Conversational Leadership: A Leadership Approach for Nonprofit Executive Directors

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Conversational Leadership: A Leadership Approach for Nonprofit Executive Directors

A Dissertation by

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Conversational Leadership: A Leadership Approach for Nonprofit Executive Directors

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ABSTRACT

Conversational Leadership: A Leadership Approach for Nonprofit Executive Directors

by Qiana S. O’Leary

Purpose. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality).

Methodology. The qualitative phenomenological method was decided by a group of 12 thematic researchers to study conversational leadership practices based on four variables: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. This method was selected to investigate the experiences, perceptions, and decisions of the participants to help identify the patterns of conversational leadership practitioners. The population for this study was nonprofit executive directors in the Southern California region.

Findings. Extensive research on leadership communication and its impact on nonprofit executive directors has been completed. There still remains considerable gaps to identify the exemplary behaviors of nonprofit executive directors. A triangular data collection of personal interviews, observations, and artifacts was collected from the study participants. The data analysis of this study resulted in 12 themes and 426 frequencies. Eleven key findings emerged from the 12 themes.

Conclusions. This research study determined the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead the members through the conversational elements of intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality as described by Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b). Exemplary nonprofit executive directors build trusting and safe work environments through storytelling and establishing systems of two-way communication.
Additionally, they listen attentively to include the perspectives of all stakeholders when making key decisions centered on the mission and vision of the organization.

**Recommendations.** Future studies may include a comparative study to determine similarities between the perceptions of exemplary nonprofit directors and their followers. Additionally, further research by replicating this study in a region outside southern California.
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PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study Groysberg and Slind’s (2012a) conversational leadership in multiple types of organizations, four faculty researchers and 12 doctoral students discovered a common interest in exploring the ways exemplary leaders practice conversational leadership using the four elements of intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. This resulted in a thematic study conducted by a research team of 12 doctoral students.

This phenomenological research was designed with a focus on the behaviors of top executives in elementary education as they practice to lead their organizations through conversation. Exemplary leaders were selected by the team from various public, profit, and nonprofit organizations to examine the behaviors these professionals used. Each researcher interviewed 10 highly successful professionals to describe how they lead their organization through conversation using each of the four elements outlined in Talk, Inc. by authors Groysberg and Slind (2012b). To ensure thematic consistency, the team cocreated the purpose statement, research questions, definitions, interview questions, 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: Nikki Salas, city managers; Jacqueline Cardenas, unified school district superintendents; Chris Powell, rural superintendents; Lisa Paisley, assistant superintendents; Kristin Brogan-Baranski,
elementary school district superintendents; Jennifer LaBounty, community college chancellors; Robert Harris, urban principals; John Ashby, suburban principals; Tammie Castillo Shiffer, migrant education regional leaders; Cladonda Lamela, health care administrators; Vincent Plair, law enforcement executives; and this researcher studied nonprofit executive directors.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, “What are you doing for others?”

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The nonprofit sector has become one of the leading U.S. contributors in charitable and economic donations. According to Clark (2014), there are over 1.6 million registered nonprofit organizations that donate over $290 billion to missions that support their communities and religious affiliations. Nonprofits are driven by their mission to support a specific cause or movement. Typically, nonprofit mission statements derive from nonprofit leaders who attempt to meet the demands of humanitarian needs. Clark claimed that nonprofit leaders are driven by passion and support service demand. The increased demand for these supportive services, in conjunction with decreased funding opportunities, has created unbearable challenges for nonprofit organizations to maintain sustainability in this nation’s posteconomic crisis. Uzonwanne (2007) noted that this rapidly changing world directly affects the needs of nonprofit organizations. She further added that an increase of unforeseen events has spiked the demand for resources and, in turn, has created a sense of urgency for nonprofits to adapt to these changes in various ways (Uzonwanne, 2007).

In recent times, nonprofits have become limited by budget reductions and programmatic suspensions on community outreach activities. These funding limitations have caused nonprofits to review their long-term plans. A primary focus of strategic planning for nonprofits includes securing revenue from highly competitive funding sources to help retain and develop qualified and committed employees. As a result, nonprofits are in need of organizational leaders who possess the competencies to build
and sustain organizations during economic hardships. McKinsey & Company (2001) ascertained that the current trend for nonprofit leaders is to build organizational capacity to effectively deliver the organization’s mission and goals. Nelson (2013) added that successful nonprofit leaders will need to establish clear communication that characterizes the culture of the organization by creating expectations that aim to deliver the intentions of the mission statement.

Twenty-first century nonprofit leaders are compelled to employ effective communication strategies that stimulate both collaborative and innovative outcomes within the organizational culture. Through communication, all functions of the organization tie together resulting in deliberate and dynamic nonprofit organizational structures (Zelman, 2014). Establishing a common language will help to establish common norms and practices within the work space. Nelson (2013) claimed that a comprehensive assessment of the environment will help improve communication and business practices.

Developing conversational capacity may offer a leader the type of communication that can increase the internal and external impact of the organization. Craig Weber (2013), in Conversational Capacity, explained that the goals of conversation are to state a clear position and to explain thinking that informs others of one’s ideas, views, and perspectives. A deeper understanding of leadership skills that specifically employ conversation as a framework for organizational change may potentially benefit nonprofit leaders across the globe.
Background

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

—Barack Obama

Our Changing World

Our world is rapidly changing through trends of new communication expectations. Nichols (2012) suggested that the advancements in technology and how people distribute information is a result of the complexities of the job market. The increase in nonprofit employment and human need has impacted the work dynamics for these agencies. The U.S. nonprofit sector is the world’s leading asset and employee holder (Sarantopoulos, 2008) and yet many of these organizations find themselves searching for ways to keep up with current trends. In an economic era where private and public funding has decreased, the nonprofit sector has become more competitive. Accelerating organizations understand the significance of organizational transformation. Clark (2014) reported that in the past decade nonprofit organizations have been focused on interorganizational restructuring. Leading organizations have determined that their future will rely on the organization’s ability to adapt to change. For this reason, nonprofit leaders will be required to produce transformative and purpose-driven results. Silver (2008) asserted, “Tight operating budgets, limited resources, and low pay may contribute to an environment of high turnover, and organizational knowledge and processes may be lost if teams lack leadership” (p. 18).

The role of the nonprofit leader is to create a well-balanced work environment that generates creativity and develops collaborative teams through effective
communication. Leaders need to find effective approaches to engage employees and strengthen their ability to critically think to solve prospective challenges (Connell, 2010). Leaders are required to make a conscious effort to build consensus on common goals through extensive conversation and debate. Successful teams address real issues through intentional conversation (C. Weber, 2013).

**Leadership**

A man who stands for nothing will fall for anything.

—Malcolm X

M. E. Brown and Mitchell (2010) asserted that effective leaders possess the ability to build relationships. Over time, various models of leadership theory have shifted from traditional leadership styles. Traditional leaders implement systems of hierarchy. According to M. E. Brown and Mitchell, “Leaders are often in a position to control many outcomes that affect employees (e.g., strategies, goal-setting, promotions, appraisals, resources)” (p. 583). Traditional styles of leadership produce anxiety, tension, and lack of trust within an organization. Furthermore, members may not view the responsibilities of the organization as equally shared (M. E. Brown & Mitchell, 2010). The new challenges for leaders require developing best practices to help endure organizational complexities (Van Wart, 2003). According to Mintzberg, “Leaders have the responsibility of dividing and coordinating work in complex systems in which distractions, systems deterioration, and external challenges are constant, even in stable times” (Van Wart, 2013, p. 583). These leaders are commonly confident and competent in their leadership practices. People follow leaders who demonstrate energy and efficacy
Effective leaders establish organizational cultures that maximize human potential by generating social acceptance (Marques, 2007).

**Situational Leadership Theory**

Situational leadership theory (SLT) is a highly recognized theory in the field of managerial leadership (Meier, 2016). Developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1988), this model of leadership aims to apply different styles of leadership according to the maturity level of the employee. Chaneski (2016) described SLT as four leadership styles that are applicable based on specific situations: directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. Chaneski claimed that adopting the right leadership style to manage situational occurrences with employees will inevitably create easier opportunities for leaders to guide their employees to the desired outcomes.

**Authentic Leadership Theory**

Authentic leadership is defined as a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008, p. 94)

The theory is broken into four major components: self-awareness, balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, and societal pressures (W. Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005). Multiple research studies link authentic leadership behaviors to above-average team performance (Lyubovnikova, Legoo, Turner, & Mamakouka,
Fusco, O’Riordan, and Palmer (2015) claimed that authentic leadership positively relates to organizational climate, communication, knowledge sharing, job satisfaction, and overall company productivity.

**Transformation Leadership Theory**

Transformation leadership theory has been one of the most recognized topics in the field of leadership research (Raj & Srivastava, 2016). Transformational leaders motivate their followers and bring awareness about the importance and value of designated outcomes and the ways of achieving those outcomes (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Transformational leadership requires exceptional influence that motivates followers to perform above and beyond the required expectations (Marques, 2007). Raj and Srivastava (2016) asserted that transformational leaders empower and encourage employees to try new things, for example, new ways of communicating. Leadership and communication are inextricably intertwined, so the types of communication skills that leaders need change as well as their concomitant responsibilities (Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin, & Kakabadse, 2002). The ability to be flexible and grow with new changes will provide opportunities for leaders to become self-reflective and transformative.

**Conversational Leadership**

Great communication begins with connection.

—Oprah Winfrey

Van Engen (2012) claimed that leaders cannot lead without understanding the value of communicating and listening. From this perspective, communication is an essential trait for leaders to possess. Everything we do as humans communicates. Bateson’s (1972) seminal research on the ecology of the mind explains that everything
leaders do communicate information about content and relationship. It is important to acknowledge that communication encompasses verbal and nonverbal attributes and may occur intentionally and unintentionally. Effective leaders are cognizant of these factors and strive to purposely deliver effective communication at all times. Leaders with effective communication skills understand that listening and leading are inseparable (Steil & Bommelje, 2004). Van Engen (2012) suggested that leaders position themselves as listening communicators.

Conversational leadership may be a valuable tool for developing transformational change in today’s leading organizations. Barge’s (1985) seminal research attempted to explore the relationship between leadership’s performance and conversation patterns, and he declared that research had not been conducted on conversational patterns of poor leadership. Barge realized that while communication commonly identifies as a significant trait in effective leadership, its impact on how leaders perform requires additional research. According to Groysberg and Slind (2012b),

The power of organizational conversation isn’t the kind of power that manifests itself as control over a person or a process. It’s energy, in other words. It’s fuel.

In organizational terms, conversation is what keeps the engine of value creation firing on all cylinders. (p. 2)

Through conversational leadership, an organizational leader may possess the ability to facilitate the process that allows systemic transformation to occur.
**Theoretical Framework**

A true and worthy ideal frees and uplifts a people; a false ideal imprisons and lowers.

—W.E.B. DuBois

More recently, additional theoretical framework has evolved to explore the link between leaders and their conversational styles. Groysberg and Slind (2012a) in their article, “Leadership is a Conversation,” introduce a model for conversational leadership based on these four elements: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Groysberg and Slind defined “smart leaders” as those who “engage with employees in a way that resembles ordinary person-to-person conversation than it does a series of commands from on high” (p. 78). They suggested that transformational leaders are inclined to develop culture through effective patterns of communication. These variables create diversity and stimulate a paradigm shift for employers as they consider desirable leadership attributes for future organizational executives.

**Four Principles of Conversational Leadership**

**Intimacy**

Intimacy refers to relationships between pairs and has been traditionally studied at the interpersonal level (Horvath & Van Diest, 1998; Prager, 1995). Intimate conversations involve an exchange in dialogue between participants where there is implementation of active listening skills. Groysberg and Slind (2012a) believed that the most powerful trait gained from intimate conversations is trust. Employees who experience positive relational exchanges with their leaders become motivated to achieve the goals of the organization (Corner, Fugate, Hartnell, Kinicki, & Lambert, 2016).
Intimate leaders must be comfortable with getting personal in professional settings. Such interpersonal and unscripted conversations “make a strong impression on employees” (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, p. 5).

**Interactivity**

Interactivity is “a continuous construct capturing the quality of two-way communication between two parties” (Alba et al., 1997, p. 38). Efforts to close gaps between employees and their leaders will flounder if employees do not have both the tools and the institutional support they need to speak up and (where appropriate) talk back. Interactivity allows the process of dialogue to occur between leaders and employees without the fear of negative consequences.

**Inclusion**

Premeaux and Bedeian (2003) defined an inclusive environment as one where employees “openly state one’s views or opinions about workplace matters, including the actions or ideas, suggested or needed changes, or alternative approaches or different lines of reasoning for addressing job-related issues” (p. 1538). In this role, employees are encouraged to share their ideas and contribute to rich conversations related to critical decisions within the organization. Inclusion creates a shared responsibility for all members. Passionate employees become living representatives of the company and serve as brand ambassadors (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a).

**Intentionality**

Campbell (2009) defined intentionality as “identifying a specific outcome for a communication interaction, recognizing how one should or does appear to one’s audience, and adapting one’s behaviors, tone of voice, word choice, etc., to convey the
desired motivation in pursuit of a goal” (p. 2). Different from the other three components, intentionality requires transparency and honesty from leaders. In this area, leaders openly share their intentions for the organization their vision for success. Groysberg and Slind (2012a) believed that employee buy-in may increase when they have opportunities to participate in strategic planning and development. Creating multilevel participation in the early conversations of strategic planning promotes a shared vision across organization.

Conversational Leadership of Nonprofit Executive Directors

In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute.

—Thurgood Marshall

Accountability has been a staggering issue in the nonprofit sector. Sarantopoulos (2008) highlighted that a social concern of nonprofit leaders is the issue of ethical values. Nonprofit organizations are looking for new ways of repackaging their mission and human support efforts. These efforts may be accomplished with the support of visionary leaders. The role of nonprofit leaders is to create a vision and build unity among staff while managing the operations of the organization (Zumdahl, 2010).

Nonprofit leaders will lead the organization’s charge to fulfill its mission as they manage the direction for employee cohesion (Uzonwanne, 2007). More than ever, nonprofit leaders are obligated to demonstrate transparency and genuine communication skills. Communication skills are highly valued skills in the contemporary job market. Upper-level executives, including nonprofit CEOs, must be good communicators to
succeed (Melewar, Bassett, & Simões, 2006). Leaders with strong communication skills may have a higher probability of facilitating meaningful conversations.

Conversation brings forth collective thinking and experts have begun to recognize its role in organizational change. The quality of conversation may contribute to the personal and professional development of employees. Conversational practices can be considered essential tools for nonprofit leaders to build capacity within the organization. Glaser (2014) claimed that conversational rituals enable the development of complexity, ambiguity, and change. She further asserted that conversational rituals are the bridge to building common language, definitions, and meanings in the work community (Glaser, 2014). By strengthening conversational intelligence, nonprofit leaders may be able to develop the potential to maximize the strength of their team. Through effective use of conversation, nonprofit leaders can gain access to the inner thoughts and feelings of their followers, which would help manifest healthy relationships and success (Glaser, 2014).

Conversational leadership shows evidence of building and sustaining common ground in an organization. The implications from the literature reveal that it is still considered a fairly new and emerging concept that is being explored by leaders in various fields. Further examination of the four principles of conversational leadership—intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality—may lead to promising expectations for leaders who seek to transform the culture and long-term purpose of their organization.
Statement of the Research Problem

When morality comes up against profit, it is seldom that profit loses.

—Shirley Chisholm

During the massive recession of the last decade, the work of nonprofits has been threatened by diminished resources. Silver (2008) reported that common financial challenges in the nonprofit sector correlate with declining corporate support, fierce competition for sponsorship revenues, and increasing operational expenses. In a highly competitive market, effective leaders are in great demand to direct and sustain the mission of nonprofit organizations. Clark (2014) attributed the leadership development deficit in nonprofit organizations as an essential component for organizational failure. Many nonprofit organizations experience high turnover rates and lack of organizational sustainability. Sarantopoulos (2008) claimed that the selection of transformational leaders who bring positive values-based change may present significant opportunities for growth.

Bonner and Obergas (2008) suggested that the future success of nonprofit organizations relies on their abilities to identify, grow, and embrace the talent of transformational leaders. According to Northouse (2013), transformational leadership is a process that transforms people. Transformational leaders establish cultures with meaningful practices that connect team members in working toward a common goal. Recognizing leadership behaviors may be especially relevant to the future of nonprofits because of the often high turnover in staff they will experience, the constant pressure of fundraising, and the challenges of recruiting and managing volunteers (Silver, 2008).
There is a growing need to explore research-based leadership competencies practiced by exemplary nonprofit leaders. According to Doebert (2004), research supports communication competencies as a central element for effective nonprofit leadership. Zelman (2014) discovered that if leaders do not communicate effectively, problems may arise with the leader’s employees. The communication style of an organization and its employees must connect (Martinez, 2012). Communication serves as a foundational component for a sustainable and productive work culture. Although the need for adequate communication practices is relevant in theory, it may be difficult to implement within the daily functions of an organization. Martinez (2012) explained that organizational communication is situational. The ability to facilitate conversation is critical for nonprofit leaders. Effective leadership communication competencies will be required for leaders who aim to use conversation to build a strong organizational culture. According to Silvestri (2013), leadership is a behavior intended to influence followers to accomplish common goals. Leaders must make meaning for the organization by communicating and connecting its members with a purpose that matters to all (Bowman, 2014).

