Probe: Do you see a widening of the circle of participants here on campus?

4. What is changing about enhancing profitability in this organization?

Probe: What is being accomplished through organization-based initiatives?

What kinds of networks do you see developing surrounding enhancing profitability?

5. Have you or your colleagues encountered resistance to these reforms in your department or this organization?

### **C. Measurement**

1. How do you go about assessing whether employees grasp the organization initiatives to enhance profitability?

Probe: Do you use evidence of employee training in your measurement of organization strategies?

2. What kinds of measurement techniques tell you the most about what employees are executing?

Probe: What kinds of measurements most accurately capture what employees are executing?

3. Are you involved in evaluating, training, and measurement practices at either the department or organization level? How is this achieved?

4. How is the measurement of employee training and execution used to enhance profitability in your department and the organization?

### **D. Department and Discipline**

1. What are some of the major challenges your department encounters in attempting to change profitability enhancement and measuring strategies? What are the major opportunities?

Probes: How can barriers be overcome?

How can opportunities be maximized?

2. To what extent are profitability-related activities evaluated within your department and the organization?

Probe: How is “good strategy” rewarded?

3. To what extent is profitability and strategies valued within your discipline?

Post Interview Comments and Observations:

### **E. Interview Questions**

1. What strategies do you use to ensure profitability in your organization?

2. What unique strategies provide your organization with a competitive advantage to ensure profitability?
3. What are the strategic leadership skills required to enhance profitability in your organization?
4. What are some of the successful new strategies undertaken in your organization within the last 5 years that impact profitability?
5. What training do you provide your senior executives that provide them with strategies to ensure profitability?
6. What criteria do you use to select senior executives with strategies to ensure profitability?
7. What strategies do your senior executives use to manage risk while ensuring profitability?
8. What is the effectiveness of strategic leadership initiatives regarding enhancing profitability in your organization?
9. What other strategies do your senior executives use to elevate performance and ensure profitability?

What additional information would you like to add to this study?



Appendix B: PHRP Certificate



## Appendix C: Participation Invitation Letter

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss,

I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: The Role of Strategic Leadership in the Profitability of Large Organizations. I am inviting you because you are one of the senior executives (or member of the board of directors) with strategic leadership responsibilities in ensuring profitability. The purpose is to explore strategies senior executives in large organizations use to ensure profitability.

The findings of this study may improve the understanding of the dynamics of organizational profitability in top management teams of medium to large sized commercial organizations in the Northeast of the United States. Stakeholders and academia may benefit from improved understanding of the contribution strategic leadership have on organizational profitability. Top leaders may use the recommendations to improve organizational profitability and to prevent and reverse similar strategic leadership failure and may improve the soundness of the financial system in the country.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Informed Consent letter attached and respond to the researchers' email address with the words "I consent" to evidence your acceptance to participate in the study.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Bernard Owusu-Boadi, M.S., MBA, Doctoral Student, Walden University

## Appendix D: Organization Physical Document

