Exemplary Nonprofit Leaders and the Behaviors They Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

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Exemplary Nonprofit Leaders and the Behaviors They Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

A Dissertation by

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Brandman University
Irvine, California
School of Education
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership
April 2017

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ABSTRACT

Exemplary Nonprofit Leaders and the Behaviors They Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

by Candice Flint

Purpose: The purpose of this mixed method case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Methodology: A mixed method case study was utilized to identify and describe behaviors exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. Participants were identified for the qualitative portion of the study based on leaders meeting at least five of the six criteria for an exemplary leader. Through purposeful, random sampling three leaders were chosen and face to face interviews were conducted using an interview protocol and script. For the quantitative portion of the study, each leader provided the researcher with names and email addresses of twelve followers to participate in an online survey. The qualitative data was analyzed to determine themes and the quantitative data was analyzed to determine frequency distribution and mean scores.
**Findings:** This study revealed that exemplary nonprofit leaders felt the leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration were all important in creating meaning within the organization. The leaders believed there was an interplay between all five elements and in some situations the elements were used simultaneously while in other cases they were used separately. The study also identified specific behaviors leaders utilized to create meaning through the five leadership elements.

**Conclusions:** The study supported the combined effects of the behaviors when intertwined have a greater impact on leaders and followers to create personal and organizational meaning.

**Recommendations:** Recommendations for further research included replicating this study on a larger scale, conducting a phenomenological study with an equal number of female and male exemplary nonprofit leaders to determine if any differences emerge and replicating this mixed methods case study in different geographical locations in the United States.
PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study meaning making in multiple types of organizations, four faculty researchers and 12 doctoral students discovered a common interest in exploring the ways exemplary leaders create personal and organizational meaning. This resulted in a thematic study conducted by a research team of 12 doctoral students. This mixed methods investigation was designed with a focus on the ways in which top executives in nonprofit organizations make meaning for their followers and their organization. Exemplary leaders were selected by the team from various public, profit and non-profit organizations to examine the strategies these professionals used. Each researcher interviewed three highly successful professionals to determine what behaviors helped them to make meaning; the researcher then administered a survey to 12 followers of each leader to gain their perceptions about the leadership behaviors most important to creating meaning in their organization. To ensure thematic consistency, the team co-created the purpose statement, research questions, definitions, interview questions, survey, and study procedures. It was agreed upon by the team that for the purpose of increased validity, data collection would involve method triangulation and would include interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Throughout the study, the term “peer researchers” is used to refer to the other researchers who conducted this thematic study. My fellow doctoral students and peer researchers studied exemplary leaders in the following fields: Barbara Bartels, Presidents of Private Non-Profit Universities in Southern California; Kimberly Chastain, Chief Executive Officers of Charter School Organization; Frances E. Hansell, K-12 Superintendents in Northern California; Stephanie A. Herrera, Female Chief Executive
Officers of Private Sector Companies in Southern California; Sandra Hodge, Chief Executive Officers of Engineering Technology Organizations; Ed Jackson, Technology Leaders in Northern California; Robert J. Mancuso, Managing Partners in Consulting Organizations; Zachary Mercier, NCAA Division 1 and Extraordinary Professional Athletic Coaches; Sherri L. Prosser, Healthcare Chief Executive Officers in California; Jamel Thompson, K-12 Superintendents in Southern California; Rose Nicole Villanueva, Police Chiefs in California and Utah; and this researcher studied Presidents or CEOs of Nonprofit Organizations in Northern California.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Meaning brings purpose and happiness to humans’ lives and there is an inherent drive to pursue it. As Aristotle stated, “Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence,” (as cited in Zubko, 2000, p. 228). Finding meaning in life helps people to understand themselves as human beings. They find personal meaning through emotional connections with others and achieving goals which give them a feeling of significance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Finding meaning gives people a sense that their lives matter and it helps them to understand their place in the larger world (Wong, 2012). While people spend their lives seeking meaning, they also find themselves devoting much of their waking hours to work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This leads people to seek meaning in their professional lives as well. Mautz (2015) stated, “70 percent of us are experiencing a greater search for meaning at work than in life,” (p. 10).

Meaning can be created when individual’s values are closely aligned to the organization’s values (Liborius, 2014; Mautz, 2015). Finding meaning at work through a sense of belonging and significance, maximizes employee motivation (Ghadi, Fernando, & Caputi, 2013; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Organizations which have created places of meaning experience more employee engagement, higher productivity, less attrition and employees are more satisfied with their work endeavors (Mautz, 2015; Rath & Conchie, 2008; Sinek, 2009; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

Naturally, with organizations now being looked at to provide purpose for people’s lives, the leaders of these organizations are being expected to take on the challenge of creating meaningful workplaces. Their role is essential in this endeavor. Leaders must
provide opportunities for followers to feel connected, use their talents and skills as well as work toward a greater purpose because these are what will sustain the work of the organization. (Mautz, 2015). If leaders do not have the ability to create meaning in the workplace, their organizations will not flourish (D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

Leaders must exemplify certain attributes to foster cultures of meaning within their organizations through their character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. When exemplary leaders utilize these qualities they can create a sense of purpose for themselves and their followers where the intrinsic rewards come from the feeling of being valued and contributing to the common good (Campbell, 2013; Dik, Byrne, & Steger, 2013).

Nonprofit organizations bring people together around a particular cause or issue providing those within them a means of conveying their values which can result in creating a meaningful work environment (Frumkin, 2012; Thiagarajan, 2004). However, if this does not occur, there will be a misalignment of values for both leaders and followers within the nonprofit organization and the values which the nonprofit organization claims to embody (Liborius, 2014). The charge for exemplary nonprofit leaders is to create and sustain meaning for themselves and their followers.

**Background**

**Theoretical Framework of Meaning Making in an Organization**

Since human beings became self-aware, they have been trying to make meaning of their lives. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, believed that happiness was the purpose of life and in order to achieve it, one must cultivate certain virtues, such as courage, friendliness, temperance and generosity (Curzer, 2012). In more modern times, people
have continued to theorize about the meaning of life. Neurologist and psychiatrist, Victor Frankl (1992), who also was a Holocaust survivor, spent his career studying meaning. He stated, “Striving to find meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man,” (Frankl, 1992, p. 104). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) is a world-renowned psychology professor who developed the concept of flow, theorizing that one can experience deep happiness and meaning when one is in the state of flow. Flow is when one is completely immersed in an activity and other things do not seem to matter (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

It can be difficult to have time to find meaning in life when, according to a 2014 Gallup study, salaried employees spend 9.4 hours per day at work (Saad, 2014). With so much of the day now spent in the workplace, both leaders and followers are looking to the organizations that employ them as places to find meaning. While leaders create their own meaning within the workplace, they must also communicate a clear, inspired message about the organization’s purpose to their followers which shows how the organization’s values align with their own (Ghadi et al., 2013; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Leaders do this by developing relationships with their followers and creating a sense of belonging across all levels of the organization, eliminating isolation and building connection (Holtaway, 2012; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Meaning is created when people feel that what they do matters, that their work has significance and it contributes to the common good of the organization (Mautz, 2015; Tracy, 2014).

**Theoretical Framework of Leadership**

There are a multitude of leadership theories which have been championed over the years. Some focus on the bottom-line to bring monetary success, while other theories delve deeper, touching on the human need for meaningfulness and advancing approaches
which leaders can utilize to bring purpose to their organizations. Hence, Eich (2015) asserted leadership is about building, “a work climate of integrity, intellect, trust, and safety wherein all members of the team are highly respected, their dignity is reinforced, and their efforts are recognized and celebrated,” (p. 4). Authentic leadership, servant leadership and transformational leadership are three theories which leaders have looked to in order to create this kind of work environment.

Authentic leadership theory involves leaders being self-aware and not compromising their values or belief systems (George, 2003). George (2003) contended the theoretical ideas of authentic leadership are centered on five aspects. Authentic leaders must develop these areas in order to be effective. First, they must understand their purpose which requires being aware of who they are and what drives them (George & Sims, 2007). Authentic leaders must practice solid values which are beliefs they have personally developed, integrity being of the utmost importance (George, 2003). George asserted they lead with the heart and draw upon their compassion as well as passion. Authentic leaders establish relationships with followers, making them feel their work is meaningful (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Lastly, they demonstrate self-discipline by being aware of themselves and regulating their emotions and behavior (George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007). Leaders who lead with authenticity are not ruled by ego, rather they are driven to support and empower their followers by building their autonomy and effectiveness as leaders (George, 2003; Rath & Conchie, 2008).

The servant leadership theory asserts that leaders find meaning through serving followers and placing others’ needs and goals above their own (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). They believe in sharing power with their followers. As different talents and skills
are needed, the overseeing role can fluctuate between leaders and followers (Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leaders believe their true impact lies in service to their followers in order to help them perform at their highest potential (Rath & Conchie, 2008; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

In his seminal work, Leadership, Burns (1978) introduced the theoretical concepts of transformational leadership theory in which leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation in order to generate change in an organization’s culture. Transformational leaders guide change in an organization through the creation of a shared vision in which individual and collective values as well as aspirations align. They heighten their followers’ drive, morale and performance through personal connections (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Homrig, 2001; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014).

Transformational leaders motivate their followers to achieve goals and perform beyond initial projections through challenging expectations. These leaders possess a heightened self-awareness and they have the ability to promote positive change in individuals through dynamic relationships and shared values (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This leadership approach fosters the growth of their followers and develops them into the leaders of tomorrow through empowerment and motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass and Avolio (1994) described four behavioral characteristics necessary for leading transformational change. These transformational principles act as a framework for leaders to utilize and guide change in behavior, mindsets and the culture of the followers within an organization. They include Inspirational Motivation, Individualized
Consideration, Individualized Influence and Intellectual Stimulation (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

**Theoretical Framework of Followership**

Much less literature exists for followership especially as it compares to the vast amount of research on leadership (Baker, 2007; Kelley, 2008; Oc & Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). However, in the last several decades, people such as Robert Kelley (2008) and Ira Chaleff (2008) have contributed research to followership theory. Followers possess their own unique characteristics separate from leaders yet the interdependence of leaders and followers is undeniable (Kelley, 2008; Oc & Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

There is an abundance of literature and theories regarding leadership yet followership is a relatively new theory (Oc & Bashshur; 2013; Riggio, Chaleff, & Lipman-Blumen, 2008; Baker, 2007). Kelley (1988) first introduced his model of followership in the article, *In Praise of Followers*. He contended that there are five types of followership styles: effective, alienated, pragmatic survivor, passive and conformist (Kelley, 1988). In 1995, Ira Chaleff examined followership and built on Kelley’s followership concepts. In Chaleff’s book, *The Courageous Follower*, he also proposed a followership model consisting of five types: the sheep, the yes-people, the alienated, the pragmatics and the star-followers. Since these works were published, followership has become a topic which more people are researching as this theory asserts without followers, leaders have no one to lead (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Followers play active roles in the relationships they have with leaders (Leroy, Anseel, Gardner, & Sels; 2015; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). They are not a passive group of subordinates.
A subordinate refers to a lower ranked person in an organization; however, Kelley (2008) asserted that subordinates are not the same as followers. Effective followers possess certain qualities which enhance the leader’s ability to lead and influence the success of the organization. Followers are committed to the mission of the organization and work for its common good (Kelley, 1988; Schindler, 2014). They are loyal, self-motivated and autonomous as well as comfortable playing a secondary role (Kelley, 1988).

**Leadership Elements**

The theoretical framework for the five elements of “meaning” explored in this research was first introduced by Dr. Keith Larick and Dr. Cindy Petersen in series of conference presentations and lectures to school administrators in ACSA (Association of California School Administrators) and to doctoral students at Brandman University. This initial research and work by Larick and Petersen (2016) coupled with their leadership experience as school district superintendents inspired the need to explore what exemplary leaders do to develop personal and organizational meaning leading to high achievement. The five elements of leadership explored in this research include: character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. The framework proposed by Larick and Petersen suggests that while each element has merit, it is the interaction of the elements that support the making of meaning in organizations. In a 2015 Association of California School Administrators State Conference presentation, Larick and Petersen proposed that leaders with character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration have the integral skills to create personal and organizational meaning. In recent presentations at Brandman University, Larick and Petersen further asserted that creation of personal and
organizational meaning is fundamental to leading innovation and transformational change. The theoretical framework suggests that exemplary leaders who have developed behavioral skills in each element have the capacity to create personal and organizational meaning for followers.

**Character.** Exemplary leaders have a strong sense of character that is built on a foundation of trust. When leaders are transparent and consistent in their actions and words, it signals to their followers that they are trustworthy (Liborius, 2014; Volgelgesang, Leroy, & Avolio, 2013). Leaders can further build trust with followers when they communicate clear goals and the values which they align with their actions (Dik et al., 2013; Sinek, 2009). Because their actions are ethical and moral, the decisions they make are based on what is in the best interest of the people within the organization (Bauman, 2013; Kaipa & Radjou, 2013). Furthermore, leading by example, they model self-awareness, humility and integrity which indicates to followers they can trust their leader to guide them through abundant as well as turbulent periods (Campbell, 2013; Kaipa & Radjou, 2013; Liborius, 2014).

**Vision.** Successful organizations have a vision of what they want to exemplify. When a vision is compelling and affirms people’s identities as well as their values, it becomes rich with personal meaning (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Landsberg, 2000). Exemplary leaders know that a meaningful vision cannot be created by one person alone. They must listen carefully to followers and be attentive to their needs (Kouzes & Posner, 2009). In doing so, leaders are able to understand their followers’ aspirations and what will bring them satisfaction (Kouzes & Posner, 2009). Leaders can then enlist the help of their followers to create a shared vision because when a vision is developed
collaboratively it is more likely to come to fruition (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2009). This vision coalesces leaders and followers around a greater purpose, bringing meaning to their work (Burns, 1978; Mautz, 2015).

**Relationships.** Naturally, working toward a shared vision, leaders and followers will begin to build relationships as they pursue their collective goal. Leaders know that relationships with followers become an asset, not a weakness, for the organization (D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). In order to strengthen their relationships with their followers, leaders must be emotionally intelligent as well as skilled in creating connections with people (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Mautz, 2015; Smith, 2011). These are essential in not only developing relationships, but sustaining them. Leaders who have high emotional intelligence have a genuine interest and concern for their followers (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013; Liborius, 2014; Mautz, 2015; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011). Additionally, they know that connections are built when followers feel valued, are given opportunities to participate and feel secure (Tracy, 2014; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). By making these emotional connections with followers, exemplary leaders can create a meaningful workplace at all levels of an organization (Holtaway, 2012).

**Wisdom.** Wisdom is both a pragmatic ability and a core virtue that is an essential attribute of exemplary leadership (Banicki, 2009; Kessler & Bailey, 2007; Yang, 2011). Leaders with wisdom have the ability to bring people together and align their efforts and desires toward a greater purpose (Kaipa & Radjou, 2013). Wise leaders reflect on their experiences and observations, applying their knowledge for the common good (Barbuto & Millard, 2012; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). They have the ability to synthesize meaning from paradoxical information and they possess a deep understanding of life
This wisdom enables leaders to make decisions which are in line with the organization’s vision and values while also in the best interest of followers (Greaves et al., 2014; Melé, 2010). As leaders exercise wisdom, meaning is created for those within the organization.

**Inspiration.** Exemplary leaders have charisma and possess a deep understanding of the “why” of their organization, which when passionately messaged to followers brings meaning to their work (DuBrin, 2015; Sinek, 2009). Leaders understand the importance of appealing to the heart and mind of their followers as they communicate the vision of the organization (DuBrin, 2015; Lee, 2014). When they can do this, leaders are able to motivate followers to commit to a greater purpose and encourage them to put in more effort to achieve than they thought could be possible (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Lee, 2014; Sinek, 2009). They inspire followers by using language and actions that enhance the importance of their purpose, and as followers aspire to this purpose, they find meaning (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013). Based on the inspirational nature of their leader, followers feel compelled to act and seek to reach their highest potential because they have found a sense of identity in the vision (Ghadi et al., 2013; Lee, 2014; Sinek, 2009).

**Nonprofit Organizations**

Nonprofit organizations are unique compared to other organizations because there is already an inherent meaning to their work. Nonprofits evolved out of the endeavor of charitable work and donations. Charity, the act of giving and easing others’ suffering, has existed for centuries (Ott, 2001). It can be traced back to ancient Jewish life and its moral imperative as well as the ancient Greeks with their civic ideals (Collins, 2006; Ott,
2001). In the United States, charitable giving saw a significant change shortly after the Civil War when the numbers of the newly wealthy grew exponentially (Zunz, 2012).

People with this new-found wealth sought to contribute more than just giving money to charity, they sought to solve the root causes of social issues (Hall, 2006; Ott 2001; Zunz, 2012). “Charity had been for the needy; philanthropy was to be for mankind,” (Zunz, 2012, p.10). Through the work of these philanthropists, “foundations” were created to help build universities, hospitals and libraries (Zunz, 2012). Later, nonprofit organizations emerged as mass-giving became mainstream. Nonprofits continue to support a multitude of human needs locally, nationally and globally.

Yet even with their noble past and their mission to “do good,” nonprofit organizations are organizations of people, and people need to find meaning. It cannot be assumed that just because an organization’s mission is meaningful that those who work within it find a sense of purpose. Leaders and followers in nonprofit organizations face the same daily challenges and turbulent periods which private sector organizations face (Hannum et al., 2011). Therefore, exemplary nonprofit leaders must help followers find meaning in their work in order for their organizations to persevere and flourish.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

People may not initially think that places of employment are seen as sources for creating meaning in their lives. However, in this modern age, salaried employees devote much of their waking hours to their organization. In fact, they spend 49 hours per week on average at work (Saad, 2014). With so much time spent at work, they are increasingly looking to their organizations for meaning.
Mautz (2015) concluded that 70% of employees are looking for meaning at work. Yet, the statistics do not reflect that people are finding purpose in their workplace. In a January 2015 Gallup study, only 32.5% of employees considered themselves “engaged” (Adkins, 2016). An overwhelming amount, 51.9%, identified themselves as “not engaged” and 15.7% said they were “actively disengaged” (Adkins, 2016).

With this amount of employee disengagement there are repercussions for the organization. Disengagement leads to employees who, “are ten times more likely to say they will leave their company within a year,” (Mautz, 2015, p. 6). It also leads to conflicting perspectives, apathy, low productivity and employees not feeling valued or having an impact within the organization (Hannum et al., 2011; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). The implications for organizations are that leaders are expected to take action in order to mitigate this malaise. Therefore, leaders must hold particular qualities and act in certain ways which will establish and sustain a culture of meaning (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Mautz, 2015; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzeshniewski, 2010; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

What is not known and represents a gap in literature is how leaders create meaning for themselves and others from the perspective of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. Additionally, it is not known how these attributes are perceived as effective in creating meaning for their followers. By investigating leadership from this perspective, information could be collected to enlighten the understanding of this leadership approach and provide more knowledge about how leaders can create organizations of meaning.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed method case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Research Questions

1. What are the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration?

2. To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

Significance of the Problem

Nonprofit leaders are tasked with the need to help the organization evolve while keeping focused on doing something meaningful for society (Dobbs, 2004). While nonprofit leaders and followers pursue the mission of their organizations, they also seek fulfillment in their workplace. When they find meaning in their work, they bring what D. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) called “market value.” Working for a greater purpose builds stronger teams, creates a sense of value, problems are solved more creatively and the
organization as a whole becomes more productive (Dik et al., 2013; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011).

Furthermore, nonprofit leaders also face the need to build meaningful workplaces even though there is an inherent greater purpose to their organizations. In 2013, there were nearly 1.41 million nonprofit organizations registered with the Internal Revenue Service and they added approximately $905.9 billion to the United States economy (McKeever, 2015). The nonprofit sector is continuing to grow and become more complicated (Hannum et al., 2011). Nonprofit organizations face an unusual challenge in which employees, “may be more married to the cause than they are to an organization,” (Hannum et al., 2011, p.15). Therefore, employees are more willing to seek employment elsewhere if they are not satisfied in their workplace because they have other prospects to pursue (Hannum et al., 2011). However, when leaders help followers find meaning in their organization, they are more likely to stay (Hannum et al., 2011).

Although creating meaningful organizations has been studied, research has only focused on the attributes of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration separately. The studies have concentrated on a single element of leadership, or perhaps a couple, but they have not been examined from the perspective of these five elements combined (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Beck & Cowan, 1996; Dik et al., 2013; Greenleaf, 1977; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). These five elements, when used in combination, may hold the key for leaders in the creation of meaningful organizations for themselves and their followers.

This study will identify how nonprofit leaders build meaning within the workplace through the lens of the five elements of character, vision, relationships,
wisdom and inspiration. Furthermore, it will ascertain the degree to which followers feel the application of these elements create meaningful organizations. As more and more people look to their workplace to find meaning (Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010), this research will provide nonprofit leaders with specific ways to build meaningful organizations through the use of these five elements. As important as it is to create meaningful organizations in the nonprofit sector, leaders in all organizations could benefit from such knowledge.

**Definitions**

Following are definitions of terms relevant to the study. For alignment and clarity the definitions are presented below with the theoretical definition followed by the operational definition.

**Exemplary**

*Theoretical Definition.* Someone set apart from peers in a supreme manner, suitable behavior, principles, or intentions that can be copied (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014)

*Operational Definition.* Exemplary leaders are defined as those leaders who are set apart from peers by exhibiting at least five of the following characteristics: (1) Evidence of successful relationships with followers, (2) Evidence of leading a successful organizational, (3) A minimum of five years of experience in the profession, (4) Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings, (5) Recognition by their peers, and (6) Membership in professional associations in their field.
Meaning

_Theoretical Definition._ Meaning is a sense of purpose as a fundamental need which leads to significance and value for self and others (Bennis, 1999; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Frankl, 1984; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007; Pearson, 2015; Socrates, 469BC; Tredennick, 2004; Varney, 2009; Yeoman, 2014).

_Operational Definition._ Meaning is the result of leaders and followers coming together for the purpose of gathering information from experience and integrating it into a process which creates significance, value and identity within themselves and the organization.

Character

_Theoretical Definition._ Character is the moral compass by which a person lives their life (Bass & Bass, 2008; Bass & Steidlmeyer, 1999; T. Moore, 2008; J. C. Quick & Wright, 2011; Sankar, 2003)

_Operational Definition._ Character is alignment of a value system which promotes ethical thoughts and actions based on principles of concern for others through optimism and integrity while being reliable, transparent, and authentic.

Vision

_Theoretical Definition._ A bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding meaning to the organization, sustaining higher levels of motivation and withstanding challenges (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007; Landsberg, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992).
**Operational Definition.** Vision is foresight demonstrated by a compelling outlook of the future shared by leaders and followers who are engaged to create the future state.

Relationships

**Theoretical Definition.** Relationships are the bonds that are established between people through encouragement, compassion, and open communication which lead to feelings of respect, trust and acceptance (Bermack, 2014; Frankl, 1984; George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007; Henderson, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2007, 2009; Liborius, 2014; Mautz, 2015; McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008; Reina & Reina, 2006; Seligman, 2002; D. M. Smith, 2011; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

**Operational Definition.** Relationships are authentic connections between leaders and followers involved in a common purpose through listening, respect, trust, and acknowledgement of one another.

