

2020

## Strategies to Implement Organizational Changes in Middle East and North Africa

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Ilham Hiyari

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

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Strategies to Implement Organizational Changes in Middle East and North Africa

by

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MBA, National University, 1994

BA, I.S.C.A.E, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

February 2020

## Abstract

Organizational change initiatives often fail in the implementation phase resulting in decreased productivity affecting the net profitability of the organization. Grounded in Kotter's 8-step change model, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies used by business leaders to implement organizational change initiatives successfully. A purposeful sample of 10 business leaders from 2 organizations located in the region of the Middle East and North Africa participated in the study. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and secondary sources including strategic business plan presentations, change tracking tools, meeting minutes, financial statements, and archival records. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis with 6 themes emerging to include adopting formal and informal communication, ensuring employees' engagement and commitment, choosing the right leadership style, applying a cohesive culture, developing the proper tools and training, and speeding the execution process. A key recommendation includes utilizing open communications that allow employee input. Implications for social change include the potential effect on surrounding communities. Successful organizational change initiatives implementation could lead to reduced employee job loss, more opportunities for increased employment, a potential increase of incomes, and local economic improvement.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to all the business leaders who welcomed me into their work lives and openly shared their time and experiences on their journey as leaders of change. They provided a wealth of information and support for this research. Without the data they provided, this work could not have been completed. I also dedicate this work to all the leaders and managers who have struggled with or are struggling with the concept of change management. Successful change implementation is possible when the people responsible understand the requirements and strategies needed to deliver and thrive during the process. I hope that business leaders seeking successful organizational change initiatives implementation find value in the findings and recommendations of this study.

## Acknowledgments

A project of this magnitude is never the product of one mind or one person's effort. This doctoral program has been a test of patience and resilience, but also a period of tremendous personal and professional growth. I thank God for the light and for holding my hand at every step of this incredible journey. I offer my most sincere and eternal gratitude to Dr. Robert Banasik, who agreed to serve as my committee chair. His knowledge, prompt and judicious feedback, patience, and humility molded me to be a better educator and hopefully academic leader. He had a unique way of championing my efforts, particularly when I could not see a path forward. Dr. Banasik made my feet "stay on the fire" to deliver a refined up-to-standard piece. Special thanks as well to Dr. Timothy Malone, my second committee member, and Dr. Judith Blando, my university research reviewer, whose unwavering guidance and insightful comments through the dissertation phases often pushed my thinking in new directions.

I also want to express my deep and eternal gratitude to my parents, Mohammed and Khadija, who have always encouraged my curiosity and fostered a love for learning. Special thanks as well to my two brothers, Ihsane and Brahim, who were very instrumental in my success and relentlessly offered moral and emotional support.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Change is taking place at an unpredictable pace and is considered a constant challenge facing organizations (Van Den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2016). Change is essential to create or maintain a competitive advantage and long-term success (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). How a company manages change can directly correlate with whether it will be successful (Christensen, 2014). Organizations' leaders find it critical to make a cognizant effort to plan and implement organizational changes in an inclusive manner to ensure that the change is sustained over time (Vantrappen & Wirtz, 2018). This study addressed the strategies business leaders used to successfully implement organizational changes in the region of Middle East and North Africa.

### **Background of the Problem**

Organizational change occurs frequently in business environments and is considered an important management topic (Mathews & Linski, 2016). Change is inevitable because of the dynamic and shifting social, political, economic, and technological landscapes (Dobrovic & Timkova, 2017). For organizations to be sustainable and build a competitive advantage, change must become the norm, and organizations need a systematic approach to drive change successfully (Imran, Rehman, Aslam, & Bilal, 2016).

Organizational change initiatives often fail in the implementation phase resulting in decreased productivity, which affects the profitability of the organization (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). Various theories and methods have been proposed to manage organizational change initiatives; however, the magnitude of failure rates implies a lack

of a valid organizational change framework (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015).

Implementation failure rates range between 50% and 70% (Brand, Croonen, & Welsh, 2016). The failure rates indicate a continued need to investigate factors and practices that foster successful organizational change initiatives and to determine the best model for the process. This study may help close this gap by helping organization leaders develop an integrated approach to drive systematic, constructive, and successful organizational change initiatives.

### **Problem Statement**

Organizational change initiatives often fail in the implementation phase resulting in decreased productivity affecting the net profitability of the organization (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). Even though organizational change initiatives are important, their implementation has high failure rates between 50% and 70% (Brand et al., 2016). The general business problem was that organizational change implementation is often unsuccessful. The specific business problem was that some business leaders lack strategies to successfully implement organizational change initiatives.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that business leaders have used to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. The target population consisted of 10 business leaders within two corporations operating in the consumer goods industry in the Middle East and North Africa region, who have successfully implemented organizational change initiatives. The findings of this study may have a positive social change effect on surrounding communities, as successful

organizational change initiatives may lead to more stable employment of local citizens for improving communities' local economies.

### **Nature of the Study**

Three research methodologies are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Boeren, 2017). Qualitative researchers can provide more information about the behavior and characteristics than quantitative researchers (Yin, 2018). In contrast, researchers use a quantitative method to examine data by testing hypotheses about variables' relationships or groups' differences (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The mixed-methods approach is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods whereby researchers capitalize on the strengths of each method combined in a single study (Annansingh & Howell, 2016; Yin, 2018). The quantitative method was not suitable for my study because I neither analyzed numeric data nor tested statistical hypotheses. The mixed-methods approach was not appropriate for my study because I explored participants' experiences and did not test a hypothesis or theory. The qualitative method was appropriate for this research because I explored data from specific participants to identify and understand their experiences.

A multiple case study was the research design for this study because I explored the what, how, and why of an event. Researchers benefit from using multiple case study designs to investigate individuals' experiences and perceptions to understand processes, feelings, and concerns of individuals in the context of a subject (Yin, 2018). Researchers use the phenomenological design to explore participants' perceptions of experiencing a phenomenon (Errasti-Ibarrondo, Antonio Jordan, Diez-Del-Corral, & Arantzamendi,

2018). The phenomenological design was not suitable for my research because I did not explore the participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon. Researchers conduct ethnographic studies to explore shared cultures and patterns of behavior or attitudes characterizing a culture (Bass & Milosevic, 2018). Because I did not explore the culture of my research participants, an ethnographic design was not appropriate. In the multiple case study design, researchers describe a specific event, activity, or problem by using a single case or multiple cases in a real-world situation (Yin, 2018). Using a multiple case study design was appropriate for this study because I explored detailed and real-life information using different data types to discover strategies used by business leaders to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. I used a multiple case design versus a single case design to enable more in-depth understanding. Evidence arising from multiple case studies is robust and more reliable than from single case research (Yin, 2018). Multiple case studies provide a more comprehensive answer to a research question than a single case design (Yin, 2018).

### **Research Question**

What strategies have some business leaders used to successfully implement organizational change initiatives?

### **Interview Questions**

Question 1: What strategies did you use to successfully implement organizational change initiatives?

Question 2: To what extent were the employees involved in the development and implementation of successful organizational change?

Question 3: How did you prepare employees to be qualified to successfully implement organizational change initiatives?

Question 4: How did you respond to any resistance from employees, managers, or departments while implementing successful organizational change initiatives?

Question 5: What challenges were encountered during the implementation of new organizational changes?

Question 6: How did you address each of the challenges to implementing successful strategies for organizational change initiatives?

Question 7: How did your organization assess the effectiveness of its strategies for successful organizational change initiatives?

Question 8: How has your company benefitted from more effective organizational change initiatives?

Question 9: What other information can you offer regarding strategies your organization used that led to the successful implementation of organizational change initiatives?

### **Conceptual Framework**

In qualitative studies, the conceptual framework provides concepts from the literature that could ground the research (Adom, Hussein, & Agyem, 2018). The conceptual framework that guided this research was Kotter's (1996) eight-stage process for leading change. Although other models exist, Kotter's has been highly influential through its structured framework to analyze processes of organizational change (King, Hopkins, & Cornish, 2018). According to Kotter, to create a successful change

implementation, there is a series of eight phases: (a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) forming a powerful guiding coalition, (c) creating a vision, (d) communicating the vision, (e) empowering others to act on the vision, (f) planning for and creating short-term wins, (g) consolidating performance and producing still more change, and (h) institutionalizing new approaches. The first four steps of Kotter's eight-step change theory are related to creating the right climate for change. Steps 5 and 6 link the change to the organization. Steps 7 and 8 address the implementation and perpetuation of the change. Kotter's model is known as a reliable resource for organizations and champions of change to implement change successfully (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). Kotter's model offers a phase-driven strategic approach and a systematic framework that can help leaders design, deploy, initiate, and integrate strategies to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. Kotter's model aligned with the purpose of this study because the implementation of successful change initiatives is at the core of the organizational change. The process detailed by Kotter provided an adequate lens through which to analyze the information that was shared by the participants in this study.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Change agents:* The people within an organization who are leaders and champions of the change process (Kotter, 1996).

*Change implementation:* The execution of a change management plan that is intended to create organizational change (Grawitch & Ballard, 2016).

*Change initiative:* A project designed to improve operational performance within an organization (Naslund & Norrman, 2019).

*Change management*: The set of processes, tools, and practices used to manage the people side of a change. Change management is the final element of realizing change effectively (Al-Alawi, Abdulmohsen, Al-Malki, & Mehrotra, 2019).

*Organizational change*: The process by which an organization moves from a current state to a desired state with the intent of improving the value or effectiveness of the organization, including more efficient use of resources (Espedal, 2016).

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

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are aspects of a study taken for granted for which there is no specific evidence (Noble & Smith, 2015). The following two assumptions accompanied this research. First, I assumed that the participants would be candid, accurate, and truthful in their answers and would refrain from personal bias. Second, I assumed that the participants would understand the interview questions and would have a vivid recollection of their experience.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses of a study, which might compromise its validity. Researchers should state the limitations that are not within the control of the principal investigator (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013). Limitations are uncontrolled potential events that might affect the method and conclusions of the study. There were two main limitations to this study: Participants' may not have been able to interpret and communicate their experiences effectively, and the results of the study may not apply to other organizations in other regions of the world.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are constraints that an individual conducting a study might develop to determine the boundaries of the research (Halstead & Lare, 2018). These delimitations are related to choices made by researchers that define the parameters of their study. There were two delimitations to this study. The first delimitation was the constraint to several participants from whom conclusions were drawn per the qualitative method. Second, only leaders who had been directly involved in the successful implementation of organizational change initiatives and still served in the selected organizations were eligible for participation.

**Significance of the Study**

Organizational change represents movement from the current state to the desired state (Espedal, 2016). The ability to react to market demands and to manage change is important (Dobrovic & Timkova, 2017). Successful change management is necessary in any organization seeking to sustain its business and succeed in a highly competitive environment (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015).

**Contribution to Business Practice**

A fundamental determinant of organizations' growth and sustainability is the successful implementation of changes (Kotter, 1996). The findings of this study may be used to improve the rate of successful implementation of organizational change initiatives. The results may also be used to help reduce unsuccessful organizational change initiatives costs. Finally, the findings of this study may provide examples of policies, procedures, processes, and initiatives to improve the implementation of

organizational change initiatives.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Several popular management concepts associate a range of organizational activities with positive social change (Stephan, Patterson, Kelly, & Mair, 2016). Successful implementation of organizational change initiatives may contribute to the advancement of societal well-being (Stephan et al., 2016). According to Stephan et al. (2016), an improved success rate of organizational change initiatives could provide opportunities for increased employment, increased incomes, and improved local economies.

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

A literature review reveals numerous gaps and potential research opportunities. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore business strategies used by business leaders to successfully implement organizational change initiatives in the region of the Middle East and North Africa. This literature review begins with an exploration of the conceptual framework. Afterward, I discuss alternative theories such as Lewin's model, ADKAR, and McKinsey 7S model. A detailed discussion follows on organizational change initiatives implementation (OCII). I address factors that impact the successful implementation of organizational change initiatives. Exploring these themes involved a multifaceted perspective for OCII and provided valuable insights into OCII around the globe.

This literature review comprised peer-reviewed works from reputable published materials in online databases and professional organization websites. I used sources such

as the Walden Library databases including EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, Emerald Management, Science Direct, ProQuest, Business Source Complete, SAGE Premier, and ABI/INFORM Complete. The selection of seminal books and reference materials supported the conceptual framework underpinning this study and provided a foundation for the study. The literature review also provided a means for acquiring the knowledge to explore the parameters impacting OCII. Using Kotter's model as a conceptual framework helped me understand the process of change and served as the theoretical lens to view the concept of OCII. The model also served as an essential resource and point of reference in my analysis of data from the interviews I conducted on strategies used by business leaders to successfully implement organizational change initiatives.

I used research to build and complement the purpose of this study through a total of 98 sources, 96% of which were peer-reviewed publications. Among the peer-reviewed journal articles, 82% were published from 2016 to 2020 and 18% were published before 2016. Table 1 shows the numbers of sources and the percentages of publication dates.

Table 1

*Literature Source Content*

Literature source content	Total #	Total published between 2016 and 2020	% published between 2016 and 2020	Total published before 2016	% published before 2016
Peer-reviewed journals	94	77	82%	17	18%
Non-peer-reviewed journals	0	0	0%	0	0%
Dissertations	0	0	0%	0	0%
Books	4	0	0%	4	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21%</b>

When conducting the literature review, I used key words pertaining to OCII, which included the following: *change, change management, organizational change, communication, resistance to change, leadership, emotional, internal and external factors, successful and failure implementation, change initiative, organizational change theories, cultural and behavioral aspects of change, change frameworks, and managing change processes*. The literature review covers Kotter's change model and its implementation and addresses organizational change initiatives on change strategies and potential barriers to implementation. I organized the literature review into five subsections: (a) Kotter's conceptual framework, (b) supporting and contrasting conceptual change models, (c) internal factors, (d) external factors, and (e) critical viewpoint analysis.

## **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is the basis for any qualitative study and reflects ideas from existing literature or theory on the research topic (Adom et al., 2018). Researchers use a conceptual framework to ensure the extension of knowledge by providing both direction and impetus to the research inquiry (Adom et al., 2018). Different definitions and methods have been proposed to manage the change process (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Change models can offer a useful guide to implementation for leaders to improve effectiveness (Hussain et al., 2018). These models typically depict change processes as a series of steps or phases guiding implementation efforts toward the desired goal (Hussain et al., 2018). The most widely recognized model for managing change is Kotter's eight-step model (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). In the following sections, I share the data and analysis on four organization change frameworks that I considered: Kotter, Lewin three-step, McKinsey 7s, and ADKAR. I conclude this section with the rationale behind the selection of Kotter's framework to support this study on successful OCII.

### **Kotter's Change Model**

Many models of change management exist. The model that has been the most significant and enduring in academic and practitioner settings is Kotter's model of leading planned change (Chappell et al., 2017). Kotter's model is one of the most renowned models of change management. The model was originally published in *Harvard Business Review* in 1995 and later as the bestselling book titled *Leading Change* in 1996. Kotter's model emerged from his observations of organizations that had not been successful in implementing change (Hughes, 2016). This model remains a reference in

the field of change management (Chappell et al., 2017). The assumption in Kotter's model is that successful change of any magnitude goes through all eight steps, usually in sequence (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). According to Kotter (1996), skipping steps creates the illusion of speed and does not produce a satisfying result. Critics of Kotter's model suggest that not all steps require the same level of attention (Wentworth, Behson, & Kelley, 2018).

Kotter (1996) noted that the primary goal of organizational change is to make fundamental changes in how business is conducted to help cope with a new and more challenging market environment. According to Kotter, the primary function of management is to provide order and consistency to organizations by planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, and decision-making (Hughes, 2016). Kotter's central argument is that most organizational change efforts are not successful, but attempts could be improved by following an eight-step model for change management. Kotter's eight-step process is based on eight faults he consistently found in unsuccessful change initiatives. Kotter stipulated that the change process could stall due to cultures, bureaucracy, politics, lack of trust, lack of teamwork, negative attitudes, lack of leadership, and fear of the unknown. Kotter's eight-stage process of creating significant change includes (a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) creating the guiding coalition, (c) developing a vision and strategy, (d) communicating the change vision, (e) empowering broad base action, (f) generating short-term wins, (g) consolidating gains and producing more change, and (h) anchoring new approaches in the culture. Kotter emphasized that each step builds on the previous steps; skipping steps may create a sense of quick

progress, but it undermines the likelihood of success (Baloh, Zhu, & Ward, 2017).

Kotter's model is driven by strong leadership and includes the most critical steps that leaders must take when implementing change initiatives. In the following sections, I summarize the academic literature to explain and define each of Kotter's steps.

