A Case Study of Nonprofit Organization Leaders
Viewed through the Lens of Synergistic Leadership Theory

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of executive directors of four exemplary nonprofit human service organizations through the lens of the Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT). A purposive sampling technique was implemented and data was collected through individual interviews, administration of the Organization and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI), and examination of existing documents. Participants' leadership behaviors, organizational structures, the external forces impacting the organizations and leaders, and the attitudes, values, and beliefs of executive directors, staff members, and board members were explored and were found to be synergistically aligned. Participants were motivated by external forces to modify their leadership behaviors, enhance their organizational structure and culture, and to embrace and embody the core values shared by their constituents to advance the missions of their respective organizations. Findings confirmed existing literature and contributed an expanded understanding of the theory and practice of nonprofit leadership. By extending the SLT to the field of nonprofit administration, the current study provided a deeper insight into the dynamic factors of effective executive leadership of nonprofit human service organizations. The findings of this study may assist current and future nonprofit sector leaders who seek to improve organizational effectiveness and mission accomplishment.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The nonprofit sector and the communities it serves are experiencing rapid and constant change (Independent Sector, 2012). Post-recession organizations face a continually widening gap between resources and needs, much like the gap between rich and poor. Technological advances also have changed the ways in which nonprofit executives approach their work; technology has "transformed the way we ask for and distribute funds, measure outcomes, and communicate with the people we serve" (Aviv, 2012, p. 3). Additionally, recent proposals to change or limit the charitable deduction for donors as part of the debates over government spending and overhauling the tax code may have significant implications for the nonprofit sector (Perry, 2013). Furthermore, projected rates of executive turnover remain high and many boards of directors are underprepared to select and support new senior managers (Cornelius, Moyers, & Bell, 2011).

Despite the challenges associated with their roles, a recent study of nonprofit executives revealed that the majority of nonprofit executives demonstrated a high level of resolve and confidence in their ability to lead (Cornelius et al., 2011). These executive directors reported remaining committed and passionate about their leadership roles in the nonprofit sector, with 45% reporting being very happy in their jobs and another 46% reporting that they have more good days than bad in the leadership role (Cornelius et al., 2011). The commitment and passion expressed by these directors is not uncommon. For example, the majority of respondents in Whitaker's (2012) study of nonprofit human service organization leaders reported a career calling and a deep desire to serve; these

leaders believed that what they were doing was the right thing to do. In a similar vein, Twist (2011) referred to the nonprofit sector as the "social profit" sector, as those involved create social profit not just for themselves, but for all life. Twist (2011) went on to praise the "visionary, committed people working in this transformational sector" (p. 573), referring to them as "social prophets" (p. 573) who are called to this work and who take a stand and give themselves wholly to it. This passionate commitment of nonprofit leaders, combined with mounting expectations to effectively, efficiently, and energetically meet the urgent needs of their communities while under immense financial and external pressure, led to the development of the current study.

In a quest to discover what effective leadership looks like in the complex environment of a nonprofit human service organization, the current study was designed to examine the experiences of executive directors of nonprofit organizations through the lens of the Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT). The SLT assumes that it is the dynamic interaction of four equal and interactive factors (the leader's behavior, the organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, beliefs, and values) that affects the perceived success of the leader (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002; Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013; Schlosberg, Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2010).

This chapter introduces the study within the current climate of the nonprofit sector and the framework of the Synergistic Leadership Theory, followed by a line of logic explaining the study's importance and timeliness. The purpose and significance of the study are presented within this chapter, as are delimitations and assumptions. Also included in chapter one are the study's research questions, definitions of terms used in the

study, an overview of the methodology, and a description of the organization of the study.

Background

In order to help the reader understand the current study in the proper context, a situational and theoretical framework follows. Background information is provided on the scope and structure of the nonprofit sector, including data on nonprofit organizations in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Because these organizations are essential to improving the quality of life for individuals and communities, the need for effective leadership is critical. This section describes the leadership needs of the nonprofit sector and concludes with an overview of the Synergistic Leadership Theory, which provides the basis for the study.

Scope and structure of the nonprofit sector. America's nonprofit organizations play a vital role in the lives of individuals and communities across the country and around the world (Cryer, 2008; Gaudiani, 2004; Salamon, 2012). According to Independent Sector (2013), nearly 1.1 million 501(c)3 organizations were registered with the IRS in 2011. The tax classification 501(c)3 is used by the Internal Revenue Code for public charities that are "organized and operated exclusively for one or more of the following purposes: religious, charitable, scientific, testing for public safety, literary, educational, or prevention of cruelty to children or animals" (Cryer, 2008, p. 11).

Locally, nonprofit public service organizations play an integral role in the Greater Kansas City metropolitan region's economy and the health of the community. The Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership (2013) reported that in 2012, there were 7,816 charitable nonprofits registered with the IRS in Kansas City. Generating $13.6 million in

revenues in 2012 (an increase of 7.3% over the year 2011), and total assets of $23 billion (an increase of 14.8% over the year 2011), the charitable nonprofit sector comprised nearly 13% of the region's total economy.

The human services subsector, the setting for this study, comprised the largest single segment (25.9%) of Kansas City's nonprofit sector, yet these agencies as a group received only slightly more than 10% of all revenues in 2012 (Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership, 2013). The category of human services, according to the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE), includes organizations that are diverse in size and scope, mission, and population served; included in this category are organizations serving youth and families, the elderly, the poor, and people with disabilities, as well as public safety, recreation, employment, and housing organizations (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2013).

Human service organizations and other types of nonprofit organizations often operate with limited resources and staff; leaders of these organizations are expected to do more with less. Recognizing the challenges that nonprofit executives face with regard to the mutual demands of mission fulfillment and business efficiency, Kansas City community leaders established Support Kansas City in 2001. Support Kansas City is a 501(c)3 organization that provides professional and affordable administrative services in the areas of accounting, board and strategy development, database management, fundraising and special events, general administrative support, and marketing and public relations.

In response to increased demands for accountability, transparency, and effective leadership and board governance, Support Kansas City created the Excellence in

Nonprofit Leadership Award. This award, based on the Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice set forth by Independent Sector's Panel on the Nonprofit Sector, is presented annually to two organizations, one with an annual operating budget greater than $1 million and one with an annual operating budget less than $1 million. Table 1 includes basic demographic information about the four organizations with annual operating budgets greater than $1 million that received this award between 2010 and 2013.

Table 1

Characteristics of Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Awardees (Greater than $1 Million)

Characteristic	Organization A	Organization B	Organization C	Organization D
Incorporation date	1916	1978	1980	1998
United Way status	Partner	Partner	Partner	Non-partner
Budget	FY13	FY14	FY13	FY14
Revenue	$32,203,704	$5,352,824	$3,268,353	$2,334,633
Expenses	$32,228,614	$5,352,824	$3,268,353	$2,508,855
Number of paid staff	167	92	63	42
Number of volunteers	380	3000	800	310
CEO term start	2007	1996	1992	1998

Note. Adapted from "Nonprofit Search," by the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, 2014; and from "Partner Agencies," by the United Way of Greater Kansas City, 2013.

Basic demographic information about Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award

recipient organizations during the years 2010-2013 with annual operating budgets less

than $1 million is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Characteristics of Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Awardees (Less than $1 Million)

Characteristic	Organization E	Organization F	Organization G	Organization H
Incorporation date	1985	1985	1986	1967
United Way status	Partner	Non-partner	Non-partner	Non-partner
Budget	FY13	FY13	FY14	FY14
Revenue	$998,663	$700,000	$929,202	$25,000
Expenses	$993,262	$688,270	$929,202	$18,000
Number of paid staff	11	4	9	0
Number of volunteers	263	1000	200	50
CEO term start	2009	2003	2009	2012

Note. Adapted from "Nonprofit Search," by the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, 2014; and

from "Partner Agencies," by the United Way of Greater Kansas City, 2013.

Nonprofit sector leadership needs. One of the nonprofit sector's most valuable

resources is its workforce, yet without training and adequate staff support, nonprofit

employees may experience high levels of stress and burnout (Light, 2002). Halpern

(2006) asserted that "the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations and the health of our

nation's communities are dependent upon the strength of the nonprofit sector workforce"

(p. 3). Effective leadership was found to be the strongest predictor of nonprofit

sustainability in York's (2009) nonprofit sustainability study, based on survey responses

from 700 nonprofit organizations. These studies support the notion that "executive leadership is perhaps the single most important component for understanding why nonprofits, corporations, and governments succeed or fail in achieving their goals" (Carson, 2011, p. 29).

The intensified focus on leadership for the nonprofit sector came on the heels of the seminal Bridgespan Group research report (Tierney, 2006), which described an impending leadership deficit attributable to many factors, including the retirement of the baby boomer generation of workers. The Bridgespan Group report conservatively indicated that over the years 2005-2015, nonprofits would need to attract and develop 330,000–640,000 new senior-level managers, and that by the year 2016, these organizations would need nearly 80,000 new senior-level managers annually (Tierney, 2006). Along with the private and public sectors, the nonprofit sector was pressed to prepare the next generation of leadership in anticipation of fierce competition for new talent.

In reality, in addition to creating pressure for executives to do more with less, the recession required many older executives to reconsider or delay their transition timing (Cornelius et al., 2011). The recent Daring to Lead research report suggested that although projected rates of executive turnover remained high and the sector had spent a number of years paying attention to the issues of selecting and supporting new leaders, few organizations had a documented succession plan (Cornelius et al., 2011).

Recognizing the importance of diverse and prepared leaders to constructively and collaboratively address the complex challenges in American society, Independent Sector (2012) launched the Initiative for Nonprofit Talent and Leadership during the White

House Forum on Nonprofit Leadership in November 2011. This collaborative effort was designed to bring national attention to leadership as a nonprofit sector priority, and aimed to create a set of goals and strategies that would serve as the foundation for a national cross-sector effort to better prepare, train, and sustain nonprofit leaders (Independent Sector, 2012).

This sense of urgency to strengthen leadership for the nonprofit sector impacted academia as well. As nonprofit leadership has developed as a profession, a number of universities have developed academic programs in nonprofit management and leadership. Offerings include stand-alone courses, continuing education programs, and certificate and degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels to prepare the next generation of leaders for the nonprofit sector. Long and Orosz (1997) explained that growth in the number of academic programs has been a direct result of the increasing size and scope of the sector and the call for leadership and management development opportunities from its volunteer and professional leaders. The most recent census of nonprofit management programs found more than 292 colleges and universities with courses in nonprofit management and 168 programs offering a graduate degree with a concentration in the management of nonprofit organizations (Mirabella, 2009). Ninety-one programs offered noncredit courses; 73 programs provided courses through continuing education (Mirabella, 2009). One hundred thirty-two schools offered at least one course for undergraduate credit, nearly 70 affiliated with Nonprofit Leadership Alliance, an alliance of colleges, universities, and nonprofit organizations preparing undergraduates for careers with nonprofits (Mirabella, 2009). The creation and growth of these academic programs

in nonprofit management has resulted in greater awareness of nonprofit leadership as a professional career for which university students may prepare.

Within the sector literature and these academic and leadership development programs, a range of trait, behavioral, and situational or contingency leadership theories is considered. Specific theories commonly discussed in nonprofit management texts include laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational leadership. The current study examined the application of another theory, Synergistic Leadership Theory, to the context of nonprofit management and leadership.

Synergistic Leadership Theory. The Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT) is a gender-inclusive theory that is relational and interactive, giving consideration to the alignment and harmony of four interconnected elements of leadership: (a) leadership behavior; (b) organizational structure; (c) external forces; and d) attitudes, beliefs, and values (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002; Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013). The SLT provides a framework for describing interactions and dynamic tensions between these four factors. A tetrahedral model depicts the SLT's four equal and interactive factors as four equilateral triangular faces (see Appendix A). Demonstrating that it is the dynamic interaction of each of the four factors that affects the perceived success of the leader, there is no structural hierarchy in the model; this model can be rotated on any apex and still maintain its shape (Schlosberg et al., 2010).

The SLT is beneficial in determining why an individual does or does not experience success within their organization (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002; Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013). When the leader's behavior, the organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, beliefs, and values are aligned, the SLT assumes that the

leader will be perceived as effective. Conversely, misalignment among these factors may result in tension or disharmony, which may negatively impact perceptions of the leader's effectiveness (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002; Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013). Because it focuses on the interconnection of the four factors and their impact on the leader, the structure of the organization, and the people within the organization, this theory also can be used to "analyze and describe particular interactions which may account for tension, conflict, or harmony at specific points in time or over time" (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008, p. 147).

The first factor, leadership behavior, describes the actions and characteristics of the leader. A wide variety of leadership behaviors derived from the literature on traditional male and female leadership behaviors is included in the model. The SLT does not connect particular leadership behaviors with success or failure; rather, this theory implies that the leader may change leadership behaviors in order to align the factors (Schlosberg et al., 2010).

The second factor is organizational structure, which refers to the characteristics of organizations and how they operate (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002; Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013). These characteristics may range from a tall organizational hierarchy having many rules to an organization that promotes community, rewards professional development, makes decisions by consensus, and recognizes the expertise of members rather than their rank. In examining organizational structure, the SLT also considers issues such as employee motivation, organizational complexity, and the level of flexibility with regard to decision-making. The current study examined how specific

nonprofit organizations were structured in order to accomplish the organizational mission and complete their work.

The third factor, external forces, includes the outside influences on an organization that also have their own set of values, attitudes, and beliefs (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002; Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013). External forces impacting a nonprofit executive director may include the board of directors, staff members, clients or recipients of service, donors, and volunteers. Other types of external forces affecting nonprofit organizations and their leaders may include the political, social, and economic climates in which the organization operates; state and federal mandates; and accountability systems. The executive director does not control these external forces but must work within their boundaries and influences and often in collaboration with them in order to advance the mission of the organization.

The fourth and final factor combines attitudes, values, and beliefs; in the SLT, this factor is the "foundation for guiding principles from which individuals operate daily" (Schlosberg et al., 2010, p. 6). According to Irby, Brown, Duffy, and Trautman (2002), beliefs may change as new information is processed, while values become more permanent realizations of beliefs and attitudes. This factor may be especially applicable to nonprofit organizations, because one of the reasons that individuals choose to volunteer, donate, or work for a nonprofit organization is personal commitment to the mission, vision, and core values of the organization (Cryer, 2008).

The SLT was developed by Irby, Brown, Duffy, and Trautman (2002) and is based upon a systems theory approach that seeks to provide an alternative to traditional leadership theories. Developed and validated in the context of educational

administration, this theory can be applied to various organizational settings. Unlike previous leadership theories in education and business that were based largely upon the experiences of white males, the SLT examines and reflects on the female perspective and includes attributes, experiences, and abilities inherent in both male and female leaders (Holtkamp, Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2007; Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013; Kaspar, 2006; Leonard & Jones, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Effective leadership at all levels is needed in every organization and community (Independent Sector, 2012). Because executive directors are expected to lead effective organizations and produce exemplary results, a deeper understanding of how executive directors lead exemplary nonprofit human service organizations needs to be developed and shared. Although a nonprofit leader's skills and behaviors arguably are a significant factor in an organization's success (York, 2009), other factors and the synergy between them also may play an integral role in the organization's well-being and its impact on the community it serves.

There is not an in-depth analysis of the experiences of executive directors who lead exemplary human service nonprofit organizations related to the interactions among leadership behaviors, external forces, organizational structure, and attitude, values, and beliefs. The need for additional research focused on the connection between leadership in the nonprofit sector and organizational effectiveness and mission accomplishment has been suggested by other studies and initiatives (Garner, 2011; Independent Sector, 2012; Suarez, 2010). Meanwhile, as nonprofit sector literature has shifted from defining organizational "best" practices to encouraging "promising" or "next" practices in

nonprofit leadership and management, scholars and practitioners have suggested that alignment of a number of factors is critical to organizational effectiveness (Andersson, 2012; Herman & Renz, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000). The current study explored the alignment of the four factors of the SLT as related to the experiences of executive directors leading effective organizations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of the four factors of Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT) to the experiences of executive directors leading exemplary nonprofit human service organizations. Case studies of executive directors were used to examine the executive directors' experiences as they related to leadership behaviors, organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs. Additionally, the study was conducted to examine how the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the executive directors aligned with the attitudes, values, and beliefs of their respective board chairpersons and development directors.

Significance of the Study

This study contributed a deeper understanding of how executives effectively lead nonprofit human service organizations. Through an examination of executive directors' leadership experiences, the current study illustrated how the directors addressed external forces, operated within the organizational structure, and aligned leadership behaviors with their attitudes, values, and beliefs to produce exemplary results. This study also extended SLT from the field of educational administration to the field of nonprofit administration. As SLT has been validated across geographic areas and cultures in the United States and internationally in the field of educational leadership, it has the potential

as a gender-neutral leadership and organizational theory to be widely applied in different academic and business contexts worldwide (Holtkamp et al., 2007).

By applying SLT in this new context (the nonprofit human service organization), the current study contributed an expanded understanding of both the theory and practice of nonprofit leadership. The findings of this study may be useful to current and future nonprofit sector leaders who seek to improve effectiveness and mission accomplishment, as they may examine their own organizations with regard to the four factors of the SLT and make adjustments to enhance alignment as needed. Findings also may expand the knowledge base for scholars, educators, and students examining leadership theories applicable to the nonprofit sector.

Delimitations

This study was limited to nonprofit human service organizations in the Greater Kansas City metropolitan area. Kansas City benefits from a strong support system of nonprofit organizations and generous individual, corporate, and foundation donors. Because the focus of the study was leadership of exemplary organizations, participants for this study were recipients of the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award between the years 2010-2013. The Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award is granted by Support Kansas City, which recognizes agencies for strong fiscal management and sound strategic focus. Organizations selected for this award exhibited a strong and balanced relationship between the board of directors and executive staff and met criteria drawn from the Nonprofit Sector's Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice. The sample was limited to the executive director, the board chairperson, and the development director from each of the organizations selected for participation in the study.

Assumptions

One assumption of the study was that the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership award, based on criteria from the Nonprofit Standards for Good Governance and Ethical Practice, is presented to effective organizations and leaders. A second assumption was that participants responded honestly to interview and inventory questions.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were modeled from questions used in previous studies in the field of educational administration (Bamberg, 2004; Kaspar, 2006). The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the leadership behaviors of the executive directors of exemplary nonprofit human service organizations?

2. How does the structure of each nonprofit organization align with the executive directors' leadership behaviors?

3. How do the leadership behaviors of the executive directors of exemplary nonprofit human service organizations align with the external forces?

4. How are the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the executive directors aligned with the attitudes, values, and beliefs of their respective board chairpersons and development directors?

Definition of Terms

To help the reader better understand the key terms in the chapters, definitions are provided. This section includes a list of definitions for key terms used in the current study.

Attitudes, values, and beliefs. Attitudes, values, and beliefs are the foundation of principles for the organization, the leader, and the workers in the organization. Attitudes and values are more stable, while beliefs can change as new information is processed (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002).

External forces. External forces are outside influences on an organization that also have their own set of values, attitudes, and beliefs over which the leaders of the organization has no control (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002; Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013).

Human service organization. For purposes of this study, a human service organization is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization that provides social services, such as forms of assistance, other than outright cash aid, that help individuals and families to function in the face of social, economic, or physical problems and needs (Salamon, 2012). The task of human service organizations is to restore, protect, maintain, and promote quality of life (Cryer, 2008).

Leadership behavior. Leadership behavior consists of actions or behaviors which are characteristic of both males and females in leadership positions and may range from autocratic to nurturing (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002).

Nonprofit organization. For purposes of this study, a nonprofit organization is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization that benefits the broad public interest (Cryer, 2008).

Organizational and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI). The OLEI is a 96-item survey divided into four parts that relate to the four factors of the Synergistic Leadership Theory: (a) leadership behavior, with management behavior and interpersonal behavior as subfactors; (b) external forces; (c) organizational structure; and (d) attitudes,

beliefs, and values. A section on demographic information also is included (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013).

Organizational structure. Organizational structure refers to characteristics of organizations and how they operate in order to accomplish their goals and complete their work; organizational structure may range from a collaborative feminist style structure to a tightly bureaucratic structure (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002).

Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT). The SLT is a gender-inclusive theory that uses the tetrahedron as its model and includes four factors: (a) leadership behaviors; (b) organizational structure; (c) external forces; and (d) attitudes, beliefs, and values (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002; Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013).

Overview of the Methodology

A qualitative research approach with a phenomenological case study design was selected as the most appropriate methodology for this study. More than a story, a case study has a learning objective and presents the reader an opportunity to analyze and critique decisions made, to offer alternatives, and to consider next steps that an organization might take to deal with problems or to maximize opportunities (Dolch et al., 2013). Through case studies, the researcher examined the executive directors' experiences as they related to the four factors of SLT: leadership behaviors, organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs. The sample included the executive director, board chairperson, and development staff member from four of the eight organizations that received Support Kansas City's Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award between 2010 and 2013. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants, in which open-ended questions were used to elicit

participants' views and opinions. These semi-structured interviews were recorded;

responses were transcribed, coded for central themes in the life world of the subjects, and

analyzed in the context of the Synergistic Leadership Theory. Participants also

completed the Organizational and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI).

Responses from the OLEI were analyzed as qualitative data and were compared with

interview transcripts to determine alignment of interview and inventory responses.

Organization of the Study

The current study was designed to examine the relationship of the four factors of

Synergistic Leadership Theory to the experiences of executive directors leading

exemplary nonprofit human service organizations. This chapter introduced the study

within the context of the nonprofit sector and the framework of SLT and presented the

purpose, significance, and timeliness of the study. The study's research questions and

definitions of terms used in the study were included in this chapter, as well as an

overview of the methodology. The remaining chapters provide additional information for

the current study. Chapter two is a review of literature relevant to this study. Chapter

three outlines the research methodology. The fourth chapter provides research findings

and presents graphics to assist the reader in understanding the case study data. The final

chapter is devoted to interpretation of the findings and recommendations for future

research.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

In order to contextualize the current study, it is important to consider the work that has already been done to advance understanding of both SLT and effective nonprofit leadership. The research questions for this study were based on the four factors of Synergistic Leadership Theory as it relates to the leadership of exemplary nonprofit organizations. Thus, this chapter includes a description of the Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT) and an examination of previous studies utilizing SLT. The four factors in the theory are then described and further explored in the context of nonprofit organizations through a review of recent literature in the field of nonprofit management and leadership. Also included is a description of recent efforts to assess and improve the effectiveness of organizations in the nonprofit sector, with particular attention given to means-based assessment and the Panel on the Nonprofit Sector's Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice. This focused review of existing literature further supports the need for the current study.

Synergistic Leadership Theory

As described in chapter one, the SLT uses a systems theory approach that is inclusive of female perspectives and applicable to both male and female leaders (Kaspar, 2006). The SLT was developed by Irby, Brown, Duffy, and Trautman (2002) out of a three-phase study examining existing leadership theory and feminine leadership characteristics. The theory is based on the work of Fuller (1979) who used the word "synergy" to describe interactions of systems. The SLT focuses on the alignment and harmony of four interconnected elements of leadership, and is based on the assumption

that leadership is the interaction among four factors: (a) leadership behaviors, (b) organizational structure, (c) external forces, and (d) attitudes, beliefs, and values. The theory also is based on the assumption that an alignment of all four factors contributes to perceptions of the leader and the organization as effective or successful, while a misalignment among the four factors generally results in negative perceptions of the effectiveness of the leader or organization if left unaddressed (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002). Additional assumptions from the theory are: (a) women bring a particular set of leadership behaviors to leadership positions, (b) no theory or model exists in current literature that is all inclusive of feminine leadership behaviors or women's perspectives, (c) feminine leadership style encompasses characteristics of the transformational leader, and (d) the more feminine leadership behaviors one exhibits, the more aligned he/she will be with a postmodern organization type (Ardovini, Trautman, Brown, & Irby, 2010). The term postmodern organization was used by Drucker (1993) as a contrast to bureaucratic forms of organization. Such organizations also are called loosely coupled, fluid, or organic instead of the static bureaucratic structures that have traditionally preoccupied much of the organization literature (Hardy & Palmer, 1999).

Although each of the four factors of the SLT may be found within other leadership theories or models, the SLT is unique in that it observes the factors as equal and interactive without hierarchical rank. A tetrahedral model (see Appendix A) depicts the SLT's four equal and interactive factors, which are identified by four stellar points with six interaction pairs. Because this model may be rotated on any apex and still maintain its shape, the model indicates no structural hierarchy or linear connotation;

rather, it suggests that the dynamic interaction of each factor affects the perceived success of the leader and the organization (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013).

Another distinctive feature of the SLT is that it is gender inclusive, acknowledging that women bring leadership behaviors differing from traditional male leadership behaviors (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002). For example, leadership behaviors that are traditionally associated with male leaders are self-assertion, separation, independence, control, and competition, whereas behaviors ascribed to female leaders include interdependence, cooperation, receptivity, merging, acceptance, and being aware of patterns, wholes, and context (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002). The SLT also is a holistic leadership theory, unique from other leadership theories in that it integrates external forces that contribute to the perception of a leader's success and effectiveness (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002); this theory acknowledges that the presence of these external forces may drive organizational leaders to collaborate and strategize.

Previous Studies Utilizing the Synergistic Leadership Theory

Much work has been done in the United States and internationally to advance understanding of SLT, with several studies published to date that have either utilized or validated the theory. Each of these studies has been limited to the field of educational leadership. A brief review of this research is presented to familiarize the reader with previous studies using the SLT as well as the respective authors' recommendations for further study as related to the current study.

The SLT has been found to be generalizable to male and female leaders, leaders of different ethnicities, and leaders from various management levels and years of experience in present position, as evidenced by Holtkamp's (2001) study of public school

superintendents, assistant superintendents, and elementary and secondary principals. Holtkamp (2001) examined the psychometric properties of the Organizational and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI) developed by Irby, Brown, and Duffy (2000) to determine if data from the OLEI are a valid measure of the SLT. The results of this study further validated the SLT and resulted in modifications to the OLEI based on analysis of its psychometric properties. Following up on Holtkamp's (2001) validation of the OLEI, a revalidation of the revised OLEI as a measure of the four factors of the SLT was conducted by Hernandez (2004). The current study utilized a revised version of the OLEI in conjunction with data gathered through individual interviews and existing documents in its examination of nonprofit leaders.

The existence of synergy between the four factors of SLT has been unanimously acknowledged among both male and female leaders and among female leaders at different levels of management, as demonstrated by a number of studies. For example, Trautman's (2000) mixed methods study examined the extent of differences between male and female educational leaders and among female educational leaders at different management levels with regard to the leadership behavior factor of the SLT. The random sample of 243 participants for this study comprised superintendents, assistant superintendents, and elementary and secondary principals. Contradicting literature at the time, Trautman (2000) found that males and females, as well as females at different levels of management, acknowledged use of a wide range of male and female behaviors. Although male and female leaders viewed the interaction of the four factors of the SLT in different ways, they all acknowledged the interactivity of the four factors of the theory and confirmed that all four constructs of SLT interact in relevant and meaningful ways.