Wisdom

**Theoretical Definition.** Wisdom is the ability to utilize cognitive, affective, and reflective intelligences to discern unpredictable and unprecedented situations with beneficial action (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kekes, 1983; Pfeffer, 2010; Spano, 2013; R. J. Sternberg, 1998).

**Operational Definition.** Wisdom is the reflective integration of values, experience, knowledge, and concern for others to accurately interpret and respond to complex, ambiguous, and often unclear situations.

Inspiration
Theoretical Definition. Inspiration is a source of contagious motivation that resonates from the heart, transcending the ordinary and driving leaders and their followers forward with confidence (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; I. H. Smith, 2015; Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

Operational Definition. Inspiration is the heartfelt passion and energy that leaders exude through possibility-thinking, enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope to create relevant, meaningful connections that empower.

Followership

Theoretical Definition. Followership is the role held by certain individuals in an organization, team, or group. Specifically, it is the capacity of an individual to actively follow a leader. Followership is the reciprocal social process of leadership. Specifically, followers play an active role in organization, group, and team successes and failures (Baker, 2007; Riggio, Chaleff, & Blumen-Lipman, 2008).

Operational Definition. For purpose of this study, a follower is defined as a member of the leadership team who has responsibilities for managing different aspects of the organization. This group of followers could include: Chief Information Officer, Assistant Superintendents, Director, Coordinator, Chief Financial Officer, Director of Personnel Services, Coordinators, Administrators, Sales Manager, Account Manager, Principal, etc.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to three exemplary nonprofit leaders and 12 followers in nonprofit organizations in California. To be considered as an exemplary leader, the leader must display or demonstrate five out of six of the following:
1. Evidence of successful relationships with followers.
2. Evidence of leadership behaviors promoting a positive and productive organizational culture.
3. Have five or more years of experience in their profession or field.
4. Written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
5. Recognized by peers as a successful leader.
6. Membership in associations of groups focused on their field.

Due to the geographical proximity and availability, the researcher chose a convenience sample and a purposeful sample (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p.137). In addition, the study was delimited to followers who directly report to the nonprofit leaders.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters including a bibliography and appendices. Chapter I provides an introduction to the topic, background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, definitions for the terms used in the study and delimitations of the study. Chapter II presents a review of literature in the areas of meaning, leadership, followership, character, vision, relationships, wisdom, inspiration and nonprofits. Chapter III describes the research design and methodology used to conduct the study. Additionally, this chapter includes the population and sample, the instrumentation used, an explanation of how data was collected and analyzed as well as the limitations of the study. Chapter IV provides the results of the data collection, analysis and the research findings. To
conclude, Chapter V presents a summary of the study, research findings, conclusions and recommendations for actions and further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II of this study reviews the theoretical and historical literature as it relates to leadership and meaning. It examines how leaders can create meaning through five leadership elements (character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration) and the perceptions of these elements by followers. Furthermore, it reviews nonprofit organizations and their leaders who face particular challenges in creating meaning in their organizations. The first part addresses meaning which includes its importance, historic and modern theories, how it is created as well as how meaning can create successful organizations. The second part presents a framework of leadership theories including authentic, servant and transformational. The third part discusses followership theory, the qualities of followers and how leaders and followers are interdependent. The subsequent five parts explore how leaders create meaning as they relate to the elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. The final part reviews the history of nonprofit organizations, their role and influence in society as well as nonprofit leaders.

Review of Literature

Finding meaning in life has long been a concept pursued by human beings. However, more recently, people have been looking to their workplaces to find meaning and purpose (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Mautz, 2015; Raelin,
Leaders have great influence in creating meaning for themselves and followers within their organization (Bass & Bass, 2008; Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013; Holtaway, 2012; Kaipa & Radjou, 2013; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration are five elements which leaders can utilize to establish meaning. Moreover, these elements can help nonprofit leaders to create cultures of meaning beyond the inherent meaning of the causes their organizations champion. This is because people will work toward a cause, something they consider meaningful (Chaleff, 2009; Eberly & Fong, 2013; Kelley, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Sinek, 2009).

**Importance of Meaning**

There is a profound need for human beings to find meaning in life. People want to understand the purpose of their existence. They find meaningful pursuits both personally and professionally because they are able to determine what is most significant to them, or their “call of the heart” (Dik et al., 2013; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Knowing one’s purpose leads to feeling valued by others and a sense of belonging within their community.

People have been searching for meaning as far back as humans have been conscious beings. Aristotle (2004) believed purpose and meaning were the basis of life, bringing happiness to our existence. More recently, D. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) contended people are fundamentally “meaning-making machines” and they need to make sense out of the world around them. Meaning comes from a place of feeling significant and making a contribution.
There are countless ways meaning can be created. Some people find meaning when they discover an activity in which they can lose themselves in, bringing enjoyment and challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Others find making a difference through contributing in a positive manner to their community, family or organization helping to bring purpose into their lives (Berg, 2015; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Mautz, 2015). Furthermore, finding meaning helps people build self-identity and reach self-actualization.

People build an understanding of themselves by knowing why they choose to pursue a specific endeavor important to their lives (Collins, 2002; Sinek, 2009). Costa and Kallick (2008) asserted purpose is achieved when the mind is deeply engaged. Yet, purpose also has a second element which is engagement of the heart and a passion for the endeavor being pursued (Dik et al., 2013; Sandberg, 2013; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). These two elements are necessary to give purpose to life. Thus, a sense of purposefulness develops from a feeling of significance not just as an individual, but also feeling significant within the collective whether it is family, the workplace or society as a whole.

Humans feel a deep need to connect to others and feel valued by their community. They do this by participating in activities which bring value to the group. By working toward a common purpose they develop a sense of belonging because what they are doing benefits themselves and those around them (Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). The feeling of belonging brings an understanding of self and satisfaction to their lives. Therefore, when people feel valued and have a sense of belonging they are more motivated, creative and happy.
Theories of meaning. The meaning of life has long been contemplated by ancient philosophers as well as modern psychologists. There are innumerable theories addressing meaning from finding the ultimate happiness to having a purpose which brings a sense of value to one’s life. At one time, the meaning of life was exclusively tied to the nobler self; however, the workplace has now become a source of meaning as well.

Nearly 2,400 years ago the legendary Greek philosopher Aristotle developed theories on numerous subjects including politics, mathematics, heuristic inquiry and persuasion. One of his most notable books, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, was devoted to happiness and meaning. Aristotle (2004) theorized that the desire for happiness was at the very foundation of human life and it came from lived experience. He believed happiness was a virtue and meaning was derived from participating in activities which brought pleasure (Aristotle, 2004; Shields, 2012; Vanier, 2005). When happiness was achieved, self-realization was achieved.

Distinguished psychiatrist and neurologist, Viktor Frankl (1992), was a World War II Holocaust survivor. Through his experiences in Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz, Theresienstadt and Dachauh, he developed a theory for the purpose of life (Frankl, 1992, 2006). He believed the meaning of life was of the utmost reason for existence. Furthermore, meaning can be found in all human experience whether it was derived from happiness, pleasure, suffering or deprivation (Frankl, 1992, 2006). Indeed, meaning is reliant on how people perceive their experiences (Debats, 1996). This theory shaped not only his personal philosophy of life, but his professional beliefs as well.

Frankl’s (1992) theory became the basis for logotherapy and existential analysis. Logotherapy helps people to become aware of their “responsibleness” and whether they
feel a responsibility to themselves or to the society in which they live (Frankl, 1992, 2006). He believed meaning is not static and is unique for each person. Frankl theorized, “Meaning can be attained through creative, experiential and attitudinal values,” (Debats, 1996, p. 4). Therefore, it is through the pursuit of meaning people are able to find their true, authentic self (Frankl, 2006).

Abraham Maslow (1954) was a noteworthy psychologist who was a founding figure of Humanistic Psychology (Heinze, 2004). He took both a holistic and philosophical approach to psychology, being best known for his theory “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs” (Debats, 1996; Heinze, 2004). Maslow believed that people must have their basic needs met before reaching self-actualization. Self-actualization is the fulfillment of one’s potential which is present in all people (Debats, 1996; Sze, 2015). Maslow theorized there were five levels people must work through before reaching one’s highest potential: psychological, safety, love/belonging, esteem and self-actualization. Moreover, he felt these were universal values no matter people’s background or culture. As with other theories, Maslow believed people find themselves most fulfilled when they have achieved self-actualization.

The prominent psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (n.d.), as a positive psychology researcher, was particularly interested in studying happiness. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (2014) created the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) which was a procedure to measure people’s feelings and thoughts as well as their activities throughout their daily lives. Through this research, they developed the theory of flow (Csikzentmihalyi, n.d.).
The concept of flow was first introduced by Csikszentmihalyi in 1975. Csikszentmihalyi theorized that one cannot pursue happiness rather it is a product of being in a state of flow. Flow is when a person is completely absorbed in an activity, so much so that the sense of time can be lost and creativity flourishes because one is highly focused on the task at hand (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, n.d.). It has often been described as “being in the zone” because it is an exceedingly engaged active mental state. Having opportunities to be challenged and overcoming those challenges with the skills a person possesses leads to enjoyment, and consequently, happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi & Le Fevre, 1998). Csikszentmihalyi and Le Fevre (1998) stated that people in flow, “report feeling more active, alert, concentrated, happy, satisfied and creative,” (p.816).

Since flow is not a fixed state nor an inherent attribute, flow can be cultivated if a person chooses (Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003). Flow is fostered by bringing together one’s abilities and actions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003). When opportunities are presented to utilize, and even deepen a person’s skills, more enjoyment is experienced and more creativity results, leading to a sense of meaning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003). The activities to achieve flow are unlimited because it depends on what one finds meaningful in their life. Some people participate in sports, create art, garden, fix cars or throw themselves into work. In a 1998 study by Csikszentmihalyi and Le Fevre, people reported experiencing more flow at work than in their leisure time.

Well-known positive psychologist Martin Seligman (2011) recently developed the Well-Being Theory which goes beyond his initial Authentic Happiness Theory. His
original theory revolved around creating more happiness in one’s life through positive emotion, engagement and meaning in order to achieve more satisfaction in life (Seligman, 2002; 2011). However, Seligman (2011) revised this theory and has put forth the Well-being Theory which includes the initial three elements of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, but has added accomplishment and positive relationships. He theorized well-being to be both an internal state as well as an external state. Thus, well-being helps one to find purpose in life which is what Seligman describes as “flourishing”.

People are now looking to their work environment to find meaning in life. Inspirational speaker, Scott Mautz, (2015) has used research on organizational performance as a basis for his theory that the workplace must be meaningful because it contributes to followers feeling valuable resulting in the higher performance of the organization. Mautz has cited Gallup statistics which revealed 71% of followers are not engaged in their work leading to a workplace which is pessimistic and stagnant. This disconnection and disinterest results in people who are not willing to put forth an effort to make a successful organization, with some even actively sabotaging the work of the organization (Mautz, 2015).

Mautz (2015) believed people, “find meaning in things that make us feel significant, that help us reach our full potential, that help us make sense of things, and that serve who we are and what’s important to us,” (p. 11). He asserted this can be created in an organization, but it has to begin with the leaders. It is the responsibility of the leaders to make a “culture of consequence” (Mautz, 2015). Leaders go about creating meaningful organizations by having and sharing a clear vision of the organization (Mautz, 2015). Mautz asserted leaders help their followers see how their values are
reflected in the values of the organization. They care about their followers and work to build connections in order to create a feeling of belonging (Mautz, 2015). By feeling inspired and having autonomy to reach their fullest potential, followers understand how their contributions matter (Mautz, 2015). This creates meaning in their work which leads to greater performance. Mautz (2015) put forth that by building meaningful organizations, they will have an advantage over their competitors.

Through their theory of abundance, D. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) have focused on what is needed to create meaning in an organization. Like Mautz (2015), they have also studied research about employee engagement and organizational performance. They have concluded people are “meaning-making machines” who seek out life’s inherent value (D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Beyond this, they believe when people find a purpose at work it creates “market value” which leads to the success of the organization (D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). In the workplace, people are looking for connections, a safe place to take risks and the opportunity to contribute to something larger than themselves (D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Also like Mautz, they asserted that meaning in the organization starts with the leadership.

D. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) believed leaders must cultivate a workplace which resonates with meaning. Leaders do so by creating a vision which speaks to the emotional and intellectual aspects of people, helping them align their values with the organization’s values. D. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) have identified four categories to establish within the organization in order to create a meaningful environment. They include insight, achievement, connection and empowerment. These help break down isolationism and build a collective purpose (D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Leaders who lead
from a place of abundance show in both words and actions the efforts of followers truly matter and are valued. When leaders are able to create meaning in the organization, it results in abundance for everyone.

Having studied leadership for over three decades, Kouzes and Posner (2006, 2012) have concluded what they believe makes a meaningful organization and why. They contended it is the duty of the leader to mobilize their followers around a common purpose (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2012). Through careful listening to their followers’ aspirations and what brings them meaning, leaders can identify a common purpose in order to create a shared vision because leaders know people commit to a purpose not a plan (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2012). Additionally, leaders need to build credibility and trust. They do this by matching their words and actions as well as valuing the thoughts and opinions of followers.

Followers need leaders to provide certain conditions in order for meaningful organizations to be created. Followers need their leaders to be inspiring, passionate, provide thoughtful feedback and demonstrate they care about others’ achievements (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2012). Ultimately, “People want a chance to: be tested; to make it on their own; take part in a social experiment; do something well; do something good; and change the way things are,” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 120). When these elements are in place, followers will work harder because they are internally motivated to succeed. In the end, it is the responsibility of leaders to create a meaningful organizational environment.

**Experiences create meaning.** Positive and negative life experiences can bring meaning to people as they search for their purpose (Aristotle, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi,
1990; Frankl, 1992, 2006). Whether it is a sense of hope and optimism or adversity and challenges, meaning can be found (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). As Kouzes and Posner (2006) asserted, people must believe in possibilities and know that their attitude will determine meaning.

The positive experiences of love, optimism and hope contribute to people’s well-being and as a result help them find meaning in life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman, 2011). When these elements are present, people tend to be more creative, satisfied and happier which leads to a higher quality of life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman, 2011). Hope and optimism can arise when people participate in activities which bring them enjoyment or come from the positive, loving relationships they have in their lives (Aristotle, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Positive emotions lead to engagement, motivation and achieving goals whether personally or professionally. Moreover, leaders know creating a sense of love, optimism and hope will contribute to the organization’s success.

Exemplary leaders can create these emotions in the workplace. Hope is cultivated when people feel their work is inspiring and know it has a greater purpose (Alvy & Robbins, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011). Enthusiastically embracing a shared vision, believing in people’s potential and creating opportunities for success are ways leaders can inspire optimism in their followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Moreover, followers feel empowered when such positive emotions exist in their workplace, leading to higher performance levels (Mautz, 2015).
Although people often relate positive emotions to finding meaning, they can also find meaning in adversity and challenges. Adversity can come in the form of, “Unfilled wants, dashed expectations, loneliness, frustration, anxiety, guilt…,” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 227). Frankl (2006) asserted that in the face of adversity, challenge and even deprivation, people can make the best of the situation. He referred to this as “tragic optimism”, turning suffering into achievement, guilt into bettering oneself and temporary adversity into responsible action (Frankl, 2006). He posited that when faced with a challenge, people can find meaning by facing it with creativity. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) furthered these thoughts by proclaiming that people actually need challenges because they need something to strive for and even if people do not overcome the adversity, the effort is in trying. In fact, the authentic self is uncovered when people face adversity and challenges (Aristotle, 2004; Mautz, 2015). It is the leaders’ responsibility to help their followers perceive challenges as opportunities to grow, benefit and contribute.

**Leadership and meaning.** Exemplary leaders know what is important to both themselves and their followers. However, in order to create meaning leaders first need to have a deep self-awareness of who they are and why they do what they do (Hacker & Roberts, 2003; Sinek, 2009; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011). Once leaders understand what excites, motivates and brings meaning to their lives, then they are in a position to help followers find significance and purpose in their work and within the organization (Bass & Bass, 2008; Hacker & Roberts, 2003; Mautz, 2015; Raelin, 2006).

Leaders develop their own self-awareness by understanding what is purposeful for them. They practice mindfulness, or being present in the moment, as well as possess the ability to take a step back to self-reflect on their emotions, motives and actions personally.
and professionally (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Indeed, when they find meaning at work, higher order needs are met (Ghadi et al., 2013).

Mindfulness is being deeply aware of what is happening in the present and how it affects one’s emotions and thoughts (Chopra, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Exemplary leaders are simultaneously conscious of their actions while being observant of how they affect others (Raelin, 2006; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). The understanding they gain by being present leads to creativity, thoughtful decision-making and open communication which results in more engagement in their work (Mautz, 2015; Raz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). When leaders know what motivates them and know their purpose, they are able to lead others in developing their own personal meaning in the workplace (Berg, 2015; Raz, 2015; Shuck & Rose, 2013).

The act of reflection also brings about a deep awareness of self. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) asserted that it is more desirable to contemplate encounters with others and events which happened then it is to be non-reflective. Making a habit of reflecting helps leaders to make sense of their goals and purpose which leads to finding meaning (Costa & Kallick, 2008). Additionally, it brings about an understanding of what was successful and what areas need improvement. Leaders who are self-reflective learn from past experiences, integrating what they know about the present, in order to make decisions for the future (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013; D. Ulrich & D. Ulrich, 2010). When leaders are present and self-reflective they are able to create meaning for themselves which, in turn, provides them with the knowledge of how to create meaning for others.
With a deep self-awareness, leaders are in a position to help followers find significance in their work (Tracy, 2014). Exemplary leaders learn about their followers’ strengths and skills (Buckingham & Coffman, 2014; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011). Additionally, they learn what others personally value and what motivates them (Dik et al., 2013; Shuck & Rose, 2013). Once leaders are able to identify what is significant for followers, they are able to provide an environment which puts their talents to use in order for them to flourish (Dik et al., 2013; Shuck & Rose, 2013; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011).

It is the job of leaders to help followers see the connection between their values and the values of the organization (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Bass & Bass, 2008; Holtaway, 2012; Tracy, 2014). Avolio and Yammarino (2013) described this as the “collective concept.” Leaders frame what the organization stands for by helping followers feel a greater sense of purpose. The message is they are valued because their contributions matter and they impact the organization as a whole (Ghadi et al., 2013; Shuck & Rose, 2013; Tracy, 2014). When followers’ values are aligned with the organization’s values and purpose they will find their work meaningful (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Dik et al., 2013).

As leaders embark on the endeavor to bring meaning into their organization, part of their charge is to leave a legacy which can be sustained over time even when the leaders have gone. Kouzes and Posner (2006) contended that it is the leaders’ duty to make an impact on their organizations and followers. They can do this by creating meaning and purpose in the workplace. Sinek (2009) explained the importance of “why” for the organization and Mautz (2015) described legacy as being the “what.” Mautz
furthered his explanation that the “what” is what endures beyond leaders while also providing meaning in the present.

Leaders cultivate followers in the organization to reach their highest potential over the long-term which comes before the bottom-line (Holtaway, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Tracy, 2014). Leaders can determine their legacy by comparing their actions with who they believe themselves to be (Clarke, 2004). Mautz (2015) provided “five footprints” in order to leave a legacy: enduring results; passing on values and life lessons; relationships and lives serviced, transfer of knowledge and stories told about you. As noted by Kouzes and Posner (2006), it is the responsibility of leaders to determine if the, “legacy will be ephemeral or lasting” (p.55).

**Meaning creates successful organizations.** Exemplary leaders understand the correlation of meaning with successful organizations. Meaning is created when followers feel that their values are in alignment with the organization’s goals. Leaders also establish an organization of meaning by fostering an environment which will, “generate feelings of significance, genuineness, belonging, and expanding personal potential,” (Mautz, 2015, p. 138). Therefore, when leaders create the opportunity for their followers’ well-being performance and success will result (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

When meaning is felt by followers in the organization it can lead to market value (D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). This is because a sense of meaning leads to employee engagement. Kapoor and Meachem (2012) asserted engaged followers are fully involved and passionate about their work for the organization. Engaged employees know their purpose, work as a team, tackle challenges presented and experience personal and
professional growth (D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Therefore, the self-actualization of followers created in a meaningful workplace leads to higher performing organizations. Mautz (2015) reported that there is a three-year growth in the organizations’ profits with highly engaged followers as well as 81% of engaged followers stating they would stay with the organization. In contrast, disengaged followers see a decline in their mental health, experience low commitment to the organization, an increase in isolation, have a greater rate of absences as well as manifest higher hostility and unhappiness (Kapoor & Meachem, 2012; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Therefore, exemplary leaders are the key to creating a meaningful work environment to keep their employees engaged and ensuring the success of their organization.

**Theoretical Framework of Leadership**

Hollander (2009) asserted, “Leadership is vital to the well-being and maintenance of a group, organization, or society,” (p. 7). Leadership is when leaders work with their followers to coalesce around a specific purpose and help them understand how their values are in alignment with that purpose (Burns, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Leaders are responsible for the success of their followers and their organizations. Therefore, exemplary leaders create an environment which is deeply rooted in meaning, appealing to the hearts and minds of followers (Crowley, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 1989; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). In fact, when leaders and followers find a sense of collective purpose, they reach higher levels of performance (Crowley, 2011; Mautz, 2015; Sinek, 2009; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

However, leadership approaches take many forms. Authentic leadership focuses on leaders having deep self-awareness, not compromising their principles and supporting
followers to become self-actualized within the work environment (George, 2003). In the servant leadership approach, leaders exist to serve others. By serving, and therefore empowering followers, leaders fulfill the purpose of the organization (Greenleaf, 1977). Another approach is transformational leadership wherein leaders guide their followers through organizational change, replacing traditional ways of functioning with new innovative ways (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Each leadership approach has specific characteristics yet they all rely on a collective vision, building relationships and empowering followers.

The roots of authentic leadership theory harken back to Socrates and Aristotle with their theories of the need to examine one’s life and the search for self-actualization (Garner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). Authenticity has led to the theory of authentic leadership which is a combination of behaviors by leaders which signify to followers they are being true to themselves as they, “lead with purpose, meaning, and values,” (George, 2003, p. 12). George and Sims (2007) described authentic leaders as knowing their purpose, practicing strong values, leading from the heart, developing relationships with followers and being disciplined. Moreover, authentic leaders accept their shortcomings while not compromising on their values or morals (George, 2003). They also continue to develop their own abilities while creating a positive, hopeful work environment because they are dedicated to the success of the organization and those within it (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2005; George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007). Through modeling a combination of self-awareness, relational orientation, unbiased processing and internalized moral perspective, leaders signal to the
followers the importance of following their own principles (Garner et al., 2011; Leroy et al., 2015).

With a secure sense of self, authentic leaders create optimistic workplaces which help followers foster their own identities. They are confident enough in their abilities to not let their egos get in the way of their followers’ growth and contributions to the organization (Leroy et al., 2015). Instead, they care about supporting their followers’ development by providing opportunities for autonomy as well as giving them feedback on their performance (George, 2003; Leroy et al., 2015). These conditions lead followers to feel more satisfaction with their work and reach higher levels of success (Leroy et al., 2015, Mautz, 2015; Rath & Conchie, 2008). Additionally, another benefit of supporting followers in their growth is the legacy of leading others to become the next generation of leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Rath & Conchie, 2008). Authentic leadership comes from a place of deep self-awareness and positivity which, in turn, promotes a desire in followers to pursue their authentic selves.