**Establish a sense of urgency.** Organizational leaders need to convince at least 75% of their managers that the status quo is more dangerous than the unknown (Kotter, 1996). A greater sense of urgency may lead to more successful change implementation. Most companies were unable to successfully implement change because the leaders could not create a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1996). Top management is responsible for creating a sense of urgency and motivating all relevant stakeholders (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). A discussion of the importance of change and the possible negative impact of no change is recommended to foresee successful change opportunities (Kotter, 1996). Communication, creating short and long-term goals, teamwork, and measuring success are all required to promote urgency (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016).

**Create the guiding coalition.** For change to succeed, there needs to be a coalition that includes senior executives, management, and employees who will be instrumental in executing the change (Kotter, 1996). A coalition composed of both top management and employees has the power to shepherd changes and become part of a volunteer network, including all levels of the traditional hierarchy who drives change (Kotter, 1996; Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). These must be people who are committed to the change and who can transfer this commitment to others. The specific size of the coalition is dependent on the size of the organization. The coalition must continue to grow;

otherwise, the change efforts will stop flowing causing unsuccessful organizational change implementation (Kotter, 1996).

**Develop a change vision.** A simple and compelling vision is needed to inspire individuals. Leaders should create a vision that the organization can align and identify with to guide the change (Kotter, 1996). Kotter (1996) argued that most change initiatives fail because of vague objectives, failure to plan, and failure to implement contingency plans. Leaders should create realistic and attainable goals that turn vision into reality (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). Managers should influence the coalition team to be focused, imaginative, and communicative (Kotter, 1996). Managers also need to keep the vision simple to ensure proper communication and understanding. The coalition must develop a coherent picture of the future that speaks to other members of the organization.

**Communicate the change vision.** Employees' buy-in can only be achieved by successful and clear communication and by involving people (Kotter, 1996). Leaders need to act consistently with the vision to demonstrate commitment. Maintaining communication between all levels of the organization during a change implementation is essential (Heckelman, 2017). The use of each available channel of communication and the revamping of those focused on unessential information become fundamental. Leaders should use every form of communication such as emails, meetings, or newsletters. Leaders also should lead by example to demonstrate the needed behaviors (Kotter, 1996; Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). Kotter (1996) maintained that communication involves deeds as well as words, and that role modeling is a form of communicating the vision.

**Empower broad-based action.** Leaders should remove or mitigate any obstacles to implementing change while encouraging innovation (Kotter, 1996). Employees should not encounter barriers preventing them from conveying their thoughts in the form of complaints or recommendations (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). Employees' ability to express their thoughts will provide top management with the opportunity to identify and remove any change implementation obstacles (Kotter, 1996).

**Generate short-term wins.** This step is about sharing evidence of successes to motivate (Heckelman, 2017). Leaders should define short-term and long-term objectives to promote buy-in and change and to reward success (Kotter, 1996). By creating short-term wins, leaders and individuals can build on their success and avoid any loss of momentum (Kotter, 1996; Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). Short-term wins help ensure a sense of urgency that strategy and vision are not lost while at the same time motivating employees by giving them the opportunity to see the progress (Kotter, 1996). Change initiatives require significant time to achieve real transformation. Creating relevant metrics appears critical for success measurement so that the coalition can see the achievement of established goals and outcomes. Communicating small successes while not declaring total victory is vital (Kotter, 1996). The enhancement of successful outcomes by implementing metrics and reporting successful change results is helpful to leaders.

**Never let up.** This step involves maintaining momentum and urgency. Leaders should build on success, improve morale, and remove obstacles (Heckelman, 2017). Vision and strategy should be ingrained in the company's culture (Kotter, 1996). Every

successful phase during change implementation should be looked at as an opportunity to build on the momentum and optimize the right actions and initiatives (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). This step is necessary so that people do not revert to attitudes and behaviors prior to the change (Kotter, 1996).

**Incorporate change into the culture.** During this final step, leaders focus on embedding changes into culture and practice (Heckelman, 2017). Culture influences how employees take risk, manage change, and solve problems (Mouhamadou, Jeanie, & Rosa, 2017). Leaders should communicate the benefits of the change and supporting evidence (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). Leaders should ensure that individuals are not only committed to the new change initiatives, but also are rooted in the culture (Kotter, 1996). Leaders need to reinforce changes by stressing the connections between organizational success and the new programs or work behaviors.

### **Supporting and Contrasting Conceptual Change Models**

#### **Lewin's Change Model**

Lewin's model of change can be traced to 1951 when the focus was on planned change that related to group decisions, implementation, and social change. Lewin's model is another popular approach and is one of the foundation models for understanding organizational change (Hussain et al., 2018). Lewin (1951), a physicist and social scientist, explained organizational change using the analogy of changing the shape of a block of ice. Lewin's model of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing argues that there is a series of three steps that constitute the change process. Lewin three-step process influenced change management research over many decades (Eriksson & Fundin, 2018).

The model includes creating the motivation to change, moving through the change process by promoting effective communication and empowering people to embrace new ways of working, and reaching a sense of stability (Huarng & Mas-Tur, 2016).

**Unfreezing.** The first stage of Lewin's (1951) model involves preparing the organization to embrace the change as a necessity through breaking down the existing status quo and challenging currently defined beliefs and values. Unfreezing is the state of unleashing the current system or procedure as an urgent concern (Lewin, 1951). Lewin compared status in organizations to a block of ice that needs defrosting to function in another state; otherwise, organizations will resist change. Lewin's notion of unfreezing suggests that inertial forces must be overcome to introduce a period of fluidity and change (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016). Clear reasons for change help include dealing with organizational behavior in terms of the ways of thinking, processes, and structures (Jones & Van de Ven, 2016).

**Changing.** The second step of Lewin's (1951) involves people resolving their uncertainty and starting to believe and act in ways that support the new direction with proactive participation. People need time to understand the changes and feel connected. Once a block of ice is defrosted, it will begin to flow, move, or transition (Lewin, 1951). Changing is the state of moving forward from the old system into the new system, and it requires the processes in transition (Jalagat, 2016). New change causes uncertainty and fear as people adapt to new ways of operating (Militaru & Zanfir, 2016). According to Lewin (1951), new change is the beginning of organizational change into a new level of

equilibrium. People begin to move into the new state of being while connecting with the leaders through a change of tasks and structures (Appelbaum, Cameron, et al., 2017).

**Refreezing.** The third phase of Lewin's model (1951) indicates that the changes take shape and that employees feel confident and comfortable with the new ways of working. New behaviors and processes are formalized to make sure the changes are incorporated into everyday business operations (Burnes, 2004). The key objective is to stabilize the group and to institutionalize new behaviors through policies as a new culture to avoid regressing to the old ones (Lewin, 1951). The new behaviors should match the new environment brought about by the change. Refreezing stage is about consolidating the successful change made in the organization, and ensuring there is no digressing from the newly attained stage of organizational advancement (Issah & Zimmerman, 2016).

Lewin's model serves as a guideline, which can help to predict and resolve individual resistance to change (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). Leaders who are aware of the three stages can better manage change and improve their own success when implementing organizational change initiatives (Lewin, 1951). According to Wojciechowski, Pearsall, Murphy, and French (2016), Lewin's theory stipulates that individuals and groups of individuals are influenced by restraining forces that counter negative driving forces aimed at keeping the status quo and positive driving forces that push in the direction that causes change to happen; this tension between the driving and restraining maintains equilibrium. This equilibrium allows for smooth changes within an organization to take place.

### **McKinsey 7s Change Model**

McKinsey's 7s framework was developed by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman two consultants working at the McKinsey and Company consulting firm (1982). Peters and Waterman designed the model as a tool for monitoring change while employed by McKinsey. They combined three hard and four soft change elements. The hard areas consist of the system, strategy, and structure while the soft system areas include skills, style, staff, and shared values which generally are difficult to manage but are considered as the foundations of the organization and are a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Jalagat, 2016). McKinsey's model suggests that a successful transformation depends on the ability of leaders to tell a compelling story, model the desired behavioral changes, and reinforce employees for getting in line (Kaiser, 2018). The model encourages interdependency of the elements for managing successful implementation of change from a shared values perspective.

**Strategy.** This element refers to a plan that is developed to achieve sustained competitive advantage that is also aligned with the six other elements of McKinsey's 7s model (Peters & Waterman, 1982). This parameter is also a sound strategy, usually a long-term strategy that is reinforced by a strong mission, vision, and values. The key in the 7s model is to look if the strategy is aligned with the other elements.

**Structure.** This element considers the organizational chart of the company where it shows the departments with corresponding responsibilities and accountabilities of the workforce and the hierarchy. Most organizations use formal channels of communication

(Kirschenboim, 2018). The organizational structure must be designed in a way that information is not choked (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

**Systems.** This is a hard area which refers to the processes and procedures that the company possesses that reflect the daily activities and how the decisions are made. The internal processes and procedures should facilitate good communication. Understanding how effective processes are in maintaining the correct flow is imperative (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

**Skills.** This element represents dominating attributes, competencies, or capabilities that the organization does best. In times of organizational changes, the question of what skills are required to reinforce a new strategy or structure is addressed. Communication can flow smoothly if the staff possesses the right skills (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

**Staff.** This element is concerned with the employees' number and profile an organization needs and how they can be recruited, trained, motivated, and rewarded (Gokdeniz, Kartal, & Komurcu, 2017). People are considered a pool of resources to be nurtured, developed, guarded, and allocated (Kirschenboim, 2018). The staff element can facilitate effective communication and value needs to be attached to communication skills during both recruitment and selection.

**Style.** This element relates to the ways and means the top management uses to promote a culture of open communication and impact the performance of the entire organization. The style aspect relates to how leadership styles influence the performance

of the whole organization (Jalagat, 2016). Style is an essential element of effective strategy implementation (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

**Shared values.** This soft area reflects organizations' belief system and attitude that refer to the norms serving as a guide to employees' behaviors (Jalagat, 2016). This element is considered central to the model (Gokdeniz et al., 2017). According to Peters and Waterman (1982), the shared values area is the foundation of any firm.

### **ADKAR Change Model**

ADKAR model is one of the most commonly known and used change models developed in the form of a book by Jeff Hiatt in 2006 (Das, 2019). The model consists of five elements that define the basic building blocks for successful change. Essentially, it is an acronym that spells out the five stages of changes: **A**wareness of the need to change, **D**esire to support and participate in the change, **K**nowledge of how to change, **A**bility to implement required skills and behaviors, and **R**einforcement to sustain the change (Wong, Lacombe, Keller, Joyce, & O'Malley, 2019). According to Hiatt (2006), the ADKAR model structure is meant to be used as an individual change management model. It represents the essential elements of change of a single person or groups (Al-Alawi et al., 2019). Its main focus is on the personal perception and implementation of the change (Das, 2019).

- Awareness of the need for change represents a person's or organization's understanding of the nature of the change, why the change is being made, and the risk of not changing. Awareness also includes information about the internal and external drivers creating the need for change (Hiatt, 2006).

- **D**esire to support and participate in the change represents the willingness to support and engage in a change. It is influenced by the nature of the change and individuals' personal situation, as well as intrinsic motivators (Hiatt, 2006).
- **K**nowledge of how to change represents the training and education necessary to know how to change. It includes information about behaviors, processes, systems, and skills needed to implement a change (Hiatt, 2006)
- **A**bility to launch the required skills and behaviors represents the implementation of the change. It is about turning knowledge into action (Hiatt, 2006)
- **R**einforcement to ascertain the change successfully represents internal and external factors that sustain a change. It could include recognition and rewards tied to the change execution. Internal reinforcement could be a person's internal satisfaction with his or her achievement or other personal benefits (Hiatt, 2006).

ADKAR model is a description of successful change at the individual level and outlines the goals or outcomes of successful change. The success or failure of organizational change depends on the unique contributions of the people involved (Hiatt, 2006). The model is based on the premise that organizations do not change; it is the people within organizations who change. It provides a goal-oriented framework to help managers convey the change's objectives before the process is initiated (Das, 2019). The model is a tool for planning change management activities, diagnosing gaps, developing

corrective action, and supporting managers and team leaders (Hiatt, 2006). Using the ADKAR change model allows various goals for change management teams to focus on steps, outcomes, and results that can be sustained and implemented (Saulnier, 2017).

### **Conceptual Framework Analysis and Rationale to Kotter's Model Choice**

Several approaches to managing change exist. No model prevails to suit everyone. Each one provides positive ways to handle change and can be adapted according to organizations' needs. Models have the common ground of the importance of having a deliberately chosen framework to be used as a guideline in the process of organizational change. Conceptual frameworks to organizational change seem to contain a tendency toward a process orientation. No one theory can completely achieve a standard solution to successful organizational change initiatives implementation (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). For the purpose of this study, I have considered four frameworks: Kotter's eight-step plan, Lewin's three-step change model, McKinsey 7S model by Peters and Waterman, and the ADKAR plan. They all begin with the past or current state and end with a current or future state. Lewin's three steps, Kotter's eight-stage process, McKinsey 7S model, or ADKAR plan are also all similar when viewed as processes. Kotter (1996) suggested an eight-stage process for managing change. While Kotter did not relate those stages to Lewin's (1951) model, it is possible to align these two theories in a comparative model. Lewin wrote about the sociology of change at the individual behavioral level. By aligning Lewin's phases with Kotter's eight stages, the parallels between their concepts become evident while adding the sociological insight of Lewin.

The work of academics and practitioners serving organizations overlapped. Kotter, for example, developed his theory as a consultant with over 100 companies while working as a professor at Harvard University. Peters and Waterman, like many practitioners who worked for a consulting company that delivered change management services to organizations, are frequently cited by scholars such as Burke (2018). Lewin (1951) worked exclusively in social dynamics and rooted his theory in cultural and behavioral change. There has been some criticism of all these theories. For instance, Nystrom, Hoog, Garvare, Weinehall, and Ivarsson (2013) suggested that most of the widely accepted theories of change were similar and seemed either incomplete or oversimplified. Burke (2018) noted that most theories principles had a tendency to oversimplify actual change and overlooked the ambiguity and complexity of effecting behavioral or cultural change. Burke suggested that change is rooted in psychological and behavioral theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Because of the failure to address behavioral and psychological dynamics, Burke believed that the change theories submitted by others were incomplete. For example, according to Burke, Kotter's model presented a logical, sequential approach for organizational change, stressing change as a procedural activity; but did not emphasize behavioral aspects.

The findings from empirical research reinforce the strength and validity of Kotter's model (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Kotter's model is valuable and can lead to many positive outcomes such as employees' engagement or broad culture as well as includes key stages crucial to catapult change forward (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Each of Kotter's steps takes a similar approach for engaging personnel in that particular

step, and each is intended to effect behavioral change as part of the organizational change. Kotter's model is not without limitations (Baloh et al., 2017). Although there is significant support in the contextual dimensions, there is debate on the sequencing of the eight steps and on whether change factors are continuous or simultaneous. Sometimes some steps are skipped; yet, good results are achieved (Baloh et al., 2017).

The ADKAR model was used for many reasons such as allowing the management to separate the change process into parts, pinpointing where change is failing, and addressing that impact point. Hiatt (2006) shows that problems with the people dimension of change are the most commonly cited reasons for project failures. By focusing on processes instead of people, ADKAR fails to consider change to be a complex phenomenon that incorporates the interdependence of multiple variables. The model also fails to highlight the important differences between people and organizational changes (Das, 2019).

McKinsey 7s model set various factors all co-working together to assess how a company can manage change. However, a quantifiable metric system is missing to measure the success capability of this change management tool. It is easy to understand the model, but it is challenging to apply it because of common misunderstandings of what well-aligned elements should be like (Gokdeniz et al., 2017).

McKinsey's 7s model is used to acknowledge the structures needing attention as static or continuous elements of an organization. The change is mapped as a sequential process. Peters and Waterman (1982) considered processes unique in every case and did not believe that a generalized process model was possible. They developed a unique

process each time they engaged with a new client suggesting that each effort is unique and it would be impossible to define a process before starting work with a client. The strengths of the McKinsey 7s model are: (a) the description of organizational variables that convey obvious importance, (b) the recognition of the importance of the interrelationships among all seven variables, and (c) the application of its generic form in an easy manner. The limitations of the model are the lack of variables addressing external factors and performance related issues. This flaw seems to be driven by its origin, which was from practice as opposed to theory (Kaiser, 2018).