Additionally, female leaders validated the assumption of SLT that females at different levels of management may perceive the interaction among the constructs of SLT to vary (Trautman, 2000). The work of Ardovini, Trautman, Brown, and Irby (2006, 2010) further validated the SLT by determining perceptions of the theory among male and female leaders and among female leaders at different levels of management. Despite some disagreement between males and females on exactly how the four factors of SLT interact, there was unanimous acknowledgement that all four factors were interactive. Further, although female leaders at all management levels found interaction among the four factors, females from differing levels of management saw different patterns of interaction. Among female leaders, interactions among the four factors were positively correlated with perceptions of leadership and organizational effectiveness (Ardovini et al., 2010).

Although synergy between the four factors of SLT has been shown to be related to perceived effectiveness, differing perceptions among leaders within an organization with regard to these four factors may be potential sources of conflict. Hernandez's (2004) study examined perceptions of superintendents and school board presidents with regard to the four factors of SLT. Both male and female superintendents reported that they demonstrated a range of leadership behaviors that are traditionally considered both feminine and masculine. However, significant differences were found with regard to the SLT leadership behavior sub-factors, suggesting potential sources of conflict. For example, while superintendents perceived themselves to be risk takers, their board presidents did not perceive the superintendents to be risk takers. Another difference was that board presidents perceived external forces to be more important than did

superintendents. Additionally, the male superintendents' perceptions of themselves to be agents of change were contradicted by their board presidents' perceptions. Based on these differences, Hernandez (2004) recommended further research on perceptions and enactment of risk taker behavior as well as the impact of external forces on school organizations and leadership. These recommendations were relevant to the current study, as nonprofit organizations and leaders often are required to take risks in order to advance their missions, yet careful consideration must be given to implications for each of the organization's stakeholder groups. In addition, nonprofit organizations are subject to the effects of external forces, both positive and negative; the weight of these forces may be perceived differently among organizational leaders.

The impact of external forces such as the economic recession and government actions on leadership behaviors is acknowledged by leaders of different cultures. In a study of Chinese and American leaders of high-ranking universities, Yang (2010) found that leaders in both cultures strived to communicate, discuss, negotiate, and adjust behaviors rather than practicing defiance or resistance when dealing with external forces. Likewise, when faced with challenges related to organizational structure, leaders of both cultures felt called to reevaluate attitudes, values, and beliefs and to reflect on their leadership behaviors. These findings served to further validate the SLT and confirmed the assumption that alignment of all four factors leads to perceived effectiveness of the leader and the organization. Yang's (2010) recommendation that additional research to validate the SLT be conducted with leaders in other non-academic fields further supports the need for the current study.

Leaders in any field striving to accomplish their goals and advance their organizations may look to the example of synergistic leadership shown in Schlosberg's (2003) case study of two Mexican educational leaders, one male and one female, of a private school. The researcher found that the leadership behaviors of the school leaders were democratic, participatory, situational, and transformative (Schlosberg et al., 2010). Leaders were able to deal with the negative impact of external forces and alter their behaviors as needed to work with external forces and accomplish their goals; in this case, leaders viewed challenging situations as motivators. When examining attitudes, values, and beliefs, Schlosberg (2003) found that school leaders highly valued (a) solidarity, sharing, and citizenship; (b) teaching by example; (c) commitment, love, and care; and (d) sacrifice and hard work. These values contributed to the formation of a positive organizational culture. With regard to organizational structure, Schlosberg (2003) found that the school had clearly defined goals and a well-communicated mission, and that members of the organization were empowered and involved in decision-making and problem-solving in systematic ways. The open structure of the school contributed to a high level of satisfaction, which reflected alignment of the structure with leadership behaviors, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs. In this case, the researcher proposed that "synergy among the four factors enabled the leaders to accomplish their goals and to advance the organization" (Schlosberg et al., 2010, p. 12). The model of this Mexican school and its highly effective leadership inspired the development of the current study with leaders of nonprofit human service organizations.

While Schlosberg's (2003) work featured a highly effective organization with all four factors in sync, much can be learned from the examination of organizations in which

the four factors may not be aligned. Adjusting various factors to improve alignment can have positive effects on relations between the organization and the community or other external forces. This phenomenon was demonstrated in Bamberg's (2004) study, which applied the SLT to the leadership experiences of five female superintendents leading school districts with high levels of student achievement. For this qualitative study, the researcher utilized interviews with five female superintendents, five central office administrative team members, and five school board members from five school districts; each study participant also completed the OLEI. Bamberg (2004) found that for three of the five superintendents, aligned factors in their districts positively impacted their leadership. Two superintendents lacked alignment with external forces; one used leadership behaviors to align the district and limit the impact of the misalignment, while another did not take corrective action and her district continued to be misaligned. Although student achievement scores increased under the leadership of the latter superintendent, she encountered resistance and disharmony with school board members, teachers, and community members, and after two years she left the district. Bamberg (2004) concluded that by aligning the organizational structures with their leadership behaviors, the superintendents' leadership behaviors impacted the relations between school districts and external forces. Based on these findings, the current study was designed to examine alignment among the four factors of SLT in high-performing nonprofit organizations led by females and males.

The current study, a phenomenological case study, utilized an approach similar to Kaspar's (2006) qualitative study designed to examine the relationship of the SLT to the experiences of four elementary school principals leading exemplary, low socio-economic

campuses in Texas. The sample for Kaspar's (2006) phenomenological case study included the principal, the principal's direct supervisor, two campus staff members, and a parent from each of the four campuses rated exemplary by the Texas Education Agency from at least 2002-2005. Utilizing face-to-face interviews and the OLEI, the researcher examined principals' leadership behaviors; the alignment of organizational structure with the principals' leadership behaviors; the alignment of external forces with the principals' leadership behaviors; and the alignment of principals' attitudes, beliefs, and values with the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the principals' direct supervisors, campus staff teams, and parents. Kaspar (2006) found that the principals in this study purposefully and proactively used their leadership behaviors to positively impact the organizational structures, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs of their schools, ultimately producing exemplary student achievement. Her research underscored the critical importance of alignment among all four factors of the SLT to the leader's effectiveness and the organization's success, and provided a model for the design of the current study.

Factors of the Synergistic Leadership Theory

Based upon a systems theory approach, the SLT is interactive, relational, contextual, and contingent. The four equal and interactive factors are leadership behaviors, organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, beliefs, and values (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002). The SLT creates a framework for describing the equal and dynamic interactions among these factors; this framework provides a holistic view of the environment in which leaders operate (Yang, 2010). Each of the four factors is described in the context of nonprofit leadership.

Factor one: Leadership behaviors. The first factor, leadership behaviors, describes particular actions of a leader, and includes a broad array of behaviors compiled from the literature on traditional male and female leadership behaviors ranging from autocratic to nurturing (Schlosberg et al., 2010). Examples of leadership behaviors as suggested by the SLT include: (a) leads by example, (b) demonstrates ability to juggle, (c) is dependable, (d) communicates vision, (e) acts as a change agent, (f) shares power, (g) builds consensus, (h) has high expectations of self and others, (i) combines social talk with administrative talk, and (j) is efficient (Schlosberg et al., 2010). Rather than endorsing particular leadership behaviors as indicators of success or failure, the SLT instead implies that the leader may adapt his or her behaviors in order to align the factors.

Although the base of current literature on leadership behaviors and factors that influence effective leadership is far too broad to include in this review, a few recent studies highlighting leadership behaviors in the context of nonprofit organizations are described in this chapter. One such study was Zumdahl's (2010) dissertation, which focused on the perceived management and leadership effectiveness of leaders of urban nonprofit organizations. Through surveys and interviews with nonprofit leaders, Zumdahl (2010) found that nonprofit leaders have high levels of perceived effectiveness and that they are highly motivated individuals with self-perceived problem solving skills and cognitive capacity. Study participants indicated need for skill development in various management skills, implicit understanding of leadership, and emotional intelligence (Zumdahl, 2010).

Emotional intelligence involves self-awareness of actions and feelings and how they affect others, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman,

2006). An exploration of the relationship between chief executive officer (CEO) emotional intelligence and nonprofit human service organization intellectual and financial capital was conducted by Brown (2011). Findings from the mixed-methods study included a potential relationship between CEO emotional intelligence and an organization's intellectual and financial capital, as well as a potential positive relationship with total program effectiveness. Brown's (2011) findings and recommendations encourage nonprofit human service organizations to have emotionally intelligent CEOs.

The characteristics associated with emotional intelligence are closely aligned with the skills and behaviors connected with transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership begins with the identification of one's beliefs and values, highlighting the leader's integrity. Leadership expert Hesselbein (1996) stated "the leader for today and the future will be focused on *how to be* – how to develop quality, character, mind-set, values, principles and courage" rather than simply having learned lessons of how to do it (p. 122). Leaders of integrity exhibit strong moral character and ethical principles and consistently act upon these principles even when it is not "expedient or morally advantageous to do so" (Wakin, 2004, pp. 195-196). A second characteristic of transformational leadership is vision, explained by Covey (1989) as "beginning with the end in mind" (p. 98). Bennis (1998) states that leaders "create a vision with meaning – one with significance, one that puts the players at the center of things rather than at the periphery" (p. 144), and further explains that leaders must create an environment in which people "are empowered to be leaders, to subscribe to your vision and to make effective decisions" (p. 145). By developing a shared, significant vision, the leader provides the organization with a common goal and sense of purpose;

indeed, nonprofit leaders choose and remain in their field because of commitment to the mission of the organizations they serve (Brinckerhoff, 2000).

A third characteristic of transformational leadership is collegiality, the development of positive relationships and a sense of community among constituents that aids in achievement of a shared goal. Covey (1989) asserts that synergy tests whether constituents "are really open to the principle of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts" (p. 265). A fourth characteristic, ingenuity, refers to the leader's ability to confidently innovate and adapt to embrace a constantly changing world. St. Ignatius of Loyola encouraged the leader's indifference to inflexible structures, prejudices, and cultural preferences, so that he or she may be eager and ready to respond to opportunities with innovative approaches and community partnerships to help the institution achieve its goals (Ganss, 1970; Lowney, 2005). Leaders who develop the skill of ingenuity are risk takers whose drive and persistence inspire and influence others to join their efforts to affect positive change (Brinckerhoff, 2000).

Transformational leadership also involves the practice of discernment, which enables leaders to exercise good judgment and make effective decisions. In his Georgetown address on Jesuit higher education, Kolvenbach (1989) encouraged leaders to know the world, examine the attitudes and motives of themselves and others, and to challenge assumptions in the process of selecting values and making principled decisions. As stated previously, transformational leadership begins with the identification of beliefs and values. Kolvenbach (1989) posited that "when the mind and the heart are involved, the whole person is involved. Values lead to actual decisions and real actions – and

necessarily so" (p. 5). Each of these characteristics, integrity, vision, collegiality,

ingenuity, and discernment, aligns with the leadership behaviors suggested by the SLT.

Many of these same characteristics were found by Kunreuther (2006) in the

Building Movement Project, a study on generational differences in nonprofit leadership.

Both younger and older nonprofit leaders agreed upon key components of good

leadership in social change organizations; vision, communication skills, collaborative

style, and concern about staff were noted across all age groups and positions as qualities

of good leadership. This idea was articulated by a young nonprofit staff member

participating in the study who asserted that leaders need "open mindedness, passion,

commitment, communications skills, depth of experience or thought, and character. And

vision. It's hard to lead any of us without being able to see the world being a better

place, whether the outcomes happen or not" (Kunreuther, 2006, p. 12).

The impact of transformational leadership behaviors on achieving and

maintaining nonprofit organizational effectiveness, ethical decision-making, and the

recruitment and retention of volunteers has been examined in a number of studies

(Godfrey, 2013; Umezurike, 2011; Woodsmall, 2012). Data collected in a case study of a

small community action agency revealed a transformational leadership culture inspired

by the CEO's leadership (Woodsmall, 2012). Responses collected through qualitative

interviews with 20 participants revealed values consistent with transformational

leadership, such as innovation, respect, integrity, professionalism, and excellence

(Woodsmall, 2012). In addition, a culture of transformational leadership was evident

through the implementation of progressive initiatives and participants' descriptions of

ways in which creativity, accountability, and a focus on teamwork were encouraged and

expected (Woodsmall, 2012). This particular case illustrates an example of the impact of the leader's behaviors on organizational culture.

Another qualitative case study of nonprofit administrators explored the perceptions of effective and ethical leadership behaviors in decision making (Godfrey, 2013). Mirroring the relationship of the SLT factors of organizational structure, external factors, and attitudes, beliefs, and values, with leadership behavior, Godfrey (2013) found that influences of organizational hierarchy, family, parents, and religious beliefs appeared to guide nonprofit leaders in their ethical decision making processes. Transformational leadership theory was found to be beneficial to organizations concerned with developing organizational integrity and high ethical standards (Godfrey, 2013). Factors such as justice, trust, caring, and integrity were found by Godfrey (2013) to provide clarity about the moral values and behaviors important to leaders' behaviors and ethical decision-making.

Ethical behaviors, along with other leadership behaviors such as vision, charisma, empathy, empowerment, positive reinforcement, volunteer development, training and support, and interpersonal communication, were examined in Umezurike's (2011) collective case study of volunteers' experiences with nonprofit leaders. Transformational leadership characteristics such as having a compelling vision and charisma were found to be important in attracting, motivating, and retaining volunteers, and motivational behaviors such as empathy, empowerment, and positive reinforcement were found to increase volunteer retention (Umezurike, 2011). The nonprofit leader's ethical behaviors were found to be essential in volunteer retention and motivation, while effective

interpersonal communication behaviors affect the nonprofit leader's ability to attract, motivate, and retain volunteers (Umezurike, 2011).

The findings from each of these studies support the notion that a strategic nonprofit leader must "ensure there is a framework to guide decision making and that the framework is discussed, evaluated, and modified according to operational conditions" (Brown, 2010, p. 227). As circumstances change, leaders must adjust their behaviors and engage others around issues within the framework of their organizations (Brown, 2010; Hudson, 2011). By engaging staff and volunteer leaders in discussion at all levels, the leader creates a culture of "courageous conversations" and helps to build the adaptive capacity of the organization to excel in an environment of uncertainty (Hudson, 2011, p. 28). The culture of an organization and the decision-making frameworks within it are part of the organizational structure, the second interactive factor of the SLT, which is discussed in the following section.

Factor two: Organizational structure. As described previously, leadership behaviors are essential to organizational effectiveness. However, in his text *Nonprofit Management 101,* Heyman (2011) asserted that "although strategy and vision are integral to the success of any effort…the operational and infrastructural supports serve as the ball bearings that make success and growth possible" (p. 58). Heyman's (2011) statement supports the inclusion of organizational structure as one of the four critical and interactive factors of SLT.

According to Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008), organizational structure depicts a "framework for vertical control and horizontal coordination of the organization" (p. 38). Through this framework, structure may designate formal reporting relationships, the

grouping of people into departments, and the grouping of departments into the overall organization. Organizational structure also includes "the design of systems to ensure communication, coordination, and integration of effort across departments to support the achievement of goals" and "connects to goals and strategy, work and technology, and people, with each element influencing the others and the structural design" (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012, p. 62). Organizational structure may be based on the bureaucratic or participatory management models, or may follow an alternative approach such as compliance theory, mechanistic-organic organizations, or the strategy-structure typology (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). Because the structure of an organization impacts behaviors, communication, and relationships among members, different characteristics and practices may be found among organizations with differing structures.

In the SLT, organizational structure refers to these characteristics of organizations and how they operate. Structures may range from organic, open, feminist organizations characterized by participative decision making, rotating leadership, promotion of community and cooperation, and sharing of power, to mechanistic, tightly controlled bureaucracies featuring rules, division of labor, authority hierarchy, impersonality, and competence (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Schlosberg et al., 2010; Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012).

Organizations in the nonprofit sector are legally distinct from organizations in other sectors; they are neither for-profit business nor government, yet carry certain characteristics of each (Herman, 2010; Renz, 2012). The simplest distinction between nonprofit organizations and other organizations is found in the Internal Revenue Code (Cryer, 2008). Nonprofit organizations are tax-exempt under U.S. tax law, and gifts

received by qualified organizations are tax-deductible according to Section 501(c). Most nonprofit organizations carry the specific tax status of "public charities," or 501(c)3 organizations (Internal Revenue Service, 2013). An organization may be classified as 501(c)3 if "it is organized and operated exclusively for one or more of the following purposes: religious, charitable, scientific, testing for public safety, literary, educational, or prevention of cruelty to children or animals" (Internal Revenue Service, 2013, para 2). An organization is defined as a nonprofit entity if it shows the following characteristics: organized, private, self-governing, non-profit distributing, voluntary (Anheier, 2005; Salamon, 2012). This definition is supplemented by Cryer's (2008) description: "In general, they are mission driven, rather than profit driven; they exist to serve a public benefit; they value volunteerism and altruism; they are governed by a board of directors; and they tend to be flexible and autonomous" (p. 11).

Nonprofits also possess a unique ownership structure; Renz (2012) explained that a typical U.S. charity is "owned" by the community it exists to serve, with multiple stakeholders who may bring conflicting performance expectations to bear on the organization (p. xiii). Despite the lack of a clear external source of accountability or control, the governing board and management must act as stewards of the assets of the organization on behalf of the community (Renz, 2012). As stewards, the governing board members, or trustees, are accountable to the state governments that granted the organization's charter, to the federal government that granted tax-exempt status, and to the public itself (Wolf, 1999).

In addition to ensuring and enabling accountability, the core functions of the typical nonprofit board include: (1) providing overall leadership and strategic direction,

including mission, vision, and key goals, for the organization; (2) establishing policies to guide the organization; (3) making sure the organization secures essential resources to accomplish its mission, vision, and goals; (4) ensuring effective use of resources; (5) leading and managing the chief executive performance; (6) engaging with constituents; and (7) ensuring a high level of board performance and effectiveness (Renz, 2010). Standing committees and task forces of the board should do work that supports the above described responsibilities, and these structures should not interfere with staff operations (Renz, 2010). Wolf (1999) stressed that it is equally important to understand what trustees should not do, namely: "(1) engage in the day-to-day operation of the organization; (2) hire staff other than the chief executive officer; and (3) make detailed programmatic decisions without consulting staff" (p. 48).

While the shared governance structure of nonprofit organizations presents unique challenges for board members, executive staff members also recognize the inherent complexities found in this structure. Nonprofit executive directors surveyed in the Daring to Lead 2011 study reported that partnering effectively with the board can require a significant amount of work (Moyers, 2011). One respondent stated

> I think the most challenging thing for me is to utilize board members well – use them in a way that keeps them connected to the organization. Not to overuse them. So it's really about knowing them as individuals and how some people are willing to give more time. (Moyers, 2011, p. 6)

Another respondent concurred, stating, "I don't think I ask my board to do enough" (Moyers, 2011, p. 4). Moyers (2011) reported another executive director's perspective:

I think one of the biggest problems for nonprofits is that we are so reliant on

volunteers to do a lot of things that they don't actually know how to do. Despite

our best efforts and their best intentions, I think it's fundamentally unrealistic to

expect board members to do all we expect of them when they have busy lives of

their own. So I think part of the challenge is being realistic about what they can

do and what they can't do. (p. 5)

The importance of the relationship between the board chair and the executive director

was explored by Hiland (2006) in her study of leaders of 16 nonprofit organizations in

Santa Clara County, California. This study revealed a positive relationship among the

strength of trust between the executive director and board chair, their level of working

together in the managing, planning, and leading of the organization, and the creation of

social capital (Hiland, 2006). Among pairs of executive directors and board chairs who

were noted to have high levels of trust and social capital, the effects on the organization

included energy, productivity, confidence, and synergy (Hiland, 2006). These findings

support Renz's (2010) assertions that organizational "performance derives from the

behavior of people" rather than the creation of structures and that the success of an

organization is defined by the shared outcome, or the work of the team (p. 144).

In addition to distinctive ownership and governance structures, nonprofit

organizations have a "unique financial and capital structure, funding and financing

operations with a mix of philanthropic resources and earned income derived from a

diverse set of sources, each with its own expectations for operations, management

performance, and organizational accountability" (Renz, 2012, p. xiv). Although securing

resources to advance an organization's mission is the joint responsibility of the board and

staff, the financial structure and sustainability of an organization is both dictated by and dependent upon a number of external forces, the third interactive factor of the SLT.

Recognizing the impact of external forces, Brown (2010) described strategic management in nonprofit organizations as "the ability to understand external market opportunities and challenges while weaving together service delivery systems to address the needs and interests of the multiple stakeholders of the organization" (p. 227). Just as Heyman (2011) stressed the importance of operational and infrastructural supports to ensure organizational success and growth, Brown (2010) explained that strategic management "is informed by the desire to achieve alignment and coherence among organizational processes and practices" (p. 227). This emphasis on alignment among factors and attention to external forces further supports the SLT and its application to nonprofit organizational leadership.

Factor three: External forces. External forces are the outside influences that have an impact on leaders and their organizations. According to Bolman and Deal (2008), some external forces may have an unpredictable effect, thus challenging the organizational system and causing dissatisfaction among groups within the organization. In the SLT, external forces are described as "powers outside the control of the organization or the leader that interact with the organization and the leader and that inherently embody a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs" (Schlosberg et al., 2010, p. 6). These forces may include (a) demographics, (b) cultural and political climate, (c) economic situations, (d) technological advances, (e) local, national, and international community expectations, practices, and conditions, (f) governmental regulations or laws, (g) policy-making boards, and (h) direct supervisors (Schlosberg et al., 2010).

Nonprofit organizations are constantly changing and being changed as a result of the impact of external factors. Demographic shifts have led to "increasingly intergenerational and multicultural workplaces that must work to address issues of engagement, inclusion, and equity" (Renz, 2012, p. xii). Brinckerhoff (2007) discussed the impact of having four generations in today's workplace, describing the different cultures of each generation with regard to work-life balance, education, and technology. Nonprofit leaders must bridge the generational culture divide in order to utilize each generation's unique capabilities to advance the mission of the organization (Brinckerhoff, 2007). Additionally, challenges of finance; competition for time, talent, treasure, attention, credibility, and business; increased demands to demonstrate and prove performance and results; and new technologies increase the complexity and difficulty of nonprofit management and leadership (Salamon, 2010).

In addition to demographic shifts, economic forces have a major impact on the nonprofit sector. The economic crisis known as the Great Recession resulted in decreasing resources and philanthropic support for nonprofit human service organizations at the same time that the demand for human services significantly increased, at times far beyond an individual organization's capacity to respond (Cornelius et al., 2011; Giving USA Foundation, 2011). Executive directors of nonprofit human service organizations have been challenged to lead their organizations through this recession, which began in December 2007 and has continued to impact the nonprofit sector for several years beyond its reported end in mid-2009. During this period, an already weak economy was further jolted by turmoil in the financial markets in the fall of 2008 (Goodman & Mance, 2011). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that at its lowest point in February 2010,

employment had declined by 8.8 million jobs from the prerecession peak (Goodman & Mance, 2011). During times of economic downturn, Americans typically depend on charitable organizations for help (Dolch et al., 2013). However, nonprofit organizations themselves also have been negatively impacted by the downturn, as donors began giving smaller amounts to charities and to fewer organizations (Giving USA Foundation, 2011). The recovery from this recession is the slowest in recorded history with regard to philanthropic giving (Giving USA Foundation, 2013); at the current rate, the recovery in charitable giving is likely to take six to seven years, or at least twice what it has taken after previous recessions (McCambridge, 2013).

The Daring to Lead 2011 study (Cornelius et al., 2011) found that the recession negatively impacted a large majority of community based organizations and their leaders, resulting in diminished financial health and downsizing of organizations. In this study, 84% of nonprofits surveyed experienced a weakening of their financial position, and 26% of organizations decreased annual operating budgets due to reduced funding (Cornelius et al, 2011). One respondent explained:

> The complexity of the funding sector has evolved rapidly. The days of somebody knowing you, believing in you, and funding you based on that relationship are gone. The whole issue of return on investment and measurement makes it harder to stay true to our mission – as unimpacted by external forces as I would want to be. (Cornelius et al., 2011, p. 3)

The recent recession made evident the weaknesses in many nonprofit business models, particularly those that were financially unsustainable, according to the findings of Daring to Lead (Cornelius et al., 2011).

In the face of challenges stemming from external forces, organization leaders encounter the need for change and may experience a sense of renewed commitment. In McCambridge's (2011) survey of *Nonprofit Quarterly* readers, respondents described necessary changes and positive outcomes resulting from the rapidly changing dynamics. One participant noted that "the poor economy and tightened resources have put unprecedented urgency on planning" (McCambridge, 2011, p. 7). Another leader explained:

> The board is more engaged because we've had huge successes, but our financial status is fragile. The combination has increased [board members'] participation in meetings, prompting them to plan a retreat where we will think about the mission and strategize about programs and income. That has pushed them to make some very difficult decisions that have been necessary for the organization to move forward. It's also motivated them to take their own roles seriously.
>
> (McCambridge, 2011, p. 8)

A recurring theme in McCambridge's (2011) study was a new, post-recession willingness on the part of board members to better understand their organization's programmatic and financial choices with regard to impact and sustainability.

With regard to human resources, nonprofit leaders participating in the Daring to Lead 2011 study reported experiencing recession-related anxiety, burnout, and delayed executive transition (Cornelius et al., 2011). Projected rates of executive turnover remain high despite being slowed by the recession, and many boards of directors are under-prepared to select and support new leaders; succession planning is seen as important, yet organizational leaders are doing little about it (Cornelius et al., 2011; Froelich, McKee, &

Rathge, 2010). Despite the profound challenges of the role, however, nonprofit

executives remain energized and resolved (Cornelius et al., 2011).

Increasingly difficult economic times create additional pressure on nonprofit

organizations to demonstrate in measurable ways that they are efficiently and effectively

achieving their missions (Salamon, 2010). As a result, a new type of nonprofit

organizations has emerged; these organizations are dedicated to assessing the

performance of other nonprofits to inform potential donors and stakeholders about their

effectiveness and efficiency (Murray, 2010). The most well-known of these

organizations include Guidestar, Charity Navigator, Charity Watch, Give Well, and the

Wise Giving Alliance, among others, each of which varies greatly in terms of

performance criteria, accessibility of information, and number and types of organizations

reviewed. One criticism of these watchdog organizations is their emphasis on financial

ratios rather than organizational effectiveness; effort must be taken to estimate impact

(Brest & Hall, 2008; Murray, 2010).