Servant leadership theory’s origins can be found in the 1977 seminal book, *Servant Leadership*, by Robert Greenleaf. He theorized servant leaders’ strength and values rested in the notion of serving others first. Servant leaders have a deep self-awareness and are dedicated to their principles (Hunter et al., 2013; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). In doing so, servant leaders empower their followers to be more successful and more likely to have higher levels of performance (Greenleaf, 2002; Hunter et al., 2013; Leroy et al., 2015; Rath & Conchie, 2008). Furthermore, servant leaders seek to develop strong relationships with their followers as this will lead to meaningfulness in their work and fulfilment of their organization’s goals (Campbell, 2013; Dik et al., 2013; Greenleaf,
1977; Hunter et al., 2013; Jeavons, 2010). Subsequently, the organization can find great power and success in serving others. By behaving with humility, being inspirational, honoring people as well as celebrating others’ successes, leaders indicate to followers the importance of serving them first (Campbell, 2013; Dik et al., 2013; Greenleaf, 2002; Hopper, 2008; Jeavons, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

According to Greenleaf (2002), the focus of servant leadership is on the followers. An essential way for leaders to show this is by providing followers with, “a common purpose and a clear definition of obligations,” (p. 256). He explained five ways followers need leaders to demonstrate how they value and support them. Greenleaf suggested the following to servant leaders: (a) hear and understand their followers; (b) in disagreeing with them, let them save face; (c) acknowledge their significance; (d) assume good intentions and (e) be truthful and passionate with them (Hopper, 2008). Additionally, leaders seek to assist followers in developing themselves and finding their highest potential (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). In a study by Hunter et al. (2013), they found organizations which are based on servant leadership experience higher levels of performance, followers are more likely to encourage and work with others as well as followers who are more connected to others, reducing isolationism. By leading an organization from the perspective of serving, a caring and more successful organization is created through servant leadership.

Transformational leadership theory describes the behaviors of leaders and conditions which must be present in order to guide followers and organizations through change. Transformation is necessary when the traditional ways of functioning no longer fit the needs of the organization and it must transform itself in order to be viable and
sustain its success (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Burns (1978) was the first to develop theories about transformational leadership and described it as leaders and followers lifting their principles and purpose for an organization by engaging with each other to create a new state. This leadership approach brings about positive change in both followers and leaders, wherein the leader is aware of followers’ aspirations as well as the needs of the organization (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). These kinds of leaders play vital roles in supporting followers to reach their highest potential through inspiring a shared vision, developing authentic relationships and creating an environment where followers are committed to being active participants in the organization’s change (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Bass and Avolio (1993) expanded on Burns’ (1978) theory of transformational leadership. They proposed this style of leadership fosters the growth of their followers and develops them into the leaders of tomorrow through empowerment and motivation. Additionally, they found transformational leaders motivated their followers to achieve goals beyond initial predictions by having challenging expectations for them (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leaders possess a heightened self-awareness and have the ability to promote positive change in individuals through dynamic relationships and shared values. Furthermore, transformational leaders energize their followers to take actions in support of a higher collective purpose, ahead of personal ambitions (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Bass and Avolio (1993) isolated four key principles and behavioral characteristics of transformational leaders. These transformational principles act as a framework for leaders to utilize and guide change in mindsets, behavior and culture of followers within
an organization. The first behavior which transformational leaders demonstrate is Individualized Influence. In order to affect change, leaders first model the characteristics they desire to see in their followers. Leaders are risk-takers, consistent and stay true to their values (Bass & Avolio, 1993). This builds respect and trust in their relationships which is essential before embarking on the transformation of the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1993). When leaders’ words and actions model the expected behaviors, their followers are more likely to emulate these qualities within the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1993). The next characteristic is Inspirational Motivation which describes how leaders possess the power to motivate and communicate. It is incumbent upon the leader to have the ability to inspire others by creating a shared vision and continually communicating a strong sense of purpose (Bass & Avolio, 1993). The third characteristic shown is Individualized Consideration. This is identified as how leaders personalize followers’ growth and achievement so they embrace the mission, vision and goals of the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Bass and Avolio (1993) described it as shifting, “from outer-controlled to inner-directed,” (p. 135). The last condition leaders must offer is Intellectual Stimulation. It is important for leaders to provide an environment which stimulates innovation and creativity (Bass & Avolio, 1993). In order for followers to be committed participants in change, they must have some autonomy. Through this approach to leadership, leaders can create meaning for both themselves and followers as they guide them through the organization’s transformation.

**Theoretical Framework of Followership**

There has been a significant amount of literature and research on leadership from which many theories have been developed. However, far less literature exists as it relates
to followership (Baker, 2007; Kelley, 2008; Oc & Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Additionally, much of the literature only examined followership from the perspective of leadership. More recently, there has been new research published about followership, including the works of Robert Kelley and Ira Chaleff, which look at followership from the viewpoint of followers not leaders. Indeed, followers have specific characteristics and qualities that lead to the success of leaders and the organization. What has now been realized is leadership and followership are intertwined and one cannot exist without the other (Chaleff, 2009; Hollander, 2009; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Followership is the act of supporting leaders and the organization and it possesses specific characteristics (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Followers take an active role in working with leaders and should not be seen as somehow weaker because of their roles in the organization (Baker, 2007; Chaleff, 2009; Leroy et al., 2015). Chaleff (2009) argued followership is what gives leadership legitimacy. Indeed, Kelley (1992) asserted, “Our social fabric depends on followership; without it, society unravels,” (p. 47). Accordingly, two significant followership theories have come out of the works of Robert Kelley and Ira Chaleff.

Robert Kelley (1988) theorized five followership styles with distinct characteristics. The first style is what he labeled “sheep” who are passive followers and take little or no initiative, relying on the leaders to direct them (Kelley, 1988, 1992, 2008). He identified the second style as “yes-people” who are rather passive and wait until leaders dole out orders; nonetheless they form close alliances with the leaders (Kelley, 1988, 1992, 2008). The next style of followership is “the alienated.” These followers can think on their own and are energetic; however, they are often passive
participants in the organization preferring to negatively point out flaws in the organization (Kelley, 1988, 1992, 2008). The fourth style is labeled “survivors,” or more recently, Kelley has called them “the pragmatics.” The characteristics of this style are they are good at adapting to the changing currents in the organization, but they lack initiative and only do what is necessary to survive (Kelley, 1988, 1992, 2008). The last style, and most beneficial to leaders and organizations, are the “effective followers,” also known as “star followers.” These people take initiative, demonstrate independent thinking as well as show enthusiasm for the organization’s vision and goals (Kelley, 1988, 1992, 2008). Leaders can put these followers in charge of projects and teams with little need for supervision (Kelley, 1988, 1992, 2008). The leaders act more as facilitators of their work. Kelley (1988) concluded the success or failure of the organization rests with both leaders and followers. Therefore, it is the responsibility of leaders and followers to cultivate followership within the organization.

Followership, as theorized by Chaleff (2009), is how followers connect and interact with their leaders. He developed a theory to explain what he believes are the four followership styles. He first explained the “implementer” followers are supportive of their leaders (Chaleff, 2008, 2009). They are reliable, respectful, team players who are the work horses of the organization (Chaleff, 2009). He also identified the “partner” as a followership style. Chaleff described these kinds of followers as risk-takers who are willing to challenge leaders’ behaviors or policies when necessary. Partners believe in the goals of the organization, take time to develop relationships and are accountable for their actions (Chaleff, 2008, 2009). The third followership style is the “individualist.” This style is characterized as being a challenger, having no problem sharing their
opinions with other followers or the leaders (Chaleff, 2008, 2009). They are confident, independent and can marginalize themselves with their negativity; however, they act as a counterbalance to leaders’ and followers’ perspectives (Chaleff, 2009). The final style is the “resource” follower who operates from a place of mediocrity. These followers bring specific skills to the organization, yet are not committed to leaders, followers or the organization (Chaleff, 2008, 2009).

Chaleff (2009) believed successful followership can be fostered by leaders, and being a “courageous follower” is what followers should strive to achieve. He described the dimensions of courageous followership as a blend of accepting responsibility, serving others, being willing to challenge, participating in transformation and taking moral action (Chaleff, 2008, 2009). These behaviors lead to self-actualization, making these individuals the most valuable kinds of followers in organizations (Chaleff, 2008, 2009). Furthermore, Chaleff believed followers should not acquiesce to leaders. As Chaleff stressed, “Followers and leaders both orbit around the purpose; followers do not orbit around the leader,” (p. 13). Therefore, leaders and followers can influence each other in positives ways.

Organizations will experience more success when followers are not “mindless subordinates” rather they are engaged, contributing members to the collective purpose (Chaleff, 2009; Hollander, 2009; Kelley, 1992). Followers clearly understand how their roles support leaders and the organization (Kelley, 1992; Powell & Mendez, 2008). Moreover, they share a common vision with leaders (Baker, 2009; Chaleff, 2009; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Kelley, 1988, 1992). They understand how their aspirations and values align with the goals of the organization. Followers are focused individuals who are
capable of putting their skills and experience to use for the benefit of leaders and the organization (Kelley, 1992). They take ownership of their work and feel a sense of satisfaction in their contributions without expecting “fanfare” because their ultimate goal is to ensure the organization’s success (Chaleff, 2009; Kelley, 1988).

Followership can also be cultivated when leaders foster work environments where followers have opportunities for autonomy. Followers need to be trusted with tasks and projects which allow them to take initiative and thinking independently (Chaleff, 2009; Kelley, 1988, 1992). This is especially important because followers are entering organizations with increased skills and education allowing them to handle more responsibility (Powell & Mendez, 2008). In an environment where followers feel they have freedom to make choices, they are more likely to take risks and be more creative which leads to greater ownership of the organization’s goals (Kelley, 1992). Additionally, followers can be placed in charge of leading teams as this will provide opportunities for followers to grow and strengthen their skills while allowing leaders to focus their efforts elsewhere (Chaleff, 2009; Kelly, 1988). Powell and Mendez (2008) further explained organizations need to be more flexible given the rapidly changing world, and teams have become something leaders rely on more heavily.

In any organization leaders and followers are dependent upon each other. Burns (1978) believed leadership and followership were inseparable. The distinction between the two arises from the role they are playing and is not tied to their capabilities (Kelly, 1988). The relationship between leaders and followers is both reciprocal and beneficial (Baker, 2007; Howell & Shamir, 2005). They each need the other to be successful. What brings them together is a common purpose to accomplish the goals of the organization.
(Baker, 2009; Chaleff, 2009; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Kelley, 1988, 1992). Without their relationship in pursuit of a collective vision, the organization would be unable to thrive. This is because responsibility for the success of the organization rests with both leaders and followers (Baker, 2007; Kelley, 1988; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Vecchio, 2007).

Leaders do not stand apart in isolation because the interwoven nature of the leader-follower relationship requires them to work in conjunction with one another. Leaders influence followers’ behaviors and followers have the capacity to influence leaders’ behaviors (Baker, 2007; Chaleff, 2009; Hollander, 2009; Oc & Bashshur, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Additionally, leaders can further the reciprocal relationship. When leaders learn followers’ aspirations and values and link them to the collective purpose of the organization, followers are more supportive and committed to the leader resulting in higher level performances (Chaleff, 2009; Collinson, 2006; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). In the end, when leaders and followers share an interdependent relationship based on mutual respect and responsibility as well as a collective vision, both will find meaning in their organization.

**Importance of Character**

Character is a multi-faceted attribute which is deeply rooted in values and trustworthiness. Character can continually be nurtured throughout one’s lifetime (Gini & Green, 2014; Harvard Business Review, 2015). It is what helps guide leaders toward reaching goals for themselves, their followers and the organization, what might be considered “destiny” (Gini & Green, 2014). “Character- not only the aspect of integrity, but also humility, forgiveness, interest, and gratitude- matters, and leaders have to keep
this in mind.” (Liborius, 2014, p. 372). Additionally, leaders’ character can be seen as how they treat their followers, especially if they have nothing to gain from it (Leavy, 2016). When values displayed by leaders as part of their character are in alignment with followers, trust and relationships will form (Covey, 1991; Liborius, 2014). Moreover, leaders perceived to behave with a strong, positive character see a higher return on investment for their organizations (Leavy, 2016).

Possessing a moral compass helps leaders determine right from wrong. Morals are based on principles and wisdom which help leaders to determine what is right for their followers and organizations (Thompson, 2010). These morals, or ethics, are recognized as universal principles which drive decision-making and actions. (Burns, 1978; Covey, 1991; Thompson, 2010). Leaders and followers want their organization’s morals to be in alignment with their internal moral compass. In fact, Kouzes and Posner (2006) found followers believe ethical or unethical behavior within the organization is due to the leaders’ behavior. In addition, the importance of possessing a moral compass guides leaders in their conduct especially during uncertain or turbulent times because it is based on objective principles (Covey, 1991). Therefore, exemplary leaders of character model ethical behavior and will not accept unethical behavior from followers.

Values are different from morals because they are based on a set of beliefs, often influenced by one’s development into an adult and includes ideas, “such as prudence, honor, courage, civility, honesty, fairness.” (Burns, 1978, p. 75). Leaders need to be fully cognizant of the values which they bring to an organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2012). These values guide their behaviors as they lead followers to fulfilling the organization’s purpose (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich,
Hallinger (2011) defined values as, “both the ends toward which leaders aspire as well as the desirable means by which they will work to achieve them,” (p. 128). Additionally, Kouzes & Posner (1989) asserted followers want their leaders to be confident in their values knowing they are based on sensible reasoning. Exemplary leaders model their values each day by matching their behavior and words signaling to followers the expectations of them and it reinforces the values of the organization.

It is the job of leaders to create a sense of optimism in the work environment. Optimism necessitates the ability to look at the present and toward the future with positivity (Alvy & Robbins, 2010; Kool & van Dierendonck, 2012; Mandela, 2012). This is essential in order to create organizational meaningfulness. In a study of leadership by Kool and van Dierendonck (2012), they concluded optimism was, “a crucial factor for well-being and an openness to explore new avenues,” (p. 429). By displaying optimism, leaders help motivate and engage followers in the organization’s purpose. In fact, exhibiting an optimistic attitude generates excitement and energy resulting in a higher level of commitment by followers to the organization’s purpose (Kouzes & Posner, 1989; Wilson, 2013).

Kouzes and Posner (2006) asserted leadership necessitates trust because that is the only way anything can be achieved. A study by Kouzes and Posner (1989) found that trustworthiness was the most important quality followers felt leaders should possess. Liborius (2014) contended, “A leader’s worthiness of being followed is the foundation of trust, and it is affected to a great extent by his or her character,” (p. 371). If leaders are to build a culture of integrity, honesty and trustworthiness, they need to start by doing what they say they will do (Covey, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 1989; Liborius, 2014). Trust is
built when followers observe and experience leaders matching their actions and words (Covey, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 1989; Sinek, 2009; Volgelgesang et al., 2013).

Moreover, leaders must trust others by being honest and open (Kouzes & Posner, 1989, 2006). Trust is also the foundation of relationships. If trust is present in leader-follower relationships, then followers are more likely to be engaged with the work of the organization (Rath & Conchie, 2008). Therefore, it is essential that leaders create a culture of trust with their followers.

Resiliency is the ability to face adversity with a positive outlook (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Lucy, Poorkavoos, & Thompson, 2014; Northouse, 2010; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; Wilson, 2013). Being able to pause momentarily when faced with challenging circumstances in order to find opportunities is a vital attribute for leaders to possess (Lucy et al., 2014; Wilson, 2013). Resilient leaders are comfortable with uncertainty, possess self-control, are creative, learn from mistakes and stay true to their values (Lucy et al., 2014; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; Wilson, 2013). Consequently, leaders who behave in resilient ways, demonstrate to followers they have strong character.

Leaders who convey authenticity have a deep self-awareness and understand how their behaviors can influence followers (McKee et al., 2008; Northouse, 2010). Authentic leaders are humble, open, ethical and optimistic with others (Avolio & Reichard, 2008; Campbell, 2013; Northouse, 2010). Kouzes and Posner (2006) asserted when followers feel their leaders are authentic, they are more willing to follow. The authenticity of leaders can also be seen in their commitment to the organization’s purpose through high engagement in their work (Dik et al., 2013). In addition, authenticity can be
demonstrated through being transparent. Leaders who act in a transparent manner create a work environment that openly exchanges information, whether it is positive or negative (Liborius, 2014). Moreover, transparent leaders tell the truth, even if it is difficult (Liborius, 2014; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). In a culture of transparency and authenticity, followers are more confident in their leaders. This results in followers more likely to work as a team because a sense of belonging has been created by the leaders’ behaviors (Avolio & Reichard, 2008; Mautz, 2015).

Burns (1978) stated that people learn in a variety of ways, including from others whom they identify. Kouzes and Posner (1989) emphasized, “Leaders are role models. Leading is not a spectator sport,” (p. 503). Leaders can use modeling as a powerful tool to create the culture of their organizations. By modeling values and behavior expectations, leaders signal to their followers what is important. Conversely, followers will look to the actions of their leaders for guidance on how they should behave and what is valuable to the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 1989). Also, leaders know by modeling how to behave, they will gain the commitment of followers (Bass & Bass, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

**Character and meaning.** Character is a critical element exemplary leaders must possess before being able to create meaning in their organization. Without a commitment to their values, followers will have difficulty in following their leader (Kouzes & Posner, 1989). As leaders show a commitment to their morals and values, they inspire followers to embrace their collective purpose which leads to finding meaning in their work (McKee et al., 2008). Character built on the foundation of values and trust, leads to everyone in the organization feeling connected, “by shared values or common goals,” (Lahno, 2001,
Followers need to know that their leaders have their best interest in mind as they endeavor to create meaning within their organization (Sinek, 2009). Ultimately, without meaning the success of leaders, followers and the organization has little significance (Leavy, 2016).

**Importance of Having a Vision**

Vision is the ability to connect the present to the future with a purposeful goal developed collaboratively (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Kantabutra & Avery, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2009; Landsberg, 2000). Having a vision represents a hopeful state one can aspire to achieve. Additionally, it is important to have a clear vision as it helps provide a path to the goal or aspired state (Covey, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 1989). Based on a meaningful purpose, a vision represents hope for the future.

**Overview of Vision**

Having a vision is an essential element which leaders must demonstrate to followers. Followers want to understand the connection between their work and the organization’s purpose. People want visions which are positive and represent their aspirations while also in alignment with their values (Kouzes & Posner, 1989, 2009). Moreover, vision can help move an organization through adverse times to stay competitive in the global market because it surpasses the “bottom line” (Kantabutra & Avery, 2006).

Vision comes from one’s values and dreams for the future. Kouzes and Posner (2012) have concluded, “Visions are reflections of one's fundamental beliefs and assumptions about human nature, technology, economics, science, politics, art, and ethics,” (p. 104). People are compelled to align themselves with a cause rather than a
plan because they want to make a positive impact on others and the world at large (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). A vision is created by leaders and followers from what they collectively believe they should seek to achieve.

A vision represents an optimistic view of what leaders and followers can help their organization to become because it coalesces everyone around a higher cause (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Landsberg, 2000). A shared vision generates commitment, excitement and energy within the organization (Kantabutra & Avery, 2006). Furthermore, a clear vision can guide decision-making and create initiative among leaders and followers (Kantabutra & Avery, 2006). Vision is a vehicle for moving an organization from its present state into a more hopeful and meaningful future condition.

According to Kouzes and Posner (2009, 2012), followers have ranked a leader’s ability to be forward-thinking as one the highest behaviors leaders can display. Leaders must possess the ability to look toward the future for possible developments which may affect the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Also, leaders who are forward-thinking are able to anticipate challenges as they arise (Kouzes & Posner, 1989, 2012). Followers want to trust that their leaders have a vision for what they want the organization to be and how they want to guide it there. Additionally, followers want to be involved with their leaders in developing the future state for the organization (Bayler, 2012).

An organizational vision is based on articulated values and a well thought-out purpose about what the future should hold (Chaleff, 2009; Mendez-Morse, 1993). Visions for the organization should be created through the combined efforts of leaders and followers as it empowers everyone and garners a deeper commitment from them.
(Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Baker, Mathis, & Stites-Doe, 2011; Chaleff, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 1989, 2009, 2012; Landsberg, 2000). Having a shared vision creates a work environment which is more meaningful and rewarding because leaders and followers are working in the best interest of the groups’ collective goals.

A meaningful vision emphasizes the organization’s values and expectations (Strange & Mumford, 2002). Kantabutra and Avery (2006) asserted organizations which have a vision set high expectations and are able to stay competitive and relevant in the global economy. A shared vision can positively impact an organization because it leads to more commitment, energy and innovation from leaders and followers (Kantabutra & Avery, 2006; Sarros, Cooper, & Santora, 2008; Strange & Mumford, 2002).

Creating a vision. Leaders develop a shared vision with followers which draws on their hopes and dreams (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Covey, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 1989, 2009, 2012; Landsberg, 2000). Followers do not want to be handed a vision from the leader rather they want to help create it. It is vital that followers feel ownership in creating the vision as it will have a higher chance of being achieved (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Carsten & Bligh, 2008). As a result of this ownership of the vision, the organization will be positively impacted by achieving more success (Kantabutra & Avery, 2006).

In the traditional model for creating a vision, leaders would develop what they envisioned the organization should be; then they would make plans to plot the course towards the future (Carsten & Bligh, 2008). A vision created by leaders exclusively would be imposed on followers expecting them to embrace it. A vision created with only leaders involved does not help bring about change or propel an organization into the
future (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Carsten and Bligh (2008) argued it is important to have followers highly involved in creating the organization’s vision.

A shared vision is based on a captivating future state developed by both leaders and followers (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Landsberg, 2000). Leaders are responsible for inspiring the shared vision and they can do so by ascertaining what is meaningful to followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2012). When followers are brought into the visioning process, they have a deeper understanding of the vision and are better able to communicate it to others which leads to a higher commitment (Carsten & Bligh, 2008; Kantabutra & Avery, 2006). Therefore, when leaders and followers develop a shared vision, there is a greater chance of achieving it and the organization being successful (Anderson & Anderson, 2010).

It is not enough to create a shared vision; it must be communicated to everyone in the organization. It is imperative leaders have followers help in communicating the vision (Carsten & Bligh, 2008). Everyone should understand how the vision aligns to their personal and the organization’s values (Mautz, 2015). Furthermore, communicating the vision often and in a variety of ways helps to emphasize its importance to the organization (Carsten & Bligh, 2008).