While a great deal is known about leadership and communication, and some studies have been conducted on nonprofit executive directors, there is no research on how exemplary nonprofit executive directors use conversational leadership to lead their organizations. Understanding the use of intentional dialogue between nonprofit executive directors and their followers may stimulate exemplary results for other nonprofit organizations.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead their organization through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality).

Research Questions

Central Question

What are the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead their organization through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality)?

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of interactivity?
3. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of inclusion?
4. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of intentionality?
Significance of the Problem

If you don’t like something change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude.

—Maya Angelou

The dialogue between leaders and their followers is significant in determining the quality of their leadership practices. According to Gambetti and Biraghi (2015), “Despite the recent interest in leadership-related issues, up until now, corporate communication studies have only carried out exploratory surveys aimed at determining the presence and perceived importance of certain leadership features” (p. 417). A global leadership study discovered that 38% of people in more than 60 countries gave critical reviews of business leaders, and many opined that communication competence was an essential component for highly effective leadership (Flauto, 1999; Gallup, 2006). Bowman (2014) described communicatively competent leaders as individuals who “inspire followers to make meaning for one’s organization by connecting the efforts of everyone in it with a purpose that matters to the world” (p. 143). Groysberg and Slind (2012a) suggested that today’s communication is about creating and sustaining a relationship with employees. Since stakeholders are the key to the success of the organization, communication is to be carefully thought out. A comprehensive understanding of communication strategies may assist leaders with meeting the goals of the organization. Communication thinking and the practice of leadership is important (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016). Although a great deal of research has been conducted on both communication and leadership, only very limited research has addressed the communication competencies of nonprofit leaders whose role is so critical to their organization’s mission.
In the last decade, the nonprofit sector has made significant increases around the globe (Nelson, 2013). The high demand for community services and resources inevitably creates a need for the nonprofit sector. A better understanding of the impending growth in the nonprofit sector suggests a careful review of nonprofit organizations and their leadership (Crosby & Bryson, 2005). Uzonwanne (2007) asserted that organizational leaders influence through clear and concise communication. The quality of communication may create synergy within the organization. Leaders who use conversation to confirm common understanding and shared meaning will lead their team to purposeful action (Jorgensen, 2010). Conversational leadership practices may provide solutions to nonprofit leaders who aim to bring their staff together around their mission to provide quality supportive services in their communities.

The exploration of conversational leadership in this study can create a collection of best practices implemented by leaders who drive organizational change. Babarinsa (2012) highlighted that the extent of organizational change initiatives depends largely on the credibility of leaders and their ability to communicate the change. The findings from this applied research of communication and leadership theories will be useful to leaders who want to enhance their credibility and communication skills with their employees.

At present, there seems to be little research on the use of conversational leadership in the nonprofit sector. This study addresses the gap in this research. Crosby and Bryson (2005) highlighted that “a careful review of nonprofit leadership will make the leadership framework accessible and relevant to the challenges of twenty-first century” (p. xiii). This study adds to nonprofit leadership development by describing the perceptions of successful nonprofit executive directors who use conversational leadership
practices to transform and elevate their organizations beyond ordinary to extraordinary performance. The findings can be used by the Center of Nonprofit Management, the National Council of Nonprofits, and other organizations that provide training for nonprofit leaders as well as universities whose degree and certificate programs are used by individuals aspiring to leadership roles in the nonprofit sector.

**Definitions of Terms**

The definitions used for the purposes of this study are listed below.

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

**Behavior.** An action, activity, or process that can be observed or measured (Dainton & Zelley, 2005; Griffin, 2012; West & Turner, 2010).

**Intimacy.** The closeness, trust, and familiarity created between people through shared experiences, meaningful exchanges, and shared knowledge (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Schwarz, 2011).

**Interactivity.** Bilateral or multilateral exchange of comments and ideas, a back-and-forth process (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Liden & Graen, 1980).

**Inclusion.** The commitment to the process of engaging stakeholders to share ideas and participate in the development of the organization (J. Brown & Hurley, 2009; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Jefferies & Hunte, 2003).

**Intentionality.** Ensuring clarity of purpose that includes goals and direction to create order and meaning (Barge, 1985; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Men, 2012).
**Delimitations**

This study was delimited to 10 exemplary nonprofit executive directors in Southern California. This study identifies an exemplary leader as someone who displays four of the six following criteria:

1. evidence of successful relationships with followers;
2. evidence of leading a successful organization;
3. a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession;
4. articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
5. recognition by his or her peers; or
6. membership in professional associations in his or her field

**Organization of the Study**

This study was divided into five chapters, including relevant appendices. Chapter I introduced the background, the study’s theoretical framework, the four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality), and the research questions used in the study. Chapter II provides an extensive review of relevant literature related to the global changes in communication, the theoretical evolution of leadership theory, communication theory, and the proposed conversational leadership theory. Chapter II discusses the role of nonprofit executive directors in conversational leadership. Chapter III outlines the research design, methodology, data collection, and research instruments used in the study. Chapter IV provides an in-depth analysis of the qualitative data collected in the study. Chapter V summarizes the study and provides the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II offers an examination of 21st-century changes in nonprofit organizations. An overview of how new leadership expectations in technological, generational, and organizational changes in communication have impacted leadership practices is included. A discussion regarding the evolution of various leadership theories follows. A description of the four principles of conversational leadership and their relationship to building organizational capacity is explored. Literature illustrating the role of nonprofit executive directors and their use of effective conversation is also included. The chapter concludes by identifying the gaps in research regarding the long-term impact of conversational leadership theory and offers future opportunities to explore the conversational patterns of nonprofit executive directors.

21st Century Changes in Nonprofits

The nonprofit sector is one the most diminishing industries in this era of change. Some nonprofit organizations are facing budget decline and increased staff departure (Cornelius, Moyers, & Bell, 2011). Restoration of nonprofit industries will depend heavily on a new generation of leadership. According to Clark (2014), the major threat to the future of nonprofits is the lack of highly trained leaders. In such a challenging environment, there is a critical need for the nonprofit sector to strengthen its leadership pipeline by creating a new generation of nonprofit leaders who must be able to build organizational capacity in economically challenging times (McKinsey & Company, 2001). Networking and establishing strong partnerships are vital to sustaining the growth of this sector. A report by Gianneschi Center for Nonprofit Research at CSU Fullerton suggests that improved communication and consensus building across organizations in
the same service field could support the longevity of nonprofits (Costello & Manzo, 2005). Developing strong communication systems has become a significant leadership competency for the success of future nonprofit leaders.

Peters (1950) highlighted the need for communication structures to fit the needs of the organization. In 1950, he realized that one of the problems during this time period was lack of two-way communication between the employer and employee. According to Peters, organizational leadership competencies require organizations to adapt their communication style to improve the interactions between the leaders and their followers. Cyphert (2009) claimed that the role of business communication is constantly evolving based on the rapid changes of the environment. Constant advances in communication technologies have resulted in an increased volume of messages exchanged as well as an expansion to a multidisciplinary approach to communications (Du-Babcock, 2006). From these seminal findings, Zelman (2014) concluded, “The challenge going forward is to learn how to cope with the global, complex communication environment” (p. 37).

**New Leadership Communication Expectations**

Our world is ever changing and ever growing. According to K. Weber, Harper, Konnola, and Barcelo (2012), “The need to transform current systems is heightened by emerging global trends” (p. 153). Globalization, technology, media, and workforce demographic changes are requiring necessary shifts in organizational structures (Dunston, 2016). Changes in communication are highly influenced by these factors. Martinez (2012) ascertained that “organizations must develop a communication style that resonates with its employees” (p. 7). According to Accenture (2016), this nation in a major technological revolution and high-performing industries will create corporate cultures
that allow people to use technology to adapt, learn, and create. The shift in speed and the ability to communicate information has changed the way people share information socially and at work (Aichner & Jacob, 2015). Organizations across the United States recognize the need to transform and evolve to accommodate changing technology and organizational demographics as well as increased emphasis on values and social norms, societal and community behavior (Mason, 2012).

**Technological Changes in Communication**

The combination of technology and high-speed global communication has affected the aspects of life and society (Mustard, 2000). At the brink of the 20th century, virtual organization became a popular trend for information sharing within organizations. Engkavanish (1999) defined virtual organization as a “dispersed set of groups or individuals that are organized and coordinated based on their expertise needed to complete a project, i.e., a virtual project” (p. 1). She further described virtual organization as a link to people, ideas, and shared vision through use of technology (Engkavanish, 1999). Horvath and Fulk (1994) stated that networking enables the distribution of information, expertise, cooperative work, reward, and responsibility throughout the organization. Through this shared practice of information sharing, the transformation of organizational structures shifted. Barnatt (1995) noted that this evolution of the work environment requires stakeholders who desire to use information technology to reduce physical constraints and limitations from organizational adaptations. Such adaptations include learning and understanding generational communication patterns and preferences to develop systemic communication practices and protocols.
Both internal and external factors impact the systems and structures organizations set to establish meaningful communication. Mustard (2000) identified computers, local area networks, web sites, and e-mails as necessary organizational tools used to manage internal activities while effectively managing the external environment. Although significant for organizational sustainability, the shift in communication technology has greatly impacted knowledge acquisition of employers. Sung-min (2009) claimed that the advances in communication technology, such as e-mail and mobile devices, have created communication among workers to be more efficient while simultaneously developing dependency of unskilled workers on skilled workers for immediate support and assistance. New leaders need to possess tech-savvy communication skills to maximize the use of technology while increasing the knowledge acquisition and information sharing of stakeholders (Sung-min 2009). Additionally, Lynn (2016) suggested that new leaders need to consider a strong social media presence in platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to capitalize on branding and to generate buzz for their organizations. With millennials as the largest group adapting to advanced communication technology usage and representing the largest group in the workforce, organizational leaders will need to incorporate more tools and practices that lean toward progressive methods of communication and collaboration (Aichner & Jacob, 2015; Cardon & Marshall, 2015).

**Generational Changes in Communication**

Creating effective strategies and systems is critical to establishing organizational success. One of the greatest responsibilities of an organizational leader is to create a culture of justice, balancing communication and misunderstanding (Mayer & Croin, 2008). A recurring theme in organizational research is generational differences in the
workplace (Yost, 2013). Communication barriers in multigenerational work environments are a major concern for organizational leaders. Managing multiple generations can be difficult (Bourne, 2009). Generations are distinctively defined by common beliefs and norms and are shaped by the important and historical events that dictate society during influential adolescence and young adult years (Arsenault, 2004; McNamara, 2005). These differences are factors that contribute to the unique qualities that are infused into a single workplace by three distinct generations of employees. Three very different generational cohorts—baby boomers, Generation X, and millennials—are experiencing various milestones in the workplace (Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar, & Kaifi, 2012).

**Baby boomers.** The largest generational cohort in the U.S. workplace consists of individuals born between 1946 and 1964, known for high education levels, dual income households, the need for individuality, and a focus on health (Loroz & Helgeson, 2013; Marcinkus Murphy, 2012). In the workplace, boomers prefer independence and will challenge authority (Langdon, 2012). Additionally, boomers believe they have the ability to make a difference in the world (Meredith, Schewe, Hiam, & Karlovich, 2002).

**Generation X.** The generational cohort following the baby boomers, consisting of individuals born between 1965 and 1980, characterized as an independent generation that started the push for a better work-life balance (Krahn & Galambos, 2014). In the workplace, the Gen X cohort has no reservations with questioning and prefers environments where information sharing is prevalent (Langdon, 2012). They consider themselves resourceful and independent and they value the opinion of leadership (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Meredith et al., 2002).
**Millennials.** An emerging generational cohort of individuals born between 1981 and 2000, characterized as digital natives who want personalized work experiences, place a high value on a work-life balance, and want to have their voices heard so they can make an impact (Kappel, 2012; Marcinkus Murphy, 2012). In the workplace, millennials appear to be authority driven and they will rebel against unjust and unfair programmatic processes (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). They tend to be more concerned with their peer groups and will stand firm on their beliefs (Langdon, 2012). Similar to baby boomers, millennials believe they have the ability to make a difference in the world (Meredith et al., 2002).

At different points in the organizational structure, generations communicate with coworkers (Langdon, 2012). Newer organizational structures and intercommunication processes will drive the generational cohorts to interact on a more frequent basis (Schultz, 2010). The generations that are currently in the workforce have differing views on communication and the media by which communication should be conveyed (Burmeister, 2008; Gibson, 2009) and leaders must understand these differences to sustain a positive and productive work climate (Yost, 2013). Sherman (2006) suggested that leaders must have the capability of using different methods and mediums to better address generational cohort differences. Lines (2004) claimed that organizations that include their workforce in change initiative decisions are less likely to meet resistance, and the leader’s role is to find the most effective method to clearly and concisely communicate his or her intentions (Langdon, 2012). Understanding the preferred methods of communication to the three predominant generational cohorts will assist in creating transparency; underpinning the success of change initiatives (Sherman, 2006).
Organizational Changes in Communication

Communication serves as the foundation to the daily operation, effectiveness, and competitive advantage of an organization by fostering significant context about the organization’s mission, vision, goals, and strategy (Anjaiah & Sekhar, 1995; Edstrom & Galbraith, 1977). Goldhaber (1974) defined organizational communication as the “flow of messages within a network of interdependent relationships” (p. 108). Brownell and Lundberg (1993) defined organizational communication as the patterned process of sharing meaningful information among social entities or members with roles in an organization. Redding and Tompkins (1988) defined organizational communication as the process and structures of communication between persons or positions. Although relevant to the study of organizational communication research, there is no single definition to describe the meaning and significance of communication as it relates to organizational change.

Communication is necessary and essential to an effective and successful implementation of the organizational change process (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998). Babarinsa (2012) ascertained, “Organizational change can be caused by one or all of the following: new technologies, competition, legislation, regulation, programs, policies, processes” (p. 9). Change often entails organizational restructuring, developing new job functions, or creating new organizational departments (Mahesh & Suresh, 2009). These reasons may influence organizational change to happen suddenly, causing resistance from employees. Successful organizations identify best practices to overcome resistance to organizational change (Babarinsa, 2012). As communication is often a vehicle to change, developing an increased understanding of organizational change communication could improve the organizational change processes (Johansson & Heide, 2008).
Effective communication protocols require strategic planning. Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework that suggests the major elements of internal communication strategy as the following: employee involvement, multiple modalities of communication, and the timing of the presentation of the message (Babarinsa, 2012; Smeltzer, 1991). Employee involvement is one of the most critical aspects of the development of the communication change process. Because organizations are composed of individuals, the need to develop strategic communication to promote organizational change beyond operational change has become apparent (Cutcher, 2009; Gill, 2011). By accepting that employee involvement is central to the organizational change communication process and the subsequent shaping of change outcomes, organizational leaders should become more willing to include a diverse collection of opinions and concerns in the process (Lamm & Gordon, 2010). Communication systems should contain storytelling and narratives to promote dialogue among employees and between employees and organizational leaders (Cutcher, 2009; Driver, 2009).

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the communication change strategy.
Another critical aspect of the development of the communication change process is message redundancy. Large, complex organizations require the use of a multistage, multimethod to announce organization-wide change (Smeltzer, 1991). Repetition of the message through more than one medium increases people’s memory of the message (Klein, 1996). Klein’s (1996) observations and experiences in organizations include leaders delivering new change initiatives once or twice through a written medium. The method and channels of communication used show the importance leadership attaches to change (Babarinsa, 2012). Bjorkman (2007) informed that communication is a two-way process that involves both the sender and the receiver and strongly encourages organizations to resist traditional methods of one-way forums of communication during times of organizational change.

Smeltzer’s (1991) findings include timing as an essential aspect to communication change. Timing of communication is more significant than the content of the message (Bjorkman, 2007). Timing focuses on the relevance for delivering the message to employees quickly. Leadership should wait for the whole story or until a convenient opportunity arises but deliver as much information as possible to control rumors (Bjorkman, 2007). These findings support this study’s investigation on the need to determine conversational leadership practices used to establish exemplary nonprofit organizations.

**Leadership**

“Leadership is the primary factor that distinguishes organizations from one another over the long term” (Anderson, 1998, p. 12). Leadership is constantly evolving because of new contexts, tools, and differing situational demands (Van Wart, 2003).
Leaders must align all organizational resources, manage people, develop strategies, and oversee the operations of the organization (Hesselbein, 2003; Miles, 1999; Rieley & Clarkson, 2001). Leaders must interpret and integrate a holistic system that aims to meet the vision and performance expectations of the organization (Hesselbein, 2003; Miles, 1999). As a result of constant change and internal and external management responsibilities, leadership has been defined in many ways (Fisher, 2006). Connell (2010) revealed that there is not a universal approach to leadership. Conversational leadership is a new, emerging field of study (Nichols, 2012) that focuses on leadership communication styles in the 21st century. An exploration of leadership theories influenced from the 20th century, such as situational leadership, authentic leadership, and transformational leadership, will help unveil the impact on employees by the common practices leaders use to communicate.

