Exemplary City Managers Leading Through Conversation

Nikki Marie Salas

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Exemplary City Managers Leading Through Conversation

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Exemplary City Managers Leading Through Conversation

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ABSTRACT
Exemplary City Managers Leading Through Conversation
by Nikki M. Salas

**Purpose:** The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) 4 elements of conversation leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality).

**Methodology:** This qualitative research study was used to describe the behaviors of exemplary Southern California city managers. The counties included in the study were San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino. The researcher selected 10 exemplary city managers that met 4 of the 6 criterion identified as exemplary. The phenomenological research design was selected to explain how these city managers lead through conversation. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, observation, and collection of pertinent artifacts. The researcher used the NVivo software to provide analysis of the data and show the emerging themes. The themes were then examined to identify behaviors that the exemplary city managers practice to lead through conversation.

**Findings:** Examination of qualitative data from the 10 city managers, collected through in-depth interviews, observational data, and review of artifacts produced 20 themes and 299 frequencies within the conversational leadership elements. Ten key findings supported the conversational leadership elements of intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.
Conclusions: The study supported Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) 4 elements of conversational leadership and identified specific behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations. The culmination of research identified four conclusions. City managers must (a) engage in conversations that promote trust and listening attentively to engage stakeholders in honest communication, (b) focus development strategies to cultivate a culture of open dialogue and a two-way exchange of information, (c) use strategies to gain active contributors to ensure a member’s commitment to organizational goals, (d) use conversation to create clarity of message, provide focus, and elicit feedback on goals and directions.

Recommendations: Further research is needed on city managers practicing conversational leadership in different regions of the United States. Additionally, research is needed on for-profit, publicly traded companies and professional sports organizations and the use of conversational leadership.
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PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) 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 city government who 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 Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) Talk, Inc. To ensure thematic consistency, the team co-created the purpose statement, research questions, definitions, interview questions, and study procedures. The team agreed that for the purpose of increased validity, data collection would involve method triangulation and 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 in Southern California; Jacqueline Cardenas, unified school district superintendents; Chris Powell, elementary principals; Lisa Paisley, educational services assistant superintendents in Southern California; Kristen Brogan-Baranski, elementary
superintendents in Southern California; Jennifer LaBounty, community college presidents; Robert Harris, high school principals; John Ashby, middle school principals; Tammie Castillo Shiffer, regional directors of migrant education; Cladonda Lamela, chief nursing officers; Vincent Plair, municipal police chiefs and sheriffs; and Qiana O’Leary, nonprofit executive directors.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee and just as hard to sleep afterward.

–Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *Gifts from the Sea*

Today’s world is constantly changing (Honoré & Robinson, 2012). Global changes happen quickly, and the world receives this information as it is happening. In 2016, the world saw a flurry of new leaders come into power, like former television comedian Jimmy Morales becoming president of Guatemala (Makortoff, 2016). The world followed every detail of Greece as the country teetered on the edge of economic ruin (“Explaining Greece’s Debt Crisis,” 2016). As these changes unfolded, the media communicated these stories through a variety of different mediums to people around the world. Similar to the news that flows quickly from the media to people, information and the words used to communicate those messages abounds quickly from leaders through their organizations (Bowman, 2014). Leaders across every genre of organizations must have the communication and leadership skills to adapt to the constantly changing world.

Communication comes in many forms. Indigenous leaders cultivated the use of a talking stick to facilitate meaningful communication throughout their tribes (Bowman, 2014). Organizational leaders today use language to communicate with their subordinates (Bowman, 2014). In years past, leaders relied on the command-and-control model of leadership to communicate with their employees (Honoré & Robinson, 2012). As technology changes the way leaders communicate throughout organizations, conversation is emerging as a new way for leaders, in all types of organizations, to connect and lead their employees. Barge, Downs, and Johnson (1989) discussed the
importance of routine conversations between business leaders and their subordinates but acknowledged the lack of research in the area of how conversations lead to strengthened leadership.

Communication, stemming from the Latin word *communicare*, became part of the English language sometime in the 15th century (Peters, 1999). Communication began as a way to interrelate ideas among people (Peters, 1999). In ancient times, civilizations used hieroglyphics to communicate (Adams, 2010). Couriers delivered messages from one government to another in early civilizations (Adams, 2010). Today employees may call, e-mail, tweet, or send a text message to communicate their message (O. Schwarz, 2011). Communication is a fundamental part of human interaction; communication is also a fundamental part of how leaders move organizations forward (Bowman, 2014; Honoré & Robinson, 2012; O. Schwarz, 2011).

Unlike business leaders who embrace the use of technology to personalize communication with those they lead, government leaders are slower to adapt new technology to communicate (Crane, 2002). Twitter, blogs, podcasts, and forums allow leaders more opportunities to connect with their stakeholders; unfortunately, city managers rarely use available technology such as these (Ferro, Loukis, Charalabidis, & Osella, 2013). In the last few years, the explosion of new communication technology has provided city managers the opportunity to communicate in a variety of mediums; however, city managers tend to package messages to staff as they did in the past. City managers push out formal, rigid, one-sided communications focused on informing stakeholders on a topic instead of conducting an interactive discussion with staff (Honoré & Robinson, 2012). Embracing the new forms of communication would move city
managers out of their offices and into their organizations to communicate directly with stakeholders (Stephenson, 2011). This change will allow city managers to move beyond heavy-handed bureaucratic communication methods and move toward an interactive and inclusive form of leadership (Honoré & Robinson, 2012). The Groysberg and Slind (2012b) emerging model of conversational leadership is premised on the ability to allow leaders, such as city managers, to lead their organizations through four fundamental components of conversation. Conversational leadership includes developing intimacy, fostering interactive dialogue, and creating intentional messages, while creating a culture of inclusion, which invites employees to participate in the conversation. The emergence of conversational leadership can allow city managers the ability to lead their organizations into the future using a new model that incorporates both leadership and communication that may lead to increased employee engagement.

Background

Global integration and increased changes in technology require organizations to examine how they conduct business and begin to run their organization in different ways (Kotter, 2012). As changes occur across the globe at a sweeping pace, businesses must transform how they do business to adapt to changing times. World leaders change, the economy changes, access to information changes, people change, and perceptions about government change. These changes bring about transformational opportunities for organizations that require rapid responses to keep up with the fast pace of the communication and organizational changes (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Leaders must be at the forefront of facilitating change within organizations. The strategies leaders use to transform organizations today are different from the strategies leaders used in the past
Leadership communication changed; social media and other communication mediums allow for an instant exchange of ideas by people all over the world (Stephenson, 2011). Today’s turbulent and frantic changing times require leaders to adopt new approaches for communication and leading people.

**Political**

World leaders are being elected into positions of power in countries across the globe. New leaders bring new perspectives and new leadership styles that facilitate change in governments. The world has seen a variety of new leaders sworn into office (Makortoff, 2016). In late 2016, the United States elected a new president, Donald Trump, a well-known, successful business leader and television personality with no prior political experience (Flegenheimer & Barbaro, 2016). In May 2017, the French people elected their youngest president, Emmanuel Macron, a 39-year-old relatively unknown investment banker with no prior political experience (Hjelmgaard, 2017). President Trump and President Macron both bring about new perspectives to the presidency, and each president brings his individual leadership perspective to his nation as he transforms into a new way of conducting the business of his country.

Leaders are critical at all levels of government. In the United States, the president leads the country and makes changes at the federal level. At the state level, like in California, Governor Jerry Brown leads the change for the statewide agencies (Mandaro, 2014). At the local level, the city council is elected to set the legislative agenda for the city it represents (Poturica & Urban, 2007). At each level of government, leaders are
responsible for transforming everyday policies for the citizens they represent regardless of how remote the everyday citizen’s access is to that leader (M. Roberts, 2017).

City councils have the most direct relationship with their citizens. At the local level, city councils deal with budget shortfalls, economic uncertainty, and unfunded mandates passed down from the state and federal governments with few resources to meet these mandates (Frederickson & O’Leary, 2014). It is critically important for city councils to judiciously protect their economic vitality to maintain a fiscally sound city for their residents (Frederickson & O’Leary, 2014).

**Economic**

In 2016, the world saw the continued struggle with the global economy. Greece continued to struggle with the potential of economic collapse (“Explaining Greece’s Debt Crisis,” 2016). In the United States, although many sectors of the economy were thriving, the manufacturing section still struggled to recover from the great recession of 2007 (Bardhan & Walker, 2011; Gillespie, 2016). California, specifically, is still recovering from the recession. With the high number of foreclosures from the collapse of the housing bubble, California cities are recovering slowly compared to other regions of the county (Bardhan & Walker, 2011). California cities rely heavily on tax revenue collected to fund municipal activities (Chernick, Langley, & Reschovsky, 2011). Property tax is the single largest revenue source for local cities, and the collapse of the housing market had a long-term impact on California cities’ abilities to fund municipal activities (Chernick et al., 2011). The leaders of those cities felt this economic strain.
Local Government

The growth of the American city exploded from 1865 to 1895 (Wheeland, Palus, & Wood, 2014). Cities grew from a combination of immigrants and people moving from rural areas looking for centralized resources (Wheeland et al., 2014). Cities have come a long way since the late 1800s. Populations increased and manufacturing flourished, creating economic growth, which became a staple for the growth of American cities (Goheen, 1973). Modern-day cities are a hub for people looking to connect with their government for a variety of services. Cities provide police and fire protection, trash and sewer services, and park and recreation amenities as well as building and transportation needs to their residents. Cities today are complex organizations, dealing with a multitude of issues including economic challenges, transportation issues, integration and serving the needs of a multiethnic population, while providing basic services with limited funding (Hostyn & De Moyer, 2014). Leading the task to run these cities are elected city councils and professional administrators known as city managers.

In 2016, cities across the United States held elections to vote on new leadership at local levels while newly elected city council members worked to establish policies for the running of their organizations for the next few years. Within these organizations, the city council tasks the city manager, a professional administrator hired to handle the internal running of the city, to carry out the council’s policies (Roman, 2015). As city council members and city managers work together to lead the city, they must clearly and concisely articulate necessary information to the public. Today, information is available faster than ever before. Leaders and the public alike have at their fingertips the ability to tweet, text, post video messages, blog about an event, or instantaneously post an opinion
on social media (O. Schwarz, 2011). City leaders today must perfect the use of social media and information technology to lead a multifaceted city and include all stakeholders.

**Leadership**

Traditional theories of leadership discuss command and control as a means of leaders directing staff within organizations (Honoré & Robinson, 2012). Governments, specifically, have used the command-and-control model of leading people (Honoré & Robinson, 2012). The command-and-control form of leadership is premised on one leader controlling all aspects of an organization by instructing employees on what to do and when to do it (Stephenson, 2011). Staff are less likely to respond to a leader telling them what to do and how to do it (Stephenson, 2011). Today, leaders are less inclined to lead through total control and are more inclined to find ways to lead staff with influence (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Northouse, 1997; Stephenson, 2011; Thakadipuram, 2010). Influence allows leaders to guide followers; influence must exist for the leader to be successful (Northouse, 1997). As the work environment continues to evolve, leaders must move away from the command-and-control model of leadership and work to increase dialogue and motivation, and they must influence their followers by having person-to-person conversations (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Northouse, 1997). Fear is not sufficient to motivate employees for the long term; leaders must let the command-and-control leadership model die and begin to examine the needs of their employees (Crowley, 2011; Honoré & Robinson, 2012).

Today’s leaders are expected to transform their organizations by identifying the needs of their staff, increasing staffs’ motivation, and pushing their followers to reach
their fullest potential (Northouse, 1997). Leaders must focus on the good of the organization while projecting their vision for advancement and simultaneously include those around them (Thoreson & Muse, 2012). For today’s leader to evolve beyond just being a good manager, the leader must be able to be creative, to collaborate, to communicate, to motivate, and to exude a level of authenticity to build trust with all organizational stakeholders (Northouse, 1997; Thoreson & Muse, 2012).

It is essential for leaders to communicate effectively to connect with stakeholders. When leaders exhibit strong, open, honest communication, it builds trust, increases transparency, and enables an environment for creativity to thrive (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Northouse, 1997). It is essential for city managers to possess these skills to serve the diverse population within the community. Communication can take on a variety of forms. Communication theory examines the way people look at different thoughts and concepts through a variety of methods, including discussions (Peters, 1999). Leaders use communication as a fundamental way to move their organizations forward (Bowman, 2014; Honoré & Robinson, 2012; O. Schwarz, 2011). Research shows that regular, open, authentic, and clear communication is at the center of all relationships (Benson & Stieglitz, 2013; Crowley, 2011; Glaser, 2014).

**Leadership Communication**

Leadership and communication are tied together in every organization. Researchers studying leadership and communication look for ways to improve upon both areas of study. Groysberg and Slind (2012b), authors of *Talk, Inc.*, described the results of their research, which shows how leaders are looking to connect with their people on a deeper level by using conversation. They developed a conversational leadership model
that includes four main areas: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) research identified the need to move the focus from an organization with formal corporate communication to a conversationally focused organization. Changes in the world, the economy, in organizations, and in the composition of the workforce necessitate the move toward conversational leadership (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). Conversational leadership theory is based on the fundamental belief that leaders can move their organizations’ strategies forward by intentionally engaging their workforce through intimate, inclusive, interactive, and intentional conversation.

The Four I’s of Conversational Leadership

Groysberg and Slind (2012a) determined, through research, that leaders using conversation to advance their organizations focus on four main areas to achieve success. Intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality are the components that help leaders transform their organization through conversation. The goal of developing conversation through intimacy, interactivity, and inclusion is to infuse life and vibrancy into employees in the workplace. Intentionality will guide that newfound enthusiasm, moving the organization’s communication into the organization’s strategy (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

**Intimacy.** Intimacy is the closeness, trust, and familiarity created between people through shared experiences, meaningful exchanges, and shared knowledge (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; O. Schwarz, 2011). Leaders look to develop a level of trust with their employees (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). Trust is a fundamental component of honest communication; without trust, intimate conversation cannot exist
(Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). Employees want to feel valued; open, honest conversations with employees help to develop intimacy faster (Crowley, 2011). Research shows that actively listening to stakeholders helps to build intimacy (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a; Stone, Patton, & Heen, 2000).

**Interactivity.** For a true conversation to exist, two or more parties need to have an exchange of dialogue (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The dominance of one party’s message over another’s is not a conversation. To make a meaningful conversation, both parties need to engage equally in the topic of discussion without one voice quieting the other (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). With the increased use of multimedia on the work environment, leaders are more open to use technology to communicate with their staff. Communication mediums like social networks, blogs, Twitter, online communities, podcasts, and video conferencing offer a variety of ways for leaders to get their message out to their subordinates (Waters & Williams, 2011). Unfortunately, these new mediums for communication can often lead to one-sided messaging (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Leaders need to ensure that there is a mechanism that allows their staff to engage in the conversation in meaningful ways that encourages the exchange of ideas between leadership and staff (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

**Inclusion.** Inclusion is the idea that leaders invite employees into the workplace conversation by allowing for a mutual exchange of ideas (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Moving away from the traditional command-and-control form of leadership communication, inclusive communication allows employees, at any level of an organization, to formulate an employer’s message without relying on formal channels of communication (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The types of inclusive communication that
stem from this free exchange of ideas include employee blogs, employee-generated media content, and employee-focused social networking posts (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Waters & Williams, 2011).

**Intentionality.** When two people are engaged in a dynamic conversation, they stay involved in that conversation because the conversation moves forward with a purpose (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). When conversation lacks focus, or is no longer following a coherent path, one or more of the conversational participants will disengage from the process (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Intentionality in conversation works when there is a strategic path designated to bring fruitful conversation to a close (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Having a plan, and then executing that plan, is the means for the intentionality within conversational leadership (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

**Role of the City Manager**

Within every city, town, or village across America, there is one central leadership position that guides the leadership of the municipal organization forward. The role the city managers play within municipal organizations is to function as the leader of the municipal team (Roman, 2017). As cities rose in popularity in the late 1800s, they needed a central leader to handle the daily affairs (Wheeland et al., 2014). The early 1900s saw the need for professional administrators to handle the internal dealing of the cities (Wheeland et al., 2014). In the early 1900s, the city manager position lacked power, training, and experience, so the job became more professionalized as time progressed (Wheeland et al., 2014). Today, cities are run by highly trained professional administrators known as city managers; they are tasked with running cities with multimillion- to billion-dollar budgets depending on the size of the city. Today’s city
managers resemble chief executive officers of multimillion corporations when comparing size, scope, and complexity of the organization.

Cities are tasked with providing a variety of municipal services to the residents, such as parks, administrative support, recreation, sewer, street maintenance, code enforcement, police, fire, planning, and building construction inspections. Cities rely on a limited amount of tax dollars collected through a variety of sources to fund the municipal activities (Bardhan & Walker, 2011). The city manager, with the help of the municipal staff, is charged to carry out the various municipal duties entrusted to the city by its residents while spending tax dollars in a judicious manner. The city manager reports to a governing body, elected by the residents of the community, known as the city council. Depending on the population of the city, the city council is typically comprised of multiple elected council positions and one mayor. The city council tasks the city manager with the responsibility to lead the daily functions of the organization (Roman, 2015). The city council serves as the policymaker for the city, while the city manager serves as the executive responsible for implementing the city council’s policies (Roman, 2017).

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Employees are disengaged in their jobs today more than ever before (Maciag, 2013a). Employee engagement is on the decline due in part to lack of visionary leadership (Maciag, 2013a). Visionary leaders today share common traits, which include leading teams with frequent, effective, and fruitful communication to increase employee engagement levels (Crowley, 2013). Leaders have many ways to communicate with employees using today’s ever-changing technology (O. Schwarz, 2011). As technology
increases, employees expect to participate and have a voice in how the work environment functions (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). However, with the increased availability of technology and with the speed at which people communicate, employees are no longer satisfied with the status quo from leaders. Today’s leaders must embrace a new way to communicate with employees that makes employees feel connected and engaged in the workplace. Government leaders are not immune to the changing expectations of employees and communication (Maciag, 2013a).

Employees demand the same level of intimate and inclusive communication from government leaders as employees in the private sector expect (Maciag, 2013a). Today’s employees entering government careers have a desire to make a difference in the community for which they work (Carpenter, Doverspike, & Miguel, 2012). Those same employees expect a high level of trust and honesty from government leaders. Unfortunately, government leaders must satisfy more than just the people who work for them with their communication style; government leaders must also communicate in an open and transparent way to convince the skeptical citizens they serve (Maciag, 2013a).

Citizens are demanding more information from their government leaders. From mayors to city council members to city managers, government leaders must be more transparent, more open, and more honest than ever before (Relly & Sabharwal, 2009). Citizens expect their city managers to engage the public by providing more information on how the leaders are running the city. Citizen groups, like Transparent California (2017), serve as watchdog groups, waiting, watching, and reporting on the actions of government leaders to ensure that the work is performed and appropriately compensated.
For city managers to meet the higher level of accountability expected by citizens today, these managers must commit to a more open, intimate, and inclusive way of communicating. City managers must interact with the community in an intentional manner. City managers must forgo the heavily crafted public relations messages that these leaders relied upon so heavily in the past (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). City managers must commit to ongoing transformational change that enables the manager to lead the organization from the heart (Crowley, 2011). While simultaneously communicating with multiple stakeholder groups in a manner that builds trust and encourages open communication, city managers must build the infrastructure that invites transformational change. Current research focuses on city managers and their need to develop relationships with the city council members. Communication is the foundation for development of the council/manager relationship dynamic (Nalbandian, 1989). However, research is lacking on the role of communication practices for the city manager as the internal leader. City managers are responsible for more than just city council management and communication with the public, they are also responsible for the internal city operations. There is a need for research that shows what communicative practices city managers use to lead their organizations.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.
Research Questions

Central Research Question

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

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of interactivity?
3. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of inclusion?
4. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intentionality?

Significance of the Problem

With increased professionalism within the role of the city manager, today’s government leaders are under tremendous pressure to deal with a multitude of changes affecting cities. With the responsibility to set the administrative direction for their organizations, city managers must deal with global, economic, organizational, generational, and technological issues facing their city governments (Schmidt & Posner, 1987). With an average population of California cities hovering at 77,000, city managers are powerful executives in large, complex organizations that directly compare to chief executive officers of major corporations (League of California Cities, 2011; Schmidt &
Posner, 1987). City managers, like chief executive officers, must look for ways to incorporate new technologies for the betterment of their agencies while maintaining the community’s safety and being steadfast with their budgetary funds (Lewis, 2017). As they begin to embrace the multitude of challenges that come with a complex organization, city managers must embrace ways to communicate and engage their constituents that lead to increased engagement and participation (Lewis, 2017). While it is important for city managers to engage with residents and the city council, it is equally important for those leaders to embrace the changes of internal communication styles to connect with employees in a meaningful manner because employees today are more disengaged from the workforce than ever before (Maciag, 2013a).

Today’s city managers face pressure on multiple fronts because of the need for strong leadership and improved communication methods (Maciag, 2013a). While city managers have made strides in transparent communication, research shows that inclusive communication that allows for feedback and an exchange of ideas leads to increased trust and a buildup of communication channels (Kane, 1999). Stakeholders are making demands of government leaders, and so are government employees; employees want a say in the management of government agencies (Denning, 2011). City managers can no longer run their organizations with a top-down command-and-control approach, but must embrace change, remove obstacles, and communicate the strategic vision with employees as they lead (Denning, 2011). City managers must also find a way to embrace the diversity within their workforce and explore ways to bridge the communication gaps. The new generation entering the workforce seeks to find meaning in the work it performs (Carpenter et al., 2012). This situation creates a challenge for city managers to create an
environment rich in communication that allows the next generation’s voices to be heard by their leaders (Mounce, 2017). City managers must find a way to connect with the generations in the workplace while adapting leadership methods, improved technologies, and innovative communication strategies to facilitate stronger work environments. To accomplish the increased need for communication, city managers must alter current communication methods to allow for a more inclusive, intimate, interactive, and interconnected communication style (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Therefore, this research focused on the conversational leadership behaviors that exemplary city managers practice based on Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of intimacy, inclusion, interactivity, and intentionality. City managers must find ways to implement methods that enable municipal agencies to thrive during trying economic times (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2005). The results of this study will allow municipalities to target the identified behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to aid agencies in recruiting and selecting future city managers skilled in the art of conversational leadership. The results of this study will also provide guidance for professional municipal associations, such as the League of California Cities, International City/County Management Association (ICMA), International Public Management Association (IPMA), and through public administration programs at local universities to provide behavior training programs for future city managers on conversational leadership techniques (Wheeland et al., 2014). With the silver tsunami hitting local governments with the impending retirements of baby boomers in this career field, there is an urgent need to develop a cache of well-trained city managers to fill the retirement gap (Maciag, 2016b). By identifying strong conversational leadership practices in exemplary leaders,
up-and-coming governmental leaders can practice traits to increase employee
engagement, build trust with stakeholder groups, and embrace new forms of technology
moving government forward.

**Definitions**

The following defined terms are relevant for this study.

**Intimacy**

The closeness, trust, and familiarity created between people through shared
experiences, meaningful exchanges, and shared knowledge (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg &

**Interactivity**

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

**Inclusion**

The commitment to the process of engaging members of the organization to share
ideas and participate in the development of the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b;
Hurley & Brown, 2010).

**Intentionality**

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

**Exemplary**

**Theoretical definition.** Someone set apart from peers in a supreme manner,
suitable behavior, principles, or intentions that can be copied (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin,
2014).
**Operational definition.** Exemplary leaders are defined as those leaders who are set apart from peers exhibiting at least four of the following six characteristics:

(a) evidence of successful relationships with followers; (b) evidence of leading a successful organization; (c) a minimum of 5 years of experience in the profession; (d) articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings; (e) recognition by their peers; or (f) membership in professional associations in their field.

**Behavior**

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

**Delimitations**

Delimitations for this study were used to narrow down the scope and establish the boundaries of the study. This study was delimited to exemplary city managers within Southern California. The League of California Cities representatives (League of California Cities, 2011) helped to identify the city managers studied. To be considered an exemplary city manager, the city manager must possess a minimum of four of the following 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. recognized by their peers; or

6. membership in professional associations within their field.

**Organization of the Study**

The study includes five chapters, including all references and appendices related to the study of exemplary city managers. Chapter I provided the study’s research statement, research questions, purpose, significance, and delimitations. This chapter also gave an outline of the discussion and the theoretical framework, leadership and conversation components, city government, and the elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality). Chapter II focused on an extensive review of the literature relating to leadership, communication, and conversational leadership as defined by Groysberg and Slind (2012b) and city managers. Chapter III is concentrated on research design, the methodology, and limitations for the research study. Chapter IV reports the findings from the data collected and summarizes the pertinent findings. Finally, Chapter V summarizes the study, offers conclusions, and provides the next steps in research for this topic.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The art of communication is the language of leadership.

—James Humes

Chapter II examines the research and supporting literature relating to exemplary city managers’ leading through the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. The literature review begins with a look at the evolution of leadership, moving into the evolution of communication models, and then, into the emergence of the developing theory of conversational leadership. The four elements of conversational leadership—intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality—examine how exemplary leaders lead their organizations through these elements. The literature review then moves into the history of city managers and their contributions to local government and their organizations. Finally, the literature review provides the path the researcher took to examine how exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the four elements of conversational leadership.

Our Changing World

Today’s world is changing at a rapid pace. Global changes make for uncertain times for organizations near and far. With the end of communism in much of the world, globalization increased world markets to economic competition, while the U.S. economy just faced the worst recession in the last 80 years (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). Leaders today must deal with a myriad of different issues including economic, organizational, global, generational, and technological changes, which were not seen by past leaders (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).
Business Trends

Groysberg and Slind (2012b) discussed the significant business trends in *Talk, Inc.* that have an effect on organizations. The five main business trends addressed by Groysberg and Slind were economic changes, technological changes, global changes, organizational changes, and generational changes. These changes manifest in different ways across many organizations. Local municipal organizations suffer the effects of changes in all five of these business trends.

**Economic changes.** Beginning in 2007, America saw its greatest economic challenge since the great depression (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). The nation’s economy lost almost $10 trillion, and unemployment skyrocketed to 9% (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). The deep recession, coupled with the global shift from the manufacturing industry to the service industries, there is an immediate need for an increase in the technical skills and knowledge base for the American worker (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The changes to the economy have a significant impact on organizations across the country.

**Technological changes.** Since the 20th century, the technological landscape for organizations has transformed tremendously. Technology disrupted the way organizations conducted business. The increases in technology have supplanted the need for routine work; automatization of work duties help to streamline repetitive tasks (Bresnahan, Brynjolfsson, & Hitt, 1999; Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Employees today have new technologies available to do their job. According to Cascio and Montealegre (2016), “Employees can integrate their use of Facebook, Twitter, Google, and other social media into their daily routines, and companies can integrate social media into their
intranets, so that they can share internal information and knowledge with employees” (p. xx). The technological advances allow organizations the ability for instant communication across multimedia platforms virtually simultaneously as events happen around the world (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; O. Schwarz, 2011).

**Global changes.** Global changes can make for uncertain times for organizations. Globalization has opened trade paths by eliminating tariffs, which traditionally stood as barriers for emerging countries trying to increase their economic prosperity through the sale of goods (Collins, 2015; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). Many thought globalization would bring about economic gains for all; however, globalization brought about the decline in America’s industrial sector (Collins, 2015). With the decline in industrialization in America, local municipal agencies in California felt the effects. Globalization directly affected California, the world’s sixth largest economy (Kasler, 2017). Decreases in middle class jobs and tax shelters for multinational corporations create an environment of economic slowdown, resulting in lower tax revenues to fund municipal services (Collins, 2015).

**Organizational changes.** Nontraditional figures are rising into powerful leadership roles without the typical experience and pedigree as seen in past leaders (Makortoff, 2016). Today’s leaders must be agile and flexible in their leadership style to adapt to the constant changes in the world and adjust to the changing times. Leaders need to keep innovating and never resting on past achievements (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). Traditional forms of leadership are no longer standard. Leaders are looking at transforming the world through interactive and dynamic means of intentional
communication instead of maintaining the status quo (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Fisher & Frey, 2014).

**Generational changes.** With multiple generations in the workplace and a decrease in employee engagement, leaders must find a unique way to cross these barriers and speak a language that bridges the gap for all people in the workplace while creating a dynamic, two-way form of communication (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). To help overcome these barriers, leaders are looking at adapting new communication methods to keep up with the technology advances in the world and the constant changes of the 21st century. Leaders from all occupations can look to start-up companies to see how new types of communication methods and leadership can come together to build strong organizational messaging that crosses over traditional organizational boundaries.

For generations, municipal agencies were desired, sought-after organizations for long-term, secure employment, which provided employees with motivation and a sense of security, but with economic changes, reduced budgets, and the instability of government pensions, local government is not the desired employer it once was (Crowley, 2011; Maslow, 1943). The turbulent landscape has done little to settle the instability of the multiple generations in local government. In California, the city of Vallejo filed for bankruptcy protection due to skyrocketing salaries and benefits for employees resulting in layoffs (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Hicken, 2014). Employees are no longer receiving their workplace satisfaction from job security as prior generations did; today’s employees are looking for feelings of appreciation and genuine care from their employers to bring about the loyalty from employees (Crowley, 2011; Risher, 2017).
Leadership Theory

Globalization and technology have made change and innovation in the workplace move at a relentless pace (Stephenson, 2011). Today’s workforce continues to become more diverse as the barriers for global employment break down (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). As the makeup of the workplace continues to evolve, the leaders within the workplace must evolve to meet the changing demands of their environment. Leadership has evolved over time. From great man theory to transformational leadership, and others in between, leadership trends evolve and adapt with the changing times. Evolving leadership styles today have an impact on how leaders adapt their communication styles to effectively lead (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Early Leadership Theories

Leadership concepts date back to ancient Egypt found in the Instruction of Ptahhotep from 2300 B.C.E. to writings from Confucius and Lao-tzu both in the 6th century, which discussed different types of leadership responsibilities (Bass & Bass, 2008). Bass and Bass (2008) discussed the evolution of leadership, highlighting examples of Confucius’s message on leadership responsibility and Lao-tzu calling upon leaders to participate in the development of organizations to the British Empire, invoking ideas regarding the need for leaders to serve the public. Even the works of Greek and Roman mythology show as many as 50 different types of leaders that provided Machiavelli with glimpses of inspiration for his work The Prince in 1513 (Bass & Bass, 2008). The writings of Machiavelli highlighted that leaders need to be firm as they maintain strong leadership in a powerful position among those they lead (Bass & Bass,
As leadership theories continue to evolve, stakeholder groups play a role in the success or failure of organizations.

**Great Man Theory**

In 1840, Thomas Carlyle delivered a series of six lectures that brought about the great man theory. The theory asserted that certain men are born to improve human existence (Organ, 1996; Spector, 2016; Zaccaro, 2007). With religious undertones in his writing, Thomas Carlyle noted that those men not “divinely designated” as a great man must obey the teaching and follow the great men that were delivered upon the Earth to guide humankind (Spector, 2016, p. 251). Spector (2016) examined the great man theory in a modern-day context likening the concept of the great man theory to those strong leaders, both male and female, that come into a failing organization like a super hero and successfully turn the company around.

**Trait Theory**

Dominating research in the early part of the 20th century, trait leadership is based on the work of Gordon Allport whose premise is that leaders possess inherent traits not present in other people (Colbert, Judge, Choi, & Wang, 2012; Zaccaro, 2007). The foundation of Allport’s theory is that leaders are born with inherent skills that other individuals cannot develop (Colbert et al., 2012). Zaccaro (2007) described the three components supporting trait theory. First, leadership traits work in conjunction with leadership attributes that enhance performance. Next, inclusiveness is a primary personality quality within effective leaders. Third, the leader has enduring traits that lead to stability in performance. Communication, however, seems to enhance trust trait in an inherent leader (Allert & Chatterjee, 1997). The repeated communication between
leaders and followers creates an ongoing relationship that strengthens the trust and reinforces the leader’s position within the organization (Allert & Chatterjee, 1997; Liden & Graen, 1980).

**Style Approach**

Where trait leadership is premised on the belief that people are born with inherent leadership traits, the style approach emphasizes the leader’s personality characteristics. Style leadership approach focuses on what leaders do and how leaders act (Northouse, 1997). The leader is examined by the way he or she acts toward his or her subordinates in a variety of circumstances. The leader is evaluated based on how he or she acts toward his or her subordinates rather than his or her own innate characteristics. Researchers Blake, Mouton, Barnes, and Greiner (1964) conducted research on style approach and determined five major leadership styles including the following: authority-compliance, country club management, impoverished management, middle-of-the-road management, and team management. Northouse (1997) noted that the style leadership approach broadened the way that leaders were examined to allow for a study of behaviors rather than personality characteristics.

**Command-and-Control Leadership**

Machiavelli’s lessons on authoritative leadership can be viewed as a basis for modern-day command-and-control leadership. Hierarchical command-and-control leadership dominated the landscape, especially in military and paramilitary environments like police and fire departments (Brunacini, 2014; Stephenson, 2011; Storlie, 2015). The traditional command-and-control model had leaders directing the work of subordinates from the executive level by issuing directives and orders to followers at various levels of
the organization. Brunacini (2014) described the main traits of a traditional command-and-control leader. First, the leader tells the follower what to do while providing the tools and training for the job. Then, the leader allows the follower to complete the work and, when the job is complete, the leader tells the follower how the job went. Storlie (2015) described that “command climate is the culture of the unit. . . . A command climate is set by what the leader says and does. Leaders must set the example. Period. Soldiers must watch their leaders and follow the examples they set” (p. 35). Figure 1 highlights the typical command-and-control model of leadership.

![Command and Control Model](https://chewmark.com/2011/05/03/old-model-of-leadership-command-and-control/)

The command-and-control leadership style had signs of life in other industries, such as manufacturing (Tetenbaum, 1998). In the manufacturing industry, the factory worker produced work based on the direction of the leader. The factory worker received precise directions on what needed to be done, when, and how. The worker was generally thought of as a good worker if he or she showed up and completed his or her work in a passive manner (Tetenbaum, 1998). However, the leadership structure in place for the traditional factory worker did not serve to motivate the worker to look for ways to innovate his or her job. Moreover, the traditional command-and-control manager failed to motivate employees and killed innovation (Denning, 2011). With the new economic age, globalization, changing technology, multiple generations in the workforce, and the need for organizational agility, this management method of communication is slowly giving way to interactive leadership, leaving the traditional methods behind and embracing the new era of rapid, dynamic, and transformational change (Tetenbaum, 1998; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Leading people today is no longer about control, but it is about being a strong communicator, listening effectively, and being action oriented toward strategic objectives (Kirk, 2003). Communication needs to shift from the command-and-control model into a conversational model that shifts the role of the leader from the authoritarian to the strategic partner that can transform organizations (Denning, 2011).

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leaders began to emerge during the 1970s and 1980s, eras that were dominated with development and transactional leadership changes. These types of changes were more controllable and better managed. Transactional managers work with
employees and only intercede when errors begin to emerge in the work (Bass, 1985). However, as the workplace changed and employees needed more direct say in the work environment, the workplace leader began to evolve from transactional change and shifted his or her focus to transformational change (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Bass, 1985). Bennis & Thomas (2002) described transformational leadership as a way to create a desired vision that brings about a strong commitment by employees to follow. Transformational leadership concentrates on changing both the employee’s and the leader’s mindset to move an organization forward in a direction that is new and unexpected (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Bass, 1985). Leaders must make a conscious change to increase the awareness and the need for change within the organization and to make advances in an organization (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Bass (1985) described the three key components of transformational leaderships as follows:

1. Raising our level of consciousness about the importance and value of designed outcomes and ways of reaching these outcomes;

2. Getting us to transcend our own self-interests for the sake of the team, organization or larger polity.

3. Raising our need level on Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy from, say the need for security to the need for recognition, or expanding our portfolio of needs by, for example, adding the need for self-actualization to the need for recognition.

(p. 31)
The transformational leader has a strong set of values that serve to motivate followers to achieve more than originally thought possible (Northouse, 1997). Leaders must guide followers to move beyond their own self-interests and make positive transformational change for the benefit of the organization (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Bass, 1985; Northouse, 1997). Leaders look to utilize the seven key drivers of change to make a transformation within an organization (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Figure 2 highlights the key change drivers.

Figure 2. The drivers of change model. From The Change Leader’s Roadmap (2nd ed.) by L. S. Ackerman Anderson and D. Anderson, 2010, p. xx (San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer).

Successful transformational leaders use communication as a key to facilitate organizational change. Transformational leaders outline the change message by articulating the strategy and vision when communicating with followers (Barge et al., 1989; Bass, 1985). Communication is the key for followers to hear the leader’s message clearly and in multiple forums, while giving the followers time to have conversations with each other, to discuss the emerging transformation, and to bring questions back to
the leader prior to implementation (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Barge et al., 1989; Northouse, 1997).

Communication Models

Communication is key to building effective relationships in the workplace. Communication can take place in many different forms. From the use of hieroglyphics in ancient tribes to provide a visual message to tribes using storytelling to modern-day use of text messaging, blogs, and social media, communication can take on numerous forms to convey a message (Adams, 2010; O. Schwarz, 2011). The traditional model of employer-employee communication involves managers telling their employees what to do and how to do it. It is time to change the communication model; workplace communication must be conversational (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). It is important to focus on how conversations occur to tune up conversational skills (Paull & McGrevin, 1996). New workplace conversation needs to evolve by incorporating listening and opening up dialogue focused on improving the flow of ideas among employees at all levels of an organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Shannon and Weaver’s Communication Theory

Communication is the basis for successful relationships (Allert & Chatterjee, 1997). First introduced by Shannon and Weaver in 1949, communication theory was based on the premise that selected information is converted into a message and transmitted as a signal through a communication change to an awaiting receiver. Shannon and Weaver (1949) primarily focused on telephony and telegraphy transmissions when describing the communication system (see Figure 3).
Shannon and Weaver’s (1949) model of the communication system identified noise as a problem with the communication. Disruptions in a variety of forms can have an impact on the accuracy and delivery of the message being communicated. Harrah (1956), however, disagreed that the communication system is information being conveyed. Rather, Harrah’s belief was that information is not being communicated per se but being transmitted and received between two parties, resulting in each party’s interpretation of the information.

**Schramm’s Model for Mass Communication**

With roots in Shannon and Weaver’s 1949 model of communication, Wilbur Schramm (1962) discussed his model for mass communication. Schramm focused on the encoding of thoughts into words to develop the content of communication. The person receiving the spoken content must decode the communicated message. Only when the received decodes and understands the message is the communication successful. To fully
close the communication cycle, the recipient must acknowledge the sender’s message (Schramm, 1962).

![Schramm's communication method](http://www.communicationtheory.org/osgood-schramm-model-of-communication/)

*Figure 4. Schramm’s communication method. From Communication theory (http://www.communicationtheory.org/osgood-schramm-model-of-communication/)*

The flow of communication between the sender and the receiver, under Schramm’s (1962) method of communication shows a series of encoded, decoded, and interpreted messages between parties.

**Early Conversation**

Storytelling was an early form of communication. Indigenous tribes used storytelling as a way to facilitate communication for numerous purposes (Mundy & Compton, 1999). In the 4th century BC, the Greeks used verbal communication, often in the form of song, as the primary means for communicating the information conveyed in their literature (Thomas, 1992). While in the 5th century BC, teachers used poems from well-known poets as a means for teaching recollection and memorization to allow orators to give the appearance of speaking from the heart (Thomas, 1992). When elders in
indigenous tribes in the Pacific Islands are too old and weak to fish, they pass on knowledge to younger members of their tribe by providing oral instructions on how to handle the fishing nets and operate the boats (Mundy & Compton, 1999). The passage of knowledge from one generation to another facilitated through a back-and-forth exchange of communication by members of the same tribe ensures the survival of cultural traditions (Mundy & Compton, 1999).

**Dialogue**

Workplace communication needs to involve open dialogue. Typical management communication is highly entitled with the belief that the recipient will simply do whatever a manager asks without any meaningful response (Svennevig, 2008). Evolving the workplace communication into a conversational model, which will allow for a meaningful flow of two-way dialogue between the levels of management, will help to open dialogue and flow of information and ideas, especially between the managers and entry-level staff (Young & Post, 1993). Groysberg and Slind (2012b) discussed how company executives found one-on-one communication a more effective means of creating dialogue with employees. Newsletters and e-mails created a monologue to employees, imparting a prescribed message to recipients rather than facilitating interactive conversation (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

**Adapting Communication**

Today’s start-up businesses communicate differently. Space and geographical differences lead start-up businesses to coordinate a variety of communication methods to achieve their work through virtual teams (Im, Yates, & Orlikowski, 2005). Research shows that communication today involves teams focused on articulating the group’s
vision and fostering acceptance of group goals rather than top-down communication (Lehmann-Willenbrock, Meineke, Rowold, & Kauffeld, 2015). Denning (2011) explored the need for communication changes within traditional leadership structures to stimulate innovation. Anthropologist Alan Fiske (1992) first discussed the need to adapt communication styles in the workplace to focus on people talking to each other like regular people. Denning (2011) focused on the need for people to talk to each other as opposed to talking at each other in the workplace to increase innovation. Fiske’s (1992) research explored using different methods of communicating, like stories, metaphors, and open-ended dialogue, to ignite imagination and creativity among the employees.

According to Glaser (2014), “Conversations are multidimensional, not linear. What we think, what we say, what we mean, what others hear, and how we feel about it afterward are the key dimensions behind Conversational Intelligence” (p. 3). Business leaders today who desire to have truly open conversations with employees must open the conversation with trust and treat the employee as an equal (Fawcett & Waller, 2013). Consideration of the tone and the supportive nature of workplace conversations are important to keep communication authentic (McDonald, Vickers, Mohan, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2010). FedEx leadership demonstrated how to adapt communication to convey an authentic message to their employees worldwide. Hours after FedEx acquired a smaller, rival company, FedEx Chairman Fred Smith and Chief Operating Officer Jim Barksdale chose to communicate with all 35,000 employees in over 800 different locations through an unscripted discussion broadcasted across the company’s internal television station to facilitate direct communication to all employees in order to alleviate the employees’ concerns (Young & Post, 1993). For FedEx, the authentic message from
its top leaders communicated within hours of the closing of a merger demonstrated the leaders’ commitment to adapting communication methods based on the message and the company’s needs.

Companies today, like AT&T and Bank of America, are prospering in the workplace, due in part to their dynamic and unconventional communication style, which uses interactive websites and blogs to create digital conversations for employees within these organizations (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The conversational leadership model as described by Groysberg and Slind (2012b) highlights how businesses today shed the traditional command-and-control and top-down methods of communication for a more intimate workplace where conversations flows in all directions. Leaders need to listen to employees instead of talking at them (Batty & Hilton, 2003). Leaders often speak without understanding how their words affect the people around them. Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) concept of conversational leadership focuses on how leaders use communication within their organizations to create a message, build trust, establish intimacy, and promote organizational conversations rather than a top-down corporate message.

**Theoretical Framework for Conversational Leadership**

Communication is the basis for the theoretical framework of this research. Building upon communication is the idea of conversational leadership (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Leaders deploy conversational methods when establishing relationships with employees. Glaser (2014) focused on how leaders used conversations intelligently to guide their organizations. Groysberg and Slind (2012b) stressed that to build trust among employees, it is essential to establish two-way communication and bring
employees into the conversation. When employees help build the corporate message, it allows leaders to utilize components of conversational leadership.

For the last decade, the corporate world has incorporated the philosophy of conversational leadership into its strategic business models with positive results (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The review of the literature failed to show public sector agencies using conversational leadership as part of moving their organizations forward. Historically, leaders within public sector organizations drove their organization’s performance through commands passed down by managers to employees (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The traditional command-and-control communication style was used to run companies for generations. In military style organizations, command-and-control communication (Leifler & Eriksson, 2012) has always been the only way they communicate. Employees have not had an opportunity to add their opinions to the organizational conversation; this model is changing.

Traditionally, businesses rely on top-down communication “to be exploited in the service of the organizational objectives” (Smeltzer, Glab, & Golen, 1983, p. 74). Denning (2011) discussed how traditional leaders did not adapt to disruptive changes brought upon through innovation. Moreover, traditional managers did not effectively deal with the increased demands of social media (Denning, 2011). Military organizations used command-and-control communication to ensure that all members in the chain of command follow orders without questioning the message (Leifler & Eriksson, 2012). Similarly, crisis communication relied on command-and-control leadership communication to convey the message that there is no room for interpretation (Leifler & Erikson, 2012). Command-and-control methods (Smeltzer et al., 1983) of leadership are
still prevalent in government organizations. There is a need to identify exemplary leaders in government who have adapted Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four I’s of conversational leadership and examine the behaviors practiced within the agencies.

The framework for conversational leadership is premised on all stakeholders working together to make a positive organizational change. Hurley and Brown (2010) focused on six processes for creating engagement through conversational leadership. Those six processes are as follows:

1. Clarify purpose and strategic intent
2. Explore critical issues and questions
3. Engage all key stakeholders
4. Skillfully use collaborative social technologies
5. Guide collective intelligence towards effective action
6. Foster innovative capacity development. (p. 4)

Figure 5 illustrates Hurley and Brown’s (2010) 6-step process. Where Hurley and Brown explored the concept of conversational leadership in 2010, the topic continued to gain momentum with Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) book *Talk Inc.* and Glaser’s (2014) book *Conversational Intelligence*. Each book added to the depth of knowledge on how conversation with key stakeholders leads to increased trust and great engagement.
The Four Elements of Conversational Leadership

Groysberg and Slind (2012b) introduced the four elements of conversational leadership in their book *Talk Inc.* The four elements are intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality, which provide the building blocks for leadership to evolve communication into a method that brings forth a work environment enriched with dynamic, multifaceted conversations with free-flowing ideas that engage stakeholders with organizational meaning and purpose. In short, “Conversational leadership takes root when leaders see their organizations as dynamic webs of conversation and consider the conversations as the core process for effecting positive system change” (Hurley & Brown, 2010, p. 3).
Intimacy

Intimacy, in terms of conversational leadership, involves building trust and creating a sense of closeness between two people (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Stephenson, 2011). Intimacy, the first piece of the conversational leadership foundation, establishes the base for conversational leadership elements. Where closeness can mean proximity, closeness can also mean leaders must reduce formality when communicating with employees. Leaders must spend less time watching the clock during conversations and must spend more time cultivating unhurried conversations (McCann, 2014). Leaders who communicate with a sense of honesty, authenticity, at a personal level, and in a meaningful way create closeness and build trust with employees (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Kark, 2012). The closeness, trust, and familiarity created between leaders and employees come through shared experiences, meaningful exchanges, and shared knowledge (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; O. Schwarz, 2011).

Trust. Glaser (2014) discussed how trust is a fundamental component in honest communication. Trust, intimacy, and honesty are the basis for healthy relationships within the workplace, leading to increased employee productivity (Zak, 2017). Conversational leadership moves beyond mundane discussions and into meaningful conversations when leaders intentionally work on establishing trust and cohesion with employees through self-disclosure and discussion of topics that leaders typically prefer not to discuss (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Kashdan, McKnight, Fincham, & Rose, 2011). Experts agreed that it takes authentic communication aligned with behaviors to build trust between leaders and employees (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Stephenson, 2011).
Extensive research from Glaser (2014), Groysberg and Slind (2012b), and Fiske (1992) and Michael (2014) all firmly agreed with the research of Allert and Chatterjee (1997) that it takes work from leaders to build trust through direct and honest communication in a manner that enhances teams, organizational culture, and interpersonal relationships. Barge et al. (1989) strongly asserted that leadership is based on building up the interpersonal relationships between the leader and the follower. Glaser (2014) supported this assertion and strong evidence that once trust between the leader and the follower is built, the conversation can elevate the relationship to a level of higher intimacy.

Unfortunately, conversation breaks down when there is a lack of curiosity and intolerance to small talk (Glaser, 2014). Leaders need to authentically engage in small talk to develop intimacy in conversation. Intimacy in conversation begins when two people listen to each other and build on the information shared (Kashdan et al., 2011); however, conversational intimacy breaks down when conversations are shared with outside parties. Glaser’s (2014) research supported O. Schwarz’s (2011) assertion that trust is needed to sustain the intimacy in a relationship. O. Schwarz (2011) and Glaser (2014) agreed that trust is violated through sharing conversations with outside people. Barge et al. (1989) examined the importance of conversation as leaders interact with staff but also acknowledged the lack of research in this area. Communication enables leaders to make personal connections with those they lead (Crane, 2002).

**Listening.** Listening for understanding is an essential component to changing the communication model for today’s leaders (Block, 2010; Jorgensen, 2010). Managers who take the time to solicit input from their employees, receive information without
judgment, and listen without preparing their response improve the level of trust with subordinates (Allert & Chatterjee, 1997). Van Engen (2012) discussed the importance of developing listening skills as a behavior among today’s leaders. Listening is a key component to conversational leadership as it reduces the pressure on the leader to speak and gives the leader the opportunity to create engagement (Allert & Chatterjee, 1997; Block, 2010). As leaders start to incorporate listening and open dialogue into regular conversations with employees, ideas will begin to flow freely among the different levels of the organization (Van Engen, 2012). Managers who treat communication as regular person-to-person conversations will help change the environment from the traditional communication model into a more modern workplace (Fiske, 1992).

Shared experiences. According to Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2005), “Dissolving the boundaries between seer and seen leads not only to a deep sense of connection, but also to a heightened sense of change” (p. 43). To build closeness within a team, leaders cannot stay in their offices, isolated from the experiences going on within their organizations if they hope to build trust and relationships (Stephenson, 2011; Zak, 2017). Trust comes with shared experiences. Leaders must initiate, nourish, and maintain regular conversations to build workplace relationships (Stephenson, 2011). Great leaders understand the value of transparency and vulnerability that comes with open communication (Stephenson, 2011). After teams struggle through the initial awkward first meetings, a sense of purpose and commonality will begin to form and real conversations will emerge (Senge et al., 2005). Shared purpose increases trust and reinforces the sense of purpose enhancing the team (Zak, 2017).
Interactivity

Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) second element of conversational leadership was interactivity. Interactivity is the bilateral and multilateral exchange of comments and ideas, a back-and-forth process (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Building upon the foundation established by intimacy, interactivity allows the mechanism to deliver the two-way mutual conversation. Conversation requires the mutual exchange of dialogue between two or more parties without either party monopolizing the conversation (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Without a mutual exchange of ideas, the conversation lacks interactivity. Additionally, a single party cannot dominate the conversation (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Leaders must establish the forum for intentional conversation by allowing others to introduce ideas, ask questions, and agree and disagree on discussion topics in a comfortable, secure environment (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Therefore, a fundamental component of conversational leadership requires leaders to move the conversation along among their employees by talking and listening to those around them (Stephenson, 2011).

Creating channels. Leaders must enable interactive communication within their organization. In other words, “Before leaders can open an organizational conversation, they first must create a channel for it” (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 68). Leaders have different mechanisms, from simple question-and-answer sessions to complex technology, available to support an interactive work environment. To expand employees’ ability to have a meaningful workplace conversation, opening the types of communication is essential. Gone are the days when memos ruled the workplace. Simple question-and-answer boards, like “Ask the CEO” (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 68), allow employees
direct communication through basic communication channels. Tyler (2011) discussed the ability to marry work with regular conversations to accomplish goals and increase employee engagement. Technology today allows for the free flow of messaging by numerous leaders and participants across an organization in a more dynamic fashion. Through different types of multimedia, such as blogs, chat rooms, podcasts, and social networking sites, employees can embrace the leader’s message, provide real-time feedback, and engage in honest communication (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). These interactive communication tools allow employees to be part of the message instead of simply receiving the message, which was the case in traditional one-sided corporate communications.

**Exchange of information.** The mutual exchange of information among managers and team members compounded with building social ties increased the trust among the team members and improved work performance (Michael, 2014; Zak, 2017). Managers who work to build a social connection in the work environment created a more connected and interactive team. According to Zak (2017), only 40% of employees believe they are adequately informed about their company’s goals, objectives, and operational strategies. Organizational communication increased among these employees as the leaders provided daily direct communication to subordinates. Groysberg and Slind (2012b) discussed the importance of creating an open communication channel within the organizational culture that provide employees the freedom to express ideas without fear of retribution. Employees must participate in the conversation, and it is the leader’s responsibility to create a true feeling that the dialogue is welcomed and encouraged (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The mutual exchange of ideas is further accelerated when the leader exhibits
vulnerability allowing for the employees to be open in their communication with employees (Zak, 2017).

**Inclusion**

Inclusion is the commitment to the process of engaging members of the organization to share ideas and participate in the development of the organization (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2010). Inclusion begins by bringing all levels of the organization into the conversation (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; McCann, 2014). The innovative leader will propel all members of the group to achieve more (Thoreson & Muse, 2012). Leaders gain credibility by being open and admitting when help is needed (Zak, 2017). Creating an inclusive culture allows leaders and employees to create deeper, meaningful, and credible conversations (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Zak, 2017). Leaders today must look to make employees partners in corporate messaging by creating an inclusive culture.

**Evolving for the future.** Leaders like Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon, discussed in a letter to his shareholders how the concept of being finished is the death of a company. Businesses need to continue to evolve and discuss new ideas in order to continue to grow and expand (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). Conversational engagement is a requirement (McCann, 2014). With the idea of leaders engaging and exchanging ideas, the leader must keep employees “looking to reinvent, reengineer, and reimage your job” (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011, p. 150). Leaders at GE embraced the notion of using employee-generated pictures and content to tell the corporate story; similarly, other companies, like AT&T, McDonalds, and Juniper Industries, welcomed
employee-generated content and messaging as ways to engage employees in creating and distributing corporate messaging (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

**Content development.** Denning (2011) discussed how conversational leaders create autonomous teams empowered to create the message and respond directly to customers. These teams use a variety of ways to communicate, including instant social media responses, which allow for employee-driven messages in the marketplace (Denning, 2011). Groysberg and Slind (2012b) discussed the need for leaders to utilize employees as partners in corporate conversation development. Miles and Mangold (2005) discussed that Southwest Airlines used and encouraged employees to project the corporate brand to customers and organizational stakeholders. Employees are looked at as a trusted member of the corporate communication team who create unique messages based on their perspective (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Miles & Mangold, 2005). The leader’s fundamental role is to “establish and maintain a relationship with employees rather than top-down command and control” (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 119). By creating this employee relationship, leaders open up a vast array of employee-generated content for corporate use (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

**Giving up control.** Leaders understand that when employees begin to generate organizational content, the leader must give up control over the content (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Inclusion builds upon the factors of intimacy and interactivity. Trust is a major factor that allows for the success of employee-generated content. Employees are a major part of the social fabric that makes up today’s organizations. Leaders who embrace employees’ ability to create and comment on organizational messaging see the authenticity in the messages produced. The employee-generated communications are
deemed more authentic by leaders and engage employees’ creativity, thus stifling boredom (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

**Intentionality**

Groysberg and Slind (2012b) noted, “Rich communication between two people is open, but it is not aimless” (p. 173). Intentionality is ensuring clarity of purpose that includes goals and direction to create order and meaning (Barge, 1985; Groysberg & Slind, 2012; Men, 2012). Built upon the conversational elements of intimacy, interactivity, and inclusion, intentionality sets the agenda for the conversation. Intentionality seeks to align conversational strategies with strategic conversations, which allows leaders the ability to align the organizational purpose (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Employee performance improved when leaders regularly interacted strategically with their staff (Zak, 2017). Leaders seeking strong strategic alignment between the staff and the organizational goals take the time to intentionally discuss long-term future strategies with employees (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). With intentionality of messaging, leaders cannot communicate too much. General Motors created a habit of communication with expectations as part of their institutional standards (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Creating an intentional communication plan provides the strategic partners with a full understanding of the organizational strategy and intentionally corresponds the message before, during, and after each initiative (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Barge & Fairhurst, 2008).

**Clarity of purpose.** Leaders must share the strategic conversation that is “multifaceted, multidirectional, multifocal, and multivocal” with their stakeholders (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b, p. 190). While the message must be organic and authentic, it
must define the corporate purpose and align with the strategic goals. By combining the many voices in the conversation into one, the single vision for the organization emerges and becomes the strategic message (Stanfield, 2000). Leaders must regularly dialogue with employees on the strategic message, so all stakeholders emerge and broadcast the same single organizational message (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Stanfield, 2000).

**Organizational vision.** Intentionality of messaging across the whole organization allows employees to feel a sense of ownership in their work. Groysberg and Slind (2012b) discussed the intentionality of messaging within Volcano Corporation. The employees, motivated by their work, did not just recite the organizational message, they lived the organizational message. Miles and Mangold’s (2005) research focused on how employees live and work the organizational message through their interactions with customers, key stakeholders, and interactions with the public. The employee interactions are seen as part of the business and help shape the corporation’s message (Miles & Mangold, 2005). Employees’ behaviors, both on and off duty, play a part in building the corporate customer service image (Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009). Employees share great work produced through conversations at work, at home, and in the community (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Employees show an undeniable dedication to their organization through their support of the team (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

**Organizational action.** Leaders must utilize their conversational leadership skills to create a visual image of the organizational strategy to engage stakeholders in order to move forward with a single voice (Barge et al., 1989). Guiding communication with intentionality allows a leader to deliver the organizational message to employees on multiple fronts. Hills (2015) discussed the need for the leader to communicate to
increase employee engagement. Precise communication to employees through a variety of mediums increased the saturation of the strategic message. Employees, in turn, feel like organizational insiders when they are involved through communication on the strategic message. Employees increase organizational engagement and become vested in the organization’s strategic vision. Leaders utilize all four conversational leadership traits—intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality—in unison to advance the strategic goals with an engaged workforce (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Leaders cannot overlook the need to communicate the importance of action. Intentionality calls for leaders to communicate a singular strategic voice, so all stakeholders can move forward as a united front to achieve the organizational mission (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Nichols, 2012). However, it is imperative for the leader to direct the forward movement. Leaders cannot assume that knowing the strategic vision moves the organization forward (Tyler, 2011). Leaders must be precise in their communication and direct their stakeholders to affirmatively move toward achieving the desired goals (Barge et al., 1989; Tyler, 2011). Where clarity of purpose is an essential element of intentionality, the knowledge that it is time to act is just as important.

City Managers

Public agencies are “facing a world disrupted by demographic, social, value, and technological shifts; public distrust; and permanent fiscal stress” (Benest, 2013, p. 26). Housing shortages, transportation issues, unfunded liabilities, decreased employee engagement, lack of public trust, and increased technology costs are only some of the issues facing municipalities today (Benest, 2013; Block, 2010). Pandey and Wright (2010) discussed the bureaucratic nature of municipal organizations and how
transformational leadership is “less common and less effective in public sector organizations” (p. 75). Municipalities must seek out new ways of providing leaders to local communities while meeting the challenges of living in the 21st century global economy. Local agencies face issues, such as increased immigration, global turmoil, extreme economic distress, rapid increases in technology, and intergenerational differences that have a significant impact on an agency’s ability to meet the needs of their communities (Batty & Hilton, 2003; Crowley, 2011). With the increased polarization of people brought about by political discourse, local governments face challenges leading a 21st century municipal organization. Local government agencies are looking for a 21st leadership approach to meet these new organizational complexities (Batty & Hilton, 2003; Maciag, 2013b; Peters, Thee-Brenan & Sussman, 2016). With communities feeling disconnected and unheard, local government leaders must effectively communicate with stakeholders to create an understanding that listening is a fundamental component of local government leadership (Thoreson & Muse, 2012).

There are many different levels of government that define the scope of authority for specific agencies (M. Roberts, 2017). Federal government handles national issues, such as national defense, while state government handles issues related to the overall state and the impacts to residents of the state. Local agencies, like cities, are responsible for the issues that occur within that jurisdiction with the largest impact on the residents’ daily life, like handling issues involving solid waste and trash services (M. Roberts, 2017). Local government leadership is comprised of a city council and a hired administrator known as the city manager. The professionalism of this position occurred about 100 years ago as a reform initiative designed to model local government agencies
after businesses in order to create efficient delivery of services (Funkhouser, 2013). With the business model in mind, city manager positions function like corporate chief executive officers with the responsibility of reporting to the city council and an engaged group of stakeholders comprised of city residents. The modern-day government leader must be a collaborator looking to solve problems by establishing cross-function teams consisting of elected officials, employees, community members, and business leaders (Thoreson & Muse, 2012). City managers cannot function in isolation. City managers rely on a professional staff in a variety of disciplines to handle specific department work in areas including public works, planning, police, fire, human resources, risk management, finance, parks, recreation, building, and engineering.

**Role of the City Manager**

Evolving from a political system of local government, the modern world created the powerful position of city manager as a nonpolitical position with the primary responsibility of handling the day-to-day administration of the local municipal government (Funkhouser, 2013; Schmidt & Posner, 1987; Thorson & Muse, 2012). The city manager’s role is leader, responsible for rallying people to work for the benefit of the local community (Benest, 2013). City managers in bureaucratic organizations seek to be equitable, predictable, efficient, and stable as they provide a uniform response to most situations (Funkhouser, 2013; Wright & Pandey, 2010). Using a hierarchical system, the city manager distributes authority among subordinate levels, utilizing strict systems of rules, regulations, and policies to guide actions down through the organization with very little upward influx of policymaking and rule setting and the need for intense supervision over subordinates (Batty & Hilton, 2003; Wright & Pandey, 2010). The rigid nature of
the hierarchical system limits the effectiveness and creativity needed in a modern-day organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Shamir & Howell, 1999). Batty and Hilton (2003) discussed the need for a transition away from full command-and-control leadership to a new model based in trust that provides supervisors and frontline staff with the tools to evolve and develop without the fear instilled from traditional government culture. Today’s city manager must serve as the coach, serving the people within the community by listening and establishing trust, communicating with stakeholders, and dealing with potential conflicts before they arise (Botch, 2011).

**City Managers and Transparency**

The role of city managers must transition from traditional command-and-control leadership style to a modern-day leadership, ready to face unique organizational challenges (Batty & Hilton, 2003). City managers face intense public scrutiny due to recent events diminishing the noble pursuit to serve the public that motivates most city leaders. Critical events transpired in city governments across California that led city managers to become transparent in their daily operations (P. West, 2012). The city of Bell made national headlines with the arrest and conviction of several government officials, including the city manager (Liu, Moldogaziev, & Mikesell, 2017; Rodgers & Watkins, 2015). The city manager and key staff bilked the city for millions of taxpayer dollars, resulting in increased citizen participation in local government and a call for transparency measures for all local government officials (Liu et al., 2017; Rodgers & Watkins, 2015). Distrust for local government agencies and city managers increased following the city of Bell scandal (Rodgers & Watkins, 2015). On the heels of the Bell scandal, President Obama called for increased transparency in the way government shares
information (R. Schwarz, 2010). With the increased call for transparency and stemming out of this ethical crisis in Bell, California, city managers are now required to publicly disclose salary and benefit information annually through the State of California Controller’s Office website (Bucher, 2014; Hennum, Thakkar, & Reese, 2017).

City Managers and Changes in Leadership

At any given time in California, there will be numerous articles in newspapers announcing the retirement of another city manager. With the emergence from the great recession, retirement numbers for baby boomers in government jobs continues to increase (Kerrigan, 2016; Maciag, 2013b). In the city of Sacramento in 2007, Brian Moffitt (2017) discussed how 62% of leaders in the city would be eligible to retire by the year 2012. California is experiencing a phenomenon involving a large wave of city managers retiring known as the Silver Tsunami (Maciag, 2016). Baby boomers currently occupying these jobs across the state are retiring faster than they can be replaced (Kerrigan, 2016; Maciag, 2013b, 2016). Municipal organizations struggle to deal with the turnover of leadership in the city manager position (Maciag, 2013b). The city of Sacramento responded to this impending crisis by creating the City Management Institute to address the leadership needs of the city as more of its seasoned leaders moved into retirement (Moffitt, 2007). Sacramento invested $40,000 into a plan that trained future city managers by creating a curriculum-based program teaching city fundamentals, such as operations, management, legislation, financial management, strategic planning, and conflict resolution (Moffitt, 2007).
Beyond training programs to build up future city managers, the leadership skill set for city managers must change. Transformational leadership allows followers to see a vision and move toward it with the guidance of a strong leader (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Batty & Hilton, 2003; Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Wright & Pandey, 2010). With the influx of baby boomers into retirement in the public sector, the city manager position must evolve from the day-to-day manager into that of a transformational leader, a role model for the organization, and a confident leader for employees to follow (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Botch, 2011; Maciag, 2013b; Wright & Pandey, 2010). The role of modern-day city manager must be one of motivator, role model, and transformational leader (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Botch, 2011; Wright & Pandey, 2010).

**City Managers and the Elements of Conversational Leadership**

The ease with which people can communicate across the globe has permanently changed how leaders must engage their followers (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Instant access to information and the ability to comment on worldwide issues creates the opportunity for immediate dialogue on important issues. Business and government leaders recognize the impact that communication has on leadership today. As technology changes, people expect more interaction from their leaders (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Stakeholders expect leaders to provide them with the opportunity to have a say in business decisions; the same is true for government leaders and their stakeholders (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). Today’s government leaders are not exempt from the desired participation of their constituents. Citizens want government leaders to be transparent with the organization’s daily operations while providing the opportunity for residents to interact and contribute to the running of their government (Porumbescu,
To increase transparency and engage their citizenry, government leaders today need to use a variety of methods and technologies to bridge the desired communication with a varied stakeholder base (Porumbescu, 2015).

Changes in technology permanently altered the way workplaces communicate (Charlot & Duranton, 2006). Technology allows for free-flowing communication among people all over the world (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). Now everyone can pick up a smartphone, open Twitter, type 140 characters, and then hit send to communicate thoughts and feelings for anyone to see (Groysberg & Slind, 2012a). The creation of this kind of communication technology made the world smaller. Twitter is not the original communication technology company. Social media began as far back as 1997 with the creation of a website called Six Degrees (History Cooperative, 2015). As the use of the Internet expanded, so did the use of social media. By early 2000s, more than 100 million people had access to the Internet and used it on a regular basis (History Cooperative, 2015). Social media companies, like Myspace, Facebook, and Instagram, saturated the market with the goal of breaking down barriers to communication and allowing easy communication all over the world (Willis, 2017). Social media products today are tailored to almost every available interest, and people use them to express whatever is on their mind.

With the explosive increase in communication technology, it is also time for government leaders, like city managers, to embrace new communication platforms and begin to develop ways to build communication bridges with people (Ferro et al., 2013). Government agencies do not fully utilize social technologies to effectively connect with their constituents (Ferro et al., 2013). Increasing the use of communication technology
may build the trust and increase transparency between city managers and the citizens they serve (Porumbescu, 2015). However, city managers need to bridge communication methods to include building relationships with other groups. Government leaders also need to adapt their communication methods to meet different audiences (Porumbescu, 2015). With four different predominant generations in the workforce, leaders need to step away from the status quo and use targeted methods of communication with people of all ages (DelCampo, Haggerty, Haney, & Knippel, 2011). For example, the newest generation entering the workforce, the millennials, are looking for different things from their leaders than the baby boomers and Generation Xers. Millennials want their voices heard and want immediate feedback to fuel their motivation to work (Miller, 2015). To keep up with this emerging population in the workplace, leaders must change the way they interact with employees. Citizen groups are questioning government leaders because of the belief that governmental agencies do not listen and lack transparency (Houstoun, 2011). To clarify the message to all of the stakeholder groups, government leaders need to conduct the right conversations with the right people at the right times (Benson & Stieglitz, 2013). Government leaders have ample opportunities to alter current communication methods in order to create a more dynamic, intimate, interactive, inclusive, and interconnected environment to communicate with the masses, stakeholders, and employees.

There is a significant amount of research showing the need for city managers to communicate with stakeholder groups, citizens, businesses, and city councils (Frederickson & O’Leary, 2014). The city manager’s primary role is management of the city for the city council (“Governing, 2012”; Nalbandian, 1989). A primary function of
the city manager is to communicate and listen with city officials, employees, and stakeholders to the variety of employees in today’s workforce (Botch, 2011). Trends in public sector leadership show growth in the role of city manager as malleable, moving away from day-to-day administrator and more into the role of policy influencer for the city council (Wheeland, et al., 2014). What the research fails to show is how the city manager is keeping up with the increased role of leader within the city to the staff (Frederickson & O’Leary, 2014). With so much of the city manager’s time focused on external factors, such as managing the town council and meeting the new demands put on the position by the community, there is a need for city managers to adapt their leadership style to focus on the needs of employees (Getha-Taylor, Fowles, Silvia, & Merritt, 2015).

**Summary**

It will take work to move today’s government agencies from organizations dependent on hierarchy for their primary method of communication to agencies willing to embrace Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) conversational leadership methods. Governments will have to work to establish the four I’s: intimacy, inclusion, intentionality, and interactivity (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Throughout the literature, the missing component is how emerging conversational leadership theory works in the public sector, specifically with city managers. The literature focused on leadership theory, communication models, the emerging conversational leadership, and the role of the city managers, specifically local government. However, nowhere in the literature is there an explanation of how the emergence of conversational leadership can work for government leaders. O. Schwarz (2011) along with Waters and Williams (2011) discussed the movement into new communication mediums, like Twitter, blogs,
and other types of social media, along with transformational leadership models as discussed by Bass (1985), Northouse (1997), and Ackerman Anderson and Anderson (2010), but research is lacking on how the use of these new models to move conversational leadership into the role city managers plays out in local government.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I might remember. Involve me and I will understand.

—Benjamin Franklin

Overview

This qualitative study observed how exemplary city managers lead organizations using the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Chapter III includes the discussion of the selected qualitative method used for this study as well as a review of the following: purpose statement, research questions, research design, population, sample, instruments, validity and reliability, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations, culminating with a summary. Throughout the study, the term peer researcher is used to refer to the 12 Brandman University doctoral students who worked on this thematic team under the guidance of four faculty persons, collaborating on design and implementation of the research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.
Research Questions

Central Research Question

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

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of interactivity?
3. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of inclusion?
4. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intentionality?

Research Design

In determining the proper research design for this study, it was imperative to find a method that would allow for in-depth examination of the behaviors city managers used to lead their organization through conversation. The group of 12 peer researchers and the four faculty members met, discussed, and determined that the best way to identify the behaviors was through qualitative research. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described research design as the way the researchers are able to establish a plan that enables the credible conclusions for the research questions. This study sought to examine the phenomenon of conversational leadership and how exemplary leaders use conversation to
lead their organization. The peer researchers discussed the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative research methods utilize numerical data to measure and analyze the relationship between different variables (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Quantitative research is best used when the researcher is seeking to make vast generalizations of large groups of participants (Patton, 2015; Salkind, 2011). However, qualitative research provided the researcher the opportunity to seek answers to the phenomenon involving complex questions surrounding the multiple variables of conversational leadership in the life of an exemplary leader (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The use of qualitative research design allowed for the in-depth examination of the conversational leadership phenomenon. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described qualitative research as a way to examine how human behavior works in a complex world. Therefore, the peer researcher team determined that the qualitative methodology met the unique needs of the conversational leadership phenomenon for this study.

With the selection of qualitative research, the next step was to identify which qualitative method would be most effective to answer the research questions. A quality study must seek to align the research method to the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The 12 thematic peer researchers considered several different qualitative methods but ultimately selected phenomenology as the research methodology for this study. Phenomenology provides an in-depth examination of the participants’ actual lived experiences (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Patton (2015) described a phenomenological study as “gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. 115). Phenomenology describes the lived experience;
Patton explained that “the term *lived* derived from the German erlebnis – experience as we live through it and recognize it as a particular type of experience” (p. 115).

The use of a phenomenological methodology begins with the presumption that essentially all participants share similar experiences (Patton, 2015; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). The research team determined that a phenomenological study would examine the shared everyday practices of conversational leadership with the sample group of exemplary leaders. Researchers collected data through in-depth interviews, artifacts, and observations of leaders in their work environment. Today’s leaders face complex issues that require communication; the peer researchers were able to observe the leaders’ lived experiences through the collected data. The phenomenological approach to the research provided rich details about the leaders’ lived experience, allowing for a greater understanding of the phenomenon that is conversational leadership (Patton, 2015).

Focusing on 10 exemplary Southern California city managers, this research study examined the lived experiences of these leaders (Patton, 2015; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015) through the examination of artifacts, direct observations, and in-depth interviews. The goal of this qualitative research was to embrace the richness of the phenomenon that is conversational leadership from the viewpoint of exemplary city managers. After data collection, the research was coded to identify commonalities, themes, and consistent traits among all subjects (Patton, 2015).

**Population**

Creswell (2008) described population as “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics” (p. 644). Population is a large group of subjects who meet defined criteria, which allows the researcher to generalize findings from a study
The population for this study was city managers in incorporated cities within the United States. City managers are the chief executive officers hired by an elected body, known as the city council, to run city governments. The city manager is primarily responsible for carrying out the policy direction of the city council (M. Roberts, 2016). The position requires a significant level of education and experience in municipal government. Throughout the United States, there are 19,505 incorporated cities that employ city managers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, 2016). However, because qualitative phenomenological research is time consuming, labor intensive, and cost prohibitive, to conduct research on a large population, it is necessary to further narrow the population. The researcher narrowed down the U.S. population of city managers to California. In California, there are 482 city managers.

**Target Population**

The target population for the study was the individuals selected from the overall population of the study for which inferences were made (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The research was generalized for the whole population based on findings from the target population. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described the importance of having a clearly identified target population for the purpose of a research study. Creswell (2008) defined the target population as a group of subjects with characteristics in common that allow the researcher to study and make generalized inferences regarding the findings. According to the League of California Cities (2011), California has 482 incorporated cities. Because of California’s vast geographical area and the large number of incorporated cities, it was not feasible to study all California city managers. Therefore,
with an overall population too large to conduct qualitative research, the researcher reduced the target group to a manageable sample (Creswell, 2008).

Due to geography and convenience, the researcher selected city managers in Southern California cities as the target population for this study. The Southern California counties were included in the target population. The target population included the counties of San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino. Within these four counties, there are 146 incorporated cities. The researcher further narrowed down the number of participating city managers to only those meeting the study criteria as exemplary as determined by the thematic team. The researcher worked with the League of California Cities and California Joint Powers Insurance Authority staff to identify Southern California city managers who met the exemplary criteria (see Figure 6).

*Figure 6. Population–target population–sample.*
Sample

The group of participants selected from the population that the researcher used to
generalize the findings is called the sample. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described
sampling as selecting a “group of individuals from whom data is collected” (p. 129).
Both Creswell (2008) and Patton (2015) described the sample as a smaller,
representational subset of the whole population. When selecting a sample, it is
imperative to choose a population that holds the characteristics that most closely align
with the population and that represent the population being studied to allow the
researcher to draw conclusions from the sample population (Creswell, 2008; Salkind,
2011).

When selecting the sample, the researcher must consider probability and
nonprobability sampling. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described probability
sampling as selecting research subjects from a larger population where the probability of
drawing each subject from the overall population is known. Nonprobability sampling
occurs when researchers select participants based on defined characteristics (McMillan &
Schumacher, 2010).

Nonprobability sampling includes stratified sampling, which aims to obtain the
same number of samples in each group; snowball sampling, in which participants identify
others to participate to become part of the sample; multistage cluster sampling, which is
comprised of a hard to reach or hard to detect group; convenience sampling, which is
comprised of a group that is easily accessible; and finally, purposive sampling, which
uses selected criteria to establish the group of participants (Creswell, 2008; McMillan &
Schumacher, 2010).
Wang and Fan (1998) discussed the following six criteria that must be considered when selecting a sample.

- A specific target population
- Specific analysis based on the research questions
- Specific sample size for the research
- A detailed description of the sample’s selection procedure
- And data analysis and generalizing of findings that are consistent with the chosen selection strategy

For this study, the thematic research team used purposeful sampling. Patton (2015) described purposeful sampling as intentionally recruiting a population of participants who exhibit the desired characteristics intended for the study. For this study, purposeful sampling was used to obtain a group of exemplary city managers. In purposeful sampling, the researcher selects particular elements from the population that are representative or informative about the topic of interest (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Purposeful sampling provides a look at a representative group rather than an exhaustive group of the target population (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016). For this study, the purposeful sampling of exemplary city manager must 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. recognized by their peers; or
6. membership in professional associations within their field.

Ten exemplary city managers who met the criteria were selected from the target population for the study.

**Sample Subject Selection Process**

The researcher used the following process to select research participants:

1. The researcher contacted League of California Cities and California Joint Powers Insurance Authority Southern California office to identify 10 exemplary city managers meeting the established criteria.

2. The researcher established a list of potential city manager participants and began contacting the participants via e-mail and/or telephone to determine their level of interest in participating in the study.

3. Using the purposeful criteria and convenience sampling, the researcher selected 10 exemplary Southern California city managers.

4. A researcher e-mailed a letter of invitation describing the main purpose of the study, detailing out the risks and research procedures.

5. The researcher continued to send out invitation letters until such time that 10 participants met the exemplary criteria and agreed to participate in the research study.

Patton (2015) discussed the need for a phenomenological study to be rich in depth, which requires an appropriate sample size to meet the needs of the study.
**Instrumentation**

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher functions as the instrument for the data collection (Patton, 2015). The three kinds of qualitative data collected included semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions and probes; observations of activities, such as actions, conversations, and processes; and documents, such as written materials and records, surveys, pictures, and publications (Creswell, 2008; Patton, 2015). Qualitative research requires the researcher to serve as the instrument (Patton, 2015). Pezalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012) discussed how the researcher functions as the primary instrument in qualitative research, and, as such, the researchers bring their own unique skills, ideas, and traits to the interview process that have the potential to influence the study. The researcher must gather authentic data through means that is not dependent upon human interpretation and feelings (Patton, 2015). For the research to remain unbiased, the researcher must stay emotionally distant and uninvolved with the subjects (Patton, 2015). Therefore, qualitative research is dependent upon the researcher for the level of quality of the data collected. This study required the researcher to function as the instrument to collect the three types of qualitative data.

The thematic research team determined a phenomenological study that used semistructured interview protocols and probes to collect data most appropriate for the study (Patten, 2012). When developing the research questions, the researchers developed open-ended questions aligned to the purpose of the study to elicit information that captures the subjects’ lived experiences (Patton, 2015). The team developed
semistructured research questions that align to the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. The use of semistructured interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to probe the interviewee for in-depth responses to the established field-tested interview instrument (Harrell & Bradley, 2009; Leech, 2002; Turner, 2010). The use of interview probes was an effective way of maintaining the focus of the interview on the research topic while focusing on the need for rich, in-depth data while the use of semistructured interviews allowed the researcher to use open-ended questions to gain knowledge and insight into the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Moreover, the use of open-ended questions allowed the researcher to engage the interviewee in dialogue that gave the interviewee an unconstrained voice to share his or her lived perspective (Creswell, 2008).

The peer thematic research team developed 12 open-ended questions for the research study. The researchers split into four groups of three team members charged with drafting three interview questions for one research variable. The first team’s questions related to intimacy, the second team’s questions related to interactivity, the third team’s questions related to inclusion, and the fourth team’s questions related to intentionality. The faculty reviewed and approved the questions.

After review by the faculty team, the research team received feedback on the proposed questions along with a revised draft of the interview questions. Incorporating the feedback from the faculty research team, each team was tasked with revising and resubmitting three to four interview questions, with follow-up probes, back to the core faculty team for validation. Finally, thematic researchers submitted the 12 open-ended
research questions to a panel of faculty members at Brandman University for validation. At the end of the validation process, the four faculty members, serving as the expert panel, then met with one representative from each research team to gain consensus on the final questions (Appendix A), follow-up probing questions to elicit additional information (Appendix B), and interview protocols (Appendix C).

With the final feedback from the faculty serving as the expert panel, the researcher commenced with field testing of the approved questions and protocols. The field-test interview was constructed to replicate how actual interviews would occur during data collection. The thematic researchers conducted field testing during the week of July 27 through August 8, 2017. Field testing the interview questions allowed the researcher to receive feedback on the instrument and make necessary modifications prior to conducting field research (Creswell, 2008). The subject of the field test for this study was an exemplary city manager as defined in this study but not included in the study. Exemplary city managers must 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 by their peers, or
6. membership in professional associations within their field.

During the field testing, the researcher briefly reviewed the study with the participant, provided the informed consent form (Appendix C), and the Brandman Bill of
Rights form (Appendix D). For field testing, the researcher had the presence of an expert observer, which is an exception to the approved interview protocol (Patten, 2012). The expert chosen recently completed a qualitative research study at Brandman University. During the field-testing interview, the expert functioned as a process observer, making notes and recommendations to the researcher about how the researcher conducted the interview, the researcher’s level of nervousness, the timing of the interview, and the clarity of the interview process. The expert observer and the researcher met to dissect the field-testing interview to gain clarity on the process, discuss areas for improvement, and provide recommendations for future interviews. The researcher took the feedback from the expert observer as well as the field-test interviewee and provided the feedback to the expert faculty panel to assist in finalizing the field-test interview questions used by all members of the thematic research team.

**Validity**

C. Roberts (2010) defined validity as the process in which the credibility of the study is determined. Validity allows the researcher to determine the accuracy of the data collected through the qualitative research process. Validity also allows the researcher to draw conclusions from the data collected from a sample of the research population (Creswell, 2008). Researchers employ a variety of strategies to verify the validity of the data while ensuring the instrument deployed in the study functions as intended to accurately report the findings.
Content Validity

Content validity requires evidence to show that the qualitative interview questions used to collect data in the study match the research questions (Patton, 2015). The researcher used content validity to minimize confusion and ensure that the conclusions drawn are based on the collected data. For this study, the researcher is the instrument, and therefore, training the researcher in qualitative research minimized the limitations. The researcher conducted the following steps to address the limitations:

1. The researcher performed a field test with an exemplary city manager prior to conducting the actual data collection. During the field test, the researcher reviewed the interview protocols prior to beginning the interview. The researcher recorded the interview with two digital recorders to record the data. The researcher also employed a subject matter expert in qualitative data collection to sit as an observer during the field-testing interview.

2. The thematic research team worked with the faculty to develop and refine the 12 qualitative interview questions. The thematic researchers field tested the interview questions and engaged in an interactive process to discuss the effectiveness of each question. The research team worked together to validate the interview questions to ensure that they adequately aligned with the research questions.

Reliability

C. Roberts (2010) defined reliability as “the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another” (p. 151). Qualitative research requires reliability in data collection to ensure that the instrument used is clear and
unambiguous, testing procedures are standardized across all interviews, and interviewees are confident, comfortable, and clearly understand the interview questions (Creswell, 2008). For this research study, the researcher used an interview guide with a script and interview questions to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions in a similar manner.

**Internal Reliability of Data**

Internal reliability of data shows that when the testing instrument is used once, the data collected from that use are consistent with the data collected when the instrument is used again in the same manner (Creswell, 2008). Triangulation of the data requires cross-checking the information collected to ensure consistency. Triangulation methods can include multiple parties observing interviews and comparing interview transcripts with written program documents that support the interview statements (Creswell, 2008). This research study utilized a thematic research team of 12 members with each researcher studying the phenomenon of conversational leadership on a specific genre of exemplary leaders. The thematic research team developed the same research purpose, research questions, and instrument for data collection. As a group, the thematic research team worked together to identify and discuss the research findings from each researcher’s perspective. Each researcher collected multiple forms of data, such as artifacts and field observations, that the researcher used to cross-check and confirm the information collected during the field interviews. With the variety of methods used to collect and cross-check, the research data increased the reliability of the study.
Intercoder Reliability of Data

Once the researcher completed the data collection, transcribed the data, and coded the data, the researcher moved into validating the data. Working in a thematic research team, the researcher provided another thematic team member researcher with 10% of the collected data for independent verification of the research. Patton (2015) described intercoder reliability as the process of utilizing a third-party evaluator to analyze, verify, and determine the same conclusion for the data collected. For this study, the researcher provided a thematic team researcher with one of the 10 transcribed interviews. After the thematic researcher completed the verification of the data, the researcher looked for the level of intercoder reliability. Lombard, Synder-Duch, and Campanella Bracken (2004) established intercoder reliability as “coefficients of .90 or greater are nearly always acceptable, .80 or greater is acceptable in most situations, and .70 may be appropriate in some exploratory studies for some indices” (p. 3). The process of cross-checking the data with an independent researcher created a level of reliability (Patton, 2015).

External Reliability of Data

External reliability of data allows an independent researcher to replicate the research study and achieve the same results with the same conclusions (Patton, 2015). Phenomenological research makes external reliability of data more difficult to replicate because phenomenology qualitative data rely on the lived experience of the subject. Subjects in a phenomenological research study have their own independent experiences, which is difficult to replicate.
**Data Collection**

The researcher relied on face-to-face interviews with 10 exemplary city managers for the data collection for this research study. The researcher digitally recorded the interviews, downloaded the file, and saved them in password-protected digital files. The researcher preserved all signed informed consents, written notes, and interview transcripts produced during the data collection process and secured the research in a locked cabinet.

The data collection process began after the researcher completed the Brandman University’s Internal Review Board (BUIRB) process. The BUIRB process requires each researcher to submit all research projects involving human participants for approval prior to commencing a study. The BUIRB is charged with protecting the participants’ rights in research projects by ensuring the following:

- the participants’ rights to give informed consent;
- safety and protection from undue risk;
- guided research using ethical principles as set forth in the Belmont Report;
- research conducted with expertise and integrity;
- research complies with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations; and
- maintain confidentiality of participants contact information.

Additionally, the researcher completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) certification for protecting human research participants (Appendix G). The researcher preserved the rights of all research participants throughout the course of the study. The researcher provided each participant with the informed consent documents and collected the signed document prior to commencing the interview.
Interview Process

Once BUIRB granted approval, the researcher contacted the 10 exemplary Southern California city managers via e-mail or by telephone to seek their participation in the study. The researcher sought 1-hour, in-person interviews using the interview questions and follow-up prompts created by the thematic research team for this study. Once the researcher secured agreement on participation in the study, the researcher scheduled the date, time, and location for the interviews. The researcher sent out confirmation e-mails with the researcher’s contact information to each participant and included the Brandman University informed consent disclosures. Prior to commencing data collection, the researcher collected the signed informed consent disclosures from each participant. The researcher explained the interview protocol and proceeded to ask the 12 predetermined open-ended interview questions. The researcher asked three questions for each of the four variables. The researcher used interview probes as necessary to elicit additional pertinent information throughout the data collection process. The researcher used two different audio recording devices to capture data from the interviews. The researcher also took handwritten notes of nonverbal responses from the participant as part of the observational data. The data collection procedures are outlined in Table 1.
Upon completion of the interview, the researcher utilized the services of a confidential transcription service for obtaining a full record of the interview. The researcher requested that each research participant review the transcribed interview record to ensure the accuracy of the data prior to the commencement of the data analysis process. Once the participants reviewed and verified the accuracy of the transcribed interviews, the researcher utilized the NVIVO software with the transcribed interviews to determine themes and patterns from the participants’ responses to identify commonalities among all interviews. The researcher utilized this information in the data analysis process.
Data Analysis

After completing the 10 exemplary city manager interviews, the researcher took the 10 transcribed interview records, the observational data, and the artifacts collected and began analyzing the data. The researcher utilized the process of coding the qualitative data collected during the field research. Coding consists of collecting the data from the individual interviews and organizing the data into categories based on patterns (Patton, 2015). Upon completion of the field interviews, the researcher utilized a confidential transcription service to transcribe the interviews. Once the transcribed interviews were received, the researcher provided the subjects with their interview transcription to verify the accuracy of the interview. The researcher typed up all handwritten notes and field logs. Once the researcher finalized all field notes and received verified transcribed interviews from the participants, the researcher commenced the data coding utilizing the NVIVO software program. NVIVO allows the researcher to code a significant amount of information into themes and identify patterns in common from the subject interviews (Patton, 2015). The researcher studied each interview to develop an overall sense of the emerging commonalities within the interviews. The researcher triangulated the data through an analysis of the interviews, the artifacts, and the observational data. The researcher made notes of the commonalities, and emerging themes began to emerge. The researcher then began to code the data into repetitive patterns, categories, subcategories, and, finally, assertions (Patton, 2015). The researcher looked for four specific elements related to Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four conversational leadership variables (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality).
for coding and frequency. After completing the coding process, the researcher worked with other thematic team members to compare codes and ensure consistency of the data.

Limitations

C. Roberts (2010) described limitations as those conditions beyond the researcher’s control that make generalizing the population more difficult. For this study, there were four main limitations identified. Those limitations were location, sample size, time, and instrument.

Location/Geography

The location for the population of the study was a challenge. California has over 400 city managers. It was necessary to limit the location of the population. Due to the size of the state of California, the study was delimited to Southern California.

Sample Size

California’s hundreds of city managers was a limitation of the study. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, 10 exemplary city managers were selected to answer the research questions. The small sample size limited generalizations for the overall population sample. Additionally, due to the constraint with the completion deadline, the number of city managers had to be limited.

Time

Time was a limitation for this study. With a qualitative research design, the interview was an essential component of the study. The interviews for this study were limited to 1 hour, which may have created difficulty in obtaining the depth of the information necessary to fully address the research question from the exemplary city managers. Additionally, the researcher faced time constraints in completing the research.
The data collection period was limited to several months in order to meet university deadlines.

**Researcher as the Instrument of the Study**

When conducting a qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher is the instrument (Patton, 2015). Although, the researcher has the necessary education and 20 years of experience as a public sector human resource professional with extensive interviewing skills, the researcher is a limitation when conducting interviews with human subjects. The researcher must account for any bias, conscious and unconscious, when conducting the field research. During field testing, the researcher sought feedback from the expert observer and the interviewee to minimize personal bias and personal assumptions. Therefore, the use of field testing, soliciting feedback, education, and work experience all work together to minimize the impact of using the researcher as the instrument.

**Summary**

Chapter III focused on the qualitative research methods used to complete this study. The purpose statement and research questions provided the roadmap for the study. The chapter discussed the research design, the sample, the population, and the instrument used as well as how the data were collected and processed for this research study. Ultimately, the limitations of the study were discussed.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This phenomenological qualitative study observed the behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Chapter IV begins with a review of the purpose statement, the research questions, the population, the methodology, and finally the data collection and analysis process. The data and key findings are presented for each of the research subquestions.

Purpose Statement

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

Research Questions

Central Research Question

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

Subquestions

1. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intimacy?

2. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of interactivity?
3. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of inclusion?

4. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intentionality?

**Population**

This study’s population was the 482 city managers in California (League of California Cities, 2011). The population was further narrowed to Southern California counties, which included San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino. The target population focused on the 146 city managers in Southern California counties.

**Sample**

The 12 thematic researchers and four thematic team dissertation chairs worked cooperatively to establish the criteria for determining exemplary leaders. Each peer researcher used the established criteria to narrow down the target population within his or her specific research area. The study participants had to meet at least four of the six following established 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 peers; or
6. membership in professional associations in their field.
Based on the established criteria, the researcher further narrowed the target population to a study sample of 10 exemplary city managers with the help of League of California Cities’ members and California Joint Powers Insurance Authority staff. Each organization provided city managers in the Southern California counties meeting at least four of the six exemplary criteria. The smaller sample size is preferred with a phenomenological study to provide an appropriate candidate pool to provide a depth of information (Patton, 2015). The researcher made contact with the potential study participants through e-mail and telephone conversations until securing 10 exemplary city manager interviews.

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

The phenomenological study utilized in-depth interviews with each of the 10 exemplary city managers to gain knowledge and insight into their lived experiences. The interviews focused on the four elements of conversational leadership. The primary source of data came from the in-depth interviews with the exemplary city managers. However, the researcher collected additional data through observations and artifacts to allow for triangulation of the research data.

The 12 peer researchers developed 12 semistructured interview questions (Appendix A), with three questions focusing on each of the four conversational leadership elements. The interviews consisted of six face-to-face interviews and four telephone interviews. The interviews lasted between 16 minutes and 86 minutes with 37 minutes being the average length of each interview.
The researcher focused on collecting pertinent data through in-depth interviews. However, the researcher conducted direct observations with three of the city managers and city staff. The direct observations of the city managers lasted a total of 7 hours.

The researcher collected 16 artifacts directly related to the conversational leadership elements from study participants, from city social media pages, from city websites, and at city hall that directly aligned with the data provided by the city managers during the interview process. During the coding process, the researcher used the data collected during the interviews, direct observations, and artifacts for coding purposes. Additionally, the researcher coded interview and observational data along with the artifacts collected that directly related to the city manager interview to corroborate the content of the interviews and the direct observations.

**Research Participant Demographic Data**

To maintain the confidentiality of each of the study participants, each participant received a unique number and the cities were not identified in the study. Each city manager in the study meets or exceeds the definition of exemplary leader as established by the peer research group (see Table 2). Table 3 illustrates the demographic data for the study participants.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The findings presented in Chapter IV were collected through an examination of information from the in-depth interviews and observations with the exemplary city managers and the culmination of their lived experiences as related to the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.
Table 2

Exemplary Criteria for City Managers

<table>
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<th>Study participant</th>
<th>Successful relationship with followers</th>
<th>Leading a successful organization</th>
<th>Minimum of 5 years in the profession</th>
<th>Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings</th>
<th>Recognition by peers</th>
<th>Membership in a professional organization</th>
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</table>

Table 3

Study Participant Demographic Data

<table>
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<th>Age range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years in the profession</th>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
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<td>6-10</td>
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<td>6-10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

The 10 in-depth interviews were transcribed and uploaded to NVivo, a qualitative research software, used to assist the researcher with analysis of the research data. Patton (2015) discussed how a researcher codes the qualitative data based on repetitive patterns, categories, subcategories, and, finally, assertions. The coding for this study related directly to themes consistent with the four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality).

During the data analysis process, the frequencies of the codes were provided to the researcher to give her an understanding of the behaviors exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations through Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

Reliability

At the conclusion of the interviews, the data collected, along with the direct observations and artifacts, were used to triangulate results and report findings to the research subquestions. To ensure the reliability of the data, the researcher provided a peer researcher with 10% of the coded data for analysis. The peer researcher conducted an independent analysis of 10% of the transcribed data, coding the data for frequencies, with an agreement rate of 85.7%; 18 of 22 frequencies matched the variables, showing reliability among the researchers.

Research Questions and Subquestion Results

The peer research team created an interview protocol for field research, which included 12 in-depth questions. The central research question was, “What are the behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations through
conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership?”

The peer research team identified the following four subquestions:

1. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intimacy?
2. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of interactivity?
3. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of inclusion?
4. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intentionality?

The researcher conducted a thorough analysis of the interview and observational data, which resulted in 20 themes and 299 frequencies of the themes based on the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Figure 6 highlights the themes for each of the conversational leadership elements.

Intimacy had seven themes, interactivity had five themes, inclusion had four themes, and, finally, intentionality had four themes.

In addition to the 20 themes identified using the four elements of conversational leadership, the frequencies for each theme were calculated. To determine the frequencies of each theme, the interview data, observations, and artifacts were transcribed and coded. Intimacy had seven themes and 99 frequencies, which consisted of 33% of the total data. Interactivity had five themes and a total of 77 frequencies, which consisted of 26% of the
total data. Inclusion had four themes and a total of 48 frequencies, which consisted of 16% of the total data. Finally, intentionality had four themes and 75 frequencies, which consisted of 25% of the total data. Figure 7 illustrates the frequencies for each element.

**Figure 6.** Frequency of themes in each element.

**Figure 7.** Element frequencies.
Intimacy

The team of peer researchers defined intimacy as the closeness, trust, and familiarity created between people through shared experiences, meaningful exchanges, and shared knowledge (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; O. Schwarz, 2011). The research question was: How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intimacy? The first conversational leadership element, intimacy, had seven themes. Of the 10 research subjects, all 10 referenced intimacy 99 times for a total of 33% of the responses. Table 4 demonstrates the breakdown of the intimacy themes.

Table 4

*Intimacy Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Observational sources</th>
<th>Artifact sources</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of personal stories to promote trust</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening attentively to engage in honest communication</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating informal space for conversation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations that promote trust</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating and appreciating stakeholders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for the individual needs of stakeholders</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being present and available for stakeholders</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Sources include interviews, observations, and artifacts.
Use of personal stories to promote trust. This theme was referenced 18 times, in 10 different sources (interviews and observations), and represented 18% of the intimacy coded content. This theme had the third most frequencies within the element of intimacy. When leaders engage employees with personal conversations rather than corporate speak, leaders build relationships based on honesty, and trust with employees (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Kark, 2012).

Within the city managers studied, 90% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of sharing mistakes with stakeholders to gain trust. One city manager discussed a time early in his/her career when a superior almost fired her/him for a mistake. Although the city manager had good intentions, the story shared illustrated a valuable lesson. The city manager told the story:

If you’re going to be late, you’re going to call in sick. If there’s a problem, you talk to me directly. You don’t call in sick to the receptionist at the front counter. And he warned me if you do that again, I will fire you because you are not only disrespecting me, you are not following chain of command and you are not holding yourself accountable.

The city manager explained that by his/her sharing this story with subordinates, they see it as an example of how using a personal story helped to make their city manager relatable to the staff. This story worked to establish a level of trust between the leader and the subordinates. The city manager continued the story:

He was absolutely right and when I shared that story with staff, they got my point that I was trying to make that this willy-nilly behavior needs to stop. I felt more real to them, I guess, because they had a personal story to go on from me and they
know that I almost got fired over it. Stories are a real-life example and I think it shows that I may be their boss but I’m human. I put my pants on one leg at a time and I think it helps, again, build their trust.

During the direct observations, the city manager shared a personal story of a difficult interaction with a city council member, who was disappointed with the city manager’s response to a request for budget information. The city manager retold the conversation to staff to illustrate the need for open communication and transparency. The city manager stressed the need to anticipate the level of detailed communication the city council member wanted when presenting a budget idea to the public.

Listen attentively to engage in honest communication. This theme was referenced 20 times, by 11 different sources (interviews and observations), and represented 20% of the intimacy content coded. This theme had the second highest frequencies within the element of intimacy. Leaders use listening as a key to building conversation by speaking less and listening more, which allows the employees to engage in authentic discussions (Allert & Chatterjee, 1997; Block, 2010; Van Engen, 2012).

Within the city managers studied, 100% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of focusing on what the stakeholder said and really listened to what was being communicated. One city manager stated, “I try to pay attention and look them in the eye. I mean, I talk to them and I try to say, ‘Look, any time you have problems, come over and talk to me.’” Another city manager focused on hearing what individuals say without making assumptions: “That they’re not just listened to, but they’re heard, because there is a difference, and
acknowledging their struggle, because there is a difference from department to department.”

During the direct observations, a city manager and his/her staff discussed a series of sensitive items involving city council business in an open, honest, and transparent manner. The city manager sat and listened while the staff discussed options for handling the situation. The city manager gave pertinent feedback only after listening to staff’s concerns, which were adequately articulated.

Creating informal space for communication. This theme was referenced five times, by four different sources (interviews and observations), and represented 4% of the intimacy content coded. This theme had the second lowest frequencies within the element of intimacy. Groysberg and Slind (2012b) stated, “Before leaders can open an organizational conversation they must first create a channel for it” (p. 68).

Within the city managers studied, 30% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of making the stakeholder feel at ease when communicating. One city manager stated, “When I would have employee discussions, I made a point of going to them, to their workspace, and have it there, not force them to come into city hall.” Another city manager held voluntary meetings with line staff called, “Donuts with the city manager.” The city manager described it as, “So once a month, we have a big conference room, there will be a sign-up sheet for up to 20 employees to just come. No agenda, no schedule, and no defined subject matter.”
Finally, another city manager found a creative way to create an informal space for communicating with stakeholders:

There’s the desk area but I also know that people, for lots of reasons, can be intimidated by coming into the city manager’s office, and especially for me, and so, every office I’ve had where I’ve been an executive, the person before me had a conference table in the office and I take it out and build a living room.

The city manager used the comforts of creating a living room environment in an office setting to help establish an informal conversation area that helps built trust with stakeholders.

During the direct observation, the researcher witnessed a city manager utilize an informal space for an impromptu discussion with a subordinate who had an issue of concern. The employee appeared visibly upset and the city manager immediately provided a quiet, private space to address the employee’s concern.

**Conversations that promote trust.** This theme was referenced 39 times, by 10 different sources, and represented 39% of the intimacy content coded. This theme had the most frequencies within the element of intimacy. Trust, intimacy, and honesty are the fundamental basis for healthy and productive workplace relationships (Zak, 2017). Leaders who move beyond mundane conversations and intentionally work to establish trust and cohesive work environments though authentic conversations and self-disclosure establish trust with stakeholders (Glaser, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; O. Schwarz, 2011).

Within the city managers studied, 100% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of establishing and building trust
with stakeholders through words and actions. Multiple city managers stressed the importance of having open and honest conversations as a means to build trust. One city manager discussed building trust by “bringing everyone in instead of having only some people be on the inside of the circle.” When building trust with staff, another city manager said, “It’s okay to disagree with me. Let me know what you think, we’ll talk about that and see if we can come up with common ground.” One city manager discussed lack of trust between departments:

One of the things that we really strive to do is when I first started we didn’t have very much communication between departments. It was pretty much everyone was in their own little silos and so some things were missed. I think of the things we have done in the last 8 years is really develop the communication between departments because everyone relies on the other one.

Multiple city managers discussed that when having a conversation with stakeholders, it is important to not only say what you are going to do but to actually do it. Stakeholders want to know the values the city managers hold and see the city managers live those values in their daily interactions.

**Celebrating and appreciating stakeholders.** This theme was referenced 10 times, by six different sources (interviews and artifacts), and represented 10% of the intimacy content coded. This theme had the fourth highest frequencies within the element of intimacy. Leaders who celebrate victories through shared experiences increase trust and reinforce the sense of purpose and enhanced teams (Zak, 2017).
Within the city managers studied, 30% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of celebrating the achievements of their stakeholders through a variety of means. One city manager discussed the change within his/her organization through celebration. The city manager stated, “Incorporating their ideas, letting them see the fruits of their ideas and giving them accolades. Celebrating them has made all the difference in the world.” Another city manager described his/her celebration, “We have an annual session where it’s all about the employee, and all the great things we’re doing, the things we need. We celebrate each other and the council serves lunch.”

The need for celebration reaches beyond just the work achievement. Here is another example from a city manager on celebrating and appreciating stakeholders:

I write a personal note on every employee’s anniversary and on their birthday. On their employment anniversary, I make a note in their card of something that I think they’ve done great that year and I continue to encourage them to do great things. So they get this personal note from the city manager every year that says something they specifically did that I was impressed with.

**Caring for the individual needs of stakeholders.** This theme was referenced only one time by one source, representing 1% of the intimacy content coded. This theme had the fewest frequencies within the element of intimacy. Crowley (2011) emphasized that employees need to feel appreciated and cared for by their leaders. Employees want growth opportunities that allow them to make meaningful contributions to the organization.
Within the city managers studied, 10% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of caring for stakeholders on an individual basis. The responsive city manager said, “So we have several task forces and different committees; one of those I kind of thought about when we created this is the Employee Development Advisory Committee focused on the health, morale, motivation, and growth of the employee.” In this instance, the city manager felt the need to establish a committee within the city to help address the individual needs of employees.

**Being present and available for stakeholders.** This theme was referenced six times, by three different sources, and represented 3% of the intimacy content coded. This theme had the fifth lowest frequencies within the element of intimacy. Employees respond when leaders communicate and gain insight into issues affecting employee engagement (Crowley, 2011).

Within the city managers studied, 30% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of truly being available to stakeholders. To establish intimacy with stakeholders, the city managers needed to back up what they said with actions and demonstrate open communication. One city manager explained the steps taken to develop intimacy with staff:

Openly acknowledging what was going on. It was a purple elephant in the room that everyone knew was there but nobody talked about. I just pulled everyone out of their comfort zone without divulging confidential information or violating any HR rules, put all the cards out on the table. This is what’s going on. This is what it is and these are the steps to change, towards making a positive change. And telling people I want to hear from you. I want to hear your opinion and if you’re
not comfortable, I get it because this hasn’t been a trusting environment in the past. So here’s my cell phone number. You can call me after hours or we can go have coffee offsite and my door is always open.

**Interactivity**

The thematic team defined interactivity as the bilateral or multilateral exchange of comments and ideas: a back-and-forth process (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The research question was: How do exemplary city managers lead their organization through the conversational element of interactivity? Throughout the coding process, interactivity produced five themes and was referenced 77 times by the 10 city managers. Table 5 illustrates the five themes within interactivity.

Table 5

**Interactivity Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Artifact sources</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Varying stakeholder groups to promote conversations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies to cultivate culture of open dialogue</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange of ideas around difficult issues or topics</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in two-way exchange of ideas and information</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a safe space for stakeholders to take risks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**Varying stakeholder groups to promote conversation.** This theme was referenced one time, by one source, and represented 1% of the interactivity content coded. This theme had the lowest frequencies within the element of interactivity.

Leaders who establish a forum for employees to interact, ask questions, and introduce
discussion topics promote organizational conversations (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Within the city managers studied, 10% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participant outlined the importance of keeping all stakeholders informed and making them involved in the success of the city through shared information and varying the stakeholder group. The city manager went on to say,

I think when you withhold information from certain segments, there’s a natural tendency for people to try to figure out what they truthfully know, or what they don’t know, and then they start making assumptions. So I decided if I was going to be in the room every time it’s not just going to be with the department heads where we close the doors. The staff meetings, I try to get all of the departments in to meet with each other.

This city manager allowed staff at all levels to hear the same message, bringing in staff as city insiders to avoid misunderstanding and assumptions.

**Strategies to cultivate a culture of open dialogue.** This theme was referenced 23 times, by 10 different sources, and represented 13% of the interactivity content coded. This theme had the second most frequencies within the element of interactivity. Zak (2017) discussed how the mutual exchange of information among managers and team members builds up the trust between team members and improves work performance.

Within the city managers studied, 100% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of providing space and opportunity for staff to have open dialogue. One city manager stated,
I want everyone to know everything, so if a lady comes to the front counter, or a
gentleman, some person comes into the front counter asking questions, I don’t
want that person to feel that they’re getting passed around. So we try to, again,
with Wednesday staff meetings, everyone was given brief updates on everything
they were working on.

Another city manager said, “I spent time with employees. I do a lot of walking
around and I’ve explained what the strategy is, what the culture is, and what we’re trying
to create.”

Another city manager described the steps used to cultivate a culture of open
dialogue in that city:

They used to call it management by walking around, and I guess that’s what I do
although I haven’t been able to do it as much as I’d like. But I think being out
and engaging at their workspace whenever possible.

**Exchange of ideas around difficult issues or topics.** This theme was referenced
12 times, by nine different sources, and represented 16% of the interactivity content
coded. This theme had the third most frequencies within the element of interactivity.
Groysberg and Slind (2012b) discussed the need for leaders to establish open
communication channels that allow employees to address difficult topics without fear of
retribution.

Within the city managers studied, 90% provided specific content to support this
theme. The study participants outlined the importance of having difficult conversations
at a variety of levels within the workplace. One city manager provided a detailed
example of how better communication around a difficult topic could have provided for a better result in the workplace:

> We had issues with a couple of employees; that was difficult, and through the course of what I found out, I hadn’t been given the information that I should have been given. So, it would have given me an opportunity to try and take corrective action before things got bad and so we sat down with the people that should have made me aware of [what was going on] because they knew what was going on and we had a long conversation about the need to keep me informed on things.

That’s what I expect. I gave them the opportunity to say why they hadn’t, which I wasn’t certain how I felt about. Well I guess I was certain how I felt about that, but it was a perception that I didn’t think existed. And so it’s important for me to hear that part. It has allowed me to take some corrective action. But it was also an opportunity to stress again; just if there’s something that can affect this organization, I need to know about it in advance to deal with whatever it is and give me an opportunity to correct the situation before it became worse. So, like I said, it was a difficult conversation, but I think it was necessary and we made progress, actually good progress since that point.

**Engage in two-way exchange of ideas and information.** This theme was referenced 33 times, by 12 different sources, and represented 43% of the interactivity content coded. This theme had the most frequencies within the element of interactivity. Leaders who can exhibit vulnerability when communicating with employees accelerate the trust built between the leader and the employees as well as increase the mutual exchange of dialogue among the team members (Zak, 2017).
Within the city managers studied, 100% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of sharing information and ideas throughout the organization. One city manager stated,

I meet with department heads, like I said, at the staff meeting on a weekly basis so I ask them to keep their guys notified as well. So anything that we talk about in there, feel free to share with your folks and make sure they are aware of that. Then I also meet individually with each one of them if they want to meet on a weekly basis as well. Where they may share some things that is going on within their department that maybe they don’t feel comfortable about everyone else learning.

During the several direct observations, the researcher observed city managers engage in meetings with subordinates that facilitated two-way, and multidirectional exchange of ideas and topics involving pertinent city issues. Although each city manager observed had slightly different techniques to facilitate two-way communication, all of the city managers allowed staff to participate in free-flowing discussions involving a variety of topics of concern to the organization.

Creating a safe space for stakeholders to take risks. This theme was referenced eight times, by two different sources (interviews and observations), and represented 10% of the interactivity content coded. This theme had the third most frequencies within the element of interactivity. For businesses to thrive, leaders must encourage new ideas and growth opportunities while providing employees with a supportive environment to explore and grow (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).
Within the city managers studied, 20% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of open dialogue that allows room for stakeholders to take risks. One city manager stated, “In a culture of open dialogue, you cultivate a culture of trust, vulnerability, teamwork, confidence, support, safety to share, appropriate risk taking, then comes open dialogue.”

Another city manager discussed creating a safe space for employees to take risks: So people are being pushed to innovate, but at the same time they are being told they are not allowed to fail, and the only way they can be bounced, other than bad behavior, is to actually try to do something. So the creation of trust is promised first and foremost on repeated instances that I have your back.

During the direct observations, the researcher observed a city manager engage with a subordinate on a risky initiative involving a potential high-profile city project. The city manager praised the employee’s initiative and encouraged the risk.

**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 (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2010). The research question was: How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of inclusion? Throughout the coding process, the conversational leadership element of inclusion produced four themes and was referenced by the study participants for a total of 75 times. Table 6 reflects the four inclusion themes.
### Table 6

**Inclusion Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interview sources</th>
<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Artifact sources</th>
<th>Total sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of technology to allow for stakeholders contributions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies to gain active contributions and spokespeople for the organization</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational strategies to ensure member commitment to goals</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow members to generate content</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Sources included interviews, observations, and artifacts.

**Use of technology to allow for stakeholder contributions.** This theme was referenced 10 times, by eight different sources (interviews and artifacts), and represented 13% of the inclusion content coded. This theme had the lowest frequencies within the element of inclusion. Leaders who utilized stakeholders to create corporate communications created a sense of empowerment within the employees and that empowerment led to employee-driven communication (Denning, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Within the city managers studied, 20% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of allowing staff to use technology as part of the communication plan. One city manager described,
Our communication team has a plan, and a methodical, very intentional approach to delivering communication. We all get together multiple times a week to discuss messaging, and timing, communication activities, and the timing, which messages need to go out first. So it’s all planned out, I would say, at least a week in advance. Even when the content was delivered this weekend, it was planned out days ago. Then we use the metrics from the website, and various social media platforms, to determine what types of messaging are resonating better than others. Then we are trying to expand upon those ones that are more successful for the engagement level to be more successful.

Another city manager discussed plans for using technology for communication:

So this year, we are gonna have a lot more focus on video, and doing little video snippets, and video interviews, to engage the citizens and deliver more important communications and engagement. So that’s one. The other one I was thinking about was when we rolled out our social media and our social media content and how we respond. What we show, what we do, that was entirely generated by nonmanagers, members of the organization who had an interest and a passion for social media.

Strategies to gain active contributors and spokespeople for organizations. This theme was referenced 21 times, by nine different sources, and represented 28% of the inclusion content coded. This theme had the second highest frequencies within the element of inclusion. Leaders encouraging conversational engagement provide opportunities for employees to reinvent and reengineer their jobs (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; McCann, 2014).
Within the city managers studied, 90% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of the staff-generated ideas and enthusiasm. One city manager stated,

I will use that time during the staff meeting to share articles from *Harvard Business Review* that I think help staff define the purpose of the organization, or help them focus on the purpose, or help them create more enthusiasm and buy-in to the purpose.

Another city manager discussed strategies used to gain contributors:

I’ve told them to be honest. Sometimes there’s great ideas, but the timing isn’t now. Sometimes there are great ideas, but there are constraints on the organization that don’t allow for them to happen at that time. We try to keep a list of some of those great ideas and shift them off to the back cuz that was a back-burner item because whatever constraint we had at the time, whether it’s financial, or political, or whatever. And so, again just taking the conversation and flipping it on its head, and putting it to them to provide the solutions and the direction on how we’re going to get there and why. Why they changed, why they feel this is important for the organization and having them own it.

**Conversational strategies to ensure members’ commitment to goals.** This theme was referenced 25 times, by nine different sources, and represented 33% of the inclusion content coded. This theme had the highest frequencies within the element of inclusion. Employees today work for employers because they want to be engaged in organizational culture and they expect to be included in achieving high-level strategic goals (Groysberg & Slind; 2012b)
Within the city managers studied, 90% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of organizational conversations. One city manager stated,

Every year, I have a meeting with every staff after the City Council approved the budget. I will call them in, in two different groups, one in the morning, one in the afternoon, so I don’t have to shut down the city. At that meeting, I will give them the budget, the breakdown of the revenue, where the money is coming from, I explain it to them. I will give them the expenditures, where the money going to, line by line.

Another city manager discussed his/her conversation strategies around organizational goals:

I think, one of the things that we do is, on a quarterly basis, I try and just give them an update on our goals and objectives, and where we are with the progress on them. Give them an opportunity to ask any questions that they may have. Why are we doing it this way?

Allow members to generate content. This theme was referenced 19 times, by 15 different sources (interviews and artifacts), and represented 25% of the inclusion content coded. This theme had the third highest frequencies within the element of inclusion. Employees are in a unique position, as an organizational insider, able to create messages, market ideas, and respond to external stakeholders using a variety of communication methods such as social media (Denning, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).
Within the city managers studied, 80% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of employee-generated content.

One city manager stated,

Well we have adopt a family during Christmas where my staff goes to different elementary schools in town to create a message that the city is willing to help the poor families. Please give us the names of the families and how many kids and what they want.

Another city manager took an innovated approach to the state-of-the-city address.

The city manager said,

What we did is very different in our state-of-the-city address. It is not the mayor up there talking for an hour about everything and it’s not me either, because neither the mayor and the other council members, nor myself, could do and accomplish anything that we are doing without the team. So we actually break our state-of-the-city address into departments and each department presents at the state of the city. Each department head is the keynote speaker for their section. They’re encouraged to make it fun because I want the citizens to feel connected to them, to feel personal to them, and approachable, and so each of them are encouraged to make it unique and make it their own.

**Intentionality**

The team of peer researchers defined intentionality as ensuring clarity of purpose that includes goals and directions to create order and meaning (Barge, 1985; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Men, 2012). The research question was: How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intentionality? Throughout
the coding process, the conversational leadership element of intentionality produced four themes and was referenced 48 times by the 10 city managers.

Table 7

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
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<th>Observation sources</th>
<th>Artifact sources</th>
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<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>Conversations to elicit feedback on goals and direction</td>
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</tbody>
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*Note. Sources include interviews, observations, and artifacts.*

**Used conversation to create clarity around organizations’ purpose.** This theme was referenced 14 times, by eight different sources, and represented 29% of the intentionality content coded. This theme was tied as it had the second highest frequencies within the element of intentionality. Leaders must intentionally engage employees in dialogue around the organization’s strategic message to ensure that all stakeholders are clear on the outgoing message (Fairholm, 2009; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b).

Within the city managers studied, 80% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of communicating with employees over the organization’s goals. One city manager described the process at his/her city:
I think the best way is again, number one, establishing what our goals and objectives are. So the way that our processes work is each year, when the council sets their goals and objectives, specifically their goals and the areas that they want to work on, then we come back together. Our folks come back together, decide on what specific actions we will take to achieve the goals they want. We identify [what] the outcomes are, we identify what the timeline will be, we identify what departments have responsibilities for making that so it’s a team effort to establish what those are. Once we had that, then again quarterly, I asked them to report on the progress of where we are. Is there anything that is holding us back? What can we do to move that one forward and so we focused on particular areas, but it’s identifying those things, then the department heads going back making sure that their folks know it.

**Strategies to give focus and direction on scattered communication.** This theme was referenced 14 times, by nine different sources, and represented 29% of the intentionality content coded. This theme was tied for the second highest frequencies within the element of intentionality. Leaders cannot take for granted that employees know the strategic mission; leaders must provide focus and direction to achieve the desired goals (Barge et al., 1989; Tyler, 2011).

Within the city managers studied, 90% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of continual communication between members of different departments. One city manager stated,

I told the council that is ridiculous they should never give more than five goals.

You have to be very focused on the goals you have the organization working on.
You have to be very specific in your feedback and you have to be very specific in what your values are. As I said, pride in service, integrity in action, and legendary customer service. Being the city, owning this place, when you are that focused on those three things and the five goals you have, that allows you to really focus your communication, focus your efforts. So the strategy would be to recognize that you can only have so many things that you are focused on, make them clearly delineated, repeat them, post them, follow up on them, hype people’s progress to them, continue to enunciate them, be redundant on how you enunciate that, and be very clear in your communication.

**Conversation to elicit feedback on goals and directions.** This theme was referenced 16 times, by nine different sources, and represented 33% of the intentionality content coded. This theme had the highest frequencies within the element of intentionality. Leaders who engage in honest communication, and who are transparent about their objects, can elicit true feedback from stakeholders on goals (Berson & Stieglitz, 2013).

Within the city managers studied, 90% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of having direct communication with stakeholders. One city manager described,

I just ask them and when I drive around, I stop and talk to the guys. If they are trimming the bushes or fixing the wall, a lot of times you get better communication when you are out in their turf then when they come in here to talk to the boss. Oh, the boss called me, I’m in trouble. They don’t want to say much but if you are out there, on their turf, they tend to open up.
Another city manager stated,

I like the phrase, “Tell me what you think,” and then you just wait. I don’t like surveys because I don’t think people’s comments fit into A, B, and C. I like to do it personally so that I can hear it myself and I like to do it when the opportunity is right. Sometimes, people are ready to give you feedback and sometimes people are in a position to give you their thought process. When that happens, you should take advantage of it.

**Continuous messaging around the organization’s purpose.** This theme was referenced four times, by three different sources, and represented 8% of the intentionality content coded. This theme had the lowest frequencies within the element of intentionality. Leaders must openly communicate strategic plans to gain a strong commitment from stakeholders to help the organization prosper and thrive (Berson & Stieglitz, 2013; Hills, 2015).

Within the city managers studied, 20% provided specific content to support this theme. The study participants outlined the importance of reinforcing the city’s message with employees. One city manager stated,

I say that I am the city. Every employee, when they started here, I personally give them a mirror, like a makeup mirror, it says I am the city and that is about taking risks, taking ownership, taking collective responsibility for the city and the organization.
Key Findings

Once the interviews, observations, and artifacts were coded for themes, 10 key findings emerged as to how exemplary city managers lead their organizations using the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. In order to select the 10 key findings, it was determined that only those themes that were referenced by a minimum of six of the 10 exemplary city managers and a 20% or greater response per element were selected.

Key Findings: Intimacy

1. *Listen attentively to engage in honest communication.*

   This finding resulted in 20% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced 20 times by 11 different sources including all 10 (100%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

2. *Conversations that promote trust.*

   This finding resulted in 39% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced 39 times by all 10 (100%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

Key Findings: Interactivity

3. *Strategies to cultivate culture of open dialogue.*

   This finding resulted in 29% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced 23 times by all 10 (100%) of the exemplary city manager participants.


   This finding resulted in 43% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced 33 times by all 10 (100%) of the exemplary city manager participants.
Key Findings: Inclusion

5. *Strategies to gain active contributors and spokespeople for organizations.*

   This finding resulted in 43% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced 21 times by nine (90%) of all exemplary city manager participants.

6. *Conversational strategies to ensure member commitment to goals.*

   This finding resulted in 52% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced 25 times by nine (90%) of all exemplary city manager participants.

7. *Allow members to generate content.*

   This finding resulted in 39% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced 19 times by eight (80%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

Key Findings: Intentionality

8. *Used conversation to create clarity around organizational purpose.*

   This finding resulted in 33% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced 16 times by eight (80%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

9. *Strategies to give focus and direction on scattered communication activities.*

   This finding resulted in 33% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced 16 times by nine (90%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

10. *Conversations to elicit feedback on goals and direction.*

    This finding resulted in 29% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced 14 times by 9 (90%) of the exemplary city manager participants.
Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. This chapter provided the research data on the 20 themes that align to the central research question along with the four subquestions. The data summarized came from 10 in-depth interviews with city managers, four direct observations lasting 7 hours, and 16 artifacts directly relating to the central research and subquestions. Additionally, 10 key findings described the behaviors that exemplary city managers use to lead their organizations through conversation.

Chapter V provides the final summary for the research study including the study’s major findings, conclusions, implications for actions, recommendations for further research, and the concluding remarks and researcher’s reflections.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. At the conclusion of the field research, the researcher conducted an extensive analysis of the data collected through direct interviews with study participants, observational data, and artifact review, and identified 10 major findings and 20 conversational leadership themes. Because of the totality of the collected data, the researcher formed findings and recommendations as well as identified future research opportunities.

Chapter V provides the final summary for the study, which includes the purpose, research questions, and study’s key findings. This chapter also identified the unexpected research findings, conclusions, potential future actions, recommendations for future studies, concluding remarks, and, finally, the researcher’s reflections.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. The research study focused on one central research question and four subquestions with a focus on each element of conversational leadership. The central research question was, “What are the behaviors that exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality?” The subquestions were
1. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intimacy?

2. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of interactivity?

3. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of inclusion?

4. How do exemplary city managers lead their organizations through the conversational element of intentionality?

The phenomenological research study consisted of 10 in-depth interviews with exemplary city managers in Southern California to gain an understanding of the city manager’s lived experiences related to the four elements of conversational leadership. NVivo software was used to code and analyze the data collected through the in-depth interviews. Additionally, 16 artifacts directly relating to the conversational leadership elements were collected through field research and reviewed during the data analysis along with 7 hours of direct observation that provided additional data to support the research questions. The use of artifacts and observational data, along with the data collected through in-depth interviews, allowed the researcher to utilize multiple methods to triangulate data. The target population of the study was the 146 city managers in California.

Twelve peer researchers and four chair faculty members collaboratively designed this study and, as a group, established the criteria to identify the target population. Each peer researcher studied a sample of 10 exemplary leaders within their focused population. The target populations for the study included city managers, nonprofit executive
directors, municipal police chiefs and sheriffs, regional directors of migrant education, community college presidents, school district elementary and unified superintendents, assistant superintendents of educational services, and principals. The study participants had to meet at least four of the six following characteristics of exemplary leaders, as identified by the peer research team:

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. recognized by their peers; or
6. membership in professional associations within their field.

**Major Findings**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the behaviors exemplary city managers practice to lead their organizations through conversation using Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality. Through the analysis of the subquestions, the study’s central research question was answered. The research findings, as presented in Chapter IV, were established through the examination of the data collected from a simple majority of the 10 studied city managers and a minimum of 20% of the references within each of the four conversational leadership elements. In-depth interviews, observational data, and artifacts were used to determine the data frequencies for the study themes.
Key Findings: Intimacy

1. *Listen attentively to engage in honest communication.*
   This finding resulted in 20% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced 20 times by 11 different sources including all 10 (100%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

2. *Conversations that promote trust.*
   This finding resulted in 39% of all intimacy frequencies and was referenced 39 times by all 10 (100%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

Key Findings: Interactivity

3. *Strategies to cultivate culture of open dialogue.*
   This finding resulted in 29% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced 23 times by all 10 (100%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

   This finding resulted in 43% of all interactivity frequencies and was referenced 33 times by all 10 (100%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

Key Findings: Inclusion

5. *Strategies to gain active contributors and spokespeople for organizations.*
   This finding resulted in 43% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced 21 times by nine (90%) of all exemplary city manager participants.

6. *Conversational strategies to ensure member commitment to goals.*
   This finding resulted in 52% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced 25 times by nine (90%) of all exemplary city manager participants.
7. Allow members to generate content.

This finding resulted in 39% of all inclusion frequencies and was referenced 19 times by eight (80%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

Key Findings: Intentionality

8. Used conversation to create clarity around organizational purpose.

This finding resulted in 29% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced 14 times by eight (80%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

9. Strategies to give focus and direction on scattered communication activities.

This finding resulted in 29% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced 14 times by nine (90%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

10. Conversations to elicit feedback on goals and direction.

This finding resulted in 29% of all intentionality frequencies and was referenced 14 times by nine (90%) of the exemplary city manager participants.

Unexpected Findings

This study generated three unexpected findings: The first finding was in the conversational element of intimacy, caring for the individual needs of stakeholders; the second finding in the conversational element of interactivity, varying stakeholder groups to promote conversations; and, finally, also in the conversational element of intentionality, continuous messaging around the organization’s purpose.

In the first instance, only one city manager, 10% of the study participants, referenced this theme; however, the literature demonstrated the importance of caring for the individual needs of stakeholders. Crowley (2011) emphasized that employees need to feel appreciated and cared for by their leaders. Employees want growth opportunities
that allow them to make meaningful contributions to the organization. Caring conversations can meet the needs of the stakeholder and the leader (Berson & Stieglitz, 2013).

In the second instance, only one city manager, 10% of the study participants, referenced this theme; however, the literature discussed the need to vary stakeholder groups to promote conversations. Leaders who establish a forum for a cross-sample of employees to interact, ask questions, and introduce discussion topics promote organizational conversations (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). When utilizing a variety of stakeholders, the organizational message will be consistent across all departments (Berson & Stieglitz, 2013).

Finally, in the third instance, only two city managers, 20% of the study participants, referenced this theme; however, the literature discussed the need for continuous messaging around the organization’s purpose. Leaders must openly communicate strategic plans to gain a strong commitment from stakeholders to help the organization prosper and thrive (Berson & Stieglitz, 2013; Hills, 2015). Groysberg and Slind (2012b) stressed that communication on the organizational message must be nurtured across different departments to achieve commitment from stakeholders. Leaders, unfortunately, must practice this skill and develop it until it becomes second nature.
Conclusions

Based on the study’s key findings, the following conclusions describe the lived experiences of exemplary city managers who lead their organizations using the four elements of Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality.

Conclusion 1

City managers must listen and engage stakeholders in intimate and trusting conversations to establish a level of confidence with their stakeholders.

When exemplary city managers create an environment of open and honest communication, rooted in the desire to create meaningful contact with stakeholders, they establish a strong foundation for trusting communication. The city managers who took the time to engage staff in a variety of topics that include routine tasks, stressful topics, and organizational issues provided the stakeholders with the opportunity to build a solid foundation based on trust. Leaders who are ready to move from telling employees what to think to asking stakeholders their opinions take a leap forward in building a powerful organizational dynamic that builds collaborative teams (Glaser, 2014).

When the leader demonstrates to stakeholders that the relationships are based on trust, and they truly listen for content, the speaker and the listener are both actively engaged in successful communication (Block, 2010; Glaser, 2014). When the city managers sat back and listened to the thoughts of the stakeholders, without interjecting their opinions on how to do something right, the stakeholders felt heard and showed a
level of confidence in the conversation. Through listening, city managers increased the level of trust in their communication through actions, eye contact, and body posture, more so than their words.

**Conclusion 2**

*City managers must focus on developing strategies that cultivate a culture of open dialogue that encourages an exchange of ideas and information to develop a supportive stakeholder group committed to organizational goals.*

When city managers created a culture of open dialogue by providing stakeholders with opportunities to share information across departments and specialty areas, they created a committed group of organizational insiders. City managers facilitated, through a variety of ways, opportunities to exchange ideas between stakeholders as well as from the employees to the leaders in an open, transparent, and productive manner. Some of the city managers studied broke down the formal communication channels by inviting all stakeholders into the inner circle by providing unfiltered, direct communication. Communication must be two-way when a leader wants feedback on a shared idea (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). Interviews, observations, and artifacts supported this study’s conclusion.

**Conclusion 3**

*City managers must use clear communication strategies with stakeholders or they will fail to realize the benefits of grassroots messaging and identify innovative ideas that emerge from their staff.*
Exemplary city managers clearly communicated with staff to gain active contributors. Leaders who encouraged conversational engagement provided opportunities for employees to reinvent and reimage how to do their jobs (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; McCann, 2014). The city managers must encourage stakeholders to develop and grow ideas for future organizational programs. While not all of the new ideas would come to fruition, the encouragement by the city manager created a trusting environment that encouraged stakeholder contributions. Groysberg and Slind (2012b) discussed that stakeholders expect to be included in high-level strategic goals as a means to facilitate engagement.

Exemplary city managers in this study provided stakeholders with the opportunity to generate organizational content in support of the organization’s mission by allowing employees to utilize their voice and communicate the organization’s message. Employees have a unique opportunity to be the voice for the organization, to create messaging from the perspective of the organizational insider that translates to messaging for the external user (Denning, 2011; Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). The leaders must allow for a divergence from the standard delivery of an annual message and allow for unique messaging to residents on the status of the city’s strategic goals and directions delivered by the employees engaged in the daily tasks.

Conclusion 4

City managers must fully commit to utilizing conversation as an essential tool to provide direction and elicit feedback from stakeholders to build clarity of message while reinforcing the organization’s purpose.
Today’s city managers must provide clarity and engage in conversation around the organization’s purpose. When leaders intentionally engage stakeholders in the organization’s message, they create a dialogue of understanding and create clear messaging (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b). By developing a systematic approach to developing, educating, and communicating organizational goals, the city managers create an engaged employee base whose members have a deeper understanding behind the meaning of their work. Connecting the goals with the everyday work created an environment of engaged workers (Crowley, 2011).

City managers who provide strategies that give focus and direction to communication efforts will first narrow the expectations placed on the staff and focus the strategic goals on achievable tasks. Stakeholders must review the goals on a regular basis and work to achieve them as a cohesive group. The leader guides the development of the organization’s goals and creates the movement and opportunity to achieve goals by intentionally guiding the process, managing expectations, and engaging in organizational conversation to allow employee achievement (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2010).

**Implications for Action**

Conversational leadership is a developing field of study ripe for further research. The implications from the research conducted by the team of 12 thematic researchers are vast. The research on exemplary city managers using conversational leadership practices to lead organizations provides new opportunities for additional use.

1. As municipal governments seek city managers who can lead through the complex issues facing government agencies today, city councils need to use the content from
this research to identify future leaders who are poised to incorporate the four elements of conversational leadership (intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality) as a basis for organizational leadership. The Internal City Managers Association must develop guidelines for recruiters and human resource professionals to follow to identify candidates for city manager positions that possess highly evolved conversational leadership skills that encourage open, honest, and transparent organizational conversations.

2. The thematic research team needs to collaborate on a book that highlights the lived experiences of each of the researchers’ respective populations. Each researcher can provide specific examples on how his or her exemplary leaders utilized the conversational leadership behaviors.

3. Human resource departments need to develop internal training programs that focus on conversational leadership behaviors with an emphasis on the four elements of conversational leadership: intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and interactivity for managers delivered through online training modules available for managers and supervisors to work at their own pace. The training needs to be included in the onboarding process with refresher training on an annual basis.

4. City managers must utilize the study results as a basis to conduct 360-degree evaluations seeking feedback from the city council, external stakeholders, and internal stakeholders on the city manager’s ability to incorporate the conversational leadership key findings into the organization. The data from the 360-degree evaluations will provide city managers with honest feedback on the success or failure of their conversational leadership strategies.
5. Colleges and universities with public administration programs need to add conversational leadership training into a current human resources management course to prepare future government leaders to engage employees in the workplace. The key findings from this study, along with the book *Talk Inc.* should be used to design that portion of the class.

6. The International City Managers Association (ICMA) needs to incorporate the four elements of conversational leadership into two of the city manager certificate offerings: Emerging Leaders Development Program and the Mid-Career Managers Institute. Incorporating the conversational leadership behaviors early into management training programs will expose future city managers to this emerging communication method. Additionally, as the Silver Tsunami hits governments and the experienced leaders retire, the addition of this focus to the program will help to create new city leaders well versed in conversational leadership ready to pick up and lead.

7. The League of California Cities needs to incorporate a conversational leadership workshop in the annual city managers training. The workshop can focus on the lived experiences of the study participants and allow interactive discussion with a panel of current city managers on how conversational leadership works in their organizations.

8. Thematic team members should submit speaker proposals to human resource organizations at the local, state, and national level to teach human resource professionals how to identify and hire candidates experienced in conversational leadership.
Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the study’s findings, additional research is needed in the four elements of conversational leadership as defined by the research study in the following areas:

1. It is recommended that a phenomenological study be conducted to identify how intimacy is used to build honesty and trust in workplace relationships. Research on organizational intimacy is scarce. Intimacy generated the greatest number of themes and references during the study, but so much is still unknown about developing and sustaining organizational intimacy.

2. This research study did not delineate the size of the organization in the description of the population. It is recommended that future research examine the differences in conversational leadership traits in city managers of small organizations with staffs under 500 versus city managers of large organizations with staffs of 500 or more.

3. It is recommended a future ethnography study focusing on the similarities and differences in responses based on gender for city managers using conversational leadership to lead their organization should be conducted. This research study protocols did not delineate the differences between female and male city managers’ responses during the in-depth interviews and observations.

4. This research study focused on Southern California counties of Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Luis Obispo. It is recommended that future phenomenological research studies should examine leaders utilizing the conversational leadership elements in other diverse communities and populations of the United States.
5. The team of 12 thematic researchers focused the study on city managers, nonprofit executive directors, chief nursing officers, municipal police chiefs and sheriffs, elementary superintendents, community college presidents, elementary school principals, middle school principals, high school principals, regional directors of migrant education, unified school district superintendents, educational services assistant superintendents, and elementary superintendents. It is recommended that future research should be conducted to replicate this study with a different population such as leaders in for-profit publicly traded corporations and professional sports organizations.

6. This study showed that the use of personal stories promoted trust between the leaders and the stakeholders in cities. It is recommended that further research, utilizing a mixed methods study, with questionnaires and phenomenological research, is needed to see if the use of personal stories, known to increase trust in the workplace, can be used to increase employee engagement across the multiple generations in the workplace.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

The doctoral program provided me with a tremendous opportunity to study the conversational leadership behaviors that city managers practice to lead their organizations. I believe I have had the unique opportunity to have an insider’s perspective on different types of government leaders prior to commencing my dissertation research. The results of this study provided me with insights into the career field that I have dedicated over 20 years of my life pursuing. I was so appreciative to learn from some exemplary city managers who practice conversational leadership
methods to lead their organizations. This study provided me with a rejuvenated love for public service and a motivation to share my knowledge on this topic with a new generation of incoming city managers.

I cannot express enough thanks and gratitude to the Brandman University doctoral program. This fine program allowed me to explore my passion for public service while satisfying my lifelong love for learning. At the end of this life-changing journey, I was able to directly witness conversational leadership, see the beauty of strong, compassionate leadership, and build a strong bond with a cohort of exceptional leaders who traveled with me on this journey. I am very proud of the research in this study and the changes I discovered within myself through my work in the Brandman University program.
REFERENCES


/download?doi=10.1.1.521.2458&rep=rep1&type=pdf


Government Finance Review, 23(4), 55.


APPENDIX A

Conversational Leadership

Interview Questions

Note: The interview is in 4 sections. Each section begins with the definition of a particular element of Conversational Leadership and then proceeds to 3 related interview questions.

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

1. How do you create conversations that promote trust between you and members of your organization?

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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?

2. What strategies do you use to encourage all members to become active contributors and spokespersons for the organization?

3. Please share a story about a time when you allowed the members of your organization to generate the content for an important message.

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

1. Can you share some examples of when you used conversation to create clarity around your organization’s purpose?

2. How do you use conversation to elicit feedback on the goals and direction of your organization?

3. What strategies do you use to give focus and direction to what otherwise might be a scattered set of communication activities?
Conversational Leadership

Interview Questions with Additional Probes

Note: The interview is in 4 sections. Each section begins with the definition of a particular element of Conversational Leadership and then proceeds to 3 related interview questions.

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

How do you create conversations that promote trust between you and the members of your organization?

Optional probe: As you consider all the teams you work with in your organization, what would you identify as the most important factor in establishing trust with your team members?

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.

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, 2012b).

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?

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

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

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 (Groysberg & Slind, 2012b; Hurley & Brown, 2009).

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?
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?

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 of that?

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

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?

How do you use conversation to elicit feedback on the goals and direction of your organization?

Optional probe: How have others responded to that?

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?
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent and Audio Recording Release

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: Nikki Salas, MA

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Nikki Salas, 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 City Managers practice to lead their organizations through conversation using the principles as depicted by Groysberg and Slind’s (2012b) 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 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 transcriptionist from the interview will be destroyed.

d) If I have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Nikki Salas, MA at nsalas@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 909-725-2964; or Dr. Keith Larick (Committee Chair) at klarick@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
APPENDIX D

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 E

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**
Interview Feedback Reflection Questions

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your ‘observer’ after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your prospective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate?

2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?

3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?

4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?

5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?

6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?

7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?
Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Nikki successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 05/18/2016.

Certification Number: 2075369.