Leadership and vision. Burns (1978) noted leaders perceive their roles as helping to shape the future based on values and what is in the best interest of the group. Additionally, leaders play an integral role in inspiring vision among followers. Carsten and Bligh (2008) believed part of the role of leadership is to live out the vision of their organization. Therefore, when leaders “walk the talk” of the shared vision, their actions have an effect on followers.
Exemplary leaders use vision to guide their actions, expressing vision in their daily interactions and decision-making (Carsten & Bligh, 2008; Kantabutra & Avery, 2006; Yang, 2011). In addition, leaders are also responsible for participating in the communication of the shared vision, helping followers to understand the importance of their contributions to the vision of organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Having internalized the vision, leaders promote the participation of followers to help achieve their shared vision (Strange & Mumford, 2002). Since leaders are clear about the vision, they behave as role models for followers, setting high standards, and encouraging creativity (Baker et al, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Sarros et al., 2008).

Vision has an effect on the behavior of their followers and it guides their actions within the organization (Kantabutra & Avery, 2006; Strange & Mumford, 2002). When a strong vision has been created, followers become committed and take ownership of it (Kantabutra & Avery, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Carsten & Bligh, 2008; Nanus, 1992). A shared vision helps followers to see how their contributions matter to the organization and motivates them to continue with their work (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Kantabutra & Avery, 2006). In addition, a shared vision can lead to followers performing at higher levels as well as being more creative, optimistic and successful in their work (Kantabutra & Avery, 2006; Sarros et al., 2008; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

**Meaning and vision.** Unlike in the past, work is now seen as a place for people to find meaning and fulfillment (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Vision embraces a positive future state and it allows people to contribute to something larger than themselves which helps bring meaning to their work. Csikszentmihalyi (2003) argued vision, “provides a goal that is worth pursuing above and
beyond the extrinsic rewards that can be provided by the job,” (p. 155). Therefore, meaning can be found when a compelling vision exists.

By linking the present and the future, a vision helps bring meaning to the work of leaders and followers (Kantabutra & Avery, 2006). A meaningful vision motivates leaders and followers to accomplish their aspirations and work for the success of the organization. It also provides a sense of significance, connecting people to an optimistic future (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Vision provides the idea of a brighter future state, and in pursuing their shared vision, leaders and followers can find meaning (Landsberg, 2000; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

**Importance of Relationships**

Relationships between leaders and followers are essential in order for both to find meaning in their work. As Kouzes and Posner (2006) stated, “Leadership requires a resonant connection over matters of the heart,” (p. 48). Authentic connections result when a bond is developed through mutual respect, trust, open communication and recognition. Strong relationships also produce benefits for leaders and followers as they create a work environment which is engaging and high performing. When leaders are able to build relationships with their followers they are both committed to the success of the organization.

Humans have a need to form relationships in their organizations because this leads to self-actualization, satisfaction and meaning in their work. Leaders can help build authentic connections with their followers by expressing their care and concern for them. (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Liborius, 2014; Mautz, 2015; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011). Effort on the leaders’ part must be put forth to affirm with their followers that what they
contribute to the organization matters. Exemplary leaders invest their time in developing bonds with their followers (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Mautz, 2015; Powell, 2012; Smith, 2011). According to Mautz (2015), leaders create meaning in organizations by cultivating, “feelings of significance, genuineness, belonging, and expanding personal potential,” (p. 138). In addition, when leaders demonstrate relationships matter, followers will develop higher quality relationships with both their leaders and other followers. When followers feel connected, they are more likely to garner meaning from their work which in turn creates a willingness to work harder (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Mautz, 2015; Reina & Reina, 2006; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011).

Strong relationships benefit all people in the workplace since they contribute to an overall positive environment. In fact, once seen as a hindrance, having personal relationships with followers is now accepted as advantageous to leaders because it creates richer, more meaningful organizations (Grayson & Speckhart, 2006; McKee et al., 2008; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). According to Patterson, Grenny and Maxfield (2013), leaders who are able to build “social capital” with their followers are also able to influence them to the benefit of the organization. When strong relationships have been established, leaders can share ideas with their followers and receive genuine feedback (Grayson & Speckhart, 2006). Furthermore, followers feel more comfortable bringing issues to leaders’ attention without fear of reprisal (Chaleff, 2009).

Followers receive benefits from relationships formed with their leaders as well. Feeling their ideas and input are appreciated, they become committed to the organization’s values and goals (Tracy, 2014). Additionally, followers are more likely to
openly communicate as well as collaborate when they feel a sense of caring from their leaders. As followers feel valued and their skills, talents and knowledge are utilized, a greater connection is developed with their leaders. This results in an increase in performance and more success for the organization (Grayson & Speckhart, 2006; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011).

**Leadership and relationships.** Exemplary leaders are successful when they build relationships with people at all levels in their organization (Nohria, Joyce, & Roberson, 2003). Developing authentic connections with their followers is more than caring about them, it also depends on a sense of mutual trust which leads to a cooperative environment (Chaleff, 2009). When trust and respect have been established, it makes it easier for leaders to have difficult conversations because followers know that their leaders have their best interests at heart (Patterson et al., 2012). Having a foundation of trust and being able to have uncomfortable discussions is what leads to being able to affect change within the organization. What further strengthens the bonds is when leaders support followers to grow, be creative and take risks.

“Trust is essential to the leader-follower relationship,” (Chaleff, 2009, p. 29). It begins when leaders’ actions and words are in alignment. When leaders promote a clear vision and set of values which are mirrored by the leaders’ behavior, they demonstrate to their followers that they can be trusted (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Liborius, 2014; Sinek, 2009). The credibility they earn promotes loyalty among followers who feel like important members of the team (Harvey & Drolet, 2006; Liborius, 2014). Relationships based on trust evolve into a cooperative atmosphere where the clear vision put forth by
their leaders gives followers a purpose and a willingness to work toward organizational success (Fan, 2009; Grayson & Speckhart, 2006; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

It is inevitable difficult situations or conflicts will arise among people in an organization; however, they are more readily resolved when strong connections between leaders and followers are present. Hence, exemplary leaders understand that with trust and respect, they are able to create a sense of safety with their followers before having any crucial conversations (Patterson et al., 2012). Otherwise, followers will view the conversation as a threat or an attack (Moua, 2010). Leaders, therefore, know they must be honest about problems which surface, allow people time to process and listen attentively to what their followers have to communicate (Alvy & Robbins, 2010; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

In an ever-evolving world, organizations must possess the ability to adapt in order to maintain their success. The leaders’ role is to build a culture of flexibility and optimism within the organization to guide followers through change. Exemplary leaders build the capacity for change by being positive, hopeful and supportive in their relationships with followers (Alvy & Robbins, 2010; McKee et al., 2008). These leadership elements along with a clear vision and a shared set of values help followers to feel a collective purpose which motivates them to support the organization’s success. Moreover, McKee et al. (2008) asserted that when leaders can create meaning and inspiration, their followers are able to handle the future with innovative solutions to embrace change.

Relationships with followers are nurtured when leaders create a meaningful work environment which encourages followers’ growth and success. Exemplary leaders
accomplish this by understanding followers’ talents, values and aspirations, then finding ways to connect them to the organization (Dik et al., 2014; Holtaway, 2012; Kaipa & Radjou, 2013; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011). An additional way leaders show their support is through being visible. Sinek (2014) contended, “Leaders, in order to truly lead, need to walk the halls and spend time with the people they serve,” (p. 160). Furthermore, as followers feel their leaders’ support and caring, they are more willing to take risks and work harder because they find their work purposeful (Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

**Meaning and relationships.** Exemplary leaders know it is essential to build personal relationships with people in their organizations because it will create meaning for both their followers and themselves (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Building relationships takes work and if leaders intend to make followers a priority, a commitment of time and effort must be put forth. This time and effort becomes an investment in themselves, their followers and their organization (Mautz, 2015). Leaders development of connections can be seen if their behavior shows followers they can listen attentively, appreciate their efforts, provide support for personal growth and acknowledge their accomplishments because this shows a deep sense of caring (Mautz, 2015; McKee et al., 2008; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011; Zewilling, 2014). Consequently, the connection they feel provides a sense of meaningfulness at all levels within the organization (Holtaway, 2012; Raz, 2015).

Caring and connection create a work environment and an organizational culture that leads to people finding inherent meaning in what they do. If followers know that their leaders care about them, they are willing to work harder, striving to bring success to
their organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; R. Ulrich & Woodson, 2011). D. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) asserted that when leaders can create a workplace where followers know each other’s abilities and limitations, they can create a “synergy” among teams and in the organization. This leads to, “a competitive advantage over a less relationally sophisticated competitor,” (D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010, p. 41). Revesncio (2015) explained a University of Warwick study revealed there is a 12% increase in productivity when followers are happy. Unhappiness and stress lead to a decrease in productivity by approximately 34% (Higginbottom, 2014; Revesncio 2015; Zewilling, 2014). Relationships are a key to this productivity and leaders’ behavior is vital to building relationships. Therefore, strong relationships in the work environment help create meaning which creates high performing organizations.

Importance of Wisdom

Wisdom was contemplated by Greek philosophers, including Aristotle, who believed that wisdom was the ultimate trait man could aspire to and without it could not accomplish other aspects of a virtuous life (Kessler & Bailey, 2007; Kupers & Pauleen, 2013; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Wisdom is utilizing one’s knowledge and experience to solve problems in all areas of one’s life. It is an amalgamation of ethics, morality and practicality (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Schwartz, 2011; Yang, 2011).

Overview of Wisdom

Wisdom is not a static state rather it is an evolving element throughout one’s life (Spano, 2013). Wisdom in both a theoretical notion as well as a behavior (Bassett, 2011). Sources of wisdom come for a variety of areas with everyone’s journey being different. Wisdom has distinct elements and behaviors which can be observed and its effects on self
and others can be profound. Observations, reflection and learning from one’s mistakes can contribute to the development of wisdom. Brown (2002) asserted wisdom is a life-long process and is developed by one’s, “orientation to learning, experiences, interactions with others, and the institutional environment,” (p. 30). Wisdom can also be gained by learning universal values as well as learning from a mentor (Chima, 2014; Melé, 2010).

When one has gained wisdom from a variety of sources, it will be manifested through numerous characteristics. Knowledge and insight are characteristics of wisdom (Greaves et al., 2014; Yang, 2011). Judgement and the ability to decipher whether solutions to problems are the right ones for the situation also play a role in possessing wisdom (Greaves et al., 2014; Schwartz, 2011; Yang, 2011). Additionally, the characteristics of wisdom include an integration of intelligence, creativity, practicality and the ability for reflection (Ardelt, 1997; Schwartz, 2011; Yang, 2011).

Wisdom is a habit of mind and behavior which helps one navigate through life’s challenges (Bassett, 2011). It can help one problem solve personal and professional issues. By possessing wisdom, problems can be dealt with using the solutions which are in the best interest of oneself, others and the larger society (Bassett, 2011; Kupers & Pauleen, 2013; Melé, 2010). When one is able to integrate the many characteristics and behaviors of wisdom, more positive solutions to issues can be generated (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Bassett, 2011; Yang, 2011). Therefore, given all of the effects wisdom can have, Basset (2011) asserted, “Wisdom is about human flourishing,” (p. 36).

**Theories of wisdom.** Wisdom has long been a subject in which people have pondered and theorized. It has not been until the last several decades that specific theories with measurable outcomes have been developed. Much of the modern work has
been led by the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and, in particular, Paul Baltes. More recently, scholars and theorists such as Robert Sternberg, Judith Glück, Susan Bluck and Scott Brown have taken up this subject.

In the 1980s, Paul Baltes was a German psychologist, researcher and theorist at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin. His work was focused on the life-span orientation of human development and he originated the theory of the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm (Wikipedia, n.d.). Baltes and his research colleagues developed the theory of the fundamental pragmatics of life, an explicit knowledge theory (Banicki, 2009; Brown & Greene, 2006). This became known as the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm which was a metaheuristic (pragmatic) theory having an, “expertise in the conduct and meaning of life,” (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 124). Their work revolved around how wisdom is gained and, ultimately, how people live a meaningful life. They theorized a number of ways in which people gained wisdom over a lifetime, some of which included chronological age, a wide-range of life experiences, experiences as a mentor, motivational dispositions and cognitive mechanics (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). Five criteria were developed in order to measure wisdom in their research: (a) factual knowledge; (b) procedural knowledge; (c) life-span contextualism; (d) relativism of values and (e) awareness and management of uncertainty (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Banicki, 2009; Brown & Greene, 2006). Furthermore, they believed these criteria could be used to assess both individuals as well as social constructs, such as constitutions and institutions (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000).

Glück and Bluck (2013) based their wisdom model on the fact most laypeople and theorists agree one cannot have wisdom without a broad range of life experiences;
however, they also contended that age alone is not the basis for gaining wisdom. They asserted wisdom is gained through a combination of MORE- mastery, openness, reflectivity, and emotion regulation/empathy (Glück & Bluck, 2013). Glück and Bluck believed MORE resulted in one being able to foster wisdom, deal with life’s adversity and integrate their experiences in order to grow as an individual. The concept of mastery is viewed as one’s understanding of what can and cannot be controlled in life, yet are able to face adversity as it arises (Glück & Bluck, 2013). Openness refers to the ability to be tolerant of differences whatever their nature (Glück & Bluck, 2013). Glück and Bluck defined reflectivity as being able to thinking deeply about life. Lastly, emotion regulation and empathy refer to the capacity to control one’s own feelings as well as show concern for others (Glück & Bluck, 2013). Glück & Bluck contended if one has high levels of these elements, “the resources reinforce each other over time, forming a kind of ‘positive syndrome’ that helps people deal with challenges in their own and others’ lives,” (p. 93) which, inevitably, leads to wisdom.

The Balance Theory of Wisdom was developed by Robert Sternberg (1998, 2001), an American psychologist and psychometrician. He conceived wisdom as using one’s knowledge to seek the collective good which is done by balancing the interests of self, others and society (Sternberg, 1998, 2001). One’s knowledge can be gained through implicit and explicit learning (Sternberg, 2001). However, Sternberg’s theory stressed tacit (implicit) knowledge over explicit knowledge because it can be used across subjects and situations whereas knowledge of a specific content area cannot (Brown & Greene, 2006; Sternberg, 2001). He believed that tacit knowledge could be developed. Sternberg
Brown (2002) focused his research on student learning in higher education and as a result of his studies he developed the Model of Wisdom Development. Brown theorized, “Wisdom is a construct of six interacting dimensions: self-knowledge, understanding of others, judgment, life knowledge, life skills, and a willingness to learn,” (p. 30). He believed people develop wisdom when certain conditions exist. One comes to wisdom through “learning from life” or what he described as a process of “reflection, integration and application” (Brown, 2002, 2004). In addition, several conditions need to be present to facilitate the development of wisdom including one’s orientation to learning, life experiences, interactions with others and the environment (Brown, 2002, 2004; Brown & Greene, 2006). Through the interplay of “learning from life” and the conditions identified, wisdom can be developed by individuals.

**Leadership and wisdom.** Wisdom is a fundamental attribute exemplary leaders display and continue to cultivate over time because, “They consistently work in the best interests of their staff or team,” (Eich, 2015, p. 9). Leaders make decisions based on their knowledge and experience. This allows them to understand the challenges being faced in order to choose the solutions which will sustain the collective good (Melé, 2010). Hence, the use of wisdom in the organization supports both themselves and their followers.

Since leaders do have a responsibility to followers and the organization, they need to be ever cognizant of making wise decisions. McKee et al. (2008) stressed leaders, in particular, need to understand and use their power in a wise manner. Their choices must improve the lives of their followers and the work environment (Baltes & Staudinger,
2000; Yang, 2011). Through good judgement, leaders help to identify the highest expectations and goals for the organization while choosing a wise path to achieve them (Campbell, 2013). Leaders also serve as a role model for wisdom because it should be demonstrated (Sternberg, 2001). Therefore, wise leaders can have a significant impact on their followers as well as the organization.

There are a number of ways followers benefit from leaders who act in a wise manner. Since leaders model good judgment, they help followers to understand the thought processes that occur when making wise decisions (Sternberg, 2001). In addition, since exemplary leaders are continually seeking personal growth, they encourage the growth of their followers while simultaneously helping followers understand the need for balancing what is best for themselves and others (Greaves et al., 2014; Sternberg, 2001; Yang, 2011). Followers also benefit from leaders who are able to attentively listen, reflect and offer guidance (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). Consequently, Kaipa and Radjou (2013) asserted, “The culture of wise organizations is more synergistic, and the outcome is much more than the culmination of individual outcomes,” (p. 190).

**Meaning and wisdom.** When leaders are able to use their knowledge and life experiences to guide followers, they create purposeful goals and make wise decisions which result in the collective good. The leaders handle adversity in a way which brings a sense of meaning to their work (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). Through being aware of a higher purpose, leaders seek to make decisions based on their wisdom which helps to create meaning for the entire organization (Greaves et al., 2014). Kaipa and Radjou (2013) contended wise organizations are driven by a noble purpose. By being wise, leaders and followers seek to make decisions based on moral judgment and their life
experiences in order to achieve a common purpose. Additionally, by being open and contemplative, leaders and followers are better able to understand how what they do is meaningful.

**Importance of Inspiration**

Inspiration is a feeling and a mindset which enables one to look toward the future with optimism and hope about the possibilities that may present themselves. A forward-thinking mindset is profoundly personal, motivating one to be more open and creative (McKee et al., 2008; Sinek, 2009). Inspirational leaders act from the heart, engaging followers’ emotions (Gallo, 2007; Lee, 2014; McKee et al., 2008). In addition, inspiration motivates people to work for the collective good as they seek a positive future state together (McKee et al., 2008; Sinek, 2009; Smith, 2014).

**Overview of Inspiration**

Thrash and Elliot (2014) theorized inspiration occurs because one develops insight which was not possessed previously and feels moved to communicate it with others in order to move toward a better future state. Inspiration can develop out of a variety of sources which can be both emotional and intellectual (Chan, 2014; Thrash & Elliot, 2014; Watters, 2016). Thus, leaders can have a profound effect on followers and the organization leading to positive changes.

People can be inspired by a transcendent feeling, a response to beauty, new insight or past experiences (Chan, 2014; Thrash & Elliot, 2014; Watters, 2016). Sinek (2009) asserted exemplary leaders possess charisma and have a “clarity of WHY.” This turns into a passionate state whereby leaders communicate to followers their excitement about new possibilities envisioned (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Sinek, 2009; Watters, 2016).
It generates motivation among followers which is reflected in their work moving beyond the current state (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Sinek, 2009; Watters, 2016).

Leaders inspire by communicating the emotional significance of their message to followers. The message is optimistic, motivational, and inclusive. DuBrin (2015) asserted leaders share the message through the use of, “metaphors and analogies, and the ability to gear language to different audiences,” (p. 84). They communicate by sharing the greater purpose of the inspired state through their language and actions (Cleavenger & Munyon, 2013). The message is hopeful and motivational, leading to a connection among others within the organization (Sinek, 2009).

When leaders behave in inspirational ways, they help followers to find a sense of purpose in what they do which brings meaning to their work (Lee, 2014; Watters, 2016). Feeling inspired also leads to followers feeling a sense of belonging and identity, reducing isolationism (Lee, 2014; Sinek, 2009). The manifestation of inspiration can be seen in more creativity and higher level of performance by everyone (Ghadi et al., 2014; Lee, 2014; Sinek, 2009). Watters (2016) concluded, “Inspiration has often been cited as the source and catalyst for many breakthroughs and inventions and has been described as a powerful tool for driving change and achieving success,” (p. 4). Leaders who are clear about their message draw people to their organizations because of their inspirational nature (Sinek, 2009).

**Theories of inspiration.** For thousands of years, inspiration was seen as something mystically or divinely imbued upon a person; however, this idea has since been rejected by modern psychologists (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In the more modern era, psychologists, researchers and scholars have been trying to discover ways to identify how
and why one becomes inspired. Over the last several decades, there has been a great deal of research conducted on inspiration with a number of theories and measurement instruments developed to seek out a greater understanding of the phenomenon of inspiration.

Hart (1998) is a psychologist and researcher who conducted an empirical study to research whether inspiration appeared in the daily lives of people not just as a mystical phenomenon. His study found that inspiration does occur in everyday life. Hart (1998) concluded four characteristics emerged which included connection, opened, clarity and energy. Connection referred to moving beyond a previous self-awareness (Hart, 1998). Tobin described opened as being receptive to internal change and external influences. In his research, clarity was identified as gaining deeper insight into issues and/or oneself (Hart, 1998). Finally, Hart referred to energy as moving into a happier, more positive state. The research concluded inspiration does not take a form, but rather a higher level of consciousness (Hart, 1998). It is beyond a cognitive construct, “that has a particular phenomenological and cognitive-emotional matrix and is typically characterized by some degree of transient synesthetic perception,” (Hart, 1998, p. 25).

Thrash and Elliot (2003) took a phenomenon-based approach to studying inspiration as there had been little research conducted from the aspect of personal or motivational psychology. Thrash and Elliot (2003) conceived of inspiration with three main components: (a) transcendence, (b) evocation, and (c) motivation. First, they described transcendence as a moving beyond one’s normal awareness to a higher level (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Evocation referred to a state which arises unintentionally and “unwilled” (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Lastly, Thrash and Elliot (2003) described
motivation as the impetus to achieve a desired goal. Their research led to the development of the Inspirational Scale which is an instrument to collect data on inspiration and how it brings meaning into people’s lives (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Moreover, this measurement instrument was intended to be used by psychologists since little empirical data existed on inspiration in this area (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

Mark Crowley (2011) is an expert in leadership and employee engagement. In his book, *Lead from the Heart*, Crowley explored why leaders must inspire followers by “leading from the heart.” He asserted leaders must bring an emotional aspect to their organizations, connecting with followers in genuine ways as this will result in a meaningful work environment which will produce higher employee engagement and increased levels of productivity (Crowley, 2011). Crowley stressed that inspirational leaders understand their followers’ needs for satisfaction, support, autonomy and recognition. Crowley emphasized the need for leaders to behave with sincerity in order to make followers feel connected, safe and significant contributing members to the organization. If leaders are inspirational and heartfelt, they will make a much greater impact on the lives of those around them.

Rooted in the work of Thrash and Elliot (2003), Isaac Smith (2015) further examined the idea of inspiration, “with a particular focus on what it is about certain ideas, potentialities, and possibilities that inspire people to act,” (p. 4). Based on his research, Smith developed the Disruption Model of Inspiration. His model proposed inspiration is felt when (a) there is a disruption to one’s mental schema (forcing to view something differently), (b) it is relevant to the realization of core human motives (agency, communion and coherence) and (c) it is attainable (ability to achieve the possibilities)
(Smith, 2015; Watters, 2016). He applied this model to the notion of leadership and inspiration. Smith theorized leaders can make followers feel inspired to action by clearly communicating the goal and its relevancy as well as its attainability.

**Leadership and inspiration.** Leaders hold a powerful position in which they can influence followers to effect change within their organization for the collective good (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Lee, 2014; Watters, 2016). They can inspire by harnessing followers’ skills and values to create meaning for their organization. The behavior of exemplary leaders is enthusiastic, passionate and communicative; it coalesces their followers around a shared vision of a future state (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; McKee et al., 2008; Sinek, 2009; Watters, 2016).