**Situational Leadership**

Northouse’s (2009) definition of situational leadership is described as “requiring the leader to adjust his leadership style to the demands of unique situations; utilizing the directive and supportive dimensions under Situational Leadership” (p. 91). Situational leadership focuses on aligning certain leadership styles to specific circumstances. This leadership approach, originally called the life cycle theory of leadership in 1972, was later renamed situational leadership theory by authors Hersey and Blanchard (1974). In 2007, Blanchard revised a second version after receiving major criticism (Irby, 2011). The framework of both models suggests that successful leaders possess the flexibility to adjust their leadership styles to meet the maturity level of each employee. The four maturity levels are identified as the following:
M1–Lacks basic skills and demonstrates the inability to perform the task or take responsibility for the task.

M2–Lacks responsibility but are willing to try to work on a task.

M3–Experienced to meet the demands of the tasks but lacks confidence to take responsibility of the task.

M4–Experienced to meet the demands of the task, and are willing to complete the task and take responsibility for the task.

Hersey and Blanchard’s (1974) work on situational leadership connects with the major elements of conversational leadership. The framework emphasizes the importance of leaders assessing the needs of the employee in order to identify the best leadership style that will evoke employee motivation through commitment. According to situational leadership theory, “The effectiveness of the leader is determined by how well the leader adapts their leadership behavior to the maturity level of the follower according to the demands of the situation” (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988, pp. 172-173).

**Authentic Leadership**

Avolio, Luthans, and Walumbwa (2004) described authentic leaders as “individuals who know who they are and what they think and are perceived by others as being aware of their own values, moral perspective, knowledge and strengths” (p.4). Authentic leaders are considered to be self-aware of their individual areas of growth and display transparency to their followers. The transparency demonstrated by authentic leaders may lead to work climates where values and information sharing become a fluid process between the leader and their followers. Leaders can shape followers’ attitudes, beliefs, and values (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004).
Additionally, authentic leadership has been linked to a number of positive outcomes at the individual level, including performance, work engagement, creativity, and job satisfaction (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005; Giallonardo, Wong, & Iwasiw, 2010). Lyubovnikova et al. (2017) ascertained, “Authentic leaders will become positive role models of self-regulation for their team, fostering and reinforcing a climate in which team members also strive to develop such behaviors” (pp. 9-10). By establishing a positive and fluid climate, teams will be engaged in meaningful conversation that may lead to their participation in decision-making processes of the organization. These team interactions may involve deliberate discussions about organizational alignment, progress, and shared goals, which can support leaders with assessing the team’s values, motives, strengths, and areas of growth (Lyubovnikova et al., 2017).

**Transformational Leadership**

During the 1990s, transformational leadership was the most studied of all leadership theories (Judge & Piccolo, 2004), and it was also the most widely published theory in the *Leadership Quarterly* journal during the 1980s and 1990s (W. Gardner, Lowe, Moss, Mahoney, & Cogliser, 2010; Lowe & Gardner, 2000). Transformational leadership is defined as the “the process of influencing major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of organization members and building commitment for the organization's mission, objectives, and strategies” (Yukl, 1989, p. 269). Transformational leaders motivate their followers and bring awareness about the importance and value of designated outcomes and the ways of achieving those outcomes (Bass & Avolio, 2004). In a society where new trends bring forth rapid changes through new technological
advancements, innovation has become a favorable asset for employers. Transformational leaders create cultures where employees are empowered and encouraged to articulate and try new ideas (Raj & Srivastava, 2016). Leaders of this kind become emotional conduits of inspiration and shared values with their employees (Bass, 1991).

Transformational leadership has a major influence on its focus of specific leadership behaviors. According to Bass and Avolio (1995), transformational leadership includes four types of behaviors: idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. The conceptual framework of transformational leadership is illustrated in Figure 2. Through individualized consideration, transformational leadership and conversational leadership share similar approaches towards establishing intimate relationships with employees. Raj and Srivastava (2016) asserted “that by individualized consideration, leaders build one-to-one relationships with their followers by providing support, and encouragement, and show concern for the followers’ needs, skills, and aspirations” (p. 203).

Although transformation leadership theory is highly recognized for its model in promoting organizational innovation, some critics believe there is a missing link between how leaders behave and how they communicate to their followers. Lehmann-Willenbrock, Meinecke, Rowold, and Kauffeld (2015) suggested transformational leadership as an individual approach does warrant claims of soliciting desirable outcomes from followers but rather a combination of transformational leadership behaviors with the leaders’ communication approach during team interactions is the leading contributor in receiving the desired manifestation of behaviors from followers. By studying communication dynamics between leaders and followers, organizations may begin to
consider the role of time in leadership (Bluedorn & Jaussi, 2008; Shamir, 2011). An in-depth review of conversational leadership theory may further support these claims while providing a holistic application of linking transformational leadership behaviors with communication leadership styles.

![Figure 2. Conceptual framework of transformational leadership.](image)

**Conversational Leadership**

The idea of conversational leadership is a relatively new leadership approach (Nichols, 2012). According to J. Brown and Isaacs (2005), Carolyn Baldwin coined the term and defined as “the leader's intentional use of conversation as a core process to cultivate the collective intelligence needed to create business and social value” (p. 2). From this explanation, J. Brown and Hurley (2009) developed a framework for exercising conversational leadership. According to this framework, leaders establish effective conversation by implementing six architectures for engagement. Figure 3 illustrates the conversational leadership framework for developing architectures for engagement. Through the lens of this framework, J. Brown and Hurley identified conversation as
actions that ought to be considered “the very heartbeat and lifeblood of social systems like organizations, communities, and cultures” (p. 3).

Along the same lines, Glaser (2014) ascertained that creating conversational space builds trust, which allows deeper understanding and engagement to occur. In her learning through neurological and cognitive research, Glaser indicated the following discovery about the value of conversational intelligence:

Conversations are dynamic, interactive, and inclusive. They evolve and impact the way we connect, engage, interact, and influence others, enabling us to shape reality, mind-sets, events, and outcomes in a collaborative way. Conversations have the power to move us from “power over” others to “power with” others, giving us the exquisite ability to get on the same page with our fellow humans and experience the same reality by bridging the reality gaps between how you see things and how I see things. (p. xiii)

From this perspective, conversations are multidimensional (Glaser, 2014) and require a deeper understanding in how people develop and sustain healthy conversations.
Additionally, Glaser (2014) discovered that conversational gaps, communication through emotional fear, occur when a lack of connectivity is exchanged between those in conversation. Through intentional and intimate conversations, these gaps can be reduced once trust is established (Glaser, 2014). Figure 4 illustrates this process through Glaser’s conversational dashboard tool. Comparably, J. Brown and Hurley’s (2009) conversational leadership architectures to engagement and Glaser’s (2014) conversational dashboard both identify actionable dynamics that are required in order to experience healthy conversations. Without collective intelligence and effective action, the future of organizations will remain challenged if trust and the focus of what people need from each other are not validated and confirmed (J. Brown & Hurley, 2009; Glaser, 2014).

![Figure 4. Conversational dashboard.](image)

Previously, others such as Connolly and Rianoshek (2002), created the conversational model called the cycle of value, which intended to coordinate conversations, implement agreed-upon plans, and revise the plans as needed (Nichols, 2012). The overall structure of the model aimed at creating meaningful conversations rather than using valuable time on wasteful conversations. Observations of companies
using this model to develop leadership programs revealed that leaders with stronger conversational competencies were the most successful (Nichols, 2012). According to Connolly and Burnett (2003), these conversational competencies were not as crucial when the system experienced greater stability and equilibrium, but with rapidly changing strategy, measures, and processes, these skills became critical. Fluctuation and complex changes in the social infrastructure of 21st-century organizations require leaders to adopt purpose-driven conversational practices.

Adding to the conversational leadership narrative is Groysberg and Slind’s (2012a) research in organizational dynamics. In their attempt to investigate how people communicate in 21st-century organizations, they discovered that creating organizational conversation was no longer an option for executive leaders (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). From this view, Groysberg and Slind defined smart leaders as those who “understand that they can’t avoid conversation nor can they control it, but if they engage with it in the right way, they have the potential to unleash organizational energy that no leader could ever demand” (p. 9).

**Theoretical Framework**

After 2 years of extensive research with executive leaders in a variety of organizations, Groysberg and Slind (2012b) developed a model that uses communicative indicators to shift the focus of corporate communication from a top-down distribution to a bottom-up exchange of ideas. According to Groysberg and Slind (2012a, 2012b), the four essential elements in developing organizational conversation are intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Organizational leaders who establish these
conversation-based practices tend to receive high levels of employee engagement and outperform their industry counterparts (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a).

**Intimacy**

According to Groysberg and Slind (2012b), conversational intimacy is a function of leadership that addresses human relations where those in authority seek to earn the trust of those who work under their authority. They stated, “For leaders, the pursuit of intimacy in communication means stepping down from their corporate perch and then stepping up to the challenge of speaking with employees in ways that are personal, authentic, and transparent” (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 16). These leadership adaptations ultimately produce intimate and trustworthy organizational cultures. Seminal findings from Jourard (1964) and Getzoff-Goldstone (1985) provide further insight into how self-disclosure and intimate behaviors support the development of establishing intimacy through conversations.

**Self-disclosure builds trust.** Jourard (1964) claimed that self-disclosure is the process of letting another person know one’s thoughts, feelings, and wants, and is the most direct way that an individual can reveal him/herself to another person. Through these conversations, trust is established, which ultimately leads to intimate relationships. Jourard further claimed that the requirements of disclosure include unveiling and showing oneself so that can others can perceive him or her. This level of disclosure also requires emotional and physical stability. In later research, Jourard (1964) indicated that emotional and physical health is indicative of one’s ability to self-disclose to his or her partner. Healthy intimacy builds interpersonal relationships and productive work environments (Covey, Merrill, & Jones, 1998; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). Work
productivity and job performance relate to aspects of intimacy (Pope, 1994). Rytting, Ware, and Olszewski’s research in 1993 identified the following 14 qualities as aspects of intimacy:

1. Trust
2. Ability to confide in another person
3. Group collaboration
4. Productive work
5. Good peer relationships
6. Feeling of inclusiveness, being part of a group
7. Closely connected
8. Sharing - self-disclosure
9. Caring - helping
10. Daring - taking risk, surrendering control
11. Commitment
12. Mutual support
13. Acceptance

In hierarchical organizations, invisible barriers between leaders and their followers send out informal signals that the two groups should not have intimate interactions (Pope, 1994). Giving trust leads to earning trust. Leaders must learn how to be givers of trust before conversational intimacy can be established (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). According to Groysberg and Slind (2012b), “Hearing what employees have to say and a willingness to talk straight about matters that senior leaders prefer not to address” will lead to authenticity (p. 19). Developing trust among employees should be a necessity—a key factor to how the company operates (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). Enhancing organizational trust through communication requires leaders to initiate behaviors that reciprocate openness from their employees.

**Intimate behaviors.** Getzoff-Goldstone (1985) alluded that “people of all ages and cultures are confronted with the same dilemma: how to achieve intimacy and overcome separateness” (p. 1). Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1956) expressed that it
would benefit people to learn intimate behaviors to avoid experiences of separateness and anxiety. Intimacy can be established by behaviors exchanged between parties. There is a constant delivery of communication people deliver through their behaviors that influences how people perceive if they are behaving intimately or not (Getzoff-Goldstone, 1985). According to Getzoff-Goldstone (1985), intimate behaviors include “facial expressions, eye behavior, posture, touch, synchrony of actions and interaction rhythms” (p. 29). Where fear prevails, conversational capacity plummets as people’s natural tendency to display negative intimate behaviors overrides their normal conversational tactics (C. Weber, 2013). In her research, Silverman (1979) informed her readers that there are not specific indicators that promote or deter intimacy, but there are indicators of intimate behaviors. She further pointed out that “each person in a relationship . . . has his own attitudes. . . . These attitudes are mutual subverbal messages and willingness to allow the other person to enter into his personal space; allowing a relationship to develop” (p. 16). Messaging is successful when trust and relationships are developed (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). A leader should aim to strengthen his/her ability to demonstrate intimate behaviors and disclose intimate information about him or herself to others. A combination of these attributes may increase trust from employees, which may result in their willingness to become vulnerable and interact with their colleagues.

**Interactivity**

Organizational conversations include leaders who exchange comments and questions with employees through open and fluid dialogue (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Two-way communication can be achieved through interactivity. Interactive organizations promote opportunities where leaders and their employees possess the
ability to exchange conversations at rapid speeds through face-to-face technologies. J. Brown and Hurley (2009) asserted that “conversational leadership involves understanding these and other social technologies, wisely choosing those appropriate for a given purpose, and integrating them in skillful architectures of networked inquiry and cascading action” (p. 5). By understanding interpersonal and perceived interactivity, adept leaders can value and incorporate conversational interactivity to advance the success of the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a).

**Interpersonal interactivity.** According to Wu (2000), through the advances of communication, humans have gained various platforms of communicating with each other. Wu added that humans actively participate in interactive communication through media technologies that give audience members control to determine how they interact with the sender. Social technologies such as e-mail, text messaging, internet, webcast, and so forth have united people’s minds, experiences, and perceptions. The impact of mass media interactivity has impacted the way in which interpersonal relationships are formed and maintained (Palmer, 1995).

As a result, the understanding of interpersonal interactivity has been explored by many scholars, beginning as early as the late 1980s. The reoccurring theme in these studies presents the notion that increased interpersonal interactivity of mass communication has a distinct, universal culture that differs from traditional face-to-face interpersonal communication (Ball-Rokeach & Reardon, 1988; Walther, 1996; Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988). Wu (2000) suggested that it is essential to approach interpersonal communication through mass media interactivity to leverage technology as a medium for
exchanging information and sustaining relationships among individuals, organizations, and communities.

**Perceived interactivity.** Pruitt (2002) discovered time/speed as elements of perceived interactivity, which has been defined as “how long it takes for a response from the interface after a user has completed a specific action” (p. 57). This phenomenon is relevant as the implication for increased interpersonal interactivity was mentioned earlier in the study. Scholars have investigated the perceptions of interactive users to develop a broad sense of norms and conditions associated with social technologies. According to Pruitt, researchers discovered that users’ perceptions during an interactive exchange are linked to nonverbal information and the speed of response—faster responses equal a more interactive perception. For example, an employee may be perceived to have a less interactive exchange with a supervisor who responds slowly to the employee’s e-mail inquiry. Yun’s (2007) findings about speedy interactive responses highlighted that the users’ perceptions can depend on their own needs when engaging in social technologies. This poses potential problems because it dismisses consideration toward situational obstacles that can delay an interactive response (Pruitt, 2012). Overall, the perceptions of interpersonal interactivity through social technologies may generate varied responses and opinions from different users. To ensure that members of the organization establish norms and practices that promote positive and productive interactivity through communication, adept leaders will establish inclusive environments that encourage stakeholder participation.
Inclusion

Communication in an inclusive organization is about establishing and maintaining a relationship with employees (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b) and the leader’s ability to model inclusivity with their employees with less concern for communication control (Boekhorst, 2015; Nichols, 2012). Leaders who create inclusive work environments promote employee engagement and invest in establishing a culture where ideas, vision, and purpose are shared. Inclusion is the process where leaders are involved in creating intimacy with their employees (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Leaders who use inclusive practices through conversation must be willing to provide leadership opportunities for employees to share stories of their lived experiences with the organization. By offering a platform for employees to speak openly about their daily encounters, leaders increase levels of inclusion by encouraging employee voice.

Employee voice. Competing 21st-century organizations recognize the value of employee voice. Employee voice is a proactive, discretionary behavior (Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) that individuals express upwardly in the form of challenging opinions, concerns, or ideas about work-related issues (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Employee voice motivates individuals to speak up from their desire to establish norms and customs that will support the growth and development of the organization (Sumanth, 2011). While some managers may lean toward resisting the risks for employee voice to override leadership authority, research indicates the inherent challenges associated with getting employees to speak their honest opinions since they have often been shut out of the inclusive practices (Detert, 2003; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Ryan & Oestreich, 1998; Sumanth, 2011).
Research has begun to explore how to encourage employee voice. Greek scholars Nikolaou, Vakola, and Bourantas (2008) discovered that individuals with personality traits: extraversion, openness, and agreeableness were more emotionally stable to express their voice to their supervisor. Other research identifies employees’ attitudes toward their job and supervisor as the primary factor to drive their decision to speak up (Farrell & Rushbult, 1992). Satisfied and loyal employees are commonly willing to express their opinions in an effort to sustain the culture of the organization. Exploring how leaders can encourage employees to express themselves for the advancement of the organization is relevant and instrumental for further research in organizational leadership (Sumanth, 2011). The benefit of employee voice promotes upward communication and disables organizational silence.

Organizational silence. Morrison and Milliken (2000) identified employee silence (ES) as a collective phenomenon in which employees keep back their ideas about potential organization issues. Employees who believe their ideas, concerns, and opinions do not hold value to a decision-making process are more likely to practice behaviors of employee silence. These behaviors displayed by multiple members in the organization may lead to organizational silence. Organizational silence is described as a conscious, intentional, and purposeful action in which employees withhold useful knowledge (Avan, Zorlu, & Baytok, 2016). Its origins are believed to be associated with fear, negative feedback, and implicit beliefs to be held by managers (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Piderit and Ashford (2003) ascertained that employees voicing their concerns have potential risks for their credibility in the organization.
Employees should be considered beyond their work contributions. Avan et al. (2016) described employees as the main source of “change, creativeness, learning and innovations which are essential for organizational success” (p. 283). From this perspective, employee empowerment is instrumental in moving the organization forward. Empowerment requires a desire to embrace uncertainty and trust within the people of the organization (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). Leaders must be deliberate in their approach to enhance employee feedback by establishing a culture where it’s embraced. Enhancing employee feedback, sharing knowledge, and making suggestions is an effective strategy that leaders should implement to gain favor and insight into employees’ experiences, ideas, and opinions (Lashley, 1995). A comprehensive understanding of the levels of inclusion may help leaders explore options to promote, engage, and implement employee voice.

**Levels of inclusion.** Mor Barak (2005) suggested that inclusion occurs within the workgroup, from the supervisor, from the organization, from higher management, and socially or informally. Workgroup inclusion is access to information. Access to information is cultivated through formal and informal relationships between employees (Cottrill, 2012). This occurs when employees share their collective ideas, skills, and contributions. Additionally, workgroup inclusion happens when recognition by peers is demonstrated. Cottrill (2012) informed her readers that employees feel included when they are known and respected.

Inclusion by the supervisor involves intimacy. The supervisor is expected to value the employees’ contributions; however, they should additionally play a more intimate role through mentorship (Cottrill, 2012). The strength of the
employee/supervisor relationship is dependent on the openness exchanged between the two parties. Inclusion may exist if there is and open relationship between the supervisor and employee, as well as the supervisor demonstrating an interest in the well-being of the employee (Hayes, 2002). The supervisor carries the responsibility of establishing or initiating these relationships. Additionally, employees who are included are invited to engage in formal and informal functions, both social and work-related (Mor Barak, 2005).

Inclusion by the organization and higher management requires access to decision-making processes. According to the Association of the Study of Higher Education (2007), inclusion allows individuals who are not traditionally involved in upper-level leadership have practice and access to the power and authority connected to higher-ranking positions. Cottrill (2012) suggested, “Employees who are included have access to opportunities traditionally offered only to employees who are members of dominant or privileged groups” (p. 11). Leveraging this level of access to all employees is critical to the growth of the organization. The process of inclusion should be strategically planned and intentionally demonstrated.

**Intentionality**

Northouse (2003) emphasized that leaders have a visionary responsibility in taking an abstract mission and delivering it to followers with well-thought-out and concrete initiatives. New organizational initiatives are best delivered through intentional conversations. For leaders, intentionality identifies a specific outcome for communication interaction by recognizing how one should or does appear to one’s audience and adapting one’s behavior to motivate others to pursue the desired goal.
(Campbell, 2009). Groysberg and Slind (2012a) described the objectives of conversational intent that organizational leaders should employ to motivate participants to engage in meaningful interpersonal dialogue about the organization’s strategic plan:

In organizational context, intentionality is the element that gives shape, focus, and direction to what otherwise might be scattered set of communication activities. It allows talk to segue into action, and it ensures that any such action will conform to a clear set of company objectives. . . . Leaders therefore must take steps to orient that flow of conversation to an agenda that supports the operational and competitive goals of their organization. The items on this agenda should address big questions that strike at the core of what drives a company: What business are we in? What challenges and opportunities do we confront in the marketplace? Where will our company be one year from now, five years from now, ten years from now? Exploring such an agenda with internal stakeholders is no less than critical than exploring it with any other stakeholder group. (p. 174)

**Concept of intentionality.** The concept of intentionality has been researched by many philosophers throughout the 20th century. Heidegger (1952/1962) suggested that by nature, humans are intentional beings and intentionality is a result of the human experience. Through this school of thought, intentionality in the physical world is developed in the conscious and subconscious thought processes of mankind. Another concept of intentionality offered by Forguson (1989) claimed that both desire and beliefs are required in order to act with intentionality. This perspective evolved into a three-way model that identifies desire, belief, and action as essential components of intentionality. In 1983, Searle extended the construct of the three-way model by defining intentionality
as “the conditions under which an intention is fulfilled or carried out” (p. 22). Searle offered a linguistic analysis suggesting that people must be able to communicate their intentions (Jones, 2013). Beyond action, Searle’s beliefs highlight the value of fulfilling intentionality through a series of multiple actions and strategic discourse. Lastly, Malle and Knobe’s (1997) research of intentionality focuses more on the behavior of people rather than a theoretical formula for understanding its makeup. A collection of empirical evidence led them to identify that interpersonal interactions was a significant indicator of intentionality (Jones, 2013). After the conclusion of three distinctive studies on intentionality, a concept model of intentionality was developed. The components of the model are “a desire for an outcome; beliefs about an action that leads to that outcome; an intention to perform the action; skill to perform the action; and awareness of fulfilling the intention while performing the action” (Malle & Knobe, 1997, p. 111). From this context, conversational leaders are those who demonstrate intentionality through purpose-driven conversations. Such leaders use intentionality to engage and interact with others by “cultivating a communicative space, inquire using powerful questions, engage with openness ad curiosity, and welcome uncertainty and not knowing in their everyday workplace interactions” (Nichols, 2012, p. 5).

**The Role of Nonprofit Executive Directors in Conversational Leadership**

Dym and Hutson (2005) contended that leadership within the nonprofit realm is an active and aware process involving interplay between the leader’s “skills, style, and values and those of the organization and the community in which the organization resides” (p. 68). Nonprofit leaders are assumed to have personal and philosophical alignment with the mission and vision of the organization, and according to Hesselbein
(2003), should model what they say they believe. This unique expectation of nonprofit executive leaders differs greatly from their for-profit counterparts in that they’re highly challenged to uphold moral and ethical standards. This perspective endorses H. Gardner’s (2007) commentary of the ethical mind that “considers the nature of work and the community in a larger way” (p. 52). Hesselbein (2003) further alluded to the fact that the position of the nonprofit leader should demonstrate an investment in his or her employees through action and communication. Through these strategic investments of human capital and other resources, nonprofit leaders will foster motivation and inspire their followers to serve with purpose and heart during these pivotal times in this world (Zumdahl, 2010).

Leaders operate in the lens of public speculation where their behaviors are visible and open for comment and question (Nelson, 2013). Nonprofit leaders are subject to display at board meetings, community forums, social media, and other public relation mediums. What they say and how they say it matters. Leaders receive solicited and unsolicited feedback and are accountable for accusations, even when problems are not directly related to them (Katsioloudes, 2002; Nelson, 2013). In these moments, their communication strategies are critical to integrating culture, reaching out to others to develop understanding, and being willfully open to do what it takes to resolve (Nelson, 2013). Thus, communication between organizational leaders and their members may encourage feedback to help strengthen the organization as well as inform nonprofit leaders how to better serve the community in which they serve (Nelson, 2013). Conversational leadership principles of intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality are essential leadership practices for nonprofit leaders to develop internal
and external leverage while cultivating a collective effort to reach the goals of the organization.

**The Role of Nonprofit Executive Directors**

Bass (1990) defined transformational leadership as leadership that goes beyond the focus to exchange between leaders and followers. The distinctive nature of nonprofit organizations greatly aligns with the characteristics of transformational leaders. According to Bass, transformational leadership characteristics include (a) charisma, (b) inspiration, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Although the transformational leadership approach is a great fit for nonprofit leaders, a specific leadership style for nonprofit executive directors has yet to be determined. Zumdahl (2010) suggested that due to the varying and drastic values, cultures, goals, and objectives of nonprofit organization, board members select different types of leaders to meet the needs of their organizations. Navigating through various external and internal roles, as well as adhering to the unique needs of the organization, has made it challenging for researchers to identify a universal model for nonprofit leaders.

In 2006, Schmid created a model to determine the correlation between the types of nonprofit organizations and the types of leadership. Figure 5 illustrates Schmid’s four quadrant leadership model. Each quadrant is used to describe the types of leadership and patterns of management for a specific situation. Schmid (2006) concluded, “The ideal situation is one in which the leader is able to adapt his or her behavior in the transition from one stage of the organization’s life cycle to another, consistent with the four quadrants” (p. 191). While it may be a useful tool for board members to consider when selecting organizational leaders, other researchers found challenges in Schmid’s work.
Critics of Schmid’s model argued that it is limited in validity and reliability and requires more research before deemed credible (Zumdahl, 2010). Overall, the study initiates a framework for nonprofit leadership to help leaders adapt their leadership style with the fluidity of the organization (Schmid, 2006).

![Schmid’s leadership style model for nonprofit leaders.](image)

*Figure 5. Schmid’s leadership style model for nonprofit leaders.*

Zumdahl (2010) highlighted the reinforcing idea that “leaders must both have a combination of a skill set that can be adapted to a variety of situations and some inherent characteristics and knowledge that gives them the ability and drive to be effective in their positions at the top of nonprofit organizations” (p. 38). This perspective suggests that nonprofit leaders align with the characteristics of situational leadership. As defined earlier, situational leaders align certain leadership styles to specific circumstances. A mark of an effective leader is his or her ability to discern and adapt to varying levels of need (Uzonwanne, 2007). Edwards and Yankey (2006) claimed that leaders must deal with complexities in society that require a diverse set of management skills. According to the research, the roles of nonprofit leaders are broken into eight specific skills. Figure
6 illustrates the various roles of the nonprofit leader. The following are Edwards and Yankey’s eight skills of management:

1. Innovator—creative thinker and manages change effectively
2. Broker—negotiates well with others and establishes coalitions
3. Facilitator—oversees group interactions
4. Mentor—understands the potential of individuals and coaches them to their success
5. Coordinator—uses information to strategically plan and organize
6. Monitor—evaluates and manages operational tasks
7. Producer—delegating others
8. Director—sets up structure and context (Zumdahl, 2010).


Being a nonprofit leader means more than just having good leadership skills; one must also possess effective management skills (Stid & Bradach, 2009). Management skills differ greatly from leadership style. Additionally, the ethical practices and personality traits of a nonprofit leader must also be greatly taken into consideration. The
collective use of this knowledge will inevitably lead to effective use of leadership style among nonprofit leaders and executives in order to maintain accountability, remain competitive, and leverage funders to support the mission and vision of the organization (Uzonwanne, 2007).

Effective Conversations With External and Internal Members

External members. One of the most influential relationships for a nonprofit executive leader to maintain is one with the organization’s board members. According to Zumdahl (2010), maintaining these relationship entail facilitating interactions in board relationships, demonstrating respect toward board members, collaborating with board members to develop innovative solutions for the organization, motivating board productivity, and sharing information with members of the board. It is key for the nonprofit leader to possess skills that establish and sustain positive interpersonal relationships with external stakeholders. Through conversational leadership practices, nonprofit leaders can engage with members of the board who promote high levels of intimacy and inclusion from stakeholders at every level. J. Brown and Hurley (2009) informed their readers that “developing conversational leadership and fostering process intelligence at every level of the system may be one of the most productive investments that organizations can make” (p. 6). These practices must be intentional and will require consistency and direction from the nonprofit leader.

Internal members. Leading through conversation requires conversational design. Aakhus (2007) viewed communication design as an invitation to use preferred forms of communication to address challenges and problems. As nonprofit leaders aim to build organizational cohesion, its critical to design a practice that reinforces the principles of
conversational leadership. Barge’s (2014) conversational design is separated into two components: (a) individual messages through social technologies and (b) ongoing flows of conversations. Given the nature that conversations may emerge without notice, the intent of the conversational design is to connect people and maintain uniformity (Barge, 2014). Groysberg and Slind (2012b) maintained, “The conversation that unfolds within a company should reflect a shared agenda that aligns with the company’s strategic objectives” (p. 83). This level of design will inevitably lead to the development of conversational capacity. C. Weber (2013) defined conversational capacity as the ability to have balanced, transparent dialogue about difficult topics during challenging times. Leaders who develop these internal conversational structures within the organization, will create teams with high levels of conversational capacity. Effective conversational practices for nonprofit executives will involve intentional focus on the flow communication for single conversational situations but will also include a design for members within the organization to use for conversational situations over time (Barge, 2014).

**Gaps in the Research**

**Long-Term Impact of Conversational Leadership**

The results of limited research in conversational leadership practices have led to ambiguous implications from researchers in the field of study. Nichols (2012) explained that the concept of conversational leadership is still considered a new research topic of interest. She further suggested that an increased awareness and interest in conversational practices may generate more research attraction that increases and contributes to the organizational outcomes of this phenomenon. According to Gambetti and Biraghi
(2015), conversational leadership implies the emergence of the communication leader; one who relies on human connectivity to address the concerns of others. In Glaser’s (2014), *Conversation Intelligence*, she too concludes that conversational practices lead to human connectivity by causing one to “see differently, listen differently, and to process what we are perceiving differently” (p. 199). J. Brown and Hurley (2009) believed that the heart of conversational leadership is using conversation as the foundational process for creating change. They expressed their belief that individual and collective power is maximized through conversations that align people’s thinking. The scholarly journey of each researcher has unveiled multiple interpretations on the value of this work. The uncharted dynamics and lack of consistency in the research makes it difficult to substantiate its long-term impact on nonprofit organizations.

**Conversational Patterns of Nonprofit Executive Directors**

Clark (2014) explained that there are limited research studies about leadership competencies for nonprofit leaders. The few studies that attempt to address these competencies have gaps in research that measure the conversational patterns of nonprofit leaders. According to Clark, the four relevant topics related to nonprofit leaders are capacity building, planning, intergenerational difference, and diversity. Zelman (2014) ascertained understanding the size, success, status of the nonprofit organization to help executive leaders develop an internal communication plan for the organization. Her research conclusion suggests that further research examine the role communication plays within nonprofit organizations. The intent of this recommendation was to help board members determine the communication skill sets executive nonprofit leaders should possess prior to making a positional offer (Zelman, 2014).
Summary

Conversational leaders understand the fundamental value of cultivating a workspace that uses conversation to develop connections, bridge gaps, and establish shared practices. C. Weber (2013) identified leaders who take the road less traveled as those who are willing to “counter arrogance with humility, counter certainty with curiosity, counter caution with candor, and counter timidity with courage” (p. 204). With limited research on nonprofit leadership competencies, nonprofit executive directors have the freedom to embrace and explore conversational leadership practice without fear of failure. While the elements of conversational leadership have been clearly defined by Groysberg and Slind (2012a, 2012b), more information is needed to determine how nonprofit executive directors may use conversational practices to develop exemplary nonprofit organizations. Chapter III contains an explanation of the research design and the methodology of the study, including the study population and sampling procedures for data gathering and analysis.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used to compete this study. First, is a review of the study’s purpose statement and research questions. A detailed description of the qualitative research design used to collect data is provided in this section. Second, this chapter describes the population, sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis for this study. Lastly, this chapter describes the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive summary of the information examined in this chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead their organization through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality).

Research Questions

Central Question

What are the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead their organization through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality)?

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of interactivity?

3. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of inclusion?

4. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of intentionality?

**Research Design**

The thematic research team selected the qualitative research design for this study. Roberts (2010) identified qualitative research as a philosophical approach in which researchers seek a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena they are investigating. Qualitative research was defined by Ravid (2011) as “research that seeks to understand social and educational phenomena” (p. 5). According to Patton (2015), qualitative studies examine systemic functions and the consequences of system dynamics to provide context. He further referred to context as “what’s going on around the people, groups, organizations, communities, or systems of interest” (Patton, 2015, p. 9). This study focused on individual interviews with 10 exemplary nonprofit executive directors to add to this researcher’s understanding of their conversational leadership practices of incorporating the variables of intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality to create meaning for their organizations. The small sample size provided “valuable and information-rich” data (Patton, 2015, p. 311). The data collected were synthesized and coded to establish themes.

A team of fellow researchers reviewed several qualitative methods and determined that a phenomenological method was most appropriate for this thematic
study. The goal for the thematic research team was to understand “how individuals make sense out of a particular experience or situation” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 24) across various fields or professions. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described, “The typical data collection technique for phenomenology is the personal in-depth, unstructured interview” (p. 346). This method was selected to investigate the experiences, perceptions, and decisions of the participants to help identify the patterns of conversational leadership practitioners. Oral interviews of exemplary nonprofit executive directors were audio recorded and transcribed.

The qualitative phenomenological method was decided by a group of 12 thematic researchers to study conversational leadership practices based on four variables: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Figure 7 illustrates how the thematic team developed the research design process. The researchers used the same methodology across a diversified group of professions and organizations within the following industries: K-12 public education, healthcare organizations, nonprofit organizations, police departments, city councils, and public universities. Each researcher interviewed 10 exemplary leaders in his or her specific research field. The use of a common research design for the thematic research team was to gather broad patterns of conversational leadership practices to establish “a narrative and coherent story in which themes are described and connected” (Vaismoradi, Jasper, Bondas, & Turunen, 2014, p. 107).
Figure 7. Graphical representation of thematic research design process.

Population

In Carol M. Roberts’s (2010) *The Dissertation Journey*, the population is referenced as the researcher’s group of interest. The population for this study was nonprofit executive directors in the state of California. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) identified a population for scholarly research as “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize results of the research” (p. 129). According to Tax Exempt World (n.d.), an information database for charities and nonprofit organizations, the state of California has a reported number of 252,994 nonprofit agencies. The California Association of Nonprofits is a statewide organization that brings nonprofits together for community advocacy and policy reform. Nearly 10,000 nonprofits are members of CalNonprofits and receive resources and trainings through their membership. Although the purpose of these nonprofits may vary, many are traditionally set up to reach the goals of their mission under the direct leadership of the executive director.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) defined the target population as “a group of individuals [or a group of organizations] with some common defining characteristics that the researcher can identify and study” (p. 142). The target population selected for this
study was exemplary nonprofit executive directors who lead nonprofit organizations in Southern California. According to the Southern California’s Nonprofit Sector Report, there are over 13,000 nonprofit executive leaders in the Southern California region (Costello & Manzo, 2005). The survey population was restricted to exemplary nonprofit executive directors in Los Angeles County. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined the survey population as “the list of elements from which the sample is actually selected” (p. 129). Although other exemplary nonprofit executive leaders met these criteria, only 10 in Los Angeles County were selected as the sample frame. The outcomes from this study may be recognized by nonprofit executive directors in California that exhibit exemplary leadership characteristics. This study considered an exemplary executive nonprofit leader as one who meets at least four of the following criteria:

1. evidence of successful relationships with followers;
2. evidence of leading a successful organization;
3. a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession;
4. articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
5. recognition by his or her peers; or
6. membership in professional associations in his or her field.

**Sample**

Wiersma and Jurs (2009) defined a sample as “a subset of the population the researcher intends to generalize the results” (p. 325). This study’s sample was produced from the targeted population and was criteria based. The researcher used nonprobability and purposeful sampling for this study.
Nonprobability sampling does not include random selection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher in this study used this method to easily access participants who had certain characteristics. Since nonprobability samples cannot depend on the probability theory, this study did not aim to use the results of the research to establish generalizations for the entire population (Explorable, 2009; Trochim, 2006). Time, budget, and workforce constraints supported the researcher’s decision to select nonprobability sampling as the most beneficial method of sampling for this study. More specifically, the type of nonprobability sampling selected for this study is purposeful sampling.

Purposeful sampling is often used to select participants with similar qualities (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Purposeful sampling was selected as the method of sampling to support the criteria for exemplary leaders. According to Yin (1994), purposeful sampling is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). Through purposeful snowball sampling, the researcher leveraged access to select specific participants with the experience of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2003).

According to Wiersma and Jurs (2009), “Snowball sampling is the process by which individuals initially selected suggest the names of others who might be appropriate for the sample” (p. 345). Participants were referred by the initial group of participants as well as from recommendations received by the researcher’s professional network. According to Patten (2012), this technique requires trust from the participants in order for them to generate additional prospective participants. The intended outcome for
purposeful snowball sampling was to help the researcher develop a sample size of 10 research subjects who met the criteria in a timely manner. The advantage of using purposeful snowball sampling was that it allowed the researcher to focus her/his time and attention on collecting information rich data (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The selection process is illustrated in Figure 8.

![Figure 8. Graphical representation of sample selection.](image)

**Instrument**

The researcher for this study used a set of predetermined, open-ended questions as a tool to help guide each interview. Patton (2015) explained that the purpose of
qualitative interviewing is to gain the lived experience of others with the presumption they hold meaningful and concrete knowledge of a particular phenomenon. According to Patten (2012), “Qualitative researchers gather data (such as responses to open-ended interview questions) that must be analyzed through the use of informed judgement to identify major and minor themes expressed by the participants” (p. 9). The thematic researchers, in conjunction with faculty, worked collaboratively to develop an interview protocol for qualitative interviews with nonprofit executive directors (see Appendix A). The intent of this instrumentation method was to conduct in-depth interviews of exemplary nonprofit leaders. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “In-depth interviews use open-response questions to obtain data on participants’ meanings—how individuals conceive of their world and how the explain or make sense of the important events in their lives” (p. 355).

Validity

The validity of the study’s instrument is a key component of determining the accuracy of the study. According to Patten (2012), content validity requires the researcher to assess the proficiency of the instrument. The thematic research team, in conjunction with faculty, developed a set a semi-structured research questions for qualitative interviews. Semistructured questions are open-ended questions that allow for individual responses with a focused intent (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). After the questions were vetted and agreed upon, each member of the thematic team conducted a pilot test to check for bias and to develop a standard protocol for interviewing participants during their individual studies.
Content Validity

Creswell (2003) stated, “Researchers evaluate content validity by examining the plan used in constructing the instrument and they examine the information about the objectives and level of difficulty of the questions” (p. 164). The team of thematic researchers worked collaboratively to develop a qualitative research instrument that could be used across disciplines to examine conversational practices of exemplary leaders of various professions. Content validity is when a researcher must depend upon the appropriate construction of the instruments to ensure that the elements of the construct are measuring the research questions adequately (Patton, 2015). A major significance of this thematic research study is the implementation of a shared research instrument to support validity of content for each researcher’s individual study.

Criterion Validity

A field-test was conducted by all researchers of the thematic team to establish fidelity for selecting participants and establishing an uniformed interviewing protocol for each study. Criterion-related validity “determines whether the scores from an instrument are a good predictor of some outcome they are expected to predict” (Creswell, 2003, p. 165). The researchers partnered with Brandman faculty to determine six criterion of exemplary leadership. The criterion was used a guide to select qualified leaders to participate in each individual research study.

Reliability

Patten (2012) claimed, “A test is said to be reliable if it yields consistent results” (p. 73). Additionally, Creswell (2003) asserted, “Reliability means that scores from an instrument are stable and consistent” (p. 162). By using a qualitative semistructured
interview guide developed by 12 thematic researchers, the researcher for this study was able to reliably gather data from exemplary nonprofit executive directors selected for this study. A thorough review of candid responses given by the participants of each of the 12 student interviews displayed consistency in their responses. This process supports Patton’s (2015) position that qualitative inquiry requires careful reflection of the research investigator to report potential biases and error. Each interviewer from the thematic research team generated similar responses proving the reliability of the instrument to reveal conversational leadership practices of exemplary leaders.

**Field Test**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) asserted, “The pilot test provides a means of assessing the length of the interview and will give the researcher some idea of the ease with which the data can be determined” (p. 206). Pilot interviews were observed and evaluated by a qualified expert observer. An expert observer is defined as someone who has obtained a Doctorate of Education through completion a qualitative research study via interview questions as instrumentation. At the conclusion of each pilot interview, the observer completed and provided an evaluation to the researcher (Appendix B). After each researcher gathered feedback data from his or her expert observer, a team meeting between researchers and faculty was scheduled to make adjustments and to determine the final interview questions for the thematic study team (Appendix A). The researcher used the thematic team’s final interview protocol and interview question guide to conduct face-to-face interviews of exemplary nonprofit executive directors. During the interview, the researcher recorded notes of the participants’ responses as well as digitally recorded the interview in its entirety after obtaining consent from the participant. All interviews
were transcribed through a professional agency. The researcher reviewed the data and
developed themes using the NVivo (Version 10) qualitative data analysis system.

**Data Collection**

Yin (1994) noted the importance of obtaining institutional review board approval
prior to commencing research to assure participants of their confidentiality, safety, and
full knowledge of the research. The South Los Angeles Transit Empowerment Zone
(Slate-Z) directory was used to ascertain the names and terms of current community
nonprofit executive directors in Southern California. A matrix was created for potential
participants and then these identified participants were sent an e-mail with a request for
their participation in the study. Patton (2015) noted that this snowball sampling
technique “generates a chain of interviewees based on people who know people who
know people who would be good sources given the focus of inquiry” (p. 298). The
researcher contacted each candidate by telephone to identify their his or her leadership
role and years of service within his or her organization. Those who met the criteria
established to determine exemplary leaders received a formal invitation to participate in
the research study. Each participant who agreed to participate in the study received a
confirmation e-mail of their interview time, location, a copy of the following:
(a) Brandman University Bill of Rights (Appendix C), (b) Institutional Review Board
(IRB) informed consent (Appendix D), and (c) a request to complete the form before the
interview. IRB protocols were thoroughly followed to ensure confidentiality and
protection of each participant.
Interviews

Patton (2015) claimed that interviews give researchers the opportunity to learn about what is in someone else’s mind by entering into their personal perspectives. Qualitative data were collected through face-to-face semistructured interviews. The interviews were conducted at the participants’ professional worksites and the duration for each interview was 60 minutes. Audio recordings were gathered using the interview protocol established by the thematic research team. After each interview, the audio recordings were immediately transcribed and then were submitted to the NVivo (Version 10) database to initiate the process of establishing themes. Figure 9 illustrates the interview protocol data collection process.

![Interview protocol process](image)

**Figure 9.** Interview protocol process.

Observations

The researcher for this study included observation notes of nonverbal communication from each face-to-face interview. Patton (2015) asserted, “Observers must learn the language of participants in the setting or program they are observing to faithfully represent participants in their own terms and be true to their worldview” (p. 373). Prior to each interview, the researcher informed the participant of the purpose
of the researcher’s notebook and its contribution to the overall study. The researcher recorded objective notes while observing the behaviors and gestures of the participant during his or her interview responses. Observation notes were submitted to the NVivo (Version 10) database to initiate the process of establishing themes.

**Artifacts**

According to Patton (2015), fieldwork requires the researcher to explore opportunities to gather artifacts and documentation. Sangi (2009) asserted, “If it isn’t documented, it didn’t happen” (Slide 1). A significant purpose for gathering artifacts is to support claims made by the participant. The researcher for this study negotiated with each participant to submit artifacts or documentation to support their interview responses. Participants were provided a sample list of relatable artifacts such as meeting agendas, e-mail correspondence, flyers, policy revisions, meeting notes, and so forth. Participants were not required to provide the researcher with artifacts and were strongly encouraged to omit private information from the documentation. Artifacts were submitted to the NVivo (Version 10) database to initiate the process of establishing themes.

**Data Analysis**

In qualitative analysis, processes are needed to reduce, transform, and interpret the large amount of data collected (Roberts, 2010). The researcher analyzed data that were developed from a collection of qualitative interviews and observation notes during face-to-face interviews at the participants’ professional worksites. The data were reviewed to explore the findings of the study.
Interview Data Analysis

After each interview, audio recordings were immediately transcribed by an outside professional agency. Then the researcher developed themes and patterns based on the interviewees’ transcripts. The researcher reviewed and coded the raw data by nodes according to the four domains of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. During this process, smaller patterns evolved and were coded into child nodes. Additionally, the researcher coded interview observation notes by each domain. These notes consisted of nonverbal behaviors observed by the researchers during the face-to-face interview. The NVivo (Version 10) database was used as the instrument for coding data. The database supports the researcher’s collection and organization of data to track frequency and develop themes.

Interrater Reliability

In effort to support the interrater reliability of the researcher’s coding process, another researcher from the thematic research team completed a second analysis of the data to develop his/her own codes according to the four domains of conversational leadership. Patton (2015) noted that interrater reliability in qualitative research allows multiple individuals analyzing the same data to “discuss what they see in the data, share insights, and consider what emerges from their different perspectives” (p. 667). Both data sets were compared to effectively establish the final codes for themes for this study.

Limitations

The purpose of this section is to identify the barriers that may have impacted the outcomes of this study. Roberts (2010) defined limitations as “particular features of your study that you know may negatively affect the results or your ability to generalize”
The limitations of this study include sample size, geography, sampling technique, and researcher as the instrument.

**Sample Size**

Sample size directly affects the ability of the researcher to examine the findings at robust confidence levels (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The sample size of this study was limited to lived experiences and personal perspectives of 10 nonprofit executive directors. The data collected from the participants were used to make a generalization of members within the same population.

**Geography**

This study examined exemplary nonprofit executive directors in Southern California. The inability to engage participants in other regions was limited to time, resources, and accessibility. The location for this study was determined by the researcher’s ability to conduct face-to-face interviews with participants in a timely manner.

**Sampling Technique**

The sampling technique for this study was based on criterion sampling. Participants of this study met four of six criteria established by the thematic research team and Brandman faculty advisors. Due to limited professional associations and recognition platforms for small nonprofit organizations, the initial screening process eliminated participation from candidates who may have lived through conversational leadership practices but did not meet the criterion.
**Researcher as Instrument**

Researcher bias and personal assumption may critically influence the research study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained,

Experimenter effects (bias) refer to both deliberate and unintentional influences that the research has on the subjects. This may be reflected in differential treatment of subjects, such as using different voice tone, being more reassuring to one individual, reinforcing different behaviors, [or] displaying different attitudes. (p. 113)

The interview protocol and interrater reliability were implemented to reduce the impact of the researcher bias in this study.

**Summary**

A phenomenological research study was designed to describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012a, 2012b) four elements of conversational leadership. Criterion sampling was used to identify eligible participants for the study. This qualitative study used face-to-face interviews to collect testimonials of those who have lived through the phenomenon researched. Semistructured interviewed questions were designed to align with the research subquestions. A concise interview protocol was followed to ensure validity and reliability of the instrumentation used for this study. Upon approval of Brandman University Institutional Review Board and consent from each participant, interviews were conducted and audio recordings were transcribed for data collection. Data analysis gathered from this research study contributed to the
understanding of exemplary leadership behaviors for leading through conversations to achieve organizational success by creating safe and productive work environments.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This phenomenological study identified and described the behaviors exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead through conversations using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012a, 2012b) four elements of conversational leadership. The chapter summarizes the data collected from 10 face-to-face interviews with nonprofit executive directors. The chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study, research questions, and methodology. Next, the chapter includes tables illustrating the themes and patterns collected and analyzed for each interview. Chapter IV concludes with a summary analysis of the findings from all 10 interviews.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality).

Research Questions

Central Question

What are the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality)?

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead through the conversational elements of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead through the conversational elements of interactivity?

3. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead through the conversational elements of inclusion?

4. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead through the conversational elements of intentionality?

Population

The population for this study was 260,556 reported nonprofit agencies in California (Tax Exempt World, n.d.). The population was reduced from all 260,556 nonprofit agencies in the state of California specifically to Southern California nonprofit agencies in Los Angeles County. Los Angeles County is home to 66,889 nonprofit agencies and makes up half of the nonprofit sector in its region. Los Angeles County consists of 88 cities and covers 4,084 square miles. The major population centers in Los Angeles County are Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley, Santa Clarita Valley, Pomona Valley, Crescenta Valley, and Antelope Valley. From these data, the target population was 66,889 nonprofit executive directors in Los Angeles County.

Sample

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggested that the general rule for sample participants in a qualitative study is to gather as many subjects as needed to establish credibility. They further ascertained that phenomenological studies typically have fewer sample participants than other research studies in order to produce valuable theoretical concepts. For this study, sample criteria for identifying exemplary leaders were
developed by 12 thematic team researchers. Prospective participants were required to possess four of the following six characteristics:

1. evidence of successful relationships with followers;
2. evidence of leading a successful organization;
3. a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession;
4. articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
5. recognition from his or her peers;
6. membership in professional associations in his or her field.

In an effort to reduce the target population of 66,889 to a sample size of 10, the researcher solicited nonprofit executive directors in the South Los Angeles Transit Empowerment Zone (Slate-Z) coalition. Interested participants informed the researcher of their interest to participate by responding via e-mail. Participants from the initial group also referred prospective research participants from their professional contacts. The researcher contacted each prospective participant by telephone to identify his or her current leadership role and years of service within his or her organization. Those who met the criteria established to determine exemplary leaders received a formal invitation to participate in the research study. Each participant who agreed to participate in the study received a confirmation e-mail of his or her interview time, location, and a copy of the following documents:

1. Brandman University Bill of Rights,
2. Institutional Review Board (IRB) informed consent, and
3. A request to complete the consent form before the interview.
Methodology and Data Collection Procedures

According to Wiersma and Jurs (2009), the goal of phenomenology is to attempt to understand the perspectives of the person experiencing the phenomenon. The research method used for this study was a qualitative, phenomenological study of exemplary nonprofit executive directors who lead through conversational elements of intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. The implementation of personal interviews was the primary source of data collection with secondary sources of artifacts and observations.

Participants completed separate interviews that utilized a set of predetermined, open-ended questions to gather the individual’s perceptions of their conversational leadership practices. The researcher asked additional probing questions to gather more information as needed. The interview was guided through the use of the interview protocol (Appendix A) developed by the peer researchers. A field test of the interview protocol was first conducted by the researcher and observed by an expert researcher to determine quality interview procedures. A total of 10 exemplary nonprofit executive directors completed the personal interviews. Two of the 10 interviews were face-to-face, eight were phone interviews, and one interview was conducted through Adobe Connect. All 10 interviews ranged between 30 and 60 minutes with an average duration of 37 minutes.

Other multimethod strategies included observations and artifacts. This allowed the researcher to triangulate data between in-depth interviews, observations, and artifacts. For this study, 12 artifacts were collected and two observations were conducted. The
artifacts included 10 mission statements, a strategic plan, and an annual report. One on-site observation and one video observation was conducted.

**Interview Process and Procedures**

Data collection was initiated by e-mailing 15 nonprofit executive directors from the Slate-Z coalition. These candidates were selected from the DoGoodLA.org website, an online directory of nonprofits in Los Angeles. The first 10 who responded were contacted by phone for a prescreening discussion to determine if they met the criteria of the exemplary leader as listed above. Those who met the criteria were e-mailed the invitation letter, informed consent, Research Participant’s Bill of Rights, and interview questions. The participants were scheduled a personal interview either personally or through their executive assistant. Prior to each interview, the participants were asked to review the documents (informed consent, Research Participant’s Bill of Rights, and interview questions). The participants submitted a signed informed consent before the recorded interviews began. Demographic questions were asked and recorded in the researcher’s observation journal. The scripted interview protocol was conducted and all answers were digitally recorded and later transcribed. After the interview, participants were asked for artifact samples and for opportunities where the researcher could observe them interact with their followers.

**Demographic Data**

A total of 10 exemplary nonprofit executive directors were selected for the study. All nonprofit executive directors in this study led nonprofit agencies in the city of Los Angeles. Each study participant was assigned a number in order to maintain confidentiality. Further, the names of their organizations were not used in the study.
Seventy percent of the study participants were male. The average age range of the study participants was 40–50 years old. The longest years of service in the profession was 35 years. Tables 1 and 2 highlight the demographic data of each participant. All study participants exceeded the minimum requirements of the thematic research team’s definition of exemplary leader, which is highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1

Exemplary Traits of Nonprofit Executive Directors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study participant</th>
<th>Minimum of 5 years in the profession</th>
<th>Successful relationships w/ followers</th>
<th>Leading successful organizations</th>
<th>Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings</th>
<th>Recognition by peers</th>
<th>Membership in professional association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Demographics for Nonprofit Executive Directors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Years in the profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>15–20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>10–15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>25–30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>15–20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>20–25 years</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>30-40</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>10–15 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Presentation and Analysis

The findings outlined in this chapter were obtained from content generated by the study participants. As highlighted in the interview sessions, the selected exemplary nonprofit executive directors shared their lived experiences as related to the four elements of conversational leadership.

Data Analysis

The goal of qualitative research is to make sense of the data by discovering patterns and by examining the data in as many ways as possible (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Interview transcripts, artifacts, and observation notes were uploaded to NVivo 11, a web-based software program, to assist with aggregating the data. The coding produced patterns related to the four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality). Once the coding process was complete, themes for each element were identified and frequencies were collected to determine the relevance of each theme.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), themes relate to the conceptual framework of the research. The coding process allowed the researcher to understand the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012a, 2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

Intercoder Reliability

For the purposes of this thematic study, an intercoder agreement with a peer researcher was established to determine accuracy of the themes identified from the data collection. The purpose of the agreement was to discover the extent to which two or
more researchers consistently rate their observations of the research data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Similar consistencies and patterns identified between both researchers were used to develop variables and related codes. Ten percent of the coding from this study was analyzed by a peer researcher. The peer researcher independently coded frequencies from one of the interviews, with a 90% agreement, indicating reliable coding. The researchers used the NVivo (Version 11) as the instrument to document and code their findings.

**Research Question and Subquestion Results**

The thematic research team, in design of the study’s purpose and research questions, created an interview protocol containing 12 questions. The coding of all data sources resulted in the development of 12 themes and 426 frequencies related to the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Each element produced three major themes. Figure 10 highlights the breakdown of the frequency and percentage count that emerged from each element of conversational leadership.

![Frequency and Percentage in Each Element](image)

*Figure 10. Frequency and percentage in each element.*
leadership. Intentionality had the highest frequency count of 120, which accounted for 28% of the data. Interactivity had a frequency count of 119, which accounted for 27% of the data. Next, intimacy had a frequency count of 100, which accounted for 23% of the data. The lowest element was inclusion with a frequency count of 77, which accounted for 18% of the data.

**Intimacy**

The peer research team defined intimacy as the closeness, trust, and familiarity created between people through shared experiences, meaningful exchanges, and shared knowledge (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Schwarz, 2011). The results from the coding process identified three themes related to the conversational element of intimacy. The element was referenced 100 times by the 10 study participants, which represents 23% of the data. Table 3 illustrates the three themes that emerged from the element intimacy.

Table 3

*Intimacy Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Artifact sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing trust in work relationships</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading by example</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing personal stories to establish relevancy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Sources include transcribed interviews, observations, and artifacts.

**Establishing trust in work relationships.** This theme was referenced 43 times in 11 sources and represented 43% of the information related to the element of intimacy. This theme produced the highest frequency count for the element of intimacy. Leaders
must learn how to be givers of trust before conversational intimacy can be established (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a).

Ninety percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from one artifact and during one observation. From providing one-on-one attention to staff members to establishing lines of similarity, each of the nine nonprofit executive directors shared common practices of establishing trust in work relationships. They each articulated the significance of including all stakeholders in this process, starting with leadership. One nonprofit executive director shared that he/she establishes trust in work relationships through vulnerability:

Predictability trust, which is what most of us operate off of, which is like I can predict how you're going to hate this because of our experience together. I know what you really mean now because you have five years, six years, seven years working together. It’s a trust based on time and work projects. That's good, but not everybody has all the time for it and it’s not really helpful in short terms. So, we've been moving towards this notion of vulnerability-based trust, which is moving away from allowing the amount of work and projects to define our relationship, but to be willing to talk about your mistakes, your weaknesses, be apologetic when you make a mistake. That’s the general framework that we try to operate off of here because we just don't have the luxury of waiting for five, six, seven years.

Another nonprofit executive director expressed that one of his/her strategies for establishing trust in work relationships is through his/her ability to lead with love. Since the nonprofit sector focuses on supporting the needs of the community, this nonprofit
executive director believed that demonstrating love was the foundational element to leadership. During a coaching session with one of his/her managers, this nonprofit executive director expressed, “You need to be a manager [who] leads through love because this work is about loving people and believing that they have the abilities and the solutions to solve the problems in their community.”

A third nonprofit executive director communicated his/her efforts in demonstrating love in order to build trust:

I think that first and foremost I show up as myself with my strengths, and areas—or opportunities for development, transparently open to people. So, I try to be authentic with everybody I work with and value them for what they bring, and contribute and invest, and having a very authentic transparent relationship, and set that as the touchstone for the way I work with people, but also for the culture of the organization.

One nonprofit executive director highlighted in his/her strategic plan artifact that one of the goals for his/her nonprofit agency was to grow, retain, and diversify its volunteer base through providing individual attention as a means to establish trust. During an observation, one nonprofit executive director exhibited trusting work relationships through personal greetings, high fives, hugs, and by acknowledging all staff members by first name when entering their work space.

**Leading by example.** This theme was referenced 24 times in 11 sources and represented 24% of the information related to the element of intimacy. This theme produced the lowest frequency count for the element of intimacy. Leading by example, as related to the element of intimacy, focuses on the leader’s ability to deliver
transparency through communication. The leader’s role is to find the most effective method to clearly and concisely communicate his/her intentions (Langdon, 2012).

One hundred percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from one observation. All of the study participants shared that leading by example was an essential method for modeling intimate conversations. The participants shared that opportunities of leading by example may occur during annual staff retreats, weekly meetings, personal conversations, and informal conversations such as “water-cooler” discussions. One nonprofit executive director explained his/her practice for modeling intimate conversations:

I model sort of those behaviors as a leader for my team and I think it helps in the type of structure we’ve created here at the organization, which is to have a strong leadership team that I can work very closely with to help ensure that this communication or conversation models are being sort of molded and supported from the top to the rest of the team as well. I think that’s been effective and being able to have more intimate conversations with directors and then being able to help each other support our teams by modeling and ensuring the norms we’ve established as an organization sticks with our culture and with certain centers.

Another nonprofit executive director shared that listening attentively to others is a strategy he/she practices to lead by example. Hearing from employees and openly talking about those matters will lead to authenticity (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). During the organization’s weekly calibration meetings, he/she expressed,

I’ll drop in for a few minutes to see if there’s anything specifically that I can be helpful with or that I need to be aware of, and it gives those folks direct access to
me. And it’s not infrequent that they may share some concern, or frustration, or sometimes even a concern about whether they’ve understood a message from me properly or from management properly. And it’s a great opportunity to listen, really hear them, and either respond in the moment or let them know that I’m going to take it under consideration and come back with a response. And again, of course the measure I think of the value of the relationship is, Do we hold ourselves accountable? When if I say that I'm going to take that into consideration and do something about it, then I need to do that because otherwise that capital, that credibility can easily be diminished. So, I do very regularly have opportunities to listen to my staff and I think that’s a big part of my job.

A third nonprofit director expressed his/her strategy for leading by example in the following way:

As a leader, demonstrating alertness and responsiveness and awareness, I think that’s how, over time, trust is built among the team members because we’re showing and the leadership is showing that we’re all in this together and we have so much at stake and we demonstrate that and along the way. We care about everyone’s growth and success and those are the key components in the way the drive is supposed to work that has built trust over time.

In an observation, one nonprofit executive director demonstrated leading by example in a YouTube promotional video that highlighted the mission of the organization. In the video, this leader was seen communicating intimately with staff members to prepare for a major event. During this collaborative team effort, the nonprofit executive director demonstrated leading by example by attentively listening to team members.
Sharing personal stories to establish relevancy. This theme was referenced 33 times in 11 sources and represented 33% of the information related to the element of intimacy. This theme produced the second highest frequency count for the element of intimacy. Jourard (1964) claimed that self-disclosure is the process of letting another person know one’s thoughts, feelings, and wants and is the most direct way that an individual can reveal him/herself to another person.

One hundred percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from one artifact. All study participants shared a time when they shared a personal story to inform the staff of their reason for doing nonprofit work. Additionally, they all shared how communicating personal stories was significant to building common connections with their staff. One nonprofit executive director described sharing his/her personal story as an opportunity to connect everyone to the mission of the organization:

I think for me being able to share an honest story about growing up, and even though I’m in a position of leadership for an organization that focuses on writing and literacy and education, I didn’t start off in a place where that was where I thought I’d end up. For me, the drive has been really to improve myself and to help maybe inspire young people to see that. They have time to figure themselves out and we shouldn’t ever label kids in any way. Showing those kinds of intimate details about my own upbringing and growth is really where I’ve been focused really. It not only helps me connect with my staff but I think it really helps them know that I’m here in fact when you are working in a nonprofit you are not here for the paycheck; you are here to help with the mission. I do think that when you
are honest about your own circumstances and where you come from, it really connects inversely to your team and to others.

Another nonprofit executive director shared a personal story to demonstrate vulnerability in an effort to have staff members reflect on his/her own individual struggles. In his/her recollection of the process, he/she expressed,

A story, I think to me, helps to not only be very authentic about what are some of the challenges that I have as a leader, but people do see that I’m sharing intimate things that I struggled with an ongoing basis, and part of that conversation with the staff was to also have them think, back up, about what are the things that impact their work ethic and performance.

One goal of a strategic plan artifact is to focus on telling stories that market and brand an awareness of the organization. In this instance, the leader is facilitating a culture of sharing personal stories to build intimacy both internally and externally. Stakeholders at every level will have opportunities to engage in storytelling strategies to showcase the overall strength of the organization in an effort to increase awareness about the services and programs offered to the community.

**Interactivity**

The peer research team defined interactivity as the “bilateral or multi-lateral exchange of comments and ideas, a back-and-forth process” (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 64). The results from the coding process identified three themes related to the conversational element of interactivity. The element was referenced 119 times by the 10 study participants, which represents 27% of the data. Table 4 illustrates the three themes that emerged from the element interactivity.
Creating a safe work space. This theme was referenced 33 times in 12 sources and represented 27% of the information related to the element of interactivity. This theme produced the second highest frequency count for the element of interactivity. Ninety percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from three artifacts. The participants referenced in this theme commonly indicated value in providing a safe space for members to engage in honest and authentic conversations. They further believed that by creating safe workspaces the members grow collectively as a team as they learn and value the diverse perspectives of their colleagues. One nonprofit executive director expressed the following reflection from an experience with his/her team:

By establishing that safe space, we were all able to come as ourselves and be honest anyway and we had some pretty intimate conversations and I was able to really also listen very closely and feel and understand how others in my team had encountered moments of racism or feeling excluded not feeling like another. I think it really helps me and the rest of the team feel closer and to also get a better sort of understanding not only [about] what we are dealing with but what our students bring in.
While the majority of the study participants value safe work spaces for authentic conversations, one nonprofit executive director believed another value of creating safe work spaces was to build patience. During the interview, he/she shared,

So, our strategic plan is going to take a year before we're done. We're not rushing. Like, we're giving ourselves the time to actually do it right, and to be patient, and thoughtful, and intentional, and even if sometimes it can be frustrating, because like, “Oh, geez. It feels like we just took a couple steps backward,” but we know in the long-run, like, everyone feeling heard.

Two artifacts—a mission statement and a strategic plan—as well as two observations served as an additional frequency for this theme.

**Sharing new ideas and information.** This theme was referenced 62 times in 14 sources and represented 52% of the information related to the element of interactivity. This theme produced the highest frequency count for the element of interactivity.

Enhancing employee feedback, sharing knowledge, and making suggestions is an effective strategy that leaders should implement to gain favor and insight into employees’ experiences, ideas, and opinions (Lashley, 1995).

One hundred percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from two artifacts and two observations. All study participants used multiple platforms to encourage idea and information sharing.

One nonprofit executive director stated, “I’m always asking the staff to talk with their leaders about a couple of questions when a decision point come up such as: 1) What is important to us? 2) What is important to this person?” The same participant expressed the following practice to engage members in idea and information sharing:
We do an evaluation in a very elementary sense at the end of every meeting, literally every meeting whether 10 people [are] going to meet with elected official, or a planning meeting, or there [is] always a brief e-mail. If we are really running late, sometimes it’s as simple as how are you feeling leaving this meeting? Give us one or two words. Sometimes it is involved as what were our goals for this meeting? Did we accomplish these goals? What did you notice about yourself or about the meeting or about where we are trying to get? What are our new learnings? What can we do better together next time? What did we do well?

Three artifacts—an annual report, mission statement, and a strategic plan—were mentioned during two interviews and served as an additional frequency for this theme.

**Building a culture of open communication.** This theme was referenced 24 times in 11 sources and represented 20% of the information related to the element of interactivity. This theme produced the lowest frequency count for the element of interactivity. Sessions of open dialogue between leaders and employees, where employees do not feel judged for their creativity and innovation, are important in building emotional connections (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011).

One hundred percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from one artifact. Many study participants identified open communication leads to the discovery to the power of voice. Once nonprofit executive director informed,

We are, I think, what we do internally is we provide platform for each other’s voices. I don't think—like we're not an organization where someone would feel
like they wouldn't have a voice, which makes sense, because we're an organization that is about, sort of, highlighting voice in students.

Another nonprofit executive director expressed his/her support of healthy disagreements during exchanges of open communication. He/she stated, “You can be in conflict, you can have inquiry and you can have respectful banter, but it is important for people to be able to articulate their point of view.” The same nonprofit executive director also expressed his/her belief in creating a culture where open communication can occur between all parties at all levels of the organization. During the interview, he/she mentioned, “You can't get hung out on a title. So, if I've even done something to you as a CEO then I hope and expect for you to say to me like you’ve offended me, you’ve hurt my feelings.”

One artifact—a mission statement—was mentioned during an interview and served as an additional frequency for this theme.

Inclusion

The peer research team defined inclusion as the commitment to the process of engaging stakeholders to share ideas and participate in the development of the organization (J. Brown & Hurley, 2009; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The results from the coding process identified three themes related to the conversational element of inclusion. The element was referenced 77 times by the 10 study participants, which represents 18% of the data. Table 5 illustrates the three themes that emerged from the element inclusion.
Table 5

Inclusion Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Artifact sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active contribution from all stakeholders</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing organizational ambassadors</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission-driven discussions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Sources include transcribed interviews, observations, and artifacts.

Active contributions from all stakeholders. This theme was referenced 28 times in 14 sources and represented 36% of the information related to the element of inclusion. This theme tied with another theme for the highest frequency count for the element of interactivity. Employees feel valued for their contributions to the organization and, in turn, continue to add to and share the organizational story with stakeholders (Crowley, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012).

One hundred percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from three artifacts and one observation. A common thread for study participants was creating a culture where active contributions from all stakeholders was an expectation. One nonprofit executive director stated,

I think that’s been helpful in creating a unified team structure because there’s space for participation at all levels and shaping the organization we’re in, what the priorities are, and then I think that facilitates an empowering space for two-way conversation as challenges arise because they always do.

Another nonprofit executive director expressed his/her disapproval of the notion to trust the process. He/she stated, “So we really encourage people to learn the process, challenging the process, and practice.” The same nonprofit executive director also
explained that his/her organization’s expectation for active contributions requires “a lot of training and then it’s a lot of practice.”

Three artifacts—a mission statement, an annual report and a strategic plan—as well as one observation served as an additional frequency for this theme. During the observation, one nonprofit executive director displayed a promo video for the organization’s 25th-year gala celebration that was collaboratively created by multilevel stakeholder groups from each department of the organization.

**Developing organizational ambassadors.** This theme was referenced 22 times in nine sources and represented 28% of the information to the element of inclusion. This theme produced the lowest frequency count for the element of interactivity. Employees become the “brand ambassadors, thought leaders, and storytellers” (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, p. 81).

Sixty percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from one artifact and two observations. One nonprofit executive director stated the following expectations for leaders to serve as organizational ambassadors:

I tend to probably push a little hard especially if you're on the leadership team. It is your job to be an ambassador and to be of help to your colleagues in a variety of different ways. Help isn’t just showing up to an event but sometimes it's being able to solicit volunteers to go to this event or sometimes it’s you physically showing up to an event.
Another nonprofit executive director explained how he/she believes people learn by getting involved. Following is an example of how he/she provides opportunities for interns and volunteers to lead major events:

We recently had an event here, and often times in those kind of events the CEO would welcome people or at least be on stage at a certain point during the presentation. But in fact, I sat in the back and let the whole thing be run by people who actually put it up all together. Not many of them had ever had that opportunity before and they were looking nervous. Show that you have faith in them and that you allow room for mistakes because we all learn by making mistakes. When people make mistakes, the response is not yelling and screaming. Help them learn something. Help them make sure they don’t do it the next time.

One mission statement artifact and two observations served as an additional frequency for this theme. The mission statement focuses on building community by creating opportunities for people to influence and change public policy.

**Mission-driven discussions.** This theme was referenced 28 times in 11 sources and represented 36% of the information related to the element of inclusion. This theme tied with another theme for the highest frequency count for the element of interactivity. Premeaux and Bedeian (2003) defined an inclusive environment as one where employees “openly state one’s views or opinions about workplace matters, including the actions or ideas, suggested or needed changes, or alternative approaches or different lines of reasoning for addressing job-related issues” (p. 1538).

Sixty percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from three artifacts and two observations.
Leadership plays a vital role in committing to this level of continual and consistent organizational messaging (J. Brown & Hurley, 2009; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b; Nichols, 2012). Many study participants communicated that an essential focus for inclusive conversations is to connect members to the mission. One nonprofit executive director expressed, “Feel free to bring anything you want, but just make a connection to how it connects to the mission or the values of the organization.” Another nonprofit executive director stated, “We work and we strive toward all of our staff having ownership over the mission, the goals and the values of the organization.”

One nonprofit executive director informed the researcher that mission-driven discussions should be ongoing and conducted at every level of the organization. He/she claimed,

I start every board meeting asking one or two board members to share a personal story about why the mission of [the organization] is meaningful to them . . . we’re actually revisiting mission and vision, it's been five years. And that process has been—multiple conversations, some that we have led internally, but others that might have had a facilitator lead around the mission and vision, why, and around the world. I think one of the things that we have found as we matured as an organization is that as the world changes, we must change.

Three artifacts, a mission statement, an annual report, and a strategic plan, as well as one observation, served as an additional frequency for this theme. During the observation, the nonprofit executive director allowed staff members to share personal reflections about the organization and their personal commitment to support the organization’s missions.
**Intentionality**

The peer research team defined intentionality as ensuring clarity of purpose that includes goals and direction to create order and meaning (Barge, 1985; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012). The results from the coding process identified three themes related to the conversational element of intentionality. The element was referenced 120 times by the 10 study participants, which represents 28% of the data. Table 6 illustrates the three themes that emerged from the element intentionality.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Artifact sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring awareness of common purpose</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing external message</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soliciting feedback from all stakeholders</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Sources include transcribed interviews, observations, and artifacts.*

**Monitoring awareness of common purpose.** This theme was referenced 63 times in 13 sources and represented 52% of the information related to the element of intentionality. This theme had the highest frequency count for the element of intentionality. Conversationally intentional leaders provide employees with the opportunity to understand larger perspectives of the whole organization through two-way, dynamic communication processes in order to deepen their knowledge base of how all the departments work together to support the overall vision of the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).
One hundred percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from three artifacts. One of the artifacts is an organizational strategic plan that entails four priorities to guide the organization from 2015–2018. During the interview, one nonprofit executive director identified the following process to promote awareness of common purpose:

We went through a strategic plan and process a few years ago and I was told by consultants that this is your vision, this is an opportunity for you to really push your idea of what you want for the organization moving forward. It didn’t sit well with me. I don’t know if that’s typical of all foci of consultancy on how a strategic plan should evolve. Obviously, I know that a big chunk of what’s happening is my vision, but I’ve always been somebody who wanted to create a sense of giving people an opportunity to really voice their ideas. I decided to go a different route and I certainly wanted to bring in the opinions of not only my staff but also student voices, family voices, volunteer voices and of course the board as well. That was a time when we included as many viewpoints of perspective but we also made it clear that not everything will get into the final plan. Even though some people might have felt pretty passionate about certain avenues and directions they wanted to go, we would ultimately, at least I would ultimately, decide which areas made the most sense for us to embark on.

Another nonprofit executive director explained his/her agency’s process monitoring awareness of purpose as follows:

So, we created a spreadsheet where every single person on the staff, me, and even interns, have, like, our goals for the year. And then, there’s a—there's a column
for each week and I ask everyone at the end of each week to take half an hour or 45 minutes, an hour, to, like, turn off your e-mails, stop everything, sit down, and look at your goals for the year. . . . And then this has started a conversation that then we often have a staff meetings. We start the week with “What's your big priority for the week and how is that tied to one of your goals for the year?”

Then, I think that they're doing both of those starting the week with an intention and stating it, and the accountability of stating it publicly to everyone. I feel it's accountability, and I love it. That any person or staff can go in and look at my page of, like, my goals and what did I do that week to move the needle.

A third nonprofit executive director describes the difference of monitoring awareness of common purpose between different stakeholder groups:

I think with the staff, it’s a different kind of discussion around goals and intentionality and around some of that because obviously every department has a sole function and purpose and so the way we try to do it is, here are the organizational goals and then here's how your department and this is how your work fits for us to accomplish the mission.

Three artifacts—a mission statement, an annual report and a strategic plan—served as an additional frequency for this theme.

**Developing external messages.** This theme was referenced 16 times in eight sources and represented 13% of the information related to the element of intentionality. This theme had the lowest frequency count for the element of interactivity. Campbell (2009) defined intentionality as “identifying a specific outcome for a communication interaction, recognizing how one should or does appear to one’s audience, and adapting
one’s behaviors, tone of voice, word choice, etc., to convey the desired motivation in pursuit of a goal” (p. 2).

Seventy percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme, and this theme produced content from one observation. Many study participants expressed their belief in collaboratively developing the message for external audiences. One nonprofit executive director conveyed, “At the end of the day, it’s our members that serve the basis for what our communication strategy looks like from our collaterals to our messaging to press events.” Another nonprofit executive director said, “It's not my job function to craft to the external message or the voice for our organization. I think it's my job to make sure that that voice and that message is aligned with our values and our mission.” A third nonprofit executive director stated, “We’ll draft something [message content] but I want the staff to be involved, not every single staff member can be on every message, but through the management team they can take a look and give their feedback from the staff’s perspective.”

One observation served as an additional frequency for this theme. During the observation, the nonprofit executive director highlighted the practice of staff and students working together to generate the communication and marketing materials for a community event.

**Soliciting feedback from all stakeholders.** This theme was referenced 41 times in 10 sources and represented 34% of the information related to the element of intentionality. This theme had the second highest frequency count for the element of intentionality. This forward movement is shaped by the leader’s intentional
communication and feedback from employees regarding the organization’s vision, clarity of purpose, and organizational activity (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a, 2012b).

One hundred percent of the study participants shared their experiences related to this theme. All of the study participants communicated their use of technology and a multiple method of communication, soliciting feedback from all stakeholders. One nonprofit executive director stated, “I want to make sure everyone feels engaged so each manager then breaks off into their individual department and talks that idea again constantly soliciting new ideas.” Another nonprofit executive director explained, “We're also very intentional about integrating study groups in the work that we do whether it's on a particular issue or about a particular way that we want to approach the work.” A third nonprofit executive director described his/her agency’s process for soliciting feedback from all stakeholders as follows:

We do a lot of input gathering. Like we ask people all the time to give feedback on our chapter on various leads in the leadership of our chapter. We do two-by-two feedback conversations every quarter and check-ins or structures also be two-way dialogue. So instead of the manager developing a check-in agenda and driving a conversation, the staff member develops a check-in agenda. Like, I expect you to come into a conversation having thought about how you most want to use me and what questions you want to discuss with me, how you want to use the time the best support your work.

Key Findings

After the interviews were transcribed and coded for themes, the observations were coded for themes, and the artifacts were reviewed for themes, 11 key findings were
evident regarding how exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organizations using the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Selection of the 11 key findings was determined by evaluating which themes were referenced by at least 60% of study participants and represented at least 20% of all frequencies within each of the four conversational leadership elements.

**Major Findings for Intimacy**

1. Establishing trust in work relationships represented 43% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced by 90% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

2. Leading by example represented 24% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

3. Sharing personal stories to establish relevancy represented 33% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

**Major Finding for Interactivity**

1. Creating a safe work space represented 27% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by 90% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

2. Sharing new ideas and information represented 52% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

3. Building a culture of open communication represented 20% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive directors.
Major Finding for Inclusion

1. Active contributions from all stakeholders represented 36% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

2. Developing organizational ambassadors represented 28% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by 60% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

3. Mission-driven discussions represented 36% of the inclusion frequencies and was referenced by 60% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

Major Findings for Intentionality

1. Monitoring awareness of common purpose represented 52% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

2. Soliciting feedback from all stakeholders represented 34% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012a, 2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. This chapter provided a data summary of the 12 major themes aligned to the central research question and four subquestions. Data were summarized and coded from 10 interviews and two observations, and eight collected artifacts were used as additional frequencies for
the themes. These artifacts allowed the researcher to connect consistencies between the interview content and the observations. Eleven key findings describing the behaviors of exemplary nonprofit executive directors were identified from the 12 themes.

Chapter V provides a final summary of the study, including major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections from the researcher.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A summary of the study’s findings is presented in this final chapter. The chapter begins with a summary restating the purpose, research questions, and methodology that developed the content of the study, followed by the descriptions of the study’s population and sample participants. Next, the chapter provides a breakdown of the findings and conclusions for each element of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality). The chapter also presents implications for action as well as the researcher’s recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with personal reflections and comments shared by the researcher.

Purpose

The lived experiences of exemplary nonprofit executive directors who lead their agencies through one or more elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality) were investigated in this research study. Eleven major findings and 12 conversational leadership themes emerged from a triangular data collection of personal interviews, observations, and artifacts. Conclusions stemmed from these findings as well as recommendations for further research.

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012a, 2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality). This study included one central research question and one subquestion for each element of conversational leadership. The central research question for this study was, “What are the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead through
conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality)?”

**Research SubQuestions**

The research subquestions were as follows:

1. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of intimacy?

2. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of interactivity?

3. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of inclusion?

4. How do exemplary nonprofit executive directors lead their organization through the conversational elements of intentionality?

**Research Methods**

For this qualitative phenomenological research study, personal, in-depth interviews with 10 exemplary nonprofit executive directors in Southern California were conducted to gain their perspective of their lived experiences as related to each of the four elements of conversational leadership. Data generated from the interviews, artifacts, and observations were coded and analyzed for themes in NVivo. This study’s main data collection method was the in-depth interview; however, multimethod strategies allowed the researcher to triangulate the data from the in-depth interviews with observations and artifacts. The study’s target population was the approximately 66,889 nonprofit executive directors in Los Angeles County.
Each of the peer researchers, 12 doctoral students with four faculty chairs who collaboratively designed this study, used the same criteria for identifying a study sample of 10 leaders within his or her respective target population. These target populations included elementary and unified school district superintendents, assistant superintendents of educational services, and principals; community college presidents; regional directors of migrant education; chief nursing officers; municipal police chiefs and sheriffs; nonprofit executive directors; and city managers. All potential study participants needed to exhibit at least four of the following six characteristics identified by the peer research team as criteria for determining an exemplary leader:

1. evidence of successful relationships with followers;
2. evidence of leading a successful organization;
3. a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession;
4. articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings;
5. recognition by his or her peers; or
6. membership in professional associations in his or her field

**Major Findings**

The study’s central question was answered through an investigation of the study’s subquestions. The findings were informed by criteria used to evaluate the percentages of references for each theme. The themes that were referenced by at least 60% of the nonprofit executive director study participants and represented at least 20% of all references within each of the four elements of conversational leadership were identified as a major research finding. Eleven major research findings emerged from the data
analysis. The major themes were also developed from a data collection of 12 artifacts and two observations.

**Major Findings for Intimacy**

1. Establishing trust in work relationships represented 43% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced by 90% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.
2. Leading by example represented 24% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.
3. Sharing personal stories to establish relevancy represented 33% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

**Major Finding for Interactivity**

1. Creating a safe work space represented 27% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by 90% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.
2. Sharing new ideas and information represented 52% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.
3. Building a culture of open communication represented 20% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive directors.

**Major Finding for Inclusion**

1. Active contributions from all stakeholders represented 36% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.
2. Developing organizational ambassadors represented 28% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by 60% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.
3. Mission-driven discussions represented 36% of the of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced by 60% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

**Major Findings for Intentionality**

1. Monitoring awareness of common purpose represented 52% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

2. Soliciting feedback from all stakeholders represented 34% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced by 100% of the nonprofit executive director study participants.

**Unexpected Findings**

This study identified the following two unexpected findings related to the conversational leadership element of inclusion: (a) developing organizational ambassadors and (b) mission-driven discussions. Research about the nonprofit sector suggests that employees and volunteers of nonprofit agencies are committed to the humanitarian contributions of the organization. The development for these individuals to become organizational ambassadors was not highly regarded by all nonprofit executive director study participants. Additionally, it has been noted that mission statements are the staple of nonprofit organizations. It was surprising that not all nonprofit executive director study participants referenced mission statements as a significant inclusive finding.

**Unexpected Finding 1**

Developing organizational ambassadors was an unexpected finding related to the conversational element of inclusion. This theme was the least referenced theme for the
element of inclusion, although the literature values the importance of developing employees as organizational ambassadors to promote excitement about the organization’s services. According to Groysberg and Slind (2012a), employees become living representatives of the brand when they are passionate about the company. Additionally, Miller (1998) ascertained that organizational success occurs when the identities, talents, and perspectives of employees are leveraged by inclusive organizations that foster employer branding. Employer branding occurs through organizational ambassadors who exhibit excitement and passion about the organization they represent.

**Unexpected Finding 2**

Mission-driven discussions was another unexpected finding related to the conversational element of inclusion. This finding was unexpected since the literature acknowledges nonprofit agencies as mission-driven organizations and identifies inclusion as a source for organizational growth. Zumdahl (2010) asserted that nonprofit leaders need to demonstrate the ability to cast a vision and build consensus among staff members. Exploring how leaders can encourage employees to express themselves for the advancement of the organization is relevant and instrumental for further research in organizational leadership (Sumanth, 2011). Through inclusive conversational practices, leaders will gain implicit feedback on how to develop programmatic initiatives and strategies that will yield mission-driven results.

**Conclusions**

This study identified the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012a, 2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and
intentionality). The results from the study show that exemplary nonprofit directors have behaviors related to all four elements of conversational leadership to leverage personal and organizational development for themselves and their followers. Additionally, the results indicate that exemplary nonprofit executive directors use multimethod conversational practices to engage stakeholders at every level. The conclusions are supported by the literature as follows:

**Conclusion 1**

*Nonprofit executive directors who want to provide an intimate, trusting work environment must lead by example and share personal stories to establish relevancy.*

Exemplary nonprofit executive directors in this study engaged organizational constituents, including employees, volunteers, board members, families, and community members, to set leadership expectations for midlevel management leaders and to demonstrate the value of being vulnerable and transparent. Hesselbein (2003) argued that leaders must model what they say they believe. Hesselbein believed the strength of any nonprofit begins with its mission statement as it is core to describing “the organization’s reason for being” (p. 63) but emphasized, “You just can’t talk values. Your people watch you and every action, everything you do is the embodiment of what you believe. We hope [the actions and words] are consistent” (p. 63). Showkeir and Showkeir (2008) claimed that leadership implications for using conversation to change culture is an act of engagement that cultivates the culture a leader wants to create while engaging others in the creation.

Leading conversationally also involves expressing one’s own doubts and uncertainties as a way of giving others permission to do the same and to encourage
curiosity and inquiry (Gratton & Ghoshal, 2002). Leaders can establish this level of intimacy by sharing stories to create a culture of transparency. Creating a culture of authentic and open communication will elicit trust from all stakeholders and perpetuate the desire for all members to freely share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions.

Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported this study’s conclusions:

1. Exemplary nonprofit executive directors who participated in this study emphasized the significance of leading by example. Building trustworthy relationships with stakeholders at all levels was a key leadership behavior trait for the element of intimacy.

2. Exemplary nonprofit executive directors who participated in this study regularly shared personal stories with members of the organization to demonstrate authenticity and vulnerability. This style of open communication generated trust and encouraged members to be vulnerable with their leaders and their peers.

Conclusion 2

Nonprofit executive directors who create safe spaces for their employees to communicate openly to express their views will develop organizations where information sharing is embedded within the culture.

Exemplary nonprofit executive directors in this study created organizational cultures where members of the organization feel safe to exchange in open dialogue to express their ideas, beliefs, and opinions without the fear of negative repercussions. Smart leaders initiate protocols that promote conversational sensibility throughout the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). These leaders observed that when the anxiety levels of the members were reduced, they were more courageous to participate in high-
stakes conversations. As a result, the nonprofit executive directors in this study expressed their ability to quickly address and resolve challenges within the organization through meaningful conversations with their members.

Exemplary nonprofit executive directors in this study highlighted the benefits of sharing ideas through personal conversations. Groysberg and Slind (2012a) defined a personal conversation as “an exchange of comments and questions between two or more people” (p. 5). Block (2008) asserted that change in organizations would come by changing the conversations taking place among organizational stakeholders. Leaders are mindful about valuing the perspectives of their members to leverage the capacity of organizational growth. They think about who is vital to the conversation to ensure that key stakeholders participate, and they establish an environment that encourages authentic contributions (J. Brown & Hurley, 2009; J. Brown & Isaacs, 2005). In an effort to ensure that each person’s perspective was valued, they welcomed dissent and allowed space for others to voice their doubts (Block, 2008).

Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported this study’s conclusions:

1. Exemplary nonprofit executive directors who participated in this study used multimethod strategies to engage in two-way communication. Whole group, small group, one-on-one, and a variety of technologies were embedded as daily practices to share information.

Conclusion 3

*Nonprofit executive directors who value inclusion should seek active contributions from all stakeholders.*
Exemplary nonprofit executive directors in this study required active conversational participation from all organizational stakeholders. Nichols (2012) asserted that a common understanding here is the belief that conversation does not just lead to action, it is action. Leaders set expectations for members to contribute to the decision-making process. Inclusive leaders count on employees to be full-fledged conversation partners (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). Furthermore, inclusive conversational leadership behavior promotes stakeholder buy-in toward accomplishing the goals of the organization. Connolly and Rianoshek (2002) suggested that well-designed listening and speaking creates high-velocity value, which in this case is services that employees are willing and able to provide.

Exemplary nonprofit executive directors in this study also identified including stakeholders in developing organizational correspondence as active conversational participation. Employees who participate in developing the message content for the organization are more prone to actively engage in conversations. In the following excerpt, Schuman (2011) explained how conversations improve by changing one’s participation:

We pay attention to the quality of the conversation, believing that the best path to a good outcome is good process. Accordingly, the core value is not to be in control, but to be in right relation. Without unrealistic expectations of control, there is less anxiety and defensiveness opening more space for curiosity, experimentation, dialogue and critical reflection—ideal circumstances, as we shall see, for adaptability and innovation. (p. 2)

Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported this study’s conclusions:
1. Exemplary nonprofit executive directors who participated in this study set expectations for all stakeholders to actively participate in conversations. Inclusive artifacts showed that behavioral practices are the norm of the organization.

2. Exemplary nonprofit executive directors who participated in this study were observed providing opportunities for their members to develop the message content for the organization. In this capacity, members serve as developers, which inevitably leads to their desire to actively participate in key conversations.

**Conclusion 4**

*Nonprofit executive directors who intentionally seek to demonstrate the mission of their organization must monitor awareness of common purpose by soliciting feedback from all stakeholders.*

Exemplary nonprofit executive directors in this study intentionally monitored awareness of purpose through conversations and accountability systems. Leaders routinely checked with their members to ensure that their daily practices aligned to the goals and purposes of the organization. The nonprofit executive leaders in this study expressed how they used multiple tools to calibrate purpose-driven conversations across all departments. These tools included, but were not limited to, department meetings, management team meetings, e-mails, one-on-one meetings, project management software, and annual retreats. Nelson (2013) asserted that nonprofit leaders create expectations by having recurring conversations about purpose throughout the organizational mission.

Exemplary nonprofit executive directors in this study gained ongoing feedback from stakeholders that was specific to the organization’s mission. For instance, J. Brown
and Hurley (2009) encouraged practitioners to consider ways to leverage conversation as a fundamental process in formulating strategic change initiatives. Nonprofit executive directors are mission-driven leaders who are constantly searching for new ideas to help guide the members of their organizations toward attaining their common purpose. They seek to learn what works and what does not work from the members who implement organizational initiatives. From Isaacs’s (1999) perspective, this type of leadership involves an ongoing process of unearthing “the hidden, creative potential in any situation” (p. 2). From this view, the organization can be seen as a vibrant web of conversations in which people share ideas in a meaning-making process through which new possibilities are cocreated and a holistic knowledge emerges (Nichols, 2012).

Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported this study’s conclusions:

1. Exemplary nonprofit executive directors who participated in this study regularly monitor awareness of purpose through multiple means of accountability. Artifacts gave evidence that use of intentional conversation ensures that all members are in sync with the purpose and mission of the organization.

2. Exemplary nonprofit executive directors who participated in this study received constant feedback from their members to review and develop initiatives that aimed to meet the goals of the organization. The leaders of this study understood the relevance of intentionally collecting and analyzing anecdotal feedback to help drive strategic goals.

**Implications for Action**

The conclusions developed from this study highlight specific implications for action by nonprofit executive leaders who seek to develop and/or strengthen
conversational leadership practices. The researcher recommends the following actions based on an in-depth review of literature and the data analysis presented in this study.

**Implication 1: Leadership Screening**

A screening tool for hiring nonprofit executive directors should include questions or scenarios related to the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Nonprofit governing board members and human resource (HR) representatives should employ nonprofit executive leaders with strong communication competencies in the elements of conversational leadership. Nonprofit governing board members and HR representatives play a key role in selecting nonprofit executive leaders for their organizations. As nonprofit agencies shift to embrace 21st-century changes in technological, generational, and organizational structures, strong leadership is a crucial indicator to organizational success.

**Implication 2: Self-Assessments**

Nonprofit executive leaders should take time for self-reflection on an annual basis. The emotional intelligence survey and the 360-degree assessment are two of many tools nonprofit executive leaders can incorporate into their annual reflection. Other methods for self-reflection may include personal journals and exit interview surveys for employees seeking to leave the organization. Identifying the key areas of professional growth will aid in determining the key areas of professional development that are necessary for exhibiting strong conversational leadership skills.

**Implication 3: Professional Development**

Nonprofit organizational leaders should seek professional development opportunities for themselves and key staff in the four elements of conversational
leadership. The nonprofit sector is ever changing, which requires nonprofit executive leaders to stay current and connected to the needs of their local communities.

Professional development is a missing link for nonprofit executive directors. Since nonprofit organizations are unique by mission, nonprofit executive leaders may experience difficulty with identifying training opportunities to assist with developing skills that are specific to their organizations. Conversational leadership practices are universal elements that can assist all leaders regardless of their professional field.

**Implication 4: Professional Leadership Network**

Nonprofit executive leaders should use social media to expand their professional networks to stay connected with other leaders in their geographic region. Staying connected with other leaders is key to avoiding leadership burnout. The organizational charts for most nonprofits separate nonprofit executive leaders from having common leadership connections with other stakeholder members. They are typically positioned between the governing board and their followers. Local nonprofit organizations will have one executive leader while national nonprofit organizations may have regional executive leaders. All in all, it can be very difficult to network with other nonprofit leaders on a regular basis.

**Implication 5: Staff/Volunteer Training**

Establishing a culture of conversational sensitivity is essential for creating safe work environments. Training staff members and volunteers on the four elements of conversational leadership will help to establish a work space where all members are welcomed to participate in authentic and honest conversations while respecting the diverse perspectives of their colleagues. Using the strategies related to the four elements
of conversational leaders—intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality—as the foundation on which all members construct conversations may eventually lead to reduced employee turnover. It would be fitting for exemplary nonprofit executive directors to consider reading such books as *Crucial Conversations* by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler (2012), *Conversational Capacity* by Craig Weber (2013), and *Conversational Intelligence* by Judith E. Glaser (2014).

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings from this phenomenological research study provide a frame for additional research about the behaviors that exemplary nonprofit executive directors practice to lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality). Recommendations for further study of these four elements include the following:

1. The current study included 10 exemplary nonprofit executive directors in California. In order to gain more insight into this study, the research should be replicated in other parts of the United States and internationally.

2. A comparative study should be conducted between nonprofit executive directors and their followers to explore and identify any differences or similarities between the leaders’ perceived conversational leadership practices and their followers’ perceptions of their conversational leadership practices.

3. A quantitative study should be conducted to reach more exemplary nonprofit executive directors by use of survey. This method would allow the researcher to gather data on a state-wide level versus the current study’s limitations to Los Angeles County.
4. A quantitative study about conversational leadership should be conducted to discover the differences between exemplary nonprofit directors based on gender, age, and number of years in their position.

5. This study focused on nonprofit executive directors and the behaviors they practice to lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality). The data collected from this study and the 11 peer researchers should be compiled and further examined to determine if there are any cross-discipline similarities that could lead to generalization in all executive leadership capacities.

6. This study focused on nonprofit executive directors and the behaviors they practice to lead through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality). The participants in this study were not formally trained to utilize conversational leadership strategies as recommended in this study. Further research should investigate the lived experiences of exemplary nonprofit executive directors who have received in-depth professional development in the conversational leadership framework.

7. A comparative study should be conducted between nonprofit executive directors and exemplary for-profit leaders to determine if conversational leadership practices by leaders are impacted by leadership qualifications, profitable and shareholder accountability, and size of institutional constituents.
Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.

—Harriet Tubman

I have spent most of my life dreaming of how to help others in my family, in my community, and in our world. My first encounter in the nonprofit industry occurred during my teenage years while serving food to homeless members of my community. From there, I learned the value of nonprofit organizations and their commitment to provide services to those in need—true humanitarians at their best. I wasn’t sure when or how, but I always knew that I would dedicate my life’s practices to develop, support, and replicate the efforts displayed by the hard-working members in the nonprofit industry.

In 2012, I tried my luck by launching my own nonprofit, Lancaster Youth Development Foundation. Our mission was to empower underserved youths and their families by providing a holistic youth development program that offers an authentic educational curriculum, professional training, advocacy, and supportive services. Together, with 10 board members and 14 volunteers, my team and I spent 5 good years working with the youth in our community to help them achieve their dreams. We were dedicated and passionate about our services to these children. With confidence, I can truly say we served with a great heart. Unfortunately, heart and passion is not enough to successfully operate a nonprofit organization. It requires funding, political support, and a strong team of 21st-century skilled employees. With great sadness, I had to let the organization close.
In my journey of becoming a transformational leader, I’ve learned a multitude of skills that would have greatly impacted my role as a founding nonprofit executive director. This research study has allowed me to listen, observe, and review best practices of exemplary nonprofit executive directors in one of the largest cities home to many nonprofits. Through the lens of conversational leadership, many of the study participants were able to articulate what they naturally do on a consistent basis. During my interviews, each of the participants expressed their sentiment of gratitude for someone finally taking the time to listen and acknowledge their efforts of leading nonprofit organizations that make our world a better place. In those moments, I felt honored to know that my research study will contribute to a greater good to support rising nonprofit executive leaders.

As I close the final words of this dissertation, I look forward to the possibilities of leading a nonprofit organization in the future. Additionally, I feel a strong sense of urgency to encourage others to learn from their failures, to stay resilient, and to hope against hope. I will continue my mission to broadcast education as a vehicle to empower the oppressed and the disenfranchised members of our society. I hope that my research study will equip and recharge nonprofit leaders who fight the good fight to serve those in need. I soon look forward to joining the fight and connecting with you in the future.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol w/Interview Questions

“My name is Qiana O’Leary and I am the Founding Principal at LA Promise Charter High School. 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 strategies are used by exemplary leaders to lead their organization through conversation. The four elements of conversation used in this study are depicted by Groysberg and Slind’s framework of conversational leadership, intimacy, interactivity, inclusion and intentionality. Conversation as used in this research applies to the full range of patterns and processes by which information circulates through an organization. It is all the ideas, images, and other forms of organizational content that passes between leaders and all members of the organization including personal, interpersonal, group and organization. This study is about what behaviors you use to lead the organization through conversation.

Our team is conducting approximately 120 interviews with leaders like yourself. The information you give, along with the others, hopefully will provide a clear picture of the thoughts and behaviors that exemplary leaders use conversation to create quality in their organizations and will add to the body of research currently available.

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

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.

Did you receive the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights I sent you via email? 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.

Interview Questions

Intimacy. The closeness, trust and familiarity created between people through shared experiences, meaningful exchanges, and shared knowledge (Schwarz, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012; Glaser, 2014).
1. How do you create conversations that promote trust between you and the members of your organization?

   *Optional probe:* What would you identify as the most important factor in establishing trust with your team members?

2. Research indicates that a leader can use personal stories that show vulnerability to build trust and authenticity with members of their organization. Please share with me an example of a time when you disclosed a personal story that showed your vulnerability in an effort to build trust and authenticity with members of your organization.

   *Optional probe:* Tell me about the outcome from that disclosure.

3. Tell me about a time when you listened attentively to members of your organization to engage them in honest and authentic conversations.

   *Optional probe:* Tell me about the impact of that conversation on the members of your organization.

**Interactivity.** Bilateral or multilateral exchange of comments and ideas; a back-and-forth process (Groysberg & Slind, 2012).

1. How do you engage members of your organization in conversations that are two-way exchanges of ideas and information about your organization?

   *Optional probe:* What tools and institutional supports do you utilize to encourage the process of this back-and-forth conversation?

2. How would you describe the strategies you use to cultivate a culture of open dialogue?

   *Optional probe:* What role does social technology (such as blogs, wikis, online communities, twitter, social networks, web-enabled video chat, video sharing etc.) play in supporting this culture of dialogue?

   *Optional probe:* How do you deal with the unpredictable nature of conversation within your organization?

3. Tell me about a time in which you effectively promoted conversation with members of your organization that incorporated an exchange of ideas around a difficult issue or topic.

   *Optional probe:* How do you provide the risk free space that encourages people to participate in the exchange of ideas?

**Inclusion.** The commitment to the process of engaging stakeholders to share ideas and participate in the development of the organization (Brown & Hurley, 2009; Groysberg & Slind, 2012).
1. What conversational strategies do you find effective to ensure members of the organization remain committed to and included in the organization's goals and or mission?
   
   Optional probe: Why do you feel that these strategies encourage more commitment to organizational goals?

2. What strategies do you use to encourage all members to become active contributors and spokespersons for the organization?
   
   Optional probe: What are the ways that you gauge the impact of members’ contributions?

3. Please share a story about a time when you allowed the members of your organization to generate the content for an important message.
   
   Optional probe: How did that work out for you and what was the impact?

**Intentionality.** Ensuring clarity of purpose that includes goals and direction to create order and meaning (Barge, 1985; Groysberg & Slind, 2012; Men, 2012).

1. Can you share some examples of when you used conversation to create clarity around your organization’s purpose?
   
   Optional probe: What do you think you did that created that clarity?

2. How do you use conversation to elicit feedback on the goals and direction of your organization?
   
   Optional probe: How have others responded to that?

3. What strategies do you use to give focus and direction to the organizations’ communication activities?
   
   Optional probe: Why do you think that the strategies you use help to provide focus?

“The 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.”

**General Probes**

May be used during the interview when you want to get more info and/or expand the conversation with them. These are not questions you share with interviewee. It is best to be very familiar with them and use in a conversational way when appropriate to extend their answers.

1. “What did you mean by ……..”
2. “Do you have more to add?”
3. “Would you expand upon that a bit?”
4. “Why do 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 B

Field Test Participant Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview you should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. **Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation.** Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

*Before the brief post interview discussion, give the interviewee a copy of the interview protocol. If their answers imply that some kind of improvement is necessary, follow up for specificity.*

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?

3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked? *If the interview indicates some uncertainty, be sure to find out where in the interview it occurred.*

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview… (I’m pretty new at this)?

*Remember, the key is to use common, conversational language and very user friendly approach. Put that EI to work!*

**NOTE: Red font is for your eyes and support info only**
APPENDIX C

Research 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 D

Informed Consent

INFORMATION ABOUT: The behaviors that exemplary leaders practice to lead their organizations through conversation using the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion and intentionality.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Qiana O’Leary, MA

PURPOSE OF STUDY:
You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Qiana O’Leary, MA, a doctoral student from the School of Education at Brandman University. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe behaviors that exemplary municipal police executives practice to lead their organizations through conversation using the principles as depicted by Groysberg and Slind’s (2012) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion and intentionality.

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 safe-guarded 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) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings, transcripts and notes taken by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be destroyed.

d) If I have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Qiana O’Leary, MA at qoleary@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx; or Dr. Doug DeVore at ddevore@brandman.edu.

e) 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.

f) 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.

_________________________________________ Date: _______________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

_________________________________________ Date: _______________________
Signature of Principal Investigator