Similarly, individual donors and institutional funders often have unrealistic

expectations for nonprofit organizations to maintain very low overhead (Gregory &

Howard, 2009; Pallotta, 2013). The starvation cycle, according to Gregory and Howard

(2009), "starts with funders' unrealistic expectations about how much running a nonprofit

costs, and results in nonprofits' misrepresenting their costs while skimping on vital

systems" (p. 49), which in turn feeds the skewed beliefs of funders. Funders' focus

should shift from costs to outcomes and defining successful achievement rather than

attempting to gauge efficiency by monitoring overhead (Gregory & Howard, 2009). This

idea is aligned with Pallotta's (2013) assertion that Americans' view of giving, charity,

and the nonprofit sector – specifically, that overhead is negative and separate from an organization's cause – undermines the causes we care about and our desire to change the world. Instead of recognizing charitable organizations for low administrative costs, Pallotta (2013) suggests rewarding them for big ideas and achievements.

Calls for increased accountability and transparency also have contributed to the pressure on nonprofit executives. This scrutiny is a result of increased public concern about the ethical underpinnings of the nonprofit sector, due in part to scandals and controversies that have received a great deal of media attention (Aviv, 2008; Golensky, 2011). As federal legislation, particularly the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (Cryer, 2008; Golensky, 2011), has led to changes in the requirements of business leaders with regard to accountability and oversight, federal officials and nonprofit sector leaders and scholars have focused on the issue of nonprofit sector transparency. Because executive directors of nonprofit organizations must relate with a broad array of internal and external constituents, these leaders are challenged to prioritize among competing demands for accountability. As a result, directors must decide both to whom and for what they owe accountability and focus particular attention on strategy-driven forms of accountability that can help them achieve their missions (Ebrahim, 2010).

Technological advances, another external force, have impacted nonprofit organizations in both positive and negative ways. New information technology has increased the capacity of nonprofit organizations to advocate; technological tools reduce expenses related to mobilizing constituents and connecting with policymakers (Salamon, 2010). Nonprofit organizations also have benefited from new technology with regard to raising funds via the Internet. For example, online charitable fundraising totals increased

by 21% in 2012 compared with 2011 totals, and the number of Internet donations received increased by 20% during the same period (Wallace, 2013). However, the capital requirements posed by rapid technological advances present a resource challenge for nonprofit organizations (Salamon, 2010). In addition, issues such as creative control and intellectual property rights in the arts have presented challenges as nonprofit organizations utilize new technologies (Salamon, 2010; Wyszomirski, 2002).

It is clear that a number of recent trends, including (a) requirements for evidence-based data to demonstrate a return on donor investment, (b) demand for transparency and performance metrics, (c) the economic recession, (d) a new social justice orientation and involvement in advocacy, (e) the aging of the Baby Boomer generation, and (f) the resulting need to develop a viable leadership and management pipeline, have impacted the nonprofit sector (Cornelius & Wolfred, 2011). As result, nonprofit organizational characteristics and leadership practices are adapting to the changing environment (Cornelius & Wolfred, 2011). The literature has shown the dynamic interaction of the first three factors of the SLT, leadership behaviors, organizational structure, and external factors, within nonprofit organizations. The fourth factor, attitudes, beliefs, and values, also is an integral and interactive component of nonprofit organization leadership.

Factor four: Attitudes, values, and beliefs. The fourth and final factor includes the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the leader and is the foundation of the guiding principles for the organization, the leader, and the workers in the organization (Schlosberg et al., 2010). While attitudes and values are more stable, beliefs may change as new information is processed (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002). Schlossberg et al. (2010) point out that the SLT model illustrates the dichotomous nature of attitudes,

beliefs, and values, as people would either adhere or not adhere to specific attitudes, beliefs, and values at a given point in time. For example, the leader may or may not be open to change; value character, ethics, and integrity; respect the need for professional growth; build trust and support among employees; and value diversity, as outlined in the SLT model (Leonard & Jones, 2009; Schlosberg, et al., 2010). In order to move the vision of the organization forward, 21st century leaders must understand their own attitudes, values, and beliefs, as well as those of the individuals they lead (Schlosberg et al., 2010). The leader must be mindful that lack of congruence between attitudes, values, and beliefs and the other factors of the SLT results in tension among the four factors that should be addressed (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002).

This incongruity is described by Belton (2011) in the context of a nonprofit organization:

A nonprofit may, on the surface, be making every effort to promote teamwork and 'the higher good,' but if its people continue to perceive a culture that supports a different and less reliable set of operating norms and assumptions than what is written or espoused, they will not bring themselves wholly to our efforts. (p. 67)

Indeed, scandals or controversies surrounding mismanagement of funds or abuse of power in nonprofit organizations affect public perceptions of the sector as a whole. The nonprofit sector economist Weisbrod (1988) observed: "Whenever any nonprofit is found to have abused its trusted position, the reputation of trustworthy nonprofits also suffers" (p. 13). This assertion of 25 years ago still holds true as nonprofit organizations are subject to intense media scrutiny (Jeavons, 2010).

The trust of donors, clients, and the larger public is critical to the ability of nonprofit sector organizations to fulfill their crucial societal roles. According to Jeavons (2010), nonprofit scholar and former executive director of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), "The lifeblood of the nonprofit sector is trust" (p. 203). To earn and retain the public's trust, a number of ethical qualities are essential in the character of public benefit nonprofits. Jeavons (2010) explained that nonprofit organizations "are expected to – and should – demonstrate integrity, openness, accountability, service, and a caring demeanor" (p. 187). Therefore, nonprofit leaders must model these ethical qualities in their own behavior, articulate and foster them as ideals for others, and give continuing attention to ensure that these values are reflected throughout their organizations (Jeavons, 2010).

Beyond modeling and encouraging ethical values and behavior, nonprofit leaders must create and maintain an organizational culture of integrity. In contributing to this culture, strategic managers must ensure that there is a framework to guide decision making and that the framework is discussed, evaluated, and modified according to operational conditions (Brown, 2010). Similarly, Jeavons (2010) explained that "organizational structures and processes and systems of rewards and disincentives must be put in place and consciously maintained" (p. 202) to reinforce the organization's core values. A culture of integrity that actively supports and reinforces the ethical values stated above will lead to consistently ethical behavior within nonprofit organizations (Jeavons, 2010). The current literature underscores the interactivity of the four factors of the SLT, connecting attitudes, beliefs, and values with the leader's behavior, external factors, and organizational structure.

Nonprofit Organization Effectiveness

As mentioned in the section on external factors, there has been an emergence of a

new genre of nonprofit organizations devoted to evaluating other nonprofits with regard

to their effectiveness and transparency. Charity Navigator (2013), promoted as

America's leading independent charity evaluator, "works to advance a more efficient and

responsive philanthropic marketplace by evaluating the financial health and

accountability and transparency of 6,000 of America's largest charities" (p. 1). However,

accountability and transparency are a means, rather than an end, according to Tyler

(2013), who stated "Transparency does not suffice as a legitimate end unto itself but is

always in service to some other valid goal" (p. 94). Tyler (2013) further explained that

"conversations about transparency should facilitate the ways philanthropy fulfills its

unique roles in our social, economic, and political systems rather than undermining its

performance" (p. 94). Clearly, transparency and accountability are critical factors in

enhancing public trust of nonprofit organizations, yet the issue of evaluating the

effectiveness and social impact of nonprofit organizations is much more complex.

Herman and Renz (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000) have written extensively about

nonprofit organizational effectiveness, seeking to encourage growth of the research on

effectiveness and advance the debate about nonprofit effectiveness, and to build the

nonprofit sector's capacity to achieve meaningful results. Based on their study of Kansas

City area nonprofit organizations from 1993-2000, Herman and Renz (2000) developed

nine theses on organizational effectiveness: (1) Nonprofit organizational effectiveness is

always a matter of comparison, (2) Nonprofit organizational effectiveness is

multidimensional, (3) Boards of directors make a difference in the effectiveness of

nonprofit organizations, but how they do so is not clear, (4) Nonprofit organizational effectiveness is a social construction, ultimately judged by the perceptions of stakeholders, (5) The more effective nonprofit organizations are more likely to use correct management practices, (6) Claims about "best practices" for nonprofit boards and for the management of nonprofit organizations warrant critical evaluation, (7) A measure of nonprofit organization effectiveness that emphasizes responsiveness may offer a solution to the problem of differing judgments of effectiveness by different stakeholder groups, (8) It can be important to distinguish among different "types" of nonprofit organizations in order to make progress in understanding the practices, tactics, and strategies that may lead to a nonprofit organization's effectiveness, and (9) Because nonprofit organizations increasingly operate as part of networks of service delivery, network effectiveness is becoming as important to study as organizational effectiveness (pp. 3-8).

Although organizational effectiveness is real, it cannot be reduced to a single indicator, and it is ultimately judged by the perceptions of stakeholders (Herman & Renz, 1999). Because effectiveness is a result of interaction among an organization's leaders, clients, and other stakeholders, more qualitative forms of evaluation that emphasize engagement of key stakeholders are more likely to result in achievement of mutually-valued results (Herman & Renz, 2000). Thus, defining the concept of nonprofit organization effectiveness and making it meaningful are continuing challenges in this era of heightened concern for organizational performance, results, and accountability. Following are descriptions of varying types of assessment measures and their use in the sector among a variety of nonprofit organizations.

Outcomes-based assessment. The assessment of organizational effectiveness is a challenging, ambiguous task; one size does not fit all organizations. One form of assessment focuses on the ends, or outcomes of organizational goals. For example, the United Way's evaluation system, outcome-based performance assessment, evaluates results of United Way member agencies. Implementation of this evaluation system occurs in six stages: (1) building agency commitment and clarifying expectations, (2) building agency capacity to measure outcomes, (3) identifying outcomes, indicators, and data collection methods, (4) collecting and analyzing outcome data, (5) improving the outcome measurement system, and (6) using and communicating outcome information (Murray, 2010). This intentional focus on the implementation process underscores the need for organizations to take time to get the system working well before turning attention to what the data say about what is taking place in the programs.

With a focus on outcomes, an organization's rationale for how its actions will ultimately lead to the achievement of its goals and mission is known as a theory of change (Hanna, 2010). The theory of change explains how the organization will achieve its intended impact, working alone or with other organizations. This explanation should be broad enough to show the scope of the organization's beliefs about how social change occurs, yet specific enough to enable decision makers to map programs and resources against it (Bradach, Tierney, & Stone, 2008). Having a focused, or linear, theory of change and a tightly focused operational strategy makes measuring results easier for an organization, whereas "in an environment where the theory of change is less well understood, organizational resources would be better used pursuing the mission and developing approximate measure to help it improve, rather than chasing hard proof or

impact" (Hanna, 2010, p. 3). Similarly, Sawhill and Williamson (2001) stated that a system of performance measures "is no substitute for a compelling mission, uplifting vision, clear goals, and innovative strategies" (p. 385), and encouraged nonprofit leaders to "ensure that they take care of first things first – and then worry about assessing programs" (p. 386). Thus, the challenges surrounding developing and measuring a theory of change involve questions of proving which specific elements created positive results and the determining where one organization's work begins and ends relative to the work of other organizations (Bradach et al., 2008).

Means-based assessment. Other forms of assessment focus on the means for achieving outcomes, or inputs and processes. Means-based assessment tools include The Balanced Scorecard, best practice benchmarking, and a number of performance checklists. The Balanced Scorecard, originally developed for business organizations and adapted for nonprofits, is a system for conceptualizing and measuring performance (Kaplan, 2001; Murray, 2010). This multi-attribute system encourages a balance of performance attributes grouped around four perspectives: (1) the financial perspective, (2) the customer perspective, (3) the internal business perspective, and (4) the innovation and learning perspective (Murray, 2010). Despite considerable use of the Balanced Scorecard in nonprofit organizations, there is little research with regard to its long-term value (Murray, 2010).

Benchmarking compares an organization's practices with those of other organizations doing similar work but who are deemed to be doing it very well. This system typically is applied to specific programs or functions rather than to the organization as a whole. Research has shown that despite considerable enthusiasm for

benchmarking, it was not actually frequently implemented, likely due to a number of challenges (Paton, 2003). Benchmarking may be time consuming and expensive; organizations also may have difficulty in finding similar, better-performing counterparts, and there is no way of knowing whether a specific practice is the reason that another organization is successful (Murray, 2010). Practices that work well for one organization may not fit with another organization's culture. Furthermore, in the field of nonprofit leadership, the concept of "best practices" has been replaced with "promising practices" or "next practices" (Andersson, 2012; Herman & Renz, 1998, 1999; Hudson, 2011).

Other means-based performance assessment tools include a number of checklists available on the Internet. Nonprofit leaders may find these organizational performance measurement tools useful in stimulating critical thinking about management practices (Murray, 2010). Examples of publicly-available tools include: (1) the United Way Management Indicators List, a behaviors-based tool including a suggested "best practices" standard, (2) the Drucker Five-Question Self-Assessment Tool, (3) the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits "Principles and Practices," a principles-based tool that suggests principles for effectiveness in many of the major functions in nonprofits, (4) the Maryland Association of Nonprofit Organizations "Standards of Excellence," a widely-recognized tool that also suggests principles for effectiveness, (5) Assessment for Start-Up Organizations, and (6) Fieldstone's Nonprofit Life-Stage Assessment, which includes descriptions of the various life cycles of nonprofits with best practices to address each stage (McNamara, 2013). Another tool gaining widespread acceptance and use is the Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice developed through the work of the Panel on the Nonprofit Sector convened by Independent Sector, a leader in helping

organizations maintain the highest standards of ethics and accountability (Independent

Sector, 2013).

  Panel on the Nonprofit Sector. Since its inception in 2004 at the encouragement

of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, the Panel on the Nonprofit Sector has been

committed to "formulating effective, broadly applicable methods of self-regulation"

(Panel on the Nonprofit Sector, 2007, p. 3). Formed by Independent Sector, the Panel is

an independent effort by charities and foundations "to ensure that the nonprofit

community remains a vibrant and healthy part of American society" (Panel on the

Nonprofit Sector, 2013, para. 1). The Panel is comprised of 24 nonprofit and

philanthropic leaders of organizations demonstrating diversity of location, mission,

perspective, and scope of work, and has received expert assistance from a series of

diverse groups in an effort to reflect the diversity of the sector. To improve the oversight

and governance of public charities and to ensure high standards of ethics and

accountability among individual nonprofit organizations, the Panel prepared a series of

recommendations to Congress and the nonprofit sector. The Panel's report *Strengthening*

Transparency, Governance, and Accountability of Charitable Organizations was issued

in June 2005 with a supplemental report in April 2006 (Panel on the Nonprofit Sector,

2013).

  Recognizing the need for standards of ethical practice for the entire range of

American charitable organizations, the Panel set forth the *Principles for Good*

Governance and Ethical Practice: A Guide for Charities and Foundations in 2007. The

Panel has operated from the belief that widespread use of a set of principles would enable

organizations to improve operations by learning from each other. The 33 principles,

intended to strengthen organizations' effectiveness and accountability, are organized under four main categories: (1) legal compliance and public disclosure, (2) effective governance, (3) strong financial oversight, and (4) responsible fundraising. The Panel suggests that organizational leaders conduct a thorough review of the application of these principles to their organization and develop a transparent process for communicating how the organization has addressed the principles (Independent Sector, 2013).

According to Independent Sector (2013), organizations that have applied the Principles for Good Governance and Effective Practice reported increased capacity to achieve their missions; these organizations reported improved governance, stronger organizational cultures and practices, and enhanced credibility with funders, individual donors, and community partners. As the nonprofit community continues to become aware of these Principles, institutions of varying sizes are using this tool to ensure high ethical standards within their respective organizations. For example, the Smithsonian Institution utilized the Principles for Good Governance and Effective Practice when retooling its board governance structure and operations (Hechinger, Bobowick, & Heard, 2008). Locally, the supporting organization Support Kansas City utilizes the Principles through board and strategy development services with its clients, Kansas City area 501(c)3 organizations.

Support Kansas City. Support Kansas City, a 501(c)3 organization, was established in 2001 by community leaders who recognized that many nonprofit organizations are challenged by the mutual demands of mission fulfillment and business efficiency (Support Kansas City, 2013). Support Kansas City provides professional and administrative services in the areas of accounting, board and strategy development,

database management, fundraising and special events, general administrative support, and marketing and public relations. Since 2010, Support Kansas City has presented the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award based on Independent Sector's Panel on the Nonprofit Sector's Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice. This award is presented annually to two organizations, one with an annual operating budget greater than $1 million and one with a budget less than $1 million. Recipients of the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award comprised the sample for the current study.

The current study helped to fill gaps in the literature to date by providing a deeper understanding of how executives effectively lead nonprofit human service organizations. Leadership of nonprofit organizations had not been empirically examined through the lens of SLT. By examining how executive directors addressed external forces, operated within their organizational structure, and aligned leadership behaviors with their attitudes, values, and beliefs, this study illustrated how these leaders - human beings faced with extraordinary challenges - produced exemplary results. By applying SLT in this new context, the nonprofit human service organization, the current study also contributed an expanded understanding of both the theory and practice of nonprofit leadership.

Summary

This focused review of literature took into consideration the work that has already been done to advance understanding of the SLT and effective nonprofit leadership. A description of the SLT and an examination of previous studies that utilized SLT were presented, and the four factors of the theory were described and further explored in the context of nonprofit organizations through a review of recent literature in the field of nonprofit management and leadership. Recent efforts to assess and improve nonprofit

organizational effectiveness also were described, with an emphasis on means-based

assessment and the Panel on the Nonprofit Sector's Principles for Good Governance and

Ethical Practice. This review of existing literature further supported the need for the

current study. The next chapter focuses on the research methods for the current study.

Chapter Three

Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of the four factors of Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT) to the experiences of executive directors leading exemplary nonprofit human service organizations. The study was conducted to examine the directors' experiences as they related to leadership behaviors, organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs. This chapter describes the research design, the study population and sample, and the sampling procedures used in this study. The instrumentation, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis also are described in this chapter. The role of the researcher and limitations of the study are provided in an effort to preclude misinterpretation of the findings.

Research Design

Employing a social constructivist worldview, a qualitative approach was selected as the most appropriate research design to address the purpose of the study and the research questions. Creswell (2009) explains that constructivist researchers address "processes of interaction among individuals…and focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work" (p. 8) with the intent of interpreting the meanings others have about the world. While quantitative methods may determine the existence of potential causal relationships, qualitative research has greater power to explain why these relationships may exist, to see what issues are about, and to explore how issues are understood by people connected to them (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Qualitative inquiry "emphasizes understanding by closely examining people's words, actions, and records" (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 89) and examines the themes and patterns of meaning that

emerge from the data. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research design involves multiple data sources, such as interviews, observations, and documents. Multiple forms of data and multiple perspectives were used in the current study in order to sketch the larger picture that emerged. This holistic approach was a natural fit with the researcher's desire to better understand effective leadership processes in nonprofit human service organizations through visiting the setting, gathering information personally, and viewing this context through the lens of SLT.

Since leadership of nonprofit organizations had not been empirically examined through the lens of SLT, the qualitative methodology of phenomenology was selected for the purpose of understanding the phenomena of excellence in nonprofit leadership. In this strategy of inquiry, the researcher seeks to understand the lived experiences of participants and recognize phenomena through the eyes of participants with deep and rich descriptions of phenomena gathered through a number of inductive methods (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) further explained that case studies are specific, in-depth explorations of processes, programs, activities, events, or people. Case study explorations may utilize data such as basic demographic information, organizational history, document analyses, and interview data. Collective case studies, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), are studied jointly in order "to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition" (p. 123). Understanding these cases may lead to deeper understanding of a larger group of cases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The phenomenological case study design, combining the case study and phenomenology provided the opportunity to examine nonprofit organization executive directors' experiences as they related to the four factors of SLT.

Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of the leaders of the eight nonprofit human service organizations in the Kansas City area that were awarded the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award presented by Support Kansas City during 2010-2013. A phenomenological study is conducted with participants who have experienced the phenomena being explored and who can articulate their lived experiences (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Since this study examined effective leadership of nonprofit organizations, the sample for this study was comprised of four of the eight nonprofit human service organizations that were selected for the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award.

Sampling Procedures

Four of the eight organizations in the sample were purposefully selected to participate in the case study based on budget size, United Way partner agency status, and executive director tenure. This study included the executive director, the board chairperson, and a development staff member from each participant organization, ensuring that a variety of perspectives on organizational leadership were collected. The following sections provide a description of the organization and participants for each of the case studies.

Organization A. The mission of Organization A is to improve life for those who lose sight. The organization was founded as an association in 1911 and incorporated in 1916 under a new name. In 1993, the association again revised its name. Following a successful capital campaign, the organization moved in 2002 to its current campus, which offers rehabilitation, vocational education, employment, and support services to more than 60,000 blind and visually impaired Kansas City residents. More than half of the

organization's workforce is comprised of blind and disabled adults (Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, 2014).

Executive director description. Organization A's president and CEO holds an MBA and a Bachelor of Science degree in political science. This executive director has extensive experience in marketing, sales, and operations management in nonprofit organizations focused on expanding employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The director joined Organization A in 2006 as Chief Operating Officer and became CEO in 2007.

Board chairperson description. Board Chair A is a community volunteer who has served as chairperson at Organization A since 2007. This chairperson holds an MBA and has more than 30 years of sales, marketing, and project management experience in corporate, government, and nonprofit settings in the U.S. and abroad.

Development staff member description. Organization A's director of development and public relations joined the organization in 2008 and has nearly 20 years of experience in nonprofit management and community development. Development Director A holds a Bachelor of Science degree in social work.

Organization B. The mission of Organization B is to break the cycle of domestic violence so that individuals, families, and youth can live free of abuse. The organization was founded in 1978 when a group of volunteers who were concerned about the abuse of women in the Kansas City opened a 24-hour crisis hotline. In 1979, the organization's first 19-bed emergency shelter opened. Organization B currently occupies a campus with an emergency shelter, outreach services, children's programming, administrative

services, and the region's only on-site pet shelter for residents with pets (Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, 2014).

Executive director description. Executive Director B assumed leadership of the organization in 1996, bringing professional experience in both social services and business. This executive director earned a Master of Social Work degree and has assumed numerous community leadership roles, including serving as past president and board member of the Missouri Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Vice Chair of Goodwill Industries, and a member of the Leadership Team of Safe Family Coalition.

Board chairperson description. Organization B's board chair for 2013-2014 is a partner in a global network of firms providing audit, tax, and advisory services with offices in Kansas City. This board chair is a CPA with more than 30 years of experience in the financial services industry and has served on a number of nonprofit boards in the Kansas City area.

Development staff member description. Organization B's Chief Development Officer joined the organization in November 2011. This development director earned a Bachelor's degree in social work. Prior to joining this organization, Development Director B held numerous nonprofit leadership positions with other organizations, including two domestic violence shelters.

Organization C. The mission of Organization C is to break the cycle of domestic violence and partner abuse for victims and their children by providing shelter, advocacy, counseling, and prevention education in the community. The organization began in 1979 as a group that established a network of safe homes. In 1984, the organization opened a

15-bed shelter that was full the first night. In 1987, the shelter was re-named and was expanded to accommodate 29 residents (Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, 2014). Current services include emergency shelter, children's programs, transitional living program, community education and prevention programs, clinical counseling, and economic empowerment programs (Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, 2014).

Executive director description. Executive Director C began working with Organization C as a part-time grant writer in 1997, becoming associate director in 2004 and executive director in 2012. This director earned a Master of Social Work degree. Prior to joining this organization, Executive Director C worked in direct client service with people who were homeless and was an instructor for the KU School of Social Welfare.

Board chairperson description. Board Chair C is a retired human resources executive with more than 36 years of experience directing human resources for large corporations. In addition to leading the board of Organization C, this chair has served on a number of nonprofit boards and is actively involved in the Kansas City community.

Development staff member description. Organization C's director of development began in February 2011, having previously served in development roles with other human service organizations and 10 years as CEO of another nonprofit organization. Development Director C holds a Master of Divinity and a Bachelor of Arts degree in theatre and philosophy.

Organization D. The mission of Organization D is to empower people living in low-income housing communities with the on-site support they need to gain stability and achieve self-sufficiency. In 1988, the organization began offering services at three

affordable housing communities. Since then, the organization has expanded its services

to 30 housing communities, serving more than 4,500 children, adults, and seniors living

in Missouri and Kansas through youth development, senior empowerment, and family

support programming (Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, 2014).

  Executive director description. Executive Director D has served as the executive

director since Organization D's inception in 1988. This director earned Master of Social

Work and law degrees, and holds a number of community leadership positions.

Executive Director D also serves as a field instructor for three area schools of social

work.

  Board chairperson description. Board Chair D is President at a large, privately

owned insurance brokerage firm. In addition to serving as Organization D's board chair,

he has held volunteer leadership roles with a number of other organizations, including

Junior Achievement, the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, and United Way.

  Development staff member description. Development Director D has served in

this role at Organization D since 2006. She earned a Master of Public Administration

degree and holds the Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE) designation. Prior to

joining Organization D, she held development positions with Big Brothers Big Sisters

and Water.org, and served in the Peace Corps.

Instrumentation

  The researcher is the "key instrument" for data collection in qualitative research

(Creswell, 2009, p. 175). Data was collected via semi-structured, open-ended interviews,

the Organizational Leadership and Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI), and existing data.

The existing data included mission and vision statements, annual reports and copies of

each organization's IRS Form 990, and organizational profiles submitted to the Greater

Kansas City Community Foundation and Guidestar.

Interview instrumentation. The primary source of data used in the study was

semi-structured, open-ended interviews. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative

interviews involve "generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended

to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (p. 181). In semi-structured

interviews, some questions are developed in advance while follow-up questions are

developed by the interviewer based on participant responses as the interview progresses

(Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). For this study, interviews were conducted with the executive

director, board chairperson, and a development staff member from each participating

organization.

The semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were modeled after

questions utilized in previous studies of school superintendents and principals (Bamberg,

2004; Kaspar, 2006; Schlosberg et al., 2010; Trautman, 2000) and were rephrased for this

study's participants. Interview questions were based upon the four factors of the SLT,

with questions designed to allow other participants the opportunity to reflect on the

executive directors' leadership behaviors and how they related to the SLT. Nine

interviews were conducted on site at the organization or at a mutually agreed upon place

and in person with each of the participants; three interviews were conducted by telephone

and email with participants who were unable to meet in person. Participants received the

basic interview questions with additional information about the study in advance of the

scheduled interview. The interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Measurement. The use of semi-structured, open-ended interviews with questions based upon the four factors of the SLT enabled the researcher to gather information related to each of the four research questions in the study. Questions were designed to provide the opportunity for each participant to reflect on the executive director's behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and values and how these related to the SLT. The interviews provided the best means by which to elicit views and opinions from participants and to enable the researcher to better understand the phenomena of nonprofit leadership.