Exemplary leaders understand their role and responsibility to lead followers and the organization toward an optimistic future. Leaders bring followers together around a collective goal which creates meaning for their work, engaging their minds and hearts to act in order to achieve the inspired state they envision (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Crowley, 2011; Gallo, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Lee, 2014; Sinek, 2009; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Inspirational leaders are able to do so because they display an excitement in pursuing their shared vision based on their mutual goals and aspirations (Lee, 2014; Kouzes & Posner, 2009; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; Watters, 2016). In addition, leaders who inspire do not use coercion rather they act as role models showing followers the importance of being motivated and engaging in their work (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). They also support, encourage and affirm their followers on the inspired journey with an optimistic attitude in order for all to be successful (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013;
Kouzes & Posner, 1989; Sinek, 2009; Watters, 2016). In turn, these behaviors lead to having a positive effect on followers.

Followers are inspired by leaders’ enthusiasm, the values they display and a clear understanding of where they are going. Inspirational leaders build connections with their followers creating a sense of belonging and a common purpose which goes beyond any external gains (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Sinek, 2009). Moreover, followers strive for higher performance, mastery and innovation when they are inspired by their leaders (Ghadi et al., 2013; Lee, 2014; Sinek, 2009; Watters, 2016). This is a result of feeling supported to reach their highest potential (Dik et al., 2013).

**Meaning and inspiration.** Leaders who wish to create meaning within the organization endeavor to help followers see how their values and dreams connect to the collective goal to which they aspire. Inspiration cultivates a compelling reason to strive toward a more optimistic and successful future. Lee (2014) asserted inspirational leaders set high expectations to fulfill a common goal while encouraging their followers to reach beyond the current state. By being inspirational, leaders have positive effects on their followers which leads to everyone within the organization being able to flourish. In addition, heartfelt enthusiasm and vision for a positive future leads to creating meaning (Crowley, 2011; Gallo, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; McKee et al., 2008).

Consequently, being inspired to find meaning helps the organization to thrive and reach higher levels of performance (Crowley, 2011; Kouzes, & Posner, 2006; Sinek, 2009; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).
Nonprofit Organizations

The roots of philanthropy, or charitable giving, can be found extending back to Ancient Jewish and Greek life (Robbins, 2012). Philanthropy has played an important function in society with its role evolving over time to adapt to societal and political changes. Nonprofit organizations were created to broaden the base of charitable giving and now they are a dynamic and robust sector in our society. Despite nonprofit organizations existing to address issues for a greater societal purpose, leaders of nonprofit organizations face many of the same challenges as leaders in the public and private sectors (Hannum et al., 2011). For example, the intricacies and rapid expansion of nonprofit organizations have created challenges for nonprofit leaders because, “many nonprofits do not have the access to resources to enable them to cope with the pace and scale of change,” (Hannum et al., 2011, p. 7). As nonprofit leaders face these challenges, they must contend with others challenges which can include new technology, stakeholders’ diverse demands and expectations, trying to measure the impact of the organization’s work, possible lack of human resources support and trying to combine the organization’s efforts with those of other organizations (Hannum et al., 2011). If leaders are not able to create meaning for themselves and their followers within their organization in the midst of these challenges, there is the real possibility of employees seeking employment elsewhere if they are not satisfied in their workplace. As Hannum, et al. (2011) reported, “The new workforce is willing to change organizations if they do not believe they are having an impact,” (p. 3).

Historic background of philanthropy and nonprofits. Philanthropy has been a part of the Western culture for thousands of years. The practice of charitable giving can
be found in Ancient Jewish culture with the concept of *tzedakah* (Kosmin & Ritterband, 1991; Robbins, 2012). Charitable actions were both a religious and moral obligation because it was a tenet of Judaism. Providing assistance to those in need was part of the Jewish identity and helped establish status within the community (Bergoffen, 2016; Kosmin & Ritterband, 1991; Robbins, 2012).

The Ancient Greeks were also known for charitable acts yet it manifested in a different manner. There was no religious obligation to give, but there was a societal imperative for the aristocrats to donate generously to cities and towns (Christ, 2016; Robbins, 2012). Protocols were devised to require the wealthy to provide funding for city buildings, temples, libraries and the protection of its citizens (Robbins, 2012). Philanthropy was a civic ideal and if the wealthy did not act as benefactors, they were seen as, “entirely uncivilized, warranting mockery by peers and plebs,” (Robbins, 2012, p. 91).

Charitable giving in the United States has been influenced by the ideas and cultures of Ancient Civilization. In fact, as far back as the Puritans and colonial times, charitable actions have been a part of American society (Holland & Ritvo, 2012; Norris-Tirrell, 2014). Religious organizations, voluntary associations and benefactors have participated in what has been viewed as a moral duty to help the needy, contribute to educational institutions or give to churches and hospitals. Indeed, in his 1835 book, *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about the many voluntary associations that were present in the United States. It was extraordinary to him that Americans had the freedom to form associations that supported any variety of social and political needs which they saw fit (as cited in Hall, 2006; also Holland & Ritvo, 2012).
The birth of modern nonprofits happened in the years following the Civil War. It was a time of economic boom and expansion for the country. The people who capitalized on the rise of the Industrial Revolution with its factories, railroads and inventions like the telegraph and electricity quickly prospered (Casey, 2016; Hall, 2006; Zunz, 2012). With their vast wealth, they started to look for ways to influence and benefit society. They were not just seeking to give charitable funds, they wanted to establish organizations and institutions that determined the root causes of social problems (Hall 2006; Norris-Tirrell, 2014; Zunz, 2012). The philanthropists joined forces with institutions dedicated to education, public health and the sciences and these partnerships created a new entity known as the “foundation” (Zunz, 2012). Foundations could collect and oversee large amounts of money which could be distributed to organizations or institutions they felt were in need of assistance (Zunz, 2012).

However, it was not just the wealthy participating in charitable acts. The contributions of the middle and working classes began to grow with “mass philanthropy” becoming a part of the American culture (Hall 2006; Zunz, 2012). Fundraising campaigns started to appear to support a myriad of causes and social issues. The first large fundraising campaign begun in 1907 with the Christmas Seals which were sold to promote the awareness of the public health crisis of tuberculosis as well as raise money to find a cure for the disease (Zunz, 2011, 2012).

While these charitable organizations were expanding throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, state and federal policies were being reformed to address their scope of influence (Hall, 2006; Holland & Ritvo, 2012). In the decades following the 1940s, clearer delineations were made between private enterprise and charitable organizations.
(Casey, 2016; Hall, 2006; Holland & Ritvo, 2012). It was not until 1975, with the release of the Filer Commission report that the nonprofit sector, as it is known today, was “invented” (Hall, 2006; Holland & Ritvo, 2012). This report established nonprofit organizations as the third sector of our economy with government being the first sector and business being the second (Casey, 2016; Hall, 2006; Holland & Ritvo, 2012; Zunz, 2012). The Filer Commission report made it evident how essential nonprofit organizations had become to the American economy and democracy (Hall, 2006).

**Role and function in society.** Nonprofit organizations legally operate under five standards as defined by the United Nations: organized, private, self-governing, not profit distributing and non-compulsory (Anheier & Salamon, 2006; Casey, 2016). Nonprofit organizations are value-driven whether they focus on a specific cause, multiple issues or influence public policy because they are motivated and deeply committed to bringing about social change (Casey, 2016; Cook & Inman, 2012). There are four goals in which nonprofits occupy in society. They include vanguard (innovator), advocate, value guardian and service provider (Kramer, 1981). Nonprofit organizations provide services in areas where government and business operate in a limited fashion or not at all. Healthcare, higher education, welfare, the environment, scientific research, culture and the arts are the most common areas where they concentrate their efforts (Casey, 2016; Salamon, 2001). Due to the nature of these social issues, nonprofits function locally, nationally and globally.

**Local, national and global influence.** Initially philanthropy, and later nonprofit organizations, served local communities with citizen groups providing for the poor including, “orphans, widows, and refugees,” (Robbins, 2006, p. 14). They focused their
efforts on the disenfranchised and the less fortunate in society (Robbins, 2006). Today, local nonprofits support entities like community-theater, schools, museums and churches as well as other issues specific to the community through donations and volunteerism.

Later, nonprofits evolved out of philanthropy in order to make larger impacts on societal issues as they coalesced their resources of “mass philanthropy” and volunteerism (Hall 2006; Zunz, 2012). Nonprofit organizations began gifting substantial amounts of money to universities, research facilities, healthcare and social causes on a national scale trying to find solutions to the problems of society. Additionally, national nonprofits have benefited from volunteers working for organizations like the American Cancer Society, the Sierra Club, American Red Cross and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Naturally, nonprofit organizations began expanding their scope globally based on the American model (Casey, 2016). Nonprofits such as Greenpeace, Human Rights Watch and Save the Children emerged to tackle societal issues which affect the world. In part, this was made possible due to technology, globalization and because people in other countries were starting to question what they deemed as inadequacies in business and government in meeting their societal needs (Casey, 2016). With the growth and dynamic nature of the Third Sector, both nationally and globally, exemplary leaders are needed to guide these organizations to not only be successful, but sustain their success as they face the challenges of the future.

**Nonprofit organization leaders.** Nonprofit leaders are in a unique position to work for inherently values-driven organizations unlike leaders of business and government entities. They can more easily find meaning in their work by creating
change through assisting in solving societal problems and influencing public policy for the greater good. However, there are challenges they are now facing in leadership that they must be prepared to handle. The nonprofit world is facing more professionalization of its operational structure as well as partnering with business to move forward with the missions of the nonprofit organizations (Casey, 2016; Norris-Tirrell, 2014; Weisbrod, 2012). These changes require skills that were not necessarily needed in the past.

Due to national and global expansion, nonprofit organizations are becoming more professionalized and moving toward an operational business model (Casey, 2016; Norris-Tirrell, 2014; Weisbrod, 2012). With the rapid growth of the Third Sector, they are experiencing an increasingly more competitive market with greater accountability to stakeholders (Casey, 2016; Ostrower & Stone, 2012). In addition, the leaders and staff within the nonprofit organizations have had to learn how to network as they compete with other nonprofits as well as with business and government for funding (Casey, 2016; Weisbrod, 2012).

Nonprofits have had to become entrepreneurial as a result of these changes (Felicio, Goncalves, & Goncalves, 2013). The most significant way they have been innovative is in developing partnerships with businesses both nationally and globally (Casey, 2016; Weisbrod, 2012). They have also had to learn how to cooperate and collaborate with what had been seen as their competition (Casey, 2016; Norris-Tirrell, 2014). These partnerships blur the lines somewhat between the sectors; however, they have often been beneficial to both parties (Casey, 2016; Norris-Tirrell, 2014).

Nonprofit leaders have found themselves in a new realm where they must possess certain skills and attributes in order to grow and sustain their organizations. Dobbs
(2004) stated that nonprofit leaders must continually communicate and model the values and goals of the organization to its followers and stakeholders. Nonprofit leaders need to be self-confident, build trust, have good judgment, possess emotional intelligence, think abstractly, motivate others as well as understand their followers and stakeholders (Casey, 2016; Dobbs, 2004; Kearns, Livingston, Scherer, & McShane, 2015). Furthermore, if nonprofit leaders are working in an international organization, they need to be culturally competent (Casey, 2016). According to Casey (2016), if nonprofit leaders are to be successful on a global scale, they must also have the following skills: openness, cultural knowledge, emotional strength, transparency and synergy.

The world of nonprofit organizations has changed significantly from the times of the Industrial Revolution. The demands placed on nonprofit leaders have increased, especially with the pressures to grow and sustain the organizations. However, nonprofit leaders must find a way to continue to keep the organization values-driven and to create meaning within the organization for themselves and their followers.

Summary

The review of literature demonstrated the need to study the five elements (character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration) which exemplary leaders can utilize to create meaning for themselves and followers within their organization. Meaning is an essential element for human beings to possess in their lives (Aristotle, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Curzer, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). They find personal meaning through emotional connections with others and achieving goals which give them a feeling of significance (Bass & Bass, 2008;
The theoretical frameworks of both leadership and followership revealed the interdependence of leaders and followers. As a result, the theories explained how leaders can influence their followers in order to create a meaningful organizational culture. Leaders have the opportunity to create meaning in the workplace and this is done by appealing to the minds and hearts of followers (Crowley, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 1989; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). When leaders and followers find a sense of collective purpose, they reach higher levels of performance (Crowley, 2011; Mautz, 2015; Sinek, 2009; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). This is especially relevant to nonprofit leaders because they have the unusual challenge of being in an intrinsically values-driven organization as it advocates for a specific cause. Nonprofit leaders must frequently communicate and model the values of the organization to its followers in order to create a meaningful organization, not just having followers rely on the cause they are championing to find meaning (Dobb, 2004).

Character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration are elements exemplary leaders can demonstrate in order to create meaning within the organization. Character helps leaders establish trust with their followers (Liborious, 2014; McKee et al., 2008; Sinek, 2009; Volgelgesang et al., 2013). Trust leads to building connections and establishing common values (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Lahno, 2001; Liborious, 2014). Vision is the capacity of leaders to relate the organization’s present state to a more optimistic future state by sharing a purposeful goal developed collaboratively (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Kantabutra & Avery, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2009;
Landsberg, 2000). The leader’s ability to develop relationships is essential to being able to lead followers. Exemplary leaders know they must lead from their heart (Crowley, 2011; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). In addition, possessing wisdom is both a theoretical state and a behavior. Leaders who are wise have the ability to use their personal experiences and knowledge to make decisions for the good of the whole organization (Bassett, 2011; Greaves et al., 2014; Kupers & Pauleen, 2013; Melé, 2010; Yang, 2011). Finally, exemplary leaders use inspiration to communicate an optimistic message about the purpose and meaning of their work (Lee, 2014; Watters, 2016).

The literature review of meaning as well as the theories of leadership and followership provide a framework to understand the need to study the five elements as they relate to leaders creating meaning. There have been no studies to date on how these five specific elements combined have an effect on creating meaning for leaders and followers in their workplace. From the literature review, it can be concluded this is an area which needs further research.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III is a detailed presentation of the methodology and research design which was used to guide the study. In this chapter, the researcher begins with the purpose for the study and the research questions which were presented in Chapter I and which were used to guide the study. Chapter II provided a review of literature as it relates to leaders creating meaning for themselves and followers within the organization through the distinct elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. This chapter will describe in detail the methodology used to conduct the study. It begins with the purpose statement and research questions. Then, it is followed by the rationale for the research design, including the population, sample, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis as well as the limitations of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed method case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.
Research Questions

1. What are the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration?

2. To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

Research Design

Method

In this study, the methodology used to identify and describe strategies which nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers was a mixed method case study. This mixed method case study was selected by the 12 peer researchers and four faculty as the best method to arrive at rich and meaningful answers to the stated research questions. According to Creswell (2003), a case study allows the researcher to deeply explore a phenomenon in a specific place at a specific point in time. “The case study stands on its own as a detailed and rich story about a person, organization, event, campaign, or program,” (Patton, 2015, p. 259). Case study research provides the researcher with the ability to reach an in-depth understanding of topics through detailed analysis. Indeed, case study research can build upon previous research, adding strength to what is already known.

“Historically, qualitative researchers cited two major purposes of a study: to describe and explore and to describe and explain,” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 325). Patton (2015) explained the qualitative researcher becomes the “instrument of
inquiry” (p. 3). Qualitative research has no pre-determined ideas of what the study will find rather it is referred to as, “an inductive approach of planning the research,” (Patten, 2012, p.19). For the qualitative portion of this study, open-ended interviews were conducted with three exemplary nonprofit leaders to complement the quantitative results from surveys provided to followers of the exemplary leaders. From the data collected, the researcher must organize them to find patterns and themes to explain the study’s findings (Patten, 2010; Patton, 2015). According to Patton (2015), the use of a qualitative means of study provides the researcher with more details and descriptions of the phenomenon being studied.

The quantitative method of study is, “a research paradigm in which objective data are gathered and analyzed numerically,” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 489). The quantitative researcher does a literature review to help refine the research objective, establish a framework for the study, determine the significance of this work, identify methodology with its limitations and discover any contradictory findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The quantitative portion of this study was achieved by an electronic online survey which was taken by followers of the identified exemplary nonprofit leaders. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the degree of importance which followers ascribed to strategies and behaviors utilized by exemplary leaders to create meaning for themselves and others in the organization. The researcher’s intent is to be as objective as possible throughout the study.

The mixed method approach to research combines qualitative and quantitative research design. According to Roberts (2010), having both qualitative and quantitative results allows for greater breadth and depth. Evidenced-based inquiry, which is grounded
in empirical data, is used in conjunction with data gathered from, “direct quotations from the people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge,” (Patton, 2015, p.14). Using a mixed method design leads to the study being more detailed, richer in content and more enhanced in quality (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). After the researcher completed the interviews of exemplary leaders and surveys of their followers, the data was then brought together for consistency and depth of data. Figure 1 illustrates how the researcher organized this mixed method case study.

![Figure 1. Mixed Method Case Study.](image)

**Method Rationale**

The 12 peer researchers with the four faculty and instrumentation expert collaboratively chose the mixed method case study design in order to study meaning making across various industries. The study areas included: nonprofit universities, charter schools, nonprofit entities, K-12 school districts, private sector organizations, technology companies, automotive companies, NCAA Division I teams, healthcare organizations and police departments. The peer researchers used the mixed method case study methodology in order to add strength and breadth to the topic of how exemplary leaders create meaning. By merging qualitative and quantitative data for a mixed
methods study, a greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied will emerge (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Patton (2015) explained, “The case study stands on its own as a detailed and rich story about a person, program, organization, event, campaign, or program,” (p. 259). Additionally, through the utilization of a case study method, the researcher establishes a “boundary” around the study providing a context for the investigation of the phenomenon (Patten, 2010). Twelve peer researchers each interviewed three exemplary leaders and surveyed 12 of their followers within their chosen industry.

Furthermore, using this method of study allows for triangulation of the data collected which enhances the validity and reliability of the study and helps to offset the limitations of using only one method of study (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Patton, 2015). The research was embarked on in order to identify and describe behaviors which exemplary leaders use to create meaning for themselves and their followers. In Chapter II, the literature clearly substantiated each of the five elements under study: character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. A gap exists in the literature regarding how the five elements in concert work together to create personal and professional meaning. The followers’ perception of importance of these elements and behaviors was also not present in the literature and research. The understanding gained from this mixed method case study has the potential to expand the base of knowledge about how nonprofit leaders create meaning for all those who work within an organization and the possibility for other leaders to replicate it in their own organizations.
Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a population as, “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research,” (p. 129). The population for this study was leaders of nonprofit organizations. In 2015, there were 1,571,056 nonprofit organizations in the United States registered with the Internal Revenue Service (National Center for Charitable Statistics, n.d.). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), 11,426,870 people were employed by nonprofit organizations. With such a large number, it was not feasible to use this population due to time, geography and monetary constraints. This national population was narrowed down to nonprofit organizations registered in the state of California. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics (n.d.), there were 163,924 nonprofit organizations registered in California in 2015.

Target Population

A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data is to be used to make inferences. The target population indicates the population to which the findings of a survey are meant to be generalized. It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is typically not feasible, be it time or cost constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the peer researchers chose population samples from within the larger group. With 163,924 non-profits in California employing approximately 2,131,000 people it is not practicable to include all nonprofits in California. Consequently, the number included in the target population was reduced to
sixteen nonprofit organizations in Northern California who received a 90% or higher rating as identified by Charity Navigator. The Charity Navigator website includes all nonprofits registered in the United States. It uses an objective rating methodology based on seven criteria to rate nonprofit and charitable organizations. The criteria include: tax status, revenue, length of operations, location, public support, fundraising expenses and administrative expenses.

Sample

“The group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected is referred to as the sample,” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). This study used purposeful and random sampling to identify participants. A purposeful sampling was used because the participants chosen embodied certain criteria which produced the most beneficial data for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this case, it was leaders of nonprofit organizations. Additionally, a random sampling helped to identify three exemplary leaders. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a random sampling is, “a procedure for selecting subjects from a population in such a way that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected,” (p. 490). Once interested exemplary nonprofit leaders were identified, they were assigned random numbers. Beginning with the lowest number, leaders were contacted until three agreed to participate. Then, each leader provided the researcher with lists of names and email addresses of 12 followers to participate in the online survey. Thirty-six followers were invited to participate and 27 completed the survey. The 12 peer researchers each used a sample population of three identified exemplary leaders. Figure 2 displays the
population, target population and sample for the study. The selection process is explained in the following section.

**Population: Nonprofit Organizations in California**

*N = 163,924 nonprofit organizations in the United States*

**Target Population: Nonprofit Organizations in Northern California**

Target population selected for this study was 16 nonprofit organizations in Northern California

**Sample: Three Exemplary Nonprofit Leaders and 12 Followers**

3 exemplary nonprofit leaders and 12 followers where chosen from the target population

*Figure 2. Population, Sample, and Target Population.*

**Sample Subject Selection Process**

In order to conduct the research, three exemplary nonprofit organization leaders in Northern California needed to be identified. The leaders had to personify five of the six characteristics of being an exemplary leader. Exemplary leaders were defined as those leaders who are set apart from peers by exhibiting at least five of the following characteristics:

- Evidence of successful relationships with followers.
- Evidence of leadership behaviors promoting a positive and productive organizational culture.
- A minimum of five years of experience in the profession.
- Written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
- Recognized by peers as a successful leader.
• Membership in associations of groups focused on their field.

Additionally, an exemplary leader is defined as someone who is set apart from their peers in a supreme manner and possess suitable behavior, principles or intentions which can be copied (Goodwin, Piazza & Rozin, 2014). The following describes the process used for subject selection:

1. The first step of the selection process began with a purposeful sampling. High-performing nonprofit organizations in Northern California were identified based on an objective rating system found on the Charity Navigator website. Possible participants were selected by reviewing the biographies of the leaders on their nonprofit organizations’ websites as well as their LinkedIn accounts to see which characteristics each leader possessed. Sixteen possible participants who fit most of the criteria were identified and placed on a list.

2. Possible participants were contacted via email to determine if they would be willing to participate in the research study.

3. Once participants who met five of the six criteria agreed to participate in the study, three leaders were selected based on random sampling. Those participants who were willing to participate were assigned random numbers. The numbers were sorted from lowest to highest. Beginning with the lowest number, possible participants were contacted until three agreed to be in the study.

4. The three leaders were sent documents which included the purpose of the study, the Informed Consent (Appendix A), the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix B) and the Interview Protocol and Script (Appendix C).
5. Additionally, based on information provided by the nonprofit leaders, 12 members of their management teams were selected by the nonprofit leaders to participate in the secondary part of the study.

