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Leadership Techniques to Catalyze Organizational Productivity in Small Consulting Firms

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MBA, Grantham University, 2015

BA, American Military University, 2014

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

Small business owners employ 47% of the U.S. labor force, yet 50% of small businesses do not survive beyond 5 years. This failure can impact approximately 29% of the U.S. workforce. Therefore, this study is important to small business owners because the research and findings may help them evaluate their leadership techniques, which may help them improve their organizational productivity and survive. Grounded in the vertical dyad linkage theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore effective leadership strategies small business firm leaders used to maintain a steady growth of their organizations past the initial 5-year life cycle. The participants comprised 8 leaders of 4 small government consulting firms in Northern Virginia, which elaborated on the leadership techniques for catalyzing organizational productivity. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and regulatory documentation reviews. Data were analyzed using methodological triangulation. 4 themes emerged: individual leadership techniques, barriers to communication, servicing clients versus profit and loss, and organizational productivity. A key recommendation is for small consulting firm leaders to combine different individual leadership techniques to form unique personal relationships with their employees, which naturally creates the platform to catalyze organizational productivity. The study's implications for positive social change are the potential for small business leaders in the government sector to gain knowledge of leadership strategies to catalyze productivity, which leads to an increase in retention of key personnel and revenue.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to every leader in small consulting firms that struggle to provide better leadership to their subordinate employees. My desire is that the results of this study will help improve the environment within the small consulting companies that are struggling to maintain key employees. I would also like to dedicate this study to my family: my girls, Macy and Mia, my grandparents Sandra and Fil Tobias, my dad, Ronald Zapien; and my mom, Cheryl Zapien. I would like to also mention a couple of key friends and mentors that have had faith in me through this entire study and my education: my friend; Roderick Trotter; my friends, Heath and Shirley Weisiger; my friends, Trevor and Cassie Tong; my friend David Ortiz, my friend, Steven Kitchen, my friend and mentor, James Davis my mentor, Daniel Dailey; my mentor, Robert Moss; my mentor Robert Lee; my mentor and friend, Mark Baxter; my mentor and chair, Dr. Chad Sines; second committee member Dr. Edward Paluch; and my URR, Dr. Cheryl Lentz. I would also like to dedicate this to LTC Joe Handke, Dan Long, and Dan Lennox who helped me through my first four classes 10 years ago. Lastly, everything in life comes to an end and a new chapter begins, never stop striving to learn new and interesting ways to improve yourself and the ones around you.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank several people in my life that either pushed me through this challenging time in my life and during my previous educational goals. First, I would like to thank my daughters Macy and Mia for your support, time, and unconditional love as I went through this journey. Although, she and I have parted ways, I know I would not have gotten through this journey without my children's mother Ashley Zapien. Thank you for continuously pushing me when I want to stop because things were difficult and allowing me to become an academic scholar and practitioner. As I walk across the stage, I want to thank several academia whose patience and guidance assisted me in this journey. To my committee chair, Dr. Chad Sines, second committee member Dr. Edward Paluch; and URR, Dr. Cheryl Lentz, CSM (R) Robert Moss, CSM (R) Jerry Taylor, Dr. Jim Deureth, Dr. Joyce Costello, CSM (R) Mathew Bartel, , Mr. Michael Formica and MG (R) Wilson A. Shoffner. In addition, I would personally like to thank the Duffy Paulson, Kathy Martin, Allison Fox, Andrew Pavord, Bill Doyle, Vincent Pope, Michael Wochomurka, and Patrick Lynch for providing me with insight into government industry. To everyone who stuck with me through this journey, I want to thank you for taking the time and effort to push me further and always encouraging me to set new limits. Finally, thank you to all the Walden Staff for assisting me in every aspect of the program from the Writing Center to the Library.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

As small business firms are becoming more prevalent in government contracting, many small business leaders struggle to employ talent management and the proper individual relationship techniques with their employees that can increase organizational productivity (Sturm, Vera, & Crossan, 2017). In the 1999-2019 period, small companies struggled to stay in business because business leaders fail to instill effective leadership practices, which in turn leads to increased turnover of key personnel (Horn, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017). Key personnel within small companies not experiencing effective leadership may decide to leave their organizations. Kacem and El Harbi (2014) stated that theoretically, leadership is the main catalyst of cultural values within organizations. Leadership and a communal sense of belonging can cause a team to be successful and maintains retention of essential personnel (Zaharee, Lipkie, Mehlman, & Neylon, 2018). Conversely, ineffective leadership can negatively affect organizations, potentially contributing to organizations entering bankruptcy or ceasing operations (Zapien, 2019).

Background of the Problem

Many small consulting firms have struggled to remain in competition with larger companies due to dysfunctional leadership behavior, ineffective talent management, and inaccurate activity-based costing (Foroughi, Kocakulah, Stott, & Manyoky, 2017). DuBois, Koch, Hanlon, Nyatuga, and Kerr (2015) found small companies need to invest in personnel that know and understand how to be a project leader, not just a project manager. Rao (2015) suggested that leaders are healthy individuals with extraordinary qualities that allow them to coach and mentor their subordinates to increase organizational productivity. Foroughi et al. (2017) acknowledged that entrepreneurs who lack formalized work and quality standards, costs, and other employee skills usually start small consulting firms. Traditional, often informal accounting practices, which include language and cultural barriers have led to drastic effects on organizational productivity (Foroughi et al., 2017).

Fonseca, Lima, and Pereira (2018) noted that investments in human capital or changes in the firm size could reflect task reconfigurations and adaptation due to technological change, which can increase organizational productivity. In this study, I explored different leadership techniques that may contribute to increases in organizational productivity. Specifically, I explored different leadership strategies that leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector use to catalyze organizational productivity.

Problem Statement

Leaders engaging in dysfunctional leadership practices can negatively impact their organizations' productivity, causing employees' efforts to decline, organizational performance to plummet, and the loss of key employees due to negative organizational cultures (Rose, Shuck, Twyford, & Bergman, 2015). Sixty to seventy percent of working adults have stated that their direct supervisors are the most stressful aspect of their jobs (Patel & Hamlin, 2017). The general business problem is that ineffective leadership practices can negatively affect organizational productivity. The specific business problem is that some leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector lack effective leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies that some leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector use to catalyze organizational productivity. The target population consisted of at least eight leaders from four small consulting firms in the northern Virginia area who had developed effective leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity. This study's implications for positive social change may have included the opportunity for leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector to learn specific leadership strategies used to catalyze organizational productivity. Increasing productivity may result in increased revenue and profits, which increases the region's tax base thus improving the standard of living including increased funding for social programs such as state childcare and job locating services to expand their network for clients. In addition, with an increased tax base, state services such as road repair and environmental programs may be more available to the community.

Nature of the Study

There are three methods researchers use to conduct research studies: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Researchers use the qualitative method to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations expressed in a natural language (Gerring, 2017). Conversely, researchers use the quantitative method to emphasize objective measurements by conducting statistical, mathematical, or numerical analyses of data using tools such as polls, surveys, or questionnaires (Gerring, 2017). Because I did not use statistical analyses to explore leadership strategies used to catalyze productivity in small consulting companies, a quantitative method was not appropriate for this study. A researcher uses the mixed method approach to combine qualitative and quantitative components into one study to add strength to the researcher's findings and conclusions (Bazeley, 2015). Since I did not need to use the quantitative component of this method, the mixed method approach was not appropriate for this study.

Qualitative research designs include ethnographic, narrative, phenomenological, and case study (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). Researchers using the ethnographic approach focus on the investigation of a network of social groupings or practices (Percy, Koster, & Kostere, 2015), which was not appropriate for this study. Researchers using the narrative design explore the lived experiences of the participants through personal stories (Bowler, Knobel, & Mattern, 2015), which was not the intent of this study. Researchers use the phenomenological design to investigate the meanings of the participants' lived experiences and to explore various psychological phenomena such as beliefs, feelings, or opinions (Percy et al., 2015). I did not explore the meanings of personal lived experiences of this study's participants, so the phenomenological design was not appropriate. Hollweck (2015) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry that includes an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon (the case). Yin (2017) concluded that researchers choose to conduct a case study to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and in its real-world context when boundaries are not evident. Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson (2014) noted that case study researchers collect and analyze in-depth data through multiple sources and types of data to explore a phenomenon. I collected data from multiple sources to explore, in a real-world context, leadership strategies used to catalyze organizational productivity. Accordingly, a case study design was appropriate for this study.

Research Question

What leadership strategies do leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector use to catalyze organizational productivity?

Interview Questions

1. What leadership strategies did you use to catalyze organizational productivity?
2. How did your company determine the most effective leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity?
3. What key barriers did you encounter when introducing or implementing leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity?
4. How did you overcome these key barriers?
5. What were the outcomes of applying these strategies within your organization to catalyze organizational productivity?
6. What additional information would you like to add regarding leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity we have not previously discussed?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the vertical dyad linkage (VDL) theory. The early developers of this theory, Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975), theorized that employees through leaders taking an active role in building individual relationships add value to their organization's industry (Dansereau etal., 1975). Schultz (1961); Becker (1994); and Dillard (2017) also observed a relationship between human capital and productivity and noted that leadership techniques support the development of personnel concerning their skills. Leaders applying dyad-based methods may use balanced techniques to manage individuals, ensuring organizational sustainability through the retention of essential personnel (Singh & Rukta, 2018). For this study, elements of the VDL theory may explain the role of leadership techniques and leader-employee dynamics in driving enhanced organizational productivity. Accordingly, I expected the VDL theory to provide a useful lens to explore untapped leadership strategies that some leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector use to catalyze organizational productivity.

Operational Definitions

Key personnel: Key personnel are those individuals whose performance and career potential are exceptional: their institutional knowledge, direct relationships, or technical expertise can make their retention critical (Cosack, Guthridge, & Lawson, 2010)

Leader-member exchange (LMX): LMX refers to differentiation as a group-level construct and is the degree to which the same leader differs in his or her exchange relationships with group members (Chen, He, & Weng, 2018).

Productivity: Productivity is defined as the end state of goals based on channels of the workforce selection and pays (Bender, Bloom, Card, Van Reenen, & Wolter, 2018).

Servant leadership: Servant leadership is empowering and developing people while expressing humility, authenticity, and interpersonal acceptance (Harju, Schaufeli, & Hakanen, 2018).

Team building: Team building refers to team training and exercises that allow individuals with diverse skill sets and personalities to function as a team (Zhang et al., 2018).

Vertical dyad linkage theory (VDL): VDL is a theory in which leaders are perceived to use their power, time, and limited resources while developing various relationships with subordinates (Yildiz, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts considered to be true but not verifiable (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Thomas, 2018). I made four assumptions in this study. First, I assumed that participants would be open and honest when responding to questions asked during the interview process. Second, I assumed that I would be able to find a large enough sample of participants to allow me to achieve the necessary data saturation for my study. The third assumption is that my interview questions would correspond with the appropriate theory within the conceptual framework and would be the best fit to help explain the research question in my study. Fourth, I assumed that I would be able to effectively interview participants in the study area while I was working from a different region in the world.

Limitations

Limitations are the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and utility of findings (Thomas, 2018). First, I only included leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector, which may limit the generalizability of findings from this study. Second, is the bias that may have occurred from personal beliefs or feelings regarding leadership techniques, which is based on my time spent in the military. Bias about personal beliefs or feelings has been linked to a lack of rigor among researchers (Reis, 2009). The third limitation of my study could have resulted from the use of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) as a method of communicating with participants for the interviews. Lo Iacono, Symonds, and Brown (2016) noted that a limitation with using VoIP is the availability of compatible software for both parties during the interview. Lastly, some government consulting firms may have been reluctant to discuss their leadership techniques with individuals outside their organization.

Delimitations

Delimitations are theoretical boundaries necessary to complete a research study that can narrow a broad topic (Pan, 2016). First, I included only leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector. Second, I researched and conduct interviews with companies from Northern Virginia, which could prohibit data validation due to this region producing a smaller pool of participants. Coffie (2013) noted that conducting a study from a specific geographic location with a smaller sample size could limit desired results. Third, I would face the time difference between Germany and the East Coast of the United States, which may result in conflict of scheduling necessary interviews. Evans and Lewis (2018) collaborated that scheduling guides the interview process while allowing other relevant themes to emerge unless the time differences limit scheduling. The last delimitation in this case study involved the research question maintaining continuity throughout the case study. Alpi and Evans (2019) stated that treatment of a research questions, richness of description, and analytic strategies vary in depth, which at time can exceed the theoretical boundaries.

Significance of the Study

Banerjee (2015) maintained that leaders initiate positive social change starting at the individual level. Glasø, Skogstad, Notelaers, and Einarsen (2018) observed that leadership development programs could provide leaders with a better understanding of their spectrum of leadership abilities. Leaders who enhance their abilities may reduce negative behavior and enhance constructive behavior, leading to increased productivity (Glasø et al., 2018). Hussain and Hassan (2016) found a direct correlation between ineffective leadership and negative aspects of employee performance, such as reduced output, malingering, and negligence. Business leaders require knowledge and processes for developing and implementing effective leadership strategies to catalyze organizations' productivity.

Contribution to Business Practice

Business leaders may use the results of this research study to develop a better understanding of how to combine different leadership strategies to assist leaders with inadequate training and using essential personnel within their organization to assume supervisory roles through these leadership strategies and training. Maxwell (2018) asserted that effective leaders use their abilities and creativity to magnify the influence and effectiveness of their teams of employees, leading to increased organizational productivity. Leaders of firms who promote creativity among employees can, in turn, improve their companies' performance and growth in a demanding and competitive environment. Executives and managers could use results from this study to identify leadership strategies they can use to retain key personnel and support improvements in firm productivity.

Implications for Social Change

Given the right leadership strategies, future leaders of small companies can catalyze positive social change. Kalwar and Siddiqui (2017) observed that leadership theories have shifted from a focus on managerial functions to a focus on interpersonal dynamics, which motivates a team to work harder and increase productivity to meet organizational goals. Leaders of small consulting firms who gain knowledge of leadership strategies to catalyze productivity may increase their firms' revenue, leading to an increase in the regions' tax base and, subsequently, the availability of more funds for vital social programs for supporting local communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The vast literature on incorporating different leadership techniques into small consulting companies can at time be problematic and debatable based on human organizational behavior. The goal of this qualitative study was to explore different leadership strategies to assist leaders of small government consulting companies in catalyzing organizational productivity. The purpose of a literature review was for the reader to gain clarity through the synthesis of all research material and the researcher's comprehension of the topic under research (Baker, 2016).

For this literature review, I compiled the justification of the topic through a variety of resources. Hart (2018) stated that justification of the subject that a researcher is studying is a critical component of the literature review. This literature review justified the topic of this study through a variety of primary and secondary resources about leadership techniques, which include the VDL theory, which is the predecessor to LMX and is being incorporated in small consulting companies to catalyze organizational productivity. Saunders et al. (2016) defined primary sources as immediate, first-hand pieces of published works. Some of the primary sources that I used for my literature review included peer-reviewed articles, business, and industry documents (print and electronic), memorandums, reports, and government documents about small government businesses. Saunders et al. also observed that secondary sources are a step below primary sources, though they are often collected and further analyzed to provide additional or different knowledge, interpretations, or conclusions. Some secondary sources that justify the research are reviewing journals, dissertations, and books.

I retrieved sources for this literature review from the Walden Library, Google Scholar, and the Walden Dissertations website. The literature review includes 81 sources. Of this total, 70 are peer reviewed, and 52 are published works within 5 years of my intended study completion date. I used the following keywords to identify articles relevant to this literature review: *small government consulting companies*, *leader-member exchange (LMX), vertical dyad linkage (VDL) theory, organizational productivity,* and *leadership techniques*. The system I used in my literature review is Ulrich's Serials Analysis System (USAS), which Metz and Gasser (2006) described as an analytical tool used by librarians to organize their products built on detailed information for their current subscriptions. The literature review included 52 (88%) peer-reviewed journal articles, four dissertations, and four books, which are published works from 2015-2019 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Reference Table for the Literature Review

Publication	Published within 5 years of expected publication date	Older than 5 years	Percentage of overall sources
Books	4	2	6%
Dissertations	4	0	5%
Peer-reviewed articles	52	18	88%
Total	60	20	80
Total %	75%	25%	100%
Total Sources	60	20	80

Leadership Techniques Used in Organizations

Leaders in organizations look for techniques they can use to catalyze organizational productivity in the workplace. Leaders struggle to understand the psychological side of their subordinates (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Modern techniques in leadership have become increasingly difficult due to factors regarding increased availability of information, diversity in talent pools and constructs that are affecting the way leaders operate in public and private organizations (Izard-Carrol, 2016). Leadership techniques are often a combination of social influence and power, which enables a leader to generate purpose, direction, and motivation to employees (U.S. Department of the Army, 2012a; Maduka, Edwards, Greenwood, Osborne, & Babatunde, 2018). Leaders often use their understanding of different leadership techniques or stimulants to catalyze organizational productivity in small consulting firms by applying the concept of quality of work life (QWL), which combines the dimensions of the work environment, occupational stress, opportunities for development, social support, compensation and rewards, and work-life balance (Nayak & Sahoo, 2015).

Several leadership techniques that include QWL have proven to be effective techniques both in the government and in the private sector to catalyze organizational productivity. Rekhi and Sharma (2019) equated QWL to employees' wellbeing based on their job security, chances of growth, and occupational health and safety. D'Innocenzo, Mathieu, and Kukenberger (2016) suggested that traditional leadership techniques become disjointed with a proliferation of nomenclature and conceptualizations. The disjointed leadership techniques have left many researchers and leaders having trouble choosing the right leadership technique for their organization. Organizations and leaders must adapt to the everchanging environment, which brings leadership challenges and requires the right leadership techniques to catalyze organizational productivity

(D'Innocenzo et al.). Many leaders do not know how to communicate effectively with their employees, which leads to ineffective placement for each member of their team. This ineffective communication leads to the failure to place employees in the right positions, that would enhance the overall team goals the leader might aspire to achieve to enhance the organization.

Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory

The VDL theory is the baseline for the relationship and team building through the dyadic process that a leader and their employees need to formulate unique relationships with each other as well as with their teammates. This theory is the predecessor of the LMX theory; scholars and researchers continue to conduct high levels of research across all disciplines based on the tenets of the VDL theory (Fenner & Piotrowski, 2018). The VDL theory was developed by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, in 1973 as an alternative leadership style (Dansereau, Cashman, & Graen, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). VDL theory is an original leadership technique by which Dansereau et al. (1975) suggested that the vertical dyad approach will allow leaders the potential of improving leadership techniques through a dyadic relationship process with their subordinates. The basis of VDL model is a combination of leadership styles that leaders use to effectively connect and communicate with their subordinates without the constriction of a single theory (Liden & Graen, 1980). Improving organizational productivity in a small company requires the leaders to promote creative thinking from their employees and the leaders focusing on each member of the dyad to build the best team (Dansereau et al., 1975; Javed, Rawwas, Khandai, Shahid, & Tayyeb, 2018).

The VDL theory is a vital leadership technique in terms of the application of the traditional five stages of team building. Tripathy (2018) observed that the five stages of team building include forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. The five stages of team building and VDL theory when properly applied together can build stronger teams that effectively catalyze organizational productivity through collaborative efforts, energy, and enthusiasm of every individual performing hard work (Tripathy, 2018). The VDL theory is an effective way for leaders of small companies working with government agencies to build effective teams that will catalyze organizational productivity. The leaders are effectively managing the VDL and catalyzing organizational productivity to build lasting relationships between leaders and their employees (Wijaya, Sapta, Agung, & Sudja, 2019). VDL theory and its characteristics may make a suitable leadership technique option for small government consulting companies.

The VDL theory allows leaders to formulate lasting and functional teams through a dyadic process, which is based on the combined theoretical works of Dansereau, Cashmen, and Graen,. Dansereau et al. (1973) stated that VDL theory is known for two assumptions, which include that each member of the “workgroup” is sufficiently homogeneous with the leader of the workgroup and that the leader or superior behaves in the same manner towards each of his/her subordinates in the workgroup. Dyadic symmetry was suggested by Gerstner and Day (1997), as well as Provenzi, Scotto di Minico, Giusti, Guida, and Müller (2018) as a parental-infant relationship where the parent who serves as the nurturer for an infant forming a unique relationship with that child. Motivation is a critical factor in correctly applying VDL. Motivation tends to be the same approach that leaders apply with their employees by taking a parental role within their workgroups and forming dyadic relationships with each of their employees. The two assumptions combined with the parental-infant relationship may enhance the effectiveness of formulating a highly functioning team that will outlast other teams within the same organization.

VDL theory works in many of the same ways that LMX works because of the shared relationship that each theory has about the dyadic relationship between a leader and each member of the team. Graen and Schiemann (1978) discussed how in a high-quality dyadic relationship, the member is more likely to feel comfortable discussing issues in both their personal and professional lives, which prevents a decrease in productivity. Graen and Schiemann acknowledged that leaders tend to fail when forming strong dyadic relationships that frequently tend to have lower quality interdependencies with their employees, which leads to a higher probability of lower output in productivity. The low performance or output is due to the member not being able to cope with the demands of the work and having no outlet (leader) to use as a coping mechanism. Dansereau et al. (1975) discussed steering the appropriate unit of analysis for examining leadership processes for the VDL theory to accurately reflect the processes linking member and superior. The characteristics of the VDL theory are vital in establishing the right dyadic relationship between a leader and their member(s).

Characteristics of VDL theory. Several characteristics distinguish the VDL theory from other leadership techniques. Liden and Graen (1980) stated that the characteristics of the VDL model are consistent on three determining factors when a leader is working with each member of the team. The three factors are competence and skill, the extent to which the member can be trusted to perform work independently, and motivation to assume greater responsibility within the unit. Dansereau et al. (1975) discussed how both leadership (i.e., influence without authority) and supervision (i.e., an influence based upon only authority) are some of the factors that leaders look at when employing VDL theory in the workplace. The VDL theory encompasses natural trust through open communication and building unique relationships.

Competence and skill are essential drivers for leaders of any organization when choosing the right people to build a strong team. Competence and skill between the leader and member(s) of the team correlate with top management tangible competencies and relationship business networks (Akhtar, Khan, Frynas, Tse, & Rao-Nicholson, 2018). Organizations rely on the top management to employ talent management when hiring employees and on those employees having the analytical skills to perform the jobs they were hired to do for the company. Fernández-Sanz, Gómez-Pérez, and Castillo-Martinez (2017) emphasized that competence is a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, abilities, strategies, and awareness that leaders strive from their employees to perform tasks, solve problems, communicate, build knowledge and even socialize with other members of a team. Leaders use their dyadic relationship to build competence and skill with each member of their team based on individual relationship building between the leader and member.

Leaders and members together need to share the responsibility of demonstrating their competence and skills. Rabogadi (2017) acknowledged through Trivellas and Reklitis (2014) previous research that managers characterized by high levels of job performance excel in practicing leadership competencies. Members' skill and competence are equally important when in a dyadic relationship. A team member's skill whether hard or soft can help them respond to the continually evolving needs of the contemporary workplace (Andrews & Higson, 2008). The leader's function is to help bring out each member's skill by providing them the confidence to share their specific skill set and competence that makes them valuable to the team.

The second characteristic of the VDL theory is trust and the extent to which a leader trusts each member of their team to accomplish the mutual goals. Graebner, Lumineau, and Kamal (2018) and; Jeffries and Reed (2000) suggested that asymmetric dyads are rare and unstable whereas matching trust dyads are stable. Zhong, Su, Peng, and Yang (2017) emphasized that trust is not developed from an inter-organizational trust (IOT) but from trustfulness developed over time between two parties (e.g. leader and member). The characteristic of trust has many levels and is dependent on the character(s) of the people involved in the dyadic relationship.

Numerous leaders struggle to understand the level of trust necessary to gain with each of their subordinates. Rotenberg, Betts, and Qualter (2018) emphasized that having little trust causes the dyadic relationship to breakdown or cease to exist, whereas too much trust leads to more significant problems with peer to peer interactions. These trust indifferences can be exhibited through the dyadic relationship between a leader and a member. Some firms have even suggested providing their employees with higher levels of employment security with facilitating a fair distribution of value through trust-based, long term relationships, which may increase firm performance (Gambeta, Koka, & Hoskisson, 2019). Leaders and employees need to establish the correct amount of trust through time and hard work.

The last characteristic of the VDL theory is the motivation to assume the leader gives greater responsibility within the unit preferential treatment. Motivation is defined as a motivating force, stimulus, or influence (“Motivation”, n.d.). The VDL theory focuses on the motivation of each employee while ensuring that the leader understands intrinsic factors that feed the employees motivation through various measures to enhance performance (Matsuki & Nakamura (2019) and; Moslehpour, Altantsetseg, Mou, and Wong (2019). Motivation is one of the essential factors in an employee ‘performance. Many full-time employees mentioned that “motivation” was a common theme along with “service” and “time”; while part-time employees discussed “shift” and “environment” being essential aspects of their working environment (Moslehpour et al., 2019). Motivation is a two-way relationship in the VDL theory, and a leader needs to understand how to motivate their employees properly.

Leadership and motivation are a critical factor in applying VDL theory correctly. Mira and Odeh (2019) confer that leaders apply motivation by focusing on transparency, positivity, and high moral standards. Matsuki and Nakamura (2019) noted that leader behaviors need to promote positive psychological capacities and favorable ethical climate to adopt the self-awareness, moral perspective, balance of information and relational transparency between leaders and followers, which leads to higher self-development. A leader promotes motivation from leading by example and providing each of their employees with a sense of pride and motivation from within themselves.

The three characteristics of the VDL theory are vital because they are the baseline for successfully incorporating VDL theory as a leadership technique. Slepian and Carr (2019) emphasized that authenticity to power is how people regulate their emotions. The three characteristics allow a leader to authenticate their power to the employee's, which helps create a sense of a dyadic linkage that promotes the right amount of skill and competence; trust; and motivation. Singh and Rukta (2018) suggested that the level and quality of the LMX is found to be at a higher quality when a member placed in the in-group. The three characteristics of the VDL theory ensure that the member meets the necessary steps to either join or stay in the in-group, which enables proper team building.

Applications of VDL theory. Application of any leadership technique is essential when establishing how to properly incorporate the themes into the workplace concerning the relationship between leaders and their member(s). The VDL theory as discussed before has three specific characteristics that need to establish between the leader and their member(s) to catalyze organizational productivity. The VDL theory enables knowledge sharing between the leader and member(s) of an organization which increases radical innovation which ultimately catalyzes organizational productivity (Wang & Tarn, 2018). VDL and intellectual capital (IC) is in some ways interchangeable; IC works effectively on IC related factors such as background similarity, interpersonal trust and cooperative experiences (Goldman & Goldman, 1981; Vătămănescu, Andrei, Dumitriu, & Leovaridis, 2016; Wang & Tarn, 2018). The VDL theory is an applied concept in conjunction with IC can catalyze organizational productivity by formulating a strong team that understands how organizational productivity works based on similar backgrounds, trust, and striving for a collective obtainable goal.

Benefits of Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory With Small Government Consulting Firms

Large consulting firms that acquire a massive project have been known to outsource to smaller companies that consist of a specific number of SME's to fill the necessary requirements. These individuals create a specific revenue and serve as subcontractors when slots need to be filled (Kokkonen & Vaagaasar, 2018). Some benefits of using the VDL theory in small consulting firms include collaboration, the more significant number of SME's in a smaller operating pool, and the easier time leaders and their teams can focus on establishing collective goal(s) which meet the client's (governments) demands. Gandhi, Sachdeva, and Gupta (2019) discussed collaboration which sets levers between management and employees that enable cost saving through a transfer of best practices, improve the effectiveness of decision making through sharing of opinion, induces innovation through the cross-pollination of ideas and enhance the capacity of collective action. Nilsen, Falk, and Haugen (2018) observed that collaboration is an orchestrated action through interface management (IM) which enables a project manager to assist in the control product development with a division of efforts between the government agencies and consultants working on the project(s). Smaller consulting companies may utilize their smaller teams through collaboration which may perhaps effectively enhance trust and confidence of the government agency(s) they are consulting with on projects or products. The VDL theory is beneficial to establishing collaboration because this theory is based on dyadic relationships establishing a set of goals for product or project development.

The second benefit to using the VDL theory with small government consulting firms is based on VDL theory focusing on each SME area of responsibility and allows a leader to focus and then exploit the skills of each SME on the team to provide the best results for the client. SMEs potential on multi-directional interactions between trusting attitudes and cooperative behaviors may lead to perceived benefits such as SMEs remaining passionate about their roles within the organization (Gausdal, Svare, & Möllering, 2016). Researchers Chen et al. (2018) correlated that creating positioning strategies that differentiate them from Large design-oriented organizations may contribute to a stable dyadic relationship amongst individuals working in a small government consulting firm. SMEs develop and enhance their skills through dyadic relationships and experience which may quickly be gained through smaller group settings.

Challenges to Using the Vertical Dyadic Linkage Theory

Every theory within a conceptual framework has its unique challenges associated with a case study. Some researchers consider VDL to be a challenging leadership technique for the following reasons which include (a) misalignment between theory, measurement, analysis; (b) data dependence; and (c) construct validity (Herman, Troth, Ashkanasy, & Collins, 2018). Singh and Rukta (2018) further suggested that the reasons previously discussed along with other hindrances to include the time constraint of respondents, the authenticity of data and the attitude of respondents may have affected the analysis of the VDL theory.

Misalignment between theory, measurement, and analysis. Misalignment between theory, measurement, analysis; data dependence; and construct validity are challenges that a researcher needs to grasp to use the VDL theory effectively. Misalignment between theory, measurement, and analysis. Misalignment between theory sometimes occurs between similar theories or a misconception of stated theories such as VDL and LMX due to the close connection both theories share. Grainger and Gilbert (2016) proposed that linking theory to empirical data generated from study systems characterized by a variety of competitive and consumptive interaction will reduce the possibility of misalignment, measurement, and analysis. Misalignment, measurement, and analysis of theories can be less noticeable when they have multiple levels of decision-making and diverse operating contexts, which best utilized through matrixes or charts (Alexander, Kumar, & Walker, 2018). The misalignment of the VDL theory and LMX in this study may be inadvertently reduced by using the essential characteristics of the VDL theory which are similar but have unique differences to each theory.

Data dependence. This second challenge to the VDL theory correlates with data saturation and validity of the research being collected and then analyzed. All research is reliant on correctly measuring and analyzing all data associated with the VDL theory which is driven by data dependence. Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2018) pointed out that, assessing measurement and quality has become a prominent issue among business researchers and policymakers. Researchers use programs and models such as the actor-partner interdependence model to analyze distinguishably or same dyadic links, measure dyadic patterns, estimate actor and partner effects of one or two predictors, and to control for covariates, which are data dependent (Stas, Kenny, Mayer, & Loeys, 2018). Regt, Molleman, and Van de Brake (2018) affirmed that using multiple measurements reduces the risk analysis of error and these measures are dependent on data collection based on VDL theory. Researchers can alleviate the challenge of measurement and analysis by using the tools and model stated above, which is data dependent driven.

Construct validity. Bedford and Speklé (2018) said construct validity refer to whether the operational definition of a variable reflects the true theoretical meaning of a concept. Researchers may find constructing validity a challenge in a case study involving VDL theory because of the depth of information about this type of leadership technique. VDL theory is validated through member checking which decreases the opportunity for participants and a researcher to have conflicting data based on behavior (Smith & McGannon, 2018); behavior constructs are often complicated to compare based on one specific leadership technique which can lead to irregular findings (Olutade, Liefooghe, & Olakunle, 2015). Saunders et al. (2016) discussed how construct validity is a set of questions which measures the presence of a construct which a researcher intends to measure. Construct validity in this case study will be dependent on the research questions administered to the participants and the behavior of the participants during the interview process.

Prominent Researchers of Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory

VDL theory was developed in the early 1970s and since then has been used by many researchers in the fields of business, psychology, and even sociology. Vertical dyad linkage theory's most prominent researchers have been using VDL theory as an evolution of theory. According to Van Seters and Field (1990), the transactional era is where researchers began using VDL theory as a prominent theory for leadership within the exchange period. Some of the first prominent researchers who established a stronghold for this conceptual framework were Dansereau, Graen, and Cashmen in 1973 which focused on both the behavior of the leader and the dyad of each member of the team (Dansereau et al., 1975). In 1978, Graen and Schiemann further investigated the hypothesis consequent to the VDL model by conducting a study titled "Leader-Member Agreement: A Vertical Dyad Linkage Approach," in which they hypothesized that dyads with higher quality interdependencies will demonstrate higher agreement than dyads with lower quality interdependencies. Graen and Schiemann's (1978) study further revolutionized the original theory of VDL, and this theory shifted into LMX or leader-member exchange theory which focuses on organizational differences which are a result of the VDL model (Northouse, 2018). Since the original conceptual framework of VDL, this theory has been revolutionized in LMX, therefore creating a baseline for many other several researchers throughout the last 30 years to use in continued research in the area of the dyadic relationship between a leader and their individual members of the team.

Alternate Conceptual Frameworks

The history of the VDL theory is one of the earliest of the theories used today, but there are similar frameworks that are closely related to this conceptual framework. Van

Seters and Field (1990) stated that during the transactional era, there were two periods referred to as the Exchange Period which consisted of VDL, LMX, Reciprocal Influence Approach, and Emergent Leadership and Role Development period which consisted of social exchange theory and role-making model. The transactional era has generated during recent times when dominance continues to increase between the managers and their subordinates pushing the evolutionary development of leadership during the transformational era (Advani, 2015). The transactional era was a revolutionary period for leadership techniques which are still highly preferred by many business organizations and governments around the world.

Leader-member exchange theory. The LMX theory is the closest relative theory to the VDL theory. The LMX refers to the LMX theory as the process that centers on interactions between leaders and followers (Northouse, 2018). Al-Shammari and Ebrahim (2015) maintained that leaders assume they are bounded by time and resources forming different relationships of different qualities with their subordinates; causing potential discrimination in the treatment of subordinates, which possibly leads to feelings of resentment between employees. VDL theory is the direct predecessor to LMX and as a result, both theories share many of the same characteristics that have shaped the dyadic-relationship based theory. Chan, Chok, Lae, Lam, and Lee (2017) affirmed that when a low-quality LMX relationship takes place, employees take a lesser role in their job responsibility and tend to withhold the self-contribution to the team.

LMX is a complex theory based on dyadic relationship differentiation. These relationships take place on three levels of LMX differentiation which are the following:

individual, meso, and group level LMX differentiation (Epitropaki et al., 2016). Martin, Thomas, Legood, and Dello Russo (2018) declared that the different levels of LMX predict outcomes of work-related variables that are associated with interactive exchanges that occur between a leader and their member(s). LMX differentiation is a baseline in the theory that supports and can either lead to positive or negative work-related outcomes. LMX theory is widely used; but misinterpreted due to leaders of organizations not understanding the nature of the theory.

Reciprocal influence approach. The reciprocal influence approach is a component of LMX; this approach develops a stable exchange relationship between leader and member through different dyadic dimensions (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Lunenburg (2010) stated the reciprocal influence approach ascertains that leader behaviors cause subordinate behaviors that influence specific acts of subordinates (for example, low performance) can cause the leader to modify behavior. Reciprocal influence approach is reality and is becoming an ongoing problem because leaders do not comprehend how to create positive individual relationships with each of their members. Leaders choose to create individual relationships with individuals who are high performers but fail to create relationships with low performers to enhance the entirety of the team which causes a more punitive approach towards low performers (Lunenburg). The reciprocal influence approach has often mitigated the concept of key management (KM).

KM refers to a plan or actual coordination of a firm's major goals and learning, in time which influences both governance mechanisms and learning routines (Chen & Fong, 2015). Hahn (2015) affirmed that the reciprocal influence approach which is based on the empirical evidence states that a large fraction of actors (leaders and members) are driven by reciprocity, and not by self-interest. KM can decrease the need for a punitive relationship to develop and can increase a leader's ability to create a stable behavioral exchange between leaders and their member(s). The reciprocal influence approach is the way that leaders use to form partnerships (Graen & Schiemann, 1978).

Emergent leadership. Northouse (2018) referred to emergent leadership as a technique of leadership that is acquired through support and acceptance of other people within an organization towards one individual. Emergent leadership is not affected by different variables such as age, previous job experience, or experiences currently performed in positions that leaders currently hold (Yoo & Alavi, 2004). Two of the characteristics or ties that make emergent leadership similar to VDL theory are leader relationships from the perspectives of both leader and follower (Holland, 2015). Emergent leadership is based on the dyadic relationships which occur through admiration and respect between a leader and their members. Mendes, Gomes, Marques-Quinteiro, Lind, and Curral (2016) reaffirmed that organizations are built upon complex dynamic systems and relationships that allow agents (leaders and members) to freely interact and increase efficiency across the organizational system. Emergent leadership is a theory that was developed from observations based on the theories of VDL and LMX; this theory continues to enhance the dyadic linkage between leader and member exchange.

Social exchange theory. Redmond (2015) refers to Blau (1964) who defined social exchange theory as voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others. There are three distinct elements of social exchange theory: (a) Exchange: Trade something of value (cost) for something needed/valued (reward), (b) Rewards: Costs equals Positive Outcomes (profits) or Negative Outcomes (net loss), and (c) Inequity: Cost is greater than Reward or My Costs greater than Your Costs or My Rewards less than Your Rewards (Redmond, 2015). Social exchange theory is a prominent role player in commitment; both supervisors and coworkers assist in keeping the commitment amongst employees (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, & Hall, 2017). Social exchange theory is related to the VDL theory due to the fact both theories work on a dyadic relationship that occurs between a leader and an employee. Social exchange theory mediates the organization-based social exchange i.e. affective commitment, which is affected by the three characteristics of VDL theory from both the leader and member. Nie and Lämsä (2015) confirmed this belief that values such as mutual trust, obligation, respect, loyalty, and reciprocity are the direct result of three dyadic elements: the leader, the follower, and the exchange relationship.

Role-making model. The role-making model is associated with LMX, which is the predecessor to VDL theory as for a way of using an ethical baseline to establish a dyadic relationship. Bedi, Alpaslan, and Green (2016) discussed how leaders acting with ethical behavior serve as role models motivating their members by demonstrating the type of actions they want to promote and reward. A role-making model is set by spacing the quality of LMX (higher or lower) which sets the stage for an effort to engage in extra-role behavior (Little, Gooty, & Williams, 2016). A role making model is an important tool in working through the dyadic process of LMX and creates an ethical model for members and their leaders.

Other Common Theories

VDL theory and similar frameworks are based on a dyadic relationship that revolves through mutual trust, admiration, between leaders and their members based on the dyadic process. The current and most common era to evolve leadership techniques comes during the transformational era which includes such theories as transformational leadership theory and charismatic leadership theory ,which were first developed in the charisma period; then during the second period known as self-fulfilling, SPF leadership theory and performance beyond expectation approach evolved (Van Seters & Field, 1990). Researchers and leaders use these different leadership techniques in the social sciences and business world to create and sustain organizations in what Northouse (2018) defined as part of the New Leadership Paradigm. Transformational leadership theory and charismatic leadership theory in consort with other leadership technique are different in nature but align with VDL theory.

Transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership theory is one of the most dominant and misinterpreted leadership techniques used in business (Banks, McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016). Northouse (2018) defined transformational leadership as the process where a person engages with others and creates a connection that enhances the level of motivation and morality between two individuals. Ghasabeh, Soosay, and Reaiche (2015) stated that there are four dimensions associated with this theory and they consist of idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. These four dimensions are utilized in much of the same way that the three characteristics of VDL theory are used to establish a dyadic relationship between a leader and their member(s).

Transformational-transactional leadership framework (Bass, 1985) dominated literature that pertains to leadership and studies have linked transformational leadership to a range of outcome variables that add concrete material to this theory. Antonakis and Day (2017) discussed how many leaders idealize this form of leadership because they can induce certain behaviors which then transcends to their subordinates for the greater good of the organization. Transformational leadership takes a stance on holding responsibility and accountability on the leaders which includes interactions with their members that are either positively or negatively influenced by their growth as future leaders.

Transformational leadership continues to be a source for the untapped potential for enhancing and supporting the educational process through institutional leadership (Aguas, Zapata, & Arellano, 2017). Transformational leadership is still being researched and newer discoveries are being found by researchers on this leadership technique.

Charismatic leadership theory. Northouse (2018) suggested that charismatic leaders act in unique ways that members want to follow such as being strong role models who are competent and expect the same high standards from their subordinates as they do from themselves. Lovelace, Neely, Allen, and Hunter (2018) added that charismatic leaders lead with a sense of a clear casual purpose while the leader maintains the highest level of standards. Charismatic leaders maintain two philosophies (1) they should not expect their subordinates to do a task or goal they would not complete and (2) if they have to say they are in charge, then they are not in charge. Some researchers Shamir, Arthur, and House (2018) have made references to rhetoric playing a contributing factor in charismatic leaders communicating with their subordinates or members. Charismatic leaders use tools such as speeches and utilizing the tone of speeches to motivate their members. Some examples of some charismatic leaders of the 20th Century are Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson, Presidents John F. Kennedy Jr., and Ronald Reagan.

Charismatic leaders develop a relationship with their members by providing three unique characteristics that their members can relate to a sense of identity, stress a sense of a shared experience, and provide direction to solve problems associated with the identified goals (Lovelace et al., 2018; Shamir et al., 2018). Charismatic leadership works with leaders who understand the concept of communication and demonstrate interpersonal skills. Charisma requires the following signals for leaders to reach their members or subordinates: attract attention, arouse emotions, and articulate a vision – Invoking shared values, norms, and collective identity (Grabo, Spisak, & Van Vugt, 2017). Charismatic leadership theory is another theory that continues to develop and grow avid support from researchers and leaders in the business world.

Organizational Productivity

Organizational productivity is very important because it keeps companies and governments running on a tight schedule. Organizational productivity according to Imran, Majeed, and Ayub (2015) comes down to two factors (a) organizational justice and (b) job satisfaction. Organizational justice is important because it involves a leader showing the same amount of fairness to each of their members which enables the members to increase their product output (Imran et al., 2015; Sindhu, Ahmad, & Hashmi, 2017). The member(s) feel that the leader will not show retribution if they miss something or need assistance /clarification on a task. This eliminates the aspect of stress which can lead to lower output. Job satisfaction is important because a member of any team needs to feel that they have a sense of worth with both their leader and organization.

Organizations have developed over the years from a system of managerial control and information system to more dynamic rules such as establishing dyadic relationships. This is a direct result of organizations trying to establish LMX behavior which generates distributive justice which influences positive exchanges between leaders and their members; increasing organizational productivity (Sindhu et al., 2017). Researchers Hanaysha and Tahir (2016) affirmed that employee empowerment leads to higher job satisfaction which increases organizational productivity. Organizations have a responsibility to instill in their leadership how to promote products without utilizing managerial control over the member(s) of their team. Organizational productivity is only as effective as the relationships between the leader and member(s) to include how the members perceive organizational justice and job satisfaction.

Small Business and Organizational Productivity

Small businesses need to understand and implement organizational productivity because this product output is what is going to allow a small company to either succeed or fail. Scholars Ivars and Martínez (2015) suggested that small companies find difficulty in reaching organizational productivity due to ineffective hiring procedures; developing, retaining, and motivating their workforce which leads to a shortage of SME’s. This leads to a lack of competence and organizational productivity because the leadership of these small companies spends more time reacting to problems. This case study may serve as a guideline for leaders developing protocols based on hiring practices, training, and retain ability of SME's in their companies through strong leadership. These measures in protocol can lead to competent SME's and a rise in organizational productivity. Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) asserted that small to medium size companies have a better chance of surviving against larger companies when they use one of the key tenets of organizational productivity, which is employee's job satisfaction which leads to a lower turnover rate. This study may assist leaders of small consulting companies the opportunity to utilize different leadership techniques to create an atmosphere of job satisfaction, this will reduce the turnover rate of employees in their company's. According to Ogunyomi and Bruning, there is growing empirical research that links Human Resource Management (HRM) and organizational performance in larger organizations. Smaller companies are structured differently, they can still use a similar HRM process to increase the success of organizational productivity in their companies. Small companies can create high organizational productivity, they need to investigate different strategies and how to implement them to catalyze organizational productivity. This study is relevant because it discusses in depth different aspects of HRM and how leaders in that portion of the company can develop their SME's, which benefits the entire organization by hiring the right personnel.

Strategies to Catalyze Small Company Organizational Productivity

Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) found through research (Davis, Haltiwanger, & Schuh, 1996; Onugu, 2005) found through research, that many SMEs life expectancy is very minimal years of existence and about 5–10% of young companies survive, thrive and grow to medium-large size organizations. There are several strategies that researchers, scholars, and small company leadership have found to be effective in catalyzing organizational productivity. The first strategy is HRM, which was previously discussed in the prior section. Small companies HRM is the glue that holds the organization together and sets the tone for organizational productivity Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) stated that emplacing systems such as high-performance workstations (HPWS) have assisted smaller companies in significant success on performance measures. This study may assist leaders in HRM department of small consulting companies reevaluate how they are currently operating and employ new strategies such as HPWS to increase organizational productivity which is a direct result of work performance.

Another strategy that may assist smaller companies to catalyze organizational productivity is using the 5S methodology as an operational practice. Hernández Lamprea, Camargo Carreño, and Martínez Sánchez (2015) conferred that the 5S methodology dates back from World War II from the Japanese version of quality movement; there are five (5) phases of this system: Seiri (Sort), Seiton (Straighten), Seiso (Sweep), Seiketsu (Standardize), and Shitsuke (Sustain). This system falls in line with the five stages of team building but applies to productivity. Ab Rahman, Khamis, Zain, Deros, and Mahmood (2010) affirmed that 5S implementation that may improve both an organization’s physical environment and thinking processes. The 5S implementation needs to be of a business nature to be truly effective and leaders should be proactive with their dealing with employees. Small government consulting companies can use the 5S methodology to instill discipline among their employees, which will assist them staying on track and reaching the deliverables that is expected from their client.

The last and most important strategy to catalyzing organizational productivity is creating a dyadic relationship within the organization. Nayak and Sahoo (2015) stated that employees are more productive when they are rewarded for their efforts and have and high dyadic relationship with their leader(s) and teammates. Leaders may have to take more time establishing a personal relationship with some of their subordinates more than others. Cropanzano et al. (2017) affirmed that leaders utilizing dyadic linkage with their employees experienced important outcomes as more favorable employee job attitudes, less conflict, better performance, more frequent organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), higher creativity, and lower turnover. These strategies discussed in this section have been proven strategies for catalyzing small company organizational productivity. Small government consulting companies may employ the dyadic relationship within the organization through OCB to reach every employee at the specific level they are working and build unique, but strong bond. This ensures that the employee feel that their work output matters, which ultimately increases organizational productivity.

Gaps in Literature

Through the review of the professional and academic literature, several gaps identified in the literature relating to leadership techniques to catalyze organizational productivity in small consulting firms. VDL theory is limited in terms of empirical literature pertaining to studies conducted using this theory; most of the information on the VDL theory are in LMX literature and case studies. The leaders' role of establishing a dyadic relationship with their employees remains indefinable in relation to the VDL theory. Despite the increase in the use of similar conceptual frameworks, there has been a change in theoretical focus from LMX back to the VDL theory, yet there are no new studies that depict this shift on theories (Day & Miscenko, 2015). Leaders continue to lack strategies to develop relationships with their employees that catalyze productivity. Leaders across the business world continue to use terminology regarding different leadership techniques without understanding the true definition of the leadership technique which they claim to understand.

Companies are failing to use their HR departments properly and this failure is having a devastating effect on overall productivity throughout small organizations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). Employee performance management focuses on the development of employee skills and abilities to aid their performance (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016); yet many small companies continue to struggle in properly vetting SME's to ensure they can properly do the job or whether they lied on their resume or application. HRM continues to be an issue due to the lack of qualified personnel working in the HPWS.

Transition

The existing body of literature on leadership techniques to catalyze organizational productivity in small consulting firms varied. Researchers who explored different leadership techniques such as the VDL theory to catalyze organizational productivity offered small consulting firm, leaders limited evidence on processes to engage and retain employees. My analysis of literature review findings suggested the need for leaders of small consulting firms to explore diverse leadership techniques that will enable them to catalyze organizational productivity and reduce employee turnover. My analysis of professional and academic literature review included peer-reviewed journal articles related to the topic of leadership techniques to catalyze organizational productivity in small consulting firms, including rationalizations of collective ideas and theories that small consulting firms can use or enhance in future research.

In Section 1, I presented information on the specific business problem and purpose of the study. I introduced the method, design, and interview questions. This section also included a review of the relevant professional and academic literature. In Section 2, I restate the purpose of the study, expand on the role of the researcher, participants, methodology and design, population and sampling, ethical research more specifically. In addition, Section 2 includes an in-depth discussion of the following: data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, reliability, validity, transferability, and data saturation, which establish the need for the study. Section 3 includes an introduction to the multiple case study, presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, implication to social change, recommendation for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, conclusion, and appendixes/table of contents related to my study.

Section 2: The Project

In this section, I provide the purpose statement, and explain the role of the researcher, participants in the study, population, and sampling data analysis. In addition, I deliberate the methods of research and design, including any concerns or ethical research violations that can be avoided through proper research and institutional review board (IRB) guidelines. Finally, I conducted an in-depth dialogue with data collection instruments, techniques, and analysis, and how validity and reliability fit into data collection.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies that leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector use to catalyze organizational productivity. The target population consisted of eight leaders from four small consulting firms in the Northern Virginia area who have developed effective leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity. This study's implications for positive social change may include the opportunity for leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector to learn specific leadership strategies used to catalyze organizational productivity. Increasing productivity may result in increased revenue, which increases the region's tax base allowing increased funding for social programs such as state childcare and job locating services to expand their network for clients. In addition, with an increased tax base, state services such as road repair and environmental programs may be more available to the community.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in the data collection process is ensuring that data analysis is systematic and unbiased and that the researcher continues to improve the transparency of prior research throughout the data gathering process through monitoring to ensure that the data collected maintain reliability and validity (Green & Thorogood, 2018; Twining, Heller, Nussbaum, & Tsai, 2017). My role as the researcher was to ensure that I recruited the right participants for my study, conduct the interviews, and collect the correct amount of data to complete my study. I was also responsible for ensuring that the participants understood what data I was acquiring so that my study would be reliable and provide validity. Reinharz (2017) emphasized that a researcher's method should emulate their personal values and that that research becomes a mastery-inducing experience. Throughout the last 7-8 years of my military service, I have worked with military contractors on several government contracts. I have had to incorporate different leadership techniques to create effective teams consisting of government consultants, government employees, and military personnel. This experience allowed me to be objective with the participants of this study.

A researcher's role and ethical responsibility to both the participants and to the validity of the study is of the utmost importance. The 2014 *Belmont Report* provided ethical guidelines or principles for a researcher to use when involving human participants; specifically, a researcher has an ethical responsibility to show respect, beneficence, and justice to all participants involved in the study (Department of Health, 2014). Travis (2017) marked that military personnel, the Department of Army Civilian

Corps, and contractors working with the military are exceptional when it comes to research because they have set extremely high ethical and moral standards. A researcher can apply those same standards to the research they conduct during the study because it aligns with the ethical boundaries stated in the Belmont Report.

Researchers can be swayed by bias due to a lack of knowledge and issues associated with the subject matter which can lead to preconceived notions (Yin, 2017). These notions tend to lead the researcher in the wrong direction in terms of collecting the right data, interviewing the participants correctly, and achieving the desired results in which the study was originally intended. Brouwers, Mostert, and Mtshali (2017) discussed how bias, such as method bias, construct bias, and item bias can cause a researcher to produce inconclusive results based on tests or questionnaires taken by participants. I mitigated bias during the conduct of my study using two methods. As suggested by Padgett (2016), I used triangulation, which allowed me to safeguard against bias by using independent coding and comparison of data collected throughout my study. Denzin (1973) defined methodological triangulation as involving the use of more than one option to gather data, through interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents. Methodological triangulation works by gathering comprehensive lists, personal sources, and specific guidelines to identify potential participants for a study (Grace et al., 2017). I used methodological triangulation to categorize a comprehensive list of local small government consulting companies within the region of Virginia and evaluate these different companies based on specific guidelines to serve as potential participants in my study. Another way I reduced bias in my study was by gathering enough confirmatory evidence on my main study topic. Confirmatory evidence is the plausibility of the true interpretation despite additional supporting evidence, and liberal acceptance, where the plausibility of absurd interpretations is overrated (McLean, Mattiske, & Balzan, 2017). Baškarada (2014) discussed that plausible evidence supports the theory that is being conducted within a multiple case study. I used plausible evidence through, documentation, interviews, and questionnaires to investigate any rival hypotheses, or explanation on leadership techniques for small consulting companies to use in to catalyze organizational productivity.

Interviewing participants is an important piece of a case study because it continues to build on the chain of evidence for the researcher (Yin, 2017). An interview protocol is a strategy that a researcher uses as a safety net by engaging certain performance measures for interviewing participants in a study (King, Horrocks, & Brooks, 2018). Researchers use certain protocol measures during the interview process, such as asking direct questions and expecting direct answers. Vrij, Blank, and Fisher (2018) acknowledged that truth tellers answer questions relatively easily, unlike liars who have a difficult time answering questions, which makes the data they provide irrelevant. I mitigated potential confusion while interviewing applicants by creating direct questions that correlate leadership strategies based on real-life scenarios that allowed me to properly monitor whether the participants are telling the truth or lying. One of the most important ways that I used interview protocol in my study is having participants review my questions before they took the survey to ensure that all participants understood the questions of the study. Guerra (2017) highlighted through Cassidy (2013) and; Cope

(2014) prior research that conducting reflexivity during the entire process of the case study ensures objectivity. I maintained my reflexivity through a strict interview protocol so that I continue to adhere to my personal lens and remain objective throughout the study.

Participants

The basis of qualitative research is taking an interpretation of data gathered from a variety of empirical articles and participant feedback from interviews, therefore participants allow a researcher to interpret the subject being researched from a wide lens (Twining et al., 2017). The first step is establishing the eligibility criteria for participants, which based on criteria established around the research question. Martínez-Mesa, González-Chica, Duquia, Bonamigo, and Bastos (2016) conferred that eligibility of participants require similar characteristics to those which the study is based upon through the research question. The eligibility criteria for participants in my study were based on my research question: What leadership strategies do leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector use to catalyze organizational productivity? The two participants from each of the four companies participating in my study had to have a minimum of 10-15 years' experience working in the industry as either chief executive officer, chief financial officer, chief operations officer, or project managers currently working with 10-30 personnel under their direct supervision.

Gaining access to participants in research studies can be difficult, due to strict IRB requirements and the organization participating in the study, meeting the specific criteria for the study (Zhu & Cheung, 2014). Yin (2017) stated that data collection plans need to be finalized before reaching out to participants. The first stage in developing a data base of companies meeting the eligibility criteria for my study. Once I had established the data-base and identified companies, I called each of the four companies in Northern Virginia and received approval to interview two participants through phone calls and follow-up emails confirming interview appointments. In addition, I contacted some of the individuals in Northern Virginia whom I know who work for small government consulting firms and through them gained access to other small consulting firms to gain access to possible candidates.

Reinharz (2017) concluded through the participant observation method that many researchers fail to properly prepare for interviewing participants due to the three following reasons: (a) the tension between entering the research project with no pre-conceptions (which is impossible) or with predetermined definitions, (b) the degree of generality (or specificity) with which the research problems are posed, and (c) the degree of rigidity (or flexibility) with which the topic is maintained. The participants selected for this study had a minimum of 10 years in the work force, so they had a firm understanding of organizational productivity using similar techniques such as LMX theory that closely correlate to VDL theory. This pool of participants collected through specific screening criteria provided the necessary rigidity for the interviews and gathering the appropriate data pertaining to IRB requirements for the study.

Once participants were identified, I communicated directly with my participants through emails, phone calls, and video teleconferencing (VoIP) during the interview process. Comi, Bischof, and Eppler (2014) emphasized that some challenges such as establishing rapport, gaining trust, understanding, and speaking the language of the respondent can hinder a working relationship. Yin (2017) added that establishing working groups helps to alleviate some initial issues and make it more comfortable for the researcher and interviewee to work together. I started building rapport with not just the organizations I was working with, but also the individuals, so that the interviews were conducted within the ethical guidelines of IRB. I also took into consideration the culture of these companies and was respectful of their policies and procedures which allowed me to work effectively with my participants.

Participants in the study must align with the overarching research question. The participants are selected through the initial research question in the study and through specific criteria, which align with the research question (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Patton (2015) addressed that a researcher is hoping to elicit relevant answers that are meaningful and useful in understanding the interviewee's perspective, which is the basis of good interviewing. I selected participants based on or around my research question and have tailored my interview questions to gather meaningful data that supported my research with supporting claims and decisions with multiple scholarly peer-reviewed or seminal sources that have been used throughout the study.

Research Method and Design

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore different leadership techniques that that leaders of small government consulting firms use to catalyze organizational productivity. The use of the qualitative method with a multiple-case study design assisted and guided this research. The following subsections include my rationale for selecting the research method and design for this study.

Research Method

Qualitative research is used to examine the subjective experience of human beings while using nonstatistical analytical methods (Ingham-Broomfield, 2015). Sarma (2015) further emphasized that the qualitative approach is subjective and does not focus on the measurement of variables or testing hypotheses about variables. I chose to incorporate the qualitative methodology as my research method because I was not using statistical methodology. In addition, I chose to use the qualitative method because it allowed me latitude to utilize the maximum amount of resources, which included interviews without the limitations of proving a hypothesis which is a requirement for both quantitative and mixed methods.

Qualitative research methods, unlike the quantitative and mixed method, explore the lived experiences of senior leaders or managers of a small government consulting company in detail, using telephone interviews and surveys to understand the phenomenon of what leadership techniques would senior leaders of small government consulting companies use to catalyze organizational productivity. Qualitative researchers can both affect or be affected by their data collected by their sources of data (Grossoehme ,2014). I was objective when conducting interviews and reviewing other sources as the researcher.

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods have some distinct differences. Researchers do not use the quantitative research method to emphasize an unrestricted open view to the research process; rather, researchers use the quantitative method to rely on a series of delicate assumptions with the appropriateness of the subordinate variables (Bell et al., 2018; Spicker, 2018). Researchers use the mixed method to cover a diverse set of practices using deductive, inductive, or abductive approach to theory development, but mixed-methods approaches yield a more holistic picture of the outcomes of a subject (Bennett, Hanley, Abrahams, Elliott, & Turkenburg-van Diepen, 2019; Saunders et al., 2016). The purpose of this qualitative method was to explore the different leadership techniques that senior leaders of small consulting companies use to catalyze organizational productivity. The objective of this qualitative method was not to test a group of theories, but to discover leadership techniques that senior leaders of small consulting companies can use to catalyze organizational productivity. For these reasons, the qualitative method was best suited for this research and why quantitative and mixed method would not be compatible.

Research Design

I used a multiple-case study because it is suitable to the parameters of my research which is based on discovering leadership techniques that senior leaders of small consulting companies can use to catalyze organizational productivity. Researchers can use three different approaches based on different sets of philosophical beliefs that have emerged from different academic disciplines (Gelling, 2015). Yin (2017) emphasized that the three most common designs are the following: phenomenological, narrative, ethnography are based on four unique tests which include construct validity, internal validity, external validity, or reliability. Stake (2013) emphasized that multiple case studies need to have the same requirements which allows for the ultimate target collection for reliability and validity. A multi-case study worked for my research because I researched the same type, size, and challenges to affect small consulting companies in the government sector.

Phenomenological design allows a researcher to use qualitative data collection derived from either describing or interpreting the human experience as lived from the experiencer, which is utilized as qualitative evidence (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). The phenomenological design was suitable for an inquiry in which the researcher is interested in describing the meanings of the lived experiences of participants (Yin, 2017), which was not the goal of this study because the participants were answering questions pertaining to leadership and organization in general. I incorporated data collected from interviewing SME's and other sources which were not based on lived experiences, for these reasons the phenomenological design would not connect to my research.

Lewis (2015) emphasized that researchers use a narrative design to focus on the lives of individuals through their personal stories. The narrative approach allows researchers to make sense of emergent changes to stabilize a continuously changing environment through a "narrative lens" (Horst & Järventie-Thesleff, 2016). Malterud (2001) discussed how analysis is conducted through the four-step analysis procedure: (1) getting a total impression, (2) identifying meaning units, (3) abstracting the contents of individual meaning units, and (4) summarizing their importance; through a narrative approach, the data is presented. This design would not work for my research because I was not using the four-step analysis to create a narrative lens.

The ethnographic approach is another design researchers' use in qualitative research. Saunders et al. (2016) stated that ethnography is a design for studying the culture of a particular people or ethnic group. Ethnographies provide details of specific communities, social groups, and cultures (Delaney, 2017; Pluye, Hong, Bush, & Vedel, 2016). Ethnography is one of the earliest of designs, this study did not require details of cultures or social groups. My study was not based on cultural, social groups, or ethnic groups, so consequently, ethnography was not capable of meeting the requirements of this study.

A multiple-case study allows variation that endorses the significance of the research basing their study on an overt theoretical foundation or context (Morse, 2015). A qualitative multiple case study design was suitable for exploring and establishing the proper leadership technique. Researchers using the design can respond to questions developed from numerous sources based on leadership techniques and organizational productivity.

Data saturation in this study consisted of four different companies with two participant interviews within each company. Accordingly, there was currently no need for further participants in the interview process. Member checking is crucial in checking and refining each interviewees' information or data which they will provide the researcher (Morse, 2015). The use of combining interviews, empirical studies, and other information gained from previous researchers will provide enough information to achieve data saturation. I used member checking to properly represent the data provided by the resources acquired throughout the entirety of the research project.

Data saturation is used by researchers in all methods and designs of research. Data saturation is defined as continued sampling and analyzing of data until no new data or linkage to preexisting data ceases to exist (Aldiabat & Navenec, 2018). Saturation is defined as well as undefined in several ways within research literature (Saunders et al. , 2018). Researchers Saunders et al. (2018) stated that the following three core questions always need to be answered: What?'- in what way(s) is saturation defined?, Where and why?' - in what types of qualitative research, and for what purpose, should saturation be sought?, 'When and how?' - at what stage in the research is saturation sought, and how can we assess if it has been achieved? The sampling drastically affects the validity of the research, so researchers must go back to the three core questions to prevent data saturation from becoming unreliable about the case study.

As Saunders et al. (2018) emphasized, data saturation is dependent on both the quality and quantity of both participants and documentation that are compiled by the researcher during a study. The number of participants in the sample size for appropriate data saturation is dependent on previous research and where no themes emerge (Sim, Saunders, Waterfield, & Kingstone, 2018). Bradley, Getrich, and Hannigan (2015) concluded that the sample size of a study relies more on data saturation than to the number of participants who are in the study. I ensured that the data taken from interviews and information taken from other empirical studies were quality which truly answered the research question.

Population and Sampling

Gilbert et al. (2018) expressed that there are three common sampling methods used in qualitative research which include purposeful, snowball, and quarto sampling. Purposeful sampling was the sampling method which best fits the study because the sampling which I used was based off maximizing preselected criteria and capturing variation, compiling in-depth information based on the research question. Researchers Bungay, Oliffe, and Atchison (2015); Patton, (2015) further expressed that purposeful sampling is useful when a researcher is identifying participants that meet the specific characteristics or criteria that are crucial to the purpose of the study. I used the purposeful selection of participants in this study because I was able to collect wealthier data in significantly less time, whereas interviews with randomly selected participants required more time and resources without necessarily providing quality of data needed for this study.

The population sample used in this study was composed of eight leaders of four different small government consulting companies which will elaborated on the leadership techniques for catalyzing organizational productivity. McHugh et al., 2019 emphasized that themes assist in consolidating an evidence base, which provides direction for future research and practice. These leaders were located and screened through a carefully constructed search strategy using database targeting and small companies in Northern Virginia based on key terms i.e. small companies, consulting, government consulting services. Žmuk (2018) suggested that it is normal to have a response rate to a web-based survey at three percent or below; this response rate can be significantly improved through specific groupings of questions and specifically targeted groups associated with the study. The leaders will need to have at least 2 years in the company's holding key positions to include the chief executive officer, chief financial officer, chief operations officer, or project managers. Additionally, leaders of these companies needed to have at a minimum of 10 years consulting in the industry. The companies must have had no more than 100 employees. This assisted me in gathering quality data in a data saturated field of study, which allowed me to focus on quality instead of quantity. Finally, the companies operated from either a residential area or commercial complex because small consulting companies can operate from either location due to the size and number of employees.

The interview setting was conducted over VOIP or using VTC capabilities such as Skype, WhatApp, or Messenger. Lo Iacono et al. (2016) advocated that using VoIP technologies allows a researcher to create a setting ideal for interviewing participants. Nygaard (2017) further suggested that holding an interview in a private area such as an office or home creates less distractions for interviewee due to the burden of being pulled in different directions regarding work obligations. I talked with each participant and stress the importance of conducting an interview in a quiet environment such as a library or conference room. In addition, I conducted each interview during the time, which each of the participants felt comfortable and could provide me their full attention.

Ethical Research

Sil and Das (2017) maintained that the informed consent process defends the basic ethical principle in human research and is defined as a freely given, informed written consent which must be obtained from each research participant; once the IRB has issued ethical approval following a rigorous review process of completing the proposal (Gelling, 2016). I did not start the recruitment process for this study until I have met all the requirements set by Walden's IRB. Once Walden's IRB approved my proposal and assigned my approval number. I developed a set of requirements that fell in line with either approach or approved by IRB while contacting the different organizations, which I planned on using as participants in my study. Companies that are participating in the study need to receive communication through means of email and phone calls (Cridland, Jones, Caputi, & Magee, 2015; Mikėnė, Gaižauskaitė, & Valavičienė, 2013; Yin, 2017). I sent initial communication through such means as phone calls and emails as confirmation of setting up times for interviews to take place. In addition, I sent consent forms that were approved by IRB, which will be signed by each participant. The informed consent form is in Appendix A.

Hernández, Baños, Llop, and Farré, M. (2014) stated that the use of informed consent forms (ICFs), is required before participants are included in any clinical trial; McDermid, Peters, Jackson, and Daly (2014) provided proof that this information in this study includes the voluntary nature of participation, procedures for withdrawal from the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in the study. Participants had the option to withdraw at any time from this case study by telephone, email, writing, or in person which is written in the ICF. I completed the informed consent process with each participant in my study and required no notification of withdrawal of a participant. I had alternate participants in place for the possibility of a primary participant withdrawal from the study.

Gross and Bettencourt (2019) discuss in-depth about providing participants with financial incentives which include either money or gifts which increased participation up to 75% in their study. I would not be using financial incentives during this study due to the nature of my study and will be annotated in my ICF. I personally thanked them in the acknowledgement section of the case study. In addition, after the study has been approved and published by Walden University; I shared the results from the study with the participants.

Once the companies have agreed to support my study and give me the list of participants, I had the responsibility to maintain each participant’s confidentiality. According to Emami-Naeini, Agarwal, Cranor, and Dixon (2019) participants in their study were more concerned with their privacy than security during the study. I secured the participant's privacy and earn their confidence by assigning each participant an alphanumeric code (P1, P2, P3, and P4) as a safety measure for their confidentiality. In addition, I assigned an individual ID number associated which each participant. Morse and Coulehan (2015) affirmed that readers can link participants of studies to both demographics and pseudonyms; this is the reason why I used pseudonyms to link the study to any individual. Gelling (2016) suggests researchers avoid asking participants sensitive questions. I asked participants only questions pertinent to the study in accordance with the interview protocol; this will mitigate the risk of readers identifying participants in the study.

Informed consents were introduced into research to reduce coercion and respect the autonomy of research participants through informed consent forms (Niemiec, Vears, Borry, & Howard, 2018). This form explains the nature of the study, withdrawal procedures, and participant authorization to conduct interviews. The ICF also contains points of contact for any issues or concerns that the applicant may need to address throughout the entirety the interview process.

I secured the information during interviews and use the following security protocol to enhance my participants privacy: (a) store the data on an encrypted thumb drive in a locked box, (b) store the ID list on an encrypted thumb drive in a separate locked box, and (c) destroy both thumb drives after 5 years after completion of the study. Finally, I received IRB approval before beginning the study. After the study was completed, all participants received a summary of the final study with the Walden IRB approval number 12-23-19-0668004.

Data Collection Instruments

Smith-Hall et al., (2018) acknowledged that data collection instruments allow researchers to use a common operating picture known as a (graphical) notation to improve communication between the researcher and participants; Schobel et al. (2018) discuss some instruments used during research being in the form of surveys and interviews. As the researcher, I served as the primary collection instrument for this study as the primary interviewer. A semistructured interview format is referred to as the Structured Interview of Personality Organization (STIPO) due to the flexibility of following up on initial questions with probes (Hörz-Sagstetter et al., 2018). I asked each participant six open-ended questions pertaining to strategies leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector use to catalyze organizational productivity through using STIPO.

Ranney et al. (2015) specified that interviews are dependent on the length, type, and goals of the study being conducted. The interviews consisted of a 15-20-minute interview with each participant due to the nature of my study. I reviewed archival documents used throughout other studies conducted on leadership, organizational productivity, and small consulting firms.

Interviews are recorded to provide accuracy and keep the interview with the timeline allotted for each participant (Manotas et al., 2016). Kolar, Ahmad, Chan, and Erickson (2015) reinforced the idea of creating timelines for interviews are critical instruments for data collection. During the interview process, I used the interview protocol (see in Appendix A) to orchestrate the interview with each participant. I followed the interview protocol and stuck to 20-minute interviews, without deviation for both interviews, which allowed me to gather the necessary data for the appropriate amount of data saturation needed for my case study. At the beginning of each interview I started the audio recording and gave information to date, time, participant, and the study being conducted.

I took additional steps in ensuring the validity of interview data, by audiotaping each interview with permission from the participants and reflected upon hand-written notes. I conducted member checking to ensure an accurate presentation of the participants' experiences. The interview protocol is in Appendix (A) and placed in the Table of Contents of the case study.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique appropriate for the multiple case study which is being conducted is using interviews. Clarke, Braun, Frith, and Moller (2018) propose that a researcher has untapped potential for data collection using interviews and focus groups. A shorter case study may involve an interview technique consisting of semistructured interviews to collect both verbal and nonverbal data through a set of interview themes (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2017). I used a semistructured interview technique which allowed the participant to capture the research question and gave answers that allowed me to collect the necessary data to complete my findings. In addition, I used the interview protocol as a guideline for both myself and the interviewee which is in Appendix (A).

I started the interview process by identifying the subject matter experts that will serve as participants in the study. The interview will start with me welcoming each of the participants to the study; then I gave a brief explanation of the study, the time allotted for interview and data that I was acquiring from each of them. Finally, I asked if there are any questions or concerns for each of the participants. Doody and Noonan (2013) highly recommended novice researchers should record interviews and then transcribe them before conducting the next interview. In addition to conducting a one-on-one interview from each participant is received, I took copious interview notes, conduct member checking, and review of approved company documents to collect data. Once verbal consent from the participant, I used an audio recording device to provide an accurate interpretation of data collected from the interview.

Researchers encounter verbal advantages and disadvantages to using an interview as a data collection technique. Yin (2017) discussed the advantages of using interviews which include remaining targeted, focusing directly on case study topics, being insightful with participants, providing explanations as well as personal views, perceptions, attitudes, and meaning. In addition, Yin (2017) made references to disadvantages of interviews which include potential being bias due to poorly articulated questions, responses from interviewees' bias, inaccuracies due to poor recall, and reflexivity; the interviewee gives what the interviewer wants to hear. The one advantage in this study is that I had many resources that I referenced in addition to the interviews which I was conducting. There are a couple of disadvantages, which occured such as poor communication due to VoIP and poorly articulated answers related to long distance interviewing.

Pilot studies or field studies used in qualitative studies are stand-alone pieces of work planned and carried out independently or incorporated into the main study which is dependent on whether the pilot or field study is internal or external (Lancaster, Dodd, & Williamson, 2004). I did not feel that conducting a field study was necessary at this time, but there is a need to reconfirm answers given during the first interview. Therefore, after the interview, I scheduled a second meeting with each participant to conduct member checking to ensure an accurate account of the participants' experiences is represented in the case study.

Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) explained that member-checking is a tool used in the collection technique that allows the researcher to verify or confirm the qualitative results from an interview. Member-checking extends the life of a study, but may bring on negative reactions and emotions from participants being interviewed; in the end, the researcher may not change their interpretations or final conclusions in the case study (Simpson & Quigley, 2016). I used member checking to validate the participant's answers to see if they changed their original thought process from the first interview. In addition, member checking allowed me to gather additional data from answers not given during the initial interview.

Data Organization Technique

Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin (2016) suggested that a researcher utilizes qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) programs such as ATLAS.ti and NVivo as tools for data management collected from the following: interviews, focus groups, documents, field notes or open-ended survey questions. Malagon-Maldonado (2014) confirmed that data management collected for a case study keeps the researcher organized and the study structured throughout the entire process through audio devices and transcribed notes. I used a QDAS program to store and manage the data collected during the interviews and place on a USB. I transcribed all the notes taken from each participant interviews and placed them on a thumb drive. Once handwritten notes once transcribed or scanned into my electronic data management system, I destroyed all handwritten notes to protect the privacy of all participants in the study. I categorized and marked all audio tapes and notes with the alphabetical code related to each participant.

Zyskind and Nathan (2015) maintained that third party users should not be trusted to handle sensitive data to include participant personnel information due susceptibility to attacks and misue. The data accumulated during the interview process will be maintained on a Universal Serial Bus (USB) device, labeled by (day, month, and year) and secured in a locked safe in my home for 5 years. I will destroy the USB device and audio recording after 5 years.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is defined as the process for the collection and analysis of qualitative data which draws and verifies the conclusion of the study (Saunders et al., 2016). The process of data analysis includes the following five steps: becoming familiar with the data, focusing on the analysis, categorizing the data and creating a framework, identifying patterns and making connections, and interpreting the data and explaining findings (CIRT, 2019). I analyzed the data which includes interview notes, conducted member checking, and reviewed approved company documents through triangulation. Yin (2017) states that triangulation consists of four types: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation is a type of collecting data from a combination of more than two methods (Hussein, 2015). I used methodological triangulation to maximize analysis collected from data received from interviews and other sources. I saved all forms of data as electronic documents to ease the data analysis process.

There are several types of software that researcher's use to analyze data collected from triangulation. NVivo is a software program that stores, manages, queries, and analyzes unstructured data to include text, images, audio, video, and other data type (Phillips & Lu, 2018). Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, and De Eyto (2018) concluded that NVivo supports researchers in systematically coding and organizing large amounts of data, developing categories, but has limitations that can be compensated with some traditional methods such as the use display boards and color coding the themes or concepts, and understanding relationships among categories. Therefore, I used NVivo software for revealing key themes regarding topics in the literature review.

McConalogue, Kinn, Mulligan, and McNeil (2017) maintained that key themes need to be incorporated into their research design. I placed emphasis on key themes by organizing the collected data into categories that linked to topics gathered in the literature review. The key categories include small government consulting companies, LMX, VDL theory, organizational productivity, and leadership techniques.

Reliability and Validity

Saunders et al. (2016) discussed how reliability and validity are considered the scientific cannons of inquiry in conducting quality research for all-natural sciences and quantitative research in social sciences. Validity refers to the integrity and application of the methods undertaken and the precision in finding accuracy that is reflected in the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Leung (2015) maintained that assuring validity in qualitative research requires defining and using appropriate tools, processes, and data. Yin (2017) defines reliability as the consistency and repeatability of research procedures used in a case study.

Reliability

A researcher achieves reliability when they have consistency through data collection and coding; this is achieved through the five approaches of validity consisting of the following: refutational analysis, constant data comparison, comprehensive data use, inclusive of the deviant case, and use of tables (Leung, 2015). Reliability has two major aspects: the inter-rater reliability and intra-rater reliability, which lead to obtaining consistent results throughout a studied population (Charalambous, Koulori, Vasilopoulos, & Roupa, 2018). Attaining reliability in a study is important to verify the thoroughness and consistency of the data which is being coded and analyzed (Noble & Smith, 2015). According to Birt et al. (2016), researchers use member checking to validate, verify or assess the trustworthiness of qualitative research acquired from interviews, focus groups, and literature. Member checking includes a review and validation of data collected from interview responses with participants. I analyzed the participants' interview responses from the data collected then validated these responses in a synthesized summary. In addition, I utilized audio tapes and transcripts to preserve the consistency of the data collection, data organization, and data analysis process to maintain reliability through member checking.

Validity

Credibility is a degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study through findings (Connelly, 2016). Some of the key methods of ensuring credibility in a qualitative study are through methods such as triangulation and member-checking (Hadi & Closs, 2016). Morse (2015) affirmed that member checking is used to give the transcribed interview (or the completed analysis) back to the participant to obtain additional information or to correct data for a study. I used member checking and methodological triangulation to assure the credibility of the study. Methodological triangulation is the use of more than two sources of data in studying the same phenomenon under investigation which is widely used in social sciences (Hussein, 2015). Some of the data sources include interviews, data analysis, observations, and reviewing documents (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The two data sources that I incorporated into my study were interviews and document reviews. I used the combination of member checking and methodological triangulation to keep my data credible.

Transferability

Sequeira, Bouchet, Yates, Mengersen, and Caley (2018) defined transferability as the ability of a model developed for a specific site and/or time and/or taxon to predict biodiversity in a different time or place or for a different taxon defines its transferability. Saunders et al. (2016) stated that transferability allows researchers to design similar research projects which can be used in further research in a different, but suitable research setting within the same parameters. To allow other researchers a method of transferability, I provided a clear and detailed description of the setting, the selection, and characteristics of the participants, and the key design processes.

Confirmability

Cope (2014) stated that confirmability defines the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the data represents the participants' responses and not the researcher's biases or viewpoints. I utilized the concept of an audit trail that ensured my data that was collected met within the parameter's confirmability. Member checking involves rechecking interviewees to ensure the information given during the initial interview is valid or needs to be revised (Hadi & Closs, 2016). I mitigated any bias that occurs through member checking.

Data Saturation

Moser and Korstjens (2018) discussed how the collection of qualitative data that reaches a point where a sense of closure is attained, and no new data approves to exist on the subject being examined is data saturation. Saunders et al. (2016) affirmed that data saturation is complete once there is no evidence or new themes that can be generated from a researcher’s data collection process. Therefore, I confirmed data saturation by ensuring no new information or themes were observed from each of the data types and sources from literary sources and interviews.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I provided the purpose statement as well as of the role of the researcher, participants, population and sampling, and ethical research practices to justify undertaking this study. I explained the reasons a qualitative multiple case study is the appropriate method and design for this study. I specified that I was the data collection instrument and described the multiple sources for data collection that include semistructured interviews, including member checking. I also discussed the interview protocol process, and how data interpretation can enhance the credibility of my study. I further explained how methodological triangulation combines multiple data sources that strengthen and validate a case study. Moreover, in this section, I described data collection techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, as well as how I ensured reliability and validity. In Section 3, I will present the findings, application to professional practice, along with implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further research. Finally, I conclude Section 3 with a personal reflection about the doctoral study process and a conclusion to the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore leadership strategies that some leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector use to catalyze organizational productivity. Small businesses, in which leaders utilize different approaches to leadership, have proven beneficial not just to the stakeholders but also to all members of the organization, including leaders such as project managers and their employees (DuBois et al., 2015). I conducted semi-structured interviews with two leaders from four small consulting firms throughout Northern Virginia, who have sustained their operation beyond 3 years.

Methodological triangulation took place by reviewing the transcribed interview data along with the company documents, which were acknowledged by each participant for each firm (see Oleinik, 2011). Names of the individuals or the firms were not used to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Once data saturation was achieved, I utilized NVivo data analysis software to assist me in identifying themes and critical strategies that answered the central research question. The following themes emerged from the research, based on methodological triangulation: leadership techniques, building relationships, organizational productivity.

Presentation of the Findings

The centralized research question for this case study was What leadership strategies do leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector use to catalyze organizational productivity? This case study supports VDL theory and leadership techniques with similar platforms such as LMX. I interviewed two leaders from each of the four different government consulting firms with parameters of small businesses, which included personnel within their organization that met the qualifications of a small business. Of the data collected and analyzed, much of the material came from conducting interviews via Skype.

After collecting and analyzing the data from the eight different leaders to reach saturation, the four themes that emerged from conducting the study were individual, leadership techniques, barriers to communication, servicing clients versus profit and loss (PnL), and organizational productivity. Every participant in the study was a subject manager and held positions that projected their experience, operational knowledge, and leadership in explaining different techniques to catalyze organizational productivity. All participants met the study criteria of being leaders for over 5 years in established small consulting firms in the Northern Virginia area, who specialized in the government industry and had proven leadership techniques, which allowed them to sustain their firms and even expand them through growing leaders from within their organizations. I reached data saturation when the interview data along with supporting documentation such as literature and company documentation become repetitive and no additional information was apparent.

Table 2

Qualified Participants Contacted and Met Criteria

Participants	Small consulting companies (Personnel in company approximately)	Established in Northern Virginia	Operating for 5 consecutive years
P1	60	YES	9
P2	60	YES	9
P3	40	YES	13
P4	40	YES	13
P5	15	YES	11
P6	15	YES	12
P7	10	YES	11
P8	10	YES	12

I sent out emails to each participant 5 days before the interview, which gave them time to read the invitation letter and decide which leaders from their organization would provide me with the optimum data to complete data saturation. Each participant's eligibility was based on three essential requirements: position in the organization, years of experience with each organization (both military and private sector), and knowledge of leadership techniques. Emails sent to each of the firms included an introduction and a participant consent form, which outlined the background of the study, the six interview questions, and instructions for accepting the interview. I was able to conduct all interviews via Skype. Based on participant's responses to the interview questions, the following themes became evident from the study findings, including individual leadership techniques, barriers to communication, servicing clients versus PnL, and organizational productivity.

The first and fourth theme(s) were used to demonstrate the relationship and potential outcomes of utilizing different leadership techniques to catalyze organizational productivity. I used eight experienced leaders of small business firms in various leadership positions who have successfully been in the government consulting industry for more than five years. I conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain information on leadership strategies that these leaders have used to sustain and grow their firms successfully for longer than 3-5 years. They utilize different techniques to connect the goals of their employees, which catalyzes organizational productivity because their employees feel like their part of a team and that the leaders care about their interests.

I reviewed documents about leadership strategies, which these different companies implemented to assist their leadership in helping to form individual relationships with their employees. I conducted two rounds of interviews (initial and member checking) based on six questions. These six questions were provided to each of the participants to ensure validity and to gather accurate data. There were three main themes to emerge: (a) change management, (b) program management, and (c) strategies. The purpose of using methodological triangulation was to make sure the findings acquired from the analysis are from two independent data sources (interviews and company documents). Triangulation data could improve the reliability and validity of the results conducted during this study. I continued to collect and analyze the data until no new information or themes came from the further data collection process.

Theme 1: Individual Leadership Techniques

Recognizing and creating individual leadership techniques with each employee or junior leader was an essential strategy used by all participants. All the leaders interviewed expressed that personal leadership techniques were the foundation of their companies and were among the reasons why many of their employees have maintained loyalty. Their companies have produced quality work for their clients and have been given more projects from different government agencies due to their leadership techniques. D'Innocenzo et al. (2016) discussed how shared responsibilities through a common goal, which can result from such used methods such as VDL and LMX theories, had proven highly successful in many cases involving small consulting companies. P6 declared, "Sometimes, you have to let other people succeed and put their good ideas into the work." All participants stated that leadership strategies are behaviors in which many of the leaders tried different leadership strategies through trial and error methods.

Self-empowerment is another essential factor in establishing the right leadership strategy. Self-empowerment is also about allowing a leader to assist a subordinate in discovering self-empowerment within themselves. P7 stated, "People working on projects need a leader to empower them to step up and take on more than they are required to do on whether they can meet that goal or not." Saleem, Bhutta, Nauman, and Zahra (2019) explained that leadership without behavior integrity could put organizations at risk and create uncertainty among the employees. Leaders in small consulting firms must provide self-empowerment through different leadership strategies, which allows their employees to think out of the box and has the possibility of improving the overall performance of the organization.

Leadership strategies are essential for small consulting companies because they assist leadership teams at all levels with establishing individual goals and relationships with their employees. These unique relationships and goals may help the employees with real buy-in with the organizations, leading to increasing productivity while cutting down mundane routines, which generally occur after a period. Lastly, leadership strategies and philosophies cannot be word of mouth; they need to be implemented into action.

Theme 2: Servicing Clients Versus Profit and Loss

Small consulting firms in the government-industry must juggle serving their clients and expanding or remaining at the same level as PnL. Understanding these two aspects of a small business firm is fundamental for leaders when dealing with employees and projects. Żywiołek and Ulewicz (2018) suggested that effective management (including client servicing vs. PnL) affects essential processes occurring not only within the organization but also in a relation enterprise environment.

Leaders understanding the principle of servicing the client are essential for the growth and sustainability of the company. P1 stated, "Everything based on the client and what the client perceives meaning if the contract calls for individuals with a certain skill set, then it is up to the leadership as well as the HRM to place the correct person in the right position." Leaders need to take the appropriate risk management when selecting those individuals, Żywiołek and Ulewicz (2018) emphasized that the task of risk management is to identify potential events to manage risk and guarantee the stability of the organization. P7 discussed how leaders interviewing people for a project or the hiring process in a consulting firm can sometimes be disappointing and stated, "You do not always get what you think you are going to get." Every other participant made references to employees that did not always fit the criteria and the client not being satisfied. As a result, changes were necessary to improve the organization. Servicing the client is one half of the problem, many leaders of small companies' face, but the other half is PnL.

PnL is an essential theme for a small company due to the size and vulnerability of acquiring contracts to sustain a business's survival for the first 3-5 years. P1 stated, "Strategic plans and a company's evolution of their life cycle, there are other factors that can be equally important to the PnL such as services." P5 discussed how he took another approach to PnL, that avoided corporate and business development. P5 stated, "It was more important to focus on client delivery, that kind of limited building the scope and size of the organization." Fafchamps and Woodruff (2016) emphasized the growth of PnL in small companies and marked them as “gazelles”. They further suggested that the gazelles were successful because they incorporated robust business plans, and the leaders of the companies followed them precisely. PnL affects how the organization's leaders want to grow the company and what type of people they want to hire for specific projects. Servicing the client and PnL go hand in hand with the leadership decision making process and how leaders interact with their employees to get maximum buy-in and maximum results.

Theme 3: Barriers to Communication

The third theme in the study was the barriers to communication. Many of the participants found that barriers to communication continue to be issues when it comes to working with clients and their employees. Communication, according to Liaw, Wong, Mardzuki, Mohaiyadin, and Abdul (2018), is the critical element in the normal functioning of every military or civil organizations. There are many barriers in communication that can occur between a leader and their employees or direct subordinates. P8 stated, "The HR department needs to communicate with potential recruits for the company and be able to screen all applicants to ensure they meet the goals and have the proper credentials for the position they are placed in once hired." All the participants discussed how communication barriers usually occurred through trial and error methods and they discussed as a company grows and procedures progress, leaders and their employees embark on new walls of communication.

One of the most common barriers associated with communication and small companies occurs during the initial growth of a company. P1 and P6 both discussed how, initially, the clients and employees were able to communicate with the managing partners directly. As the company grew, these roles and responsibilities were delegated to other partners and project managers, which caused some huge barriers due to employees and clients adjusting to the organization's change management. Liaw et al. (2018) acknowledged how communication failures have direct and indirect impacts on individuals and organizations. Many employees have a difficult time adjusting to new lines of communication, which may affect how they work with their assigned leaders. P1 stated, "Many employees have a hard time embracing new partners or leaders, and that they need to understand that these partners are relevant in their world when it comes to pay raises, promotions, and direction."

Every participant acknowledged that barriers in communication often affected the overall performance of the company, and leaders needed to find new and innovative ways to breakdown these barriers. P4 stated, "I used a skill he learned in the military called an after-action report (AAR) to allow his employees to voice issues they saw as well as solutions." He discussed how this method alleviates barriers associated with communication because the employees have both a voice and buy-in. Many times, barriers in communication could be resolved, but it takes leaders taking an active interest in finding ways to open dialogue with their employees.

Theme 4: Organizational Productivity

The last theme which emerged from this study was organizational productivity. Researchers Hoboubi, Choobineh, Ghanavati, Keshavarzi, and Hosseini (2017) stated that organizational productivity was not solely dependent on factor, but a combination of factors such as sleep, job satisfaction, married/single, and stress. P5 discussed how organizational productivity have two separate, but equally important dimensions; P5 stated, "We are spectacular at doing projects and clientele keep come back for more. I like service deliveries."

Organizational productivity regarding employees is co-dependent on all factors mentioned previously. A leader needs to understand what makes the employee productive or counterproductive. This understanding comes from a leader taking an active interest in the individual employee. P2 discussed how there was no one way to increase organizational productivity but understanding why people want to be in a specific field of work and what motivates people to be in that field. P2 then stated, "A leader needs to find out what motivates them and create a style which motivates them."

Organizational productivity is vital for a small consulting company because individual outputs, as well as inputs from every employee, ensures either the success or failure of projects and, ultimately, the company's survival. All participants emphasized organizational productivity being placed and built on interpersonal relationships between the leaders and their employees. Organizational productivity is a result of company leadership. It ensures that the employees have a voice in some issues about the company and specific projects they are assigned to work on during its life cycle.

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to determine leadership techniques in small consulting firms used to develop and implement different strategies to catalyze organizational productivity and retain quality employees based on rewarding them on their hard work and loyalty to the organization. These small consulting firms were based around the Northern Virginia area located outside Washington D.C. Kaiser, McGinnis, and Overfield (2012) emphasized that leadership is a social function, which is used to establish interpersonal relationships. These interpersonal relationships may tend to influence the organization's strategy, structure, staffing, and work functions, i.e., organizational productivity positively or negatively. P3 discussed the importance of leadership training enhancing leader's ability to manage their employee's productivity, and P2 went into depth about when establishing interpersonal relationships, it is paramount for a leader to discover the goals of each of their employees. This personal interest and mentorship create a lasting bond of trust between the leader and the employee. This trust is based on specific leadership techniques, which are tailored to each employee.

Organizational productivity is not a natural process; it is a learned behavior through trial and error that many leaders of small consulting companies struggle to accomplish with their employees. Alexiou, Khanagha, and Schippers (2019) emphasized that an organization's ability to grow and develop in terms of organizational productivity is based on the leadership's degree of mobilization of an organization's affective, cognitive, and behavioral resources. This comes from the leadership method of trial and error; many times, leaders are afraid to confirm new processes to catalyze organizational productivity. P1 and P4 revealed that they catalyze organizational productivity by conducting meetings at the end of the day, discussing things that went right, things that went wrong, sustainability functions, and improvements. This has proven to be a useful measure in catalyzing organizational productivity, which he developed as a leader in the military for over 30 years. P3, who was not prior military, discussed that the company leadership participated in a professional leadership course, in which each leader applied interpersonal skills at different times. This has enabled the leaders to learn that there are different techniques to catalyzing organizational productivity based on individual relationships being formed.

All participants acknowledged that combining different individual leadership techniques to form unique personal relationships with their employees naturally creates the platform to catalyze organizational productivity. The participants each stated that trusting their employees and their employees believing in the company's services is crucial for their organization.

This information will allow small consulting firms to enhance their firm's reputation and retain quality people within the ranks of their organization.

Implications for Social Change

Based on findings of extensive research through interviews and documentation, the primary implications of social change may be individual, organizational behavior through leadership techniques such as VDL and LMX Theories. Sindhu et al. (2017) confirmed that these theories, based on creating individual relationships, can impact profoundly on organizational justice by moderating the role of organizational change. Positive social change may be accomplished through leaders of small government consulting firms applying proper leadership techniques to build individual relationships with their employees, directly influenced by personnel relationships.

Through establishing these individual and personal relationships, these companies could grow and establish more jobs for future employees, while maintaining or improving organizational productivity of those employed currently at their perspective firms. Kremer, Villamor, and Aguinis (2019) acknowledged that using specific leadership techniques falls underperformance management, catalyzing organizational productivity, and improves both formal and informal relationships between leadership and their employees. Forming personal relationships ensures that each employee's needs and goals are met while enabling small government consulting companies to catalyze organizational productivity and maintain their current workforce without a high turnover.

The research study's implications due to reading this study could positively affect social change if the leaders of small business firms not only review this study but apply the lessons learned from conducting this study. When a small government consulting firm operates with its employee's individual goals and contributes to the prosperity of all stakeholders in the organization, it includes their employees, their families, the communities, and the local economy through tax revenue. Operating an employee-friendly environment can reduce the unemployment rate by providing jobs for individuals in the communities the business serves. Families of these employees are, in turn, more willing to sacrifice their time with their loved ones because they understand their loved one is not just a number, but a valued member of the firm's family or team.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore and reveal what leadership techniques leaders of small business firms use to catalyze organizational productivity in the government-industry. According to Little (2019), small consulting firms make up 28 percent of the total funds awarded from the government to the consulting industry. Small firm's leadership, such as chief executive officers, chief operating officers, chief financial officers, presidents, vice presidents, and project managers should carefully review the data and themes derived from the study and apply them to their organizations. I identified two critical themes regarding leadership techniques that have assisted small consulting companies in the government sector catalyze organizational productivity. Also, I recommend that organizations such as Small Business Development Center Network (SBDC) and the U.S. Small Business Administration district branches in the Commonwealth of Virginia and other states throughout the United States should pay attention to the results and share them with potential future and current leaders of small government consulting firms.

Professionals and academia are from junior colleges, and universities should pay special attention to the two themes because it would assist them in explaining the importance of different leadership techniques and applying it to catalyze organizational productivity in a business formation. Students with this shared knowledge could provide their educational knowledge without necessarily the operational experience to their future employers or act as individual consultants to small government consulting firms to assist them in training their leadership force. This leadership training could be varied to fit the type of industry that these students are tasked to help transform to help align the organization with their client, whether government or private sector. Additionally, small business owners may be able to learn from other small company owners or leaders with different leadership strategies that have worked in different operational areas for them.

Recommendations for Further Research

I chose to conduct a multiple case study to explore leadership strategies: eight leaders from four different small government consulting firms in Northern Virginia used different leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity from within their organizations. Each of the four organizations expressed the desire to grow leaders from within their organizations, which in turn saved them additional revenue in outsourcing talent. I recommend that the executive leadership of these small government consulting companies further research into the possibility of coordinating quarterly leadership training and biannually leadership workshops to start developing employees in their companies for roles of greater responsibility. As the companies become more substantial, employees that show both initiative and leadership qualities should be considered to take over projects and sites as managers. Once these employees show they can handle the initial responsibilities given to then, they show to be considered for more significant areas of responsibilities when positions open as leadership eventually retires or leaves the firm for other reasons.

Many small consulting companies in the government sector hire former military personnel to serve in their organizations based on their operational skills and educational level, which has proven to have both positive and adverse effects in time on the organization. I also recommend that the organization's leadership on the executive level include the human research manager or director, which screens all initial resumes which come into those firms, needs to research further into the hiring processes of new personnel to see if those individuals operational and educational levels match parallel with each other. Once those applicants have been screened and passed the initial phases of the hiring process, then a more in-depth interview needs to occur. During the in-depth interview, the leadership needs to determine which direction the applicant would like to go in terms of being a consultant or, eventually, serving in a leadership position. This in-depth questioning would assist them in growing within their organization and would assist those employees hired in attaining their personal goals. Employees who attain their personal goals show appreciation to those firms by catalyzing productivity within their project teams.

My final recommendation into further research is for these small consulting firms to hire credentialed personnel such as Doctors in Business (DBA) who specialize in research and development in the realm of leadership. These personnel are also academics who spend countless hours reading and developing the latest leadership strategies, which are proven to catalyze organizational productivity effectively. Research into leadership and organizational productivity is a continuously evolving area of interest among many leaders of small consulting firms and academics alike. Multiple participants in this study expressed the importance of personnel relationships to their employees and the organizations. Additionally, a researcher could study the effects of internal relationships in a company and the effects of organizational productivity and the internal turnover of unsatisfied employees.

This study was conducted from Germany, based on interviews from leaders of companies based in Northern Virginia. This factor was a limitation to the study because of the distance and time difference. A larger sample size, located in the same geographic location, and the inclusion of samples from urban areas are areas for the future growth of this study would be beneficial for future research and development.

Reflections

Completing the Doctor in Business Administration from Walden University has been a marathon, not a sprint in my life. It has been the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my life. During my time completing this degree, I was preparing to retire from the military and have many life-changing events happened, yet perseverance kept me on track. I do not currently work in business but have, in the past, worked as a contracting officer representative (CoR) for the US Army. I learned that I enjoyed the business side of the US Army as much as the operational side. I have been a leader in the military for over 14 years, and I am passionate about influencing young professionals, whether in government or the private sector. I believe that the young professionals of today will be the leaders of tomorrow.

After I completed the study, I learned that the military and firms in the private sector have many similarities. I learned that if I could apply the lessons learned from conducting this study and apply it to aspects of the military, in many cases, retention of personnel in job-specific shortages can be retained, and organizational productivity would drastically improve much the same as in a small consulting firm. Throughout the study, I began to see every stakeholder in firms from executive leadership to consultants play a role in the success or failure of the organization. The interpersonal relationships and leadership techniques displayed by leaders of organizations define the organization.

Conclusion

Leadership techniques such as VDL theory and LMX develop relationships inspired by leaders to their employees in small consulting firms. Leaders of small consulting firms in the government sector lack both leadership strategies and time to mentor their employees effectively, and in turn, employees fail to catalyze organizational productivity. These personal relationships trigger a leader to internalize different leadership strategies to fit each employee assist in tying the organization as one functioning unit. The two themes which emerged from conducting interviews were proven successful in each of the participant's organizations. The collection process of this multiple case study process included semi structured interviews, documentation, and member checking. The interviews proved that leadership strategies focusing on interpersonal relationships catalyzed organizational productivity.

During the interview process and member checking, I used an audio device along with detailed notes to gather the necessary data to capture each participant's answers to the questions asked during each interview. The two themes that emerged from the participants were leadership techniques and organizational productivity. Small consulting company leadership that incorporates a variety of the leadership techniques conducted in this study may see a substantial increase in organizational productivity as well as an increase in retaining valued employees. Through conducting this study, I provided small consulting firms proven strategies to improve and grow their firms to larger organizations.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What I will do	**What I will say**
Introduce the interview and set the stage	Script: Hello, my name is Benjamin Zapien and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting my doctoral study about leadership techniques to catalyze organizational productivity in small consulting firms, which I will present in partial fulfillment of the requirements to complete my Doctor of Business Administration degree. I appreciate your participation in this study. Before we begin, I would like your permission to digitally record this interview in order to transcribe our conversation. Please let me know if you would like me to stop recording at any time during this interview. (At this time, I will begin recording and briefly repeat the request so that permission to record is recorded). All of your responses remain confidential.
• Watch for non-vebal clues • Paraphrase as needed • Ask follow-up questions to probe to in-depth data	1. What leadership strategies did you use to catalyze organizational productivity?
	2. How did your company determine the most effective leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity?
	3. What key barriers did you encounter to the introduction of leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity?

	4. How did you overcome these key barriers?
	5. What were the outcomes from applying these strategies within your organization to catalyze organizational productivity?
	6. What additional information would you like to add regarding leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity we have not previously discussed?
Wrap up initial interview and thank participant for their cooperation.	I would like to thank you for your time, and your participation. Do you have any questions for me at this time?
Follow-up member checking interview	I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to a follow-up interview. The purpose of the interview is to conduct member checking as stated in the consent form.

Follow–up Member Checking Interview	
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	Thank you for coming to follow up interview. Before we get started please let me know if you have any questions or concerns at this time.
• Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question. • Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found—note the information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval. • Walk through each question, read the interpretation, and ask: • Did I miss anything? Or, what would	During this interview, I would like to share a copy of the interview questions and the participant responses.
	Q1) What leadership strategies did you use to catalyze organizational productivity? R1) Q2) How did your company determine the most effective leadership strategies to catalyze

you like to add?	organizational productivity? R2)
	Q3) What key barriers did you encounter to the introduction of leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity? R3)
	Q4) How did you overcome these key barriers? R4)
	Q5) What were the outcomes from applying these strategies within your organization to catalyze organizational productivity? R5)
	Q6) What additional information would you like to add regarding leadership strategies to catalyze organizational productivity we have not previously discussed? R6)

Appendix B: Program Course

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 18-Aug-2019
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 32709531

This is to certify that:

Benjamin Zapien

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Student Researchers (Curriculum Group)
Student Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Walden University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w9c66c5fb-d907-4b97-8c76-e36599c0f7c0-32709531