Kurt Lewin has been regarded as the pioneer of planned change (Bakari, Hunjra, & Niazi, 2017). Lewin's work dominated the theory and practice of change management for years. The model approach to change attracted major criticism as many have argued that his approach was too simplistic and mechanistic for a world where organizational change is a continuous and open-ended process (Burke, 2018). Lewin's three-step model though is considered to be the basis for multiple change frameworks and has been criticized for its linearity and inability to incorporate leader-follower relationship dynamics (Bartunek & Woodman, 2015). Bartunek and Woodman added that the focus of Lewin's model was on levels of group performance, not organizational change. Lewin's model did not consider the multiple sequences, timing, pacing, rhythm, and polyphonic components of change, and it did not discuss the influential role of the change agent (Bartunek & Woodman, 2015). Cummings, Bridgman, and Brown (2016) argued that contrary to what academic writers think, change as three steps model, which has been widely regarded as foundational work in change management literature, was not proposed

and developed by Lewin. Despite this, the use of Lewin's theory is alive and continues to be utilized in a variety of applications by both academics and practitioners. Empirical findings show the continuing relevance of Lewin's work in the way it is being linked to and used alongside newer change tools and techniques, such as collaborative inquiry, authentic leadership, and motivational interviewing (Endrejat, Baumgarten, & Kauffeld, 2017). Lewin's participative approach to behavioral change, which unites theory and practice, is still a valid and useful mechanism for promoting change (Endrejat et al., 2017).

According to Burke (2018), there are three aspects of change to be equally addressed for an organizational change initiative implementation to succeed. The first factor is the process, the second is the framework, and the third is behavioral change. The process lays out the stepwise approach from a start to a future end state. The framework defines the scope of organizational structure within which the change occurs. The social element addresses organizational acceptance and behavior change. Over time, change management scholars have developed newer models for managing change. Different authors assigned different weights or priorities to each, but at some level, they recognized a need to address all three elements in an organizational change initiative (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015).

In summary, each theory addresses a part of what would be a comprehensive model while either vaguely referring to the other parts or not addressing them at all. The application of most of the process models falls in three types of widely accepted approaches to change; namely planned, emergent, and contingency. Kotter's model was

an adequate conceptual framework to support, explain, and inform my research. Despite the popularity and feasible application of other models of change, Kotter's model of change offered a practical perspective to implementing organizational change initiatives.

According to Calegari, Sibley, and Turner (2015), other models such as Lewin's framework, lack specificity when leaders attempt to implement change in a corporate setting. Calegari et al. (2015) stipulated that Kotter's model provided leaders with specific actions, tools, and techniques to move their organizations from a current state to a more desired state. Kotter's theory inspired many recent researches (Pollack & Pollack, 2015). Many researchers recognized Kotter's eight-step model as one of the most utilized approaches to organizational change initiatives thanks to its holistic approach (Aleksic, Zivkovic, & Boskovic, 2015). Kotter's model guided me to understand and assess the key parameters and the presumed relationships between them.

There is a consensus among scholars on Kotter's eight-step model for successful change (Aleksic et al., 2015). Kotter's approach centers on strong theory and sound logic, backed up with years of experience (McGuinness & Cronin, 2016). Kotter's idea in practice provides business leaders with high probability to succeed at each change stage (McGuinness & Cronin, 2016). The strategic eight-step model offers a prescriptive approach as an excellent vision for managing the change process. Kotter's publications are among the most cited in the literature on change (Hughes, 2016). Using this framework can help scholars explain how to develop and implement strategies to create change within a business (Hughes, 2016). Kotter (1996) examined mistakes organization leaders make when implementing organizational change, the problems and strategies to

the change, and the transformation. Kotter's (1996) eight-stage change process is a relevant model to examine strategies used by business leaders to successfully implement organizational change initiatives.

After exploring and identifying the conceptual framework for this study, I focus in the next section on the factors impacting organizational change initiatives. Al-Maamari et al. (2018) explained the change as seeking ways to maintain and develop competitiveness, viability, productivity, and innovation in the organization. Al-Maamari et al. argued that an organizational change was associated with a visible change of organization in areas such as technology, organizational structure, systems, strategies, and corporate culture. The need for change can be driven by internal factors that cause the change. Other times, it is the result of the external environment, such as competitive pressure or political instability. Whether the organizational change initiatives are triggered by the inside or outside environment, the main objective remains to bring improvement and progress in the relevant areas.

### **Organizational Change Initiatives Implementation Environment**

The successful management of organizational change is a critical factor for all organizations in order to survive and succeed in today's highly competitive and turbulent business environment (Heckmann, Steger, & Dowling, 2016). Research identified major factors in the organizational environment that needed to be considered during an organizational change initiative (Appelbaum, Cameron et al., 2017). Appelbaum, Cameron et al. suggested that hierarchical distances, top management communication, middle management influence, and organizational culture impacted the commitment to

change in an organization. Appelbaum, Cameron et al. added that the relationships between these variables should be carefully understood and assessed. It is vital for leaders to consider, manage, and work through all these factors during the implementation of an organizational change initiative. Some of the key factors necessary to ensure successful organization change initiatives implementation are: raising staff awareness, supporting the implementation of the changes with a strong motivational policy, preventing resistance to change, developing an organizational change culture, using a participative management style, and allowing sufficient time between changes (Militaru & Zanfir, 2016).

During an organizational change, companies and leaders are faced with a significant amount of internal and external factors. Internal elements are generally under the control of the company such as mission statement, culture, and style of leadership. On the other hand, customers, political and social conditions, competition, economy, and technology are common external factors that influence the organization and are for the most part uncontrollable. These factors influence the organization's growth and long-term sustainability. Ignoring them can be a detrimental mistake. This section explored the different factors influencing successful implementation of change initiatives.

### **Internal Factors Influence**

Within every environment, there are always areas of calm, opportunity, threats, or unknown risks. With the right qualifications, skills, and decisions; situations can be controlled and positively exploited. The company's mission statement, organizational culture, and style of leadership are factors typically associated with the internal

environment of an organization and can have a considerable impact on the organization (Appelbaum, Cameron et al., 2017). The internal environment of an organization refers to events, factors, people, systems, structures, and conditions inside the organization that are generally under the control of the company. In the following paragraphs, I address the main internal parameters and how they can contribute to the success of organizational change initiatives.

**Employees.** Many factors can impact the successful implementation of organizational change initiatives. One of these factors is the ability to smartly and effectively involve the employees in the changing process (Militaru & Zafir, 2016). Employees' resistance to change can complicate organizations' change progress (Nilsen, Dugstad, Eide, Gullslett, & Eide, 2016). If done correctly, companies will have a better chance to achieve high performance. The process through which a change occurs addresses the people side of the change, and takes into consideration employees' ability, values, attitudes, and relationships with the organization. People within organizations are key determinants and can be either beneficiaries or sufferers of the change outcomes no matter who is conducting the change (Militaru & Zafir, 2016). Equipping employees affected by change to understand, engage with, and cope with possible scenarios can benefit organizations undergoing evolution and adjustment (Hussain et al., 2018). Various research stipulated that guiding employees to cope with change could be highly beneficial to secure successful organizational change initiatives implementation (Leybourne, 2016). Employees' cooperation is vital during a change process since it is via their actual behaviors that organizational change occurs. When employees are

involved in the implementation of change initiatives, there is a high probability to succeed and less risk to face resistance (Guidetti, Converso, Loera, & Viotti, 2018). Employees' acceptance rates are directly related to leadership support (Appelbaum, Karelis, Le Henaff, & McLaughlin, 2017).

One challenge for managers is training employees to develop the skills needed to handle changes. Training courses are important to help equip employees with the necessary insights and skills to mitigate at least part of the possibly damaging effects of organizational stress (Lines, Kumar, & Vardireddy, 2017). The ability to anticipate how change may stress employees is crucial to navigate through the change process as smoothly as possible (Lines et al., 2017). Successful organizational change initiatives require that employees perform adequately on new tasks and maintain their work engagement (Petrou, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2018). The engagement in processes of reflecting, questioning, and debating an organization's identity can lead managers and employees both to support and resist new claims (Petrou et al., 2018).

Managing the human side of organizational change is one of the key challenges business leaders face (Kondakci, Beycioglu, Sincar, & Ugurlu, 2015). Employees' perception and response to change are significant indicators of either success or failure of planned organizational change initiatives (Kondakci et al., 2015). Employees can see organizational change initiatives implementation as a disturbing and distressing act. Employees' response or reaction is based on their perception of change and how the process is conducted. It can vary from excitement to resentment or relief to anxiety. Klarner and Raisch (2016) argued that employees' perception of readiness for change

would nurture their positive attitudes to help them adjust to new situations. Vakola (2016) found that supervisory support would lead to employees' positive reactions towards change initiatives. To accept the change and contribute to making it successful, people need to understand how it will benefit them.

Organizations' leaders consistently strive to improve employees' abilities to enhance their support for organizational change (Nilsen et al., 2016). Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) proposed two types of behaviors because of commitment to change: focal and discretionary. Focal behaviors are employees' actions aimed at maintaining their employment relationship with organizations. They are compliance behaviors and show employees' willingness to take necessary actions to implement organizational change. The opposite is considered resistance to change (Johnson, 2016). Discretionary behaviors are actions that involve extra effort beyond maintenance of employment and beyond expectations to ensure achievements of the change goals. Embracing the change and selling it to co-workers and partners is mandatory. Developing sustainable change with the assistance of employees can improve the chances of successful organizational change initiatives implementation (Akan, Er Ulker, & Unsar, 2016).

**Culture.** Organizational culture has become a source of competitive advantage for organizations due to its effect on people's commitment. Preparing the culture for long term change and identifying effective drivers of change can be important in implementing organizational change initiatives (Kotter, 1996). Culture can influence how employees think and make decisions that may affect their job performance (Ben Saad & Abbas, 2018). Multiple studies showed the existence of a positive relationship between

organizational culture and job performance as well as employees' performance association with organizations change implementation and organizational culture (Ben Saad & Abbas, 2018). According to Ben Saad and Abbas, four organizational culture sub-components have a positive association with job performance: managing change, achieving goals, coordinating teamwork, and leveraging cultural strength. Hatch, Schultz, and Skov (2015) suggested the existence of a tension between the old culture and the new organization identity claim along with three mechanisms of organizational change. The three mechanisms were defined as dis-embedding, dis-enchanting, and disrespecting the old culture. According to Hatch et al. (2015), the organizational identity and culture were linked in complex ways. The transformation journey set out as a change of the company's organizational identity meant for employees a deep change to the organizational culture (Hatch et al., 2015). The change threat felt by the employees could eventually reshape the course of the transformation journey.

Research defined organizational culture as a collection of beliefs, behaviors, and rules that reflect the psychological environment of an organization (Gover, Halinski, & Duxbury, 2016). Organizational culture is a paradigm developed by a group of people to become a standard for current and new employees. According to Kotter (1996), organizational culture is always about coping with change. The relation between organizational culture and leadership concepts, directly and indirectly, contributes to either raising or minimizing the productivity of any organization. The way things are done, and the acceptable behaviors and expectations of an organization influence the bottom line. Culture cannot be ignored when managing change. Culture is a critical

contributor to implementing and sustaining change. Clarity, transparency, and advocacy for the change can promote trust in the change and reduce resistance to the uncertainty associated with change efforts.

Planning for future changes can present a serious challenge for leadership. According to Besliu (2018), an organization with the best strategy in the world, but a culture that will not allow its implementation, will not succeed. Adapting to cultural changes is one attribute that can separate a good leader from a great leader and allow an organization to surpass the competition. According to O'Malley (2014), culture includes ten elements: rules and policies, goals and measurement, customs norms, training, ceremonies and events, management behaviors, rewards and recognition, communications, physical environment, and organizational structure. Organizations that embrace a culture of continuous learning and improvement tend to adapt to change as a way of life (Besliu, 2018). As a result, a robust culture enhances employees' commitment and adaptability to recurring change efforts (Johnson, Nguyen, Groth, Wang, & Ng, 2016). Willis et al. (2016) depicted that transformation incorporated effective communication, creativity, and collaboration as fundamental characteristics of the culture. Frahm (2016) suggested that organizations with thriving cultures could adapt new values and behaviors into strategic and operational structures to sustain positive organizational change initiatives.

Culture can influence team behaviors, motivation, engagement, and organizational outcomes. Ignoring undesirable or harmful behaviors in the culture may impact employees' engagement and retention (Kotter, 1996). Ignoring the influence of

culture on change implementation may have severe effects on implementing and sustaining change (Kotter, 1996). Without studying organizational culture, leaders cannot help the organization evolve. After all, the quality of product or service, the level of industrialization, and the external image of business reflect the business culture and harmony between employees and management.

**Leadership.** Top leadership commitment is one of the most recognized drivers of change implementation and sustainability (Kotter, 1996). Managers' commitment and influence along with employees' motivation and willingness to change can enhance the chances of successful organizational change efforts (Kotter, 1996). Lack of managers' understanding, commitment, and involvement in the change process can be a significant contributor to poor change initiatives implementation outcomes (Kotter, 1996). Leading and motivating employees can inspire the execution of change with minimal conflict (Rosenbaum, More, & Steane, 2018). Engaging employees also promotes a sense of alignment and commitment to the change at all levels of the organization (Kotter, 1996). When leaders inspire a clear vision and purpose, it prompts employees to aspire to own the change and create an emotional attachment to the organization, which ultimately influences the image of the organization in the community (Kotter, 1996). Fundamentally, leaders can communicate an impeccable vision and purpose by targeting employees' perceptions and beliefs while focusing on positive targeted results (Kotter, 1996).

The role of organizational leaders is important in the successful implementation of planned organizational change initiatives. Leaders must understand the human side of

organizations, which is an important factor as compared to resources and infrastructure. In recent times where frauds frequently surface on organizational levels, the need for authentic and genuine leadership is mandatory to achieve organizational objectives in a suitable way (Kiersch & Byrne, 2015). Mistrust in leadership could be the reason for organizational challenges (Vakola, 2016). Leadership is not a static style that can fit all organizational culture. A leader must adapt his/her approach to meet a specific situation, and this is why a leader should have a thorough understanding of many leadership frameworks and styles. The promoters of change should be beyond any doubt and should possess leadership qualities and a range of skills and abilities that will allow them to understand and decipher organizational culture (Moldovan & Macarie, 2014). As organizational change continues to occur, leaders need the insights and skills to help the organization evolve into a bright future. Regardless of the scale of the implementation of organizational change initiatives, managers' ability to explain the need and benefits of the change, and employees' acceptance of it requires employing a broad range of skills, including leadership, talent management, and championing organizational change (Vantrappen & Wirtz, 2018).

The most difficult responsibility business leaders undertake is the implementation of planned organizational change initiatives (Burnes, 2015). The failure rate is as high as 70% (Brand et al., 2016) and it may be driven by either a lack of efficiency and integrity of leaders or their inability to incorporate a human side of organizational changes (Bakari et al., 2017). The high failure rates are also attributed to flaws in the implementation process (Georgalis, Samaratunge, Kimberley, & Lu, 2015). Employees' perception of

management effectiveness positively impacts change self-efficacy, which increases the likelihood of successful organizational change initiatives implementation (Jernigan, Beggs, & Kohut, 2016). Jernigan et al. suggested that authentic leadership could enhance employees' self-efficacy. Authentic leaders produce positive beliefs in the followers' minds, which in turn nurture their commitment, loyalty and involvement, and foster positive behaviors (Zhou & Wu, 2018). Another study showed that authentic leadership positively related to occupational coping self-efficacy (Laschinger et al., 2016). Authentic leaders, through their transparent and supportive behavior, can enhance workplace climate to embrace change and creativity within uncertain environments (Laschinger et al., 2016). The evidence suggested that authentic leadership was positively related to trust in top management; and trust in top management was positively and significantly related to readiness for change (Alavi & Gill, 2017). Organizational change initiatives do not take place automatically, but with a leader that can see where and how the organization can grow and develop (Caves, 2018). Organizational leaders drive organizational change by demonstrating the characteristics of a lifelong learner (Caves, 2018). The role of leaders in creating a meaningful environment for the success of planned change is crucial.

**Communication.** Communication is generally at the core of any successful reform (Besliu, 2018). According to Hasanaj (2017), communication is a critical parameter and a tough issue impacting organizational change initiatives and negatively contributing to high failure rates. It is an area about which employees complain a lot during organizational changes and daily operations (Van Den Heuvel et al., 2016). Every

successful executive who has led a successful change management effort expressed the need for over-communicating during a change experience and made this statement in retrospect (Sartori, Costantini, Ceschi, & Tommasi, 2018).

Many authors have discussed the importance of communication during an organizational change process. Kotter (1996) argued that one of the common ways to overcome resistance to change was to inform people about it in advance. Kotter added that employees needed to be informed on when the change would take place, how it would be implemented, what was expected from them, and how they would be affected. It is essential to communicate and educate employees about the change implications to help prevent resistance (Appelbaum, Karelis et al., 2017). Managers should understand that effective communication is the key to implement change and make it a success (Kotter, 1996).