**Instrumentation**

Since this was a mixed method case study, both qualitative and quantitative instrumentation was used to collect data. When combined, the strengths of both methods, “provides for a more comprehensive picture of what is being studied,” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 396). The qualitative instrumentation was in the form of a semi-structured interview while the quantitative data was gathered by an online survey. The faculty, an instrumentation expert, Dr. Jim Cox, and the 12 peer researchers developed these instruments. J. B. Cox and Cox (2007) wrote the book, *Your Opinion Please!: How to Build the Best Questionnaires in the Field of Education.*

**Researcher as an Instrument of the Study**

According to Patton (2015), in qualitative research the researcher is the instrument of the study. “The inquirer’s skills, experience, perspective, and background matter,” (Patton, 2015, p. 33). Therefore, the researcher can have an influence on how the data is collected and interpreted. Consequently, neutrality can be difficult to achieve and the researcher must examine their own biases and perceptions (Patton, 2015). The researcher in this study has had a career in public education as an administrator and lacks experience working for nonprofit organizations; however, the researcher could bring a potential bias to the study based on personal background by donating to and volunteering for nonprofit organizations.
Qualitative Research

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), there are nine characteristics, “typically present to some degree in any qualitative study, and not all of them may be evident,” (p. 321). These characteristics include: natural settings, context sensitivity, direct data collection, rich narrative description, process orientation, inductive data analysis, participant perspectives, emergent design and complexity of understanding and explanation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher conducted interviews with three exemplary nonprofit leaders identified through the sample selection process. Each interview began with the researcher briefly giving an explanation of the study to the participant as well as reviewing the Participants Bill of Rights and obtaining a signed Informed Consent form prior to conducting the interview.

These interviews were conducted using a standardized interview protocol and script of open-ended questions developed prior to interviewing the participants. The protocol also provided for some flexibility by allowing the researcher to ask probing questions when more details or clarification was needed. The reason for using this kind of interview method was to elicit detailed responses from the nonprofit leaders regarding the five leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. Open-ended interviews provided data from participants which reflected their ideas, feelings, experiences and knowledge (Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010). Through the process of conducting interviews, the data collected about the thoughts, feelings and experiences of nonprofit leaders as it related to the five leadership elements was rich with detail, deepening the understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015).
The questions for the interview protocol and script were developed based on the information gathered by the 12 peer researchers in their literature reviews. The researchers were divided into four groups of three people each and assigned two variables. Each team met on multiple occasions to discuss and identify the common themes of the five elements, later presenting the information to the faculty and thematic team. Next, based on the themes identified, interview questions were developed and shared with faculty and peer researchers to evaluate. With the assistance of faculty and an instrumentation expert, the final questions were chosen for the pilot interviews.

Each of the 12 peer researchers conducted a pilot interview with a participant who fit the characteristics of the leaders they would research from their target populations; however, the data from the pilot interviews is not included in the study. As part of the pilot test, an observer was present during the interview. Both the participant and the observer provided feedback on the interview process, which along with feedback from the peer researchers, was gathered and presented to the faculty and instrumentation expert. Modifications to the interview protocol and script were made based on the feedback. Then, the finalized protocol was distributed to the 12 peer researchers.

The researcher recorded each interview using the interview protocol and script. The recordings were later transcribed by a transcriptionist. The data collected was coded and examined to identify themes.

**Qualitative validity and reliability.** In research, it is important to seek validity of the data because it determines the degree of truthfulness in which the results of the data represent the actual phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2012). In qualitative research, validity, “refers to the degree of congruence between the
explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world,” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330). To provide for content validity the interview questions were developed based on an extensive review of literature as well as with assistance from the faculty and Dr. Jim Cox, an instrumentation expert. Additionally, the participants were asked to review the transcriptions of their interviews to check for accuracy (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

McMillan & Schumacher (2010) explained, “good qualitative questions include interview script critiques by experienced interviewers, interview guide field testing, and revision of initial questions of final phraseology,” (p. 357). These techniques also establish the reliability of the qualitative data. An interview protocol and script based on the five leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration was developed and reviewed by faculty, an instrumentation expert and the 12 peer researchers. Additionally, since the protocol’s wording and order of the questions were determined prior to conducting the interviews, more reliability existed (Patton, 2015). A pilot test of the interview protocol and script, with an observer in attendance, was conducted prior to conducting the three interviews with the exemplary nonprofit leaders. After the pilot test interview, the participant provided feedback regarding the questions and process in general. This allowed the researcher to gather information in order to assist with the revisions of the final interview protocol and script. In addition, the observer provided the researcher with feedback in regards to the delivery of the interview and any biased behavior exhibited. To further ensure the overall reliability of the study, triangulation was utilized through the recording of the interviews, the participants reviewing the transcribed interviews and the surveys given to followers.
Quantitative Research

For the quantitative data instrumentation, a close-ended online survey was developed (Appendix D). The 12 peer researchers, faculty and an instrumentation expert worked in collaboration to develop a survey based on the extensive literature reviews conducted by the researchers. As noted, the researchers were divided into four groups of three people each and assigned two variables. Each team met on multiple occasions to discuss and identify the common themes of the five elements, later presenting the information to the faculty and peer researchers. Based on the themes identified, each team created a bank of questions for their two assigned elements. Each team then chose five questions with two additional questions for their assigned elements and submitted them to the instrumentation expert. The expert and the four faculty collaboratively reviewed all of the questions and developed a survey. The initial survey was evaluated and revised by the faculty, peer researchers and instrumentation expert. The survey was later field tested.

In order to collect data for the quantitative component of this study, the followers of the nonprofit leaders interviewed were given an online Likert-type scale survey. According to Burke (2016), a Likert-type scale modifies the traditional survey design by providing more responses and/or removing the neutral option. The survey instrument in this study included thirty questions based on the review of literature which suggested five behaviors leaders use to create personal and professional meaning. The six point scale was as follows: 1 = not important, 2 = marginally important, 3 = somewhat important, 4 = important, 5 = very important and 6 = critically important.
**Quantitative validity and reliability.** As with qualitative inquiry, the researcher must seek validity for quantitative inquiry as well. To ensure content validity the survey questions were developed based on the extensive research presented in the literature review and they were reviewed by an expert in survey development. In addition, the construct validity was addressed. The construct validity, “refers to the extent to which a study represents the underlying construct,” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 486). Since the questions were based on the research of five elements of leadership - character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration - the construct validity was also ensured.

**Field testing.** Besides validity, the reliability of the survey questions was likewise sought. Reliability refers to the ability of the instrument tool to produce consistent outcomes (Patten, 2012; Roberts, 2010). The reliability for this study was determined through an instrument field test. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated test-retest reliability can be achieved by administering the test to the same individuals twice over a period of time. Participants from two pre-identified management teams were asked to take the survey two separate times in order to determine if the results were consistent. The results from the two tests were correlated in order to determine the stability of the test over time (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

**Data Collection**

The researcher sought and obtained approval from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board before any data collection occurred (Appendix E). Informed Consent was obtained from all participants which described the use of the data as well as guaranteed their anonymity and confidentiality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In addition, prior permission was gained to record the interviews. During the research
study, all data were either stored electronically on a password-protected technology
device or in a locked filing cabinet. The collected data were only accessible by the
researcher. Data collection was conducted in December 2016 and January 2017.

**Qualitative Data Collection**

With mixed method case study, the qualitative data consisted of one-on-one
interviews with three exemplary nonprofit leaders. An interview was scheduled with
each participant for a mutually agreed upon day and time. Each interview lasted 30
minutes to one hour and was conducted in-person. To ensure validity and reliability, the
interviews were conducted using an interview protocol and script which included
standardized, open-ended questions. Furthermore, each participant’s interview was
recorded to assist the researcher in ensuring accuracy. Once the interview was
transcribed, a copy was sent to the participant to review the responses and provide
feedback. Any feedback from participants was incorporated into the final data.

**Quantitative Data Collection**

Quantitative data was collected by inviting 12 of each nonprofit leader’s followers
to be participants. The nonprofit leaders provided the researcher with the names of
members in their management teams. Once the participants were identified, the
researcher contacted them via email to ask for their participation in the study. When the
Electronic Informed Consent forms (Appendix F) were received, participants were sent
an email containing a link to a SurveyMonkey online survey as well as an anonymous
participant code. The online survey took no more than ten minutes to complete and
participants were given two weeks to do it. Participants were sent two emails reminding
them to complete the survey. The online survey generated results which the researcher was then able to analyze.

**Data Analysis**

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis takes large amounts of detailed data and reduces them into more generalized themes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). After the researcher interviewed the three exemplary nonprofit leaders, transcriptions were made from the recordings to begin the qualitative data analysis. These large amounts of raw data needed to be converted into themes, or codes, in order to be analyzed (Roberts, 2010). “A code is a name or phrase that is used to provide meaning,” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 371). Each transcribed interview was read multiple times and notes were taken of any patterns or key words and phrases the researcher noticed as the data was reviewed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Roberts, 2010). Next, the responses of the participants were initially coded in order to sort the data. Once sorting was completed, the researcher reviewed all the data for major themes and developed a master list (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Roberts, 2010).

Validity needed to be established through interrater reliability. Interrater reliability, “is established by determining the extent to which two or more persons agree about what they have seen, heard, or rated,” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 182). A peer researcher was asked to review the data and themes to identify any researcher bias. The peer research was given the participants’ interview transcripts to analyze. Once the data from the interviews were coded, the peer researcher’s codes were compared to the researcher’s codes. Validity of the codes was proven with an 80% or greater match
between the researcher and the peer researcher. Additionally, it provided for triangulation of the data.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics allowed the researcher to analyze the quantitative results obtained from the survey to the nonprofit leaders’ followers. “Descriptive statistics are used to transform a set of numbers or observations into indices that describe or characterize the data” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 149). Description statistics, therefore, provide simple summaries about the measures. Together with simple graphics analysis, descriptive statistics is the fundamental way to present data and to interpret the results in a quantitative research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Central tendency. The central tendency provides a numerical index of a data set and its associated distribution. Central tendency includes three indices: mean, median, and mode. The mean is the most common of the central tendencies and is used to determine the average of all scores. The median describes the center score of the data set whereby half falls above and half falls below the middle score. The mode is the score which occurs most frequently (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For the purposes of this study, the mean and frequency were used to analyze the data collected.

Limitations

According to Roberts (2010), limitations are elements which could have an adverse effect on a study and could limit the researcher’s ability to make generalizations to other populations. One limitation of this study is the small sample of nonprofit leaders interviewed. Another limitation is whether participants, both nonprofit leaders and members of their management teams, responded in a truthful and accurate manner during
data collection. Furthermore, the study was conducted with nonprofit leaders in Northern California and, therefore, the findings may not be able to be generalized to nonprofit leaders in other geographical areas either nationally or globally. Finally, a limitation of the study was the researcher acted as the instrument of inquiry for the interviews which could have an effect on the research results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Summary

Chapter III presented the purpose and questions which were researched in this mixed method case study. It also provided details regarding the method and rationale for choosing this particular research design. The chapter explained the population and sample size as well as how participants were selected. Additionally, specific information was provided about the qualitative and quantitative instrumentation. Finally, how the data was analyzed as well as the limitations of the study were addressed. In Chapter IV, the results of the data are reported. To conclude, Chapter V analyzes the data which provides conclusions, implications and recommendations.
Overview

Currently, people are spending more time than ever at work. According to Saad (2014) salaried employees spend an average of 49 hours at work each week, and Mautz (2015) determined that 70% of employees are looking for meaning from their places of work. However, with so many people looking to their organization for a source of meaning in their lives, a January 2015 Gallup study found that only 32.5% of employees considered themselves “engaged.” The remaining 67.5% reported they were either “not engaged” or “actively disengaged” (Adkins, 2016). Subsequently, this level of employee disengagement has an effect on the organization and everyone within it. Disengagement within the organization can take the form of conflict, indifference, employees leaving at higher rates, low productivity, and employees not feeling valued or influential (Hannum et al., 2011; Mautz, 2015; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Therefore, it is essential leaders behave in particular ways and possess certain traits in order to establish and sustain a culture of meaning within their organizations (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Mautz, 2015; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010; D. Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010).

In Chapter IV, qualitative data from this mixed methods case study will be presented about what behaviors exemplary nonprofit leaders employ to create meaning within their organizations for both themselves and their followers through the five elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. In addition, quantitative data will be presented on the perceptions of their followers regarding the importance of these five elements. This chapter begins with a restatement of the study’s purpose and the research questions which guided the study. Additionally, it includes a
summation of the methodology, data collection procedures, population and sample. Subsequently, this chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of the data provided in narrative, table, and figure forms by addressing each research question. It concludes with a summary of the data.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this mixed method case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration?
2. To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

In order to identify and describe strategies which exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers, a mixed method case study was utilized. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained
through the combination of qualitative and quantitative data, research questions could be more fully answered. A mixed method study is not limited to one type of research method, it enhances the creditability of the study’s findings and different kinds of questions can be researched. This research design was chosen by the 12 peer researchers and four faculty as the most effective method to obtain rich, meaningful answers to the research questions. To address Research Question 1, qualitative data were gathered through interviews using open-ended questions based on the literature review and developed through the collaboration of the 12 peer researchers, four faculty and an instrumentation expert. In order to collect data for Research Question 2, an online survey was completed by the followers for each of the identified exemplary nonprofit leaders. This survey was also developed by the 12 peer researchers, four faculty and an instrumentation expert.

**Qualitative Procedures**

An interview protocol and script were developed based on the information gathered by the 12 peer researchers in their literature reviews. The researchers were divided into four groups and assigned two variables. Each team met to discuss and identify the common themes of the five elements. Then, they presented the information to the faculty and thematic team as a whole. Based on the identified themes, interview questions were developed and shared with faculty and peer researchers to assess. The final interview questions were chosen for the pilot interviews with the assistance of faculty and an instrumentation expert. Each of the 12 peer researchers conducted one pilot interview with a participant who fit the characteristics of the leaders they would research. Feedback was gathered and presented by the peer researchers to the faculty and
instrumentation expert. Modifications were then made, producing the final interview protocol and script.

Prior to conducting the interviews, three exemplary nonprofit leaders were identified. An exemplary leader was defined as someone who is set apart from their peers in a supreme manner and possess suitable behavior, principles or intentions which can be copied (Goodwin et al., 2014). The leaders had to personify five of the six characteristics of being an exemplary leader. Exemplary leaders were defined as those leaders who are set apart from peers by exhibiting at least five of the following characteristics:

- Evidence of successful relationships with followers.
- Evidence of leadership behaviors promoting a positive and productive organizational culture.
- A minimum of five years of experience in the profession.
- Written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
- Recognized by peers as a successful leader.
- Membership in associations of groups focused on their field.

Successful nonprofit organizations in Northern California were identified via the Charity Navigator website which uses an objective rating system to rank charitable and nonprofit organizations. In Northern California, 99 nonprofit organizations presented themselves with a 90% or higher rating. The researcher reviewed the biographies of the Executive Directors/CEOs on their organization’s websites to identify which leaders possessed the characteristics of an exemplary leader. After review, 16 leaders met the criteria. Subsequently, the leaders were sent emails explaining the study and inviting
them to participate. Four leaders expressed an interest in being a participant in the study and a random sampling was used to identify three leaders to participate.

Once Informed Consent was secured, the researcher conducted the interviews using a standardized interview protocol and script of open-ended questions. Through the utilization of open-ended questions in the interviews, participants provided data which reflected their ideas, experiences, knowledge and feelings (Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010). Each interview with the nonprofit leaders was recorded by the researcher. The recordings were later transcribed and sent to the leaders for review, allowing them an opportunity to ensure the interview accurately captured their thoughts and feelings. Once the interviews were deemed accurate, the researcher was able to begin coding the data. Eventually, eight distinct themes emerged from the data gathered.

Macmillan and Schumacher (2010) explained interrater reliability, “is established by determining the extent to which two or more persons agree about what they have seen, heard, or rated,” (p. 182). Interrater reliability was established by the researcher and a peer researcher coding the three interviews independently. By conducting this process, it further added to the reliability of the data analysis.

Quantitative Procedures

An online survey was developed based on the extensive literature reviews conducted by the 12 peer researchers working in conjunction with the four faculty and an instrumentation expert. As mentioned previously, the researchers were divided into four groups and assigned two variables. Each team met to discuss and identify the common themes of the five elements, later presenting the information to the faculty and other peer researchers. The teams created a bank of questions from their two assigned elements
based on the identified themes. Each team submitted five questions with two alternate questions to the instrumentation expert. He examined all of the suggested questions and developed a 30-question survey. Then, the peer researchers, faculty and instrumentation expert evaluated and revised the survey before conducting a field test. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained a field test allows for the results from the two tests to be correlated in order to determine the stability of the survey over time. In order to field test the survey, participants from two pre-identified management teams were asked to take the survey on two separate occasions to determine if the results were consistent.

Following the interviews with the three nonprofit leaders, the quantitative data was collected from members of each leader’s followers. The nonprofit leaders supplied the researcher with the names and email addresses of members of their management teams. The researcher contacted them via email to ask for their participation in the study. Participants were sent an email containing a link to a SurveyMonkey online survey with an Informed Consent form as well as an anonymous participant code. The online survey took no more than ten minutes to complete and participants were given two weeks to complete it. Participants were sent five emails reminding them to complete the survey. The online survey generated results which the researcher was then able to analyze.

**Population**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a population as, “a group of individuals or events from which a sample is drawn and to which results can be generalized,” (p. 489). For this study, the population was leaders of nonprofit organizations. In the United States, 1,571,056 nonprofit organizations were registered with the Internal Revenue Service in 2015 (National Center for Charitable Statistics,
n.d.). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), nonprofit organizations employed 11,426,870 people. With such a sizeable number, it was not feasible to use this population due to monetary, time and geographic constraints. The population was reduced to nonprofit organizations registered in the state of California. In 2015, there were 163,924 nonprofit organizations registered in California according to the National Center for Charitable Statistics (n.d.). As the number of nonprofit organizations in California was still substantial, the number was further reduced to a target population of 16 nonprofit organizations in Northern California who received a 90% or higher rating as identified by Charity Navigator. The Charity Navigator website includes all nonprofits registered in the United States and uses an objective rating methodology based on seven criteria to rate nonprofit and charitable organizations.

**Sample**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated a sample is, “The group of subjects from whom data are collected; often representative of a specific population,” (p. 490). The 12 peer researchers each used a sample population of three exemplary leaders. In this study, purposeful and random sampling was utilized to identify participants. Purposeful sampling was chosen because the participants possessed knowledge and experience which would produce the most beneficial data for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Additionally, a random sampling assisted in the identification of three nonprofit leaders. A random sampling is when, “each member of the population as a whole, or as a subgroup of the population, has the same chance of being selected as other members of the same group,” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 131).
Demographic Data

Each of the three nonprofit leaders interviewed possessed the six characteristics to be considered an exemplary leader. Table 1 provides the criteria which the leaders met. Additionally, they were all located in Northern California, and of the three leaders, two were female and one was male.

Table 1

Exemplary Leader Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>Participant 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Evidence of successful relationships with followers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Evidence of leading a successful organization</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>A minimum of five years of experience in the profession</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Articles, papers, or materials written, published or presented at conferences or association meetings</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Recognition by their peers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Membership in professional associations in their field</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the quantitative portion of the study, a total of 27 people participated in the online survey. The participants were members of the nonprofit leaders’ management teams. Eighteen participants identified themselves as female and eight as male. The participants represented a variety of ages as indicated in Table 2.
Table 2

*Age Category of Followers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>20-30</th>
<th>31-40</th>
<th>41-50</th>
<th>51-60</th>
<th>61 or over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The management team members also indicated the number of years they had worked within their nonprofit organizations as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

*Followers’ Time with the Organization*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>0-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-20</th>
<th>21 or over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, in Table 4, the participants noted how much time they had worked with their current leader.

Table 4

*Followers’ Time with the Current Leader*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>0-2</th>
<th>3-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11 or over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

Participants for this study were located in Northern California and all were accessible. The qualitative data were collected through face to face interviews with three exemplary nonprofit leaders. An interview protocol and script were developed based on the literature reviews of the 12 peer researchers as well as guidance from four faculty and
an instrumentation expert. As for the collection of quantitative data, 36 online surveys were deployed and after multiple emails 27 followers completed the survey. This survey was also based on the literature reviews by the 12 peer researchers working in conjunction with the four faculty and an instrumentation expert.

**Research Question 1**

*What are the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration?*

Face to face interviews were conducted with three exemplary nonprofit leaders determined by purposeful random sampling to determine the behaviors used to create organizational meaning through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. Prior to asking questions regarding specific leadership elements, the interviewed opened with asking the nonprofit leaders about the importance of the five elements and if any were seen as essential. All three leaders felt the five elements were important while they each cited certain specific elements as essential. Three leaders felt character was essential with Participant 1 remarking, “You have to show that you have integrity and reliable transparency so people are going to trust you.” Two of the leaders stated relationships and inspiration were also essential leadership elements. Participant 2, when speaking to the importance of relationships stated, “That may be partially due to the nature of our organization.” Lastly, one participant stated vision was essential as an organization should know, “where it’s going and why.”

The interviews with the exemplary nonprofit leaders continued with questions regarding each leadership element in order to elicit specific behaviors and strategies they
have used to help create meaning within their organization. The data collected provided rich, deep answers to the first research question and emphasized the interplay between the five leadership elements. Furthermore, upon analyzing the data, eight major themes and the leadership elements they represented emerged (see Table 5).

Table 5

| Themes and Elements for Creating Meaning in the Organization |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Major Themes                    | Frequency of Responses | Percentage of Responses | Elements |
| 1. Moral Strength and Conduct   | 68              | 25%             | Character |
| 2. Clarity of Purpose           | 58              | 22%             | Vision    |
| 3. Connections With the Heart and Mind | 29    | 11%             | Relationships |
| 4. Connections Lead to Solutions| 28              | 10%             | Relationships |
| 5. Developing Collective Purpose| 26              | 9%              | Inspiration |
| 6. Discernment                  | 26              | 9%              | Wisdom    |
| 7. Change is Inevitable         | 21              | 7%              | Wisdom    |
| 8. Communication Builds Meaning | 21              | 7%              | Inspiration |
| Total                           | 277             | 100%            |

**Character.** Moral Strength and Conduct presented itself as a theme in which the three nonprofit leaders exhibit character within their organizations. This theme manifested itself in multiple ways. The three nonprofit leaders reported possessing integrity and having trust with followers was necessary. Participant 2 stated, “If a leader doesn’t have it, it would really effect the organization’s ability to do its work.” All three leaders reported honesty and openness can create meaning. One leader explained it is important to be open to new and innovative ideas. Additionally, the three leaders felt being transparent in their actions is a key component to leadership, especially with regards to decision-making and the expectations of the organization’s culture. Humility
is visible when a leader has ideas yet can, “also (be) open enough to recognize that there are a lot of really smart people out there,” (Participant 1). With regards to vulnerability, Participant 3 felt it is important to ask questions of followers and make mistakes in front of them while trying to deepen understanding in areas of the organization. Personal growth and reflection was cited by the leaders as a means of building greater knowledge and wisdom about their organizations, the people within it as well as outside entities in which they are in collaboration. In addition, two of the nonprofit leaders felt modeling was an essential behavior to demonstrate. It was also felt that modeling integrity, the organization’s values, expected behaviors, reflection and expectations of performance leads followers to understanding the organization’s purpose and culture. Furthermore, being optimistic about the organization can create collective purpose as noted by two of the leaders. Participant 3 explained, “You just need to be relentlessly optimistic and just know that some way the path will get there,” which is especially important when the organization faces barriers or challenges. Indeed, the literature supports the nonprofit leaders’ beliefs about character. As McKee et al. (2008) asserted, when leaders are committed to their values and morals, they can inspire their followers to embrace the organization’s shared purpose and goals which leads to meaningful work.