Validity and reliability. Validity in qualitative research involves establishing credibility, whether the findings are believable, and determining transferability, whether the findings apply to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research utilizes multiple methods, or triangulation, in an attempt to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and to ensure that the study is robust, valid, and reliable (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Data triangulation involves the use of a variety of sources or subjects in a study to build justification for themes (Creswell, 2009). Data triangulation was demonstrated in the current study through interviews with multiple stakeholders in nonprofit organizations to obtain their views on leadership. Interviews with the executive directors, board chairpersons, and development staff members contributed to effective triangulation of interview data. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), interviews and archival data constitute valid sources of data collection. In addition to interviews, the current study utilized data from the OLEI and from analysis of existing documents. This triangulation method is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Method of Data Triangulation
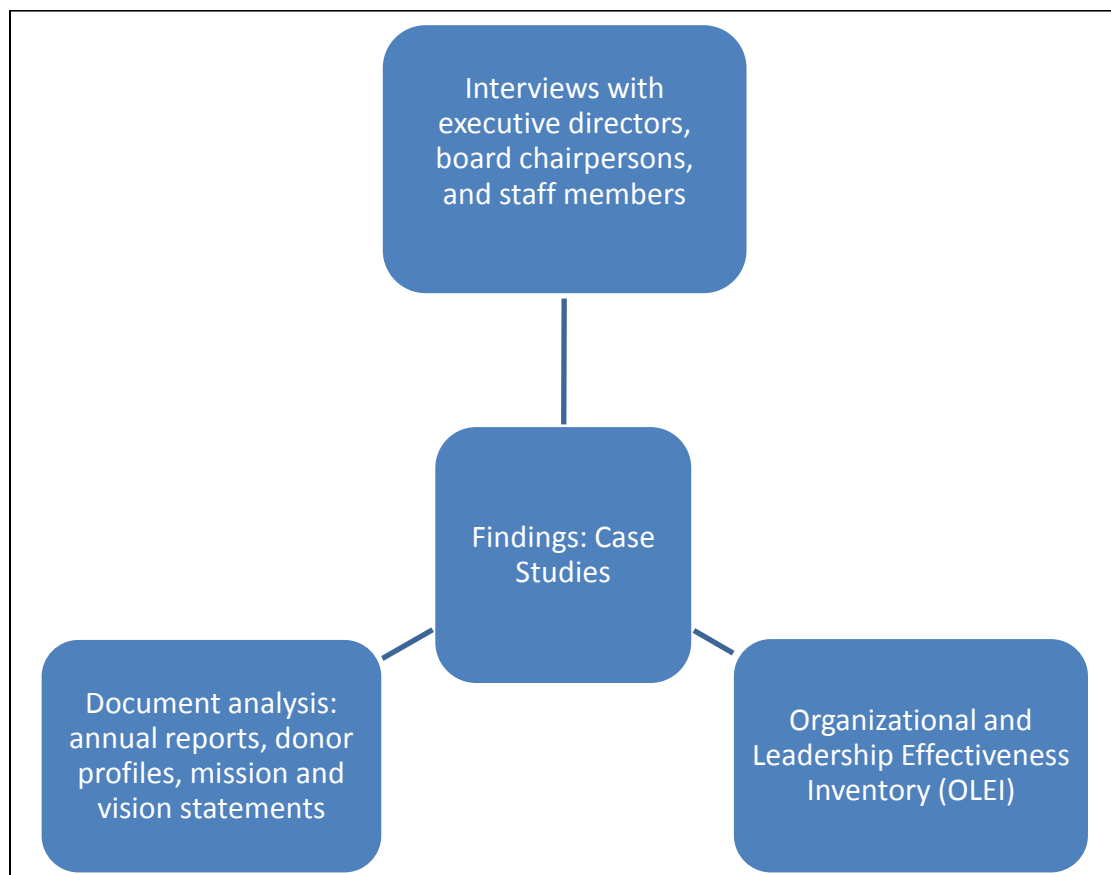
Figure 1. Triangulation method of current study.

Another strategy to establish validity is to use rich detail in describing the setting, participants, and themes of a qualitative study. This writing process, known as "rich, thick description" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191), may involve providing detailed descriptions of the settings; describing interactions, experiences, or actions; or describing multiple perspectives about a theme. This study utilized rich, thick description as it presented the factors and complexities of nonprofit human service organization leadership.

Validity also is established through a process known as peer review or debriefing. Creswell (2009) describes a peer review or debriefing as the review of the data and research process by another person. This study involved a peer reviewer who was a

nonprofit leadership scholar, university faculty member, and former nonprofit executive director. The peer reviewer, who was familiar with the phenomenon being explored, examined the interview transcripts and researcher codes, asked questions, and suggested further exploration or examination of particular statements.

In qualitative research, examining trustworthiness is critical to ensuring reliability (Seale, 1999). Creswell (2009) asserted that even with thoughtful attention and effort to the ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher brings bias to the study, and that good qualitative research "contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin" (p. 192). Personal reflectivity, or self-disclosure of the researcher's assumptions, beliefs, and biases, is a common procedure to improve credibility and trustworthiness (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The researcher's perspective in this study is acknowledged and described to allow readers to understand the researcher's positions, and then to shelve those preconceived notions as the study progressed.

OLEI instrumentation. An additional instrument used in the study was the Organizational and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI), a survey instrument developed by Irby, Brown, and Duffy (2000). This inventory was utilized as a qualitative instrument to supplement data collected from the interviews and to validate the four factors of the SLT. As with the interview questions, some statements on the OLEI were altered slightly to remove education-specific language and better address the work of nonprofit organization leaders. The OLEI instrument can be found in Appendix C.

Measurement. As a follow-up to the interviews, the OLEI was used to provide additional data by validating the four factors of the SLT. The OLEI contains five sections in which participants indicate their agreement or disagreement with various statements about leadership and organizations on a Likert-type scale of one to four for each statement; a rating of one indicates strong disagreement and a rating of four indicates strong agreement (Hernandez, 2004; Holtkamp, 2001; Kaspar, 2006; Trautman, 2000). The OLEI's four subscales mirror the four factors of the SLT and address (a) leadership behavior, (b) organizational structure, (c) external factors, and (d) attitudes, beliefs, and values. This instrument was selected for use in this study because it was designed specifically to support the SLT. Data collected via this instrument was used to supplement the interview response data and contributed to a richer understanding of the leadership of effective nonprofit organizations.

Validity and reliability. The OLEI was validated through research across geographic areas and ethnic cultures in the U.S. (Bamberg, 2004; Hernandez, 2004; Holtkamp, 2001; Holtkamp et al., 2007; Kaspar, 2006; Trautman, 2000; Truslow, 2004) and internationally (Schlosberg, 2003; Schlosberg et al., 2010). These researchers utilized the OLEI to measure perceptions of the four factors of the SLT by female and male leaders at different levels of management. Holtkamp's (2001) validation study found that (1) OLEI data aligned with the four constructs of the SLT, (2) the OLEI may be used in conjunction with the SLT to assess organizational strengths and weaknesses and to assess leaders within the organization, and (3) scores on the OLEI were independent of gender, ethnicity, management level, and years of experience, suggesting that the SLT is inclusive of gender, ethnicity, management level, and years of experience.

Reliability refers to the degree to which an instrument consistently measures what it is intended to measure (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Reliability of scores of the OLEI and the revised OLEI were confirmed through quantitative studies conducted by Trautman (2000), Holtkamp (2001), and Hernandez (2006). Using Cronbach's reliability analysis, Trautman's (2000) study yielded $\alpha = .928$ and Holtkamp's (2001) study yielded $\alpha = .9045$ for internal consistency. Hernandez (2004) utilized Cronbach's alpha of a revised OLEI, which yielded $\alpha = .9369$ for the entire instrument, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Researcher perspective. As a director of an undergraduate nonprofit leadership studies degree program, the researcher wanted to learn how executives effectively lead nonprofit human service organizations. The development of this study was driven by personal and professional interest in examining how exemplary organizations are structured and organized; the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the executive and those working with the executive; the leadership behaviors the executive identifies as essential to achieving excellence; and how the leader works through the challenges created by external forces. The researcher pursued this information in order to convey promising practices to students and fellow faculty members, and hopes that this learning will have a positive multiplier effect on future generations of leaders and the organizations and communities they serve. Additionally, by interviewing and observing exemplary leaders in action through the lens of a gender-inclusive leadership theory, the researcher sought to enhance her own understanding of the leadership process and thus apply this learning to strengthen her own leadership skills and behaviors.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to collecting data, the researcher submitted a proposal for research and obtained permission for the study from the Baker University Institutional Review Board (see Appendices H and I). In preparation for data collection, the researcher met with the executive director of Support Kansas City to discuss the award criteria and the nomination and selection processes for the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award program. The researcher then contacted potential participants via email and invited them to take part in the study (see Appendix D). Once the approval was granted to conduct the research with each organization, interviews were scheduled and conducted at the nonprofit organization offices. Participants were presented with a consent form that described the purpose of the study and how confidentiality would be handled (see Appendix E).

Individual interviews are likely the most widely used method in qualitative research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Since the researcher sought to learn from participants and gather as much data as possible for detailed accounts (Creswell, 2009), specific protocols were proposed for gathering and recording information via interviews. This study used a formal interview approach that was semi-structured with guiding questions (see Appendix B). Twelve individual interviews were the first method of data collection in this study. The researcher visited each organization one or more times to conduct individual interviews. Organizational profile data obtained from the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation and Guidestar were reviewed prior to the site visits. Additional information gathered through observations and document reviews was collected through on-site visits. Collection of this data was unobtrusive and enabled the researcher to

obtain the thoughtful language and words of participants (Creswell, 2009). Interviews

were audio-recorded by the researcher, so that the researcher could devote full attention

to listening to the interviewee and in-depth questioning (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The

audio recordings provided verbatim records of the interviews, which was critical for the

data analysis process. The researcher also made handwritten notes to record observations

and to ensure data collection in the event that the audio recording equipment failed

(Creswell, 2009).

Upon conclusion of the face-to-face interviews, the executive directors were

asked to complete an online version of the Organizational and Leadership Effectiveness

Inventory (OLEI) based on their own leadership behaviors, attitudes, values, and beliefs.

The board chairpersons and development staff members also were asked to complete the

inventory. Following the interviews, thank-you messages were sent to all participants

(see Appendix F). Participants then received an invitation and follow-up reminder to

submit their online inventory responses (see Appendix G).

Data Analysis

The analysis of phenomenological data involves disaggregating the data collected

by the researcher, condensing the information to significant statements, and merging

these statements into themes (Creswell, 2009). Moustakas (1994) suggested that data are

gathered and organized by the researcher into a succession or essence description that

tells the story of participants. This analysis, according to Creswell (2009), moves from

particular to general levels of abstraction.

To begin the data analysis process, the researcher organized the data into audio

files and converted the data to text files by transcribing the audio recordings of interviews

to written transcripts to be analyzed. These transcripts were reviewed by the researcher to ensure accuracy of the translation. Next, the researcher read the interview transcripts thoroughly and broke them into parts, highlighting statements that provided an understanding of effective nonprofit leadership. Themes and key ideas were noted as the data were analyzed, as suggested by Creswell (2009).

The researcher described, classified, and interpreted the interview data (Creswell, 2009), grouping significant statements into themes or units of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). During this phase, the researcher developed codes or categories and sorted text into these categories (Creswell, 2009) with the intention of eventually reducing and combining categories into general themes. Creswell (2009) explained that code labels can emerge from the literature, from words used by participants, or from names created by the researcher to best describe the information. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested looking for specialized or vivid vocabulary, frequently repeated nouns or noun phrases, and customization of common words to recognize concepts for coding. After categorizing and analyzing the data using this method, the researcher organized the data and presented findings in text, table, and figure forms in ways that a reader could understand (Creswell, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interview excerpts were included as a means of presenting the data in a fresh and realistic way while drawing the reader along to the conclusions of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

OLEI responses also were analyzed as qualitative data and were compared to the interview transcripts to determine alignment of inventory responses to the interview data. The OLEI responses of the executive directors were compared with responses of board chairpersons and development staff members to identify similarities and discrepancies

between responses of the executive director and other participants. Participant responses were listed in a table to illustrate the alignment or lack of alignment for each inventory item, and alignments were checked for accuracy by a second reviewer.

Limitations

Rather than generalizing to others, phenomenological research focuses on increasing understanding through a rich, local description of experiences (Creswell, 2009). The findings of this study are limited to case studies of four nonprofit human service organizations, and may not be generalized to other nonprofit human service organizations, other nonprofit subsectors, or the nonprofit sector as a whole. In addition, this study includes findings from one metropolitan area; therefore, results may not be generalized to other geographic locations.

The study was further limited in that it included primarily the perspectives of female executive directors; seven of the eight organizations recognized for the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award were led by a female executive director. The literature shows that although women outnumber men two to one overall among nonprofit executives, women are more likely to serve as executives at nonprofits with annual budgets less than $10 million (Bell, Moyers, & Wolfred, 2006). Because the organizations participating in this study with budgets less than $10 million were led by women, the executives in this study are representative of other organizations of similar size. The male perspective was included in the study through the voice of one executive director and other participants, including board chairpersons and staff members.

Summary

Utilizing a phenomenological case study approach, an attempt was made to view the experiences of nonprofit human service organization leaders through the lens of Synergistic Leadership Theory by interviewing executive directors, board chairpersons, and development staff members. Purposeful sampling resulted in four participating organizations, for a total of 12 participant interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Participants also completed the Organizational Leadership and Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI). In addition to data triangulation, the researcher employed thick descriptions and peer review to enhance the validity of this study's data. The data analysis process involved coding and constant comparison. The results of the data analysis and findings are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Results

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of the study. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of the four factors of Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT) to the experiences of executive directors leading exemplary nonprofit human service organizations. The experiences of four executive directors and their respective board chairpersons and chief development officers were studied through interview sessions and participant responses to the Organizational and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI) during the fall of 2013. In this chapter, themes that emerged from participant responses are described and connected with the research questions for the study. Each of the four research questions is addressed through excerpts from participant interviews, findings from the OLEI, and data gathered from existing documents.

Factor One: Leadership Behavior

Within the SLT, leadership behaviors are defined as "daily professional actions exhibited by an administrator" (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013, p. 985). In the SLT, it is the "specific behaviors or actions of the leader in relation to other factors rather than *style* that result in perceived success of failure of leaders and/or the organization" (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013, p. 985). For the current study, the first research question was: What are the leadership behaviors of the executive directors of exemplary nonprofit human service organizations? Seven themes related to leadership behavior emerged from participant responses and organizational publications: (1) Executive directors embody the mission of their organization, demonstrating passion through hard work; (2) Executive

directors practice visioning and focus on strategic priorities with intention; (3) Executive directors build capacity for their organizations; (4) Executive directors build and support strong teams; (5) Executive directors practice open communication; (6) Executive directors collaborate; and (7) Executive directors regularly reflect and continually learn.

Theme one: Executive directors embody the mission of their organization, demonstrating passion through hard work. Each staff member and board member interviewed emphasized that their respective executive director led by example. Development Director C shared, "I can never complain about working hard, because our executive director is working harder. She is unstoppable…she's really pretty amazing." Development Director D also lauded her executive director's program involvement:

> She never shies away from hard questions and hard work. She's there on the
>
> ground with every one of us. She maintains connections to our residents and
>
> builds relationships. She still supervises two program sites and regularly attends
>
> events, which is a visual reminder of why we're all here.

Board Chair B explained that Executive Director B also "leads by example. She never asks anyone to do anything that she wouldn't do herself." Fundraising efforts clearly fall into this category, as Executive Director B stated that "for nonprofits, fundraising is a critical component. Therefore, I'm very active in fundraising, keeping an eye on expenses, running a tight ship and keeping a can-do attitude." With regard to her role in a recent capital campaign through which $9.5 million was raised for a new facility, Executive Director B shared that the leader's "personal energy and commitment make things happen. If you believe in it, others will, too – it's contagious. Good problem solving makes more good things happen."

The work ethic demonstrated by each of the participating executive directors is inspired by their passion to excel and to achieve the mission of their organizations. On the OLEI, all four executive directors agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the behavior "leads by example" reflected their leadership style; of board and staff respondents, 100% strongly agreed with the statement regarding their executive director's leadership style. All respondents in both categories also agreed or strongly agreed that the behaviors "dependable," "high energy," and "persistent" reflected the executive director's leadership style.

Theme two: Executive directors practice visioning and focus on strategic priorities with intention. Behaviors of the four executive directors as described by themselves and their colleagues included aggressive goal-setting, keeping high expectations, and taking proactive approaches. Executive Director A described his organization's practices:

> We systematize our goals and stay focused on the goal. We wrote a strategic plan and stuck to it. We go back to it frequently, revisiting [it] every two months to review performance against goals. For all of my people, a lot of our goals are metric-based, not subjective; they're very clear. They know what the goal is, so it's not confusing, it's clear.

Development Director A concurred, stating:

> Our CEO is pretty aggressive, is very business-minded, looking at opportunities, how do we grow? We don't want to stay stagnant; we want to excel, and sometimes it might seem like pressure, but yeah, we pressure ourselves and our departments. We utilize a business-type scorecard in each area, and we're

engaged in constant self-evaluation, so everything in my area, I'm evaluating it, sometimes on a daily basis. We use a dashboard as well, where at any time we can say this is good, bad, et cetera. We're still small enough and intimate enough that we can be reactive and flexible at the same time. I think we've taken a lot of things from very successful businesses and implemented them here.

The use of dashboards also was mentioned by Executive Director C, who encourages staff leaders to examine program outcomes at weekly leadership team meetings. In relationship to the larger agency, the executive director charges each team leader to present dashboards of programs with outputs and outcomes, and to ask "What's really going on?" These dashboards also are reviewed at monthly staff meetings and with the board. The executive director shared, "Dashboards help the board better understand programs and concerns such as the waiting list for clients."

These organizations are not alone in their strategic orientation. Executive Director B stated: "[Our organization] is committed to a strategic, goal-oriented management approach. All decisions affecting programs and operations are tied to the organization's strategic plan, which is reviewed by the board of directors on a quarterly basis." Similarly, Executive Director D described an emphasis on strategic planning and outcome measurement, particularly during challenging periods of growth:

We continue to focus on measuring our delivery model and practices against industry standards. Continuing to measure ourselves against industry standards and focusing on outcome measurements will increase our ability to meet the needs of our residents and help them meet evolving challenges.

With regard to strategic planning, Development Director D described a shift in staff

perspective from responsive or reactive to a proactive stance, with more focus on the big

picture: "We now embrace the strategic plan, whereas four years ago, we as staff spent

time disagreeing with it. The goals are set by the board, and then the staff can figure out

how to get there."

Being intentional about achieving strategic priorities was a common descriptor of

executive director leadership behavior. Board Chair B described the executive director's

behaviors:

> I like the way she approaches things. She is thoughtful. She thinks about things
>
> in advance, anticipating and avoiding problems where she can. She's very
>
> determined and I think she has definite ideas about where she'd like to end up.

Similarly, Development Director C shared that the executive director "is mindful of time.

She is very intentional in her focus on key elements and has a keen sense of picking out

the priority rather than getting sidetracked by the clutter." Board Chair C concurred,

describing the executive director as "thoughtful. She doesn't do anything on the fly. She

has great follow-through and pays attention to detail. As a result, there is a sense of trust

that our time is well spent and the work done is meaningful."

OLEI responses supported participants' replies to interview questions with regard

to this theme. All executive directors agreed that "communicates vision" and

"achievement oriented" reflected their personal leadership styles; of board and staff

respondents, 100% agreed that these behaviors reflected their respective executive

director's leadership as well. Three of the four executive directors agreed that they were

"task oriented," while 83% of board and staff respondents agreed that this behavior was

reflected.   In addition, the four executive directors agreed that "analyzes situations"

described their leadership behavior, while 83% of board and staff respondents agreed.

Theme three: Executive directors build capacity for their organizations.

Participants spoke to the importance of the executive director's role in building capacity

and described observed behaviors and examples of results. Increasing capacity was an

important priority for executive directors, and having done so gave them a sense of

achievement. Executive Director D stated:

> Since we began operations, we have made huge strides forward in our
>
> organizational capacity. This past year, we completed a board redevelopment
>
> process, strategic plan, and continued to increase our funding diversity. We also
>
> launched a new program with the support of local funders.

> Representatives of Organizations B and C discussed recent capital campaigns to

increase their capacity to serve the community. Regarding the executive director's

approach, Development Director B explained "We've had four capital campaigns in 12

years. Who does that? Our executive director does that because there's a need and we're

going to do it…it's going to be done." The organization's most recent campaign resulted

in the construction of an additional wing to meet a 300% increase in demand for services.

Organization C was engaged in a capital campaign at the time of this writing; per the

organization's strategic plan goals focused on expansion, a campaign was launched to

fund a new building and program priority areas. In addition to expanding physical capital

for the organization, Executive Director C expressed pride in the work done to ensure the

organization's fiscal stability:

In spite of the economic challenges of recent years, we continue to operate in a fiscally sound manner. Our Board of Directors and management team have worked hard to strategically allocate resources, expanding needed programs and maintaining a strong financial foundation.

Organization A, historically supported in large part by federal government contracts, employed a markedly different model to build capacity in anticipation of federal market changes: seeking more commercial business and pursuing new business development acquisitions to support its core mission. Executive Director A explained that "new alliances with companies outside of our traditional government based marketplace are first steps to more effective solutions." The executive director provided additional background:

> The federal sequestration this year has caused us to lose some traction. One the one hand, top line revenue is down. At the same time, there is a combination of things we put into effect two and a half years ago - diversifying our customer base, seeking more commercial business, and pursuing new business development acquisitions – all done with the understanding that the federal market was going to change. Wars end, budgets get trimmed, governments retrench, and austerity measures get put in place. We saw it in Europe. When that happens in my business, sales drop off and people lose work. So we needed to grow that pie in order to stem what we knew was going to be a tide that was going to roll against us at some point in time. The acquisitions were done with the intent of trying to grow business but also to hedge against what we thought was going to be happening and it did.

These diversification efforts were undertaken with board support, as described by Board Chair A:

> Just like in any business, diversification and the decision to go commercial are about survival. It's all so we can keep this organization going and hire more people in the future. In leading these efforts, the executive director has kept the organization going and growing.

A positive result of these capacity building efforts, according to Executive Director A, is that more clients are employed than ever before. These clients are employed in seven different locations, and more of them are working in white collar jobs than at any other time in the organization's history.

Participants from each organization also included an appreciation for innovation and risk as an important characteristic of leader behavior that helped to build organizational capacity. Of the decision to acquire commercial businesses, Executive Director A recalled:

> I was very proud of the Board for being willing to take a risk. A nonprofit organization going out and doing acquisitions of for-profit businesses, making them a division of the business was a big leap of faith. The Board had to have confidence that we could integrate those businesses, confidence in management that we could negotiate a good deal, run the equipment, and realize a return on investment. That's a pretty tall set of expectations, and they had faith in us.

Executive Director B shared that she appreciates and celebrates creative staff ideas, supporting staff members and finding resources to make their ideas, such as the development of theory based on their professional practice, come to fruition. She shared:

I really believe in the people we've hired, that they are smart, problem-solving

people, so giving everyone the opportunity and latitude and ability to make

decisions. I'm not a micro-manager…micromanaging squashes creativity.

Letting the staff have opportunities to make decisions, that has really helped

change and drive our organization…all the great ideas have come from the staff.

For example, five of our staff leaders recently presented at the international

conference – more than any other organization in the world. We are *innovative.*

Similarly, Executive Director C explained "I'm proud of our staff because they've

stepped up and have been innovative and inventive in meeting the needs of increased

lethal situations." Likewise, Executive Director D attributed the success of her

organization to "the fact that we are willing to try new things that are new and innovative

and we think outside the box." She further explained:

We are creative in our program design and challenge staff to try new programs

that may have never been done before. It is ever evolving and growing and that

keeps things moving, along with the fact that we are constantly developing new

relationships with program partners.

OLEI responses again corresponded with the comments and examples shared

during the interviews. For example, when asked to what extent they agreed that the

behaviors "can-do philosophy," "decision maker," "transformational," and "receptive to

new ideas/change" reflected the executive director's leadership style, 100% of both

executive director and board and staff respondents agreed or strongly agreed. With

regard to the behavior "risk taker," the four executive directors agreed, while 83% of

board and staff respondents agreed.

Theme four: Executive directors build and support strong teams. Each of the four executive director participants emphasized the significance of competent staff members, with two of the four directors stressing the importance of making good hires. Executive Director A described following former presidential candidate Ross Perot's advice to "hire bright people and get out of their way," further explaining, "I don't know that I always get out of everybody's way, but I do hire people who are smarter than me in their area of expertise. We have very smart people here." Development Director A agreed:

> Our organization's administrative costs are pretty high compared to other nonprofits because he looks for the best. He'll do a national search for a director position because he wants the best people in place. The majority of our directors came from Fortune 500 companies because he's looking at those skillsets.

Executive Director B shared a similar philosophy: "It's important to surround yourself with people who are better, smarter than you, and to develop a synergistic team."

Three of four executive directors focused on nurturing and developing staff members as a critical component of their role. For Executive Director B, with regard to staff members, the question "How can I support them?" is the driving force for her work. Because the organization deals with trauma every day, there is a constant stress on staff. Recognizing the impact of this stress on employee morale, Executive Director B implemented a trauma stewardship practice. She explained, "It's important to fully engage staff in their own wellness and health. Figuring out their emotional needs becomes part of their individual development plan. We've infused this into our ongoing

policies and practices." Appreciating the executive director's approach, Development Director B elaborated:

> She has a really healthy balance between high expectations, high workloads, and high productivity with getting out of here and making sure you take care of yourself. We have really incredible benefits and our vacation time is very generous, and you can earn time off through our wellness program. That helps us keep everything in check.

In addition, staff members realize that their hard work is appreciated. Development Director B said that the executive director "communicates gratitude well for everyone here, in many ways, through emails, staff meetings, cards, cakes, and personalized messages…never a form letter."

Representatives of Organization C also expressed that staff members are appreciated and honored. Development Director C stated, "We have great employee retention. People feel valued, so they stay. Our executive director ensures staff satisfaction by genuinely appreciating staff; rather than hosting farewell parties, she celebrates employee anniversaries." To further acknowledge staff contributions and provide a means for employees to move up within the agency, Executive Director C made recommendations to the personnel committee for new leveled positions such as Advocate I, II, and III. As a result, according to Board Chair C, "Staff members feel acknowledgement and show respect for each other. I am impressed with the way the staff treat each other. Problems are handled in a professional and kind way. Staff members listen and respond with trust."

Development Director D explained that her executive director "encourages us to 'remind yourself why you do what you do' by touching base with your passion" and that she "pushes you to be the best that you can be." The executive director's support of the individual's growth was not limited to that which directly benefited the agency; for example, Board Chair D described a former staff member whose goal was to become an executive director: "While doing great things at [organization], this team member expressed interest in being groomed to become an executive director. Our executive director supported her in that goal." With this professional development support, the staff member became executive director at another organization; mutual respect and ongoing communication continued between the two directors and organizations.

Although representatives of Organization A did not explicitly discuss staff development, each participant discussed the executive director's empathy and focus on relationships. Board Chair A said, "He has a real comfort level with interacting with clients and employees. He treats everybody the same way." Indeed, one of Executive Director A's daily leadership actions is to walk through the building and engage two or three different people, asking how they are doing, what's happening in their lives, and how work is going. He explained:

> This causes me to get to know them. When I give tours, I know that James loves the Chiefs, Larry loves MU football, Cody is a runner and an athletic guy. As a result, when I give a tour, it's much more personal. It's not just, 'oh, we make stuff over here.' I can share that Larry runs this machine faster than anyone ever has before, and Janice is working over here because she was promoted to this part

of the business. This business is personal, it's not about the stuff we make or the slick brochure - it's really, at the end of the day, about people.

Responses to the OLEI rounded out the picture of executive directors as team builders and supportive managers. With regard to being "motivational," "empathetic," "people-oriented," and "responsive to needs of staff," every executive director and board and staff respondent agreed or strongly agreed that these behaviors reflected the executive director's leadership style. In addition, 100% of executive directors and 83% of board and staff respondents agreed that the executive director exhibited the behaviors "cooperative," "collegial," "team player," and "nurturing."

Theme five: Executive directors practice open communication. Every participant described open communication as being an important leadership behavior exhibited by executive directors. An "open door" policy was mentioned by representatives of the four organizations, with staff and board members expressing appreciation for the executive directors' openness to their ideas and concerns.

Executive Director B described one of her most important behaviors as "listening, and I mean really listening…not making snap judgments, but really taking the time to listen to all sides of every story." Board Chair B supported this assertion, explaining that the executive director "has strong people that give honest, candid feedback. She respects them and considers their viewpoints." Similarly, Executive Director C spoke of the need to "get input from others. It's important to get people's thoughts and ideas, and say 'yes' as often as possible." Her practice of listening and valuing input was mentioned by Development Director C as well, who said, "[Executive Director] is a listener first." Beyond listening to concerns and ideas brought to them, some executive directors were

described as actively seeking input from others. Development Director B described her executive director as "so wise, constantly coming to people for input. She wants all sides of the story." Thus, when a number of long-term board members who had served as guides for Executive Director B rotated off the board, she created an advisory board in order to keep them involved as advisors and mentors. Similar praise was shared by Board Chair C:

> Our executive director is very secure in her leadership, so she asks for help. For example, with our ongoing capital campaign and operating budget issues, she says 'I want input and I need your help on this.' A strong attribute is her openness to collaborate and involve others. She operates with complete openness and transparency. There's no question of her motives.

Transparency in communication was cited by each organization as an important leadership behavior. Clear and constant communication of both positive and negative news was essential, as described by Executive Director B:

> Last year was a very difficult year for us. We had several challenges with funding, several foundations didn't give us money that we expected to receive. So I had a meeting and told everybody what was going on. I think being transparent is critical. When something comes up, you're very clear, very transparent. And I had people walk out of that meeting going, 'Wow - that was a really great meeting!' And here I was delivering bad news, but it was because I was clear in my communications, and explained it thoughtfully…so that gives them the confidence that we're doing something right. Staff members thanked me for sharing that information with them.

Organization C's development director reported that her executive director also "engages people in conversation regarding challenges. She sets structures in place so we can succeed despite challenges. With the recent threat of a government shutdown, she immediately communicated our contingency plans, informing staff and putting them at ease." Likewise, Development Director D described her executive director's transparence:

> If you have a question, you can go to her and she will tell you the answer. She never hides thoughts or rationale unless an issue requires confidentiality. You can always go to her and expect honesty about why something is the way it is.

Executive Director A described the keen listening skills of his employees and candidly stated:

> You'd better be honest, direct, do what you say and say what you do…or it will be very apparent very quickly. And once you lose the trust of the employees you might as well go find something else to do.

> In addition to keeping communication lines open with staff members, executive directors were reported to have practiced open communication with board members. Board Chair A empathized and expressed appreciation:

> Poor guy, he gets a new boss every two years. That's hard – I mean it takes six months to adjust to your styles of management and oversight. He has to be able to explain to all of us what's going on and why, and keep us in the loop, and he does a very good job at that.

Board Chair C also complimented her executive director's communication skills:

Her communication skills regarding who and what are outstanding. The way she keeps the board in tune, and the staff, is outstanding. She never wants the staff to be caught off guard. She wants to share information, and she explains things with excitement.

Clearly, having difficult conversations is an important part of practicing open communication and resolving conflict. Executive Director D attributed the success of the organization in part to her willingness to listen to staff, board, and community partners even when conversations may offer things that one might not like or want to hear. She noted:

I think it is important to hear areas that you can grow and develop as much as hear how great the team is doing. I think that often times, particularly in the nonprofit world, teams can be reluctant to want to hear and evaluate the tough suggestions or feedback. I have learned that having those caring conversations really matter to the growth of your team and the agency.

From a staff perspective, the strength of Organization D was attributed by Development Director D in part to the notion that the organization is "home" and that the executive director views staff and clients as "family," communicating as such:

We are a fast-growing, fast-changing agency. [Executive Director] values communication during times of disagreement. There is resolution as in a family; we work it out. We are all passionate people with different ideas. [Executive Director] says, 'We're sitting down at the table on this.' So nothing goes unresolved.

With regard to the behaviors "communicator" and "strong interpersonal skills" on the OLEI, the four executive directors and 100% of board and staff respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the behaviors reflected the executive director's leadership style. Three of four executive directors and 83% of board and staff respondents indicated agreement that the executive director's behaviors included "emotionally expressive."

Theme six: Executive directors collaborate. Participants described a focus on networking and building relationships in the community to advance the mission of their organizations through human, financial, and intellectual capital. Having moved to Kansas City from another metropolitan area, Executive Director A reflected:

> I knew I needed to build a network and relationship with people who could help educate me about the town and its culture, and give me guidance. So I joined the Chamber Roundtable, and spent a lot of time around people who could help me understand where are the levers in the community, where to spend my time and energy.

Likewise, a desire to understand the community and network outside the organization led Executive Director C to join the Rotary Club. Board Chair C observed: "She's done that on her own, and paid for it herself. She's really gotten involved, building friends and a strong network to support the organization." This recognition of the importance of maintaining relationships with supporters was echoed by leaders of Organizations B and D as well; these leaders discussed their work to engage volunteers, donors, and program partners.

With regard to collaborations with other entities and community organizations, the participating nonprofits reported varied experiences and levels of collaboration.

Development Director D stated, "We partner with other agencies rather than duplicating services." Executive Director C, new to her position, shared her excitement about exploring possible joint ventures with other organizations, asking the question, "How might we work together?" With considerably less enthusiasm, Board Chair A remarked that when working with "all these health providers and organizations…it doesn't seem to stick when we try to partner." At the opposite end of the spectrum, Organization B described facilitating and convening complex collaborations involving city government, the police force, district court, youth programs, area hospitals, and other nonprofit organizations. Executive Director B explained: "This is how we accomplish our goals. We engage key leaders of the community to keep victims safe. We have 25 people who meet twice a month to make this happen. It's amazing." Development Director B further explained that through these collaborations:

> The cool thing is that the systems change beyond service delivery. These are not simple changes. It took years of relationship building to gain that entry, and the level of partnership and respect that they would consider changing their systems.

Three of the four executive directors responded on the OLEI that the behavior "consensus builder" reflected their personal leadership style, while 83% of board and staff respondents agreed with the statement. All respondents in both categories agreed or strongly agreed that the executive director's behavior included "networker" and "alert to social environment." These responses further supported the theme of collaboration as a leadership behavior of successful executive directors.

Theme seven: Executive directors regularly reflect and continually learn.

Participants from each of the four organizations reported various ways that their executive directors engaged in ongoing learning. Executive Director A reported reading as a priority to gain knowledge: "I try to learn from others and stay current, keeping well educated by reading every day, an hour a day." During the interview, Executive Director B described a book that she had read recently and shared with her leadership team. Executive Director C disclosed a more intensive approach: "I hired an executive coach to help me personally. That process has been very helpful with setting goals and staying on track." This executive director recognized areas in which she believed she needed to grow and was proactive about tackling them, according to Development Director C, who provided an example:

> She is not a finance person, so she studied carefully and bullied her way through it. She questioned the financials and talked with the finance director, the finance committee, and the board, saying 'This doesn't make sense. Can we do it this way?' She made herself understand it. She has great tenacity about understanding.

Gaining knowledge from the experiences of other organizations through attendance at conferences was another means of learning. Development Director D observed:

> Our executive director attends conferences and asks lots of questions to learn from others' best practices, like the literacy programming we are developing now. She sees other agencies similar to us yet larger, and she learns from others in the field, borrowing and applying best practices.

As previously described, participants from each organization emphasized making data-driven decisions and use of dashboards to aid in this process. In addition to simply reviewing the data, Executive Director A explicated:

> You've got to be willing to reflect on the things that you didn't do well – and not from a finger pointing or accusatory manner, but more 'let's learn from this.' The data supports our goals when we view it with honesty and integrity.

This theme also emerged on the OLEI, as every executive director and board and staff respondent agreed or strongly agreed that the behaviors "reflective," "lifelong learner," "persistent," and "strong academic self-concept" reflected the executive director's leadership style.

Factor Two: Organizational Structure

According to the SLT, the structure of the organization includes "how the system operates and the organization's characteristics, as well as how the structure influences behaviors, the exchange of communication, relationships among the organization's members, and the values of the group" (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013, p. 987). Thus, organizational structures interact with the other three factors of the SLT to impact leadership and organizational progress (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013). The second research question for this study was: How does the structure of each nonprofit organization align with the executive director's leadership behaviors? As a means of exploring this question, participants were asked to describe the structure of their respective organizations. Six themes emerged from these conversations: (1) Organizational structures are flat, broad, and appropriate for the moment; (2) A culture of respect for the individual; (3) An active and effective leadership team working together to

advance the mission of the organization; (4) Alterations to stimulate or accommodate growth; (5) An engaged governing board; and (6) A strategic orientation.

Theme one: Organizational structures are flat, broad, and appropriate for the moment. Participants from three of the four organizations indicated that their structures were relatively flat and broad structure with few mid-level positions. Board Chair B described his organization:

> There is a staff of about 100 people, and the organization is fairly flat. The executive director has 3-4 direct reports. It's an organization where key information is readily and easily passed from one to another, so there is nothing significant happening without senior leadership being aware of it very quickly. There are several staff members with longevity, and some are pretty new, so there is a good combination. I think the structure is effective for what they do. The management group is not unduly large. They do a great job of communicating among themselves. The structure serves their purpose.

Within each organization, participants noted that although the executive director gathered input, he or she ultimately was responsible for decisions. Development Director C noted, "We are hierarchical but not with a vengeance. The chain of command is respected." Similarly, Development Director A shared, "We're pretty hierarchical because of our size – it's so big. There are definite divisions, all the way down through, but there are processes for going back up as well."

Participants generally believed that their organizational structures were suitable for the current stage of their organization, and that changes in structure were to be expected in the near or distant future. Development Director D spoke of impending

changes: "We're working on strategic planning for the upcoming year. We may add more depth; there are no mid-level positions now. As we grow, it is a top goal to figure this out." Likewise, Executive Director A directly stated, "Changes moving forward will be required." The overarching sentiment shared by each organization was expressed by Board Chair C: "The structure is appropriate for the moment. We have a good balance. Over time, the organizational structure will change again to meet different goals."

Theme two: A culture of respect for the individual. OLEI responses indicated that 100% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the following characteristics applied to their organization: (a) recognizes ability or expertise, (b) values staff as individual human beings, (c) promotes community and cooperation, (d) promotes nurturing and caring, and (e) has clear norms and values. These characteristics were mentioned by participants during interviews as well, particularly with regard to the ways in which the executive directors operated and the effect on the work environment.

An inverted hierarchy was described as the operating model for Organization B, as shown in Figure 2. With clients at the top of the triangle, then staff in the middle, the executive director is at the bottom of the triangle, supporting those above him or her. Executive Director B discussed the importance of "really appreciating the values of the people that are working for you." When first beginning in her role as executive director, she interviewed staff members to learn about the major issues, to identify staff members' concerns and needs, and learn from staff how best to provide services to clients.

Figure 2. Reverse Hierarchy
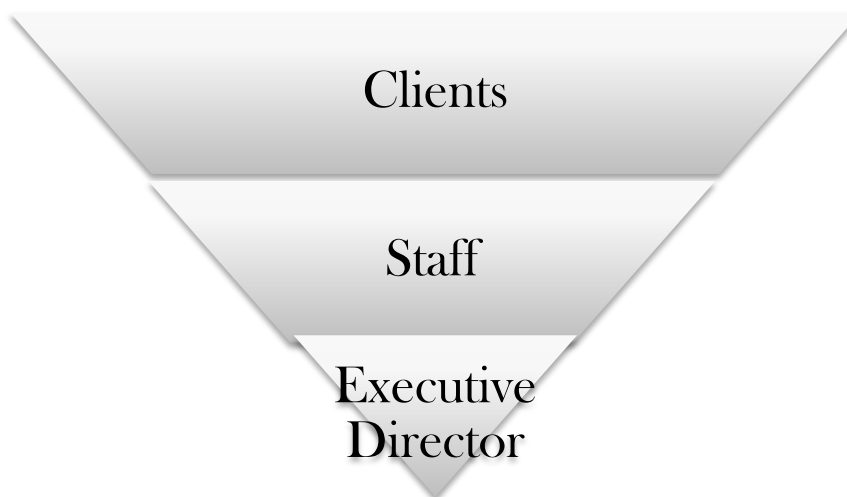
Figure 2. Inverted triangle illustrating nonprofit organization leadership approach.

Executive Director B further described her focus:

> How can I best provide services to them, support them? I'm really here for *them*.
> That's really been the driving force for me. Every strategic plan we've done, they
> all begin with meeting with staff members. We look at what achievements are
> they proud of, where do they see gaps in services, what are their dreams. I really
> have them help me decide what we need to do next.

Caring for and supporting clients while providing a supportive, flexible, family-friendly work environment are priorities for Organization C as well. Similar to Executive Director B's above-described philosophy, Executive Director C's approach includes creating a "fun, positive environment where staff members' ideas are respected and considered." In their mission to provide care for clients and to deliver outcomes, staff at Organization C reported feeling that their leader trusts and supports them.

Theme three: An active and effective leadership team working together to advance the mission of the organization. The leadership team was an important

structural component of each participating organization. Organization A's team, comprised of seven directors and the executive director, brings together a wide variety of skill sets and perspectives. In describing the group and its work, Development Director A said, "Everybody is experienced and talented. We all have input, and it's not always pretty, but we usually work things out for the best."

Also appreciative of the talents her colleagues brought to the organization, Development Director B expressed:

> The executive team is very strong and stable. Our directors are phenomenal and a huge part of why all these positive things are in place. We're not talking just service delivery. For none of these directors is this just a job, this is a life choice. That comes out. The directors in particular have a combination of professionalism, expertise, and intelligence. Here there is a balance between expertise, innovation, and passion…the executive team creates that network and the directors that are in place almost across the board are really top notch.

The idea of shared leadership also arose from participant interviews. Upon her appointment to the top leadership role, Executive Director C changed the "management team" to the "leadership team." Weekly leadership team meetings involving the directors of major programs at the agency ensure constant communication regarding issues and outcomes. Executive Director C frequently says, "I need your input as leaders," elevating the idea of leadership, and helping staff see their programs in relationship to the larger agency. This change in approach extended to practical matters, such as budgeting, reported Development Director C: "Budgeting is now hands-on for all directors. This forces us to wrestle with questions regarding money, and to practice leadership." Outside

the team meetings, the leadership team is "more fluid," according to Development

Director C:

> Departments overlap at different times – one director can call and talk with any
>
> other director. It's very pragmatic; directors are seeking solutions, asking what's
>
> most effective to finish this particular piece, or what will be most effective in this
>
> specific situation.

Although participants from each of the four organizations spoke positively about

the composition and effectiveness of their organization's leadership team, there were

differences in perspectives between executive directors and their respective development

directors and board chairs as reported in the OLEI. Two main differences were in the

areas of rotating leadership and power sharing. Whereas 100% of executive directors

agreed or strongly agreed that their organization utilized a system of rotating leadership

and that power sharing was a characteristic of their organization, 40% of participating

development directors and board chairs disagreed.

Theme four: Alterations to stimulate or accommodate growth. The structure

of each participating organization has expanded or changed over time to support growth

of the organization. Executive Director D, the founding director of her organization,

reported that the staff has grown over the past 15 years from four members to nearly 50,

and that the agency has experienced exponential growth over the past 18 months, adding

seven new positions. Similarly, over the past 17 years, the staff of Organization B has

grown in size from 28 to more than 90 employees and the annual budget has increased

from less than $1 million to $5.5 million. Staff changes included an increase in the

development staff and the creation of a director of human resources position.

Development Director B discussed an increase in administration and overhead to improve

organizational effectiveness:

> We are starting to right a wrong where we had been…it's the whole Dan Pallotta
>
> thing – the idea of where our overhead was so low. We were like 16%
>
> [administrative costs], so lean, we were at huge risk because we have 200 grants.
>
> We lost a $100,000 grant because we didn't have enough grant writers last year.
>
> So we are starting to correct that. We've recognized and are correcting.

The reference by Development Director B to Dan Pallotta is related to his teachings on

the way the public views charities, made particularly clear in his March 2013 TED Talk,

"The Way We Think about Charity Is Dead Wrong." Pallotta's simplified message is

presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. I'm Overhead T-Shirt Graphic

Figure 3. Pallotta's statement about overhead referenced by Development Director B. "I'm Overhead

Shirt," by D. Pallotta, 2013. Retrieved from http://www.shop.danpoallotta,com/products/im-overhead-shirt-

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Organizations A, C, and D also reiterated the critical need for expertise, reporting

that executive directors had brought in staff members with stronger experience. Development Director A concurred with Development Director B's position, explaining:

> Nonprofit organizations don't pay well, and a lot of times don't have insurance, or pension plans, and people want all of those things. A lot of times nonprofits try to skimp on those things so they don't affect that overhead ratio. That's nonsense. Sprint isn't going out looking for substandard employees to pay a tiny bit of money, or for interns to do free work. Nonprofits need to go out and hire the best people they can find…they need to invest in their people, because without people, we don't have programs, and we don't serve people with needs.

In addition to seeking the best qualified employees, organizations indicated willingness to utilize outside consultants for specific programs and purposes. For example, Development Director D discussed hiring a consultant to facilitate an outcomes measurement process to help the staff determine outcomes connected with the organization's mission. She explained, "We were too homed in on our outputs, so this impacts our thought process," as the organization seeks to become a United Way partner.

This theme was further supported by OLEI responses, especially with regard to the need for expertise. Eighty percent of board and staff respondents and 100% of executive directors agreed or strongly agreed that the characteristics "commitment to employee growth" and "encourages professional training" applied to their organization. Every respondent agreed that their organization "recognizes ability or expertise."

Theme five: An engaged governing board. Representatives of participating organizations reported having active and diverse boards of directors, with members

committed to the mission of the organization they served. Characteristics of these boards
of directors are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Characteristics of Participating Organizations' Boards of Directors

Characteristic	Case A	Case B	Case C	Case D
Size of board	19	26	21	9
Board term length	2	3	3	3
Board term limits	3	2	2	2
Board meeting attendance	71%	69%	63%	85%
Board monetary contributions	100%	100%	100%	90%
Board in-kind contributions	100%	100%	100%	25%

Note. Adapted from "Nonprofit Search," by Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, 2014.

Executive Director A stated: "The complexity of the organization and the need to face
new challenges requires an involved Board of Directors and senior staff. The Board of
Directors takes its duties seriously and provides excellent leadership in its management
responsibilities." Board Chair A spoke of her desire and work to engage board members
in meaningful ways:

> In the past, the board was rubber-stamping things. When I took over, I thought,
> you know, this doesn't work. You really need people to start talking so they feel
> like they are a part. We'd listen to reports and think, 'and so? How can I help
> you solve these problems?' The board is strong at this stage of the game.

Likewise, Board Chair B described his perspective on the board's role and their
performance:

The board is the organization's facing with the community. Our roles include: (1) promotion and development, assisting with major fundraising events and local fundraising efforts, and (2) governance and oversight, providing the executive director a mechanism for making sure that the decisions made are important and appropriate. We act as a sounding board for the executive director. I think the board is pretty effective at both these roles. Last year, the board brought in $400,000.

Board engagement in fund development also was mentioned by Board Chair D, who shared:

The greatest challenge I have in my role as board chair is attempting to turn each of the board members into development/fund raising experts. I learned that I was asking some of these wonderful volunteers to operate significantly outside of their comfort levels, and needed to better balance my request for them to do so along with enabling them to contribute in the areas that met their expertise and passions.

By formalizing the board committee structure and assigning each board member to committees, Board Chair D reported that there is now "a high level of expectation that these committees will lead, and they are the people that the board is looking to for guidance on each matter that is raised to the board level."

Organization C also reported working to leverage board talents and expertise through committees and personalized assignments, as described by Development Director C:

The board is evolving. Our executive director is pulling the board in closer to the organization without getting them involved in operations. She's more intent on

applying the board's gifts, through more working committees, volunteer-run
events, and empowering those committees and volunteers to make important
decisions.

As executive directors and other staff leaders worked to support and engage board members, the boards, in turn, were supportive of ideas brought forth by executive directors. OLEI responses indicated 100% agreement among executive director, board and staff respondents with regard to the statement "board supports the executive director's philosophy."

In partnership with the executive director and fellow board members, board chairs expressed their feelings of gratitude for the privilege of serving their respective organizations. Board Chair B stated:

I'm honored to serve alongside a superb group of board members who each bring
their own professional expertise. Through their committee assignments they
provide valuable oversight on the multiple programs we make available to the
community. Each board member is also actively involved in the fund
development of the organization through both personal contributions as well as
assisting to raising funds for our major fundraising events. Our board
development committee ensures that the makeup of the board is diverse in
ethnicity, skills and talents, background and perspective. Our fiscal year begins
with an annual retreat to set the board objectives as well as inspire and motivate
the board to achieve the work of the coming year.

The board's work to evaluate organizational structure, operations, and board member
roles and responsibilities was appreciated by Executive Director C. She stated: "The

result is a well-functioning team, working collaboratively to save lives and provide support in a caring and fiscally responsible manner."

Theme six: A strategic orientation. Interviews with participants revealed a pervasive strategic orientation throughout each organization. Executive directors, board chairs, and development directors referred to strategic plans with systematized goals and described revisiting the plan frequently and updating as needed. Board Chair C explained that from strategic goals in the plan come specific tactics given to committees, with the bulk of the work still residing with staff. In evaluating success, each organization described ways that information is readily available through dashboards, scorecards, and other formats so that staff and board may regularly assess performance against goals.

Organization B described its commitment to a "strategic, goal-oriented management approach, with all decisions affecting programs and operations tied to the organization's strategic plan, which is reviewed by the board of director on a quarterly basis." Executive Director B further explained:

> To create a unified philosophy and approach throughout the organization, every staff member has a copy of the strategic plan, which is used as a tool in annual employee performance evaluations. As a result, we are very proud to say that we achieve our goals and objectives in a timely manner, and continue to move forward in the field.

Although each organization discussed the importance of goal setting and strategic priorities in the interviews, OLEI responses indicated differences in perspectives between executive directors and their respective board chairs and development directors with regard to perceived reality. For example, 100% of executive directors agreed or strongly

agreed that their organization had well-defined goals, yet only 60% of board chairs and development directors indicated agreement.

With regard to long-term strategic planning, three of the four participating organizations discussed their succession planning efforts. Development Director B reported that her organization has been working on long-term succession planning through workshops with a corporate consultant and the organization's human resources director. She shared:

> We did all these exercises, so we've got the foundation to pick up and follow through with the rest of it. There are a lot of 15-20 year CEO veterans of great nonprofit organizations. The guard is going to be changing.

This change occurred at two of the participating organizations, as two executive directors had served in other staff leadership roles before being promoted to their current positions. Board Chair C described the recent leadership transition:

> Succession planning in nonprofits is huge. That's the reason we didn't miss a beat. [Executive director] was at the board meetings already, she was active with legislators. She knew what to do and she had vision. Succession planning and investing in staff pays off in ensuring that the leader is a good leader. [Executive director] will do the same for her successor, and the board is making sure that the plan goes beyond the executive director.

Factor Three: External Forces

According to the SLT, external forces are "pressures outside the organization over which leaders have no control; however, leaders must attend to such constantly changing external environments or influencers" (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013, p. 987). Contextual

examples of significant external forces are the local, state, and national and international community and conditions, governmental regulations, laws, demographics, cultural climate, technological advances, economic situations, geography, political climate, and family conditions (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002). These influences may impact an organization's structure, leaders' decisions and their decision-making processes, and the attitudes of employees. In the SLT, external forces interact with the other three factors (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013, p. 987). This study explored external forces through the research question: How do the leadership behaviors of the executive directors of exemplary nonprofit human service organizations align with the external forces? Through conversations with participants about the challenges facing their organizations, a number of external forces were revealed. Also described were the leaders' behaviors in response to, or in anticipation of, these pressures. Themes related to external forces as described by participants were: (1) An ever-increasing need for services; (2) Constant financial pressure requiring diversification of funding streams and attention to multiple constituencies; (3) Appropriate and effective engagement of the board is not automatic; (4) Public perception of the organization may not match intended image; and (5) Recruiting and managing volunteers is an ongoing and essential task.

Theme one: An ever-increasing need for services. All participants indicated that a primary challenge facing their organizations was a constantly increasing, sometimes overwhelming, need for the services their organizations were founded to provide. Board Chair B summarized this phenomenon, stating: "There seems to be an insatiable demand for our services. Staying focused on what's most important and not getting diverted is a challenge we have to be mindful of."

This overwhelming need for services was due to both an increased number of clients in need and an increase in the intensity of clients' needs. Development Director D described the challenges in reaching adult clients:

Our clients become discouraged. As they become part of the cycle of poverty and lack of education and they are shuttled from agency to agency for services, they become jaded. We are challenged to help them keep their dignity, to respect them and serve their needs with the goal of sufficiency. With adults, we're providing programs for very different reasons and needs – it's harder than with kids.

Regardless of the agency's mission, challenges in service delivery may be intensified by the attitudes clients bring as a result of their hardships. Executive Director A explained: "Our clients have a low level of confidence in their abilities. It's about moving them from 'I can't' to that 'Wow!' moment." Board Chair B shared, "The phone calls that come in don't tend to come in during business hours. These people are in crisis, and because people are in crisis, they may not present the best side of themselves." When considering the suffering endured by clients, Development Director C said "Our job is breaking the cycle of these broken spirits, and building them back up."

This extreme level of need calls for innovative approaches to program and service delivery, reported Executive Director C:

As with most nonprofit organizations, our biggest challenge is our vision to help more people and facing limited resources. Prioritizing means ongoing discussions with clients, staff, volunteers, and board members to evaluate our opportunities and needs. Some programs are directed at literally saving lives, others at rebuilding lives, still others focus on prevention. Our staff never stops thinking,

creating and refining programs, working for the best possible outcomes for the

people we serve and the best use of the resources entrusted to us.

Executive directors reported that their staff members had taken innovative approaches to

meeting increased need. Some organizations took risks, such as developing new

programs, participating in pilot programs, and engaging in commercial ventures to

generate earned income. Others focused efforts on collaboration and community

partnerships. Development Director B provided more detail:

> When I hear a staff member talking with someone in need, and we don't have
>
> room and can't help that person…it's really difficult. It's a challenge to figure
>
> out how to maximize services, be realistic about funding, and continue the
>
> partnerships we're doing so we're not the end all be all, so we don't have to
>
> provide every single service ourselves.

With regard to the community as an external factor, the four executive directors and 80%

of board and staff respondents indicated that they believed the organization's board of

directors agreed with the statement "the executive director's leadership is affected by the

expectations of the community."

Theme two: Constant financial pressure requiring diversification of funding

streams and attention to multiple constituencies. The four organizations mentioned

funding as a major challenge. Development Director C summarized the predicament of

each organization: "The economy is a force we cannot control. We have to determine

where to focus most – what is the most effective, what is the most fundable need - and

then we have to make that case." Making the case for program expenses can be difficult,

as donors often prefer to support more tangible items; Board Chair C shared, "People will

fund big things like a building, but we still have all the ongoing program expenses." In addition, competition among nonprofit organizations presents another layer of complexity in fundraising, as described by Development Director A:

> Kansas City is a very philanthropic community with big, established foundations in our backyard. The problem is that there are more than 7,000 nonprofits and more are being added every single day. Everybody has a good cause, a good reason for support. They want from that same pie. There's difficulty in that. What I've seen in the past five years is that because major foundations have taken significant hits, they are tending to give smaller amounts to more agencies, diluting their giving, or they are only giving to one or two beneficiaries.

Reliance on foundations or individual donors alone is unwise, according to participants. Board Chair A explained: "Executive Directors must understand the business part of their organization. They cannot just rely on funders; they need to find a way of generating revenue. And that's what their board is for, to help them figure it out."

> Dependence on government support through grants or contracts was mentioned as a challenge by two organizations. Development Director B explained:

> Two-thirds of our funding is from federal and state grants and foundation support. As the government has tightened its purse strings, it's been harder to get that support. Therefore we are seeking avenues for sponsor support from our partners, as revenue sources. Keeping the doors open is our first and foremost challenge.

Executive Director A concurred:

> The government market presents a challenge. We are still largely dependent on government for business, and unfortunately we've not diversified enough to

insulate ourselves from that, but we've taken some really important steps in that regard. So that's definitely a headwind for us.

Organization A also was unique among study participants in that its leaders had employed strategies to diversify funding streams, and had succeeded in generating significant earned income to support the organization's core mission. However, this additional revenue stream created unexpected challenges, according to Development Director A:

Earned income is both a blessing and a curse. Convincing people of the need for support when we have a multi-million dollar budget is tough. Fundraising is a unique challenge because we have earned income. Funders don't necessarily do what they say. Therefore, our success is a challenge.

Despite the challenges, Development Director A is proud of the work her colleagues have done to ensure the financial sustainability of the organization. She explained: "This organization truly is *the* model of what I've been hearing for the past two decades about sustainability. I like it. That's why I'm here."

The need for sustainable funding was mentioned by other participating organizations as well; representatives recognized a need to expand their organizations' donor bases. Board Chair C shared, "We have some very strong supporters. Our goal is to continue to expand our base. More donors are needed; we're seeking breadth versus depth right now." To expand the donor base, Development Director C explained, "We have to engage donors' hearts. We do this by appreciating them, helping them to understand what we're doing and how they fit into our model, and convincing them they are important." Regardless of the source of revenue, participants reported that as they

worked to grow the base of support for their organizations, there were more constituents to satisfy. Development Director D described the tremendous growth of her agency, including the launch of a pilot program, expansion to three new communities, and the hiring of several new staff members:

> Diversification of our funding structure has allowed this growth, and now we have new players to consider. When you are funded solely by outside funders, there are changes in reporting. It's a partnership structure. There are very definite sources of input.

> Development Director B described her organization's dilemma and solution with

regard to the inefficiency of coordinating in-kind donations:

> Posting a need on our Facebook page is easy. Fielding the calls, arranging the pickup, and sorting is not…by that time, we could pay for it. We used to coordinate all these little donations. We now have a volunteer who leads the in-kind giving program and coordinates the receipt of gifts. It was taking hours and hours of staff time. As much as it pains me that we now buy shampoo bottles, it's cheaper and more efficient than getting tiny bottles of shampoo here and there from well-meaning donors.

To keep these in-kind donors engaged while truly meeting client needs, she explained, "We've created a compromise. We can afford to post a need for a particular donation, such as baby formula, every month or two." Other in-kind donations offered to the agency are now efficiently fielded by a partner nonprofit organization's thrift store.

When attempting to diversify funding streams to ensure financial sustainability, participants discussed the need to connect with multiple constituencies. "We are

constantly developing new relationships with program partners," explained Executive

Director D. Beyond simply initiating these relationships, organizational leaders

recognized the importance of maintaining the partnerships. Executive Director D

posited, "We are good fiscal stewards and do what we say we will do with the resources

provided."

There was additional agreement among participants with regard to external factors

related to the economy. On the OLEI, three of four executive directors and 80% of board

and staff respondents indicated belief that the board agreed that "the socio-economic

levels in the community affect the executive director's leadership."

Theme three: Appropriate and effective engagement of the board is not

automatic. Participants from each organization described the importance of engaging

board members in meaningful ways and utilizing the individual and collective expertise

of their boards. Ensuring meaningful engagement is an ongoing challenge for

organizations, explained Executive Director B, because "We have a new board president

every year. There have been 17 during my tenure."

For one of the four organizations, engaging board members in the fundraising

process was a top priority. Executive Director B described the process:

> We've shifted our focus to the fundraising function of the board and have
>
> implemented a give or get $5,000 policy. With 25 board members, keeping them
>
> engaged and informed is a challenge. So we have board retreats and talk about
>
> what sets us apart. The directors speak, telling stories to engage the board. This
>
> has been very successful in igniting their passion for the agency's mission.

Development Director B elaborated on this focus:

We've made an enormous amount of progress over the past two years. We started

to shift from board members as 'nice people' to connectors, supporters, and

influencers. We started an in-depth screening process of everyone coming on the

board…currently we have a lot of new board members, so we're working on

getting them invested, and leveraging all of their talents. We're working with the

board development committee to keep a finger on the pulse to ensure they

continue to be engaged, invested, and mentored.

In some cases, the optimal level of engagement for some board members may be

less rather than more. For example, Executive Director D described the process of

disengaging the organization's founders from the board to ensure the health of the

agency:

I think that the most challenging time may have been when we were separating

from our founders in order to retain more independence; that was difficult for

staff and the founders. They are incredibly important people to us and are still

very involved and it was a delicate issue to get them involved but not on a day-to-

day basis. Again, these are those difficult conversations that ultimately need to

occur in order to grow and definitely make the agency stronger.

Following this separation process, Development Director D elaborated: "There was a

restructuring of the board and the organization, with all new people. We reevaluated

everything. Now, we're expanding the board to be 'connectors.' We're figuring out how

to engage the board, to connect with the community."

This process of engagement was further described by Development Director A:

It's always about engaging board members in the work you're doing. The cry of

all nonprofits, probably, is how do they get their board members working for

them and benefiting them? It's not always money; for me, asking for money is

the end game. I need them to make relationships for us, to talk about us in their

peer groups, tell their employees about us, refer their stepmother to us, et cetera.

That's the difficult part with boards.

Finding an appropriate balance in the structure and the work of the board is an ongoing

challenge as reported by participants. With regard to board composition, Board Chair C

shared: "It's a challenge to find a good balance of name recognition, well respected

people with active board members with specific skillsets who are willing to work and put

in the time." Utilizing the varied skillsets that board members bring to an organization

requires "balancing an appropriate level of communication and invitation," according to

Executive Director C. She described her approach to engaging board members: "I ask

them lots of questions so I can meet their needs. I am feeling out the role and the

relationship."

       Theme four: Public perception of the organization may not match intended

image. Participants described a lack of awareness or understanding among constituents.

For example, Executive Director A described an image problem his organization faced

with its constituency:

In the past, clients have been disappointed and there have been layoffs due to

financial management. I've addressed this challenge through consistency: telling

people what we're going to do and providing options for people with varying

skills. This process has required marketing, strategic planning, board

commitment, and fundraising efforts to diversify our base.

This process requires patience in addition to strategy and hard work, according to Board

Chair A:

When creating awareness, you need more time to make connections. People are

at least starting to know [organization] now. In the past, nobody knew who we

were. Our development staff is doing all the right things, contacting all the right

people…it just takes time.

Participants from other organizations reiterated this notion, and further clarified

that convincing people of the need for their organizations was at times a unique

challenge, particularly when the issues are sensitive or the level of suffering may be

difficult for people to comprehend. This challenge was explained by Executive

Director B:

Sometimes people don't want to know or talk about it. We have to communicate

in a way that donors can receive the scope and breadth of the issues. It takes time

to meet with donors and to maintain those communications.

Comparably, Development Director C explained that when seeking community buy-in,

"We have to tell our story, making it real. Having people be sympathetic to the issues

versus disappointed in what's happening is the challenge. We have to help people

understand that this [problem] is real."

Theme five: Recruiting and managing volunteers is an ongoing and essential

task. With regard to the involvement of volunteers in each organization, participants

reported high levels of satisfaction and expressed profound gratitude for volunteers'

service and commitment. High praise for volunteer managers/coordinators also was

shared. For example, Executive Director B shared:

> We have the best volunteer director in the world. She has been here 20 years.
>
> She makes every volunteer feel special. She develops relationships with
>
> volunteers, engages in ongoing follow-up with them, she sends them notes. We
>
> have more than 3,000 volunteers, and they often transition to become donors.

Development Director B elaborated:

> She's amazing in the way that she can work with one person, or work with a
>
> corporate group. The challenge is that when you have a group of 30 volunteers,
>
> there are safety issues. We don't want people looking at [clients] like they are
>
> animals at the zoo, but it's crucial to step foot here so you can really feel what is
>
> happening.

Another challenge mentioned by participants was having work ready to be delegated to

volunteers. To ensure efficiency, Development Director A explained: "We now have a

volunteer manager in place – we've really professionalized in that area." Similarly,

Executive Director C shared: "We have a wonderful volunteer program with a full-time

coordinator. The challenge is having enough projects for volunteers, and then keeping

the relationship. Episodic volunteer projects provide us an opportunity to educate

people." Development Director C agreed with this assessment, and further explained:

> We have a high number of volunteers, and the challenge is finding enough
>
> opportunities for them. More people are ready to volunteer. We're pushing the
>
> boundaries in coming up with new opportunities. Figuring out how to engage
>
> volunteers, giving them training, background checks...it's not easy, convincing

them it's worth it. Additional staff support is needed due to the logistics of working with volunteers.

One participant, Development Director A, also mentioned generational shifts and the impact of changing demographics:

Volunteers are different now. They want things that are quick, they want to come in and not spend a lot of time doing 'other stuff' but focus on their interest area. They want us to be flexible with their time. Our volunteers are younger, and it's a different type of volunteer – these are young professionals who want to make an impact on what's happening in the community or they have a personal tie to the cause and they want to be involved. They are very tech savvy as well. They're looking at crowd funding and how can we do this quicker, faster, better.

With regard to working "quicker, faster, and better," having effective systems in place can build staff capacity, enabling them to maximize volunteer contributions. Development Director D described the growth of her organization's volunteer base and the resulting need for such a system:

Many of our senior residents volunteer on a regular basis. In the last three years, we've started bringing in outside volunteers, and have tripled the number. The challenge for us is handling this growth and how to manage a volunteer program structurally and financially. We need a new donor database, which will cost around $30,000.

As demonstrated by this example, participants recognized that the challenges of building organizational capacity included the need for financial and human resources required to implement improved operating systems.

Factor Four: Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs

Because the way in which individuals view the world is based on their attitudes, assumptions, values, and beliefs, the choices and decisions that individuals, communities, and organizations make are directly impacted by attitudes, beliefs, and values (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013). In the SLT, attitudes, values, and beliefs are described as "dichotomous, meaning that an organization's member or group of members either adhere or do not adhere to specific attitudes, beliefs, or values at a given time" (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013, p. 987). Examples may include openness to change or diversity, valuing professional growth, adhering to tradition, and view of the role of administration and organization's purpose (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013). Participants in the current study were asked to describe the values and beliefs that guide their respective organizations, as well as how the executive director had influenced those values and beliefs. These interview questions were connected to the study research question: How are the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the executive directors aligned with the attitudes, values, and beliefs of their respective board chairpersons and development directors? Eight themes emerged from participant responses: (1) Passion for mission and people served; (2) A business mindset with an expectation of excellence; (3) Honesty and integrity; (4) Openness; (5) Support of staff; (6) A "can-do" attitude; (7) Innovation; and (8) Community collaboration.

Theme one: Passion for mission and people served. Every participant described a commitment to the mission of his or her organization and a focus on the people served by that organization. Board Chair C summarized this commitment:

> I think we have a very defined mission, very clearly set out, and the people here keep that in mind. They are aware of what needs to be accomplished. The key people in the organization are very mission focused. They have tremendous passion in how they execute what they do.

Tremendous passion was a prerequisite for the job, according to Executive Director A. He elaborated:

> Anyone who wants to do a job in this field has to have a true love of the field itself…you have to have a passion for it. Even if I get frustrated with the job, I come to work with a smile every day because I love what we do, and I love that we impact people's lives every day.

Clearly, participants were mission-driven professionals who kept the needs of clients top of mind. Development Director B explained: "Certain things are unchangeable, such as we are always going to be client-focused. We always will be thinking about how we provide services through a client needs-based lens rather than what's easy or best for us." Similarly, Board Chair C described "a never-questioned focus and purpose on helping people, focusing on the individual rather than the programs. We help every victim to the best of our abilities." Indeed, 100% of OLEI respondents agreed or strongly agreed that an "emphasis on programs based on client needs" applied to both the executive director and the organization's board of directors. Executive Director D further explained: "Programs must be people-oriented. Our programs are

designed to be modified in order to best meet the needs of individuals…our services take a holistic approach and enhance the physical, emotional, and overall wellness of each resident and family." The unwavering commitment of participants to their respective organizations' mission and people served was captured by Executive Director D: "We are fully committed to making an impact in the lives of the residents we have the pleasure to serve."

Theme two: A business mindset with an expectation of excellence. With regard to the attitudes, values, and beliefs, Executive Director B succinctly summarized the perspective of all participants: "We *are* a business." Participants across the board described employing research-based best practices, making data-driven decisions, setting and following strategic plans and priorities, diversifying funding streams, and growing the organization. Board Chair C described one of the core values for her organization:

It's administrative acumen. We have to have an appreciation for how to run a business…things like understanding taxes and benefits plans. We practice the due diligence seen in a large organization. Every resource is precious, and we keep a very watchful eye on resources.

Similarly, Board Chair A discussed the alignment of the executive director's values and behaviors with the perceived needs of the organizations:

His values are in sync with what the organization requires and needs. I think he has empathy, he's very empathetic to people but at the same time he understands the bottom line to keep the organization going. And I think that's what a lot of nonprofit executive directors don't have. They're so focused on the service part, they don't understand that you have to have the money coming in and they don't

know how to manage that. They just don't understand the business side. It's a

problem when you're so focused on mission that you can't keep the doors open.

Participants from each organization also discussed the value of having clear and

high expectations at every level. The use of rubrics or balanced scorecards helped staff

members and committee members map performance against expectations at two of the

four organizations. Board Chair D stated: "We expect that the leadership team and staff

will work to continually improve as a matter of normal business operations." With

regard to the perceived values and beliefs of board members, staff, and supporters, Board

Chair D described the specific expectation that their "time, energy, and financial

resources be maximized to create positive impact."

In striving for excellence, participants valued reflection as an important

component of their leadership practice. On the OLEI, all executive director participants

agreed that an emphasis on reflective practice applied to them; of staff and board

respondents, 80% agreed that an emphasis on reflective practice applied to their

executive director.

Theme three: Honesty and integrity. The values of transparency and

accountability were supported by participants from each organization. As previously

mentioned, board chairs and staff members appreciated candid communications from

executive directors. Executive directors strongly believed that honesty and integrity were

critical values that they must embody to ensure the trust and stability of their

organizations. Development Director B explained that her executive director's leadership

"has brought stability and trust, and that creates the atmosphere for an effective executive

team." Executive Director A shared his perspective:

The golden rule is absolute honesty and integrity. This has been a tough year for [organization]. I value being honest with people and telling people up front, 'I don't know the answer yet,' being consistent, treating people with respect even when we have to give them bad news. I tend to be candid and very direct; I don't beat around the bush. As a result, people know where I'm coming from. People who work directly for me know what my expectations are and they respond to that pretty well.

With regard to transparency, participants described donor relations and gift processing procedures as examples of ways their organizations demonstrated this value. Development Director C stated: "We are careful with how money is handled, respectful of donor intent, upfront and transparent." Likewise, Development Director D explained, "We are open about what we do, how we spend money and services. We are transparent about this with everyone, including our clients."

OLEI responses supported participants' interview comments. For the OLEI item "emphasis on character, ethics and integrity," 100% of executive directors agreed that this value applied to them, and 100% of board and staff respondents also agreed that this value applied to their organization's executive director.

Theme four: Openness. In addition to the importance of clear and constant communication, participants from each of the four organizations described valuing an open door policy. Development Director B related:

This is one of the main foundations that makes [organization] so strong and so mighty, is that it's clear how much we value one another's opinion. This is a safe place for you to express your opinion. There is an open door here.

With regard to being open to clients, Development Director D concurred: "We're here to listen, not to judge, so people feel comfortable." Of her executive director, Development Director D shared, "She is present through an open door policy. She never says that she doesn't have time. Everyone's voice is heard, even if that voice is not always acted on." This openness impacts operational processes and the leader's effectiveness, according to Executive Director D. She offered her perspective:

> I believe that good leaders coach their teams where needed but really must be willing to listen. I believe that listening to the donors, community partners, staff, and residents impacted how I could personally share ideas related to revising our mission statement.

Voice and choice for everyone was a value expressed by two of the four organizations. Development Director B explained:

> With both clients and staff, we are constantly talking about attitudes, beliefs, and values, making certain that we provide a venue for voice and choice so that everyone who works here or receives services here has a voice and choice.

OLEI responses further supported these comments, as every executive director and board and staff respondent indicated agreement that "openness to change" and "openness to diversity" applied to both the executive director and the board of directors.

Theme five: Support of staff. Participants shared that a sense of trust and stability permeate an organization when the staff members feel supported. Respondents offered several examples of ways that executive directors demonstrated support of their staff members, such as asking for their input, writing personalized thank you notes, challenging them to be their best, and advocating for more competitive wages for them.

On the OLEI, 100% of board and staff respondents agreed that an "emphasis on professional growth for self/staff" applied to both their executive director and the board of directors. The four executive directors also agreed that this value applied to themselves and their boards.

Executive director participants described respecting and supporting staff as individuals. Executive Director C stated: "We make conscious decisions to ensure that this is a supportive, flexible place for people to work." Development Director B explained how this philosophy was ingrained at her organization:

> Because of the nature of the work we do, it's incredibly intense work and so recognizing that our staff members are our most valuable resource, not only in theory but recognizing that in the way that we do business. So everything we do is about training, caring for, supporting our staff members. Our values, philosophies, and beliefs come out in some of the initiatives we have, such as a wellness program with a gym downstairs, yoga, Pilates, book club…making these values, philosophies, and beliefs tangible.

Theme six: A "can-do" attitude. Because the problems and needs are immense, and the solutions so desperately needed, respondents expressed that great tenacity among nonprofit leaders is required. Participants shared that a positive, can-do attitude was an important factor in their organizations' successes. Board Chair D explained that his organization's values and beliefs included "high levels of integrity, passion, accountability, expectations, in a positive, can-do environment." Executive Director A discussed reflecting on things that didn't go well and "finding the positive spin" so they could be tackled again. Development Director C described admiration for her executive

director's "stubbornness" in figuring out the organization's financial statements and asking the hard questions, while Development Director B lauded her executive director's "healthy disrespect for the impossible." The tenacity demonstrated by Executive Director B comes from her belief that all things are possible. She shared:

> I have this poster that says 'Damn the torpedos…full speed ahead!' My feeling has always been you have to always see that you can do something, there's always that positive component that you can make things happen. By doing so, that spreads throughout the whole organization. Everyone is a good problem solver.

Theme seven: Innovation. Representatives from each of the four organizations reported that celebrating innovation and creativity was important to the growth and success of their programs. On the OLEI, 100% of respondents agreed that an "emphasis on innovation" applied to their executive director. In addition, 100% of executive directors and 80% of board and staff respondents agreed that this emphasis also applied to their boards of directors. Participants shared various examples of ways that their leaders demonstrated and celebrated innovation. Organization A's operating model was innovative in and of itself, and the executive director's leadership of recent acquisitions was described as particularly innovative. Organization B's executive director and other staff members demonstrated innovation by presenting their ideas and theories at international conferences and by exploring opportunities to utilize this intellectual property to generate earned revenue. At Organization C, the executive director praised and supported the staff's creative changes in processes to ensure that clients received services more quickly. The work of Executive Director D to grow the organization to

reach out to more communities was described as innovative; her efforts to address literacy as an underlying issue of poverty were also complimented by staff.

Theme eight: Community collaboration. The value of mutually-beneficial partnerships was discussed as an important value for participating organizations. Numerous examples were presented by participants as evidence of this value in action. For instance, Organization A partnered with a number of commercial businesses to provide employment opportunities for its clients. Additionally, recent acquisitions and mergers have enabled the organization to hire people in other locations; by merging with an agency in another city, Organization A can enhance jobs and services for the people it serves in two distinct regions.

As previously described, Executive Director B founded an alliance with local nonprofit and public organizations and elected officials to improve systems to ensure the safety of clients. Organization B also partnered with health care providers to provide education and screening, and collaborated with other nonprofit organizations to steward in-kind gifts. Likewise, Executive Director C is bringing fellow nonprofits together to explore ways they might collaboratively work more effectively to serve clients and educate the larger community. Similarly, Organization D partners with other agencies rather than duplicating services. Executive Director D said, "I think that we work well collectively as a team and collaborate well with board, staff and community partners."

Summary

Leaders of four exemplary nonprofit human service organizations were interviewed for this study to explore the leaders' experiences with regard to leadership behaviors, organizational structure, external factors, and attitudes, values, and beliefs.

The results from an analysis of the data collected from qualitative interviews, the OLEI, and existing organizational documents were presented in this chapter. Chapter five presents the findings related to the literature, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five

Interpretation and Recommendations

This chapter is divided into several sections. A summary of the study includes a review of the problem statement, the study purpose and research questions, a review of the methodology, and major findings. These findings include an overview of the executive directors' leadership experiences related to the alignment of the four factors of the SLT in their organizations. The results of the study then are connected with the literature presented in chapter two. Conclusions about the leadership of executive directors leading exemplary nonprofit human service organizations also are presented. The conclusions section consists of a discussion of implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks.

Study Summary

An overview of the challenges faced by leaders of nonprofit human service organizations is presented in this summary, followed by the purpose statement and research questions describing what the study was designed to explore. The research design and methods of data collection are discussed in the review of methodology. Finally, the results of the current study are presented in the major findings section.

Overview of the problem. Effective leadership is needed at all levels in every organization and community (Independent Sector, 2012). This need is especially evident during times of extraordinary change, such as the nonprofit sector has experienced during the past decade. Recent trends impacting the sector and its leaders have included the economic recession, requirements for evidence-based data to demonstrate a return on donor investment, calls for increased accountability and transparency, demographic

changes, and the resulting need to develop a viable leadership and management pipeline (Cornelius & Wolfred, 2011). Because executive directors are expected to lead effective organizations and positively impact their communities, a deeper understanding of how executive directors lead exemplary nonprofit human service organizations needed to be developed and shared. Beyond a leader's behaviors and skills, other factors and the synergy between them may play an integral role in an organization's perceived success and impact. Although a number of studies have examined educational leaders through the lens of SLT, there has not been an in-depth analysis of the experiences of executive directors of nonprofit human service organizations related to the interactions among leadership behaviors, organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Purpose statement and research questions. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of the four factors of SLT to the experiences of executive directors leading exemplary nonprofit human service organizations. Case studies of executive directors were used to examine the executive directors' experiences as they related to leadership behaviors, organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs. Additionally, the study was conducted to examine how the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the executive directors aligned with the attitudes, values, and beliefs of their respective development directors and board chairpersons. The research questions for the study were:

1. What are the leadership behaviors of the executive directors of exemplary nonprofit human service organizations?

2. How does the structure of each nonprofit organization align with the executive directors' leadership behaviors?

3. How do the leadership behaviors of the executive directors of exemplary nonprofit human service organizations align with the external forces?

4. How are the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the executive directors aligned with the attitudes, values, and beliefs of their respective board chairpersons and development directors?

Review of the methodology. A qualitative research approach with a phenomenological case study design was selected as the most appropriate methodology for this study. Through case studies, the researcher examined the executive directors' experiences as they related to the four factors of SLT: leadership behaviors, organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs. Open-ended interviews were conducted with the executive director, board chairperson, and chief development officer from four of the eight organizations that received Support Kansas City's Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award between 2010 and 2013. Interviews were recorded and responses were transcribed, coded, and analyzed in the context of the SLT. Participant responses on the Organizational and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI) were analyzed as qualitative data and were compared with interview transcripts to determine alignment of interview and inventory responses.

Major findings. Through the case studies of four exemplary nonprofit organizations, the relationships between the executive directors' leadership experiences and the four factors of the SLT were examined. The SLT provided a framework for describing the interactions between leadership behaviors, organizational structure,

external factors, and attitudes, values, and beliefs in the executive directors' actions and experiences in their respective organizations. The data provided through interviews with executive directors, board chairpersons, and development directors were detailed accounts. These data were supplemented by participant responses to the Organization and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI) and by existing organizational documents. Themes emerging from participant responses confirmed dynamic and harmonious interactions between leadership behavior, organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Factor one: Leadership behavior. The leadership behaviors of the four executive directors were found to be in alignment with the other factors of the SLT. From interviews and OLEI responses, the four executive directors were found to share common leadership behaviors that were in accord with the organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs. Themes related to leadership behaviors that emerged included: (a) demonstrating passion for the mission through hard work, (b) practicing visioning and focusing on strategic priorities, (c) building organizational capacity, (d) developing strong staff teams, (e) practicing open communication, (f) collaborating, and (g) engaging in reflection and ongoing learning.

Factor two: Organizational structure. Leadership and organizational progress are impacted by the interaction of organizational structures with the other three factors of the SLT (Irby, Brown, & Yang, 2013). Themes emerging from the four participating organizations with regard to structure included: (a) flat, broad, and presently appropriate, (b) a culture of respect for the individual, (c) an active, effective, and cohesive leadership team, (d) fluidity of structure to stimulate or accommodate organizational growth, (e) an

engaged governing board, and (f) a strategic orientation. These themes were closely related to participant responses describing the other three factors.

Factor three: External forces. Participants from each organization described external pressures to which leaders must attend. External forces revealed through interviews included: (a) an ever-increasing need for services, (b) constant financial pressure requiring diversification of funding streams, (c) challenges of effectively engaging boards of directors, (d) lack of awareness or poor public perception of the organization, and (e) challenges of recruiting and managing volunteers. Participants described how each of these challenges or pressures corresponded with the leaders' strategic decisions and actions to ensure organizational effectiveness and impact.

Factor four: Attitudes, values, and beliefs. To advance their organizations, leaders must understand their own attitudes, values, and beliefs, as well as those of the individuals they lead (Schlosberg et al., 2010). The following themes emerged from participant responses with regard to attitudes, values, and beliefs: (a) passion for mission and people served, (b) a business mindset with an expectation of excellence, (c) honesty and integrity, (d) openness, (e) support of staff, (f) a "can-do" attitude, and (g) an emphasis on innovation. These attitudes, values, and beliefs were infused throughout each of the participating organizations at the staff, executive director, and board levels.

Findings Related to the Literature

A review of literature examining the four factors of SLT, previous studies utilizing the SLT, and the concept of nonprofit organization effectiveness was conducted prior to collecting data for this study. The available literature suggested that synergy between the four factors of the SLT has been shown to be related to perceived

effectiveness of educational leaders. The current study extended the SLT from the field of educational leadership to the field of nonprofit leadership.

Existing literature also advised that the issue of evaluating the effectiveness and social impact of nonprofit organizations is complex (Tyler, 2013), and that more qualitative forms of evaluation that emphasize the engagement of key stakeholders are more likely to result in achievement of mutually-valued results (Herman & Renz, 2000). By examining executive directors' experiences in the context of the SLT, the current study helped to fill gaps in the literature by providing a deeper understanding of how executives effectively lead nonprofit human service organizations. The data collected through case studies of nonprofit human service organizations suggested that the interaction of the four factors of the SLT contributed to the perceived effectiveness of the organizations' leadership, and that the experiences of executive directors were influenced by these four factors. In this section, findings related to each of the study's research questions are discussed and connected with the literature.

Leadership behaviors of executive directors of exemplary nonprofit human service organizations. Executive directors were found to embody the mission of their respective organizations and to demonstrate passion through hard work. Each staff member and board member reported that their executive director led by example, was dependable, and exhibited high energy and persistence; these perspectives also were shared by the executive directors. Common descriptions of executive directors included: "never shies away from hard questions and hard work," and "never asks anyone to do anything that she wouldn't do herself." These findings parallel the results of Schlosberg's (2003) study of two Mexican educational leaders of a private school, in

which leaders were found to lead by example, be dependable, and demonstrate sacrifice and hard work.

In addition to leading by example, executive directors in the current study were found to be visionaries who set aggressive goals, held high expectations, and employed proactive approaches to achieve strategic priorities. This visionary behavior is associated with transformational leadership and the work of Covey (1989) who explained vision as "beginning with the end in mind" (p. 98) and Bennis (1998) who stated that leaders "create a vision with meaning – one with significance, one that puts players at the center of things rather than at the periphery" (p. 144). The importance of vision also was articulated in Kunreuther's (2006) study on generational differences in nonprofit leadership, as one participant explained, "It's hard to lead any of us without being able to see the world being a better place, whether the outcomes happen or not" (p. 12).

In their efforts to achieve strategic priorities, participants reported using various scorecards and dashboards to measure program outcomes. By evaluating the effectiveness and impact of programs, these leaders worked to increase their organizations' ability to meet the needs of clients. This focus on outcomes through use of well-established business tools corroborates the work of Herman and Renz (2000), who asserted that "more effective nonprofit organizations are more likely to use correct management practices" (p. 7).

Building capacity for their organizations was another commonly cited leadership behavior. Executive directors and their respective board chairpersons and development directors described launching innovative new programs, conducting successful capital campaigns to expand their physical structures, maintaining strong financial position, and

generating earned income to support their organization's missions and to better care for

clients. These creative and strategic actions supported Zumdahl's (2010) findings that

nonprofit leaders have high levels of perceived effectiveness and that they are highly

motivated individuals with self-perceived problem solving skills and cognitive capacity.

Furthermore, the ingenuity demonstrated by executive directors as they confidently

innovated and adapted in anticipation of or response to change resonated with the

teaching of St. Ignatius of Loyola; according to St. Ignatius, a leader's indifference to

inflexible structures such as the federal government, prejudices, and cultural preferences

enables him or her to be ready to embrace innovative approaches to help the organization

achieve its goals (Ganss, 1970; Lowney, 2005). Participants from each organization

attributed the increased capacity of their organizations in part to an appreciation for

innovation and risk, explaining that they were "proud of our staff because they've…been

innovative and inventive in meeting the needs" and "very proud of the Board for being

willing to take a risk." These sentiments echoed Brinckerhoff's (2000) view of leaders

who develop the skill of ingenuity as risk takers whose drive and persistence inspire and

influence others to join their efforts to affect positive change.

Building and supporting strong staff teams was another commonly cited

leadership behavior in the current study, with respondents agreeing that their executive

directors exhibited the behaviors "cooperative," "collegial," "team player," and

"nurturing." Participants shared examples of ways the leaders developed positive

relationships and a sense of community among constituents, which aided in achievement

of shared goals. One executive director summarized: "It's important to surround yourself

with people who are better, smarter than you, and to develop a synergistic team." This

finding reinforces Covey's (1989) assertion that synergy tests whether constituents "are really open to the principle of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts" (p. 265). Additionally, these findings mesh with the culture of transformational leadership found by Woodsmall (2012) in a community action agency where participants described ways in which creativity, accountability, and a focus on teamwork were encouraged and expected. Although the organization as a whole was vital to meet client needs and accomplish the mission, participants in the current study reported a strong emphasis on supporting staff members as individuals. Nonprofit leaders in Kunreuther's (2006) study also agreed that concern about staff was a key component of good leadership in social change organizations.

The four executive directors in the current study were found to practice open communication and truly listen to others' feedback. Similarly, both younger and older nonprofit leaders in the Building Movement Project agreed that communication skills were a key component of good leadership in organizations working for social change (Kunreuther, 2006). Transparency in communication of both positive and negative news was found to be essential leadership behavior. Participants described thoughtfully and candidly sharing information with constituents, and having difficult conversations to resolve conflict. For example, one executive director shared, "I have learned that having those caring conversations really matter to the growth of your team and the agency." This kind of open communication supports Hudson's (2011) suggestion that by engaging staff and volunteers in discussion at all levels, the leader creates a culture of "courageous conversations" and helps to build the adaptive capacity of the organization to excel in an environment of change or uncertainty (p. 28).

Another leadership behavior utilized by the four executive directors was collaboration. Participants described their efforts to network and build relationships in the community as well as to partner with other organizations to accomplish their goals. From facilitating simple program partnerships to convening complex collaborations involving multiple constituents - and, at times, unlikely partners - the executive directors were alert to the social environment, acting as consensus builders and networkers to improve the lives of the people they serve. This awareness of the social environment and the ensuing innovative approaches taken through community partnerships echo the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola and of Kolvenbach (1989), who encouraged leaders to "know the world, examine attitudes, challenge assumptions, and analyze motives" (p. 11) in the process of making principled decisions.

Participants from each of the four organizations cited reflection and ongoing learning as leadership behaviors demonstrated by the executive director. Approaches included daily reading, meeting with an executive coach, conference attendance, and tenacious self-study of technical material. Participants also commonly described learning from others' best practices and using data to make decisions. Reflecting on data and processes helped executive directors and their staff and board members to learn from the things that they did and did not do well, informing their decision-making processes moving forward. One executive director explained, "The data supports our goals when we view it with honesty and integrity." Reflecting and learning in this way highlights the leader's integrity, as Hesselbein (1996) described the leader for today and the future as focused on "how to be" rather than simply having learned lessons of how to do it (p. 122). Similarly, Wakin (2004) described leaders of integrity as consistently acting on

principles even when it is not "expedient or morally advantageous to do so" (pp. 195-196). The current study supported the existing literature with regard to reflection and ongoing learning as essential behaviors for leaders of integrity.

The previously described leadership behaviors shared by the participating executive directors provided examples to support Irby, Brown, and Yang's (2013) assertion:

> The twenty-first century necessitates that leaders be not only decisive, but also insightful and reflective. Additionally, such leaders need to be adaptable as they find themselves frequently faced with challenges to traditional practices…Leadership behaviors such as decisiveness, visioning, facilitation, team building, capacity building, community building, ongoing reflection, and conflict management all support the agility necessary to lead change in the twenty-first century. (p. 987)

Participants' accounts included numerous examples of ways that executive directors demonstrate these 21st century leadership behaviors.

Alignment of organizational structure with executive directors' leadership behaviors. In addition to depicting a framework for "vertical control and horizontal coordination of the organization" (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008, p. 38), organizational structure includes the design of systems to ensure communication and integrated effort to support goal achievement (Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012). The structures of three of the four participating organizations were found to be relatively flat, broad, and presently appropriate. There was open communication across departments, a culture of respect for the individual, and active and effective leadership teams working to advance the mission

of the organization. Although one of the four organizations was reported to operate with more authority hierarchy, clear processes were in place for open communication and decision-making. These processes reflect alignment with the leaders' behaviors, particularly building and supporting strong teams, practicing open communication, and collaborating. One board chair summarized feedback from participants: "The structure is effective for what they do. The management group is not unduly large. They do a great job of communicating among themselves. The structure serves their purpose." This sense of satisfaction with current structures complemented the results of Schlosberg's (2003) findings of a positive organizational culture where members of the school organization were empowered and involved in systematic ways; the open structure of the school reflected alignment with leadership behaviors. However, participants in the current study noted that changes in structure would be required over time in order to keep their organizations in balance. This foresight supported the conclusions of Bamberg (2004) and Kaspar (2006), who found that school leaders who purposefully and proactively aligned their leadership behaviors and organizational structures to enhance the effectiveness of their schools, and ultimately, student achievement.

Indeed, the structures of participating organizations have expanded or changed to support growth. Changes included the creation of new positions and greater investment in highly qualified staff and outside expertise to improve effectiveness. The willingness on the part of participating organizations to increase administrative costs in order to better accomplish their mission, particularly in light of difficult economic times, may be construed as at odds with the criteria established by watchdog organizations dedicated to assessing nonprofit performance. Because these organizations have been criticized for

emphasizing financial ratios rather than organizational effectiveness, care must be taken

to determine impact (Brest & Hall, 2008; Murray, 2010). Although the Panel on the

Nonprofit Sector's Principles for Good Governance and Effective Practice states that a

significant percentage of a nonprofit organization's annual budget should be spent on

programs that pursue its mission, the Panel clarified: "The budget should also provide

sufficient resources for effective administration of the organization, and, if it solicits

contributions, for appropriate fundraising activities" (Panel on the Nonprofit Sector,

2007, p. 24). The practices of participating organizations followed the Panel's

recommendation.

Similarly, Pallotta (2013) argued against the "double standard," asserting that

nonprofits are rewarded for how little they spend rather than for what they accomplish.

Pallotta (2013) suggests a new way of thinking about changing the world by rewarding

charitable organizations for "the scale of their dreams…how they measure their progress

toward those dreams, and what resources they need to make them come true, regardless

of what the overhead is" (para. 25). Some participants of the current study embraced the

mindset advocated by Pallotta, even as they maintained that financial sustainability was a

critical priority for their organization. As a result of changes in perspective, commitment

to employee growth and professional training are now part of the organizational culture

for participating organizations; these dynamics were found to be in accord with the

leaders' behaviors, particularly focusing on strategic priorities with intention, building

capacity for their organizations, and building and supporting strong teams.

Another important component of the organizational structure was an engaged

governing board. Each of the participating organizations described having active board

with committed members, as well as strong relationships between the board chair and the executive director. Participants unanimously agreed with the statement "board supports the executive director's philosophy." These findings resonated with the results of Hiland's (2006) study, which revealed a positive relationship among the strength of trust between executive directors and board chairs, their level of working together in leading the organization, and the creation of social capital. Similarly, Renz (2010) asserted that organizational performance stems from the behavior of people rather than structures, and that success is defined by the work of the team and its shared outcome. The upshot for participants in the current study, summarized by one executive director, was "a well-functioning team, working collaboratively to save lives and provide support in a caring and fiscally responsible manner." The positive relationship between board and executive director was closely aligned with the leadership behaviors "build and support strong teams," "practice open communication," and "collaborate."

A strategic orientation was found to be an essential component of the structure of each participating organization. Tschirhart and Bielefeld (2012) stated that organizational structure "connects to goals and strategy, work and technology, and people, with each element influencing the others and the structural design" (p. 62). Participants in the current study described being committed to strategic, goal-oriented management approaches with ongoing performance assessments. The boards of participating organizations reported regularly reviewing and evaluating the organizations' programs, goals, and activities to ensure mission advancement and prudent use of resources, per the Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice (Panel on the Nonprofit Sector, 2007). Each of the participating organizations also made information

available on the methods they used to evaluate the outcomes of their work and shared the results of those evaluations, as suggested by the Panel on the Nonprofit Sector (2007). However, while the four executive directors agreed that their organization had well-defined goals, only 60% of board and staff respondents indicated agreement. Because clarity of organizational goals affects outcomes assessment (Murray, 2010), participating organizations may need to take time to articulate clearer goals in order to best utilize data in the outcomes assessment process.

Three of the four participating organizations discussed succession planning efforts, describing recent executive transitions as well as long-term plans. This finding was contrary to results of the Daring to Lead report, which suggested that few organizations had a documented succession plan despite projections of high rates of executive turnover (Cornelius et al., 2011). Participating organizations' emphasis on planning for leadership transitions supports Halpern's (2006) assertion that nonprofit effectiveness and community health depend on the strength of the nonprofit workforce, York's (2009) finding that effective leadership was the strongest predictor of nonprofit sustainability, and Carson's (2011) statement that executive leadership is the principal component for understanding success or failure among nonprofits, corporations, and governments.

Alignment of executive directors' leadership behaviors with external forces. A primary external force shared by executive directors was an ever-increasing, "insatiable demand" for services that their organizations provide. Participants attributed this overwhelming need to both an increased number of people and an increase in the intensity of clients' needs. The majority of participants agreed that the executive

director's leadership was affected by the expectations of the community. Leaders

responded to these extreme levels of need with innovative approaches; one executive

director described having "ongoing discussions with clients, staff, volunteers, and board

members to evaluate our opportunities and needs." Thus, the leadership behaviors

"regular reflection" and "open communication" were employed to align with this external

force. The behaviors "collaboration" and "building capacity" also were evident, as

executive directors reported taking risks such as developing new programs, collaborating

with community partners, and engaging in commercial ventures to generate earned

income to meet increased need with limited resources.

The second main external force was constant financial pressure. Securing funding

was a major challenge for each of the participating organizations, requiring attempts to

diversify streams of support and attention to multiple constituencies. This challenge is

especially intense for human service organizations; researchers at the Midwest Center for

Nonprofit Leadership (2013) found that the human services subsector comprised the

largest single segment of Kansas City's nonprofit sector (nearly 26%), yet received only

slightly more than 10% of all revenues in 2012. A number of leadership behaviors were

demonstrated by participants in the face of this enormous challenge. For example, the

demonstration of passion through hard work was exhibited by executive directors who

made fundraising a priority and blazed through multiple capital campaigns to ensure

adequate physical space for clients. Collaboration was another key behavior

demonstrated by leaders, as they worked with their boards to determine funding strategies

and developed relationships with community partners and supporters. Aggressive goal-

setting and focus on strategic priorities also were shown as leaders implemented sound

business practices and tested earned income opportunities. These strategic management behaviors, according to Brown (2010) required "the ability to understand external market opportunities and challenges while weaving together service delivery systems to address the needs and interests of the multiple stakeholders of the organization" (p. 227). The leaders' behaviors in the current study were informed by their desire to achieve alignment in their organizations.

The third external force agreed upon by the four executive directors was the challenge of effectively engaging the board of directors, a cyclical governing body comprised of volunteer leaders. As previously mentioned, strength of trust and open communication were evident between the executive directors and board chairs. The ongoing challenge for executive directors and their key staff members was to ensure meaningful engagement and effective utilization of the expertise of their board members. One executive director summarized: "With 25 board members, keeping them engaged and informed is a challenge." This challenge was exacerbated by the rotating leadership structure of the board, as one executive director reported: "We have a new board president every year." These findings were nearly identical to those of the Daring to Lead 2011 study, in which executive directors reported that partnering effectively with the board requires a significant amount of work (Moyers, 2011).

To a lesser degree, leaders described the challenges related to marketing and volunteer management. Creating awareness and ensuring accurate public perception were ongoing issues that required clear and constant communication on the part of the leader. Volunteer managers/coordinators had strong relationships with volunteers and were described by the directors as "the best" and "amazing." This emphasis on

relationship building paralleled Umezurike's (2011) finding that effective interpersonal communication behaviors impacted nonprofit leaders' ability to attract and retain volunteers. However, participating organizations described a range of logistical and administrative challenges with regard to volunteers, from having enough projects for volunteers to do to implementing the technology needed to maintaining a database of volunteers, who often transition to become donors. The leaders aligned their behaviors with these external factors by continuing to build capacity for their volunteer programs. These responses supported Gregory and Howard's (2009) assertion that all major stakeholders acknowledge that capacity building is critical to the health of nonprofit organizations and to ending the starvation cycle that plagues these organizations.

Alignment of attitudes, values, and beliefs of executive directors with attitudes, values, and beliefs of their respective board chairpersons and development directors. Clear alignment was evident among all participants with regard to attitudes, values, and beliefs. Executive directors, development directors, and board chairs shared a passionate commitment to their organization's mission and the people served. Each participant indicated a sincere belief in the mission of their agency, a commitment to achieve this purpose, and deep appreciation for the impact made in the lives of their clients. One executive director shared, "That passion to make a difference is the fire in the belly for me. It's the knowing that you helped someone in some way - big or small - that really matters." Likewise, another director said, "The core mission keeps me going." Another executive director explained, "I feel good about the role I play in solving critical issues. My staff is saving lives every day. This work is very rewarding." Similarly, a third director shared that, even when frustrated, "I come to work with a smile every day

because I love what we do, and I love that we impact people's lives every day." Each of these attitudes affirms the high level of resolve and leadership confidence found among nonprofit executives by Cornelius et al. (2011) as well as the notion of a career calling and desire to serve found by Twist (2011) and Whitaker (2012).

A business mindset with high performance expectations was another attitude shared by participants in the current study. Board chairs, development directors, and executive directors alike valued administrative acumen, an expectation of excellence in all endeavors, and good stewardship. One board chair summarized the expectation that "time, energy, and financial resources be maximized to create positive impact." This expectation was aligned with previous literature describing the board's function of ensuring effective use of resources and board members' post-recession willingness to better understand financial choices (McCambridge, 2011; Renz, 2010; Wolf, 1999).

Honesty, integrity, and openness also were embraced by participants from each organization. Transparency and accountability were important to all participants, and contributed to a culture of trust and stability within the organizations. This emphasis on character and ethical behavior supported Jeavons' (2010) assertion that "The lifeblood of the nonprofit sector is trust" (p. 203) and nonprofit organizations "are expected to – and should – demonstrate integrity, openness, accountability, service, and a caring demeanor" (p. 187). Beyond transparency in communication, openness to diversity, and openness to change were values shared by participants; a common theme among responses was that "everyone's voice is heard, even if that voice is not always acted on." Participants appreciated the way that the executive directors sought others' input, listened, and discerned. These findings resonated with Kolvenbach's (1989) suggestion that leaders

"know the world, examine attitudes, challenge assumptions, and analyze motives" (p. 11) as they select values and make principled decisions.

Each of the participating organizations expressed the belief that supporting staff members and their professional growth contributed to a sense of trust and stability throughout the organization. Light (2002) stated that one of the nonprofit sector's most valuable resources is its workforce and that nonprofit employees may experience high levels of stress and burnout without training and adequate support. Cognizant of this concern, participants in the current study made conscious decisions to ensure that their organizations were supportive, flexible places to work where ongoing training is provided. The appreciation and support of staff were summarized by one executive director: "The staff's dedication every day blows my mind. I have a responsibility to make sure I do everything I possibly can to support them in that work."

The enormity of social problems and human need requires great tenacity and a "can-do" attitude among nonprofit leaders, according to participants in the current study. Respondents valued "stubbornness" and a "healthy disrespect for the impossible." The keen problem solving ability and tenacity demonstrated by the four executive directors helped them build the adaptive capacity of their organizations to succeed in an environment of uncertainty as described by Brown (2010) and Hudson (2011). Respondents in the current study also confirmed Heyman's (2011) assertion that "unwavering tenacity is one of the most crucial elements to success for anyone in a leadership position" (p. 4).

Respondents from each organization also valued an emphasis on innovation and creativity. Innovative operating models, methods of service delivery, and the

development of theory based on practice were celebrated by participants. Collaborating with other community organizations also was valued as an innovative means of meeting client needs. Executive directors described working with community partners to improve systems and ensure the well-being of the people they serve. This attitude and resulting behaviors were encouraged by Heyman (2011) as he encouraged nonprofit leaders to "collaborate, collaborate, collaborate" (p. 3) and Renz (2010), who suggested that it is increasingly necessary for nonprofits to develop ongoing working partnerships with other organizations in order to accomplish their mission.

Conclusions

The current study presented information on the experiences of executive directors leading exemplary nonprofit human service organizations. Case studies were developed through interviews with executive directors, board chairpersons, and development directors, existing documents, and participant responses to the Organization and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI), with the Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT) used as a theoretical framework within the study to examine participant experiences. The existing literature has indicated that alignment of the four factors of the SLT led to perceived effectiveness of the leader and the organization in educational settings. This study extended the SLT to the field of nonprofit leadership; findings confirmed that synergy existed among the four factors and enabled the leaders to accomplish their goals and advance their organizations. The experiences described in the current study may provide insight to effective leadership in the nonprofit sector. Implications for action are described in the next section.

Implications for action. The current study's findings present implications for current and prospective executive directors of nonprofit organizations, boards of directors charged with hiring and overseeing executive directors, and nonprofit leadership education programs designed to prepare or further develop leaders of nonprofit organizations. Current executive directors may examine and consider their own leadership behaviors in relation to the organizational structure, external forces impacting their organization, and the attitudes, values, and beliefs of those they lead. When misalignment or tension is recognized, executive directors may alter potentially negative perceptions of their leadership by modifying their leadership behaviors or the organizational structure to improve organizational effectiveness and mission accomplishment. Further analysis of the four factors may be useful to team building and conflict resolution within an organization.

Executive directors also may seek ways to adjust the attitudes, values, and beliefs of others, or to realign or reaffirm their personal values and beliefs to the organization and the external forces. If an executive director finds that achieving synergy between the four factors is too difficult or that he or she does not fit within the organization, then he or she may decide to leave the organization. This same examination may be helpful to candidates considering an executive director position with an organization; by analyzing their own leadership behaviors and the other three factors of SLT, candidates can determine whether a particular position is a good fit.

Boards of directors engaged in succession planning for the organizations they govern may utilize the SLT as they consider particular leadership styles and behaviors desired in prospective executive directors in relation to the other factors for their

respective organization. Additionally, through regular examination of the alignment of the four factors of the SLT within their organizations, perhaps through periodic administration of the OLEI, boards may better evaluate and support their executive directors' leadership. This analysis also may inform board members regarding their own performance.

Universities and professional development programs providing nonprofit leadership and management education may encourage students and participants to examine their own leadership behaviors and attitudes, values, and beliefs. In addition to this self-examination, students may be encouraged to ask questions about organizational structure, external forces, and attitudes, values, and beliefs when considering a position with a particular nonprofit organization. Students preparing for a nonprofit sector career also may examine and reflect upon these factors through the academic component of an internship experience. Presentations by successful leaders of nonprofit organizations about their leadership experiences in relation to the other three factors of the SLT may inspire students to recognize and develop their own leadership styles and skills. Furthermore, education programs may provide experiential learning opportunities and connections to mentors to facilitate students' practice of specific leadership behaviors as identified by the participants in this study.

Recommendations for future research. The current study was based on case studies of four award-winning nonprofit human service organizations in one metropolitan area. The relationship of the four factors of the SLT to the experiences of executive directors leading these organizations was examined. Recommendations for future research include utilizing a larger sample size by examining more organizations, as well

as examining organizations from other geographic regions. Organizations from other nonprofit subsectors, such as health services, education and research, international affairs, environment and animals, civil and human rights, religious, and arts, culture, and humanities, also could be explored.

The sample for the current study included recipients of Support Kansas City's Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award. Future research may examine samples derived from other recognition programs or categories related to effectiveness. Additionally, future studies may compare and contrast the experiences of executive directors leading exemplary organizations with those leading organizations that are struggling or not perceived as successful.

This study focused specifically on executive directors' experiences through the lens of the SLT and used the accompanying instrument, the OLEI. Future research examining nonprofit executive directors' experiences may be grounded in other leadership theories, such as servant leadership. If another leadership theory is used as a framework, future studies may utilize alternate inventory instruments.

Concluding remarks. The experiences of executive directors of exemplary nonprofit human service organizations were examined in this study through the lens of the Synergistic Leadership Theory. Participants' leadership behaviors, organizational structures, the external forces impacting the organizations and leaders, and the attitudes, values, and beliefs of executive directors, staff members, and board members were explored and were found to be synergistically aligned. In anticipation of and in response to challenges and opportunities, the executive directors demonstrated passion and agility. Participants were motivated by external forces to modify their leadership behaviors,

enhance their organizational structure and culture, and to embrace and embody the core values shared by their constituents to effectively advance the mission of their respective organizations.

Findings from the case studies confirmed existing literature and contributed an expanded understanding of the theory and practice of nonprofit leadership. By extending the SLT to the field of nonprofit administration, the current study provided a deeper insight into the dynamic factors of effective executive leadership of nonprofit human service organizations. The findings of this study may assist current and future nonprofit sector leaders who seek to improve organizational effectiveness and mission accomplishment.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Tetrahedral Model for the SLT

Figure 1. Tetrahedral Model for the Synergistic Leadership

Organizational Structure
Rotates Leadership
Uses expertise of members, not rank
Has consensually derived goals
Values members
Rewards professional development
Relies on informal communication
Disperses Power
Promotes community
Promotes nurturing and caring
Has many rules
Has separate tasks and roles
Maintains a tall hierarchy
Initiates few changes

External Forces
Perceptions/Expectations of
Supervisor/Colleagues
Perceptions/Expectations of
Community, Local, State,
National Regulations,
Resources
Location and Culture of
Community
Socio-economic Status
Language/Ethnic Groups
Political/Special Interest
Groups

Leadership
Behaviors
Autocratic
Delegator
Collaborator
Communicator
Task-oriented
Risk-taker
Relational
Nurturer
Controller
Stabilizer
Intuitive

Beliefs, Attitudes,
Values
Importance of professional growth
Openness to change/diversity
Adherence to tradition
Collegial trust/support
Importance of character, ethics,
integrity
Importance of programs for at-
risk/gifted students
Role of teachers/learners
Purpose of school
Role of teachers/administrators
Importance of employee well-being

*Examples under the factors are not all-inclusive.
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This model appeared in
Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Executive Director Interview Questions

1.　　Describe the values and beliefs that guide your leadership behaviors. Describe

　　　the perceived values and beliefs of your board, staff, and the organization's

　　　supporters. In what ways have their values and beliefs influenced you?

2.　　Describe the leadership behaviors you believe have contributed to the success of

　　　your organization.

3.　　Look at your organization's mission statement. When was the last revision of this

　　　and how did you influence the revision? (Or if you have not revised the mission,

　　　do you plan to do so?)

4.　　Describe the decision-making process in your organization to improve program

　　　outcomes and impact.

5.　　How have you sustained the momentum of success in your organization? (Or

　　　how was the success sustained?) What causes you to stay as the executive

　　　director of this organization?

6.　　Look at the organizational chart for your organization. (If there is not an

　　　organizational chart, ask the executive director to explain the organization of their

　　　nonprofit.) How has the organization of staff changed under your leadership, and

　　　how have you influenced that change?

7.　　What are the greatest challenges that you have encountered in working with the

　　　following groups: the board of directors, clients, volunteers, donors, and staff?

　　　How have you met those challenges?

Board Chairperson Interview Questions

1. What values and beliefs guide this organization? How has the executive director influenced those values and beliefs?

2. Describe the leadership behaviors of the executive director.

3. Describe the organizational structure of this organization.

4. Describe the decision-making process for making changes to improve program outcomes and impact.

5. What are the greatest challenges that the organization faces with the following groups: the board of directors, clients, volunteers, donors, and staff? How has the executive director met those challenges?

Development Director Interview Questions

1. What values and beliefs guide your organization? How has the executive director influenced those values and beliefs?

2. Describe the leadership behaviors of the executive director.

3. Describe the organizational structure of this organization.

4. Describe the organization's decision-making process for making changes to improve program outcomes and impact.

5. What are the greatest challenges that your organization faces with the following groups: the board of directors, clients, volunteers, donors, and staff? How has the executive director met these challenges?

Appendix C: OLEI

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Organizational
And
Leadership
Effectiveness
Inventory

Superintendent

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Part III ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Respond to what extent you agree the following characteristics apply to your school district.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

72. Utilizes system of rotating leadership	1	2	3	4
73. Recognizes ability or expertise	1	2	3	4
74. Arrives at goals through consensual process	1	2	3	4
75. Values faculty/staff as individual human beings	1	2	3	4
76. Commitment to employee growth	1	2	3	4
77. Power sharing	1	2	3	4
78. Promotes community and cooperation	1	2	3	4
79. Promotes nurturing and caring	1	2	3	4
80. Promotes subordinate empowerment	1	2	3	4
81. Has clear norms and values	1	2	3	4
82. Encourages professional training	1	2	3	4
83. Has well-defined goals	1	2	3	4

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

46. Nurturing	1	2	3	4
47. Democratic	1	2	3	4
48. Intuitive	1	2	3	4
49. Flexible/adaptable	1	2	3	4
50. Emotionally expressive	1	2	3	4
51. Receptive to new ideas/change	1	2	3	4
52. Alert to social environment	1	2	3	4
53. Responsive to need of faculty/staff	1	2	3	4
54. Reflective	1	2	3	4

Part II EXTERNAL FORCES

To what extent do you believe your school board agrees to the importance of the following:

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

55. Emphasis on collegiality	1	2	3	4
56. Views teachers as leaders	1	2	3	4
57. Emphasis on reflective practice	1	2	3	4
58. Participative decision making	1	2	3	4
59. Utilizes system of rotating leadership	1	2	3	4
60. Recognizes ability or expertise	1	2	3	4
61. Arrives at goals through consensual process	1	2	3	4
62. Values faculty/staff as individual human beings	1	2	3	4
63. Commitment to employee growth	1	2	3	4
64. Power sharing	1	2	3	4
65. Promotes community and cooperation	1	2	3	4
66. Promotes nurturing and caring	1	2	3	4
67. Promotes subordinate empowerment	1	2	3	4

Respond to what extent you believe the following apply to the superintendent.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

68. School board supports the superintendent's philosophy.	1	2	3	4
69. The superintendent's leadership is affected by the expectations of the community.	1	2	3	4
70. The socio-economic levels in the community affect the superintendent's leadership.	1	2	3	4
71. Language groups in the community impact the superintendent's leadership.	1	2	3	4

Part I   LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR
Interpersonal Behavior

To what extent do you agree the following behaviors reflect the personal leadership style of the superintendent.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

31. Cooperative	1	2	3	4
32. Empathetic	1	2	3	4
33. People oriented	1	2	3	4
34. Compassionate	1	2	3	4
35. Collegial	1	2	3	4
36. Team player	1	2	3	4
37. Strong interpersonal skills	1	2	3	4
38. Consensus builder	1	2	3	4
39. Empowers others	1	2	3	4
40. Networker	1	2	3	4
41. Transformational	1	2	3	4
42. Combines social talk with administrative talk	1	2	3	4
43. Uses affiliate language, such as "we," "our"	1	2	3	4
44. Participative	1	2	3	4
45. Inclusive	1	2	3	4

Part IV   VALUES, ATTITUDES, AND BELIEFS

Respond to what extent you believe the following apply to the Superintendent.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

84. Emphasis on professional growth for self/staff/faculty	1	2	3	4
85. Openness to change	1	2	3	4
86. Emphasis on collegiality	1	2	3	4
87. Emphasis on character ethics, and integrity	1	2	3	4
88. Emphasis on programs for special students	1	2	3	4
89. Emphasis on innovation	1	2	3	4
90. Emphasis on reflective practice	1	2	3	4
91. Openness to diversity	1	2	3	4

Respond to what extent you agree the following apply to your school board.

92. Emphasis of professional growth for self/staff/faculty	1	2	3	4
93. Emphasis on innovation	1	2	3	4
94. Importance of programs for special students	1	2	3	4
95. Openness to change	1	2	3	4
96. Openness to diversity	1	2	3	4

Part V DEMOGRAPHICS

Please check the information that applies to you.

Ethnicity:

_____ Anglo
_____ African-American
_____ Hispanic
_____ Asian/Pacific Islander
_____ Native American

Gender:

_____ Male

_____ Female

Years of experience in present position:

_____ 1-3
_____ 4-6
_____ 7-9
_____ 10-12
_____ 13-15
_____ 16-18 plus

Additional comments regarding organizational structure, external forces, attitudes, beliefs, and values, and leadership behaviors:

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree)

17. Decision maker	1	2	3	4
18. Risk taker	1	2	3	4
19. Task oriented	1	2	3	4
20. Change agent	1	2	3	4
21. Influencer	1	2	3	4
22. Analyzes situations	1	2	3	4
23. High energy	1	2	3	4
24. Achievement oriented	1	2	3	4
25. Emotionally stable	1	2	3	4
26. Self sufficient	1	2	3	4
27. Effective time manager	1	2	3	4
28. Organized	1	2	3	4
29. Persuasive	1	2	3	4
30. Effective	1	2	3	4

Part I LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR
Management Behavior

To what extent do you agree the following behaviors
reflect the personal leadership style of the superintendent.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

1. Leads by example	1	2	3	4
2. Ability to "juggle"	1	2	3	4
3. Communicator	1	2	3	4
4. Lifelong learner	1	2	3	4
5. High expectations of self and others	1	2	3	4
6. Strong academic self-concept	1	2	3	4
7. Motivational	1	2	3	4
8. Communicates vision	1	2	3	4
9. "Can do" philosophy (resourceful)	1	2	3	4
10. Persistent	1	2	3	4
11. Shares power	1	2	3	4
12. Dependable	1	2	3	4
13. Efficient	1	2	3	4
14. Assertive	1	2	3	4
15. Delegates	1	2	3	4
16. Utilizes participatory management	1	2	3	4

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Organizational
And
Leadership
Effectiveness
Inventory

School Board

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Part III ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Respond to what extent you agree the following characteristics apply to your school district.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

72. Utilizes system of rotating leadership	1	2	3	4
73. Recognizes ability or expertise	1	2	3	4
74. Arrives at goals through consensual process	1	2	3	4
75. Values faculty/staff as individual human beings	1	2	3	4
76. Commitment to employee growth	1	2	3	4
77. Power sharing	1	2	3	4
78. Promotes community and cooperation	1	2	3	4
79. Promotes nurturing and caring	1	2	3	4
80. Promotes subordinate empowerment	1	2	3	4
81. Has clear norms and values	1	2	3	4
82. Encourages professional training	1	2	3	4
83. Has well-defined goals	1	2	3	4

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

46. Nurturing	1	2	3	4
47. Democratic	1	2	3	4
48. Intuitive	1	2	3	4
49. Flexible/adaptable	1	2	3	4
50. Emotionally expressive	1	2	3	4
51. Receptive to new ideas/change	1	2	3	4
52. Alert to social environment	1	2	3	4
53. Responsive to needs of faculty/staff	1	2	3	4
54. Reflective	1	2	3	4

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Part II EXTERNAL FORCES

To what extent do you believe your school board agrees to the importance of the following.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

55. Emphasis on collegiality	1	2	3	4
56. Views teachers as leaders	1	2	3	4
57. Emphasis on reflective practice	1	2	3	4
58. Participative decision making	1	2	3	4
59. Utilizes system of rotating leadership	1	2	3	4
60. Recognizes ability or expertise	1	2	3	4
61. Arrives at goals through consensual process	1	2	3	4
62. Values faculty/staff as individual human beings	1	2	3	4
63. Commitment to employee growth	1	2	3	4
64. Power sharing	1	2	3	4
65. Promotes community and cooperation	1	2	3	4
66. Promotes nurturing and caring	1	2	3	4
67. Promotes subordinate empowerment	1	2	3	4

Respond to what extent you believe the following apply to you.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

68. School board supports my philosophy.	1	2	3	4
69. My leadership is affected by the expectations of the community.	1	2	3	4
70. The socio-economic levels in the community affect my leadership.	1	2	3	4
71. Language groups in the community impact my leadership.	1	2	3	4

Part I   LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR
Interpersonal Behavior

To what extent do you agree the following behaviors reflect your personal leadership style.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

31. Cooperative	1	2	3	4
32. Empathetic	1	2	3	4
33. People oriented	1	2	3	4
34. Compassionate	1	2	3	4
35. Collegial	1	2	3	4
36. Team player	1	2	3	4
37. Strong interpersonal skills	1	2	3	4
38. Consensus builder	1	2	3	4
39. Empowers others	1	2	3	4
40. Networker	1	2	3	4
41. Transformational	1	2	3	4
42. Combines social talk with administrative talk	1	2	3	4
43. Uses affiliate language, such as "we," "our"	1	2	3	4
44. Participative	1	2	3	4
45. Inclusive	1	2	3	4

Part IV   VALUES, ATTITUDES, AND BELIEFS

Respond to what extent you believe the following apply to you.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

84. Emphasis on professional growth for self/staff/faculty	1	2	3	4
85. Openness to change	1	2	3	4
86. Emphasis on collegiality	1	2	3	4
87. Emphasis on character ethics, and integrity	1	2	3	4
88. Emphasis on programs for special students	1	2	3	4
89. Emphasis on innovation	1	2	3	4
90. Emphasis on reflective practice	1	2	3	4
91. Openness to diversity	1	2	3	4

Respond to what extent you agree the following apply to your school board.

92. Emphasis of professional growth for self/staff/faculty	1	2	3	4
93. Emphasis on innovation	1	2	3	4
94. Importance of programs for special students	1	2	3	4
95. Openness to change	1	2	3	4
96. Openness to diversity	1	2	3	4

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Part V DEMOGRAPHICS

Please check the information that applies to you.

Ethnicity:

_____ Anglo
_____ African-American
_____ Hispanic
_____ Asian/Pacific Islander
_____ Native American

Gender:

_____ Male

_____ Female

Years of experience in present position:

_____ 1-3
_____ 4-6
_____ 7-9
_____ 10-12
_____ 13-15
_____ 16-18 plus

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

17. Decision maker	1	2	3	4
18. Risk taker	1	2	3	4
19. Task oriented	1	2	3	4
20. Change agent	1	2	3	4
21. Influencer	1	2	3	4
22. Analyzes situations	1	2	3	4
23. High energy	1	2	3	4
24. Achievement oriented	1	2	3	4
25. Emotionally stable	1	2	3	4
26. Self sufficient	1	2	3	4
27. Effective time manager	1	2	3	4
28. Organized	1	2	3	4
29. Persuasive	1	2	3	4
30. Effective	1	2	3	4

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Part I LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR
Management Behavior

To what extent do you agree the following behaviors reflect your personal leadership style.

(1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Agree; 4=Strongly Agree)

1. Leads by example	1	2	3	4
2. Ability to "Juggle"	1	2	3	4
3. Communicator	1	2	3	4
4. Lifelong learner	1	2	3	4
5. High expectations of self and others	1	2	3	4
6. Strong academic self-concept	1	2	3	4
7. Motivational	1	2	3	4
8. Communicates vision	1	2	3	4
9. "Can do" philosophy (resourceful)	1	2	3	4
10. Persistent	1	2	3	4
11. Shares power	1	2	3	4
12. Dependable	1	2	3	4
13. Efficient	1	2	3	4
14. Assertive	1	2	3	4
15. Delegates	1	2	3	4
16. Utilizes participatory management	1	2	3	4

Additional comments regarding organizational structure, External forces, attitudes, beliefs, and values, and leadership behaviors:

Appendix D: Study Invitation

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program in the Department of Education at Baker University. My doctoral dissertation is on the experiences of leaders of exemplary nonprofit organizations, in particular those that have received the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership Award from Support Kansas City.

I'm writing to invite you to participate in an individual interview that will involve conversations about your experiences fulfilling a leadership role with an exemplary nonprofit human service organization. Your experiences and those of your colleagues will be the data on which my study will be based. My hope is that this research will contribute to the enhancement and improvement of nonprofit leadership education and will add to the body of research on nonprofit leadership and management.

Any information that you share with me will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity will be disguised to protect your anonymity, and data from the study will be kept under lock and key.

Your involvement in the study is completely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

The interview will be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time at XYZ organization.

Please read and sign the attached consent letter if you are interested in participating in the study.

If you have any concerns or further questions, please contact me at (816) 501-4299 or by email at jennifer.rinella@rockhurst.edu.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rinella
Director, Nonprofit Leadership Studies at Rockhurst University
Ed.D. candidate, Baker University

Appendix E: Interview Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

I consent to participate as an interviewee in the Case Study of Nonprofit Leadership research project with Jennifer Rinella, a graduate student in Educational Leadership at Baker University.

My consent is given on the following understandings pertaining to this research:

1. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of leaders of nonprofit human service organizations. The interview will focus on my experience, perceptions, and opinions with regard to the leadership of my organization.

2. My participation in this research will be limited to one interview of up to one hour duration at a mutually agreed upon time and place.

3. The interview will be audiotaped.

4. I understand that the Baker University dissertation advisor, Dr. Brad Tate, may have access to the notes, transcripts, and audiotapes if necessary, but not my name. The data will be treated confidentially.

5. My identity will not be revealed in any written document or oral presentation derived from this research.

6. I will have the opportunity to review the transcripts to check accuracy and if necessary to provide clarification and later insights.

7. My participation in this research is purely voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Subject to the above understandings, I agree to be interviewed in this study:

_____   _____

Signature of interviewee   Date

Appendix F: Thank-you Letter to Participants

Dear _____,

Thank you for your participation in the case study of nonprofit leadership research project.

Your generous offering of time and the manner in which you shared your experiences was truly valuable to the project. In addition to your generosity, your openness and honesty was both refreshing and stimulating. The insights gained from you and your colleagues about your experiences enrich the understanding of the leadership of nonprofit organizations. Your contribution will improve pathways for students pursuing leadership roles with nonprofit organizations and will add to the body of research on nonprofit leadership and management.

If you have any questions or further comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at (816) 501-4299 or jennifer.rinella@rockhurst.edu. Best wishes on your continuing work for the greater good.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rinella

Appendix G: OLEI Invitation and Reminder

FW: Follow-up survey
Rinella, Jennifer

Sent:	Friday, January 31, 2014 1:33 PM
To:	Rinella, Jennifer
Attachments:	image001.png (10 KB)

```
From: Rinella, Jennifer
Sent: Monday, November 18, 2013 3:02 PM
To:
Subject: Follow-up survey


Dear                                    ,

Thank you again for meeting with me last month and assisting with my dissertation
research.  As we discussed, the second and final phase of data collection is a
brief online survey.  Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated!
Please find the Organization and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI)
survey here:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8B5R96Y

Thanks in advance for taking a few minutes to complete this survey.  Responses
are anonymous, and having your response before November 27 would be very helpful.

Sincerely,
Jenny Rinella




JENNIFER RINELLA
Director of Nonprofit Leadership Studies
School of Graduate and Professional Studies
T 816-501-4299  F 816-501-4615

1100 Rockhurst Road
Kansas City, MO 64110
www.rockhurst.edu<http://www.rockhurst.edu/>

[cid:image001.png@01CEE46F.2B2411D0]
```

FW: Reminder: Follow-up survey

Rinella, Jennifer

Sent:	Friday, January 31, 2014 1:37 PM
To:	Rinella, Jennifer
Attachments:	image005.png (10 KB)

```
From: Rinella, Jennifer
Sent: Monday, November 25, 2013 10:27 AM
To:
Subject: Reminder: Follow-up survey

Dear Participants,

Thank you again assisting with my dissertation research.  As we discussed, the
second and final phase of data collection is a brief online survey.  If you have
completed the survey, thank you.  If you have not, please find the Organization
and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI) survey here:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LKXSWFB

Responses are anonymous, and having your response before November 27 would be
most appreciated. Thank you for your participation!

Sincerely,
Jenny Rinella

JENNIFER RINELLA
Director of Nonprofit Leadership Studies
School of Graduate and Professional Studies
T 816-501-4299  F 816-501-4615

1100 Rockhurst Road
Kansas City, MO 64110
www.rockhurst.edu<http://www.rockhurst.edu/>

[cid:image005.png@01CEE1F1.B512F710]
```

Appendix H: IRB Request Form

BAKER
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
GRADUATE DEPARTMENT

Date: _____
IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER _____
(IRB USE ONLY)

IRB REQUEST
Proposal for Research
Submitted to the Baker University Institutional Review Board

I.   Research Investigator(s) (Students must list faculty sponsor first)

Department(s)   School of Education Graduate Department

      Name   Signature

1.   Brad Tate, Ed.D.   _____,   Major Advisor

2.   Katie Hole   _____,   Research Analyst

3.   Brian Posler, Ph.D.   University Committee Member

4.   Stephanie Krick, Ph.D.   External Committee Member

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Rinella_
Phone: 913-209-2202
Email: jenniferarinella@stu.bakeru.edu
Mailing address: 4100 W. 91st Street, Prairie Village, KS 66207

Faculty sponsor:
Phone:
Email:

Expected Category of Review: ___Exempt _**X**_ Expedited _ __Full

II: Protocol: (Type the title of your study)

A Case Study of Nonprofit Organization Leaders Viewed through the Lens of Synergistic
Leadership Theory

Summary

In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.
As the nonprofit sector and the communities it serves are experiencing rapid and constant change, effective leadership at all levels is needed in every organization and community. Because executive directors are expected to lead effective organizations and produce exemplary results, a deeper understanding of how executive directors lead exemplary nonprofit human service organizations needs to be developed and shared. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship of the four factors of Synergistic Leadership Theory (SLT) to the experiences of executive directors of nonprofit organizations that have received the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership award. Case studies will be used to examine the executive directors' experiences as they relate to leadership behaviors, organizational structure, and external forces, as well as the alignment of the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the executive directors and their respective board chairpersons and development directors.

Briefly describe each condition or manipulation to be included within the study.
This is not an experimental study. There are no conditions or manipulations included.

What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.
The study involves individual interviews with executive directors, board chairpersons, and development directors of nonprofit organizations. Each participant also will be asked to complete the Organizational and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI). Copies of the interview protocol and the OLEI are attached.

Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical or legal risk? If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk.
No psychological, social, physical, or legal risk is anticipated for any participant in this research. Participants will be informed that information disclosed in the interview process will be kept confidential, that participation is voluntary, and that participants may withdraw from the study at any time.

Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.
No stress to subjects is anticipated.

Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.
Subjects will not be deceived or misled in any way.

Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.
Personal or sensitive information will not be requested from participants. Participants will be asked about their perceptions of the executive director's leadership style and behaviors, their perceptions of external forces affecting their organization, their

perceptions of the structure and culture of their organization, and their attitudes, beliefs, and values with regard to leadership of the organization.

Will the subjects be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.
Subjects will not be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading.

Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?
Approximately 1.5 to 2 hours will be requested of each participant.

Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.
The participants in this study will be executive directors, board chairpersons, and development directors of nonprofit organizations that have been awarded the Excellence in Nonprofit Leadership award. Participants will be invited to participate in the study via email and phone contact. The study invitation outline is attached.

What steps will be taken to insure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?
In the study invitation, potential participants will be notified that taking part in this study is voluntary. No inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation; however, participants will be offered a report of the study results.

How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.
Subjects will complete a written consent form prior to participating (copy attached).

Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.
No aspect of the data will be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject.

Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher or employer? If so, explain.
Participation or non-participation will not be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher, or employer.

What steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of the data? Where will it be stored? How long will it be stored? What will be done with it after the study is completed?
The identity of participants will be disguised to protect their anonymity. Data from the study will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. Per Baker University guidelines, the data will be kept for at least three years after the research is complete.

If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?
There are no risks involved in this study.

Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe.
Existing data including organizational mission and vision statements, organizational annual reports, and organizational profiles complied by the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation and the United Way will be used to supplement interview and inventory responses.

Appendix I: IRB Approval Letter
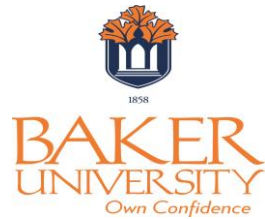
Oct. 3, 2013

Dear Jennifer,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your research project application and approved this project under Expedited Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

The Baker University IRB requires that your consent form must include the date of approval and expiration date (one year from today). Please be aware of the following:

1. At designated intervals (usually annually) until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the IRB.
2. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify the OIR about any new investigators not named in original application.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the IRB Chair or representative immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform Office of Institutional Research (OIR) or myself when this project is terminated. As noted above, you must also provide OIR with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from the IRB one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Thomas Peard
Chair, Baker University IRB

Appendix J: Permission to Use Tetrahedral Model for the SLT

Jennifer Rinella
4100 W. 91st Street
Prairie Village, KS 66207

October 24, 2013

Beverly Irby, Ed.D.
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843

Dear Dr. Irby,

This letter will confirm my recent email request regarding my doctoral dissertation at Baker University entitled "A Case Study of Nonprofit Organizations Viewed through the Lens of Synergistic Leadership Theory." I would like your permission to use and reproduce the "Tetrahedral Model for the Synergistic Leadership Theory" (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002). I plan to reprint and reproduce this visual of the Synergistic Leadership Theory.

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, and to the prospective publication of my dissertation by UMI. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the materials in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of the letter also will confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign the letter where indicated below and return to me. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rinella

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

__ _____ _____ Date: ___10-24-2013_____

Appendix K: Permission to Use and Modify the OLEI

Jennifer Rinella
4100 W. 91st Street
Prairie Village, KS 66207

October 24, 2013

Beverly Irby, Ed.D.
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843

Dear Dr. Irby,

This letter will confirm my recent email request regarding my doctoral dissertation at Baker University entitled "A Case Study of Nonprofit Organizations Viewed through the Lens of Synergistic Leadership Theory."

I would like your permission to use and reproduce the "Organizational and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (OLEI)" (Irby, Brown, & Duffy, 2000). Because the subjects in my study are leaders of nonprofit organizations rather than school administrators, I would like your permission to make slight modifications in the language of the instrument prompts to reflect the roles of study participants and the study setting (i.e. "executive director" instead of "principal", "organization" instead of "campus", and "organization's constituencies" instead of "school community"). I plan to use and distribute this version of the Organizational and Leadership Effectiveness Inventory to the participants in my study.

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, and to the prospective publication of my dissertation by UMI. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the materials in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of the letter also will confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign the letter where indicated below and return to me. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rinella
PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE: (I would prefer that you use the OELI from the Rose Hernandez' dissertation that I directed. That is the latest Revision. An analysis of superintendent and school board perceptions of the factors of the synergistic leadership theory Diss.Hernandez, Rose M. Sam Houston State University, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2004. 3143582.)

_____ _____ ____ Date: _____10-24-2013_____