Christensen (2014) explored different communication factors which affect organizational change implementation initiatives. Through his study, Christensen showed how the influence, contact, leadership, and availability of information could influence the communication quality and success rates of change initiatives. Lack of communication is the root cause of all failed interactions between management and their employees (Christensen, 2014). Business leaders must possess or develop communication skills to effectively implement change. Business leaders implementing organizational change initiatives have higher success probability if they have adequate communication skills and techniques as well as if they adopt the right communication frequency. Kotter (1996) suggested that the most effective method of communication was to use different

approaches as often as possible, and in every probable occasion, official or unofficial. According to Kotter, the main factor driving inefficient communication is low efforts. It is often assumed that the vision and plan that top management develops are clear to the rest of the employees (Kotter, 1996). Van Den Heuvel et al. (2016) stated that continuous communication with the employees during the change process helped create a positive effect on organizations' culture with more employees embracing the change. Individuals' culture, education, personal beliefs, and experience play an essential role in how they interpret communication (Imran et al., 2016).

Heckelman (2017) mentioned that one of the main reasons behind organizational change implementation failures was the use of only top-down communications to announce change; not conveying employees' reactions in constructive ways, and not engaging them in shaping the future of the organization. Heckelman added that most individuals got their cues on how to act from their direct manager. Therefore, the manager's communication and reinforcement of the rationale for the change was critical to success. Employees who experience consistent, trustworthy, and predictable communication, as well as support behaviors of leaders, exhibit stronger attachment to the organization's change efforts (Hartge, Callahan, & King, 2019). Contrary to insufficient or confusing communication, effective communication helps drive desired and required changes in any organization. Communication is the primary vehicle for conveying the core messages of the change effort.

**Processes contribution.** Organizations initiate development processes to grow a business and adopt new behaviors or organizational culture (Bejinaru & Baesu, 2017).

During organizational change initiatives, proper management processes support both the change strategy and the capability execution (Worley, Thomas, & Lawler, 2016). All management processes need to be designed well, and some of them must be designed for change (Worley et al., 2016). According to Worley et al., agile management processes help to change capabilities and other organizational aspects efficiently when change is necessary. Good management processes help a company execute its strategy and exercise its capabilities. A set of enabling processes is useful in supporting a variety of change interventions (Worley et al., 2016). Worley et al. suggested that processes could support the initial rollout of complex change and over time could be used to help the organizational change progress. Processes are central to effective change allowing change recipients to provide feedback and make local adjustments to broader change plans based on their own experience.

An organizational change initiative may concern the entire organization, a department, group or even an occupant of the job. From a managerial standpoint, it is essential to acknowledge the effect of change and the relevant stages of each process of change (Bejinaru & Baesu, 2017). Commonly, managers recur to change when the organization faces difficulties, and therefore the process is envisioned as a hardship (Bejinaru & Baesu, 2017). Managers must be educated to foresee the positive opportunities that organizational change might bring and thereby give a stronger stimulation to employees and optimize organizational processes (Bejinaru & Baesu, 2017). Leaders, managers, and employees across different levels need more direction on how to meet the organizational change goals (Heckelman, 2017). Team managers need

help managing their team members through the transition process. According to Heckelman, and based on insights gathered from over twenty-five years of client engagements; one of the critical categories preventing to overcome change difficulties is poor planning and execution. Both effective planning and proper implementation during the change effort play an important role. The processes' parameter contains a significant number of items; demonstrating that many different types of planning and execution failures can occur (Heckelman, 2017). A typical organizational mistake is taking the time to announce and explain the change effort and rationale but doing little to provide direction to sustain the change effort and address its affect over time. Another common mistake is not measuring progress to enable corrective actions. Evidence shows that organizational change planning and execution remain one of the most problematic areas for organizations (Heckelman, 2017). This demonstrates that organizations should and would benefit significantly from additional guidance in this area. Leaders need processes to help them be more efficient and more rational during an organizational change implementation experience (Caves, 2018).

The internal factors impact section tackled the crucial role of the most cited organizational internal parameters in successfully implementing organizational change initiatives. The leadership aspect and its style's impact on organizational change initiatives success is a significant internal element. Also, the relationship between organizational culture and leadership concepts, directly and indirectly, contributes to the success of organizational change initiatives. Planning for future changes can pose a serious challenge for leadership. Adapting to cultural changes is one attribute that can

separate a good leader from a great leader. An incompatible business culture may lead to greater resistance to change and a longer implementation of change. Therefore, I could not overlook the importance of assisting employees in coping with change and how they could be beneficial in ensuring that change initiatives are more effective. Change is inevitable and needs to be embraced at all management levels for organizations to survive.

In summary, organizational change initiatives implementation success depends on the innate aptitude of companies; be it managerial, cultural, or people without overlooking the external environment. Organizational change initiatives are adopted by connecting individual beliefs to organizational results. Organizational change initiatives require a planned and disciplined implementation cascade. Equipping leaders to lead through the transition accelerates organizational change initiatives. Organizational change initiatives implementation calls for frequent and ongoing communication and calibration. Transforming an organization into a learning organization must be a collective initiative between individual, group and organization (Bunea, Dinu, & Popescu, 2016). When talking about internal factors, certain members or functions play a more crucial role to ensure the change success. The proper alignment between content, people, and process is what leads to successful organizational change initiatives implementation.

### **External Factors Influence**

For change to be successful, researchers and leaders need to explore key organizational factors, which may influence change implementation and sustainability

(Rizescu & Tileaga, 2016). To stay competitive for a long time, organizations have to adapt to new conditions arising in their external and internal environment; an amendment which requires the introduction and successful implementation of various change initiatives in some or all system components (Jalagat, 2016). Organizations are faced with two sources of pressure in favor of change: external and internal. Prior sections of the literature review addressed the internal parameters impacting organizational change initiatives successful implementation such as leadership and management style, communication, employees' commitment to change, processes clarity, and cultural impact. Organizations need to be aware of the dynamic internal environment in which they operate as well as analyze its predominant parameters. If the change is not managed effectively, it can cause numerous disagreements within the organization.

But there are also multiple acting external forces that play an essential role and have a major influence during an organizational change phase (Brocke, Zelt, & Schmiedel, 2016). Organizational change initiatives can be successful if leaders can envisage the trends of changing markets, identify new configurations of service, and find new methods to tackle the challenges of the competitive market (Aslam, Muqadas, Imran, & Saboor, 2018). Kuipers et al. (2014) stated that the external context impact on organizational change has not been sufficiently explored. The external environment is related to factors which occur outside of the company that cause change inside organizations and are, for the most part, beyond the control of the company. Customers, competition, the economy, technology, political and social conditions, and resources are common external factors that influence the organization. Even though the external

environment occurs outside of an organization, it can have a significant effect on the outcome of change initiatives; thus, affecting growth, and long-term sustainability. Ignoring the external drivers can be a detrimental mistake for business leaders to make (Sendrea, 2017). External factors include but are not limited to: the market situation of the organization such as the appearance or disappearance of competition, the technology the organization uses, the governmental laws and regulations such as legislative influences that affect labor relations, and the economic environmental forces (Laurentiu, 2016).

The age of globalization makes the ability to manage the external context critical (Laurentiu, 2016). The external environment challenge is mainly driven by the accelerating development and deployment of new technologies as well as the rapid, sometimes-overnight emergence of new competitors, products, and markets (Laurentiu, 2016). To be successful, organizational change initiatives must be implemented taking into account the external environment by knowing for instance who are the customers and competitors and how well the company understands and responds to their requirements (Laurentiu, 2016). Understanding the external environment prevents being blindsided by customers or competitors. Anticipating trends or changes in the political environment that can affect organizations' change initiative implementation strategy is essential (Sendrea, 2017). Foreseeing new technologies and scientific discoveries that can change the nature of business overnight is also vital (Rizescu & Tileaga, 2016). Technology is fundamental to driving change and plays a strategic role in facilitating change and making it part of the organizational culture (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). A

rapidly changing technological environment forces firms toward cooperation in that they are not able to innovate or initiate change successfully by using its own capacity alone (Pasaman, Nimran, Raharjo, & Utami, 2018). Changes in technological and highly competitive market conditions strongly influence the organizational change initiatives' needs. To implement technology transfer successfully, companies need to have the ability to recognize the value of external technology, knowledge, and information.

From an economic standpoint; income levels, inflation, taxes, market globalization, economic crises, national and international economic markets, type of competition, government economic policy, economic policy of other countries, policy and lending terms, and fluctuations in exchange rates all effect directly the success or failure of organizational change initiatives (Khatoon & Farooq, 2016). Even the socio-cultural factors such as the demographic situation, changes in the system of values and aspirations, corruption level in countries, beliefs and religion, level of education, business ethics, and environmental protection play an essential role in handling the implementation of organizational changes (Masovic, 2018). The political and legislative parameters are no less important because laws, regulations, the level of political stability, foreign policies, relationships between government and businesses, protection of intellectual property, and social protection, etc. can impact organizations processes during a change phase (Jalagat, 2016). In the last decade, companies also started to take into account ecological factors such as climate, level of environmental pollution, and natural resources because they could profoundly influence change initiatives (Xu, 2018).

An essential prerequisite for the long-term and successful operation of any organization is the ability to predict events and the ability to adapt to market conditions (Dobrovic & Timkova, 2017). The ability to respond to current market needs and to keep pace with the market environment is important (Koraus, Dobrovic, Rajnoha, & Brezina, 2017). Some external factors are less predictable than others and less open to the planned and proactive changes. Given the dynamic external environment, most organizations try hard to level off inputs and outputs (Rajnoha & Dobrovic, 2017). But there are limits to such a control on the environment. Organizations do not grow for the sake of change, but because they are part of a broader development environment and they react to the threats and opportunities that arise (Sendrea, 2017). To survive, organizations are continually forced to adapt to the existing new environmental conditions. But at the same time, they also generate changes in the external environment through the production and marketing of some services, new products, and technologies, thereby changing the national and international business cycle and environment.

### **Organizational Environment Factors Effect Concluding Thoughts**

From the above analysis on organizational changes initiatives implementation environment, it is understood that some critical factors are key to identify the issues that should be given special attention during an organizational change process. By understanding the critical elements' implications, change agents would have a better knowledge of the context and would be able to design a feasible action plan to achieve tangible positive results through successful organizational change initiatives implementation (Juliboni & Garibaldi de Hilal, 2018). All internal and external forces

analyzed are the reasons why organizational change initiatives are inevitable. All the change drivers mentioned above are only a few and the most important ones for which empirical studies provided an in-depth analysis. The successful implementation of organizational change initiatives is an interesting challenge as well as a combination of threats and opportunities. Essentially it is to be noted that for the change to be successful, it must be based on the internal organization-managerial capacity, culture, resources, and people, and must take into account what is happening in the external environment. Change is not the final aim but rather an intermediary process used while implementing a specific strategy to accomplish a particular change objective. Organizations that can prepare for future changes can find themselves one step ahead of the competition (Wojciechowski et al., 2016). By initiating and managing change programs to transform structures, processes, and cultures, it is possible for organizations to increase their competitive advantage in the market and achieve financial success during organizational change initiatives implementation (Akarsu, Gencer, & Yildirim, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

Managing and coping with change is one of the principal challenges facing organizations today (Leybourne, 2016). Modern pressures, the rapid pace of increased globalization, the regulatory climate, the speed of communication, and many other factors ensure that organizations experience change. Change is inevitable and needs to be embraced for organizations to survive. The concept of organizational change is a common and familiar action or burden that runs through almost all businesses regardless of their size, industry, or years of existence. How organizations respond to changes can

prove to be either detrimental or provide a competitive edge. How businesses manage organizational change initiatives varies depending on multiple parameters. If organizations handle change positively, they will thrive; otherwise, they might struggle to survive.

### **Transition**

Section 1 provided the foundation for this study. I presented the background of the problem, the problem and purpose statement, and the research and interview questions. Kotter's model of change was the conceptual framework used for this study. I talked through various other concepts or models that could have been applicable to explore the strategies business leaders use to successfully implement organizational changes. The terms used in the study were defined, and the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the research were highlighted. Then, I tackled the significance of the study and its social effect. A review of the professional and academic literature was included in this chapter, which I concluded with a summary of the overall organization of the dissertation document.

In Section 2 of this study, I include the purpose statement, a review of my role as the researcher, the participants, an overview of the research method and design, population and sampling method, and ethical research. I also explain the data collection instrument, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, and the reliability and validity. Section 3 includes the research study findings, including applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for future study.

## Section 2: The Project

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that business leaders have used to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. The target population consisted of 10 business leaders within two corporations operating in the consumer goods industry in the Middle East and North Africa region, who have successfully implemented organizational change initiatives. The findings of this study could have a positive social change effect on surrounding communities, as successful organizational change initiatives may lead to more stable employment of local citizens for improving communities' local economies.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative studies, researchers are the main instruments for collecting data because they initiate and conduct the study (Saxena, 2017). Researchers gather information, insights, meanings, values, and approaches of individuals (Fleet, Burton, Reeves, & DasGupta, 2016). Researchers also make key decisions regarding the research question, composition of the sample, and selection of participants; researchers are also the source of ideas for the study (Teusner, 2016). To reduce personal bias, researchers use a system for member checking to improve the reliability and validity of the data and the data collection process (Harper & Cole, 2017).

In this multiple case study, my role included the selection and justification of a relevant research methodology and design. My primary objective was to explore the lived experiences of the participants. I collected, organized, and analyzed data. I conducted

face-to-face semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to allow participants to answer questions from diverse perspectives without restrictions. I maintained consistency in the interview process by asking the interview questions in the same order. I recorded and accurately transcribed the recordings from the interviews.

The nature of qualitative research makes it easy for researcher bias to occur because the researcher's experience can influence research validity and reliability (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2016). Bias occurs in research when the researcher fails to eliminate personal views, feelings, principles, and ethics from the research process (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2016). To minimize personal bias, I used an interview protocol with a preestablished standardized process to interview each participant (see Appendix A). The interview protocol includes the rationale for interviews, an introduction, and open-ended questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The interview protocol serves as a guide for researchers when conducting interviews with research participants (Besley, Dudo, Yuan, & Abi Ghannam, 2016).

When conducting the research, I followed the epoché principle of suspending what I already knew to see fresh perspectives. I used reflexivity and bracketing techniques to reflect on my biases and avoid making biased data interpretation. I consistently bracketed my views to keep my personal beliefs, experiences, previous research findings, and preconceived notions from the research process. I also relied on member checking to enhance the validity and reliability of my research. Yin (2018) recommended interviewing at least three participants to reach the point of data saturation. I interviewed 10 participants. I was respectful and fair to all the participants. I abided by

the ethical principles of the Belmont Report. I made known the ethical guidelines and policies that governed this study to all participants via an informed consent letter before starting the interviews.

### **Participants**

A qualitative multiple case study researcher has a role in developing a strategy for conducting the study including the ability to select participants (Teusner, 2016).

Participants sharing their experiences provide information that is not discoverable by any other means of collecting data (Bager, 2015). According to Yin (2018), the researcher in a multiple case study should select participants with the relevant experience in the research topic. The participants in this qualitative multiple case study included business leaders located in the Middle East and North Africa region. The eligibility criterion for participants was that they demonstrated success in addressing the specific business problem by having successfully implemented organizational change initiatives.

I gained access to participants by using public professional associations. I used electronic emails to potential participants as an initial means of contact. I sent a consent form to participants by electronic email. A comprehensive explanation of the purpose of the study and consent to participate in the interview were included in the consent form. Getting the verbal and written consent from participants before the interview process was imperative. I also sent an invitational email to all potential participants in which I explained the primary criterion for inclusion in this study as well as the research approach (see Appendix B). I scheduled appropriate dates, times, and places to conduct the face-to-face interviews at the participants' convenience.

According to Lamb (2016), developing rapport with research participants to draw candid answers to the interview questions is primary. I developed a business relationship by calling and explaining the objectives of my research. I also established a working relationship with my research participants by sharing some of my background and personal experiences with them.

Protecting the identity of participants is a prime concern for researchers (Guillemin et al., 2016). I addressed participants' concerns by assuring them of the confidentiality of their information as well as adhering to the ethical standards outlined in the Belmont Report. I explained the fundamentals and purpose of this study to each participant.

### **Research Method and Design**

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that business leaders used to successfully implement organizational change initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa region. I thoroughly reviewed several research methods and designs. I selected the qualitative multiple case study design as a suitable method to answer the research question. In the following sections, I explain the rationale behind the choice of research methodology and design to conduct my study.

#### **Research Method**

Researchers conduct studies to gain general and specific knowledge of phenomena (Razali, Anwer, Rahman, & Ismail, 2016). The three types of research methods are quantitative, qualitative and mixed (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2018). Researchers use qualitative methodology to collect data and interpret the study results

about the participants' experiences (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) added that using qualitative methodology might improve the analysis of data and the validation of findings compared to other methodologies. Using qualitative methodology promotes the understanding of a phenomenon and gives voices to the participants (Welch, Plakoyiannaki, Piekkari, & Paavilainen-Mantymaki, 2017). The qualitative method was appropriate for my study because I attempted to answer the what, how, and why questions of a phenomenon.

The quantitative method is an approach used to explain phenomena using numerical data analyzed via mathematical methods (Yilmaz, 2018). Quantitative methods include closed-ended questions to assist researchers in obtaining a generalized pattern of responses by participants (Yilmaz, 2018). Quantitative researchers answer the how many or how much questions by using numbers as data for statistical analysis (Fetters, 2016). Because I was neither testing a hypothesis nor analyzing statistical data, the quantitative method was not suitable for my study. The mixed-methods approach is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Fetters (2016), the advantages of the mixed-methods approach include qualitative data for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and quantitative data for statistical analysis and detailed assessment of responses.

### **Research Design**

For this study, I considered four qualitative designs to answer my research question. Four prominent qualitative designs are narrative, phenomenological, ethnographic, and multiple case study (Yin, 2018). After careful review, I decided that a multiple case study design would assist in gaining understanding of my research topic. In

a multiple case study, the researcher explores the real-world situations of an event, series of events, activity, or problem (Yin, 2018). Researchers use a multiple case study design for studying complex business processes to facilitate the collection of data at multiple levels over time (Yin, 2018).

Yin (2018) posited that researchers use the narrative design on a small sample to obtain rich data and to learn from the life stories of the participants. Because I did not explore the stories of the life experiences of my participants, the narrative design was not appropriate for my study. With the phenomenological design, the researcher examines the lived experiences of the individuals regarding a phenomenon (Hailemariam, Fekadu, Prince, & Hanlon, 2017). Because I did not examine the individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon, the phenomenological design was not appropriate for my study.

Researchers conduct ethnographic studies to explore the culture of participants and develop a clearer understanding of an event or issue (Thomson, Petty, Ramage, & Moore, 2017). The process promotes the understanding of the group's belief systems, behaviors, languages, and behaviors (Thomson et al., 2017). I did not explore in my research groups' cultures and belief systems. After a review of the different research designs, I decided that a multiple case study was the appropriate design to answer my research question.

Ensuring data saturation is important in qualitative research (Constantinou, Georgiou, & Perdikogianni, 2017). Palinkas et al. (2015) indicated that the researcher has a role to determine the number of interviews needed to reach the point of data saturation. Saturation does not require a large sample; however, it must include data that are valid

and accurate (Yin, 2018). Data saturation is the point when a researcher retrieves enough information to create themes and when no new themes, sources, or information emerges from the data (Saunders et al., 2018). According to Yin (2018), using one to 10 participants provides enough participation to obtain data saturation. I interviewed 10 participants. To ensure data saturation, I collected my data through interviews, secondary documents, and notes.

### **Population and Sampling**

Participants are central to a study and should have similar experiences, show willingness to participate, and be afforded the ability to speak freely (Ross & Berkes, 2014). Due to their direct involvement, participants provide useful insights into a research topic that other methods fail to discover (Ustundagli, Baybarsb, & Guuzeloglu, 2015). The population of the current study consisted of 10 business leaders from two companies in Middle East and North Africa region who had successfully implemented organizational changes initiatives. The number of participants was sufficient because, according to Yin (2018), using one to 10 participants provides enough data to obtain saturation. Each participant in this study had experience in successfully implementing organizational changes initiatives and provided relevant information during the interview process.

In qualitative case studies, the researcher determines when no new additional data exist in the research setting and additional interviews do not provide new information (Yin, 2018). When no new data and themes emerge, researchers reach the point of data saturation. I examined both companies' financial data, working documents, and business

plans as secondary data for my research. I used methodological triangulation to confirm the findings, increase the validity, and enhance the analysis and interpretation of the data. One-hour interview sessions provided sufficient time to establish rapport and obtain responses to the interview questions.

In this multiple case study, I adopted a qualitative inquiry approach to conduct the research. Purposeful sampling for case studies can result in the provision of willing participants who might possess relevant information on the research topic (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Etikan et al. (2016) defined purposeful sampling as an approach in which the researcher selects willing participants who possess relevant data on the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling allowed me to concentrate on people with information to assist with my study. I identified people who were proficient and well informed in the successful implementation of organizational change initiatives.

A neutral environment may better protect the confidentiality of participants (Morse & Coulehan, 2015). I conducted face-to-face interviews using open-ended semistructured interview questions with purposefully selected research participants. Interviews took place at a location convenient to the business leaders, in some cases at their offices, to create an environment of trust and confidence. I ensured that the interview area offered privacy, safety, and comfort to the participants to reduce distractions.

### **Ethical Research**

The Belmont Report defined the importance of protecting the confidentiality and rights of human subjects in research (Miracle, 2016). I adhered to the ethical standards

contained in the Belmont Report by (a) ensuring respect for participants, (b) disclosing the benefits and disadvantages of conducting the research, and (c) maintaining fairness in dealing with the participants. As a precursor to conducting this study and collecting data, I worked on obtaining the approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

According to Lee, Jung, Park, Chung, and Cha (2018), embracing transparency and data privacy establishes trust and encourages participants' engagement. A researcher should provide full disclosure to participants, including the purpose of the study, inclusion requirements, and nature of the research (Dranseika, Piasecki, & Waligora, 2017). I obtained explicit consent from participants regarding their willingness and availability to participate in the study. The consent form contained (a) the research and interview questions, (b) the purpose of the study, (c) a statement highlighting the recording process of the interview, (d) a statement on the need to use secondary data to support the study, and (e) a statement on the confidentiality of the data to be collected. I offered participants an opportunity to ask questions before signing the consent form. The distribution of the consent form took place via email. Participants should have the opportunity to withdraw from a study at any time by providing either verbal or written notice (Yin, 2018). Participants wishing to withdraw from my research were able to do so at any time before or during the interview. I will keep copies of the consent forms for 5 years.

Some researchers use incentives to encourage participation in studies, whereas other researchers offer participants the knowledge that their participation serves to further

research in a specific area (Bager, 2015). I did not give monetary incentives. However, I informed participants that their participation could make a significant contribution to the development of successful organizational change initiatives implementation.

Protecting the privacy of study participants is a vital principal of research ethics (Dranseika et al., 2017). Coding of participants' names and responses will assist in the maintenance of the confidentiality of participants' personal and business information (Yin, 2018). As a researcher, I was aware of the rights and confidentiality of all participants. I did not disclose the identities of the participants under any circumstances. I will store all recordings, notes, names of participants, and identification of the partnering organizations on a thumb drive in a lockbox. At the end of 5 years, I will destroy the thumb drive by physical means, permanently rendering the drive unreadable. In the event of my premature death, instructions will be left to my benefactors regarding where to locate and access the lockbox with clear instructions to follow the protocol for destroying the thumb drive.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The researcher is the data collection instrument in qualitative research and must use multiple sources to collect data and reach validity (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & De Lacey, 2016; Yin, 2018). In this study, I adopted the role of the sole data-gathering instrument and used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to collect primary data through semistructured interviews. I used 60-minute in-depth face-to-face semistructured interviews with research participants to gather information. I performed and recorded all interviews as well as transcribed the recorded interviews. After the completion of the

transcription of the recorded interviews, I went through the process of member checking to validate the information collected during the interviews and to ensure that I have properly and accurately interpreted the participants' answers. A researcher should ask probing questions, have a keen sense of listening to participants' responses, and accurately recording responses (Wong & Cooper, 2016). Through my role of the data collection instrument, I displayed the abilities of sensitivity, the knowledge of the research process, the dexterity in data gathering techniques, and the retention of quality information. I retained a sense of impartiality by accomplishing the interview process using open-ended questions. I intentionally avoided interjecting opinions and recommendations.

According to the Belmont Report (Office for Human Research Protection, 2016), a researcher has the responsibility to reduce personal biases, protect participants from harm, ensure the confidentiality of participants, and obtain the explicit consent form from participants to use recording devices including taking notes during the interview process. The researcher has to collect reliable and credible information (Hammarberg et al., 2016). According to Yin (2018), the interview protocol includes the major attributes of the data gathering process, the details of the multiple case studies, the research, and interview questions. Participants should have the ability to review the interview questions before the interview to gain familiarity and build comfort (Quinney, Dwyer, & Chapman, 2016).

Research validity assures the robustness and the accuracy of findings (Hammarberg et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). I assured reliability and validity by using transcript review and member checking. Yin (2018) stated that additional data could be

collected through archival records, observations, and physical artifacts in a qualitative study. In methodological triangulation, the researcher correlates data from multiple data collection methods (Joslin & Muller, 2016). I collected other data sources such as company documents, financial data, emails, progress reports, and archival records on the strategies business leaders used to successfully implement organizational change initiatives.

### **Data Collection Technique**

To address the specific business problem of this study, I scheduled face-to-face semistructured interviews at a preferred and comfortable location for the participants. I recruited the potential participants via email and gained access to their contacts' information by using public professional associations. The participants submitted a signed consent form allowing the interviews to take place. I made sure at the beginning of the interview to emphasize the rights of the participants. The collection, recording, and transcription of the data were done via in-person interviews. The process included taking hand notes as well as using portable audio recordings to avoid missing any critical information. The use of open-ended interview questions can improve the interviewees' responses (Yin, 2018). The application of semistructured interviews provides flexibility to the research method and supplies available descriptive data (Yin, 2018). The process of semistructured face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions has the potential advantage of enabling researchers to develop a rapport with participants and ask follow-up questions (Quinney et al., 2016). Face-to-face interviews also provide an opportunity

to obtain rich interaction, view the participants' body cues, and retrieve fruitful responses from research participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

I asked participants to contribute in a 60-minute in-depth interview session. I engaged in the interview process using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and an interview guide (see Appendix C) as follows: (a) Introduced the interview session with salutations and introduction of myself, (b) showed the consent form, go over the contents, and answer any potential questions and concerns of the participants, (c) gave each participant a copy of the consent form, (d) turned on the recording device, (e) followed procedures to introduce participants with coded identification; note the date and time, (f) started the interview process by asking the first question then follow up with additional questions, (g) ended the interview sequence by discussing member checking, and (h) thanked the participants. I asked probing questions, follow-up questions, and observed and recorded any form of nonverbal communication or reaction to questions.

Impartiality in the research process mitigates biases (Horne, Madill, & O'Connor, 2016). When conducting the interview, I refrained from steering the interviewee in a direction. To improve the reliability of the data collected, I immediately transcribed the notes after the interviews. I stored all data in a chronological date order on a password protected thumb drive in a lockbox. I assigned codes to all the participants' information. As suggested by Harper and Cole (2017), I used member checking to ensure the reliability of the research findings. All participants had the ability to review, correct, and approve a one-page summary of my interpretation of the interview responses.

One of the disadvantages of using face-to-face semistructured interviews is that participants might not respond truthfully to my research and interview questions. The participants seemed to have a clear understanding of the process and questions. Some of the participants prepared for the interview using the interview questions shared in advance in the consent form. Another potential disadvantage of face-to-face interviews stems from the availability of participants to devote sufficient time to the interview process. In addition, participants might express discomfort with the use of audio devices (Parry, Pino, Faull, & Feathers, 2016). Finding suitable and receptive research participants can pose a challenge (Parry et al., 2016). Using the semistructured interview technique can also take longer and cost more than to conduct surveys or distribute and retrieve questionnaires (Yin, 2018). The usage of semistructured interviews can also result in extensive data, which might pose management and analysis challenges (Yin, 2018). Another disadvantage of using the face-to-face interview as the data collection technique is that the interviewee might try to please the researcher or provide personal views rather than objective feedback (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The ability of being aware of personal bias is a way to mitigate influencing the interview results. A researcher can reduce personal bias through the use of member checking (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Member checking is a process through which sharing interview data with the participants ensures the accuracy of collected data and the credibility of research findings (Birt et al., 2016). I used member checking to mitigate bias and increase trustworthiness. The advantage of using the face-to-face interview for a multiple case study is that through the face-to-face interview, the researcher gains useful

insight and deeper context while also developing rapport and trust (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

### **Data Organization Technique**

An interview guide helps keep the interviews on track while allowing the participants to share experiences and introduce new information (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). All participants received an information packet before the start of the study, that indicated that participation in the research was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. I asked participants to complete the consent form to confirm their voluntary participation in the study. Participants had the right to withdraw anytime they wished. They could also participate in member checking.

I organized the raw data into digital and physical file folders. Protecting participants' identity is an important part of the research (Yin, 2018) and is the responsibility of the researcher (Annink, 2017). The use of a coding technique by assigning identification codes with P1, P2, and P3 ensured the confidentiality of the participant's personal and business information. I filed handwritten notes together with the transcribed interviews in a physical folder stored in a locked location. I coded the database entries with key identifier information including each subject's reference number and details specific to the interviewee that are not indicators of the subject site. A system of colored folders and labels was used to organize the information from each recording. The data was encrypted and stored in chronological order in a secure location to prevent unauthorized access. All raw data, records, notes, and other pertinent information related to this study are stored in a password-protected thumb drive in a

lockbox. I will keep the data for a period of 5 years; after which, I will shred the paper notes and destroy the electronic files.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative researchers gain an in-depth understanding of a case through preparing, collecting, interpreting, organizing, and analyzing the data (Yin, 2018). According to Yin, data analysis is a continuous process during which the researcher should search for patterns, concepts, or insights that might bring light to the research question. The fundamental components of qualitative data analysis include: (a) organizing the data, (b) familiarizing oneself with the data, (c) classifying the data, (d) coding the data, (e) triangulating the data, (f) interpreting the data, and (g) presenting and writing up the results of the data (Rowley, 2012).

After the interviews, I transcribed the recordings. Next, I reviewed what I transcribed and manually conducted open coding of the information as a means of identifying and categorizing the information shared by the participants. Rowley (2012) recommended coding data in this manner for its effectiveness in identifying themes. Rowley stated that constant coding was necessary to recognize the emerging themes in a study and to identify the point at which data saturation takes place. When the researcher defines the set of codes, a computer software program can help locate the matching words or phrases from the data (Yin, 2018). I coded the data both manually and used NVivo software. NVivo software program was designed to pick out patterns of unstructured data and make subtle connections researchers may miss (Pietkiewicz & Bachryj, 2016). NVivo software helped me to sort, organize, and analyze imported

responses from the transcribed interviews. I also backed up the material by retaining a paper copy of the data. I utilized the NVivo qualitative analysis software program to assist in the content analysis of transcripts to identify keywords and phrases in identifying themes. A system of coding helps identify themes (Yin, 2018). Theme analysis is the process of identifying repeated patterns in words from qualitative data. I defined key themes as well as related them to the literature and the conceptual framework. The identification and verification of thematic issues from statements made by participants, and from alternate data sources is important during a research process (Joslin & Muller, 2016). Word repetition and new keywords are the fundamental techniques for theme identification. The last stage was the development of a clear summary of the findings of the study. Koch, Niesz, and McCarthy (2013) noted that during the reporting of results of research, precision and in-depth representation of the participants' views, as well as a good description of the case is necessary.

In many studies, researchers use data triangulation to compare findings across different periods and in different settings (Denzin & Giardina, 2016). Both primary and secondary research can be used with data triangulation to compare different points of view through interviews, public records, documents, observations, and photographs (Denzin & Giardina, 2016). Yin (2018) asserted that a solid method of review has both negatives and positives, which researchers can validate through triangulation. The collection of multiple types of data such as in open-ended interviews, documents, direct and participant observation as a part of the same study validates the same research finding (Yin, 2018). I employed triangulation in the data analysis process by using

established data such as company documents, financial data, emails, progress reports, and archival records. I also used previous research associated with well-known methods and theories to offer supporting evidence for this study. The information garnered through the interview data, and the thorough review of the literature helped establish a comprehensive dataset to allow an in-depth understanding of my research topic. The themes that emerged within the data, validated by one or more additional types of data, helped triangulate the findings, increase the trustworthiness of the study, and guarantee the integrity of the results.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Multiple data collection sources create a more accurate case study (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015). The validity of a case study refers to the integrity of the report, while reliability defines the consistency within the analysis of the procedure (Noble & Smith, 2015). The researcher's subjectivity can cloud the interpretation of the data in qualitative research. The researcher must pay attention to the reliability and validity of the study (Cypress, 2017). Cypress further explained that the rigor of qualitative research refers to the concept of validity and reliability.

#### **Reliability**

Reliability is the consistency and replicability of the research methodology for a case study (Yin, 2018). Cypress (2017) explained that reliability based on consistency is visible during research practices, analysis, and conclusions. Tactics used to guarantee dependability are comprised of interviewees' participation in the analysis through member checking their responses and through providing a detailed description of the

research method (Yin, 2018). The researcher can enhance the reliability of the study by asking the right questions during the interviews and by properly documenting the processes and rationale for any decisions made during the research process (Houghton et al., 2015). I mitigated the potential of inaccuracy by using the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure I stay focused and unbiased during the interview sessions. I asked each participant the same interview questions using the same order and method.

Shirazian et al. (2016) explained that rigor in qualitative research means achieving a correct and genuine representation of the study participants' experiences and situations. A study is dependable if others can replicate the findings with similar participants in similar conditions (Webster, Bowron, Matthew-Maich, & Patterson, 2016). Dependability can be ensured by sufficiently aligning the gap in the literature, problem statement, research questions, methodology, research design, and documenting the inquiry process (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie, 2017). I documented the steps to be used in the research process and inquiry. Enhancement of reliability for studies increases by using a semistructured interview technique (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). I used a semistructured interview technique, recorded, transcribed, and utilized the NVivo software system to code data accurately. To improve the reliability of the gathered information, participants should be asked to review the interpretation from the interview and provide changes as needed (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). In addition to using the interview protocol for consistency, I used member checking to enhance accuracy and address any gaps or confusion in the interpretation of the data. Member checking gives the researcher the opportunity to detect any personal bias by soliciting the participants'

feedback regarding the interpretation of data (Birt et al., 2016). I provided each participant with the opportunity to review the understanding of the collected data and indicate any necessary changes.

### **Validity**

The validity of qualitative research refers to the use of the appropriate methodology for data collection and data analysis to achieve credible results (Saunders et al., 2018). Cypress (2017) explained validity as the trustworthiness of the research. El Hussein, Jakubec, and Osuji (2015) posited that trustworthiness in qualitative research signifies the level of trust and confidence in the data, as well as addressed the quality or credibility of the research. Trustworthiness is a concept that incorporates transferability, confirmability, and credibility of the research findings (El Hussein et al., 2015).

A researcher can enhance the validity of the study through the methodological triangulation of data from multiple sources, member checking, and peer debriefing (Yin, 2018). Triangulation occurs when the researcher uses more than one source to ensure the credibility of data while decreasing biases and increasing the validity and strength of the research (Joslin & Muller, 2016). With data triangulation, the researcher's different methods and perspectives produce more comprehensive findings (Yin, 2018). Member checking is a process that involves getting the participants to review the themes from the collected data, review the summary of the interpretations, and offer feedback to ensure credibility and validity of the findings (Birt et al., 2016). I used both methodological triangulation and member checking to ensure my study's validity.

Credibility in qualitative research is the essence of every research study and refers to the correctness of the data and the interpretation and representation done by researchers (Asiamah et al., 2017). Several methods exist to ensure credibility such as observation and member checking (Houghton et al., 2015). When individuals that share the same experience recognize the descriptions of human experience, then a qualitative study is credible (Cope, 2014). Describing the processes to prevent bias in a research project contributes to increasing the credibility of a study (Morgan, 2016). El Hussein et al. (2015) alluded that the higher the quality of data, the greater the credibility of the entire study. Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, and Rees (2017) suggested that researchers could establish the trustworthiness of their studies through member checking and the incorporation of participants' feedback mechanism into the data analysis process. By using the interview protocol (see Appendix A), I sought to avoid influencing the data collection and data analysis process with my personal views. By using member checking, I ensured that my data interpretation was a true and faithful representation of the participants' views.

Transferability is providing a detailed description of the results of the topic studied so that readers can compare the results of similar studies (Houghton et al., 2015). A qualitative study meets this criterion if the results have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and readers can associate the results with their own experiences (Cope, 2014). Houghton et al. (2015) stated that to enable others to determine transferability; researchers should provide rich descriptions of the context of the research and rich descriptions of the participants' accounts to enhance transferability. NVivo is a

useful management tool for providing a full audit trail of all decisions made during the research process. I enhanced transferability by providing a rich description of the data through detailed and accurate recording, collection, and analysis of all data pertinent to the study.

Confirmability refers to the systematic record keeping of all decisions from the research findings such as sampling, sources of data, analytical procedures, and their implementations (El Hussein et al., 2015). Confirmability denotes impartiality and accuracy (Elo et al., 2014). Kihn and Ihantola (2015) suggested that a researcher achieves confirmability when the findings and data leading to the results are easily understood. To ensure confirmability, I accurately denoted and safeguarded the integrity of the data provided by participants. During the research process, I met confirmability by maintaining a reflexive journal where notes pertaining to the study were documented daily.

Data saturation occurs when nothing new is revealed throughout the data collection process (Saunders et al., 2018). Sim, Saunders, Waterfield, and Kingstone (2018) explained that one method for reaching data saturation is by asking multiple participants the same questions. Sim et al. (2018) added that a researcher attained data saturation when there was sufficient data to repeat the study and when no further coding was necessary. Therefore, I objectively gathered data until no new information emerged and at which point no new patterns came out. By attaining data saturation, I was in a position to affirm and demonstrate the confirmability, credibility, and transferability of my research findings.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2 of this study, I presented a description of the project, including my role as the researcher, the participants and research method and design rationale. Then, I discussed population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity. In section 3, I present the findings of the study, the application to business and professional practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for action and further research. I also share my personal reflection on the experience within the DBA Doctoral Study process, and a conclusion of the study.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that business leaders have used to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. To gather data, I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews with 10 business leaders from two organizations located in the region of Middle East and North Africa. I also explored companies' documents. These secondary data were strategic PowerPoint business plans, change tracking tools, meeting minutes, financial statements, and archival records. Through coding and analyzing the interview and secondary data, I identified themes within the data. These themes provided strategies that could help business leaders successfully implement organizational change initiatives.

The two most prominent themes that emerged from the data were communication and employee engagement. All participants acknowledged that these strategies were key assets in devising and implementing the change. Participants also reported that soft and hard trainings were necessary to equip the people implementing the change. Participants used multiple tools to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the change implementation initiatives. Despite the use of different names and choices, participants ensured that all tools had the common objective of keeping track of the key performance indicators while moving the business in the right direction strategically, financially, and ethically. Respondents noted that employees' involvement in organizational change was important because an inadequate culture of change could hinder the execution of change initiatives by generating opposition. Benefits of participants' successful change initiatives

implementation included keeping a lean structure, staying profitable and competitive, and delivering on commitments to the marketplace and investors.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The research question for this study addressed the strategies business leaders used to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. The participants were leaders from two organizations located in the region of Middle East and North Africa. I interviewed 10 participants using semistructured interviews consisting of nine questions to collect data from each participant. The average interview time was 60 minutes. During the interviews, some of the participants presented me with company documents for additional information. I assigned the identification codes of P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10 to ensure the confidentiality of the participants' personal and business information. I reached data saturation after the seventh interview and continued until the 10th interview to ensure no new data emerged. I followed the data protocol approved by Walden University's IRB (approval number 10-03-19-0746939).

After I collected and analyzed the data, six major themes emerged: establishing a formal and informal communication plan of change, mitigating barriers to employees' engagement and commitment, adopting the right leadership style, creating a cohesive culture and team, developing training programs and processes, and embracing speed of execution. In this section, I present the study findings and interpret them in the context of previous scholarship. First, I present the theme. Second, I explain the ways this theme connects to previous research on the topic. Last, I show how the theme relates to the conceptual framework.

I used Kotter's eight-step change model as the conceptual framework to guide this study. The findings of this study aligned with the conceptual framework and supported most of the peer-reviewed studies from the literature review section. Most participants in the current study used at least six of Kotter's eight stages to define and develop the strategies they used to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. The sixth theme identified is not among the strategies presented in the literature review. The sixth theme extends the existing literature and may result in additional studies to better understand this new information.

### **Theme 1: Formal and Informal Communication on Change**

The first theme that emerged from the analysis was communication. The findings showed the relationship between communication and successful organizational change initiatives implementation. The results revealed that effective communication improved the efforts of employees to plan and execute change strategies. All the participants emphasized the crucial role communication played during a change process implementation. P1 stated that any veil of secrecy was not acceptable and that two-way communication channels were necessary to enable a change success. P1 added that secrecy was not recommended because it could amplify fear and prognostication among employees. P1 said, "We organized townhalls to properly address employees' concerns and hear their feedback." P2 corroborated by stating the following:

We made sure to gather all the employees once a week and share an update. The good and the bad. Some employees leading some changes were invited to do

presentations not only as sharing information but also to maybe get new ideas. I strongly believe that those regular townhalls helped create a positive atmosphere. P2 specified that communication should be about why the change should take place and the path going forward. P2 further said, “We provided clarity on why change needed to happen as well as how it will be implemented.” At least 50% of the participants highlighted that unclear strategic goals and poor vertical communication were silent killers to achieving a successful organizational change initiative implementation. Unclear responsibilities, insufficient strategy communication, and inadequate transformation concepts contribute to change implementation failure (P1, P3, P7, & P9).

In alignment with Kotter’s change model, all the interviewees insisted on the importance of maintaining open internal communication on the benefits of the change to remove any pending reluctance to the change initiatives implementation. Participants declared that communication combined with a question-and-answer meeting proved to be an effective way of interacting. P3 insisted that it was through regular communication that challenges during times of change could be resolved and trust could be built. P3 added, “We had regular townhalls. So, we offered a forum for everyone to ask questions, challenge decisions, and also make recommendations.” Dialogue is a must and facilitates the creation of a winning partnership between all levels and all functions. P4 stated that continuous communication inspired confidence and encouraged candid opinions. P5 declared:

Our communication strategy included a timeline for how the change would be incrementally communicated, key messages, and the communication channels and

mediums we planned to use. This is why for me communication was the strategy element that drove our success.

P8 further noted that communicating change with empathy should be considered because most of the time the way the information is communicated is more important than the change itself. P6 corroborated by saying, “We addressed with empathy people concerns through communication and a lot of human to human formal and informal communication.” P6 added, “We communicated via various forums and via one to one about the change, the goals, and why it was required to be a winning team.”

Three of the business leaders interviewed discussed how using both formal and informal communication could make a difference. P10 stated that having a successful internal communication improved the commitment and efforts of employees to properly execute the change strategies. P10 further noted, “Communication could significantly improve both transparency and employees’ commitment.”

The findings of this study aligned with prior literature in which communication was identified as an essential factor for successful change implementation. A number of empirical studies indicated a positive relationship between high-quality change communication and employees’ support for change. The importance of communication during intended change has been empirically demonstrated and commonly agreed among practitioners. Communication is one of the most critical factors impacting organizational change initiatives (Hasanaj, 2017). Employees’ insufficient understanding of the change strategy and performance measures contributes to change implementation failure (Monauni, 2017).

The results of this study were also aligned with recent research on effective communication. Fuiuaga and Rusu (2018) revealed that communication could improve employees' support and success rates for organizations going through a change initiative implementation. Karaxha (2019) suggested that there was a clear effect of effective communication on organizations' change success level. High-quality change communication can also reduce uncertainty (Ahmad & Cheng, 2018). Messages of quality and timely information are vital (Fugate & Soenen, 2018), even to say there is no new information (Dirva & Radulescu, 2018). Transparent communication can positively impact employees' openness and readiness to embrace change (Yue, Men, & Ferguson, 2019).

The results of this study aligned with Kotter's change model. Kotter (1996) stipulated that communication promoted cooperation and reduced employees' resistance to change. Kotter recognized that effective and appropriate communication was a vital ingredient in the success of any change program. According to Kotter, communication needs to be well managed so that at any time during the change process confusion is avoided through clear, accurate, uncomplicated languages, messages, and images.

## **Theme 2: Employees' Engagement and Commitment**

All participants in the current study had a common viewpoint on employees' role as key sources to effect change within organizations. Employees' engagement was the most prominent emerging theme during the field research. This study's results revealed that the ability to engage people through motivation was one of the most important skills during the implementation of any organizational change implementation. P1 identified

employees' engagement and commitment as one of the key enablers for a successful organizational change initiative implementation and considered staff members partners in both devising and implementing the change. P1 said, "Having skin in the game is key to avoid employees' alienation and helped lower barriers to change." P1 further added the following:

I have learned from past experience that the best way to manage resistance to change by employees is to address it head on at the individual level and by trying to find out the root cause of the demonstrated behavior by the employee, like for instance, not attending certain meetings, lacking on his commitments and timelines, or even adopting a more obvious defensive pushback attitude.

P1 also noted, "Staying close to employees, especially key players and agents of change was a critical early management means. It helped pinpoint issues early enough, and consequently diluting its negative impact on the overall project."

Most participants emphasized the key role human resources could play during a change process. P2 talked about the contribution of the human resource leader in addressing employees' resistance situations and providing adequate mentorship to new members. Most of the participants in both organizations mentioned conducting and relying on employees' surveys to gather data and feedback to ensure the right steps were being taken for continuous change success. P4 stated that employees' commitment was key to successful execution of change initiatives. P4 added, "People's feedback and suggestions were welcome to maintain dialogue." P5's thoughts on employees' engagement and commitment could be summarized in the following statement: "The key

strategy to the company's successful organizational change implementation lies in the hands of the people." P5 asserted that the odds of success were improved by making sure there were employees' voices championing the change initiative.

Employees are the heart of the change implementation and the most important assets. When employees are convinced of the need for change, they can share the benefits with their peers, leading to a low degree of resistance. P2 noted, "We...held meetings where learnings were shared by some people or functions on how some issues or difficulties were handled." P6 declared, "Any successful organizational change should engage employees; otherwise, it will fail or fade with time." P6 further specified the following:

Employees worked in cross-functional focus groups for a certain period of time on areas that were key to transformation and presented their ideas to subject matter experts. The startup mind-set was the framework to ensure employees were empowered to come up with their own ideas and they felt engaged and involved.

P7 noted that to encourage employees for the desired change, companies must address the apprehensions and issues related to them. P7 said, "To any employee's change resistance, engagement with the subject in a one-to-one conversation proved to be the fastest and most direct way to get to the real root causes behind his or her resistance to change."

Participants referred to comforting the employee, inspiring trust by clarifying the change need, incorporating additional training or support, and providing further clarification on the employee career path and development as some of the remedies used. Job insecurity should be decreased and a sense of community should be created so that the employees

can fulfill their responsibilities. It is necessary to make the people aware of the effect of their contribution not only on them, but also on their peers, their consumers, their customers, and their community.

The outcomes of this study aligned with prior literature addressing employee engagement. Several studies revealed that employees' engagement and commitment had a positive effect on the organization (Handayani, Anggraeni, Suharnomo, & Rahardja, 2017). Leaders who can effectively motivate employees to execute change achieve successful implementation results (Kordnaeij, 2016). As P9 expressed, the people factor is the element in any change equation that can never be discarded or ignored. Employees are no longer considered resources, but the capital or asset to the company (Barik & Kochar, 2017). Narikae, Namada, and Katuse (2017) suggested that employees' involvement in decision-making significantly influenced the change implementation success level.

The findings of this study also aligned with more recent research on organizational structure. Individuals look to see where they fit within the new organizational structure and methods (Dirva & Radulescu, 2018). Employees can see other employees as competitors, not as teammates, when the workplace is in a period of major change (Dirva & Radulescu, 2018). Improving job fit can significantly increase employee engagement and productivity (Commons, Miller, Ramakrishnan, & Giri, 2018). There is also a strong association between employees' trust and their reaction and readiness to facilitate change implementation initiatives (Yue et al., 2019). Employees

play a crucial role in ensuring a successful organizational change initiative implementation (Karaxha, 2019).

The emergence of this theme aligned with Kotter's change model. Business leaders who can get their subordinates to commit to new goals, programs, policies, and procedures stand a better chance of having critical changes successfully implemented (Kotter, 1996). Employees' engagement benefits both the organization and its staff. Even though a vision may be effectively communicated, change adoption requires buy-in from employees (Kotter, 1996). Kotter (1996) stipulated that most organizational changes failed because team members were not given the freedom to propose and carry out creative solutions.

### **Theme 3: Leadership Style Effect**

All participants indicated that they worked to ensure employees had a voice and that their opinions and input were valued. Such efforts and behaviors are typical qualities of a transformational leader who tends to coordinate with employees to share knowledge and to give opportunities in organizational level decision-making (Hussain et al., 2018). P2 stated that a culture of change or transformation starts with leaders. During a time of change, leaders must have among their priorities to cascade down the information to all functions. P1 explained that leaders should educate and introduce the reasons for the change in order to navigate the organization's thinking toward change and acceptance. P1 asserted, "The right leadership behavior inspires employees to exceed their individual interests for the good of the organization as a whole." P1 added that one of the resistances to change factors was a lack of support and commitment from the leadership team in the

organization. P1 emphasized that any lack of commitment to organizational change by the top management would be a serious challenge to a change process success. P1 further declared, “Not walking the talk and doing it the right way, creates ripple effects in the organizations that would hinder successful organizational change.” P6 corroborated by acknowledging that leaders should recognize early signs of resistance and cited some of the resources used to address potential employees’ resistance.

Most participants mentioned that conducting engagement surveys and showing empathy through a lot of formal and informal communication are methods and tactics often leaders use during the change process. P8 acknowledged that the leadership team needs to communicate change with empathy, highlighting the importance of making the effort to understand the feelings of people affected. P8 stated, “Trust me, most of the time, how information is conveyed is more important and can have a bigger impact than what information is conveyed.” P8 asserted that empathy was essential for competent leadership and that not having empathy for employees and how they felt about the change could cause its failure.

Business leaders handle change differently and have to understand how to deal with each person based on his or her personality and feelings. P3 suggested that having a well-devised plan for change was not enough; specifying that ensuring the leadership team was directly and daily involved to immediately address any issues or obstacles was important as well. P4 provided the example of one of the leaders who gathered the team in an off-site meeting, positioned the change objectives, put on the table opportunities the change could bring, and tactfully explained how the new structure potentially would be

beneficial to both the organization and its employees. P5 stated that trust was a key trait for leadership affecting organizational changes and their implementation. Trust in management is what ultimately reduces resistance to change (Cai, Loon, & Wong, 2018). P5 added, “.... Trust helped foster confidence critically needed by affected employees. It helped them take risks and venture into the new changes.” Business leaders need to build trust in employees so employees feel encouraged and motivated and become effective part of the changes.

Leaders should know their employees and build relationships with them to be more prepared to deal with resistance to change (Cai et al., 2018). P10 explained that the leadership considered the impacts of the change initiative at different organizational levels and how it would affect each function and each individual before developing a communication strategy. P7 stated that all parties involved actioned the change by defining a clear governance framework. P9 further noted the importance of leading from the front by adopting a PULL approach to prepare and gain employees’ confidence. P9 said, “Every time my team told me something was not possible or doable, I showed them how to do it by spending a good amount of time with them on the job, celebrating the wins and learning from the shortfalls.” P8 explained that it was necessary to visualize early wins to convey the change positive side. P9 expressed emotions mentioning how change was not easy on leaders either, adding that though they may not be always directly affected, leaders still sometimes need coaching to go through the change process.

The results of this study were consistent with the existing literature on the relationship between leadership style and organizational change. The results illustrated

the influence of leadership style in terms of employee involvement, change motivation, and individual knowledge sharing to make the loop of the change process. Leaders and employees were considered to be one unit. There is an increasing recognition and agreement among scholars that successful implementation of change is impacted significantly by leadership practices, styles, and behaviors. A successful organizational change implementation demonstrates leaders' ability to develop, implement, and sustain the changes long enough to yield the intended results (Militaru & Zanfir, 2016). Research has consistently shown that the right leadership style leads to positive organizational change. Most participants indicated that effective leaders provided followers with the necessary skills to achieve organizational change initiatives objectives. The results of this study confirmed the association and positive influence of leadership style on organizational change initiatives implementation level of success. According to Narikae et al. (2017), leadership commitment facilitates the realization of organizational goals and communication ensures the meeting of deadlines while coordination enhances the achievement of sufficient results.

This study's results were also consistent with more recent research. A successful organizational change initiative implementation depends on effective leadership that can convey a clear vision and can motivate employees to work together toward the same goals and organizational change (Ling, Guo, & Chen, 2018). The leadership role is the main force behind a successful organizational change initiatives implementation (Adda, Natsir, & Rossanty, 2019). Tailoring a leadership behavior to the change situation not only requires that leaders be aware of their leadership styles but also recognizes what

employees need in specific situations (Vos & Rupert, 2018). During a change process, leading by example is a critical leadership trait to engage employees and ensure a successful implementation (Hartge et al., 2019). Such behavior is important because it is a buffer against one of the most documented reasons for resistance, miscommunication, lack of information, and fear (Fuioaga & Rusu, 2018). Transformational leadership seems to be productive during organizational change initiatives (Harb & Sidani, 2019). Transformational leadership is also more effective in increasing both trust and acceptance of change (Cai et al., 2018).

The emergence of the leadership role as a theme to successfully implement organizational change initiatives was aligned with my conceptual framework. Kotter's change model (1996) is driven by strong leadership and identifies critical steps leaders must take when implementing change initiatives. Organizations should have enough proven leaders to be able to drive the change process (Kotter, 1996). By creating short-term wins, leaders build on their success and ensure a sense of urgency while at the same time motivate employees by giving them the possibility to see the progress (Kotter, 1996).

#### **Theme 4: Training and Tracking Tools Necessity**

All participants had one common message revolving around how commitment to change could reflect a state in which employees were made aware of a change, had the skills needed to implement it, were empowered to implement it, were motivated to do so by adequate rewards, and shared the vision exemplified by the change. Most participants mentioned the importance of creating metrics and monitoring them. This study findings'

analysis identified performance metrics and training support as primary aspects to successfully implement a change initiative.

P1 stated that having various instruments to track the change progress success was crucial to deliver on the organizations' change objectives and commitments. P1 added that one of the key enablers to a successful organizational change initiative implementation was identifying the proper tools and processes. P1 said, "One of the strategies adopted was the development of process tools to keep all employees and stakeholders up-to-date." P1 further posited that preparing employees for change initiatives implementation was primarily done through training programs to ensure employees got proper education and training before rotating them into new positions. P1 specified that training plans included both soft and hard trainings. P2 noted that having in place traceable tools was very helpful in the sense that it allowed the company to keep track of all the deliverables and maintain a close look and critical analysis of all the key financial indicators

Many participants referred to the value of the development of various tracking tools (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, & P9). P4 endorsed the importance of measuring the efficiencies and effectiveness of the change implementation through proper key performance indicators (KPIs) post change. Participants explained that the main monitoring KPIs were market share, weighted and numeric distribution, margins, trade budget, marketing budget, new products performance, four-year innovation pipeline, brands financial performance, in-market sales data, retailers report analysis, and quarterly priorities per country. P7 highly acknowledged the benefits of having tools to accurately

evaluate the company's achievements. P8 noted, "Work processes were drastically improved thanks to the new performance indicators." P8 further stated, "We achieved operational excellence thanks to the revised tools and processes." Participants often cited scorecard project and OGSM model (objectives, goals, strategy, measures) as the main tools used. Both instruments facilitated the effectiveness and the performance of change initiatives implementation tracking. The scorecard focused on common KPIs to quantify the effort and inputs. Some of the secondary sources explored, such as project monthly tracking and project management documents showed that KPIs were used as checkpoints to assess if the changes or new strategies were working. The main evaluation criteria were net sales, in-market sales, market share, new products distribution, and earnings before income and taxes. The OGSM model defined the key objectives, how to reach them, and how to measure them. The examination of multiple PowerPoint presentations and management business reviews (MBR) as secondary data revealed that the OGSM model was diligently tracked on a monthly basis by the second organization. Necessary actions were taken immediately when unexpected issues were raised.

Participants also introduced mentorship as one of the trainings used to ensure a change process success. P2 explained that allocating a mentor to train and coach new members in challenging situations was useful when dealing with executing change. P2 added that setting meetings dedicated to sharing learnings amongst various functions was highly useful. P2 shared some secondary sources to show best practice examples and presentations developed by some team members. P9 acknowledged that in addition to the tools and training, one of the best ways to assess the effectiveness of the change

initiatives implementation was to have best practices presented by teams. P9 further declared, “During those sessions, we had a chance to kind of visualize the successes. What to keep doing, what to stop doing, and what to start doing.” The financial statements post-change review revealed a significant profitability improvement ranging between 8 to 15% gross margin increase.

P3 said, “I experienced firsthand that training is key to comfort employees where changes in roles and tasks were in question.” P3 stated that training helped overcome resistance to change because it properly equipped employees with the knowhow and knowledge needed to perform the new duties. P4 noted the role both internal and external training could play to guarantee a successful change implementation. Mentoring employees with new or extended tasks was one of the internal trainings done. The external training was mainly conducted through sharing successful change implementation success stories from other countries. P5 acknowledged that the difficulties and challenges to carry a change execution required additional skills staff members did not necessarily have. P6 confirmed by stipulating that training and education were good tools to thrive rather than survive during an organizational change implementation phase. P6 added that sometimes new tools for experimentation were availed to enable the process of thinking and acting fast with calculated risk. P7 posited the significance of education and training to help develop a positive engaged attitude and to nourish the working environment. P7 said, “Employees attended a transformation academy. It was also a good tool to thrive rather than survive during the change.” The exploration of archival records combined with updated weekly meetings’ minutes as

secondary data sources showed transformation academy to be a heavy and serious program that was cascaded down to all employees. Employees had the task and challenge to research about new ideas implementation, experiment, and report back to subject matter experts.

The results of this study indicated that business leaders could improve change initiatives implementation success by setting well-defined key performance indicators and developing adequate training programs. All participants revealed the importance of training and tools during organizational change initiatives implementation. The findings were consistent with prior literature. Thanyawatpornkul, Siengthai, and Johri (2016) indicated that training and development were major human resource practices influencing the success of change initiatives implementation. Training and tools are central to effective change by allowing change recipients to provide feedback and make necessary adjustments (Bejinaru & Baesu, 2017). Leaders need tools, procedures, and processes to help them be more efficient and more rational during an organizational change implementation experience (Caves, 2018).

The emerging of the tools and training theme aligned with recent literature review too. Multiple scholars revealed that providing processes, tools, and resources during organizational change was amongst the key strategies needed to successfully manage the change implementation phase (Ahmad & Cheng, 2018). The findings that the measuring and monitoring of KPIs improved change implementation were also similar to the research findings from Royce (2018). Royce found that measurable goals could positively influence change implementation success.

The results of this study aligned with my chosen conceptual framework because according to Kotter (1996), leaders must create a vision and that vision must be measureable to ensure implementation success and sustainability. Kotter's model provides leaders with specific actions, tools, and techniques to move their organizations from a current state to a more desired state.

### **Theme 5: Cohesive Culture**

The next theme that emerged concerned the development of a cohesive culture. Culture can influence how employees think and make decisions that may affect job performance (Ben Saad & Abbas, 2018). Culture can hinder the execution of strategy by generating opposition to change. During the interview process, many participants acknowledged that a culture of change started with leaders who had to cascade down the information. P3 noted that in the Middle East and North Africa region, culture played an important role, and that the leaders had to be careful during the change process. P3 added that sometimes some individuals could feel being discriminated or alienated because of their gender or religion. A feeling of alienation in which employees no longer identify with the organization can lead to culture clashes (Gautam, 2016). P8 reinforced this statement by recognizing how rewarding the right employee behaviors and appointing the right ambassadors or champions strengthened the culture message. P8 emphasized that through developing a team spirit culture; the leaders of the company were well-positioned to facilitate the opening of doors to continuous cycles of improvement. P7 said, "there was a culture signature playbook available to everyone to post recommendations and ideas to go through the challenge." The access to a copy of the playbook as a secondary

source exhibited that a common platform was created and embedded the behaviors that needed to be adopted. The leaders were able to align all the employees to share company goals and values.

Employees are more engaged when they identify with the organization's values and purpose (Glavas, 2016). P5 noted the importance of establishing a culture of continuous improvement. According to P5, establishing such a culture was one of the best ways to change the hearts and minds of employees when they were continuously asked to change the way they worked. P5 posited that change did not happen once because the market industry, the competition, and the demands of customers were constantly changing. P6 stated that building a culture of change equaled embracing change and succeeding in change. P6 said, "To increase our chances to always make successful changes and successful changes implementations, we need employees who are receptive to new ways of working and new ways of thinking." P7 noted that organizational change is a reflection of an organization's culture, adding that the most powerful strategy is to ignite the desire.

The results of this study were consistent with prior literature on cultural role. Culture is a critical contributor to implementing and sustaining change and can influence team behaviors, motivation, engagement, decision-making, and organizational outcomes. An organization with the best change strategy but without the adequate culture to support the change implementation will not succeed (Mouhamadou et al., 2017). Business leaders also regularly express similar views (Zondi & Mutambara, 2016).

The results of this study also aligned with recent literature. Ben Saad and Abbas (2018) revealed the existence of a positive relationship between organizational change implementation and organizational culture. Levene and Higgs (2018) suggested that it was necessary to change the culture of the organization to successfully implement change. Business practice indicates that the culture parameter can either hinder or facilitate a successful organizational change (Wyrwicka & Agnieszka, 2019). Organizational climate and culture influence employees' engagement (Febriansyah, Pringgabayu, Hidayanti, & Febrianti, 2018). Febriansyah et al. posited that employees whose personal interests and work style mimicked that of the workplace would be more likely to embrace change. Some scholars challenged this view and postulated that culture took time to change and that change needed to be implemented within the context of the organization's culture (Dhingra & Punia, 2016). These scholars argued that organizational culture played a modest role in the relationships between change implementation initiatives and end-results (Arif, Zahid, Kashif, & Sindhu, 2017).

Levene and Higgs (2018) attested that in light of the dilemma posed by different views of the cultural effect on organizational change initiatives implementation, the relationships between culture and change implementation were recurrent. Varney (2017) examined the change process in search of the reasons why change initiatives failed. Varney suggested that leaders should conduct a test to determine if the planned change initiatives would work in the organization and understand the organization's culture before undertaking major change. Leaders need to be abreast of the role of organizational

culture during an organizational change process. Leaders need to engage with their followers based on a common understanding of the organization's culture.

The results of this study aligned with my chosen conceptual framework. One fundamental enabler of organizational change is the culture's readiness to embrace and sustain the change (Kotter, 1996). Kotter's change model calls for a culture of change to be nurtured so as to anchor the right behaviors in the culture, and ultimately sustain the change effort. Incorporating culture into the change is the eighth step in Kotter's change model where a new and winning behavior continues. Ignoring the influence of culture on change implementation may have a serious effect on the outcome. As such, preparing the culture for long term change and identifying effective drivers of change can be important to implementing change (Kotter, 1996).

#### **Theme 6: Speed of Execution**

The sixth and last theme that emerged from this study was related to the speed of execution. This theme emanated from three participants when given the opportunity at the end of the interviews to share any additional information on strategies their respective organizations used to ensure a successful implementation of organizational change initiative. P3 stated that it was crucial for the leadership team to speed up the change initiatives implementation both for the employees' and the company's sake.

P7 expressed that when a change decision was made, when possible scenarios were explored, and when potential results were studied; acting fast was necessary. P10 specified the necessity to choose the right time to make and announce the change. P10 acknowledged the importance of the organizational change timing and speed by stating,

“Once the change is communicated, you need to move fast, fast, fast. Otherwise, you leave room for rumors and uncertainty to build up.” P10 further asserted that the consequences could be serious because the word of mouth in the region was a powerful and sometimes damaging influential aspect. Speed, focus, and unstoppable momentum can make organizational change succeed and last. In contrast, P2 declared that to secure successful organizational change initiatives, small incremental steps were recommended. P2 added that taking small steps allowed time to adjust while addressing issues coming along the way.

Neither prior literature reviews nor recent studies led to any findings on the effect of a speedy execution strategy or small steps approach on successful organizational change initiatives implementation. The question remains on whether change initiatives implementation should be done quickly or through a slow implementation process. Kotter’s change model offers a phase-driven strategic approach that can help leaders identify how to design, deploy, initiate, and integrate strategies to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. But the framework does not provide or include a phase related to how fast or slow a change process should be.

### **Findings and Analysis Summary**

Successful organizational change requires organizational readiness. Change implementation failure is a global challenge for many organizations (Monauni, 2017). According to Kotter (1996), 50% of all change implementations fail due to leadership not preparing the organizations’ teams for change. Kotter emphasized that when organizational readiness was high, there was a greater chance that employees would

invest more efforts and display higher team spirit to a more effective implementation of the proposed change.

Organizational change should serve the overarching business strategy for the mid and long term. The process of organizational change begins with a strategic vision that the leaders have for their organizations. Effective leaders influence successful organizational change and integration of sustainability practices. Business leaders need to identify key enablers that would help the business implement its sought-after strategy. It is important to first clearly define the business strategy milestones, and then develop a plan to how best use the resources.

Overall, to drive successful organizational change; engaging employees, leading by example, communicating the change, putting in place adequate tools and training programs, following up, and removing the barriers are steps that should be properly planned and closely monitored. Many leaders acknowledged how a successful implementation of organizational change initiative improved the portfolio performance and led to healthier financial results. Maintaining a certain flexibility and willingness to pause, align, refine, and go back to execute was also needed at all levels. Organizational change is always about coping with change (Kotter, 1996).

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The main objective of this study was to explore strategies used by business leaders in the region of Middle East and North Africa to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. Organizations' leaders operate within a competitive environment where dynamic change strategies are necessary for the continued viability of

organizations (Yi, Li, Hitt, Liu, & Wei, 2016). Karaxha (2019) stipulated that business leaders give a high importance to the process of formulating change strategies, but less attention to the change process implementation. According to Jeong and Shin (2019), business leaders need to master the tool of organizational change instrument to succeed and persevere in a highly volatile environment.

This study could contribute to business practices by helping other business leaders develop their own strategies, reduce implementation costs, increase trust and faith in senior management, and improve the change process efficiency by identifying what strategies some business leaders used to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. Business leaders in Middle East and North Africa must acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and practices to successfully implement change initiatives and stay competitive. This study highlighted the relationship between organizations' change strategies and some tangible assets such as leadership traits, employees' engagement, and open communication channels. The findings of this study provided leaders with examples to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. These examples could lead to a better knowledge of what it would take to improve the effectiveness of the organizational change process implementation; thus, helping reduce the reported high failure rates. The results of this study could also serve as a foundation for a standardized change initiative process, which could increase productivity and minimize financial losses. Business leaders who successfully implement change initiatives will be able to reduce costs and become more competitive in the marketplace.

The participants of this study were senior and experienced leaders. The findings showed the perspectives of the business leaders who have led successful change projects. The participants explained the importance of open and continuous communication, proactive and collaborative leadership, employees' commitment and engagement, clear responsibilities and processes, and values and cultural influence. All strategies were critical to ensure successful change implementation.

Out of the six themes that emerged from the study, five fully aligned with Kotter's eight-step change model. No participant mentioned the model or cited any other theorist as a reference point during the companies' change implementation process. Participants tacitly acknowledged that change implementation success required an understanding of influencing factors related to Kotter's change model. All business leaders implicitly believed that the achievement of successful organizational change initiatives implementation was associated with Kotter's change framework. Participants indirectly indicated how most of Kotter's model steps, such as two-way communication, positive employees' engagement, appropriate leadership style, proper training programs, cohesive culture, and adequate organizational systems are important and necessary to ensure a successful organizational change initiative implementation.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The results of this study could positively impact social change by allowing business leaders to invest more money into their communities, increase productivity, and minimize financial losses. The implications of this study could steer to more stable employment of local citizens for improving communities' local economies. Successful

organizational change initiatives implementation could lead to a persistent employment effect leading to the reduction of unemployment through long-term successful and sustainable organizational change initiatives implementation. Employees could become financially healthy and would be able to lead an improved quality of life in society. A successful change process could help sustain employment practices and contribute to both decrease the cycle of poverty and improve the living standards of the people in communities. It could also positively enhance employees' commitment and contribution to the greater good.

### **Recommendations for Action**

To successfully implement organizational change initiatives, business leaders need to understand and use winning strategies. Even though the geographic location of the present study was completely different from research conducted in Western and non-Islamic settings; the findings proved to be consistent with those of Western studies. This study took place in a region where Islam is the influential and sole religion that guides behaviors. Both the values and culture might highly affect the work environment and the reactions to organizational change initiatives.

The results of this study indicated that the change process success was driven and dependent on six major strategies. Based on the findings, these strategies are: (a) a two-way open and continuous communication, (b) engaged and committed employees, (c) the right leadership style, (d) a cohesive culture, (e) metrics to measure and monitor key performance indicators, and (f) the ability to execute change rapidly.

The first recommendation from this study is to ensure leaders openly and regularly communicate with team members and stakeholders throughout the whole change initiatives implementation process. The study participants found the greatest success when communication helped employees better understand the change, the reasons, and the benefits.

The second recommendation is to engage employees to make change successful. Communication can help employees get involved in change, help them feel empowered to commit, and engage in the desired change. Most leaders interviewed acknowledged that the company approach to employee engagement was just as critical to the success of the change as the actual implementation.

The third recommendation is to ensure leaders have the right leadership style and skills to achieve a positive influence on the success of the organizational change initiative. Business leaders should establish clear expectations to help employees provide the appropriate support. Leaders' ability to engage followers through motivation is one of the most important and needed skills for change implementation success. Leadership commitment will also facilitate the realization of organizational change goals.

The fourth recommendation is to develop metrics and training programs. Both tools are crucial factors that affect the effectiveness of change initiative execution. The metrics will be used to track the progress and success of the change initiative implementation as well as add value to the organization by helping to reach organizational goals. The training plans will equip employees with the proper resources and capabilities to deal with change and sustain a competitive advantage.

The fifth recommendation is to take into account the cultural transformation involved in many organizational changes. It is mandatory for business leaders to understand the cultural change work within organizations going through a change process. If a change process strategy is incompatible with the culture of the organization, the strategy will fail. Culture can be a great enabler of successful organizational change. This study's findings suggested that organizations' members were more inclined to embrace change when the organization's culture was aligned with the mission and goals of the company. Therefore, I suggest that a cultural analysis be undertaken to facilitate the planning and implementation of organizational change initiatives. Understanding culture can be useful in two ways. First, cultural insight provides awareness of the extent to which organization members are willing to accept change. Second, a cultural assessment is likely to determine the root cause of the problems that could impede stronger performance.

I intend to present the findings of my study at professional associations based in the region of Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The members of the associations are key leaders representing more than 100 organizations operating in various industries. Such gatherings will also offer a wonderful opportunity and an effective way to communicate the results of my research study to scholars. I will also actively explore any additional options and occasions to present my findings at relevant business events such as Gulfood or SIAL Middle East. I also intend to approach leading business-consulting firms in MENA and seek opportunities to partner with them and create an occasion to share my findings and recommendations with companies planning or going through an

organizational change initiative or challenge. I will provide a summary of the study findings to the business leaders who participated in this research. I will also make myself available to make presentations and answer questions on the process, analysis, and recommendations. I will publish the study within Walden's ScholarWorks database. I also intend to convert this study into an academic paper suitable for publication in reputable and relevant journals to make the findings available to a broader range of business leaders. In the spirit of continuous learning and improvement, I also intend to attend one of the fundamentals of leading change series of workshops that John Kotter, the creator of Kotter's eight-steps change model, is organizing across the United States of America. Such events would help me further and better build the skills needed to efficiently contribute to my future scholar role to the change happening around my work and beyond.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

I conducted a qualitative multiple case study on the strategies business leaders in the region of MENA used to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. I used a sample size of 10 participants from two different organizations. The conceptual framework that guided this research was Kotter's (1996) eight-step change model for leading change. The limitations identified earlier in the study were related to participants' abilities to interpret and communicate their experiences effectively, and to how the results of the study might not apply to other organizations in other regions of the world. Whereas I believe the first limitation has been overcome, the second limitation remains valid. Extended research beyond one city or country located in the Middle East and North

Africa region would enrich the topic of successful change initiatives implementation strategies.

One of the recommendations for future research would be to conduct further studies across all 25 countries located in the MENA region. Conducting a similar study in each country would confirm or expand the findings of this study. The focus of this study was mainly on the fast-moving consumer goods sector. Further research could tackle different industries such as banking, manufacturing, retail, insurance, health care, education, entertainment, etc.

One of the findings revealed in this study was whether it was important to speed up the execution of the change process or take small incremental steps. I found neither prior nor current literature that presented any related conclusions. The explored literature stressed the relevance of communication, tools and processes clarity, cultural influence, leadership skills and style, training plans, employees' motivation and commitment, and other external factors. But, none of the literature I found showed that a study has empirically investigated or suggested that execution speed could be a factor impacting organizational change initiatives' success level. Future research could explore the relationship between the speed of execution and successful organizational change initiatives implementation. The scope of such research could be focused on one country but extended to various sectors.

This study excluded public sector organizations and leaders, and focused on the private sector, which included a more diverse and multicultural workforce. Private sector leaders could have different strategies versus leaders operating in the public sector. It

would be interesting and worthwhile to conduct a research similar to this study in the public industry and compare the results. Another possible future research area could be focused on exploring the influence of other organizational factors such as complex political environment in some countries, or women's leadership effect on organizational change initiatives in emerging markets versus developed countries.

From a technical perspective, I would like to point out that the NVivo software I used was very helpful in dealing with the documentation and categorization of the data. I could explore large amounts of textual documents to see patterns. The software has some quite powerful tools to help locate and compare concepts and themes in the literature. I highly recommend using NVivo software. But, under no circumstances, the tool can be a substitute for a researcher expected intellectual engagement and skill. As future scholars, we need to be very disciplined in keeping notes about what we are doing and how we are thinking.

### **Reflections**

For decades, multiple groups have been creating strategies and providing services around the globe to develop new business strategies and drive positive social change. I am no exception as I was raised on the core value that giving should be a passion and that it is as important as taking.

I started my DBA journey to move from the corporate world and become a full-time professor in leading business schools in my home country. I expect this step to allow me to influence the next generation by leveraging the indirect power that will be placed in my hands. I will be better equipped to educate and empower my future students to be

future leaders and positive social change assets. This journey has undeniably impacted my person both on a personal and professional level. The unlimited learning opportunities I came across during this journey expanded my horizons beyond my research topic and opened new growth paths. The challenges encountered represented a wonderful and unique occasion to be creative, think out of the box, and find growth by adapting and learning new skills.

This entire journey was very challenging; yet, very rewarding. I would have never been able to complete my research project without the support of a wonderful network composed of my parents, two brothers, and two special friends. The doctoral journey improved my knowledge and perspectives on many aspects. If I have had the chance to do my DBA years ago, I would have certainly handled many situations in both my personal and professional life in a better way. On a personal level, I would have embraced sooner the mind-set needed to drive positive social change. It would not have mattered how big my act would be as long as it would instigate change, contribute to the greater good, and have a tangible positive impact. On a professional level, I would have dealt with many events in a more resilient and positive way.

The findings of this study revealed that most of the information in the literature review corresponded with the participants' data sharing. I was able to get a fairly comprehensive understanding of the strategies used by business leaders in the region of Middle East and North Africa to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. The results emphasized the importance of communication, effective leadership, engaged employees, training programs, and cohesive culture. Some of the

business leaders interviewed showed candid excitement and interest, and provided huge support to make the experience as enjoyable as possible.

### **Conclusion**

The business environment is constantly changing, implying that businesses need to be in a constant state of transformation. New technologies and global crises have reshaped many industries. The pace of organizational change has accelerated and its magnitude has amplified. Organizational change initiatives implementation can be challenging to achieve successfully as evidenced by high implementation failure rates. Organizational change initiatives implementation failure can create a legacy of defeat by becoming part of the organization's history and making future changes challenging to implement. Unsuccessful organizational change initiatives implementation has a direct effect on all stakeholders' confidence as it can lead to organizations losing attraction and reputation in the market.

Organizations need to constantly manage and deliver successful change programs to cut costs, achieve post-merger integration benefits, or overcome other challenges. It is necessary to drive organizational change through formal organizational enablers to ensure a successful organizational change initiative. Organizations need to align their strategic approach in an effective and flexible manner when implementing changes.

All business leaders agreed that change was not a bad initiative and that it should be given a chance because it drives better business performance and wider career opportunities. The key success parameters in designing and implementing a successful organizational change initiative plan are: Understanding and communicating the effect of

the change on people, building the emotional and rational case for change, leading by example the change as a leadership team, mobilizing and engaging people to own and accelerate the change, and embedding the change in the culture of the organization. By following a solid change management approach, organizations could enhance their change capability, increase the speed of implementation, and improve the probability of success.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

<b>Interview Protocol</b>	
<b>Actions: What I will do</b>	<b>Script: What I will say</b>
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage.</p>	<p>Hello, my name is Ilham Hiyari. I am currently a student working towards a doctorate in business administration (DBA) at Walden University. Thank you for participating in my research on strategies used by business leaders to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. The interview should take no more than one hour. This interview will be recorded to assure your responses are correctly taken. After the interview, I will send you a summary of the transcript for member-checking, a means for you to check the accuracy of the information transposed. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me before we get started? (Answer questions if any are asked then move on with the interview)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch for non-verbal queues</li> <li>• Paraphrase as needed</li> <li>• Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth if needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Question 1: What strategies did you use to ensure a successful organizational change implementation?</li> <li>• Question 2: To what extent were the employees involved in the development and implementation of successful organizational change?</li> <li>• Question 3: How did you prepare employees to be qualified to successfully implement organizational change initiatives?</li> <li>• Question 4: How did you respond to any resistance from employees, managers or departments while implementing successful organizational change initiatives?</li> <li>• Question 5: What key challenges were encountered during the implementation of new organizational changes?</li> <li>• Question 6: How did you address each of the key challenges to implementing the successful strategies for organizational change initiatives?</li> <li>• Question 7: How did your organization assess</li> </ul>

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	<p>the effectiveness of its strategies for change initiatives implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Question 8: How has your company benefited from your organizational change initiatives?</li> <li>• Question 9: What other information can you offer regarding strategies your organization used that led to the successful implementation of organizational change initiatives?</li> </ul>
Wrap up interview thanking participant	Thank you for your time and consideration.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	What day and time works for me to call and speak to you concerning the follow-up member checking? I will send you a copy of the summary of the transcript prior to the call.

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### Follow-up Member Checking Interview

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Email transcript with instructions	Thank you for your participation. Attached is the transcript summary from the interview. If you feel the need to make any changes, please feel free to do so by using a different color font. Then, return the corrected version back to me before our scheduled call on. (mm/dd/yy).
Add a list of additional questions that may come up during transcription if need for clarification.	
Make call to participant	Hello (participant). Thank you for getting the revision of the interview back to me. (If not returned, offer to complete changes for participant while on the phone or reschedule for another day.) Is there anything else you want to add that you didn't include in your edits? I will continue my study and let you know when it is complete. Thank you for your time and consideration. Do you have any additional questions or comments? I will send you the final copy of the study once completed. Is it alright to reach out to you again if I need any clarification in the future? I appreciate your time and participation, please contact me if you have any questions.

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## Appendix B: Invitational Email

Date: [Insert Date]

Re: Request to Participate in a Research Study

Dear [Recipient],

My name is Ilham Hiyari and I am a Doctor of Business Administration student at Walden University. I am conducting research on strategies used by business leaders to successfully implement organizational change initiatives. In my research, I am focusing on companies located in the region of Middle East and North Africa. The primary criterion for inclusion in this study is that the participants are business leaders and senior executives with experience in successfully implementing organizational change initiatives.

I believe your participation will be instrumental in providing information to recommend tools and processes to increase the rate of successful implementation of organizational change initiatives. My research approach will include conducting interviews lasting no more than one hour. I will also be interested in reviewing company documents that could help me build valid and strong study findings' analysis and recommendations. The documents that could be useful and would add to the quality of my research are sales reports, strategic presentations, archival records, and financial progress data.

Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to participate, I will share with you a consent form which explicitly defines your rights during the interview process as well as all the details related to the purpose of my doctoral study. At the end of this study, I will share the results and recommendations with all the participants, scholars, and other stakeholders. The interview will take place at a location, date, and time that is most convenient for you.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to email me or give me a call.

Yours Sincerely,

Ilham Hiyari

Telephone number +971 55 9825070/+212 661 244000.

## Appendix C: Interview Questions Guide

**Interview introduction:** Thank you so much for participating in my research on strategies used by business leaders to successfully implement organizational change initiatives.

This interview should take no more than one hour. This interview will be recorded to assure your responses are correctly taken. After the interview, I will send you a transcript summary to allow you to check the accuracy of the information that was transcribed from the interview. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me before we get started? (If no questions, I will move on to the questions)

1. What strategies did you use to ensure a successful organizational change implementation?
2. To what extent were the employees involved in the development and implementation of successful organizational change?
3. How did you prepare employees to be qualified to successfully implement organizational change initiatives?
4. How did you respond to any resistance from employees, managers or departments while implementing successful organizational change initiatives?
5. What key challenges were encountered during the implementation of new organizational changes?
6. How did you address each of the key challenges to implementing the successful strategies for organizational change initiatives?
7. How did your organization assess the effectiveness of its strategies for change initiatives implementation?
8. How has your company benefited from your organizational change initiatives?
9. What other information can you offer regarding strategies your organization used that led to the successful implementation of organizational change initiatives?

**In Closing:** I deeply appreciate your time and views to help make my study a success. Thank you again for participating. What day and time work for you to call and speak to you concerning the follow-up member checking? I will send you a copy of the summary of the transcript prior to our call.