Vision. Clarity of Purpose was revealed as a theme from the interviews with the nonprofit leaders in which they displayed vision. The leaders reported knowing the values of the organization and having a clear purpose gives them and their followers a well-defined focus as to why they exist and what they are doing. One leader felt followers needed to know their value and what their role contributes to their organization because, as Participant 2 stated, “People come to work in nonprofits because they want to
create change.” All three leaders reported having a clear vision for their organizations was necessary with two leaders reporting they had created a shared vision and purpose through the strategic planning process. Participant 2 specifically mentioned the, “Strategic planning process has been quite helpful and solidifying so everybody is speaking from a common page and saying the same thing.” This leader also described it as, “knowing the North Star.” The importance of a shared vision is supported by the literature. When followers share in the creation of a shared vision, they have a more in-depth understanding of the organization’s vision and have a greater commitment to it which allows them to better communicate it to others (Carsten & Bligh, 2008; Kantabutra & Avery, 2006). In addition, Participant 3 shared having a clear vision allows an organization to meet, “the outcomes and the missions you set out to do.” Moreover, being able to “walk the talk” was expressed by all the leaders as a behavior which can communicate the vision and purpose of their organization. It is not enough to have a clear sense of purpose as Participant 1 stated, “You have to walk what you talk and if you are not able to do that, it doesn’t matter what your vision is like, how wise you are, nobody is going to follow you.” Participant 1 further explained one way to “walk the talk” was if there is a need, like answering phones or greeting someone who comes to the front desk, a leader should be willing to step in and help. It communicates to followers, “What you see is what I would expect you to do in the same situation. And people do respond to that.”

**Relationships.** Connecting with the Mind and Heart was the third theme which was uncovered in the data with regards to how the nonprofit leaders demonstrated the leadership element of relationships. The three nonprofit leaders expressed the importance
of supporting their followers. Participant 2 said, “We definitely try to set people up to be as successful as possible, and also play to their strengths,” including conducting weekly one-on-one meetings to check-in with followers. Additionally, caring about the people in their organizations was another behavior which all three participants felt was important to demonstrate as a leader. As Crowley (2011) emphasized leading from the heart is essential for leaders. The nonprofit leaders discussed how they expressed caring by getting to know their followers, learning about what motivates them and encouraging their growth and effort. Participant 3 explicitly stated being a leader is, “being a steward of relationships.” Furthermore, two of the leaders felt acknowledgement and recognition of followers is another way to connect. Participant 2 explained, “Making sure you acknowledge people is really important,” and, “making sure you do acknowledge them in the right setting, that has helped a lot.”

Additionally, Connections Lead to Solutions was another theme which presented itself in the data as it related to relationships. The three nonprofit leaders felt possessing the ability to bring people together to collaborate and solve problems is an essential part of leadership. Participant 2 spoke to the need for, “Collaborating and bringing together our diverse interests,” going on to explain, “That’s all about how we work together internally.” In addition, Participant 1 noted the need to, “Figure out what is the bigger issue that they are dealing with and is there a way we can help them find a response to that.” The two leaders who were involved in the strategic planning process stated through collaboration they were able to bring a variety of ideas and interests together, which were sometimes in opposition, in order to develop their shared vision. One leader also expressed it is helpful to know their followers because when individual issues arise,
it is easier to have difficult conversations because of the relationship already built. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) stated, “Feeling a sense of security, trust, and connection at work makes it easier to take tough feedback, solve problems creatively, take smart risks, and work through obstacles without giving up (p. 119).”

Wisdom. With regards to wisdom, Discernment was a theme which presented itself in all three interviews with the nonprofit leaders. Being intentional, understanding when changes need to be made, and making decisions in alignment with the organization’s values as well as handling unintended consequences were noted as behaviors which show good judgment. They also felt wisdom can be demonstrated by leaders through their ability to listen. The nonprofit leaders believed that listening to others helps them make wise choices, find solutions and gain understanding. Participant 1 remarked, “If we have an idea that we are talking about doing, it is a matter of listening to those who are more knowledgeable.” Participant 3 shared how essential it is to listen because, “I deeply rely on other people in order to be able to do the work.” One leader explained in the act of listening to others, you are honoring their opinions and wisdom.

Change is Inevitable was another theme which emerged from the interview data. Two of the three nonprofit leaders felt adaptability and perseverance are behaviors a leader should embody as organization’s need to evolve whether it is because of changing programs, policies or expectations from outside the nonprofit world. Participant 1 stated, “The size of the organization and laws change and there are things we have to do.” Participant 3 felt an organization must be willing to persevere through barriers and challenges in order to accomplish its goal. With change, two leaders cited the need to take risks and face challenges. Participant 1 shared it is sometimes necessary to just try
something because, “Bailing out is always an option if it doesn’t work.” One leader faced the challenge of transitioning their nonprofit organization from a grassroots effort to a more professional entity which took collaboration, providing support to staff and having a vision. The literature supported the importance of these leadership behaviors. Baltes and Staudinger (2000) asserted, “Wisdom is viewed as associated with a high degree of personal and interpersonal competence, including the ability to listen, evaluate, and to give advice” (p. 123).

**Inspiration.** Helping followers in Developing Collective Ownership was the fifth theme which emerged from the interviews as a way to demonstrate the leadership element of inspiration. Two leaders considered it is important to build buy-in and create a sense of ownership for the organization’s vision and purpose with their followers. Participant 2 believed ownership in the organization helps followers be, “more motivated to do the work,” and this occurs when, “They feel like they have definitely been heard, their input is taken into account and valued.” This is thought to be why their organization has been so successful. Additionally, all three leaders mentioned that when engagement and enthusiasm about their work exists, it helps develop a collective ownership of the organization’s work and purpose.

Communication Builds Meaning was the final theme revealed in the data collected from the interviews as a means to inspire followers. The three nonprofit leaders all reported communication is essential in an organization. Goals, values, expectations and vision can be conveyed through communication. Participant 3 felt communication must be explicit, constant and done in multiple ways. In addition, Participant 2 explained, “When decisions get made, no matter what the decision is we always try to go
“through how it got made and why it got made.” Furthermore, Participant 3 remarked on the importance of communication through action. “I am getting out and writing things down and being at staff meetings and discussing x, y, and z. It’s a two-pronged approach, action plus intentional communication.” In fact, the behaviors the nonprofit leaders described are supported by the literature. Watters (2016) asserted, “Inspirational leaders are energetic, creative, enthusiastic, exciting, passionate, and good communicators who are able to evoke positive emotion in their followers (p. 7).”

Research Question 2

To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?

In order to gather data to address Research Question 2, responses from a 30-question online survey were collected from the leaders’ followers. Thirty-six surveys were sent and 27 followers completed the survey. The results of the Likert-type scale survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics which included the percentage of frequency and mean score of the participants’ responses. The data was organized and summarized in the form of a separate table for each of the leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration.

Character. The respondents perceived, at a frequency percentage of 70.4, it was critically important for leaders to behave in an ethical manner when dealing with others with regards to the leadership element of character. Moreover, this behavior of the five described for character, had the highest mean at 5.63. The practice of actively listening when communicating with others was also felt to be critically important at 51.8% yet the
mean was 5.33 compared to the mean score of 5.41 for the behavior of actions with others shows he/she can be trusted. Furthermore, the data revealed at 48.2%, participants felt it was very important for a leader to respond to challenging situations with optimism compared to 33.3% who felt it was critically important. When responding to the question of a leader’s actions show concern for the well-being of others, it had the lowest mean score for character at 4.93 (see Table 6).

Table 6

Importance of Character as a Leadership Behavior in the Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Marginally Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Critically Important</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Actively listens when communicating with others.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>5.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Responds to challenging situations with optimism.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Actions with others shows that he/she can be trusted.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>5.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Actions show concern for the well-being of others.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>48.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.27</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Vision.** Of the five behaviors, communicating the organization’s vision in a way to team members enthusiastically had the highest frequency at 48% for critically important. In addition, this behavior had the highest mean score at 5.3. The leadership
behavior of demonstrating thinking toward the future through conversations and actions had the second highest mean at 5.22 and the second highest response for critically important at 44.4. With the two behaviors of the ability of a leader whose behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions and who engages team members in creating a vision of the future had their greatest frequency percentages in the very important response category, with 44.4 and 37 respectively. For the action of promoting innovation that aligns with the organization’s vision, the greatest response was for very important, at a frequency of 37%. Additionally, important and critically important resulted in the same frequency percentage with both scoring 25.9 (see Table 7).

Table 7

Importance of Vision as a Leadership Behavior in the Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Marginally Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Critically Important</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Communicates the organization’s vision in a way in team members enthusiastically.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>5.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Engages team members in creating a vision for the future.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Promotes innovation that aligns with the organization’s vision.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Average</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>4.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Relationships.** As shown, Table 8 addresses the leadership element of relationships. With a frequency of 81.5%, participants perceived it was critically important for leaders to create an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization. Furthermore, this behavior had the highest mean score at 5.74. The ability to communicate in a clear, meaningful way had the second greatest mean at 5.19 and a frequency of 48.2%. The leadership behaviors of continuously promotes the team moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose and behaves in a way that shows she/he cares about team members scored the same mean of 5.07. The former response results were 33.3 for very important and 40.8 for critically important. The results of the latter behavior were 40.8 for very important and 33.3 for critically important. Finally, the results for the behavior of encouraging team members to share leadership when performing tasks had the lowest mean score at 4.26 with the frequency percentages for somewhat important, important and very important being 22.2, 29.6 and 33.3 respectively.

**Inspiration.** As indicated in Table 9, the data presented are the results of the participants’ perceptions regarding the leadership element of inspiration. The behavior of engaging in activities that build confidence among team members had the greatest mean score of the five behaviors for inspiration with 5.07. Additionally, very important and critically important each revealed the same frequency of 37% for this behavior. The ability to empower team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving received the second greatest frequency of 33.3% for being critically important. However, this behavior had the lowest mean at 4.56. Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization’s leading edge resulted with the second highest mean
score of 4.93. In addition, this leadership behavior had a frequency of 22.2% for the response of critically important and a 55.6 for very important. The participants responded, with a frequency of 40.7%, it is very important a leader works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams. Lastly, for the behavior of recognizing and honoring achievements of teams and team members, the greatest response was for important at a frequency of 40.8%.

Table 8

*Importance of Relationships as a Leadership Behavior in the Organization*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Marginally Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Critically Important</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Continuously promotes our team’s moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>5.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Behaves in a way that shows she/he cares about the team members.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Communicates in a clear, meaningful way.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Average</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

*Importance of Inspiration as a Leadership Behavior in the Organization*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Marginally Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Critically Important</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Recognizes and honors achievements of teams and team members.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization's leading edge.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Engages in activities that build confidence among team members.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving.</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Average</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Wisdom.** Table 10 presents the data from the survey regarding the leadership element of wisdom. The greatest mean, at 5.63, and with the highest frequency of 77.6%, the participants perceived it critically important for a leader to have the ability to bring personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization. The second highest frequency, at 66.5%, was perceived to be critically important for the behavior of demonstrating compassion with team members. The mean for this behavior was 5.33. When working with teams and team members, continuously keeping the overall goals of the organization as part of the conversations had the third
highest frequency percentage for the response of critically important with 59.3%. The behavior of considering past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization had the fourth highest mean score at 4.93. Also, it resulted in very important having a frequency percentage of 48.1 and critically important scoring a frequency of 25.9%. Two of the behaviors garnered the same mean score of 4.74. Moreover, both had a focus on decision-making. These behaviors included the leader’s ability to elevate the quality of decision-making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members and the leadership behavior of being able to integrate personal values with organizational values in decision-making. Additionally, there were three behaviors which resulted in the same mean of 4.7. These three behaviors included the leader’s ability to display expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization, show concern for others in a variety of organizational settings and take action by doing the "right thing" in a variety of organization settings. The greatest frequency for each of these behaviors was for the response of very important. Their frequencies were 44.4, 37 and 37 respectively. Finally, the leader’s behavior reflects an understanding of life’s complexities had the lowest mean score at 4.22. This was the only behavior for wisdom which had frequency percentages for each of the six possible responses. It ranged from 14.8% for critically important to 3.8% for not important.
Table 10

*Importance of Wisdom as a Leadership Behavior in the Organization*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Marginally Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Critically Important</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Elevates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Demonstrates compassion with team members.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Behavior reflects an understanding of life’s complexities.</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Integrates personal values with organizational values in decision making.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Takes action by doing the &quot;right thing&quot; in a variety of organization settings.</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Average</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

This chapter presented the purpose of the study, the research questions, the research methods as well as the data collection procedures. It also included the population, sample and demographic information for the participants. Chapter IV then provided a presentation of the data collected in the study.

The qualitative data from the interviews with the three exemplary nonprofit leaders revealed eight themes used to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. The themes included: (1) moral strength and conduct, (2) clarity of purpose, (3) connecting with the mind and heart, (4) connections lead to solutions, (5) discernment, (6) developing collective ownership, (7) change is inevitable and (8) communication builds meaning. As noted previously, each of the themes are related to a specific leadership element.

Figure 3 indicates the percentage of responses from leaders as related to the themes. These are based on the five leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, inspiration and wisdom. In summary, moral strength and conduct is related to the leadership element of character (27%). Vision (20%) is shown through the theme of clarity of purpose. The leadership element of relationships (20%) is manifested in the theme of connecting with the mind and heart as well as the theme of connections lead to solutions. Furthermore, wisdom (16%) is related to the themes of discernment and change is inevitable. Lastly, inspiration (14%) is exhibited in the themes of developing collective ownership and communication builds meaning.
In addition, the exemplary nonprofit leaders described specific strategies they use as leaders of their organizations. It is their belief these practices lead to the creation of personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. The leaders identified 22 distinct strategies which they use to create meaning in the organization. This qualitative data has been summarized in Figure 4.

*Figure 3. Leadership Behaviors Based on the Percentage of Responses from Leaders.*
Figure 4. Themes and Leadership Strategies for Creating Organizational Meaning.

The quantitative data was gathered from an online survey completed by 27 participants who represented members of the leaders’ followers. For each of the leadership behaviors of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration the following behaviors resulted in the highest mean score. For the behavior of character, a leader’s ability to behave in an ethical manner when dealing with others had the greatest mean at 5.63. With regard to the leadership behavior of vision, being able to communicate the organization's vision in a way to team members enthusiastically had the highest mean score of 5.3. For the behavior of relationships, the ability to create an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization had the
greatest mean at 5.74. As for the leadership behavior of inspiration, with the highest mean score of 5.07, was the ability for a leader to engage in activities that build confidence among team members. Lastly, regarding the leadership behavior of wisdom, being able to bring personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization had the greatest mean score at 5.63. Figure 5 represents the overall summary based on the mean scores of the responses from followers as to their perception of the importance of each of the five leadership elements.

![Figure 5](image)

**Figure 5.** Leadership Behaviors Based on the Mean Score of Followers’ Responses.

In addition, Table 11 provides a summary of the quantitative data based on the number of respondents and the perceived degree to which each leadership element helps to create meaning.
Table 11

*Summation of Number of Respondents and the Perceived Degree to which Each Variable Helps to Create Meaning – Includes Percent and Mean of Totals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables (total + of answers)</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Marginally Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Critically Important</th>
<th>Total Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships (135)</td>
<td>N 0 0.0%</td>
<td>N 1 0.7%</td>
<td>N 8 5.9%</td>
<td>N 30 22.2%</td>
<td>N 38 28.1%</td>
<td>N 58 43.0%</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character (135)</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>1 0.7%</td>
<td>5 3.7%</td>
<td>15 11.1%</td>
<td>49 36.3%</td>
<td>65 48.1%</td>
<td>5.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration (135)</td>
<td>1 0.7%</td>
<td>1 0.7%</td>
<td>12 8.9%</td>
<td>34 25.2%</td>
<td>50 37.0%</td>
<td>37 27.4%</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom (270)</td>
<td>1 0.4%</td>
<td>10 3.7%</td>
<td>13 4.8%</td>
<td>56 20.7%</td>
<td>97 35.9%</td>
<td>94 34.8%</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision (135)</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>8 5.9%</td>
<td>30 22.2%</td>
<td>53 39.3%</td>
<td>44 32.6%</td>
<td>4.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Chapter V, a final summation of the mixed method case study is provided. It will include the major findings, unexpected findings and conclusions based on the data analysis. In addition, it will present the implications for action, recommendations for further research as well as the researcher’s concluding remarks and reflections.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter I began with an introduction of the background and rationale for this study. Chapter II presented an extensive review of literature presenting information regarding the theoretical framework for meaning, leadership and followership. In addition, Chapter II provided information on the five leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, inspiration and character as well as the history of nonprofit organizations. Chapter III put forth the study’s design and methodology. Then, Chapter IV presented a data analysis as well as the results gathered in the study. In the final chapter, a brief summary is provided as well as the findings and conclusions from the study. Additionally, implications for action as well as recommendations for further research will be presented. The study comes to conclusion with remarks and reflections from the researcher.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this mixed method case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning. The researcher sought answers for two research questions. One question sought answers from the perspective of exemplary nonprofit leaders to the question, “What are the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision,
relationships, wisdom and inspiration?” The second question focused on gathering answers from followers to the question, “To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?”

A mixed method case study was used to identify and describe strategies used by exemplary nonprofit leaders to create meaning within their organizations. Through the combination of qualitative and quantitative data, research questions can be answered at a much deeper level (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This research design was specifically chosen by the 12 peer researchers and four faculty as the most effective approach to obtaining rich, meaningful answers to the research questions. Based on the information gathered by the 12 peer researchers in their literature reviews and the guidance of the four faculty, an interview protocol and script was created to gather qualitative data from three exemplary leaders. The quantitative data was gathered using an online survey completed by members of the leaders’ management level teams. This survey was also developed by the 12 peer researchers in conjunction with the four faculty and an instrumentation expert.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a population as, “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to a specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research,” (p. 129). For this study, the population was leaders of nonprofit organizations in California. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics (n.d.), 163,924 nonprofit organizations in California were registered with the Internal Revenue Service in 2015. However, due to the substantial size, it was not feasible to utilize this population. Subsequently, the target
population was narrowed to 16 nonprofit organizations in Northern California who received a 90% or higher rating as identified by Charity Navigator. From this target population, a sample of three exemplary nonprofit leaders was identified through purposeful, random sampling. In order to complete the quantitative data collection of the study, the leaders each provided the researcher with names and email addresses of 12 of their followers to be participants.

Major Findings

Research Question 1

*What are the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration?*

**Finding 1.** This study revealed the exemplary nonprofit leaders felt the leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration were all important to creating meaning in the organization. The leaders believed there was an interplay between all five elements. There were some elements which were deemed more essential than others at times. Consequently, in some situations the elements were used simultaneously and in other situations they were used separately.

**Finding 2.** Character was seen as the building block of creating meaning for leaders and followers. The exemplary leaders identified many strategies which led to demonstrating character as a leader. Some of the strategies they utilized included being trustworthy, honest and open as well as possessing integrity. Moreover, these strategies were supported by the literature. Trust can be built by leaders when their words and action are in alignment because this leads to a culture of integrity, honesty and
trustworthiness (Covey, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 1989; Liborius, 2014). Transparency was another strategy used by the nonprofit leaders. Liborius (2014) asserted transparency leads to an environment which openingly exchanges information, including both positive and negative information. Showing humility as well as vulnerability in front of followers were also revealed as a means of demonstrating character. Additionally, exhibiting the ability to reflect and grow personally were strategies these leaders used to create meaning. Modeling the expectations, values and goals of the organization was regarded by the nonprofit leaders as a practice important in their leadership and a means to exhibit character. Subsequently, when leaders model the behaviors and values they expect, followers become more committed to the organization (Bass & Bass, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Lastly, the nonprofit leaders believed displaying optimism is an essential part of character. As indicated in the literature, when a leader exhibits an optimistic attitude it creates energy and excitement leading to a greater commitment by followers to the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 1989; Wilson, 2013).

Finding 3. Vision was essential to the exemplary leaders since being clear about their organizations’ purpose and values lead to meaning. This belief is also reflected in the literature. Having a clear vision helps provide a path to the goal or aspired state of the organization (Covey, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 1989). In addition, creating a shared vision was considered by the leaders to be a strategy to help build meaning. In fact, Kantabutra and Avery (2006) noted a shared vision can generate commitment, energy and help with decision-making because it provides a clear purpose. Furthermore, the nonprofit leaders credited the ability to walk the talk as a means to embody and demonstrate the organization’s vision. Part of the role as leaders is to live out the vision
of their organizations and leaders do so by using vision to guide their actions, conveying vision in their daily interactions and decision-making (Carsten & Bligh, 2008; Kantabutra & Avery, 2006; Yang, 2011).

**Finding 4.** Exemplary leaders who build strong relationships with their followers created personal and professional meaning. As the literature has indicated, exemplary leaders invest their time and put effort into developing personal bonds with their followers (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Mautz, 2015; Powell, 2012; Smith, 2011). The nonprofit leaders stated they can show caring through getting to know their followers as well as encouraging them and their efforts. Additionally, the leaders demonstrated the element of relationships in utilizing the behavior of supporting followers by creating opportunities for them to grow and setting them up for success. The exemplary leaders felt it was also important to sincerely acknowledge and recognize their followers. Moreover, the nonprofit leaders indicated when relationships are strong, a collaborative environment will occur. Lastly, the leaders noted when relationships exist, it is easier to have difficult conversations because trust and respect have already been established.

**Finding 5.** Through their experience and knowledge, exemplary leaders make decisions based on sound judgments. Indeed, the literature supports the notion that leaders should possess the ability to understand what the right solutions are for a particular problem or situation (Greaves et al., 2014; Schwartz, 2011; Yang, 2011). Actively listening to followers is another strategy for demonstrating wisdom. Baltes and Staudinger (2000) stated followers benefit from leaders who attentively listen to them. In addition, exhibiting the ability to be adaptable and persevere was considered a way to
exhibit wisdom. The exemplary leaders also thought wisdom can be shown through facing challenges head on and not being afraid to take risks.

**Finding 6.** Exemplary leaders create inspiration for their followers through engagement in the process of developing vision and purpose which guides the organization. The exemplary nonprofit leaders explained inspiration comes about when followers take ownership and have buy-in for the organization’s vision and purpose. This can be created when their input is included and valued. Another inspirational strategy the exemplary leaders utilize is being engaged and excited about their organization’s purpose. As Thrash and Elliot (2004) asserted leaders must show their followers the importance of being engaged and motivated in their work. Finally, communication is a strategy nonprofit leaders use to inspire their followers. By communicating explicitly, constantly and in a variety of ways, followers can be clear about the organization’s purpose, values, goals and expectations.

**Research Question 2**

*To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?*

**Finding 1.** The followers perceived the behaviors of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration as all essential in creating personal and organizational meaning as the data revealed there was just a 2% difference in range from highest to lowest. Based on the average mean score for each element, character resulted in 21%, vision was 20%, relationships was 20%, wisdom was 20% and inspiration was
19%. This aligned with what the exemplary nonprofit leaders believed about the importance of the interplay between the five leadership elements.

**Finding 2.** In the examination of the data, there were three leadership behaviors which resulted in frequencies of over 70%. Followers perceived these to be the most critically important as compared to other behaviors in creating meaning. Building personal and organizational meaning occurs best when leaders utilize the behaviors of relationships, character and wisdom as an interconnected act of actions. The first behavior, which is related to the element of relationships, was a leader’s ability to create an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization. This behavior had the highest score in the critically important category of all 30 behaviors on the survey at 81.5%. The next leadership behavior deemed the most critically important was the leader’s ability to bring personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization resulting in a score of 77.6%. This behavior is associated with the leadership element of wisdom. The final behavior is related to the leadership element of character. Followers considered a leader’s ability to behave in an ethical manner when dealing with others as the third most critically important behavior. This leadership behavior resulted in a 70.4% score.

**Finding 3.** The data revealed two leadership behaviors perceived by followers to be the least critically important in creating meaning within the organization and both resulted in percentages of less than 15%. The second least critically important behavior, which scored 14.8%, was related to the element of wisdom. This particular behavior was a leader’s behavior reflects an understanding of life’s complexities. The least critically important behavior as perceived by followers was a leader’s ability to encourage team
members to share leadership when performing tasks. This behavior was related to the element of relationships and resulted in a percentage of 11.1%. It had the lowest score of the thirty leadership behaviors in the critically important category.

**Unexpected Findings**

As the qualitative and quantitative data was analyzed, three unexpected findings emerged from the study. They included how significantly character resonated with the exemplary leaders as compared to other leadership elements, the difference in which the leaders ranked character compared to inspiration and how followers did not rank communication higher for being a critically important behavior for leaders to exhibit.

An unexpected finding was the difference between the exemplary nonprofit leaders’ and their followers’ views with regards to the importance of the leadership behavior of character. Character was deemed more important by the leaders to possess, at 27%, than the followers perceived it to be, at 21%. It was obvious character resonated at a deeper level with the exemplary leaders than with their followers in order to create personal and organizational meaning.

A second unexpected finding was with the leadership behavior of inspiration and it being perceived by the nonprofit leaders as the lowest of importance of the five leadership elements in helping to create meaning within the organization. There was a 13% difference in importance between character and inspiration. The literature suggests an exemplary leader should possess charisma and have a “clarity of WHY” (Sinek, 2009). When leaders communicate their enthusiasm about new possibilities and the purpose of the organization, it creates excitement and motivation among followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Sinek, 2009; Watters, 2016).
The last unexpected finding was regarding one of the leadership behaviors related to relationships and a leader’s ability to communicate in a clear, meaningful way. Although the nonprofit leaders and the literature point to the importance of communication in creating organizational meaning, followers did not score it as high in the critically important category as the researcher had expected. This behavior resulted in a score of 48.2% for critically important. The exemplary leaders felt communication was essential in expressing the values, vision and goals of the organization.

Conclusions

This mixed method case study intended to accomplish two objectives. First, through the collection of qualitative data, it endeavored to determine what behaviors exemplary nonprofit leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. Second, it attempted to determine to what degree followers perceive the behaviors related to the five leadership elements help to create personal and organizational meaning by gathering quantitative data. There are six conclusions which can be made from this study:

1. Based on the findings of the study it can be concluded that exemplary nonprofit leaders create organizational and personal meaning through the interplay of the five leadership elements. This conclusion is supported in the literature, for example Eich (2015) asserted leaders are charged with creating an environment of trust, intelligence and honesty which leads followers to feeling appreciated, safe and acknowledged. Therefore, nonprofit leaders employing the leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom
and inspiration will set the tone for their organizations’ success where both the leaders and followers have high engagement and passion for their work. When these five leadership elements are utilized by leaders concurrently, they have a more powerful influence on creating personal and organizational meaning.

2. Based on the findings and the literature review, it can be concluded that character has a significant role in creating meaning for leaders and followers. Nonprofit leaders must exhibit their character through their moral strength and conduct and convey their expectations to followers. Consequently, when nonprofit leaders exhibit strong character, trust is created which followers want and expect from their leaders. When nonprofit leaders demonstrate character on a daily basis, they set the foundation for meaning making.

3. Based on the findings and literature in this study, it can be concluded that nonprofit leaders ensure organizational vision that brings about clarity of purpose to both leaders and followers. When there is a shared vision, leaders and followers are able to keep focused on the organization’s values and goals. Hence, vision guides the decision-making and actions of those within the organization. The values and purpose defined in a collective vision support the creation of personal and organization meaning.

4. Based on the findings of this study and supported by the literature, it can be concluded that relationships are vital to making meaningful organizations. Nonprofit leaders need to make connections with the minds and hearts of followers to establish an environment where they trust and care for one
another. These relationships produce an organization where leaders and followers work together collectively in order to develop solutions to the challenges they face as they aspire to manifest the vision of the organization. Accordingly, relationships have a significant impact on creating personal and professional meaning.

5. Based on the findings in this study and the literature review, it can be concluded that nonprofit leaders must demonstrate wisdom to provide a stable, reliable force within the organization. Exemplary nonprofit leaders use their experiences and knowledge to make decisions for the collective good. Consequently, when leaders utilize wisdom it enhances the lives of themselves and their followers as well as the work environment. The nonprofit leaders’ use of wisdom is an essential behavior for meaning-making.

6. Based on the findings of this study and supported by the literature, it can be concluded that inspiration is an important behavior used by nonprofit leaders to create personal and organizational meaning. Leaders must utilize inspiration to promote a hopeful, positive outlook of the future. This brings followers together helping them to embody the organization’s values and goals because they are excited about their future state. Inspiration, when used in conjunction with the other four leadership elements, creates meaning for all within the organization.

**Implications for Action**

This study has established the five leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration do play important roles in developing meaning
within the organization, especially when used in combination. This study also
determined specific behaviors exemplary nonprofit leaders use in order to create personal
and organizational meaning through the five leadership elements. Therefore, in order for
a leader to be effective in establishing a meaningful organization, leaders should take
certain actions.

1. Based on the findings in the study and the literature review, it is recommended
that nonprofit leaders participate in a 360 Degree Feedback assessment to
identify their strengths and weaknesses in particular as related to the five
elements and their related behaviors. This will allow members at all levels of
the organization, including the organization’s Board of Directors, to share
their experiences and observations regarding the leader. Being equipped with
this information, leaders can assess the behaviors they utilize, including what
behaviors to continue, what behaviors need to be strengthened and what
behaviors need to be developed.

2. It is recommended nonprofit leaders seek out a professional coach to assist
them with developing their leadership and utilizing the behaviors associated
with character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. To support
successful coaching, the coach should be familiarized with the literature and
findings of this study prior to starting their assignment. A coach would
provide support to leaders in their professional growth. This would help
leaders create meaning for themselves and their followers.

3. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended nonprofit leaders
participate in an annual strategic planning process with their followers.
Developing a shared vision for the organization should be a key function of the strategic planning process. It will also provide a common language and alignment of values and goals while creating buy-in from followers and promoting a sense of ownership within the organization.

4. Based on the findings in the study and the literature review, it is recommended that nonprofit leaders develop professional development plans for their followers, individually and collectively. This would assist followers in building their capacity to support the organization’s vision in order to meet its goals. Furthermore, creating a culture of learning and growth for everyone sends a message of deep care and strengthens engagement and relationships.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study filled a gap in the literature by identifying strategies exemplary leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning through the specific leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. In addition, the study was also able to determine the degree to which followers perceived these behaviors help create meaning within the organization. Based on the study there are seven recommendations for further research which would contribute to the body of research.

1. It is recommended to replicate this mixed method case study on a larger scale. With a broader population as well as significantly more nonprofit leaders and followers involved, the findings would be more reliable and it could possibly yield more clarity regarding disparity within and between elements.

2. It is further recommended that researchers conduct a phenomenological study to include an equal number of female and male exemplary nonprofit leaders in
order to compare the data to determine if any differences emerge based on gender.

3. Research could be conducted regarding a mixed method case study including three exemplary leaders from each of the three sectors- public, private and nonprofit- in order to determine what similarities and differences may exist among leaders with regards to the five elements and their application across sectors.

4. Research should be conducted to replicate this mixed methods case study in different geographical locations in the United States. Another angle of this research would be to stratify the research across levels of nonprofit organizations based on size. Both geographic and size stratifications of data would provide further insight to the field on exemplary nonprofit leadership and whether the five elements are universally perceived and applied.

5. It is recommended to conduct a sequential explanatory mixed method case study to determine what differences and similarities may emerge between male and female followers regarding to what degree they perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning. The instrument developed for this study could be used for the quantitative portion of the research and an interview protocol and script could be developed for the qualitative portion of the research in order to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings.
6. It is recommended to conduct a mixed method case study which would use the same protocol and premise as this research, but would include all followers in the organization not just management level team members. The survey could contain demographic questions in order for the data to be sorted for clarity and comparison.

7. It is further recommended that a descriptive explanatory study be developed that would identify barriers and challenges for leaders and followers which hinder creating personal and organizational meaning.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

This study contributed to the understanding of how exemplary nonprofit leaders lead through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration to create meaning in their organizations. Specific behaviors related to the five leadership elements used by exemplary leaders were identified. Additionally, this study revealed how followers perceive the importance of these behaviors in helping to create organizational meaning. The results confirmed the importance of the five leadership elements in creating meaning within the organization. Moreover, the behaviors identified can be utilized by other leaders to help create meaning within their own organizations.

Leaders are instrumental in creating meaning in their organizations. Through their words and actions, they set the tone and signal to followers what is valued and expected. Hence, followers look to their leaders to provide a clear picture of their organization’s purpose. Now, with so many people expecting to find meaning in the workplace, it is imperative that a leader possess certain abilities and behaviors in order to create organizational meaning. Through demonstrating behaviors related to the
leadership elements of character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration, a leader can create meaning for themselves and their followers.

When a leader has a strong moral compass, displays good judgment, inspires through their excitement about the vision and makes personal connections, followers develop a collective sense of purpose and ownership for the work of the organization. The meaning followers attain in their work leads them to be more engaged, boosts their productivity and increases their feelings of being valued. Therefore, working with a leader who creates meaning in the organization can lead to both professional success and personal happiness.

This has been an exceptional journey in my development as a leader. I have found I ask more questions and have learned more leadership strategies. It has also made me reflect deeper on my own leadership behaviors and how I create meaning within my organization. Consequently, it has helped me to clarify what kind of leader I wish to be. This study has, and will continue, to have a profound impact on me as a leader. Additionally, working on a team dissertation with outstanding peer researchers and a gifted faculty has been an extraordinary experience. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity.
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emotion regulation/empathy


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   how-to-squeeze-productivity-from-employee-happiness/#16537e471de5

   mass-philanthropy.html?_r=0

   Press.
APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMATION ABOUT: The behaviors of exemplary leaders related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration to help create personal and organizational meaning.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Candice Flint, M.A.

PURPOSE OF STUDY:
You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Candice Flint, M.A., a doctoral student from the School of Education at Brandman University. The purpose of study is to identify and describe the behaviors that leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will include an interview with the identified student investigator. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and will be scheduled at a time and location of your convenience. The interview questions will pertain to your perceptions and your responses will be confidential. Each participant will have an identifying code and names will not be used in data analysis. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

I understand that:

a) The researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes safeguarded in a locked file drawer or password protected digital file to which the researcher will have sole access.

b) My participation in this research study is voluntary. You may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if you so choose. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

c) If I have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Candice Flint at cf Flint@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 916-704-4377; or Dr. Cindy Petersen (Advisor) at epetersen@brandman.edu

d) No information that identifies you will be released without your separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, you will be so informed and consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.

e) If I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

__________________________  __________________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party  Date:

__________________________  __________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator  Date:
APPENDIX B

Participant’s Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
APPENDIX C

Thematic Interview Protocol

My name is Candice Flint and I am an elementary principal in the Sacramento area. I’m a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the area of Organizational Leadership. I’m a part of a team conducting research to determine what behaviors are used by exemplary leaders to create effective organizations. What is it that you do to create a positive work environment, a healthy culture, and to bring meaning to your organization?

Our team is conducting approximately 36 interviews with leaders like yourself. The information you provide, along with the information provided by others, hopefully will provide a clear picture of the thoughts and strategies that exemplary leaders use to create effective organizations and will add to the body of research currently available. We are also inquiring from a sample of your management level team using a survey instrument to obtain their impressions as well.

Incidentally, even though it appears a bit awkward, I will be reading most of what I say. The reason for this is to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating exemplary leaders will be conducted in the most similar manner possible.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

I would like to remind you any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

You received the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights in an email and responded with your approval to participate in the interview. Before we start, do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. For ease of our discussion and accuracy I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, let’s get started, and thanks so much for your time.

1. “Here are five leadership behaviors that research suggests are necessary in an exemplary leader. Looking at these, would you agree that these are all important?” (display on a 3 x 5 card). Card given to the leader so that it can be referred to at any time.

VISION: The leader exhibits foresight with a compelling outlook of the future.

RELATIONSHIPS: The leader communicates a common purpose through listening, respect, trust, and acknowledgment of one another.

CHARACTER: The leader displays a moral compass of ethics and integrity while being reliable, transparent, and authentic.

INSPIRATION: The leader empowers followers by exuding enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope.

WISDOM: The leader accurately interprets and responds to complex, ambiguous, and often unclear situations.
### If “Yes”
- “Realizing that they are all important, do any jump out as being absolutely essential?”

### If “No”...
- “not really”...
- or they hedge, ask:
  - “Which of them do you believe do not fit into the group of important behaviors?”

### If any selected: “What is about those you selected that would place them a bit above the others?”

### “Why do you think it/they do not belong in this group of important behaviors?”

#### 2. The first behavior on the list is vision (pointing to vision on the card). Based upon the success of your leadership, it is clear that you have established a vision for your organization. Are there things that you recall having done to develop vision for yourself and your organization?

- “Are there some that seemed to work better than others?”
- “Why do you think they (it) worked as well as they (it) did?”
- “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”
- “How do you ensure that your team buys into your vision?”

#### 3. The second item on the card is Establishing Relationships. This involves being a good listener and establishing trust among your team members. Are there specific things you have done to develop relationships among the members of your organization?

- “Are there some that seemed to work better than others?”
- “Why do you think they (it) worked as well as they (it) did?”
- “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”
4. “If you take a look at the card, one of the five important leadership behaviors is character and leading with a moral compass. This includes integrity, reliability, and authenticity. “What kinds of things do you do to demonstrate your character as the leader of your organization?”

- “What behaviors do you look for in your peers or employees that demonstrate their character?
- “How do you communicate the importance of these behaviors to your staff members?”
- “Are there challenges that you face as you deal with these issues on a daily basis?”
- “Are there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of a particular strategy?”

5. “As stated on the card, an inspirational leader empowers staff by exuding enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope. Tell me about some of the things you do to inspire your staff to be all they can be.”

- “Are there some things that seemed to work better than others?”
- “Why do you think they [it] worked as well as they [it] did?”
- “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of any particular strategy?”

6. “The fifth item on the card is Wisdom. As the card states, responding effectively to unclear, complex issues is called for here. Can you describe a time when your organization faced a very complex or unclear situation?”

If yes:

- “What did you do or what strategies did you put in place to clarify the situation so that progress was possible?”

If no:

- “If a situation like this did arise in the future, how do you think you would go about clarifying the situation to put your staff’s mind at ease and feel ready to go?”
- “Are there some strategies that seemed to [or you think would] work better than others?”
- “Why do you think they [it] worked (would work) well?”
- “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”
7. “Of all the things we have spoken about today – vision, relationships, character, inspiration and wisdom – are there absolute ‘musts!’ that you believe are essential behaviors for an exemplary leader to have?” If yes: “What are those behaviors and why do you believe they are so critical?”

“Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of our research are known, we will send you a copy of our findings.”

GENERIC PROBES THAT CAN BE ADDED TO ANY QUESTION TO PRODUCE MORE CONVERSATION:

1. “Would you expand upon that a bit?”
2. “Do you have more to add?”
3. “What did you mean by….”
4. “Why do you think that was the case?”
5. “Could you please tell me more about….”
6. “Can you give me an example of….”
7. “How did you feel about that?”
APPENDIX D

Electronic Leadership Survey

LEADERSHIP SURVEY

**Part 1 Directions:** For purposes of this study and survey, meaning is defined as the result of leaders and followers coming together for the purpose of gathering information from experience and integrating it into a process which creates significance, value and identity within themselves and the organization.

Listed below are behaviors that research suggests leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning. Using the following descriptions, which one comes closest to your feelings about the importance of the leadership behavior in developing meaning in your organization.

1 = Not important in our organization; it’s absence would have no effect upon the leader’s overall effectiveness nor our organization’s culture.

2 = Marginally important to have but not necessary in our organization; its absence would have little effect upon the leader’s effectiveness or the cultural health of our organization.

3 = Somewhat important for a leader in our organization; this is a leadership behavior that would have a positive effect upon how we function and would contribute in some positive ways to our organizational culture.

4 = Important for a leader in our organization; this is a leadership behavior that is good for the organization and its absence in the leader would be a definite detriment in the organization’s overall effectiveness as well as culture.

5 = Very important for a leader in our organization; would contribute significantly to our overall effectiveness and enhance our organizational culture in some very positive ways.

6 = Critically important in our organization; an absolute must; its absence would severely inhibit the leader’s effectiveness and the overall health of our organizational culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Continuously promotes our team’s moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose. (relationships)</td>
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<td>2. Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization. (relationships)</td>
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<td>3. Behaves in a way that shows she/he cares about the team members. (relationships)</td>
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<td>4. Communicates in a clear, meaningful way. (relationships)</td>
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<td>5. Encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks. (relationships)</td>
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<td>6. Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others. (character)</td>
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<td>7. Actively listens when communicating with others. (character)</td>
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<td>8. Responds to challenging situations with optimism. (character)</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Actions with others shows that he/she can be trusted. (character)</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Actions show concern for the well-being of others. (character)</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams. (inspiration)</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Recognizes and honors achievements of teams and team members. (inspiration)</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization’s leading edge. (inspiration)</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Engages in activities that build confidence among team members. (inspiration)</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving. (inspiration)</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions. (vision)</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Communicates the organization’s vision in a way in team members enthusiastically. (vision)</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Engages team members in creating a vision for the future. (vision)</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions. (vision)</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Promotes innovation that aligns with the organization’s vision. (vision)</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Elevates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members. (wisdom)</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Demonstrates compassion with team members. (wisdom)</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Behavior reflects an understanding of life’s complexities. (wisdom)</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Integrates personal values with organizational values in decision making. (wisdom)</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization. (wisdom)</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>Considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization. (wisdom)</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization. (wisdom)</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings. (wisdom)</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations. (wisdom)</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>Takes action by doing the “right thing” in a variety of organizational settings. (wisdom)</td>
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</table>
Part 2 Directions: Please supply the following information. The information will be used only to assist in understanding the results of this inquiry.

1. Your gender:  ○ Female  ○ Male

2. Your age category:  ○ 20-30  ○ 31-40  ○ 41-50  ○ 51-60  ○ 61 or over

3. Your time with the organization:  ○ 0-5 yrs.  ○ 6-10 yrs.  ○ 11-20 yrs.  ○ 21 years or over.

4. Your time with the current leader:  ○ 0-2 yrs.  ○ 3-5 yrs.  ○ 6-10 yrs.  ○ 11 yrs. Or over.

When Completed...... (directions for what to do)
Thank you for your time. It is very much appreciated
APPENDIX E
Brandman University Institutional Review Board Approval

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB Application Action – Approval

Date: 11-17-16

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Candice Flint

Faculty or Student ID Number: B00464714

Title of Research Project:
A Mixed Method Case Study to Discover How Exemplary Nonprofit Leaders Create Meaning for Themselves and Followers within Their Organization

Project Type: [✓] New [ ] Continuation [ ] Resubmission

Category that applies to your research:
[✓] Doctoral Dissertation EdD
[ ] DNP Clinical Project
[ ] Masters’ Thesis
[ ] Course Project
[ ] Faculty Professional/Academic Research
[ ] Other:

Funded: [✓] No [ ] Yes

Project Duration (cannot exceed 1 year): December 2016 to March 2017

Principal Investigator’s Address: 512 Yale Drive, Roseville, CA 95668

Email Address: cflint@mail.brandman.edu Telephone Number: 916-704-4377

Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Chair Name: Dr. Cindy Petersen

Email Address: cpetersen@brandman.edu Telephone Number: 916-275-0512

Category of Review:
[✓] Expedited Review [ ] Standard Review

I have completed the NIH Certification and included a copy with this proposal

Candice Flint
Signature of Principal Investigator:
11/17/16

Cindy L. Petersen
Signature of Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Dissertation Chair:
11/17/16

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB APPLICATION ACTION – APPROVAL
COMPLETED BY BUIRB

IRB ACTION/APPROVAL

Name of Investigator/Researcher:

☐ Returned without review. Insufficient detail to adequately assess risks, protections and benefits.

☐ Approved/Certified as Exempt form IRB Review.

☐ Approved as submitted.

☐ Approved, contingent on minor revisions (see attached)

☐ Requires significant modifications of the protocol before approval. Research must resubmit with modifications (see attached)

☐ Researcher must contact IRB member and discuss revisions to research proposal and protocol.

Level of Risk: ☐ No Risk ☑ Minimal Risk ☐ More than Minimal Risk

IRB Comments:

[Blank space for comments]

IRB Reviewer:

Date: December 2, 2016

BUIRB Chair: __________________________

Telephone: __________________________ Email: __________________________ Date: ______________

REVISED IRB Application

☐ Approved ☐ Returned

Name: __________________________

Telephone: __________________________ Email: __________________________ Date: ______________

BUIRB Chair: __________________________


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APPENDIX F

Electronic Informed Consent

Survey of Leadership Behaviors That Contribute to Personal and Organizational Meaning

Introduction: The success of any organization may depend in large part on the quality of interactions among the leader and the team members and associates. The purpose of this inquiry is to seek your perceptions of the importance of leadership behaviors in five areas: vision for the organization; relationships between the leader and team members; character of the leader; inspiration the leader provides; wisdom of the leader.

Completing this survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Please choose to become a part of this important undertaking.

It is important to read the following consent information carefully and click the agree box to continue. The survey will not open until you agree.

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMATION ABOUT: The degree of importance regarding a leaders’ behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Candice Flint, M.A.

THE FOLLOWING WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE ELECTRONIC SURVEY:
You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Candice Flint, a doctoral student from the School of Education at Brandman University. The purpose of study is to identify and describe the behaviors that leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this electronic survey, you can withdraw at any time. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be confidential. The survey questions will pertain to your perceptions.

Each participant will use a three-digit code for identification purposes. The researcher will keep the identifying codes safe-guarded in a locked file drawer to which the researcher will have sole access. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only. No information that identifies you will be released without your separate consent and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or
the use of the data is to be changed, you will be so informed and consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.

I understand that the investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher. I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

If you have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please contact Candice Flint at cflint@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 916-704-4377, or Dr. Cindy Petersen (Advisor) at cpeterse@brandman.edu.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the “agree” button indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the “disagree” button.

The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate.

☐ AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and “Bill of Rights.” I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.

☐ DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey