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Meaning Makers: A Mixed-Method Case Study of Exemplary Small Business Owner
Leaders and the Strategies they Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

A Dissertation by
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Irvine, California
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

March 4, 2019

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Leaders and the Strategies they Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

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ABSTRACT

Meaning Makers: A Mixed-Method Case Study of Exemplary Small Business Owner Leaders and the Strategies they Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

by Margaret Spencer Ohlhaber

Purpose. The purpose of this replication of a thematic, mixed-method case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that small business owner leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

Methodology. Qualitative interviews with exemplary small business owners were conducted to capture their insights on how they used behaviors associated with character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration to create personal and organizational meaning. In a quantitative survey, followers of each small business owner leader participants were asked to assess how important each of the variable behaviors were for a leader in creating personal and organizational meaning within their organization.

Findings. The study found the variables of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration collectively contributed to the creation of personal and organizational meaning for small business owner leaders and their followers. Character and relationship were the top two domains used by exemplary leaders and perceived as most important by followers. The research found that establishing a co-created vision contributed to personal and organizational meaning. Exemplary leaders used a limited definition of wisdom and relied least on inspiration to creating personal and organizational meaning

Conclusions. This study concluded the interplay of the five domains of meaning; character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration create personal and

organizational meaning for leaders and their followers. Leader character is highly valued by followers as is the active engagement of followers in co-creating a vision. Leaders and their followers experience deep and meaningful relationships within their organizations which contributes to personal and organizational meaning. Leaders have an opportunity to broaden their understanding of wisdom and inspiration as they create personal and organizational meaning.

Recommendations. Research replicating this study in the micro-business segment, with female small business owner leaders, and with small businesses with international locations was advised. In addition, a future study of character and managing unethical client requests in the small business environment and leader-follower relationships in small business was suggested.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

According to the Small Business Administration (2017) 62% of net new jobs are generated by small businesses. Small businesses contribute to the overall economic health of communities and create opportunities for business owners and followers. Inspirational leadership and communication of meaning by small business leaders is a primary influencer on innovation which has been shown to drive business success (Dunne, Aaron, McDowell, Urban, & Geho, 2016; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Vecchio, 2003). Small businesses in the United States employ 60 million people (Small Business Profile, 2014). Research indicated 70% percent of all followers are not engaged or are actively disengaged (Gallop Poll, 2018). Mautz (2015) proposed meaning is the solution for disengaged followers in the workplace. Experts agreed for small businesses to flourish, small business owner leaders must create meaning in the workplace, engage followers, drive enhanced performance, and increase innovation in business (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; Dunne et al., 2016; Mautz, 2015). Given the scope of small business employment levels and impact of meaning on follower engagement, research on this topic is central to creating meaning in the small business workplace.

To effectively study small businesses and the creation of meaning, experts agreed there is value in treating small business leadership as a specialized population (Beaver, 2003; Perry, 2001; Vecchio, 2003). Inspirational leadership and the creation of meaning by small business owner leaders has proven beneficial to followers (Dunne et al., 2016; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Vecchio, 2003). Further, experts found the creation of meaning is a primary influencer of innovativeness which has been shown to drive

business success (Dunne et al., 2016; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Vecchio, 2003). Expanding on this theory, Steger, Dik and Duffy (2012) proposed by creating meaning, work-related outcomes such as “performance, engagement and job satisfaction are positively impacted” (p. 424). Inspirational leaders in small businesses increased creativity and innovation in organizations through leadership and making of meaning (Dunne et al., 2016). These findings suggested the importance of leadership in the success of small business.

Experts agreed leadership is vital to small businesses and argued small business failures can be connected to a lack of leadership (Beaver, 2003; Perry, 2001; Vecchio, 2003). Dunne et al., (2016) advocated that specific leadership behaviors foster innovation at all levels within a small business. According to research on small business retention, followers in small businesses are more frequently at risk of leaving when the small business owner leader, promised but did not provide, meaningful opportunities or recognition for employee’s accomplishments (Kickul, 2001). Research showed transformational leaders drive organizational success and profitability (Valdiserri & Wilson, 2010). Ready access to education related to transformational leadership and creation of meaning in the workplace is absent from the Small Business Administration Learning Center (SBA, n.d.). It is critical for small business owner leaders to utilize meaning and transformational leadership theories to increase the opportunity for success.

Background

Five areas of research addressed provided background for this mixed-methods case study. First, meaning is analyzed, and various theoretical foundations are discussed. Second, the five domains of meaning framework is introduced. Third, foundational

leadership theories are examined. Fourth, the history of small business ownership is presented, and finally, meaning in small businesses was explored.

Meaning

Finding meaning in one's work transitions a mundane daily work routine into a passionate daily mission. It was Nietzsche who said, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any how" (Frankl, 1984, p.76). The person with passion and meaning creates a positive effect on those encountered. The quest to find meaning in one's work is not a new trend in leadership, but rather one that began as human consciousness evolved.

History of Meaning. Study of meaning can be traced to ancient Greek philosophers Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas (Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001; Shim 2017; Vella, 2008). Nicomachean Ethics (Aristotle, 350 B.C.) explored human happiness. Aristotle's theory proposed human happiness is found through a focus on five concepts: "science, sustenance, nature, soul and human flourishing" (Vella, 2008, p.8). Many believed Nicomachean Ethics was Aristotle's greatest contribution to philosophy providing context to the question of how to find happiness (Vella, 2008). Augustine, another Greek philosopher, approached his study and philosophy of meaning through spiritual analysis and religious education (Shim, 2017). With yet another perspective, Aquinas, a Greek theologian, taught the importance of living in accordance with high virtue and God-consciousness, leading to a perspective that true happiness is knowing God (Shah, 2015). With this foundational history, experts have continued to expand studies and theories of finding and creating meaning.

Research and Models of Meaning. Eric Klinger (1998) proposed the search for personal meaning is a biological human need to rise to a higher purpose and create

meaning in life. Like a compass, meaning provided a true north to one's life (George & Sims, 2007). Search for personal meaning has driven a large body of research, models, and theories.

Viktor E. Frankl, (2006) believed everyone is a meaning seeker. Having been a prisoner held in Nazi concentration camps, Frankl sustained life under extreme and cruel circumstances with an unyielding will for meaning in life (Oppong, 2017). Frankl (2006) concluded the drive for meaning is a human being's way of making sense of events in life that otherwise may not make sense. As a result, Frankl developed a therapy called logotherapy (Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy, n.d.). Logotherapy helps those who suffer from depression, lack of spirituality, and other mental health issues such as substance abuse and anxiety. Logotherapy is based on the belief that finding meaning in one's life will sustain a person regardless of circumstances (Frankl, 2006). Frankl's research is a precursor to contemporary positive psychology. Although Frankl touched on positive psychology, Martin Seligman's research earned him the title of the founding father of positive psychology (Wong, 2014b).

Martin Seligman (2011) developed an early model of positive psychology termed authentic happiness theory. This model was later refined as Seligman found results of authentic happiness model to be mood driven, one dimensional, and subjective as opposed to providing tangible and objective results. Seligman expanded his research and transitioned authentic happiness theory to a revised model coined well-being model. Seligman believed living within the parameters of a five-part model of well-being resulted in a more flourished life. The Five elements of well-being model included positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment

(Seligman, 2011). Works of both Seligman and Frankl contributed to Esfahani-Smith's work who authored a theoretical framework on the power of meaning.

Drawing from Frankl and Seligman, combined with a spiritual upbringing, Esfahani-Smith (2017) set forth to understand differences between happiness and meaning. Esfahani was part of the Sufi Order, specifically Nimatullahi Sufi Order. Sufism is "selfless experiencing and actualization of the truth" (Ramazzina, 2009, p. 121). Search for truth led Esfahani-Smith (2017) to research meaning and develop a model of meaning based on her findings. Similar to earlier findings by Seligman (2011), Frankl (2006), and Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Esfahani-Smith (2017) found happiness unrelated to fulfillment or meaning and developed four consistent themes, or pillars, in search for meaning (2017). The first pillar of meaning was belonging. Esfahani-Smith (2017) described belonging as being valued intrinsically and valuing those around you. Junger's (2016) research on the history of tribal societies found a strong sense of belonging was fundamental to a sense of security which supported Esfahani-Smith's perspective on the importance of belonging. The second pillar was purpose. This pillar proposed using your strengths to serve others and to develop your *why* to create meaning in one's life. Supporting Esfahani-Smith's (2017) view of meaning in one's life, Sinek (2009) considered meaning to be the inspiration and driving force of meaning making in a person's life. The third pillar was transcendence. Transcendence is a connection to a higher reality that may or may not be spiritually based. As Wong (2014a) proposed, to find meaning one must pursue self-transcendence. The fourth and last pillar was storytelling. Storytelling is a specific action to recraft one's life events as events of growth and restoration by describing how these life experiences have formed them

(Esfahani-Smith, 2017). For example, Cook, Taylor, and Silverman (2004) found that storytelling helped to change a person's perspective of life's hardships through objectively addressing unreasonable thoughts and beliefs about an event.

Meaning seekers pursue meaning in their lives through many avenues including searching for meaning in their life's work. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017) found the average American spends 8.56 hours per day or 37.5% of their time at work. With so much of the average person's time devoted to work the search for meaning has naturally moved into the workplace. Dik, Byrne & Steger, (2012) found creating meaning at work impacted work-related outcomes such as performance, job satisfaction, and engagement.

Meaning in the Workplace. Gallup poll research (2018) reported 70% of followers worldwide are "not engaged or are actively disengaged at work" (para.1). Disengagement of followers impacted organizations creating a call-to-action for researchers to study meaning in the workplace (Mautz, 2015). Simon Sinek (2014) evangelized "leadership is not a license to do less; it is a responsibility to do more" (p. 286).

Taylor Pearson's (2015) research found successful, educated followers were willing to leave their jobs for significantly lesser paying positions that offered freedom and personal and organizational meaning. Pearson (2015) pointed to significant movements in history such as the Protestant and American Revolutions that created meaning in followers who changed the world. Walking away from the security of a job or embarking to participate in what may be a radical movement are examples of the power of personal and organizational meaning.

Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) developed a framework for the creation of abundant organizations. With Frankl's work and years of organization and psychiatric experience as a foundational theory, Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) described abundance as an environment that can be created where followers feel passion, hope, and a sense of determination in work being done each day. These actions of meaning are at the heart of an abundant organization. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) suggest there are seven disciplines that contribute to an abundant workplace of meaning. These disciplines included "positive psychology; social responsibility, organizational purpose and individual motivation; high performing teams; a positive work environment and organizational culture; follower engagement, growth, learning, resilience; and civility and happiness" (p. 34). Ulrich & Ulrich (2010) developed a tactical roadmap for leaders to create an abundant organization by providing foundational principles for each component allowing for an organization to create the advantage of meaning in their workplace.

In other research, Scott Mautz (2015) developed a model of personal and organizational meaning primarily based on the research of Kahn, Holtaway, Holbeche, and Springett. Mautz (2015) proposed that meaning is the solution for disengagement of followers. Mautz (2015) developed a model of "seven markers of meaning" (p. 18). Mautz's (2015) model was based on three main themes. The first theme was direction. This theme proposed doing work that matters is a condition that produces clarity and a sense of inner direction. The second theme was discovery. Discovery encompasses the establishment of conditions that create a sense of growth. The third theme was devotion. This theme includes working in a caring culture, having a connection and confidence in leaders, and working in a functioning culture (Mautz, 2015). Similar to Ulrich and Ulrich

(2010), Mautz, (2015) provided detailed actions leaders can take to create a meaningful workplace. Each author or approach attempted to provide a framework that a leader could use to create meaning in the workplace. A similar approach used in five domains of meaning proffered by Larick and Petersen (2015, 2016) identified leadership spheres research has shown to be important in the creation of personal and organizational meaning. Larick and Petersen's five domains of meaning was the model selected as the basis for this case study.

The Five Domains of Meaning.

The theoretical framework for the five domains of meaning was developed by Drs. Keith Larick and Cindy Petersen of Brandman University (2015). Based on Larick and Peterson's theory, each of the five domains played an important role in the whole of the model and creation of personal and organizational meaning (Larick & Peterson, 2015, 2016). The five domains include character, vision, inspiration, relationships, and wisdom.

Character. Character is the moral compass by which a person lives their life (Bass & Bass, 2008; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Moore, 2008; Quick & Wright, 2011; Sankar, 2003). This domain describes one's personality and one's moral commitments and values (Gini & Green, 2014). Character traits are reflected in how someone uses reason in their emotional and behavioral actions (Crossan, Byrne, Seijts, Reno, Monzani & Gandz, 2017; Ros-Morente, Mora, Nadal, Blasco-Belled & Berenguer, 2018; Sosik, Chun, Ete, Arenas & Scherer, 2018). Leavy (2016) found high levels of follower engagement are linked to high levels of character in leadership.

Vision. Vision is a bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding meaning to an organization, sustaining higher levels of motivation and withstanding challenges (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2009; Landsberg, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992). The domain of vision allows a leader to articulate a clear purpose that is both specific and commanding while allowing followers to be optimistic and invigorated (Bass, 1990). A leader's inspirational vision drives a psychological bond between followers and their organization, creating organizational commitment (Chai, Hwang, & Joo, 2017). Ndalamba, Caldwell, and Anderson (2018) conveyed a leader's vision is fundamental and essential in their ability to guide their followers in addition to their organizations.

Relationships. The domain of relationships encompasses traits that create human connection which enhance personal and organizational meaning making (Mautz, 2015). The importance of relationships in the context of leadership is highlighted throughout leadership literature (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Mautz, 2015; Seligman, 2011; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; Weisman, 2016). In fact, Weisman (2016) proposed humans innately sought out relationships and not having them, can be life ending. Ulrich & Ulrich (2010) described meaningful relationships as enhancing the abundant workplace noting that teams increase in effectiveness and performance.

Wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to utilize cognitive, affective, and reflective intelligence to discern unpredictable and unprecedented situations with beneficial action (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kekes, 1983; Pfeffer, 2010; Spano, 2013; Sternberg, 1998). The domain of wisdom is thought to be gained through experience and presents itself as a higher level of cognition and emotional regulation and development (Nayak, 2016;

Sharma & Dewangan, 2017). Wisdom leaders serve as examples and guide behaviors while fostering the great good within their organization and society (Cowan, 2017; Elbaz & Haddoud, 2017). Wise leaders create inspiration, capturing the hearts of their followers (Cowley, 2011; Zenger, Folkman & Edinger, 2017).

Inspiration. Inspiration is a source of contagious motivation that resonates from the heart, transcending the ordinary that drives leaders and followers forward with confidence (Kouzes & Posner, 2009; Smith, 2015; Thrash & Elliot, 2003). The inspiration domain is one in which a leader achieves top performance and job satisfaction in their followers (Riggio, 2009). An essential aspect of leadership is the ability to inspire followers, capturing their hearts and empowering them to achieve (Bonau, 2017; Cowley, 2011; Secretan, 2004; Zenger, Folkman & Edinger, 2009). To inspire, a leader uses interpersonal skills to create follower engagement and commitment to begin an exciting journey anticipating celebration upon arrival at the destination (Landsberg, 2000). Literature supported the direct and positive correlation between inspiration and commitment of followers (Joshi, Lazarova & Liao, 2009; Newland, 2015).

Hypothesized by Larick and Petersen's framework, the five domains of meaning, character, vision, relationship, wisdom and inspiration, when used collectively by a leader, supported creation of meaning within an organization (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mautz, 2015; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). If the five domains of meaning are used effectively by small business owner leaders to create personal and organizational meaning, this may lead to increased satisfaction, creativity, and innovation in an organization as reported by Dunne et al., (2016).

Leadership

Leadership Theory. Leadership emerged as a topic of interest in the late 1800s and continues to be debated and analyzed today (Northouse, 2013). In 1840, Thomas Carlyle proposed the great man theory of leadership. The great man theory claimed great leaders are born with leadership traits and when given the opportunity, they rise as great leaders and heroes (Dziak, 2017). The trait theory, introduced by Gordon Allport in the 1930s, proposed leaders are born with a set of common leadership characteristics (Zaccaro, 2007). In contrast to the trait theory, the behavioral theory offered leaders are not born leaders but learn to become leaders. As opposed to the contingency theory, developed in the mid-1960s by Fred Fiedler, proposed that leading is situational and how well a leader performs depends on how well they modify their leadership style to the situation (Neider & Schriesheim, 1988). Servant leadership emerged in the early 1970s in writings by Robert K. Greenleaf (Northouse, 2013). Servant leadership is a behavioral-based leadership style. This leadership style can be described as service to followers, the humility of putting followers first, and ability to influence and create a shared vision (Greenleaf, 1977). More recently, the transformational leadership theory presented a central tenant of interpersonal relationships. Leaders work with followers through inspiration and authentic concern while providing them with stimulating work opportunities (Riggio, 2009). Research advocates that leadership and followership are “inextricably connected” (Manning & Robertson, 2016, p. 277). According to McCallum (2013) a leader’s mastery of followership is just as important as their leadership capabilities.

Followership. Josh Bersin (2013) proposed to understand modern leadership theory one must study followership. As explained by Peterson (2013), Vyomesh Joshi described four necessary attributes of followership: 1) building trust, as evidenced by authentic and honest behavior in everyday leadership, 2) creating a sense of stability through confidence in a crisis, 3) showing compassion, passion, and empathy for others, and 4) hope, as the most crucial attribute of followership. In an alternative but similar model, Ira Chaleff (2009) proposed five dimensions of courageous followership. The first dimension was assuming personal and organizational responsibility. Followed by the second dimension of embracing hard work and being of service. The courage to challenge and initiate conflict when appropriate was the third dimension. The fourth dimension was being a champion for transformation and change. The fifth, and last, dimension was courage to take moral action. These models of followership reflect the connection between followership and leadership.

Leadership and followership are incontrovertibly connected. So much so that recent leadership theorist projected leadership is established based upon the leader-follower relationship (Riggio, Chaleff & Lipman-Blumen, 2008). Leaders must have the ability to follow and followers are required to lead through their ability to influence (Riggio, Chaleff & Lipman-Blumen, 2008).

Organizations that developed followership generated creativity, challenged the status quo, and fostered a continuous improvement mindset (Ramazzina, 2017). Both leadership and followership are required components of leadership. Research suggested followership is an essential factor in transformational leadership (Blackshear, 2003; Collins, 2006; Kupers, 2007).

Transformational Leadership. Research on transformational leadership theory found transformational leaders inspired top performance, job satisfaction, and leadership development in their followers (Riggio, 2009). In 1978, James Burns introduced the theory of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). To differentiate management from leadership, Burns identified separate characteristics and behaviors for each. As a result of this separation, he developed theories of transforming leadership and transactional leadership (Bass, 1990). Bernard Bass expanded on Burn's transforming leadership theory by measuring motivation and performance of transforming leadership followers and modified the theory name to transformational leadership theory. Bass' research demonstrated followers of transformational leaders worked harder than followers of transactional leaders because of trust, admiration, respect, and loyalty for their transformational leader (Bass, 1990; Covey, 1990; Lencioni, 2002). According to Bass (1990) there are four elements of his transformational leadership theory. These elements included charismatic leadership, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. The concept of transformational leadership is important for all leaders, regardless of company size (Bass, 1990). Small businesses can benefit from transformational leadership to help prevent small business failures which are shown to be connected with a lack of, or poor, leadership (Beaver, 2003; Perry, 2001).

Leadership in Small Business. Research to determine if conventional leadership theory applies to small business leaders has returned mixed results (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Vecchio, 2003). Some believed small business owner leaders are different from leaders who work for large organizations (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Vecchio, 2003). However, research emphasized conventional leadership theory also

applied to small business owner leaders (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Vecchio, 2003). Conventional leadership behaviors play an important role in business regardless of size (Bass, 1990). Although, there is value in treating small businesses as a specialized topic (Vecchio, 2003). Dunne et al. (2016) found specific leadership behaviors foster innovation at all levels within a small business. Inspirational leadership and the communication of meaning by small business owner leaders was found to be a primary influence on innovativeness (Dunne et al., 2016; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Vecchio, 2003). Researchers proposed a leader who helps establish personal and organizational meaning in their followers, increased innovative results of their organizations (Dunne et al., 2016; Özaralli, 2003).

Small Business

History of Small Business. The history of small business provides a view into an important component of American economic development, political contribution, and culture in the United States (Blackford, 1991; John, 1997; Levinson, 2012). In early America, small business took the form of individual artisans, trading posts, and plantation farming. These small business owner leaders often served as leaders in their community as well as merchants driven by a desire for financial success (Blackford, 1991; Bruchey, 1958; Friend, 1997). As merchant business practices matured in the preindustrial age, capitalism became engrained in the American business culture (Miller, 1985). Capitalism drove economic needs as well as government intervention.

Small Business Administration. Government intervention in small business took the form of financial intervention and support during the Great Depression (About SBA, n.d.). According to Blackford (1991) the United States Small Business

Administration (SBA) as it is known today was established by the United States Congress in 1953. Earlier versions of government programs that provided support included the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) which Herbert Hoover had established to assist small business during the Great Depression (Blackford, 1991). The RFC was followed by the introduction of the Smaller War Plants Corporation which was created to help small business to produce war materials in 1942 (About SBA, 2018). The modern SBA continues to support small businesses with loan financing, disaster assistance, grants, face-to-face coaching, and training (Blackford, 1991; Burlingham, 2005; Funding Programs, 2018). However, the method most small business owner leaders use for securing funds is personal savings (Global Data Point, 2017). Reliance on personal savings reflects the importance of the role that the SBA can play in assisting small businesses. Hamilton (2000) identified comfort with financial uncertainty as a key trait of small business owner leaders. Comfort with financial insecurity highlighted an array of traits that create a unique small business leader owner profile.

Profile of Small Business Owner Leaders. Gregory (2017) indicated “a hundred” traits characterize the profile of a small business owner leader (para. 1). Leading traits of small business owner leaders included a propensity for working with a sense of urgency, goal-orientation, confidence, passion, fiscal responsibility, self-reliance, humility, resilience, and focus (Gregory, 2017; Heinz, Freeman, Harpaz-Rotem & Pietrzak, 2017; Lee & Lee, 2015). Further research highlighted goal-setting and emotional resilience as fundamental in managing the challenges and stress of small business ownership (Owens, Kirwan, Lounsbury, Levy & Gibson, 2013). The traits noted here help small business owner leaders in day-to-day duties as well as mechanisms

to sustain them over the long term. However, as a small business grew and headcount increased leadership became a defining and critical qualifier for success (Dunne et al., 2016). The importance of leadership in small business owner leaders is highlighted in recent research which found inspirational leaders within small businesses increased creativity and innovation in their organizations (Dunne et al., 2016). Further, research showed creating meaning in the workplace as a critical factor in business success (Sherman, 2016, 2017). Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) also theorized creating an abundant workplace increased personal fulfillment which, in turn, translated to organizational success.

Meaning in Small Businesses

Owner Leader Meaning Making. Making meaning is a key factor in small business human capital retention and engagement (Kickul, 2001). Analyzing winners of the Entrepreneur of the Year Awards, Ernst & Young (2016) proposed companies who created meaning for their followers consistently out-performed the S&P 500. Ernst & Young (2016) stressed the importance of ensuring followers see the link between the entrepreneur's purpose and the work they are doing. According to a study on small business retention, small businesses were more frequently at risk of high follower turnover when the small business owner leader promised, but did not provide, meaningful opportunities or recognition for follower accomplishments (Kickul, 2001). McKinnon-Russell (2015) suggested transformational leaders are able to create a higher level of personal empowerment, trust, and commitment, all traits that contribute to creating personal and organizational meaning.

Follower Response to Meaning Making. Transformational leadership helped a leader create an environment of meaning in the workplace (Bass, 1990). Research showed transformational leaders drive organizational success and profitability (Valdiserri, 2010). Studies reflected a gap in current literature referencing small business and entrepreneurs and a theoretical framework for the creation of meaning in the workplace (Chuang, Hsu, & Wang, 2016; Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin & Frese 2009). Further, there is a gap in the literature which presented how the five domains of meaning — character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration — when used in combination, created personal and organizational meaning (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017).

Statement of the Research Problem

Small business is the backbone of America. - Chuck Fleischmann

According to the US Small Business Administration, 47.8% of United States workers are in jobs in small businesses (Horne, 2017). As small businesses grow and add followers, leadership became a critical qualifier for success (Dunne et al., 2016; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Vecchio, 2003). Small business owner leaders have had various levels of business and management competence which played an important role in their leadership style (Frazier, 2013). Leadership style, in turn, impacted performance, competitiveness, innovation, strategy, and overall success of a small business (McDowell, Harris, & Geho, 2016). Transformational leadership was found to be essential for all leaders regardless of their company size (Bass, 1990). McKinnon-Russell (2015) proposed that transformational leaders created a higher level of personal

empowerment, trust, and commitment, all traits that contributed to creating meaning within an organization. Transformational leadership characteristics are a foundation upon which a leader can build personal and organizational meaning in the workplace (Walumbwa, Christensen, & Muchiri (2013).

Research indicated followers who experienced personal meaning in their jobs demonstrated increased performance and engagement (Mautz, 2015; Walumbwa, Christensen, & Muchiri, 2013). According to Steger, Dik and Byrne (2012) followers desired a workplace that invested in creating meaning as much as it invested in a drive for profitability. Mautz (2015) concurred followers strongly identify with work and creating an environment at work which linked to meaning is profoundly positive for both follower and business. Research supported Ronald Inglehart's theory that industrialized societies showed a significant shift over time away from a culture of materialism and toward a culture of subjective well-being, and thus, search for meaning (Inkeles, 1991; Mautz, 2015).

Although understanding one's personal meaning in life is not a new quest, the study of a leader's role in creating personal meaning in the workplace is a relatively new area of study (Kahn, 1990). George and Brock (2011) pointed out that research related to meaning is generalized and not population-specific, making it difficult to narrow a study to small businesses owner leaders. As such, research literature specific to small business owner leadership results and creation of meaning is limited (Dunne et al., 2016). Further, there is an absence of research literature referencing entrepreneurs or small business owner leaders in studies related to the five domains of meaning theoretical model (character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration) specifically for the creation of

personal meaning in the small business workplace (Chuang, Hsu, & Wang, 2016; Rauch et al., 2009).

Small business owner's use of transformational leadership and leadership behaviors that created personal and organizational meaning does not appear in the literature. Chua, Chrisman, and Sharma (2003) have called for additional studies exploring leadership characteristics of small business owner leaders. Senior (2016) concurred with Chua, Chrisman & Sharma and determined a need for empirical research and literature on characteristics of small business owner leaders. Gorman, Hanlon, and King (1997) called for further research to understand how to influence entrepreneurial leadership characteristics and attitudes. The call to study small business owner leadership is clear. A case study which strives to determine leadership behaviors that can lead to personal and organizational meaning in the small business workplace will benefit the small business owner leader community and add to the body of research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary small business owner leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Research Questions

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

Significance of the Problem

Eric Klinger (1998) proposed that the search for personal meaning is a biological human need to rise to a higher purpose and create meaning in life. Hartung and Taber (2013) found that when work comes from the heart, it held personal meaning. Since the mid-1900s, there has been increased interest in meaningfulness in the workplace (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Esfahani-Smith, 2017; Kahn, 1990; Mautz, 2015; Seligman, 2011; Walumbwa, Christensen & Muchiri, 2013). Further, research literature found transformational leadership played a role in generating meaning for their followers (Walumbwa, Christensen & Muchiri, 2013). Research indicated followers strongly identify with their work and creating an environment at work which links meaning to work is profoundly positive for both the follower and the business regardless of the company's size (Bass, 1990; Mautz, 2015).

According to a study of small businesses, the retention of followers in small businesses was a risk and small businesses struggled with low retention rates (Kickul, 2001). Expanding on this claim, Sherman (2017) warned the inability to recruit and retain followers had a negative operational and financial consequence on small business.

Sherman (2017) further advised that leading an organization by creating an environment of significance where every follower individually mattered had a profound effect on retention and overall business success. In addition, McKinnon-Russell (2015) suggested transformational leaders created a higher level of personal empowerment, trust, and commitment, all traits that contributed to creating personal meaning. However, small business failures are connected to a lack of leadership (Beaver, 2003; Perry, 2001). Research to determine if conventional leadership theory applied to small business leaders has returned mixed results (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Vecchio, 2003). Conventional leadership behaviors played an important role in business regardless of size (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Vecchio, 2003). Vecchio (2003) further offered that there was value in treating small businesses as a specialized topic. Harrison and Kirkham (2014) recommended in future studies to consider the individuality and distinctive nature of small businesses and their owner leaders while considering the impact of the volatile and changing nature in which small business owner leaders operate. The call for targeted research is further supported by researchers who have identified the need for literature referencing small business owner leaders or entrepreneurs and a framework for the creation of personal meaning in the small business workplace (Chuang, Hsu, & Wang, 2016; Rauch et al., 2009).

Why does personal meaning in the small business workplace matter? Work occupies a significant portion of a person's life. The average American spends 8.56 hours per day or 37.5% of their time at work (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). According to Sinek (2014), creating personal meaning in the workplace is not only the right thing for a leader to do, but it also fulfills a leader's duties to his followers. Sinek (2014) proposed it

is a leader's responsibility to *do more*. John Maxwell (1999) stated that "everything rises and falls on leadership" (p. XI). Leadership plays an important role in the creation of meaning in the workplace.

Research associated with meaning found that the creation of personal meaning in the workplace would be beneficial as a tool for overall organizational well-being (Mautz, 2015). This well-being included both personal and organizational success. Kruse (2013) indicated that engaged followers have a direct impact on increased service levels which have been shown to increase customer satisfaction, which in turn was shown to increase sales and profits. Mautz (2015) proposed the creation of personal meaning in the workplace fostered personal and individual fulfillment as well. Intentional development in a small business can be challenging. Leitch, McMullan, and Harrison (2013) maintained small business owner leaders have relentless pressures of running their businesses with little time for intentional learning and are more apt to learn through social capital methods such as peer-to-peer relationships.

By exploring how small business owner leaders use character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration in their leadership and work environment, a pragmatic roadmap for small business owner leaders can be developed to create meaning in the small business work environment. Findings from this study provide input for the design and delivery of easy-access professional development opportunities for small business owner leaders. Further, small business owner leaders may not see the value in formal training and may see it as irrelevant (Small Business Training, 2015). Additionally, the findings will serve as the foundation for the development of a pragmatic curriculum offering that builds awareness in small business community networks of the

benefits of a work environment that creates personal meaning. The training will strive to identify the leadership characteristics that enable small business owner leaders to build meaning that will lead to their followers and their businesses to not only survive but to thrive.

Definitions

The definitions of the variables established for this study are described in both theoretical and operational terms. The definition of each variable is necessary to establish the association claim and validate this research (Morling, 2015). Theoretical definitions are based on a theoretical, conceptual framework and scholarly research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The foundational theoretical definitions were then operationalized to allow for measurement of the variables within this study (Morling, 2015).

Definitions

Theoretical definitions

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

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

Meaning. Meaning is a sense of purpose as a fundamental need, which leads to significance and value for self and others (Ambury, 2017; Bennis, 1999;

Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Frankl, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2009; Pearson, 2015; Tredennick, 2004; Varney, 2009; Yeoman, 2014).

Character. Character is the moral compass by which a person lives their life (Bass & Bass, 2008; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Moore, 2008; Quick & Wright, 2011; Sankar, 2003).

Vision. A bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding meaning to the organization, sustaining higher levels of motivation and withstanding challenges (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2009; Landsberg, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992).

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

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

Inspiration. Inspiration is a source of contagious motivation that resonates from the heart, transcending the ordinary and driving leaders and their followers forward with confidence (Cowley, 2011, Kouzes & Posner, 2009; Smith, 2015; Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

Operational definitions

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

Followership. For the purpose of this study, a follower is defined as a member of the small business owner leader's staff. This group of followers could include both managers and individual contributors who report directly to the owner leader.

Leadership behavior. Leadership behavior as used in this research study is defined as the actions performed by the leader that are observed or experienced by followers.

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

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

Vision. Vision is foresight demonstrated by a compelling outlook on the future shared by leaders and followers who are engaged to create the future state.

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

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

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

Small Business. For the purpose of this study, a small business is defined as a business in the professional scientific and technical services sector of the North American Classification System code (NAICS, 2017) with a minimum of 12 followers but no more than 500 followers.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to three exemplary leaders and twelve followers in each small business located in Southern California. Subjects of this study were delimited to exemplary leaders and are defined as those leaders who are set apart from peers by exhibiting at least five of the following six characteristics:

1. Evidence of successful relationships with followers
2. Evidence of leading a successful organizational
3. A minimum of five years of experience in the profession
4. Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings

5. Recognition by their peers
6. Membership in professional associations in their field

Organization of the Study

Following chapter I, the remainder of this study is presented in four chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter I provided an introduction of the topic as well as an overview of the theoretical models of meaning, an introduction to the five domains of meaning, and the history of leadership theory and small business. In Chapter II, an extensive literature review of the scholarly works impacting the conceptual framework of the study is presented. The primary focus of the literature review is the domains of the study which include: small business, meaning, character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. Chapter III presents a detailed description of the research methodology and procedures applied including the instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and limitations. Chapter IV presents a complete report of the study findings including a narrative of the qualitative results and statistical data as well as tables and figures to assist in highlighting relevant findings. Finally, Chapter V presents a comprehensive overview of the major findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for additional research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

Chapter II provides a comprehensive review of the literature covering theory, history, and context associated with the study of small business owner leaders and the creation of meaning in the workplace. The literature review is organized by four broad categories including meaning, leadership/followership, the five domains of meaning making, and small business/small business leadership. Each category topic and study variable are linked to meaning providing a concrete connection. The chapter concludes with a summary of the categories, topics and variables analyzed.

Meaning

Each man must look to himself to teach him the meaning of life. It is not something discovered: it is something molded. – Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Plato defined man simply as a being in search of meaning (Burton, 2018). Pablo Picasso believed the meaning in life is finding your gift and your purpose is to give it away (Tate, 2017). Seeking meaning is the transcendent awareness that one is given life in order to contribute in some way to the greater good (Dik, Duffy & Eldridge, 2009; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Mautz, 2015; Moore, 2008; Tate, 2017). Philosophers and researchers concurred humans are purpose-seekers, with a desire to find meaning in their existence (Bendassolli, 2017; Burton, 2018, Frankl, 2006; Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001; Shim, 2017; Tate, 2017; Vella, 2008). The pursuit of finding meaning in one's work is not a new trend, but one that began as human consciousness evolved. As a result, the search for existential meaning has found its way into today's workplace in the

perpetual desire to fulfill one's purpose by making work matter (Steger, Dik & Byrne, 2012).

Steve Jobs said, "the only way to do great work is to love what you do" (Tate, 2017, p. 53). A sense of meaning is not found in financial success (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Financial gain decreased as a motivator when work is performed out of a sense of meaning (Mautz, 2015; Quinn & Thakor, 2018). Identifying the *why* of work helped provide clarity around organizational meaning which, in turn, created a connection between work followers are performing and the follower's desire to find meaning in work they do (Kotter, 1990; Sinek, 2009, 2014). Even circumstances that seemed overwhelming and insurmountable can become meaningful, as evidenced by Victor Frankl who survived Nazi concentration camps through his ability to create meaning for his existence (Esfahani-Smith, 2017; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Nietzsche said, "he who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any how" (Frankl, 2006, p.76).

History of Meaning.

As early as ancient Greek times, philosophers such as Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas studied the meaning of life (Vella, 2008, Shim 2017, Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). In Aristotle's (350 B.C.) Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle explored how one lives a meaningful life and found one must depend on only themselves to find it. Aristotle theorized the ultimate value of your life is based on living up to one's potential as a human being – a life well lived. Aristotle's theory proposed a life well lived is the meaning of life and can be found through a focus on five concepts: "science, sustenance, nature, soul and human flourishing" (Vella, 2008, p. 8). Many believed Nicomachean Ethics is Aristotle's greatest contribution to philosophy providing context

to the meaning of life. (Vella, 2008). Augustine, another Greek philosopher, approached his study and philosophy of meaning through spiritual analysis and religious education (Shim, 2017). With yet another more spiritual perspective, Aquinas, a Greek theologian, taught the importance of living in accordance with high virtue and God-consciousness which led to a perspective that meaning in life was knowing God (Shah, 2015). An alternative view established in 400 B.C. by Cyrenaic philosophers, argued pleasure in the moment and living a pleasurable life is what gave meaning to life (O'Keefe, 2002, 2017). These philosophers are not alone in their desire to understand meaning. Theologian, Paul Tillich argued the question of meaning is inescapable in humans (Ford, 2007).

Meaning has been studied from multiple perspectives including mythology, philosophy, science, postmodernism, pragmatism, archetypal psychology, metaphysics, and naturalism each with a unique view (Ford, 2007). Experts of meaning included seminal authors and researchers Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Bryan Dik, Victor Frankl, William Kahn, Martin Seligman, Michael Steger, Paul Wong, and more recent researchers Scott Mautz and Emily Esfahani-Smith. Experts have continued to expand studies and theories of finding, and creating personal and organizational meaning.

The Search for Meaning

The importance of experiencing meaning in life has been explored for centuries. This need to find meaning in one's life is nearly universal. Wittgenstein, an Austrian-British philosopher, provided a perspective of meaning from three belief systems: naturalism, supernaturalism, and nihilism (D'Agostino, 2001). Naturalism is a secular view of the search for meaning, as opposed to a spiritual perspective. The naturalist perspective of meaning is simplistic. Naturalists believe just being alive and cherishing

being a part of the life cycle of the universe is the ultimate meaning of life (D'Agostino, 2001; Johnson, 1998). Supernaturalism understanding of meaning is through a theological lens. Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher, and theologian, believed meaning could be found only through a relationship and in obedience to God (Campbell, 2017, Tietjen, 2016). Nihilism professed to completely reject a meaning to life but provided some sense for believers that there is a reason for one's life (Golob, 1980; Grimsley, 2018). Nihilism philosophy has been debated at length (Stick, 1986). Philosopher Geir Sigurðsson (2016) concluded within nihilism beliefs, meaning indeed existed and "meaning arises necessarily as a co-creation between humans and world" (p. 389). Search for meaning crossed almost all belief systems. Philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas professed within every soul a thirst for meaning existed (McAllister, 2017).

Research on Meaning.

Research associated with meaning in work initially emerged as studies of psychology, management, intrinsic motivation, and values (Dik, Byrne & Steger, 2013). In 1974, psychologist and researcher Eric Klinger (1998) proposed the search for personal meaning is a biological human need to rise to a higher purpose and create meaning in life. Like a compass, meaning provided a true north to one's life (George & Sims, 2007). This search for personal meaning has driven a large body of research, models, and theories.

An early study on job design by professors Hackman and Oldman (1976) identified skill variety, task identity, and task significance as creating psychological conditions that fostered meaningfulness in work. However, it was Kahn who opened the

door for research into meaning and its link to engagement (Mautz, 2015; Dik, Byrne & Steger, 2013). Kahn's work, like Hackman and Oldman's, focused on psychological conditions that created the presence of meaning (Mautz, 2015, Kahn, 1990). Kahn found followers were energized by their work and saw a meaningful outcome to individual contribution, were engaged and felt a sense of meaning in their work when in a safe environment (Dik, Byrne & Steger, 2013; Kahn, 1990; Mautz, 2015). Furthering Kahn's research on psychological conditions and creation of meaning, the roots of Viktor Frankl's research grew from observations and experiences as a concentration camp prisoner, where creation of meaning was the basis for survival.

Psychiatrist and neurologist Viktor Frankl expanded the area of positive psychology and focused on meaning through work with logotherapy. Logotherapy is a form of therapy that guides a patient to become conscious and understand their meaning (Frankl, 2006). Frankl (2006), author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, believed everyone is a meaning seeker. Frankl argued the drive for meaning is a human being's way of "making sense of events in their life that may otherwise not make sense" (Logotherapy Institute, n.d., para.5). Positive psychology continued to emerge as a factor in creating meaning with supporting research by Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who focused on the impact of meaning in one's life.

Authentic happiness theory was an early model of positive psychology developed by psychologist and researcher Martin Seligman (2011). Further research by Seligman resulted in transitioning authentic happiness theory to a revised, renamed, well-being model. Seligman developed a theory that included a model of well-being that resulted in one flourishing in their life. The model focused on positive emotion and optimism,

engagement; relationships and social connections, having a meaning to one's life and having accomplishments (Seligman, 2011).

Psychologist and researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) also researched meaning. Csikszentmihalyi's work led to the flow theory. Csikszentmihalyi theorized eight characteristics to create flow. Characteristics identified as optimal for flow included concentration, clarity of goals and rewards as well as immediate feedback, time, intrinsic rewards, effortlessness, balance between challenge and skills, being lost in the work one is doing, and having control of what one is doing. These characteristics, when present, created flow and a source of meaning in work being performed. The theory of flow is the creation of an inner sense of calm and psychic energy through mood, goal setting, feedback, skill level, and concentration in all areas of one's life, work and free time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The impact of meaning on a person's life logically transferred to research and how meaning could be applied within an organization.

Scott Mautz, organizational leadership consultant, researched engagement and meaning to create a set of markers of meaning for creating conditions of meaning in one's work. (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mautz, 2015; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). Markers are organized around a need for three drivers in work; direction; discovery, and devotion (Mautz, 2015). Author and organizational consultant Simon Sinek (2009) began research on meaning and its application within the workplace. Sinek theorized, for a follower to feel fulfilled, one must understand the *why* of what they are doing or being asked to do. Sinek (2009) found if people believed in what an

employer believed in, they would give their all for their job. Sinek (2009) proposed when a “golden circle” (p. 37) was used, it created a sense of meaning to influence and inspire action. The golden circle was made of three levels, the *why*, the *how*, and the *what*. At the center of the circle was *why*. *Why*, in this case, was how a leader captured the heart of their employees and inspired them toward action. The *how* and *what* followed to further define details of action being taken. However, it was the *why* that created meaning.

Similar to earlier findings by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Frankl (2006), Mautz (2015), and Seligman (2011), author Esfahani-Smith (2017) found meaning in one’s life was the source for living a life well-lived. The research of meaning in life, as well as the impact of meaning in the workplace, will continue and expand. It has also become an important factor in follower engagement and, as such, the topic and subsequent research have manifested with a focus in the workplace.

Meaning in the Workplace

Researchers Birch and Paul (2003) explored the importance of work on the quality of one’s life and found work is not a high priority in many people’s lives. While not a high priority, economic need made work a necessity for most people. Birch and Paul (2003) raised the questions of how work could be made more fulfilling. and should work be more fulfilling? Engagement is one measure of fulfillment, and a recent Gallup Poll (2018) survey reported 70% of followers worldwide are “not engaged or are actively disengaged at work” (para.1). As a result of dissatisfaction and disengagement of followers, there is a call-to-action for researchers to study meaning in the workplace.

Taylor Pearson's (2015) research found successful, educated followers are willing to leave their jobs for jobs with a significant decrease in salary if it provided them with freedom and personal and organizational meaning. Pearson (2015) pointed to significant movements in history, such as the Protestant and American Revolutions, which provided meaning in followers who changed the world. Leaving the security of a job or embarking to participate in what may be a radical movement are examples of the power of personal and organizational meaning. How can this level of meaning be brought into the workplace? The researcher hypothesized Larick and Petersen's (2015, 2016) five domains of meaning leadership theory is the foundation upon which a small business owner leader can lead followers to increased engagement, organizational effectiveness, and a personal and organizational sense of meaning.

Theoretical Foundations of Leadership

It's not the position that makes the leader; it's the leader that makes the position.

— John C. Maxwell

Leadership emerged as a topic of study in the late 1800s and continues to be debated and analyzed today (Northouse, 2013). A search for a definition of leadership returned an endless supply of interpretations. Authors of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009), concluded leadership was a process of social influence that created inspiration in followers to achieve things they might not otherwise be motivated to achieve. Although there are similar components within various leadership theories with no single definition of leadership, a lack of acceptance in a single theory for such a complex concept existed (Bass & Bass, 2008; Kotter, 1990; Northouse, 2013). Leadership theory can be categorized into separate trait and process definition

(Northouse, 2013). Trait definition theorized leadership traits are individual characteristics that are innate within an individual leadership ability. Therefore, leadership is limited to a select group of individuals (Colbert, Judge, Choi, & Wang, 2012; Kirkpatrick, Locke, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Northouse 2013).

Alternatively, process definition leadership theories are described as various leadership behaviors used in interpersonal exchanges between leaders and followers and often used as a method to create meaning for followers (Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden, & Hu, 2014; Kotter, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Northouse, 2013).

Trait Leadership Theories

Great Man Theory. In 1840, philosopher Thomas Carlyle proposed great man theory of leadership. The great man theory concluded great leaders are born with leadership traits, and, when given the opportunity, they rise as great leaders and heroes (Dziak, 2017). American history professor, Spector (2016) believed the theme of Carlyle's great man theory rose out of Carlyle's inability to regain faith in the church. Great man theory allowed leaders to be given authority to help shape the future (Spector, 2016). It was Spector's (2016) view that the great man theory was based on the belief that heroes or great men were bestowed upon the world by God. The great man theory fell out of favor in the early 1900s when trait theory was introduced in an effort to further understand leadership (Northouse, 2013).

Trait Theory. Trait theory, introduced by Gordon Allport in the 1930s, proposed leaders were born with a set of common leadership characteristics (Zaccaro, 2007). Northouse (2013) noted trait theory was born out of a desire for continued understanding of leadership beyond great man theory. Trait theory is specifically focused on traits a

leader exhibited which correlated to effective leadership (Yukl, 2012). Additional studies indicated leaders indeed have unique personal characteristics and traits. Northouse (2013) synthesized existing leadership trait research by Lord, De Vader and Alliger (1986), Mann (1959), Stogdill (1963, 1967), Zaccaro (2007), and Zaccaro, Kemp and Bader (2017) finding intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability accurately summarized major leadership traits.

Some experts disputed leadership traits were only used by leaders and advocated that leadership traits are used by followers as well (Lord, 2000; Lord, De Vader & Alliger, 1986). For example, Gallup conducted research of individual talents used by people to think strategically, influence, execute, and build relationships (CliftonStrengths, n.d.; Northouse, 2013; Petrides, 2010). As a result, Gallup developed an assessment called CliftonStrengths (formerly StrengthFinders). Supporting Lord (2000) and Lord et al., (1986) findings, Gallup's CliftonStrengths assessment does not differentiate between follower and leader strengths, but rather identifies an individual's talent, which dependent on use, may emerge as strengths in areas of both follower and leader competencies (CliftonStrengths, n.d.).

Ties to emotional intelligence also fall within the spectrum of trait theory (Northouse, 2013; Petrides, 2010). Emotional intelligence is an important construct in transformational leadership as well as in the creation of meaning in one's life and legacy (Mautz, 2015; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Emotional intelligence was found to be a key trait for leadership success and ability to create meaning in the workplace (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Kerr, Garvin, Heaton & Boyle, 2006; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008; Northouse, 2013; Petrides, 2010)

Further research of trait theory linked values and behaviors to effective and ethical leadership (Yukl & Uppal, 2013). In contrast to trait theory, which was based on personal characteristics, process definition leadership theories were based on a premise of behaviors and how a leader influenced another within the context of leader-follower interactions (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Dinh et al., 2014; Northouse, 2013).

Process Leadership Theories

Behavioral Theory. Behavioral theory of leadership is grounded in research where leadership is based on a leader's behaviors associated with tasks and relationships with their followers (Northouse, 2013; Stogdill, 1967; Yukl, 2012). This research proposed that a leader's behaviors were instrumental in motivating followers to achieve desired organizational outcomes (Casimir & Ng, 2010; Northouse, 2013). Early seminal studies regarding behavioral theory were initiated at The Ohio State University, commonly referred to as Ohio State, and the University of Michigan (Northouse, 2013).

The Ohio State University study was based on leader actions and used questionnaires completed by followers. Academics developed three questionnaires: Supervisory Behavior Description Questionnaire (SBDQ), Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ), and Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire XII (LBDQ-X11) to measure leader actions (Hemphill & Coons, 1957; Northouse, 2013; Schriesheim & Stogdill, 1975). Results showed two primary types of behaviors in leaders categorized as *initiating structure behaviors* and *consideration behaviors* (Northouse, 2013; Stogdill, 1963).

Initiating structure behaviors were associated with task activities, setting expectations, communication, and process. On the other hand, consideration behaviors

were focused on subordinate relationships, follower's development, and work environment (Northouse, 2013, Tracy, 1987). Northouse (2013) detailed the two behavior types as unrelated and distinct behavior types. When combined, these two types of leader behaviors created effective leadership behaviors that led to increased follower development of meaning in their work.

The University of Michigan studied leadership behavior with a specific focus on small group leadership (Zaccaro, 2007). Similar to Ohio State's research study, the University of Michigan found two types of prominent leadership behaviors: employee orientation and production orientation. Employee orientation behaviors emphasized the relationship between employees and needs. Production orientation behavior drove production and tasks to achieve organizational outcomes (Northouse, 2013).

Balancing leadership tendencies between task orientation and people orientation is necessary for leaders. Understanding natural leadership tendencies builds awareness of developmental opportunities. Another seminal behavioral model theory, managerial grid, developed by Blake and Mouton in the early 1960s was a useful tool assessing a leader's tendencies (Northouse, 2013).

Major differences between Ohio State and the University of Michigan studies was the initial use of a spectrum of behaviors used in the latter study. In contrast to the Ohio State study, Michigan initially surmised that if a leader scored high in the area of employee orientation, they, in turn, scored lower in production orientation and vice versa (Blanchard, Zigarmi, Nelson, 1993; Northouse, 2013). This finding was later revised, and the two behavioral traits were treated separately and uniquely as completed in Ohio State's study.

The managerial grid is a development tool used to assess leadership style and balance between concern for people and concern for results (Blake & Mouton, 1967). Plotting a leader's style on the grid provided a perspective to the leader of demonstrated leadership behaviors in proximity to desired leadership behaviors (Blake & Mouton, 1967).

Skill-based Leadership. Skill-based leadership is an approach centered on administrative skills and abilities developed by a leader (Northouse, 2013). The skills approach model was initially introduced by Robert Katz in 1955 (Katz, 1955; Northouse, 2013). In contrast to the trait model, Katz (1955) proposed a leader developed their leadership skills. Katz (1955) further suggested three management skills were necessary for leadership. Identified skills included technical, human, and conceptual abilities. Skills were used with varying degrees of weight depending on the leader's management level. However, Katz concluded all levels of management required human skills (Katz, 1955; Northouse, 2013).

During the 1990s, the United States Army and Department of Defense expanded on Katz's skills approach with research focused on high-performing leader skills (Northouse, 2013). The study served as a model to grow research and development of a skill-based model that identified skills required for effective leadership (Northouse, 2013). In a subsequent study, to further support a skill-based approach, Mumford, Zaccaro, Connelly, and Marks (2000) proposed a model where core components of individual attributes, competencies, and leadership outcomes are gained through a combination of career experiences, and environmental influences, and increase impact on leader performance.

Northouse (2013) maintained that a skill-based approach served as a comprehensive framework for leadership development. The skill-based leadership model stressed the importance of the combination of both productivity tasks and relationships. However, Northouse further suggested this approach required refinements to identify the link between leader behaviors and consistent, effective leadership (2013). Connecting skills and meaning, Avolio and Gardner (2005) stated leadership development, specifically in areas of authentic relationships and concern for people, showed to increase a leader's ability to lead by creating meaning in the workplace.

Situational Leadership. Situational leadership theory was developed by behavioral scientists Hersey and Blanchard in the 1960s (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Nelson, 1993; Northouse, 2013; Vecchio, 1987). Research on situational leadership was based on previous studies which proposed a manager's relationship, task orientation, and effectiveness together defined leadership style (Blanchard, Zigarmi, Nelson, 1993; Northouse, 2013; Vecchio, 1987). Situational Leadership theory was a refinement of Hersey and Blanchard's tri-dimensional leader effectiveness and focused on two elements (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Nelson, 1993).

During the refinement of situational leadership theory two elements were presented, leadership style and level of development of followers (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Zigarmi, 2013; Northouse, 2013). Blanchard and Hersey defined four leadership styles using both directive and supportive behaviors. Leadership styles included 1) directing, 2) coaching, 3) supporting, and 4) delegating. Each style possessed defined levels of supportive and directive behaviors leaders used (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Zigarmi, 2013; Northouse, 2013, Yukl & Uppal, 2013). Situational leadership theory prescribed that a

specific leadership style was required depending on the developmental need of the follower with whom the leader was working with. Corresponding follower development levels included 1) low competence /high commitment, 2) some competence and low commitment, 3) moderate to high competence and variable commitment, and 4) highest development and high degree of competence and commitment (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Zigarmi, 2013; Northouse, 2013; Yukl & Uppal, 2013). In each situation, a follower had a different level of development. Therefore, the leader must assess each exchange with the follower and determine the follower's development level. Once a development level is identified for a specific situation, the leader applied the appropriate leadership style identified by Hersey and Blanchard suitable for that development level (Northouse, 2013; Yukl, 2012). Additionally, situational leadership encouraged a leader to be flexible and treat each exchange as unique thereby allowing for increased follower development leading to greater engagement and connection (Northouse, 2013).

Transformational Leadership Theory. Foundational to transformational leadership are interpersonal relationships, assisting followers through inspiration, authentic concern, and providing followers with stimulating work opportunities (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse & Sassenberg, 2013; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; Riggio, 2009). The ability to effectively use transformational leadership enhanced a leader's ability to influence followers. Adoption of transformational leader values by followers increased the breadth of the leader's influence in an organization (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). This influence allowed transformational leaders to stretch followers to reach levels of accomplishments for themselves and others, for the overall greater good, that they otherwise may not have pursued (Kuhnert & Lewis,

1987). The research focused on transformational leadership theory reported transformational leaders inspired top performance, job satisfaction, and a sense of meaning in followers (Riggio, 2009). Additionally, Bass (1999) stressed transformational leaders were influential and served as inspirational examples who followers desired to emulate.

According to Bass (1990), James Burns introduced the theory of transformational leadership in 1978. To differentiate management from leadership, Burns identified separate characteristics and behaviors for each theory. As a result, Burns developed theories of transforming leadership and transactional leadership (Bass, 1990). Bernard Bass expanded on Burns' theory by measuring motivation and performance of transforming leadership followers and modified the theory name to transformational leadership theory (Northouse, 2013). Bass' research demonstrated that followers of transformational leaders worked harder than followers of transactional leaders because of trust, admiration, respect, and loyalty felt toward the transformational leader (Bass, 1990; Covey, 1990; Lencioni, 2002). According to Bass, four elements of transformational leadership theory worked to create meaning in followers: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Northouse, 2013).

Idealized influence in the transformational leadership model was used to describe the charisma of a leader. This influence was usually created by a strong sense of moral and ethical character deeply respected by followers, creating trust in the leader's vision (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013). Professors Bass and Riggio (2006) concluded the idealized influence component of transformational leadership created a sense of faith

in the future, generating intrinsic rewards for followers. Intrinsic rewards lead to increased employee engagement through a number of mechanisms, one of which was the creation of meaning in the workplace (Mautz, 2015, Thomas, 2009, Weismann, 2016)

Inspirational motivation within transformational leadership theory was described as a leader's ability to communicate a shared and ambitious vision that inspired followers to commit and exceed their own expectations (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; Northouse, 2013). Bass and Reggio (2006) described inspirational motivation as the ability of a leader to exhibit authentic enthusiasm and optimism. Yukl and Uppal (2013) noted a leader's behavior, expertise, and aspects of a given situation influenced follower perception of the leader's charisma. Bass and Reggio (2006) defined the phenomenon of combining inspirational motivation and idealized influence as charismatic-influential leadership.

Intellectual stimulation within transformational leadership theory encompassed a leader's ability to encourage and empower creativity, innovation, and critical thinking (Bass & Reggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013; Yukl & Uppal, 2013). Followers are included in the process of problem resolution and generation of improved solutions and new ideas (Bass & Reggio, 2006). Transformational leaders encouraged followers to view problems from diverse and unique perspectives by creating an atmosphere of innovation which allowed for failure and diversity of thought between leader and follower (Bass & Reggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013; Yukl & Uppal 2013).

Individualized consideration encompassed a transformational leader's ability to create a supportive environment for followers (Northouse, 2013). The transformational leader is a coach and mentor focused on individual development of followers (Bass & Reggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013). Individualized consideration demonstrated by a leader

who sought to understand various levels of development in followers, through active listening, compassion, and desire to understand each follower, created a personal understanding of the follower as a whole person (Bass & Reggio, 2006). The value of transformational leadership was impactful to organizations and was assessed for continued leadership development. A leader's transformational leadership skills were measured using Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Avolio and Bass (1999). A leader's continued focus on self leadership development increased the creation of personal and organizational meaning.

While transactional leadership factors are included in MLQ, these factors are different from transformational leadership in that, transactional leadership focused on advancement and achievement of the organizational agenda (Hamstra et al., 2013). Transactional leadership did not focus on follower needs, development, or relationships. Rather, transactional components of MLQ included management by exception (active and passive), contingent reward, and laissez-faire (Bass & Reggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013). Management by exception was performed in either an active or passive manner. Active management by exception was demonstrated by a leader who actively monitored followers work against specified standards as it was being performed and corrected errors, as needed, throughout the work process. Management by exception-passive occurred when a leader corrected errors or mistakes only when brought to their attention and initiated correction at that time. Laissez-faire management was considered a hands-off approach with very little interaction with followers without performing basic management activities or decision making (Bass & Reggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013). In fact, Yukl (2012) referred to laissez-faire management as the absence of leadership.

Northouse (2013) noted effective leaders used a combination of both transformational leadership and transactional leadership in the workplace. This approach was aligned with Northouse's (2013) findings where strengths and weakness existed in all leadership theories and, in many cases, combining leadership approaches was most effective. Northouse's findings were echoed by Bass (1999) when he noted "the best leaders are both transformational and transactional" (p. 21).

Spiritual Leadership. According to Fry (2003) spiritual leadership was defined as "comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership" (p. 694). Fry (2003) further explained spiritual leadership theory included many attributes of other behavioral leadership theories but was different in that it focused on a follower's spiritual survival through calling and membership. The work of Gotsis and Grimani (2017) found leaders who drew upon spiritual values were more inclusive and created a climate of belongingness in diverse member work environments. Spiritual survival and organizational commitment were critical for leaders and followers (Fry, 2003).

Fry's model of spiritual leadership included two primary elements: vision and altruistic love. The author believed to motivate change, vision must set direction and described the process or journey as creating a call to action (Fry, 2003). This journey incorporated altruistic love into the follower-leader relationship. Altruistic love as a core value created harmony and well-being of both leader and follower through "patience, kindness, lack of envy, forgiveness, humility, selflessness, self-control, trust, loyalty, and

truthfulness” (Fry, 2003, p. 712). Fry’s model of spiritual leadership served followers who look for meaning primarily in the workplace.

Fairholm (1996) asserted work became a place to find meaning in one’s life often taking the place of other sources of the community such as a church or social group. With the prominence of work in people’s lives, Fairholm (1996) professed followers desired spirit in the workplace as a place to find meaning. Research showed that spiritual organizational cultures attracted leaders that created workplaces where followers found meaning (Markow & Klenke, 2005).

Similar to spiritual leadership, servant leadership placed focus on the good of followers over the leader’s self-interests and emphasized follower development (Northouse, 2013). In addition, Greenleaf (1977) spoke to a leader’s need for social responsibility. The primary goal of servant leadership is follower and organizational performance, follower development, and impact on society.

Process Leadership Theory and Creation of Meaning. Process theory of leadership encompassed theories of transformational leadership, servant leadership, social change model of leadership, and relational leadership model (Lund, 2011). The process leadership model integrated multiple theories and provided a broad integrated perspective of leadership applied to both follower and leader (Eberly, Johnson, Hernandez & Avolio, 2013). Hunt and Dodge (2001) theorized process theory “moves beyond unidirectional or even reciprocal leader-follower relationships to one that recognizes leadership wherever it occurs, is not restricted to a single or even a small set of formal or informal leaders and in its strongest form, functions as a dynamic system embedding leadership, environmental and organizational aspects” (p. 448). Northouse (2013) supported this

perspective describing process leadership as an interactive event between leader and follower creating an unrestrictive and informal designation of a leader within the group allowing leadership to be available to everyone.

The process theory model proposed by Eberly et al. (2013) combined leader trait, leader affect, leader cognition, and leader behaviors. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the leader role created follower effect, follower cognition and follower behaviors as demonstrated by follower self-confidence, self-efficacy, and optimism. Interactions between leader and follower created a sense of empowerment and leadership contribution that is a collective contribution by all members of the team (Eberly et al., 2013). Followers became empowered and inspired to lead creating a positive cycle of employee satisfaction (Eberly et al., 2013).

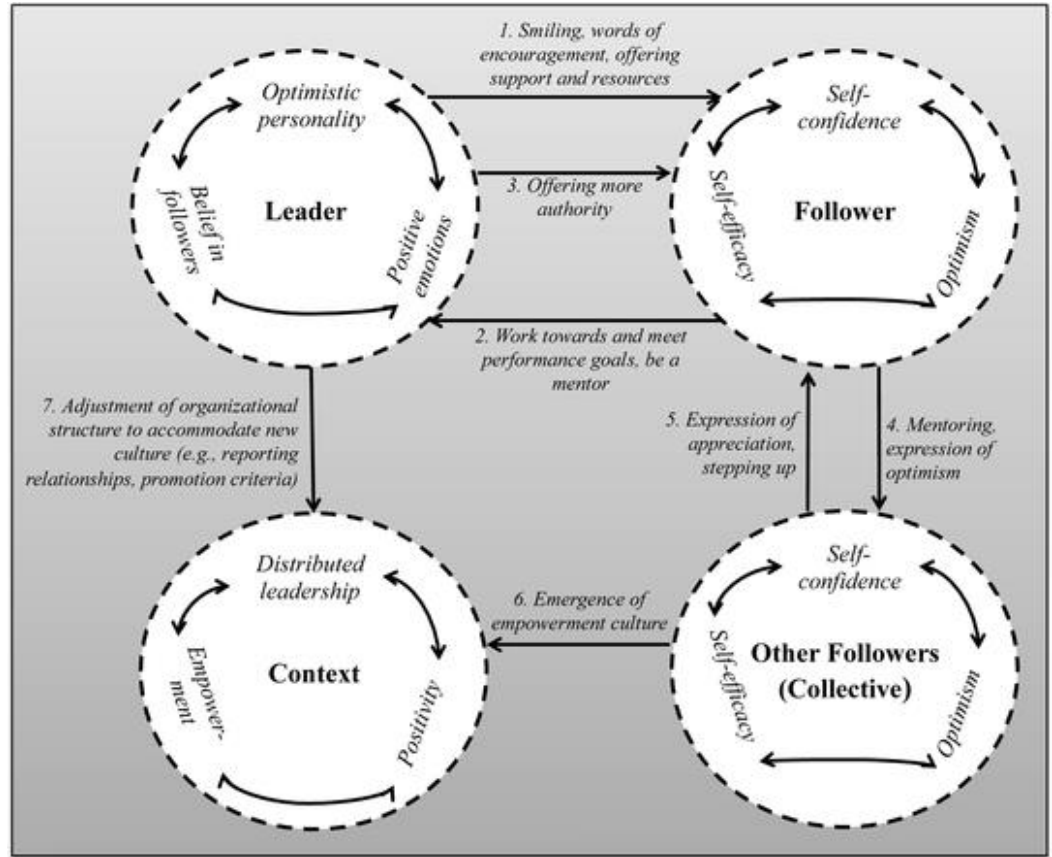


Figure 1. Application of the process model. (Eberly et al., 2013).

Lund (2011) professed process theory of leadership “promotes values of equity, social justice, self-knowledge, personal empowerment, citizenship and service” (para 6.). Research confirmed process leadership theories supported greater employee satisfaction where studies linked a sense of meaning in the workplace (Hunt & Dodge, 2001; Markow & Klenke, 2005; Yukl & Uppal, 2013). Process leadership theories have generated a sense of well-being and leader and follower perception of meaningful work (Arnold et al., 2007). The link between meaning in the workplace and employee satisfaction overlap and are interconnected as noted by Mautz (2015), Seligman (2011), Sinek (2009), Steger, Dik & Shim (2013), and Weisman (2016).

Theoretical Foundation of Followership

A small mind is obstinate. A great mind can lead and be led. - Alexander Cannon

Josh Bersin (2013) proposed to understand modern leadership theory one must study followership. Followership organizations generated creativity, challenged the status quo, and created a continuous improvement mindset (Ramazzina, 2017). Both leadership and followership are required components of leadership. Evidence supported followership as an essential factor in transformational leadership (Blackshear, 2003; Collins, 2005; Kupers, 2007).

In transformational leadership theory, a successful leader developed followers and brought out their best, contributing to organizational success. (Bersin, 2013; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002; Riggio et al., 2008; Kupers, 2007; Schindler & Schindler, 2014). Followership was often misunderstood and may even hold a negative connotation (Riggio et al., 2008). Because followership significantly impacted the success of an organization, Collins (2005) highlighted the importance of understanding what it is and how it was used in the workplace. Followership is a corresponding vital role to leadership (Riggio et al., 2018). Air Force Colonel Meilinger (n.d.) went further and stated a leader's responsibility for followership is no less important than their responsibility to lead, and yet, the focus on followership skills in the C-suite were neglected (Agarwal, Bersin, Lahiri, Schwarts, & Volini, 2018).

Followership. A leader-follower is a servant leader who understood they do not have all the answers and embraced diversity as an effective method for creating a transformational organization (Riggio, et al., 2018). As chief executive officer of a small

business, Gary Peterson (2013) developed a framework of four characteristics that encapsulated followership:

- **Trust:** Trust is earned through a leader-follower presenting themselves with humility, authenticity, and transparency.
- **Stability:** Stability is demonstrated by a leader-follower through the ability to remain consistent and confident in all situations.
- **Compassion:** Leader-followers have a passion for treating others with compassion and empathy.
- **Hope:** Followership requires that the leader has an unwavering belief that their product/service will not only succeed but will change lives.

Followership as a Leadership Trait. Dean Robert Jerry (2013), author of *Leadership and Followership*, found a paradox between leadership and followership where striking the right balance assisted leaders in creating better organizations. A leader's followership capabilities influenced organizational health, setting a tone for collaboration and humility (Reggio, 2009). Followership organization generated creativity, challenged the status quo, and created a continuous improvement mindset in leaders and followers (Ramazzina, 2017). A leader adept at followership served as a model for leadership in their organization which, in turn, provided teams an opportunity to become skilled at followership enhancing motivation, morality, and empowerment (Bersin, 2013; Dvir et al., 2002). Manning and Robertson (2006) advocated leadership and followership are "inextricably connected" (Manning & Robertson, 2016, p. 277). Supporting this theory McCallum, (2013) further argued a leader's mastery of followership was as important as leadership capabilities. Some experts believed

leadership is a life skill that should be developed by everyone (Gould & Carson, 2008; Landsberg, 2003, MacGregor, 2018).

Theoretical Framework of Five Domains of Meaning

The theoretical framework for five domains of meaning was developed by Drs. Keith Larick and Cindy Petersen of Brandman University (2015, 2016). Based on Larick and Petersen's theory, each of the five domains played an important role in the whole of the model (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Larick & Petersen, 2015, 2016; Jackson, 2017; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). The five domains include character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. Existing literature was synthesized and analyzed for each domain.

Character

It is of little traits that the greatest human character is composed. — William Winter

For purposes of this study, character was defined as the moral compass by which a person lives their life (Bass & Bass, 2008; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Moore, 2008; Quick & Wright, 2011; Sankar, 2003). At the heart of a leader's character are ethical and moral behaviors (Seijts & Gandz, 2018; Sosik et al., 2018). Character traits are reflected in how one used reason in emotional and behavioral actions (Crossan et al., 2017; Ros-Morente et al., 2018; Sosik et al., 2018). Positive character traits manifested as honesty, humility, empathy, moral courage, and self-control seeking to exemplify humankind and social betterment (Crossan et al., 2017; Ros-Morente et al., 2018; Sosik et al., 2018). Moral commitments are developed as a result of a lifetime of experiences that molded a leader's character and drove values-based decision making and actions (Strum, Vera & Crossan, 2017). Development of character is a life-long and changing experience that

must be refined and sharpened through sustained practice throughout one's life (Bryne et al., 2017; Crossan, Gandz & Seijts, 2012; Seijtis, 2018; Seijts, Crossan, Mercer & Stevenson, 2014). Understanding the theory associated with character of a leader allowed for the development of leadership, judgment, organizational risk, and corporate governance.

Theoretical Models of Character. Crossan et al. (2017) recently proposed a framework for leader character. The resulting structure provided details of a character dimension directly impacting organizational leadership. Research found decision making was filtered through the lens of judgment (Crossan et al., 2017). The foundation of judgment must exist for leaders who are mired in challenging and often paradoxical decision making. The research concluded that leader character encompassed judgment, courage, drive, collaboration, integrity, temperance, accountability, justice, humility, humanity, and transcendence (Crossan et al., 2017).

Additional character models existed. Peterson & Seligman (2004), leaders in positive psychology research, developed a model based on 24-character strengths categorized into high six virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The high six virtues included the virtue of wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. The virtue of wisdom and knowledge included creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and perspective. Second, the virtue of courage included character strengths of bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality. The virtue of humanity included character strengths of love, kindness, and social intelligence. Fourth, the virtue of justice included character strengths of citizenship, fairness, and leadership. The fifth, virtue was temperance and included character strengths of forgiveness and

mercy, humility, prudence, and self-regulation. The last virtue, transcendence, included character strength of appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These virtues, when combined, contributed to character strength of a leader.

Character as a Leadership Trait. Leadership theories conveyed character as a necessary and valuable attribute in a leader (Sturm, Vera, & Crossan, 2017). Character was the primary competency in a leadership skill set (Crossan et al., 2017, Monk, 2017, Sosik et al., 2018; Weisman, 2016). Experts surmised misconduct in the workplace was a result of behaviors and judgment based on weak leadership character (Furlong, Crossan, Gandz & Crossan, 2017). A leader with strong character was counted on to do the right thing and resolve pressing anomalous issues serving as an example for followers (Monk, 2017).

Recent research showed a leader's character was an essential driver in personal and professional success (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004). According to Leavy (2016) a leader with strong character delivered stronger and more successful business performance at a 1:5 ratio of return on assets (Sturm, Vera, & Crossan, 2017). Further, Cameron, Bright and Caza (2004) found leaders with a depth of integrated character traits outperformed those with limited character traits. Supporting Cameron, Bright and Case's (2004) findings, Leavy (2016) found high levels of employee engagement linked to high levels of character in leadership. As a result, organizations sought to develop character in their leaders (Sosik et al., 2018). Baily (2017) theorized being grounded in spiritual discipline transformed a leader's character.

Character and the Creation of Meaning. Leaders cannot avoid bringing hearts, minds, and souls to work. The entire being of a leader speaks to followers, and spiritual and philosophical foundations are exposed through the leader's actions. Religious traditions played a role in the development of values through religious teachings (Crossan et al., 2012). A recent study by Baily (2017) found spiritual ideology and associated activities such as prayer, study, and meditation, guided a leader toward a life of integrity. Supporting this claim, Klenke (2003) theorized a foundation in spiritual dimension was necessary for effective leadership. Baily (2017) concluded practicing spiritual discipline transformed character and how one lead. The International Institute for Spiritual Leadership propounded leaders who saw themselves as spiritual beings created meaning for themselves and followers (Workplace Spirituality, n.d.).

Vision

The very essence of leadership is that you have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet.

— Theodore Hesburgh

The theoretical definition of vision for purposes of this study was a bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding meaning to the organization, sustaining higher levels of motivation and withstanding challenges (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, 2006; Landsberg, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992). Being able to articulate a vision of a future that provided clarity of a desired future state and process by which it will be achieved is a foundational leadership skill (Yukl & Uppal, 2013). A vision acted as a compass setting true north for an organization and created a path to navigate toward shared meaning (George & Sims, 2007).

Theoretical Models of Vision. Kouzes and Posner (2002) believed creating vision was challenging for many leaders. Furthermore, vision was challenging due to lack of understanding or seeking out other's "hopes, dreams, motives, and interests" (p. 111). Kouzes and Posner's (2013) *Leadership Practice Inventory* reported a visionary leader positively answered the following statements:

- I talk about future trends that will influence how our work gets done.
- I describe a compelling image of what our future could be like.
- I appeal to others to share an exciting dream of the future.
- I show others how their long-term interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision.
- I paint the "big picture" of what we aspire to accomplish.
- I speak with genuine conviction about the higher meaning of our work.

Kouzes and Posner (2006) reminded leaders that vision is not created at the top of the organization. Rather the vision-building process began with collective conversations between followers and leaders about shared future.

Vision as a Leadership Trait. Vision was identified as a key leadership trait in multiple leadership theories. The founder of the Society for Organizational Learning, scientist and author Peter Senge (1990) noted in a learning organization, followers and leaders worked in unison to create a clear and compelling organizational vision. Researchers Shamir, House, and Arthur (1999) argued the ability to articulate vision was one of the most important motivational mechanisms for a leader.

Vision and the Creation of Meaning. A core element to meaning is a vision that creates meaning and ignites passion in a leader and a follower. A leader's clear

articulation of vision and organizational mission increased an employee's experience of meaning at work (Dik et al., 2013; Walumbawa et al., 2013). Mautz (2015) found communicating vision in a manner that resonated with followers created an appeal that fostered the creation of meaning.

Relationships

Personal relationships are the fertile soil from which all advancement, all success, all achievement in real life grows. — Ben Stein

Relationships are bonds established between people through encouragement, compassion, and open communication which lead to feelings of respect, trust, and acceptance (Bermack, 2014; Frankl, 2006; George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007; Henderson, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2009; Liborius, 2014; Mautz, 2015; McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008; Reina & Reina, 2006; Seligman, 2002; Smith, 2011; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). The domain of relationship encompassed traits creating human connection and enhanced personal and organizational meaning making (Mautz, 2015).

Seligman (2009) succinctly described the importance of relationships by noting “very little that is positive is solitary” (p. 20). Importance of relationships in context of leadership was highlighted throughout leadership literature (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Mautz, 2015; Seligman, 2011; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; Weisman, 2016). Weisman (2016) proposed humans naturally sought out relationships and not having relationships was life ending. Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) described meaningful relationships as enhancing an abundant workplace, noting that teams increased effectiveness when high-relating. Mautz (2015) supported this claim by noting performance increased with quality team relationships. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) proposed life without relationships was

intolerable. As a result, the study of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory has become influential in development of theoretical models of leadership and analysis of organizations (Cropanzano, Dashborough & Weiss, 2017). LMX theory studied interactions between leaders and followers and suggested a strong leader-follower relationship impacted both leader and follower work experience (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1998; Lloyd, Boer, Voelpel, 2017; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017).

Theoretical Model of Relationship in Leadership. According to Graen and Uhl-Bien, (1998) leader-member exchange theory focused on domains of leadership which included leader, follower, and relationship. Experience of relationship for each in the relationship may differ. However, experts agreed a strong leader-follower relationship increased organizational success through employee satisfaction, commitment, decreased turnover, and overall job performance (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1998; Lloyd, Boer, Voelpel, 2017; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017).

Theory of leadership member exchange (LMX) evolved over time with additional research (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1998; Mikuš, 2014). The first stage of LMX research was based on analysis within a work unit identifying differentiation between various followers and one leader called vertical dyad linkage or VDL (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). Research found relationships with the leader varied by member and may have been a result of resource constraints of the manager (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1998).

The second stage of LMX research focused on organizational outcomes based on differentiated relationships. Stage two LMX research investigated characteristics of relationships as well as relationships between LMX and various organizational outcomes.

Stage two research found when leaders and followers have quality relationships leader effectiveness increased.

Stage three of LMX research focused on increased leadership effectiveness as a result of partnerships with members. Would offering the same relationship to all members increase organizational capability? Third stage LMX research delivered a leadership making model of LMX. The leadership making model defined stages and characteristics of relationship development between leader and member. As relationship deepened, bonds of trust, respect, and loyalty increased.

Stage four of LMX research, the most recent stage, focused on leader-member relationships within networks. What is the relationship between members who may have a different level of relationship with their leader? What caused the differentiation? What is the impact of differentiation? Does leadership structure impact relationships and therefore, leadership effectiveness? Ongoing studies explore identifiable leadership traits and how those traits are developed. Supporting leadership exchange theory, leadership experts concurred leader-follower relationships are critical for personal and organizational success (Kupers, 2007; Manning & Robertson, 2016; McCallum, 2013; Peterson, 2013; Riggio et al., 2008). Similar to leader-member exchange theory, Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) agreed the relationship between a leader and follower are meaningful and greatly impacted the workplace.

A company that fosters abundance is “a work setting in which individuals coordinate their aspirations and actions to create meaning for themselves, value for stakeholders and hope for humanity at large” (Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010, p.4). Authors of *The Why of Work* authored by Ulrich and Ulrich (2010) detailed a set of leadership

principles to create an abundant workplace and a theory of how leaders can create meaningful relationships and genuine connection with followers. Crowley (2011) reminded leaders that followers desired connection and relationships with their leader. Ulrich and Ulrich's (2010) relationship theory framework included the following five components:

- Making and responding to bids. Making and responding to bids is the act of requesting someone's attention. A bid takes many forms and can be as simple as saying *good morning* or asking someone for assistance.
- Listening and self-disclosure. To listen effectively, a leader should have eye contact and open body language. The leader should also seek to validate what they are hearing, checking for understanding and asking if there is anything. Weaving self-disclosure in an appropriate manner with followers allows for connectedness.
- Navigating proximity. The framework suggests fostering strategic relationships and capitalizes on close friends and broader social networks
- Resolving conflict. A leader ensures empathy and respect for the follower and encourages a willingness to listen nondefensively, explicitly focusing on solving and not blaming and creating an "environment of emotional safety and trust" (p. 122).
- Making amends. The framework provided a simple formula for leaders to use when apologizing the leader 1) say what they did wrong if they know, 2) express an understanding of what the other person might be feeling and genuinely apologize, 3) describe how they will handle the issue the next

time a similar problem comes up and 4) ask if there is anything else, they can do to make it right.

Relationship theory suggested if leaders used the framework, they had an increased opportunity to create relationships that promoted meaning in the workplace (Ulrich and Ulrich, 2010)

Relationships as a Leadership Trait. Experts agreed building and fostering relationships was an important leadership trait (Kotter, 1999, Levine, 2004; Mautz, 2015; Seligman, 2011; Sinek, 2014; Ulrich & Ulrich 2010; Weisman, 2016). By developing relationships with followers and team members, a leader gained trust and genuine personal connection (Covey, 1990; Mautz, 2015; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010; Weisman, 2016). Followers benefited from reciprocated relationships (Riggio et al., 2008). Benefiting both leader and follower, relationships allowed for grace during tense situations in the workplace. Sinek concluded during times of conflict cooperation was more apt to happen when relationships were strong (Sinek, 2014). Developing relationships elevated performance and brought personal satisfaction and sense of connectedness at work to both leader and follower (Mautz, 2015). Followers in respectful relationships with leaders provided an advantage to customer loyalty (Levine, 2004). Both leader and follower benefited from relationships, both personally and in the workplace, as a tool to create meaning.

Relationships and the Creation of Meaning. Having an undefended heart allowed for spiritual connectedness with others and fulfillment of human need of being in relationships (Amodeo, 2018, Cowley, 2011). Out of personal experience, philosopher Buber professed meaning in life is about “a life of attentiveness to others, the life of ‘I

and thou' in an encounter'' (Amodeo, 2018, para.4). The Institute for Spiritual Leadership (n.d.) found leaders who saw themselves as spiritual beings created meaning in their lives, gathered others around them to create a sense of relationship and belonging to one another in the workplace.

Wisdom

Stronger by weakness, wiser men become. — Edmund Walle

For purpose of this study, wisdom was defined as the ability to utilize cognitive, affective, and reflective intelligence to discern unpredictable and unprecedented situations with beneficial action (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kekes, 1983; Pfeffer, 2010; Spano, 2013; Sternberg, 1998). Aristotle's perspective on phronesis, or practical wisdom, emphasized its value in creating a good life in which one's acts create a life filled with moral virtue (Bauer, King & Steger, 2018; Cowan, 2017). In today's literature a singular definition of wisdom escaped consensus with researchers citing its profound complexity and cultural perspectives (Warhurst & Black, 2017; Yang, 2008, 2017). Researchers noted a concise definition of wisdom has evolved and was dynamic with a diverse and broad range of disciplinary lenses weighing in (Sharma & Dewangan, 2017; Warhurst & Black, 2017). However, consistent themes emerged in recent literature by experts in philosophy and leadership. Wisdom was believed as gained through experience and presented itself as a higher level of cognition and emotional regulation and development (Nayak, 2016; Sharma & Dewangan, 2017). Similar research conveyed that wisdom was the processing, understanding, and navigation of complex social scenarios in service for the greater good and moral responsibility (Grossmann & Brienza, 2018; Kalyar & Kalyar, 2018; Nayak, 2016). However, experts cautioned wisdom should not be confused with

logic and intelligence but rather with acquired learning, meaningful life events, and experiences (Grossmann & Brienza, 2018; Pesut & Thompson, 2017; Yang, 2017).

Theoretical Models of Creating Wisdom. A number of theoretical models associated with wisdom are available. Holliday and Chandler (1986) presented one model although a more recent model was developed by Yang (2008). Both models supported wisdom as an important factor in leadership.

Holliday and Chandler cited five factors associated with wisdom (Sharma & Dewangan, 2017):

- one's ability to gain significant understanding from life experience
- freely providing advice through skilled communication
- overall general competence
- strong interpersonal skills
- socially objective, unbiased and non-judgmental

This early model provided the foundation for Yang's (2008) studies (Sharma & Dewangan, 2017). A *Process View of Wisdom*, was based on results from two research studies by Yang (2008). Yang (2008) reported wisdom had three core processes, "integration, embodiment, and positive effects" (p. 62). These core processes were integrated to produce wisdom. To capture the heart of wisdom, one must synergistically coordinate cognitive, social, interpersonal, and spiritual factors in behaviors and decision-making (Cowley, 2011; Yang, 2008). An embodiment of this wisdom model required one to use these core processes in decision making within one's environment. Yang (2008) proposed that those who are wise pursued an ideal life through virtuous actions for others, including leadership, and thus created intrinsic well-being.

Wisdom as a Leadership Trait. A strong association between the strength of a leader's wisdom, work performance, and organizational strength existed (Grossmann & Brienza, 2018; Kalyar & Kalyar, 2018; Pesut & Thomason, 2018). When evaluating evidence-based leadership outcomes, Grossmann and Brienza (2018) found a correlation between wisdom related attributes and successful leadership. Further, Kalyar and Kalyar's (2018) discovered that a leader's wisdom was a predictor of creative cognitive and behavioral work performance. Supporting these findings, research by Grossman and Brienza's (2018) found wise leaders had an advantage over leaders who struggled with wisdom and implied integrating wisdom improved a leader's ability to generate outcomes that impacted the greater good. Wisdom capacities and leadership style were necessary competencies for transformational leadership in complex organizations (Pesut & Thomason, 2018). Wisdom leaders better dealt with ambiguity and complexity, generating positive action in their followers (Cowan, 2017; Pesut & Thomason, 2018). Resulting behaviors enabled wisdom leaders to serve as examples, guided behaviors and fostered the greater good within their organization and society (Cowan, 2017; Elbaz & Haddoud, 2017). Serving as an example, wise leaders created inspiration by capturing the hearts of their followers (Cowley, 2011, Zenger et al., 2017).

Wisdom and the Creation of Meaning. Ritter (2014) proposed spiritual wisdom, when combined with traditional management, increased overall success. A combination of wisdom and management allowed a person to view events from a different perspective which helped gain deeper meaning in events (Tomer, Eliason & Wong, 2017a). A spiritual wisdom perspective involved a leader deeply and was not only challenging and demanding but exponentially satisfying (Pruzan, Mikelsen, Miller

& Miller, 2007). Satisfaction was further enhanced with intentional sharing of wisdom which was a gift, as well as a legacy.

Inspiration

Motivation is an external, temporary high that PUSHES you forward. Inspiration is a sustainable internal glow which PULLS you forward. — Thomas Leonard

For purpose of this study, inspiration was defined as a source of contagious motivation that resonated from the heart, transcending ordinary and driving leaders and their followers forward with confidence (Cowley, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2009; Smith, 2015; Thrash & Elliot, 2003). An essential aspect of leadership was an ability to inspire followers, capturing their hearts and empowering them to achieve (Bonau, 2017; Cowley, 2011, Secretan, 2004; Zenger, Folkman & Edinger, 2009). To inspire, a leader used interpersonal skills that created follower engagement and commitment to begin an exciting journey, anticipating celebration upon arrival at their destination (Landsberg, 2000). In addition, literature reported a direct and positive correlation between inspiration and the commitment created in followers (Joshi, Lazarova & Liao, 2009; Newland, 2015).

Theoretical Models of Creating Inspiration. In a recent study, Horwitch and Callahan (2016) explored inspiration in leadership. Their study sought to identify driving characteristics, inspiring behaviors and how to develop them in individuals. They found 33 attributes created inspiration in followers. Attributes were categorized into four areas: 1) developing inner resources (e.g., emotional expression, flexibility, independence) 2) setting the tone (e.g., openness, unselfishness, recognition) 3) connecting with others (e.g., humility, empathy, vitality) and 4) leading the team (e.g., focus, vision,

empowerment). No one attribute held more weight than another, and not all 33 attributes were necessary to create inspiration (Horwitch & Callahan, 2016). However, the model demonstrated that centeredness was pivotal to inspiration. Centeredness referred to a state of mindfulness and being present (Horwitch & Callahan, 2016). Supporting this theory, the Bain inspirational leadership model presented centeredness as one required attribute that contributed to the ability to be inspirational (Horwitch & Callahan, 2016). The Bain inspirational leadership model differed significantly from the simplicity of Secretan's (2004) research which focused on what was defined as higher ground leadership.

Secretan (2004) established a foundation for inspirational leadership by focusing on what he referred to as a "very deep place," the soul (p. xxix). Without inspiration, Secretan believed followers were simply doing a job. The higher ground leadership model was grounded by inspirational leaders being guided by destiny, cause, and calling. Foundational principles of Secretan's model, the CASTLE principles included courage, authenticity, desire to serve, passion and commitment to truth, a capacity to love, and effective in all aspects of their life. These six principles aided a leader in creating a connection with followers based on a connection with the soul (Secretan, 2004).

Inspiration as a Leadership Trait. Use of inspiration in leadership was identified by researchers as important to leadership success as well as business success (Bonau, 2015; Horwitch & Callahan, 2009; Kotter, 2001; Secretan, 2009). This finding was supported by research data of approximately 50,000 leaders who identified inspiration as important (Zenger & Folkman, 2013). Both individuals and teams responded positively to inspirational leaders who also served as mentors, providing an

example for followers to emulate (Zenger & Folkman, 2013). Inspiration is a necessary leadership attribute that created a desire in followers to work as a team toward something greater than the team itself (Newland, 2015). Leaders skilled in inspiration captured the hearts of their followers connecting organizational meaning with commitment, passion, and engagement (Cowley, 2011; Newland, 2015).

Inspiration and the Creation of Meaning. The English term inspiration dated back to the 14th century and was used primarily in terms of theology referring to a divine power (Merriam Webster, n.d.). An example of powerful spiritual inspiration in leadership came from St. Francis and St. Claire who inspired followers to leave behind prosperous lives and live in simplicity (Spirituality of Leadership, 1999). Bass and Reggio (2006) highlighted inspirational leaders who articulated a vision created fulfillment and meaning for their followers.

Small Business

Make your work to be in keeping with your purpose. — Leonardo da Vinci

In the colonial period of America, merchants created meaning in work through their dominant role in the economy and the shaping of American society (Blackford, 1991; Chandler, 1969). Today small business has been established as a significant economic factor in the United States with 62% of net new jobs generated by small businesses (SBA, 2017). Recently, the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) Small Business Optimism Index reached the highest point since 1983, igniting entrepreneurial passion as represented by increased numbers of new small business owner leaders (NFIB, 2018).

History of Small Business in the United States. Early American merchants were different from farmers and other artisans as they did not spend time growing or creating goods sold (Chandler, 1969). Farmer's had an entrepreneurial mindset. Meaning in small business during early America took the form of economic drive which was primarily focused on sustaining and providing for families (Blackford, 1991). Conversely, a merchant's focus was sales and transportation of goods operating both locally and internationally (Chandler 1969). Several categories of merchants emerged during the colonial period including larger merchants who imported and exported goods, storekeepers, and peddlers (Blackford, 1991). Due to slow communication and potential operational risks, a merchant's business during this time was comprised of friends and family members who could be trusted, further increasing meaning in their businesses (Blackford, 1991; Chandler 1969). Organizational hierarchies were not used as they were not seen as adding value (Blackford, 1991). Storekeepers were important and provided local communities with goods, as well as lines of credit, creating meaning and value in the community (Blackford, 1991; Friend, 1997). During colonial times, small business merchants comprised approximately 5% of the workforce.

American businesses grew significantly between 1800 and 1850, expanding westward in America and into Europe with cotton as the major export (Chandler, 1969). Technological innovation in manufacturing was instrumental in launching the Industrial Revolution (Chandler, 1969) and shifted organizational meaning within small businesses. Small business played a role equivalent to larger enterprise counterparts in the growth of industrialization (Blackford, 1991). American small business owners embraced capitalism with a passion (Blackford, 1991; Friend, 1997). In turn, American society did

not reflect anti-business biases that existed in Europe (Blackford, 1991). However, America's perspective of small business began to change in the late 1800s.

Economic growth, as well as the rise of large industry, escalated between 1869 and the early 1900s (Blackford, 1991). Growth was by primary advancement of transportation, communication, and technology (Blackford, 1991). America began to look at small business as inefficient and a thing of the past (Blackford, 1991; Heath, 1972). During the first two decades of the twentieth century, federal and state governmental regulation increased, providing a favorable environment for big business and labor unions (Blackford, 1991). Small firms were successful in competing with larger firms in iron and steel leading into the New Deal Era. Small business adjusted to the challenging economic environment between 1920 and 1945 (Blackford, 1991; Lanier, 2002). Following World War II consumer spending and exports increased. However, this period was not as favorable as the early 1900s for small business. (Blackford, 1991). Small business in the post-World War II Era faced globalism, technology, outsourcing, and the dot.com era.

According to Blackford (1991) between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s Fortune 500 company employment declined significantly. As large companies reduced headcount, many Americans relied on small business for economic growth which elevated the presence of small businesses within communities (Blackford, 1991). Technology innovation and the dot.com era played a role in small business success, and small businesses emerged to fill this gap with technology research and development resources (Audretsch, 2003). According to Korkki (2014) small businesses learned to use outsourcing to their advantage for special projects for which they did not have resources.

The outlook for small businesses today remains positive. Under the Trump administration, there have been 67 deregulatory actions which helped small business. Also, recent tax cuts and the Jumpstart Our Business Startups Act, or JOBS act, reduced tax for 80% of small business (Small Business Week, 2018).

The SBA and Small Business Financing. Government intervention in small business took the form of financial intervention and support during the Great Depression (About SBA, 2018). However, the Small Business Administration served as support to small businesses with loan financing, disaster assistance, grants, face-to-face coaching, and training (Blackford, 1991; Burlingham, 2005; Funding Programs, n.d.). Hamilton (2000) suggested a key trait of a small business owner leaders was comfort with financial uncertainty. Millennial small business owners appeared to be even more comfortable with financial risk than older small business owners. A Wells Fargo study showed 75% of millennials are not concerned with a taking financial risk to grow their small business (Millennial Small Business Owner Study, 2016). This trait of comfort with financial insecurity highlighted an array of traits that created the unique small business leader owner profile.

Profile of Small Business Owner Leaders. The profile of a small business owner leader included traits such as propensity for working with a sense of urgency, goal-orientation, confidence, passion, fiscal responsibility, self-reliance, humility, resilience, and focus. (Gregory, 2017; Heinz et al., 2017; Lee & Lee, 2015). Further research highlighted goal-setting and emotional resilience as fundamental to managing challenges and stress of small business ownership (Owens et al., 2013). These traits assisted small business owner leaders in day-to-day duties, as well to sustain their

business over the long term. However, as a small business grew and headcount is added, leadership became a defining and critical qualifier for success (Dunne et al., 2016).

Singh, Singh, and Kota (2018) argued the essential leadership trait demonstrated by small business owner leaders was influence and motivation, which were instrumental in driving entrepreneurial success and ability to create meaning within small businesses. Further, research showed that leadership traits helped to create meaning in the workplace and were a factor in follower engagement and business success (Mautz, 2015; Sherman, 2017).

Leadership in Small Business. Research to determine if conventional leadership theory applied to small business leaders returned mixed results (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Vecchio, 2003). Some believed small business owner leaders were different from leaders who worked for large organizations (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Vecchio, 2003). When comparing leadership in small business to leadership in a corporation, small business consultant Eliadis (2016) concluded a small business owner must be a doer in the growth stage of their business and then transition to become the leader. Conventional leadership behaviors played an important role in business regardless of size, but there is value in treating small business as a specialized topic (Bass, 1990; Vecchio, 2003). Small business coach, Melinda Emerson (2015) highlighted the importance of faith as a small business leadership trait. She noted small business owner leaders dealt with business volatility on a more frequent basis than leaders in larger business. As such, Emerson (2015) signified small business leaders used faith as a tool in leadership responsibilities. Need for faith was supported by a recent study that showed faith increased psychological hardiness of small business owner leaders (Scott, 2008;

Smith, 2015). Further studies showed a small business owner leader with spiritual character, used consciousness, moral character, and faith to create meaning in the workplace which had a positive impact on followers (Franklin, 2010; Sanders, Hopkins & Geroy, 2003; Scott, 2008). Further, research proposed leaders who were inspirational communicators lead followers to meaning in their work (Dunne et al., 2006).

Summary

Humans are purpose-seekers with a desire to find meaning in existence (Bendassolli, 2017; Burton, 2018; Frankl, 2006; Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001; Shim, 2017; Tate, 2017; Vella, 2008). Leaders and followers found the workplace a natural community to fulfill the need for meaning in their lives (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Birch and Paul (2003) encouraged organizational leaders to find the mutuality between work and a follower's belief system in creating meaning in the workplace. This literary review sought to concretely connect relevant literary works in the area of meaning, leadership theory, followership, five domains of meaning: character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration, and small business to the creation of personal meaning for leaders and followers. Literary work considered the individuality and distinctive nature of small businesses and owner leaders, as well as the impact of the volatile and changing nature in which small business owner leaders operated. It is evident from the literature that additional research specific to small business owners and how they create personal and organizational meaning is needed.

In Chapter III the author presents the replication methodology used for this study as defined by the original meaning makers thematic research team (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mancuso, 2017;

Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; and Villanueva, 2017). Additionally, characteristics of population are described including target population and sample population. Chapter III presents data collection instruments used in this study.

CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III describes the foundation of reasoning and assumptions for selected methodologies used in the study which identified and described behaviors used by exemplary small business owner leaders creating personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. This study is a replication of the original meaning makers thematic research team study by Bartels (2017), Flint (2017), Hansell (2017), Herrera (2017), Hodge (2017), Jackson (2017), Mancuso (2017), Prosser (2018), Thompson (2018), and Villanueva (2017). All sections of Chapter III were presented with a goal of allowing replication of the study for further research if desired. Details of the processes used to identify and describe behaviors that exemplary small business owner leaders used to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers and to what degree the leader's behaviors were perceived as helping to create meaning for their followers are presented.

Chapter III contains the study purpose statement and research questions which served as a basis for methodological design (Roberts, 2010). In addition, this chapter provides a detailed presentation of research design methodology, study population, target population, sample selection, research instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Finally, chapter III concludes with a methodological summary and study limitations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary small business owner leaders use to create personal and

organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Research Questions

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

Research Design

A case study is used when developing an in-depth analysis of an individual or social phenomenon (Patton, 2002, 2015). Yin (2016) further defined a case study as one that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and in its real-world context” (p. 237). This study replicated the original meaning makers thematic research team study by Bartels (2017), Flint (2017), Hansell (2017), Herrera (2017), Hodge (2017), Jackson (2017), Mancuso (2017), Prosser (2018), Thompson (2018), and Villanueva (2017), whose selection of a case study was made based on the study purpose statement and research questions which sought to explore the phenomenon of personal and organizational meaning making behaviors in exemplary leaders and their followers. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a case study as one that extensively

describes the case highlighting the complexities, presenting excerpts of participant experiences describing the targeted phenomenon and identifying patterns for use in application to similar cases. Case-study research brings forth an understanding about the intricacies of social phenomenon. Further, a case-study allowed questions of why and *how* to be answered with a relatively full understanding to the nature and complexity of the complete phenomenon” (Farquhar, 2012, p.7)

Case-study methodology is common and can be found within research in disciplines of “psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing, and community planning” (Yin, 2016, p.6). Broad application of case studies is driven by the ability of the researcher to see actions and interactions in their context in a holistic manner and its completed form. Feagin, Orum, and Sjobert (1991) argued case studies were central to specific social research. Farquhar (2012) indicated “case study research usually involves a number of different data sources and methods; further insight is gained from considering the question from a multi-dimensional perspective” (p. 7). A mixed-method approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods was employed for this study allowing for different data sources which provided broader insight.

Using a mixed-methods approach in a case study allowed for the collection of complementary information and data to further analyze and explain phenomenon (Yin, 2016). Hightower and DeVore, (2018) indicated a case study relied on multiple sources of evidence leading to the triangulation of data. The need for multiple sources of evidence was supported by Yin (2016). The complexity of a case study was considered a guiding principle for a researcher to rely on multiple sources of data including both

qualitative and quantitative data. A mixed-methods approach secured qualitative and quantitative data with an objective of decreasing potential weaknesses through triangulating results. Creswell (2014) recommended a mixed-method design using both quantitative and qualitative research results to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon. An evaluation of prevalent mixed-methods models was conducted by the original meaning makers thematic researchers (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). The models evaluated included: convergent parallel mixed-methods, explanatory sequential mixed-methods, and exploratory sequential mixed-methods. Convergent parallel mixed-method combined both qualitative and quantitative data collected within the same time frame. Explanatory sequential mixed-methods required the researcher to collect quantitative research which was analyzed and probed during the subsequent qualitative phase of research. Research began with quantitative analysis followed by qualitative analysis. Lastly, an exploratory sequential mixed-method approach began with qualitative research followed by quantitative data collection (Creswell, 2014). An exploratory sequential mixed-method approach was selected by the original 12 peer researchers and Brandman faculty advisors for purposes of this study.

The qualitative phase of this mixed-method case study was face-to-face interviews with exemplary small business owner leaders. The subsequent quantitative portion of the study was conducted through a cloud-based electronic survey administered by Survey Monkey® using closed-ended questions. Followers of the exemplary small business owner leaders who were interviewed in the first phase of the study received an invitation to participate in the electronic survey. The quantitative survey objective was to

assess the follower’s perceived importance of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration behaviors used by leaders. Following qualitative and quantitative phases of the study, data were analyzed, filtered through the five domains of meaning (Larick & Petersen, 2015, 2016) theoretical framework and interpreted, providing results with increased validity over a singular use of a case study. When using multiple methods of data collection, study results are strengthened as data from the qualitative analysis and the quantitative analysis was triangulated (Farquhar, 2012). Figure 2 depicts the convergent mixed-method design used to research exemplary small business owner leader meaning making in this study.

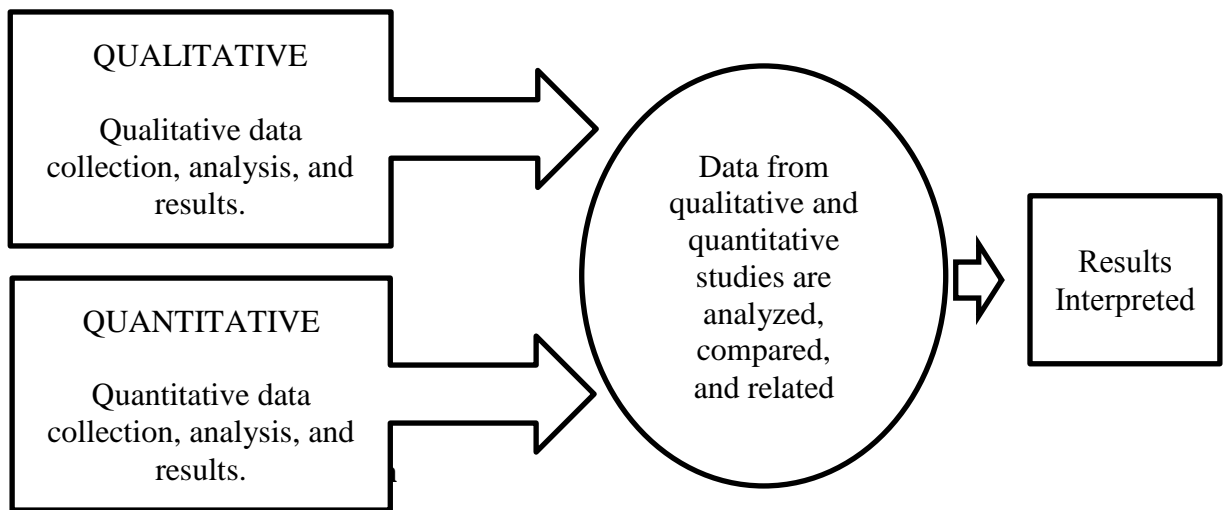


Figure 2. Convergent mixed-method design. Adapted from Creswell, 2014.

Qualitative research methods are based on a philosophy of phenomenology which allows for an individual’s experience and perspective to be considered and analyzed (Roberts, 2010). In this study, qualitative research consisted of gathering data through a personal interview process where themes were identified based on participant responses (Creswell, 2014; Patten, 2012; Patton, 2002, 2005; Yin, 2016). Corbin and Strauss

(1990) found that qualitative research uncovered details that did not surface via quantitative methods.

Qualitative data for this study was obtained through personal interviews with three exemplary small business owner leaders. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) specific characteristics are associated with qualitative research. In alignment with these characteristics, data collected from participants included responses. Information was collected from the participant's perspective and interpretation. However, as expected from qualitative data gathering, findings are complex and offered different perspectives of understanding (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Patton (2002) recommended a qualitative researcher be pragmatic and "do what makes sense, report fully on what was done, why it was done, and what the implications are for findings" (p. 72).

Quantitative Research Design

Quantitative research increased objectivity through use of data, statistics, and defined methodologies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Roberts (2010) highlighted the philosophy of quantitative research design approach was *logical positivism*. The premise of logical positivism was based on the belief that only two ways exist to view knowledge; through logical reasoning and empirical experience (Logical Positivism, n.d.). As such, quantitative research data are gathered through instruments that produced numerical and quantifiable results from a larger population of followers while easily assimilating data for statistical presentation (Patton, 2002, 2015). Quantitative research, for the purpose of this study, included a survey administered to followers of exemplary small business owner leaders who had participated in a qualitative interview. Each participating

follower rated importance of behaviors aligned to character, vision, wisdom, relationships, and inspiration in regards to creating meaning in their organization. The collection of quantitative data assisted the researcher in analyzing the degree to which participating followers perceived character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration were used to create meaning.

Method Rationale

This study precisely replicated 2017 meaning makers mixed-method research design. The original study was a collaboration of 12 peer researchers who studied meaning making, and the behaviors leaders used based on five stated domains: character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). Each of the meaning makers researchers examined a chosen organizational sector. This study expanded research to exemplary small business owner leaders. Using the same mixed-methods case study design added to the body of research on five domains of meaning (Larick & Petersen, 2015, 2016). A gap in literature referencing exemplary small business owner leaders and framework for the creation of personal meaning in the small business workplace exists (Chuang, Hsu, & Wang, 2016; Rauch et al., 2009).

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined population as a group that included “individuals, events or objects” that meet a researcher’s criteria and can be generalized (p. 129). Morling (2015) further clarified population as an “entire set of people or products in which you are interested” (p. 183). Population for this study included

exemplary small business owner leaders. Exemplary small business owner leaders served as business strategist initially to establish and execute on the vision for their business and later, on business strategy in response to market conditions. In addition, these same exemplary small business owner leaders served as top functional experts for multiple departments within their respective businesses (Eliadis, 2016). These departments included finance and accounting, sales, operations, information technology, marketing, and human resources (Eliadis, 2016). Small business owner leaders are required to have broad and diverse expertise (Eliadis, 2016).

Based on a Small Business Administration research study (2017) there are 27.9 million small businesses with 21.5% (5,998,500) who employ followers (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). Small Business Association Office of Advocacy defined a small business as “an independent business having fewer than 500 employees” (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2012, p.1). Small businesses are further defined as for-profit organizations, located in the United States, contributing to the United States economy, independently owned and operated, and not a market leader on a national basis. The identified population of small business was large and geographically dispersed. Narrowing the population was required and identifying a target population was necessary.

Target population

Defining a target population was necessary to generalize the population for sampling (Morling, 2015). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) noted that a target population (sampling frame) should be identified as a subset of the population to assist in focusing a study population. A targeted population ensured an equal chance for selection to participate in the research. Target populations are identified in cases where it was not

feasible to include the entire population in a study. The small business sector employed the most people in the United States (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014).

Therefore, the researcher further refined the target population.

According to the Small Business Administration, 78,503 small businesses existed in Orange County, California (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). According to Lavrakas (2008) “target populations must be specifically defined, as the definition determines whether sampled cases are eligible or ineligible for the survey” (p. 875). The target population for this study was identified as exemplary small business owner leaders in Orange County, California within professional, scientific, and technical services sectors as defined by the North American Industry Classification System code (NAICS, 2017). Target population for this study was further restricted to NAICS sector code 54161, which included businesses primarily providing advice and assistance to businesses and other organizations on business issues (NAICS, 2017). There are 2,751 business management consulting firms in Orange County, California employing 16,193 followers in the county with an average follower headcount of six (Factfinder.census.gov, 2016). The study further focused a target population to those who were considered exemplary small business owner leaders. An exemplary leader, for this study, was defined as one who demonstrated at least five of the following six criteria as described by the meaning makers thematic research team (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017):

- Evidence of successful relationships with followers
- Evidence of leading a successful organization

- Minimum of five years of experience in the profession
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- Recognition by peers
- Membership in a professional association in their field

Sample - Qualitative

Claims that can legitimately be made by sample data depend on the relationship between the sample and the population (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008). The sample for this study was identified through purposeful sampling. Patton (2015) highlighted purposeful sampling is often used for qualitative studies. Purposeful sampling was defined as the identification of participants that fit into a specific category. There are multiple strategies used for purposefully selecting a sample. Patton (2015) noted a homogeneous sample is typically used to describe a subgroup of the target population in depth. In this case study, purposeful sampling used a homogeneous sampling strategy that included exemplary small business owners as more narrowly defined by type of consulting business. Business and management consulting, in this case, included businesses that primarily provided advice and assistance to management on operational, strategic, and organizational planning business issues (NAICS, 2017). A list of small business and management consulting companies was created by the researcher using the small business and management consulting company section in the *Orange County Business Journal 2018 Book of Lists*.

Small business and management consulting firms were identified, and a validation process was managed through a manual research method for each business. Data were

collected from business specific websites: LinkedIn, Better Business Bureau, Orange County Chamber of Commerce, and internet searches using Google. Initial elimination of participants occurred after applying the filter for business not established prior to 2013. Orange County Business Journal *2018 Book of Lists* was used to generate an initial list of eligible exemplary small business leader owners in business and management consulting industry in Orange County, California. Each identified company was validated by the researcher for five of six exemplary criteria.

Sample - Quantitative

A sample for the quantitative phase of this study was established with input by three exemplary small business owner leaders who participated in the qualitative phase of the study. Each exemplary small business owner leader identified 12 or more followers within their small business. Following qualitative interviews with the exemplary small business owner leader, a review of quantitative phase criteria for follower participation was presented. Specifically, quantitative phase criteria for followers required the follower to be in a management or equivalent level position which reported to the small business owner leader. The survey captured follower's perceived importance of character, vision, inspiration, relationships, and wisdom in a leader's behavior toward creating meaning and was not specific to their leader. Sample size for the quantitative data collection was limited to a total of 36 followers of the exemplary small business owner leaders. Exemplary small business owner leaders were provided a scripted e-mail message to send to their 12 identified followers. The message described the study and included a hyperlink to an online survey.

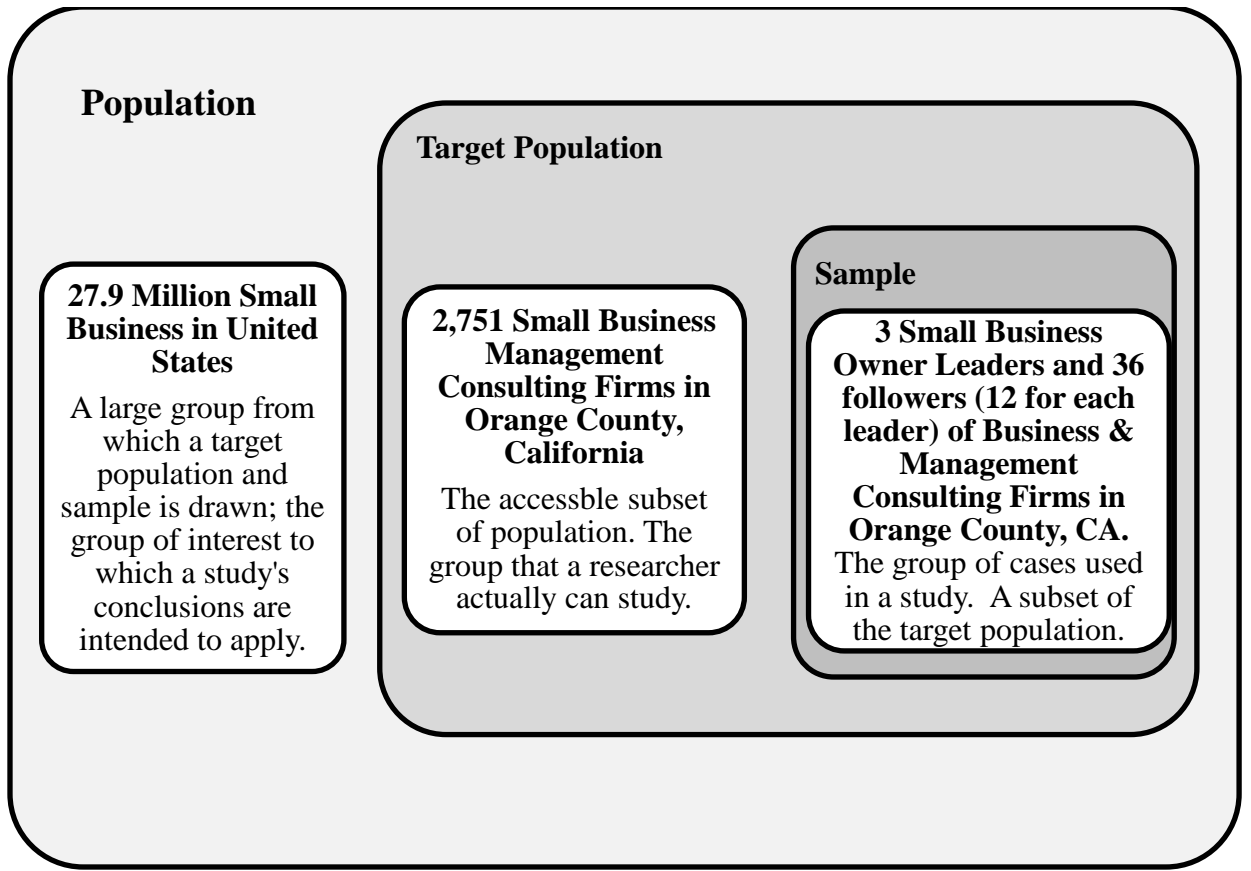


Figure 3. Population funnel technique used to determine the study sample. (Morling, 2015)

Qualitative Research Phase

The qualitative research phase began following approval of the study proposal by Institution Review Board (BUIRB; Appendix A) and the researcher's completion of the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research program, Protecting Human Research Participants (Appendix B). For the qualitative research phase, the use of a homogeneous sampling strategy that included exemplary small business owners was more narrowly defined by the type of consulting business. The business management consulting sample included businesses that primarily provided advice and assistance to management on operational, strategic and organizational planning business issues (NAICS, 2017). A list of randomly selected small business management consulting firms was established using the Orange County Business Journal *2018 Book of Lists* from those listed within the small business section of the publication. Each randomly selected qualifying small business owner leader was invited to participate in the study. The first three qualified small business owner leaders who responded affirmatively to participate in the study were deemed to be the sample, following a brief clarifying conversation with the researcher to address questions while providing research process details. Three exemplary small business owner leaders were identified using purposeful sampling techniques based on selection criteria of geographic location, and availability. Each qualifying exemplary small business owner leader was invited to participate in the study. Of the exemplary small business owner leaders who responded to the invitation, three were randomly selected. The process for contacting the sample was replicated from the original meaning maker study and are included here (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell,

2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). The process steps included:

- The researcher contacted the responding exemplary small business owner leaders by phone at their work location to provide details that included the purpose, benefits, and risks of participating in the study.
- The associated terms of anonymity for participants in the study were reviewed in detail for the potential participants, as well as an overview of the process.
- Prior to closing the meeting, the researcher ensured that the exemplary small business owner leader did not have unanswered questions regarding the study.
- Upon verbal agreement to participate in the study, the researcher scheduled a 60-minute meeting to conduct the interview. The 60-minute time frame was selected to accommodate the exemplary small business owner's schedules and to encourage participation.
- The following documents were sent in advance of the scheduled meeting to help facilitate adequate preparation on the part of the exemplary small business owner leader.
 - Introduction Letter (Appendix C)
 - Invitation to Participate letter (Appendix D)
 - Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix E)
 - Informed Consent form to be signed and collected at the time of the interview (Appendix F)

- Audio Release form to be signed and collected at the time of the interview (Appendix G)
- An advance copy of the Script and Script Questions (Appendix H)
- Prior to the scheduled interview, each participating exemplary small business owner leader was contacted by phone to confirm and offer to clarify information if needed.

Quantitative Research Phase

The meaning makers thematic research team collaborated with Brandman faculty and instrument development expert James Cox, Ph.D. to create a valid and reliable survey instrument. The close-ended quantitative survey instrument, *Leader Behaviors* (Appendix I) was used in this replication study and was completed by 30 followers from a recommended group of 36 participants provided by three exemplary small business owner leaders interviewed. The survey instrument was administered through a cloud-based software vendor, Survey Monkey®. Once a private account was secured and password protected, the quantitative survey instrument was uploaded into Survey Monkey®. Participants were sent an email with instructions, a hyperlink to the survey, and confidentiality clause. Prior to participating, respondents were asked to read an overview of the purpose of the survey. An attestation and acknowledgment that a respondent read the purpose of the survey together with an informed consent form and electronic consent to participate were required before advancing to begin the survey.

Instrumentation

By its definition, a mixed-methods case study uses both qualitative and quantitative instrumentation (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, Patton,

2002, 2005). By integrating quantitative and qualitative data from respective instruments a complete story can be told. Wisdom and Creswell (2013) provided a real-world example of combining both quantitative and qualitative data when they highlighted “sports stories frequently integrate quantitative data (scores or number of errors) with qualitative data (descriptions and images of highlights) to provide a more complete story than either method would alone” (p. 3). The original meaning makers researchers collaborated with faculty and the author of *Your Opinion Please!: How to Build the Best Questionnaires in the Field of Education* (Cox & Cox, 2008) to develop both quantitative data collection instruments using Survey Monkey and a qualitative interview guide.

Qualitative Instrumentation

Qualitative instrumentation in case studies vary. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) concluded a researcher should gather as much information as required to develop an in-depth understanding of their topic. There are various methods for data collection identified by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) and included observation, in-depth interviews, document, and artifact collection and field observations (p. 342). This study is a direct replication of the original meaning maker thematic team research by Bartels (2017), Flint (2017), Hansell (2017), Herrera (2017), Hodge (2017), Jackson (2017), Mancuso (2017), Prosser (2018), Thompson (2018), and Villanueva (2017) in which they chose an interview instrumentation approach.

Patton (2015) presented four types of interviews: “informal conversational, interview guide approach, standardized open-ended interview, and a closed, fixed-response interview” (p. 349). The meaning makers thematic team selected an interview guide approach and conducted face-to-face interviews in which they asked open-ended

questions of participants following field testing using piloted interviews (Bartels, 2017). Patton, (2002) described the interview guide approach as “conversational and situational” (p. 349) allowing for capture of comprehensive information. The rich information collected from interviews was integrated with quantitative data collected to provide a broader perspective of how exemplary small business owner leaders created meaning in their lives and their organizations. The interview guide was field tested for reliability and validity prior to the researcher interviewing the exemplary small business owner leaders.

Quantitative Instrumentation

The quantitative instrumentation selected by the meaning makers thematic research team was a closed-ended quantitative survey as depicted in Appendix I, *Leader Behaviors* (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). As with the qualitative interview inquiries, survey questions developed were based on a review of the literature and collaboratively between 12 peer researchers, faculty instructors, and instrument experts. Online surveys are prevalent, and most participants understand how to use them which assisted in an increased response rate (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The instrument was field tested by the researcher prior to distribution by duplicating the original meaning makers’ thematic research team field test for reliability and validity.

Reliability and Validity

Ensuring that study instruments are constructed in a manner that they measure what the researcher intended them to measure is called validity (Patton, 2015). Ensuring validity gives credibility to the findings of the study by answering the research questions

clearly and directly. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stressed, “validity is clearly the single most important aspect of an instrument and the findings that result from the data” (p. 178). When using mixed-method design validation of both qualitative and quantitative data are required. Creswell (2014) stressed the importance of taking advantage of using rich qualitative data when performing a mixed-method design such as this study. Creswell (2014) further highlighted the depth of the qualitative data obtained in case study procedures is valuable to the validity of the qualitative data. The instrument development for both the qualitative interview guide and the quantitative survey addressed validity and reliability by performing essential strategies as defined by instrument specialists Cox and Cox (2008). These stages included:

1. Establishing the guiding questions
2. Operationalizing the guiding questions
3. Writing items and formatting responses
4. Designing the questionnaire
5. Writing directions
6. Categorizing respondents
7. Conducting the alignment check
8. Validating the questionnaire
9. Marketing the questionnaire (Cox & Cox, 2008, pp. xi-xii)

In addition, the instruments were further validated for content ability to elicit accurate information and consistency in its measurement capabilities (Cox & Cox, 2008).

Content Validity

Content validity is related to the considerations that a researcher makes in the construction of the instrument to ensure the appropriateness of the content and its ability to obtain results that are valid in their response to the research questions (Patten, 2012). To ensure content validity the meaning makers thematic research team conducted pilot interviews using volunteer subjects with similar exemplary leadership traits prior to actual data collection. According to Bartels (2017), Flint (2017), Hansell (2017), Herrera (2017), Hodge (2017), Jackson (2017), Mancuso (2017), Prosser (2018), Thompson (2018), and Villanueva (2017), the meaning makers thematic research team conducted five field-tested interviews with an exemplary leader in their field of study during October 2016. Team members recoded the interviews and had a knowledgeable interviewer volunteer observe each interview. Results of the audio recordings and knowledgeable interviewer volunteer observations were analyzed to validate the skills of the researcher in the interview process. Interview results were reviewed and evaluated for consistency in expected responses. Prior to finalizing the interview instrument, the thematic research team, Brandman faculty, and survey development experts reviewed the content validity results and refined the interview to ensure it was accurately asking questions that would apply to the research questions. The research of this replication study tested the validity of content through the exact replication of the pilot interview process as defined by the meaning makers' thematic research team.

Reliability Field Test

Reliability can be tested by the consistency in the measurements. According to research expert Beth Morling (2015), "if your measurement is reliable, you get a

consistent pattern of scores every time” (p. 129). Morling (2015) recommended the use of test-retest in reliability field studies for quantitative instruments.

The researcher field tested the interview with one voluntary small business owner with a test-retest method using a two-test pilot. This was replicated based on the meaning makers thematic research team who tested reliability for the quantitative instrument with a test-retest method using a two-test pilot. The first test was administered to five participants who were followers of exemplary leaders similar to those being studied for each of the thematic research team members. The process was replicated by administering the survey to the same five participants within five to seven days of the first test. To evaluate stability of the instrument, results of the first and second tests were correlated to ensure reliability. Following the second test, participants each received a questionnaire to assess the the quality of the survey providing meaning makers research team, faculty advisors, and instrument experts with feedback on the response scales and overall survey experience. The refined survey was used as the final quantitative survey. The *Leader Behavior Survey* was used to conduct research with followers of the exemplary leaders used in this study. This replication study performed a test-retest study using the two-test pilot method used by the meaning makers thematic research team. Results of the two-test pilot for this study met the requirement of reliability.

Validity Field Test

Validity occurs when procedures are followed to ensure accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2014). The meaning makers thematic research team conducted test interviews and administered the survey instrument with characteristically similar participants as their sample. Instruments were refined, and this replication study used the validated

instrument. Additionally, the researcher conducted test interviews and collected feedback from a peer and correlated the quantitative two-test pilot results. The qualitative instrument was validated using the interview script and an interview observer during field testing to further assist with validity and the instruments' ability to capture valid data to increase generalization. Validity was influenced by instrument development expert Jim Cox (2008) who worked with the meaning makers thematic team and Brandman faculty to create the instruments. The quantitative instrument was administered sourcing Survey Monkey®, an online cloud-based platform. Results were captured using Survey Monkey® and compiled for analysis. The replication study used the *Leader Behavior Survey* which was refined and finalized by meaning makers thematic research team which met the validity requirements.

Data Collection

The method of data collection for qualitative and quantitative data gathered for this study began subsequent to approval by Brandman University's Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) and after the researcher completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) certification to protect human research subjects. Each participant received and signed or attested to Informed Consent documents before any data collection. Qualitative data were collected using an interview guide approach which allowed the researcher increased flexibility in conducting the interview. Quantitative data were collected using an online survey administered through Survey Monkey®. The rights and privacy of all participants were protected during the course of the study. Participant privacy was maintained by limiting use of participant's identity including generic identifiers and

employing strict data storage and password protection procedures that protected privacy anonymity and confidentiality.

Qualitative Data Collection

The researcher replicated the questions and process in its entirety as presented in the Leader Behaviors Script and Interview guide which the original meaning makers thematic research team developed. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to allow for comprehensive data collection through probing of open-ended question responses by participants. Using in-depth face to face interviews allowed the researcher to capture participant's perception and essence and meaning of events that were raised during the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The researcher was able to fully engage with the participant in the interview process observing body language, facial expressions, and cues that provided comprehensive and in-depth data collection. In addition to researcher notes, responses were recorded and subsequently transcribed by a third-party confidential transcriber after the transcriber signed transcriptionist confidentiality form (Appendix J). Each participant had been asked to carefully review and sign the audio recording release form prior to recording their interview responses.

Data were collected using direct replication of the meaning makers thematic research team Bartels (2017), Flint (2017), Hansell (2017), Herrera (2017), Hodge (2017), Jackson (2017), Mancuso (2017), Prosser (2018), Thompson (2018), and Villanueva (2017) protocol:

- Conduct face-to-face interviews, using the interview questions as a guide.

- The identities of participants remained confidential, and each was identified by the unique identifying code.
- Interviews were transcribed by a confidential transcriptionist.
- The small business owner leader is presented with the transcript and reviews it to confirm its accuracy.
- Patterns and themes were identified when reviewing the transcriptions.
- Common categories were identified and coded for interpretation.

Data Analysis

This mixed-methods case study allows for comparing different perspectives captured with both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative data were collected through use of an interview guide during face-to-face interviews, and quantitative data were captured through use of a cloud-based survey tool, Survey Monkey®. Data from both instruments were compiled and analyzed to establish study conclusions.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Data collected from personal interviews and notes of participating exemplary small business owner leaders were analyzed. The method for analyzing data was based on Creswell's (2014) recommended qualitative research analysis method involving coding, identification of theme frequencies, categorization of themes, and interpretation of themes. Research began with raw data such as participant validated interview transcripts and field notes. Initial coding involved categorizing all data into similar groupings. These groupings were refined and used to create a description of preliminary themes for analysis. The data coding process involved scanning the data for themes as

they related to specific domains of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. Codes were then reviewed, and preliminary frequency of each domain was established. NVivo was used to further refine and code the data in order to provide descriptive details, themes, and concepts in a contextual framework to understand how exemplary small business owner leaders use character, vision, relationship, wisdom and inspiration to create meaning for themselves and their organization (Creswell, 2014). Once qualitative data coding was finalized, it could be compared and related to the quantitative data collected.

Intercoder Agreement

A third party licensed clinical social worker, with experience in academic qualitative studies, was employed to code interviews for this study and establish an intercoder agreement of coding results. Creswell (2014) noted that “it is not that they code the same passage of the text but whether another coder would code it with the same or a similar code” (p. 203). Resulting coding of the qualitative interviews by the third-party assisted in establishing good qualitative reliability.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were gathered using a survey administered through Survey Monkey ®, an online cloud-based tool. Each exemplary small business owner leader participant provided a list of followers to partake in the survey. Twelve randomly selected follower participants were selected from each of the lists provided. Follower responses were gathered to answer the Research Question: *To what degree do followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?* Through the use of

descriptive statistics, the researcher analyzed quantitative results obtained from the twelve follower participants. Descriptive statistics organized and described the data that has been collected and allow for ease of understanding (Patton, 2015). McMillan & Schumacher (2010) found descriptive analytics when coupled with simple graphs and charts, allowed for a presentation of data that is fundamental to quantitative research.

Measures of central tendency are descriptive statistics and include mean median, and mode. Measures of central tendency assisted in determining what is typical within the distribution of the data collected (Patten, 2012). Measure of central tendency were used to quantify survey results to answer Research Question 2: *To what degree do followers perceive the leader behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning?*

Measures of variability are descriptive statistics that include range, standard deviation, and variance. Range describes how far apart results are from one another. Standard deviation presents the average amount of variability in a data set or the average distance from the mean. The larger the standard deviation is, the larger the distance from the mean. Variance can be calculated by using standard deviation squared and results in identifying the average of the squared differences from the mean (Salkind, 2014).

Limitations

Roberts (2010) described limitations as those area of a researcher's study which the researcher could not control and that may have negatively affected the research results to generalize. This study had a variety of limitations that may have had a potential effect on the mixed-methods case study findings. These limitations included geography, sample size, the researcher as the instrument, and interview data limitations. Personal

interviews of each participating exemplary small business owner leader were scheduled. However, one leader had an unexpected scheduling conflict, and the interview was performed by telephone. Each limitation was identified, and mitigating strategies were employed to compensate for potential weaknesses.

Geography

There were 27.9 million small business in the United States and 2,751 small business management and consulting firms in Orange County CA. It was necessary to narrow the sample to enable accessibility of potential participants. Mitigating geographical constraints through further constricting the population, allowed the researcher to conduct qualitative face-to-face interviews in the participant's natural organizational environment. The sample was narrowed to exemplary small business owner leaders in the business and management consulting industry in Orange County, California.

Sample Size

By limiting the number of participants to three exemplary small business owner leaders from business management consulting firms in Orange County, California, limited generalization to the broader population. Data were limited in both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data were limited to 36 followers of interviewed exemplary small business owner leaders. However, the multiple direct replications of the study can promote both analytic generalization and transferability.

Researcher as an Instrument of the Study

Patton (2002, 2015) described the researcher of a qualitative study as an instrument whose skill influences the credibility of the study. Training, skill, and

experience of the researcher helped mitigate the limitation associated with a researcher as an instrument. The researcher of this study had over 35 years of experience as a leader in human resources across various industries. Following three decades of interviewing candidates, the researcher had experience in identifying personal biases. To further mitigate this limitation, each participant reviewed transcripts of their respective interview for accuracy prior to coding. Lastly, employing a mixed-method approach assisted in reducing this factor as a significant limitation.

Interview Data Limitations

An interview participant might have been impacted by their emotional state at the time of the interview. Participant responses can be influenced by personal bias, anxiety, stress or a desire to present in a self-serving manner (Patton, 2015). To mitigate this limitation, the researcher created a relaxed atmosphere and capitalized on initial relationships established during the planning process. Triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative data compensated for this limitation.

Summary

Chapter III described the research methodologies used for this mixed-method case study. This study is a direct replication of the original meaning makers thematic research team (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). The chapter began with a review of the purpose statement and research questions. An overview of research design was presented, as well as qualitative research and quantitative research details. Study population, target population, qualitative and quantitative samples were presented in addition to supporting instrumentation. Validity and reliability procedures

were described, followed by steps used in data collection and analysis. Finally, limitations of the study were defined.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This mixed-methods case study identified and described behaviors exemplary small business owner leaders used to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. In addition, this study identified the degree of importance to which followers believe these behaviors create meaning. Chapter IV presents qualitative results obtained through face-to-face interviews with exemplary small business owner leaders in addition to quantitative results collected through an electronic survey deployed to followers of those exemplary small business owner leaders. The chapter begins with a restatement of both the purpose statement and research questions creating a foundation and reference for the data and findings. Following research methodologies are data collection overview, review of the population, sample, interview process and procedures, and demographic data of participants used in this study. Chapter IV focuses on data analysis categorized by five domains of meaning. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary small business owner leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Research Questions

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

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

A case study is used when developing an in-depth analysis of an individual or social phenomenon (Patton, 2002, 2015). Yin (2016) further defined a case study as one that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and in its real-world context” (p. 237). The original meaning maker thematic team determined that the meaning makers study would be conducted using a mixed-methods case study. This study, which is a direct replication of the original meaning makers study, duplicated the methodology design using a mixed-methods case study.

Exemplary small business owner leaders were identified for qualitative face-to-face interviews supporting this mixed-method study. A script and interview guide *Leader Behaviors - Interview Script and Script Questions* previously developed were used in this replication study. Each exemplary small business owner leader was interviewed with the objective of understanding behaviors they used to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. Three exemplary small business owner leaders were interviewed.

For quantitative data, an electronic survey instrument, *Leader Behaviors* was developed by the original meaning makers thematic team members were used. The survey was deployed electronically to 12 followers of each of the participating exemplary small business owner leaders. Survey questions were presented in a forced-choice format in which the participant selected the best of six options that identified the degree to which they perceived the specific behavior presented helped to create personal and organizational meaning. The electronic questionnaire was distributed using Survey Monkey cloud-based software for online survey administration. Each respondent was issued a unique identifier to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Quantitative Data Collection

The researcher conducted three interviews with exemplary small business owner leaders. Two face-to-face interviews were held at the exemplary small business owner leader's workplace while the third interview, originally scheduled for a face-to-face interview, was held by phone at the participant's request. Each exemplary small business leader is referred to anonymously in the study and only identified by the researcher through the assignment of a unique number. The researcher used the *Leader Behaviors - Interview Script, and Script Questions* and interview prompts developed by the original meaning makers thematic team for each of the exemplary small business owner leaders participating in the study. The *Leader Behaviors - Interview Script and Script Questions* asked probing questions related to each of the variables in the study which included the five domains of meaning; character, vision, relationship, wisdom, and inspiration. Each interview was recorded using iPhone Voice Notes and subsequently transcribed. Detailed manual notes were taken by the researcher during each interview to record behavior and

tone. Audio recordings were transcribed using NVivo's automated cloud-based transcription tool, NVivo Transcription. NVivo was used on a password protected computer for purposes of coding and identification of emergent themes found among transcribed interviews.

Following individual interviews, each exemplary small business owner leader provided the researcher with names and email addresses of at least 12 followers to which an electronic questionnaire was sent together with a request to participate. The quantitative survey, *Leadership Behaviors*, assessed how important the follower perceived that behaviors related to each of the five domains of meaning: character, vision, relationships wisdom, and inspiration helped to create personal and organizational meaning. Data from each survey was collected confidentially and downloaded to a password-protected personal computer. Once coding of qualitative data obtained through personal interviews was completed and descriptive quantitative data derived, a triangulation of results was performed to filter through the five domains of meaning theoretical framework to determine key findings.

Qualitative Data Collection

The identified population of small business was large and geographically dispersed with 27.9 million small businesses identified (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2012). Narrowing the population was required, and identification of a target population was necessary. In Orange County, California there are 78,503 small businesses (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). Due to a large number of small businesses in Orange County, the researcher further narrowed a target population by focusing on type of business. The Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sector as defined by the

North American Industry Classification System code 54161 was used to limit the target population further. (NAICS, 2017). NAICS sector code 54161 included businesses that primarily provide advice and assistance to businesses and other organizations on business issues (NAICS, 2017). Two thousand seven hundred fifty-one consulting firms fell within the NAICS sector code of 54161 in Orange County, California (Factfinder.census.gov, 2016). Using the Orange County Business Journal *2018 Book of Lists*, the researcher analyzed management consulting firms to identify those companies that met the small business definition of being an independent business with 500 or fewer employees and also met five of the six criteria required to be identified as an exemplary small business owner leader. The researcher emailed qualified small business owner leaders with a description of the study, in the form of an introduction letter, and an invitation to participate in a personal interview. Following a participant's verbal agreement to participate in the study, the researcher emailed a sample of the *Leader Behaviors - Interview Script and Script Questions*, Informed Consent, and Research Participant Bill of Rights. Executed Informed Consent Forms were collected at face-to-face meetings. An unexpected scheduling conflict resulted in one interview conducted by phone. Before the scheduled interview time, the researcher secured an executed and scanned Informed Consent Form from the exemplary small business owner leader. After all consent forms were received, interviews were conducted with each of the exemplary small business owner leaders.

The original meaning makers thematic team developed the *Leader Behaviors - Interview Script and Script Questions* used by the researcher based on an interview guide approach. This type of interview approach “increases the comprehensiveness of the data

and makes data collection somewhat systematic for each respondent” (Patton, 2002, p.349). The researcher also used a set of probing questions that the meaning makers thematic team developed to further the richness of each interview. Each interview was electronically recorded with the approval of the participant. Following each interview, the researcher transcribed an audio recording using NVivo Transcription tool. Data were analyzed for each interview requiring coding, classification, and categorization of primary patterns as they related to the five domains of meaning including character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration (Patton, 2002).

Intercoder Agreement

A third party licensed clinical social worker, with experience in academic qualitative studies, was employed to code interviews for this study and establish an intercoder agreement of coding results. The third party coded one of the qualitative transcribed interviews. Creswell (2014) noted that “it is not that they code the same passage of the text but whether another coder would code it with the same or a similar code” (p. 203). Good qualitative reliability was established once the third-party coder’s coded findings of the interview data were found to be consistent with the researchers.

Population

The population for this study was small business owner leaders and their followers. There are 27.9 million small businesses in the United States with 78,503 small businesses in Orange County, California (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). Further focusing the population, this study used small businesses to those in the professional, scientific, and technical services sector as defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 54161 in Orange County, California.

Target Population. At that time of publication, 2,751 consulting firms were contained within 54161 NAICS sector code in Orange County, California employing 16,193 followers in the county with an average follower headcount of six (Factfinder.census.gov, 2016). For this study a target population of management consulting firms was identified through triangulation of Orange County Business Journal *2018 Book of Lists*, meaning makers thematic team criteria for participant eligibility, business specific websites, and Google search.

Sample

The sample for this study was identified through purposeful sampling. Patton (2015) highlighted purposeful sampling is often used for qualitative studies. Purposeful sampling is defined as the identification of participants that fit into a specific category (Patton, 2015). There are multiple strategies used for purposefully selecting a sample. Patton (2015) noted a homogeneous sample is typically used to describe a subgroup of the target population in depth. In this case study, purposeful sampling used a homogeneous sampling strategy that included exemplary small business owners as more narrowly defined by the type of consulting business. The business management consulting sample included businesses that primarily provide advice and assistance to management on operational strategic and organizational planning business issues (NAICS, 2017). A list of small business management consulting firms was established using the Orange County Business Journal *2018 Book of Lists* from those listed within the small business section of the publication.

Evaluations of each selected small business owner leader were created, and criteria factors maintained using Microsoft Excel. Individual records created for each

small business included pertinent factors such as length of time as small business owner leader, conference presentations, business association memberships, organization affiliations, and speaking engagements. Evidence of successful relationship with followers and peer recognition verified thru Glassdoor ratings and informal discussions with participating business professional association members. Where available, public financial data, such as gross profit margin and sales growth, was obtained to determine success, coupled with the length of time in business, and number of active clients. Each qualifying exemplary small business owner leader was invited to participate in the study. The first three qualified exemplary small business owner leaders who responded affirmatively to participate in the study were deemed to be the sample following a brief clarifying conversation with the researcher to address questions while providing research process details. Table 1 provides sample population criteria for participating exemplary small business owner leaders.

Table 1

Sample Population Criteria for Exemplary Small Business Owner Leader Selection

Criteria	Leader 1	Leader 2	Leader 3
Evidence of successful <i>relationships</i> with followers	✓	✓	✓
Evidence of leading a successful organization	✓	✓	✓
Minimum of five years of experience in the profession	✓	✓	✓
Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings	✓	✓	✓
Recognition by peers	✓	✓	
Membership in a professional association in their field	✓	✓	✓

Face-to-face or personal interviews were held with two exemplary small business owner leaders. One phone interview was conducted with the final exemplary small business owner leader due to a schedule conflict. At the conclusion of each interview, the exemplary small business owner leader committed to providing the researcher with a list of at least 12 followers who potentially would participate in an online survey. The *Leader Behaviors - Interview Script and Script Questions* used for each interview were previously developed by the original meaning makers thematic team members. Invited followers, provided by the exemplary small business owner leaders, included senior management, management, individual contributor consultants, and staff members. Each recommended follower was contacted by email with an invitation to participate in the online survey or questionnaire. The email included study details and researcher contact information, in the event of questions. Survey results were captured and held confidentially using a password protected online survey tool ensuring secure storage.

Demographic Data

Each exemplary small business owner leader selected for participation in the interview qualified as exemplary based on the original meaning makers thematic criteria. Each exemplary small business owner leader had owned and operated their current small business successfully for a minimum of five years. The participants had each presented to various audiences including peers, clients, associations, and conferences over their tenure as a small business owner leader in addition to authoring industry white papers. Two of the exemplary small business owners were able to provide evidence of formal peer recognition through association awards and honors. One exemplary small business owner lacked formal peer recognition, yet had noteworthy informal peer recognition as

demonstrated by requests for speaking and industry panel discussion participation on a regular basis. Each of the participants held a degree from an accredited institution. All participants were male. Table 2 shows demographic information for the participating exemplary small business owner leaders.

Table 2

Demographic Information for Exemplary Small Business Owner Leaders

	Leader 1	Leader 2	Leader 3
Gender	M	M	M
Years as Owner Leader of Small Business	6.8	15.8	12.4
Years in Business Consulting Related Career	11.9	21.4	25.7
Education Degree	MILR	Ph.D.	J.D.

Note. MILR = Master of Industrial and Labor Relations, Ph.D. = Doctor of Philosophy, J.D. = Juris Doctor.

Participating exemplary small business leaders each provided names and email addresses of at least 12 followers they selected for participation in the quantitative portion of this study. The researcher provided the *Leader Behaviors* survey to followers that each exemplary small business leader owner had identified as a desired participant. Each follower was sent an invitation to the *Leader Behaviors* survey via Survey Monkey® generated email with a customized message that included a link to the survey. Of the 36 followers who received an invitation to participate in the survey. One follower agreed to participate, but skipped all questions, while 30 followers completed the survey (83.3%). Follower survey participation is represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Follower Survey Participants Demographic Details

Demographic Category	Category Tier	n	%
Gender			
	Male	13	43
	Female	17	57
Age			
	20-30 years	5	17
	31-40 years	10	34
	41-50 years	7	24
	51-60 years	8	25
	61 or over years	0	0
Years in Organization			
	0-5 years	23	75
	6-10 years	5	17
	11-20 years	2	8
	21+ years	0	0
Time with Current Leader			
	0-2 years	6	20
	3-5 years	17	57
	6-10 years	5	17
	11 years or over	2	7

N=30

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Findings for Research Question 1: *What are the behaviors exemplary small business owner leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration?*

To address this research question data was collected through a qualitative interview process with three exemplary small business owner leaders. The researcher used an interview guide and presented seven open-ended questions recording responses

electronically as well as capturing interview notes manually. Prior to presenting the first interview question, the operational definition of meaning was recounted to each leader by the researcher. The operational definition for meaning is the result of leaders and followers coming together for the purpose of gathering information from experience and integrating it into a process that creates significance, value, and identity within themselves and the organization. The operational definitions of the five domains were also presented to the leaders as a reference.

In each interview, the first question asked of the leader was positioned “Here are five leadership behaviors that research suggests are necessary in an exemplary leader. Looking at these, would you agree that these are all important?” Each responding exemplary small business owner leaders commented all five domains were essential to the creation of meaning. Leader 1 indicated the domains were also important to creating a successful business indicating he understood the relationship between meaning and organizational success. When asked, “Realizing that they are all important, do any jump out as being absolutely essential”? Replies were consistent for their most important behavior to create purpose and meaning, with all three participants noting relationships were essential. Two leaders mentioned character as important, in conjunction with relationships. Vision and inspiration were also named as essential domains, however, not as important as relationships and character. Leader 1 replied, “I think relationships and character are completely non-negotiable.” Leader 2 noted, “They are all important! I would suggest that perhaps vision and relationships stick out as my first response.” Leader 3 expressed, “I like them all. I think overall probably relationships, character and inspiration are most important.” With a desire to explain his answer, Leader 1 expanded

on his response, “I think vision and inspiration are always great to have as a leader. But, in a small business, I think it is less important. The distance from the top to the bottom [in a small business] is not very far, and a leader directly interacts with everyone. In larger companies, you may never meet some employees. If you have relationships and character in check, you don’t have to be perfect on the others.”

The resulting qualitative interview data support the leader’s top selected domain of relationships as a driver of creating meaning. The domain of relationships was referenced 115 times equating to 34% of all references. The Institute for Spiritual Leadership (n.d.) has found leaders who see themselves as spiritual beings created meaning in their lives, gathering others around them to create a sense of relationship and belonging to one another in the workplace. Where Kouzes and Posner (2006) suggested that “No matter how much formal power and authority our positions give us, we will only leave a lasting legacy if others want to be in that relationship with us” (p. 48).

Character, the second most highly mentioned domain, was referenced 76 times by the leaders or 22% of all references. Wisdom domain was ranked third with 60 references made by leaders (18% of all references), the vision domain was referenced 56 times (16%) and, with the fewest references, inspiration domain mentioned 34 times (10%). The figure below reflects the frequency of references which exemplary small business leader owners made that were coded to each of the five domains of meaning.

Meaning Maker Domains
341 Total References

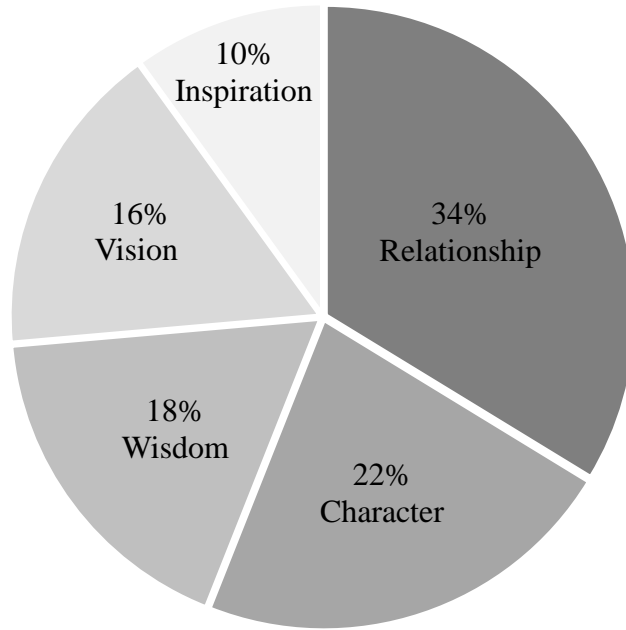


Figure 4. Percentage of leader references for each of the five meaning makers domains.

Major Findings for Relationship

The operational definition of relationships for the purposes of this study is authentic connections between leaders and followers involved in a common purpose through listening, respect, trust, and acknowledgment of one another. When a genuine relationship existed, employees, are seen for who they are, not merely for a bottom-line expense or revenue generator (Weisman, 2016). All three leaders articulated their view of relationships in a similar manner. Leader 2 stated, “I have a business urgency to build very strong relationships and more importantly to enable sort of a field or an environment where my employees can have great relationships with one another.” Leader 1 highlighted, “Without relationships, you have very little ability to influence or get

anything done, diminishing our purpose.” Leader 3 felt “Relationships are paramount to running any organization or business.” The domain of relationships was referenced 115 times or 34% of all references. Themes presenting in the relationship domain included team cohesiveness, communication, trust, respect and fairness, active listening, collaboration, and development. Figure 5 below presents references by theme within the relationship domain.

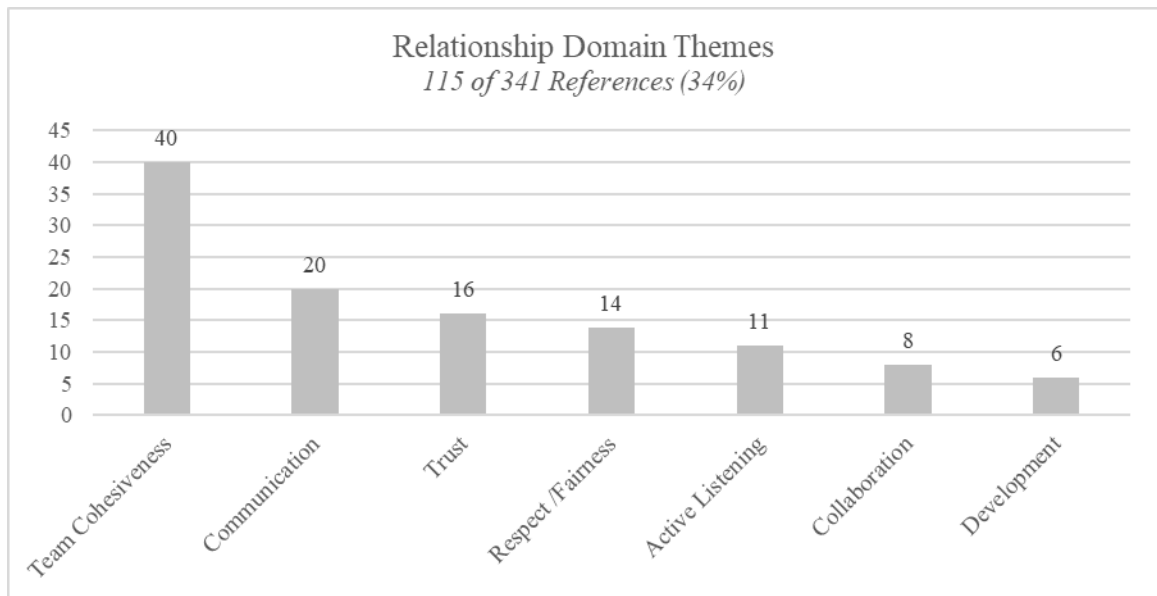


Figure 5. Representation of relationship domain themes that emerged from the total number of relationships references.

Team Cohesiveness. Team cohesiveness was referenced 40 times during the interview process or 35% of relationship references. Pratt, Pradies, and Lepisto (2013) found practices which leaders undertake to create a community for team members to support each other drove opportunities for meaningfulness. Leader 2 shared, “I am very focused daily on what am I doing to help or hinder my team member’s ability to relate to one another in a positive candid, transparent, trusting way.” Leader 1 said, “We have

core values, teamwork being one of them.” Considering the business impact, Leader 3 noted, “Our focus on relationships is driven by a business urgency.”

Communication. Communication was referenced 20 times during the interview process or 17% of relationship references. The author of *The Heart Aroused* suggested that just the “Act of being in a conversation, never mind reaching a solution for it, often is tremendously freeing and allows people to work with each other” (Whyte, D., 2006, para 1). Participating leaders also stressed communication in their small businesses. Leader 3 noted, “I think you need to have an open door to talk to you about the good and the bad.” Leader 1 stated at his company “We encourage our staff to ask for what they need when they need it.” Leader 2 found communicating in a small business was easier noting “There are no layers here. So, in a big company when you have got a lot of locations and a lot of managers in between the messaging and the tools and the systems you use to communicate are different.”

Trust. Trust was referenced 16 times equating to 14% of relationship references. Mautz (2015) believed trust is a foundational requirement that simply must be met. Leader 2 indicated that “Transparency, vulnerability, and openness - This all leads to trust in the way we want to interact in our culture.” Additionally, Leader 2 shared, “It is the simple stuff like meeting deadlines and doing what you say you are going to do that builds trust.” Leader 3 said, “I focus on building trust and sort of stripping away the fear and the authority.”

Respect and Fairness. Respect and fairness were referenced 14 times (12% of references for relationships). “When coworkers engage each other respectfully, they create a sense of social dignity that confirms self-worth and reaffirms competence”

(Mautz, 2015, p. 150). Respect and fairness appeared to be valued by respondents with Leader 1 expressing that “It is important to treat everyone with respect and hopefully treat you with respect.” Leader 2 shared that “I think just do unto others as you would expect them to do unto you is very applicable.”

Active Listening. Active listening was mentioned 11 times or 10% of all references for relationships. George, (2003) believed people are grateful when someone really listens to them. He goes so far as to say, “Active listening is one of the most important abilities to empower leaders” (George, 2003, p. 175). The respondent leaders saw value in active listening. Leader 1 shared, “It’s really making sure I’m not doing all the talking and that I am understanding what the issues and concerns are and doing my best to address them.” Leader 3 noted he practiced active listening by “Talking to them individually and getting to know them really getting to know who they are and what's important to them in life.”

Collaboration. Collaboration garnered 7% of references for relationships or eight times. Dotlich and Cairo (2002) believed that experts have now found themselves lacking critical knowledge due to the rapid creation of fresh information. Lack of critical knowledge appeared to be true for study respondents based on their comments. Leader 2 shared, “Collaboration puts everybody on a level plane – everyone contributes.” Leader 3 expressed, “You have very little ability to get anything done without collaborating.”

Development. Development was referenced six times or 5%. A growth-mindset organization is what Mautz (2015) described as “Meaning makers playground” (p. 98). Participating leaders capitalized on development for their employees because it enriches their businesses and engages their employees. Leader 1 shared an experience with an

employee noting, “His upside is unlimited. We are helping him see what the potential is in a job that I don't think he ever imagined.” Leader 3 created individual plans with is employees mentioning, “Development extends beyond just learning in the job – it's personalized.”

Major Findings of Character

This study’s operational definition for character is an alignment of a value system that promotes ethical thoughts and actions based on principles of concern for others through optimism and integrity while being reliable, transparent, and authentic. When compared to the entire set of domains, character ranked second in its ability to create personal and organizational meaning in exemplary small business owner leaders. Twenty-two percent or 76 specific references were captured and coded to the character domain. Coded culture domain themes included humility, moral compass, honesty, availability, and authenticity. Figure 6 below presents references by theme within the character domain.

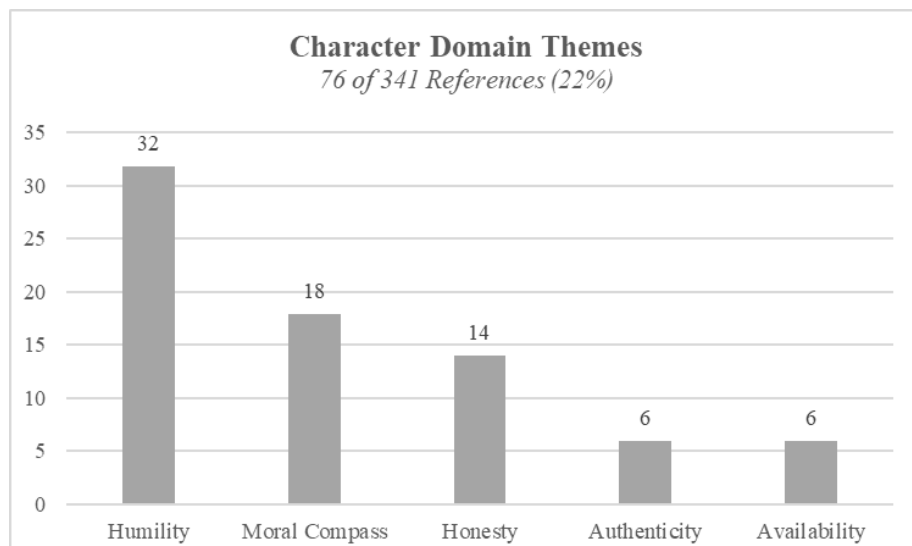


Figure 6. Representation of character domain themes that emerged from the total number of character references.

Humility. Humility was referenced 32 times by leaders during personal interviews or 42% of character theme references. Kouzes and Posner (2009) concluded to be human and humble means being down to earth and having both your feet planted on the ground and suggested the “best advice for aspiring leaders is to remain humble and unassuming” (p. 348). The exemplary small business owner leaders shared this sentiment. Leader 1 claimed, “We try to be very humble and very practical about our humanity.” Leader 2 explained [he] “Has a certain personality type and reputation. I know who I am. I can come off as an alpha male at times. Hey, I’m never going to be perfect. I’m going to make mistakes of character, integrity, honesty, and morality – but I will always admit them.” While Leader 3 expressed, “I, nor any of us can be 100 % perfect on point all the time.”

Moral Compass. Moral compass was mentioned 18 times during the leader interviews or 24% of references related to character. A moral compass is what directs one when faced with all types of personal and business decisions. In one case, the exemplary small business owner expressed the need for a strong moral compass concerning customer requests. Leader 2 highlighted, “You got to see it through to the end. That’s when your character kicks in whether or not you’re capable of doing what is right despite your client’s desires.” The other leaders supported the need for a moral compass in business sharing, “For me, true character comes into play, not with the big stuff. It’s the little stuff” and “You must have a good moral compass.”

Honesty. Honesty related themes were captured 14 times, or 18%, during the interviews. Pratt, Pradies, and Lepisto (2017) stressed the importance of honesty and integrity in developing practices that foster meaningfulness. Conviction around this

theme was echoed by Leader 2 when he said, “We intend to be transparent and intend to be honest - always.” Leader 1 professed, “Our forthrightness and transparency with ourselves and our clients *is* our business.”

Availability. Availability was mentioned six times by the leaders or 8% of references related to character. The exemplary small business owner leaders spoke about the importance of being available to employees, at all times, with an open-door policy that encourages interaction with all team members. Leader 1 noted, “You can't expect connectivity and cooperation if you're not available – you must be present.” Leader 2 expressed the benefit of his small business’s flat organization, “Our firm has hierarchies and it’s interesting, but it doesn’t guide our firm – everyone at every level makes themselves available.”

Authenticity. Authenticity was also mentioned six times by the leaders or 8% of references related to character. Authentic leaders are genuine people who do what they say and say what they do with a genuine concern for serving others (George, 2003). Authentic leadership was referenced as being as an applicable trait important to exemplary small business owner leaders. Leader 1 shared as a practice in his business they encourage “Open candor to say that there are things we didn’t do and making it OK for them to have a list of things they didn't do.” Leader 2 shared he has had “Two people that work for me sort of take me on – we may not see eye to eye, but there is no sort of power distance in our firm.” Additionally, Leader 3 noted, “We have core values that we actually talk about. Authenticity is one of them.”

Major Findings for Wisdom.

The operational definition of wisdom is the reflective integration of values, experience, knowledge, and concern for others to accurately interpret and respond to complex, ambiguous, and often unclear situations. When compared to the entire set of domains, wisdom ranked third in its ability to create personal and organizational meaning in exemplary small business owner leaders. A total of 60 references, equating to 18% of all domain references, were captured and related to wisdom. Themes arose for the wisdom domain and included experience, simplicity, innovation, tenacity, and consistency. Figure 7 below presents references by participating leaders, by theme within the wisdom domain.

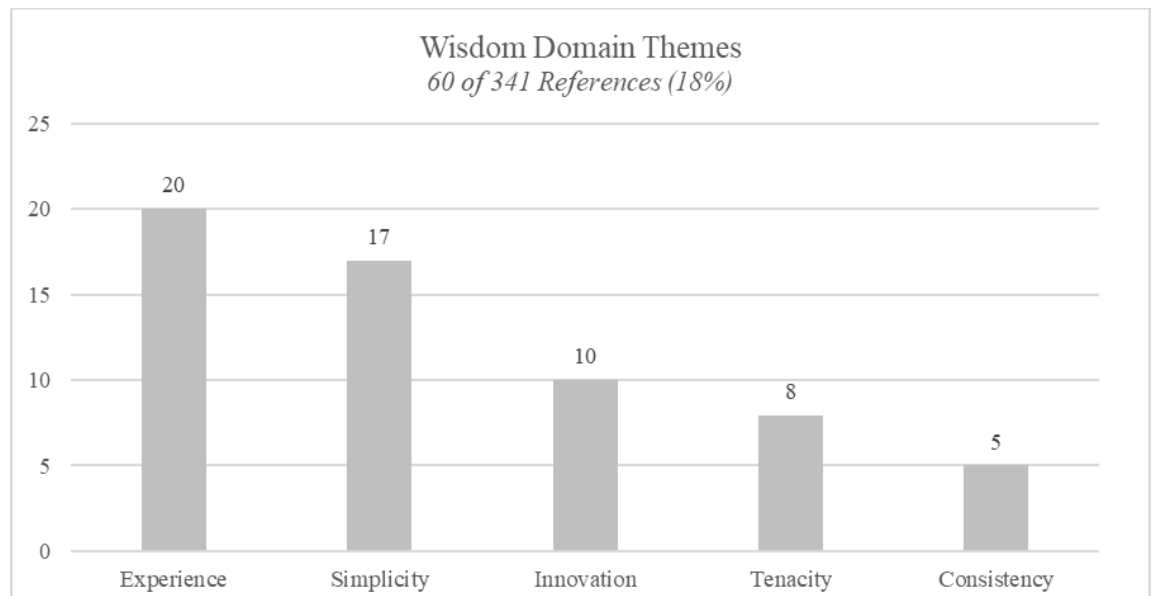


Figure 7. Representation of wisdom domain themes that emerged from the total number of wisdom references.

Experience. There were 20 references related to the experience theme (33% of references related to wisdom). The exemplary small business owner leaders referred to experience when speaking about wisdom. Mautz (2015) encouraged leaders to act on

wisdom that is learned, even expressing it is vital to act on gained insight as part of a leaders' legacy. Leader 1 shared the fact he “Pulled from my corporate background.” Leader 2 stated with confidence, “If you don't make any knee jerk-reactions we're going to be fine.” Leader 1 expanded on his thoughts associated with wisdom and expressed, [he] “Wondered a little bit if wisdom is really critical in our business. It never hurts, but I don't know if it's necessary. Maybe there's a different word for it. Maybe it's experience, but wisdom is a little over the top.”

Simplicity. The theme of simplicity was presented 17 times by the leaders or 28% of all references related to wisdom. Mautz (2015) suggested balance in the workplace does not exist, and leaders must create an environment that creates work-life harmony by “simply getting serious about simplification” (p. 153). Based on responses exemplary small businesses owner leaders felt the opportunity to simplify was easier due to company size. Leader 1 shared, “A couple of years ago we went through a reasonably complicated business plan. It was not overly complicated, but there was a lot of data, and in subsequent years we boiled it down to a handful of bullet points instead of having a complicated document. You know, three four or five key things we're going to try to achieve.” Leader 2 highlighted, “There is a simplification of being in a small business where you can just focus on the work and the politics and the layers and the communication and the complexity, we just don't have it.” Leader 3 noted, “It took us some experimentation to realize that in a smaller company sometimes the formality can feel not oppressive but it can feel corporate and can feel unnecessary.”

Innovation. The theme of innovation was referenced ten times or 17% of references related to wisdom. Dotlich and Cairo (2001) in their book *Unnatural*

Leadership suggested “What is considered bold and innovative today is passé tomorrow” (p. 245). Mautz (2015) suggested innovation makes a positive difference for everyone in the organization. Based on the exemplary small business owner leader responses, they agreed. Leader 2 “Takes pride in taking some innovative approaches in our business.” Leader 1 shared, “Entrepreneurship in my mind is a little bit of experimentation. You try stuff, and it doesn’t always work. As long as the team is together, you can pivot. In a big organization, I think it's harder.” Leader 3 echoed Dotlich and Cairo’s (2001) theory and noted, “We have to stay fresh, one step ahead.”

Tenacity. The leaders referenced tenacity eight times during the interviews (13% of references related to wisdom). According to Robinson (2014) tenacity is the number one trait required for successful small business owners. Robinson further suggested small business owners face failure every day (2014). Based on comments by the exemplary small business owner leaders, they concurred. Leader 3 suggested, everyone must “Be there and be willing to give 110%.” Similarly, Leader 1 noted, “Showing up is part of it – every day you must show up.” Leader 2 linked meaning to tenacity and noted, “This is where purpose kicks in – you keep going because you have a purpose.”

Consistency. Consistency was discussed five times or 8% of all references related to wisdom. Weisman (2016) suggested consistency speaks to reliability and stability of an organization. Stober, Putter and Garrison found congruency in organization values and actions increased leadership capabilities enhancing meaningfulness in work (Dik, Byrne, Steger, 2013). Leader 2 mentioned, “We talk about them [values], and we use them. They aren’t just a placard on the wall.” Leader 1 noted,

his followers “Rely on our process and historical information and facts instead of emotion and say this too shall pass.”

Major Findings for Vision

The operational definition of vision is foresight demonstrated by a compelling outlook on the future shared by leaders and followers who are engaged to create a future state. When compared to the entire set of domains, vision ranked fourth in its use in creating personal and organizational meaning in exemplary small business owner leaders. A total of 56 references or 16% of all domain references were recorded and related to vision. Themes that emerged for the vision domain included shared vision, co-created vision, business breakthroughs, and clarity. Figure 8 below presents references by participating leaders, by theme within the vision domain.

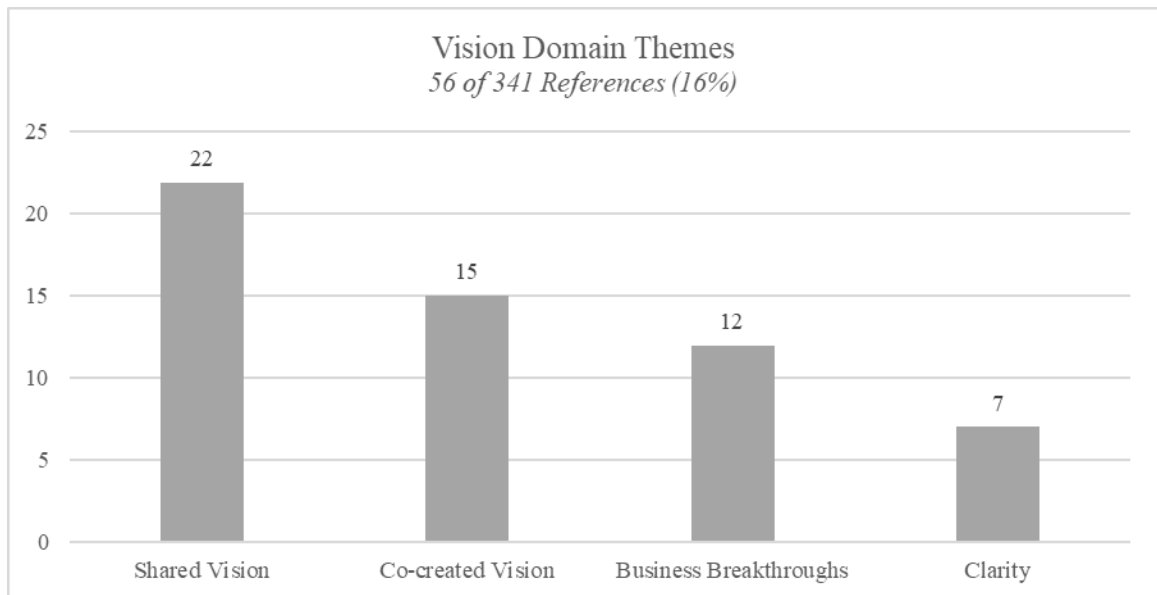


Figure 8. Representation of vision domain themes that emerged from the total number of vision references.

Shared Vision. Leaders referenced shared vision 22 times (39% of references related to vision). In order to create meaning a vision must be compelling in a way that it

adds meaning to employees' lives (Landsberg, 2000). Study respondents agreed, articulating, "Not having a shared vision can create confusion, and it can create ambiguity." Leader 2 shared, "If I can get our clients and our employees to see something of themselves in our vision that's a pretty cool thing." Leader 1 noted, "Getting employees engaged has been much easier than I ever thought it would be. In other words, you don't have to sell a shared vision." Shared vision was differentiated from co-created vision by the exemplary small business owner leaders. Leaders described shared vision as important and noted that it was demonstrated by a follower's enthusiastic adoption of the vision whether created by the exemplary small business owner leader or co-created by leader and follower.

Co-Created Vision. Co-created vision was referenced 15 times (27%).

Landsberg (2000) believed a vision is unlikely to be effective unless it is developed collaboratively. Leader 3 professed "We [the leadership team] didn't build it ourselves. We've built it with the team." Leader 1 noted, "We even took it as far as to help each person create behavioral actions within their jobs that related to the vision." Leader 2 explained, "I've just found really doing [creating the vision] from the bottom up is better than, you know, dictating or even setting a vision and expecting them to fall in line. It's really important to use the group to help create it."

Business Breakthrough. Business breakthroughs, which exemplary small business owners defined as points in their business strategy when a new focus was developed, was recorded 12 times or 21% of references related to vision. The exemplary small business owner leaders spoke of having business breakthroughs as a result of their vision and found a need to assess where they were in comparison to their vision regularly.

Leader 2 noted, “Now in the sort of third phase of our growth, the vision can become truly bold and aspirational. We have assets we have the reputation we now have an established business. Now, what do we want to be?” Leader 1 expressed, “It’s never been static. About every year or two I work very hard to figure out where we are at in our cycle and what does success or thriving, or value looks like.”

Clarity. Clarity was mentioned seven times or 13% of all references related to vision. The respondents saw their vision as providing a roadmap for their organizations. Leader 1 shared, “We wanted a real document that could help guide how we operate and why we're in the business and what we think is important.” Leader 2 said, “I think vision allows people to get clear and align their efforts toward some greater good.” Leader 3 noted, “Checking in on the team allows me to follow up with them ensuring that they're on the same page as I am.”

Major Findings for Inspiration

For the purposes of this study, the operational definition for inspiration is the heartfelt passion and energy that leaders exude through possibility-thinking, enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope to create relevant, meaningful connections that empower. When compared to the entire set of domains, inspiration ranked fifth in its use in creating personal and organizational meaning in exemplary small business owner leaders. A total of 34 references or 10% of all domain references, were documented relating to inspiration. The themes that emerged for the inspiration domain included connection, passion, and flexibility. Figure 9 below presents references by participating leaders, by theme within the inspiration domain.

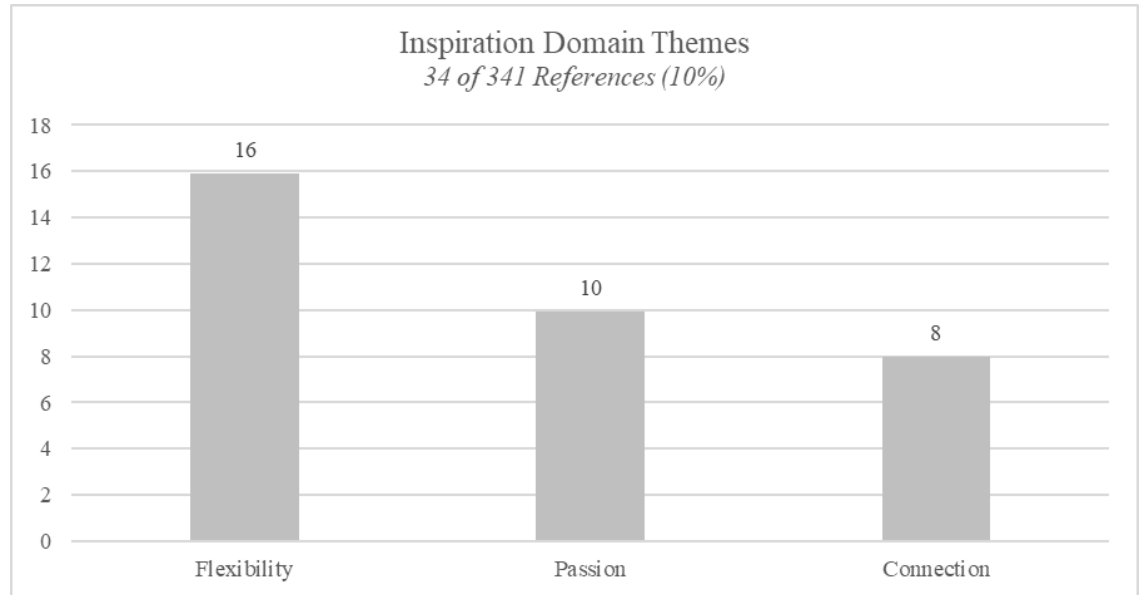


Figure 9. Representation of inspiration domain themes that emerged from the total number of inspiration references.

Flexibility. Flexibility was discussed by leaders establishing 16 references (47% of references related to inspiration). Exemplary small business owner leaders all enjoyed the flexibility they could provide to their followers as a result of being a small business. Leader 1 highlighted this and pointed out that, “You know we have the ability to give staff some flexibility.” Leader 2 commented, “In small business, we have the control to allow people to live their lives. We want them to want to be here, and we help create that by giving them the opportunity to live their lives. Work becomes a part of that – it all blends. Flexibility also applied to the roles their employees play.” Leader 3 shared, “If somebody's got a good idea in our firm, they can kind of go do it.”

Passion. Passion referenced ten times, or 29% of all references for inspiration. Kouzes and Posner (2007) inferred for leaders to get extraordinary things done they have to “Passionately believe in and commit to a common purpose” (p. 132). This passion was expressed by the exemplary small business owner leaders when Leader 2 indicated, “We

have a passion for what we do.” Leader 3 warned leaders should “Be sure your employees have that same passion as you.” Leader 1 noted, “Capturing that passion in your employees is essential.”

Connection. Connection was referred to by leaders eight times (24% of all references for inspiration). Mautz (2015) reminded us that people “Long for connection to others ... when we feel that work is a place where we can express our true, best selves every day and feel a tremendous sense of connectedness and harmony with our coworkers, leaders, and organization – it matters” (p. 12). Leader 2 shared, “In everything I've learned it suggests that if people can have some connection or line of sight between their roles and how they impact others it just enhances the chance they're going to feel connected to why we exist.” Leader 3 commented, “I think when you connect with people at their level, they want to work harder.”

Findings for Research Question 2

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

The second research question was purposeful and sought to capture primary behaviors followers perceived exemplary small business owner leaders used to create personal and organizational meaning. Domain behaviors were defined in the form of behavioral questions within the quantitative study. Behavioral questions were those the meaning makers thematic team agreed would best describe behaviors essential to each of the five domains of meaning; character, vision, relationship, wisdom, and inspiration. Each participating follower defined how important the behavior was on a scale of one

through six as follows: 1 = *not important in our organization*, 2 = *marginally important to have but not necessary in our organization*, 3 = *somewhat important for a leader in our organization*, 4 = *important for a leader in our organization*, 5 = *very important for a leader in our organization*, and 6 = *critically important in our organization*. Statistical mean scores were established for each question and for the domain. The statistical mean was used to assist in understanding central tendency of the set of responses by the participant for each behavioral question and the domain.

Perceived Importance of the Five Domains Findings. *Leader Behaviors* survey questions were categorized by each of the five domains of meaning: character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration. Follower responses were analyzed for each question related to each domain, and mean score for each domain was derived. Mean score for each domain was used to determine the degree to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Small business owner leader-followers responding to the survey perceived the collective five domains as being essential for an exemplary small business owner leader in creating personal and organizational meaning. Table 4 presents data for the five domains and illustrates the degree of perceived importance that followers placed on the five domains of meaning. The findings indicated leader behaviors play a prominent role in a follower's perception of the leader's ability to create meaning within their organization.

Table 4

The Five Domains of Meaning Making and Follower's Perceived Degree to Which Each Domain Helps to Create Meaning

Domains of Meaning	Not Important 1	Marginally Important 2	Somewhat Important 3	Important 4	Very Important 5	Critically Important 6
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Character	0%	0%	4%	16%	33%	47%
Relationship	0%	0%	4%	17%	38%	41%
Vision	0%	0%	3%	29%	40%	29%
Wisdom	0%	1%	9%	23%	36%	30%
Inspiration	0%	1%	13%	27%	36%	22%

n=30

Analysis of survey responses reflects 92% of follower respondents reported the five domains in aggregate were perceived as important, very important or critically important leadership behaviors. The total mean score for all domains was 5.17 reflecting respondents consider the domains as very important to creation of meaning. Character, or the alignment of a value system which promotes ethical thoughts and actions based on principles of concern for others, was overwhelmingly deemed critically important by 47% of responding followers of small business owner leaders. Thirty-three percent of

followers perceived character as very important, and 16% as important. Also reported as critically important was relationships, the authentic connections between leaders and followers involved in a common purpose with 41% of respondents indicating the relationship domain was a critically important leadership behavior. Thirty-eight percent of followers perceive the relationship domain as very important; 17% as important, and 4% as somewhat important. Vision, wisdom and inspiration domains were highly valued by followers with 40%, 36%, and 36% respectively, rating the domains as very important. Both character and relationship domains were perceived to have a higher degree of importance with a mean rating of 5.23 and 5.17 respectively. Larger numbers of follower respondents perceived vision, wisdom, and inspiration, as being important with mean ratings of 4.95, 4.83, and 4.64 respectively. In aggregate, the largest group of follower respondents (37%) perceived the collective domains to be very important with a mean score of 5.17 equating to very important.

Perceived Importance of Character. The *Leader Survey* presented five questions to evaluate the follower's perception of leadership behaviors demonstrating character domain. The thematic definition of character for the purpose of this study is the moral compass by which a person lives their life (Bass & Bass, 2008; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Moore, 2008; Quick & Wright, 2011; Sankar, 2003). Follower respondents were asked to rate their perceived importance of each of the five-character behavior traits on a scale of 1 = *Not Important*, 2 = *Marginally Important*, 3 = *Somewhat Important*, 4 = *Important*, 5 = *Very Important*, and 6 = *Critically Important*. The behavioral survey questions assisted in capturing a more in-depth perspective of the

follower's most valued behaviors. For purposes of this study character behaviors are characterized by the following statements:

- Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others.
- Actively listens when communicating with others.
- Responds to challenging situations with optimism.
- Actions with others show that he/she can be trusted.
- Actions show concern for the well-being of others.

As shown in Table 5, 70% of followers perceived behaving in an ethical manner when dealing with others as critically important. An equal number of respondents (70%) perceived trust to be critically important when rating the behavior described as actions with others show that he/she can be trusted while 20% perceived the behavior as being very important resulting in a slightly lower mean score than ethical behavior of 5.60 (very important). The ability to actively listen when communicating with others was perceived by 33% of the respondents as critically important, and 53% of follower respondents perceived the behavior as very important with a mean score of 5.17 (very important). Forty-three percent of follower respondents perceived a leader's "Actions show concern for the wellbeing of others" as being critically important with a mean score of 5.13 or very important. The behavior perceived as being least important by respondents is the behavior of "Responding to challenging situations with optimism" with only 20% of follower respondents perceiving it as critically important. However, 72% follower respondents identified the behavior as important, very important or critically important resulting in a mean score of 4.60 (important). It is notable that overall, 96% of respondents perceived each character related behavior in aggregate as

important, very important, and critically important with only 4% perceiving these behaviors as somewhat important. The results of character follower responses reflect overwhelming perceived importance placed on the domain of character in exemplary small business owner leaders in their use of creating personal and organizational meaning. In aggregate, 47% of follower respondents perceived this domain critically important with a mean score of 5.23 (very important).

Table 5

Character Domain Related Behaviors - Perceived Degree to Which Character Helps a Leader to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning.

<u>Character Domain</u>	Not	Marginally	Somewhat		Very	Critically
	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others.	0%	0%	0%	3%	27%	70%
Actions with others show that he/she can be trusted.	0%	0%	0%	10%	20%	70%
Actively listens when communicating with others.	0%	0%	3%	10%	53%	33%
Actions show concern for the well-being of others.	0%	0%	3%	23%	30%	43%
Responds to challenging situations with optimism.	0%	0%	13%	33%	33%	20%

n=30

Perceived Importance of Relationships. For this study, the domain of relationships is defined as the bonds that are established between people through encouragement, compassion, and open communication, which lead to feelings of respect, trust, and acceptance (Bermack, 2014; Frankl, 2006; George, 2003; George & Sims, 2007; Henderson, 2011; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2009; Liborius, 2014; Mautz, 2015;

McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008; Reina & Reina, 2006; Seligman, 2002; Smith, 2011; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). For purposes of this study relationship behaviors are characterized by the following statements:

- Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization.
- Behaves in a way that shows she/he cares about the team members.
- Communicates in a clear, meaningful way.
- Continuously promotes our team's moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose.
- Encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks.

Follower respondents almost unanimously agreed (99%) that creating an environment of trust is important (3%), very important (33%), or critically important (63%) resulting in the top mean score (5.60) in the relationship domain. A leader who demonstrates care for team members is also strongly perceived (97%) as being important (7%) very important (47%), or critically important (43%) to followers. Follower respondents exclusively agreed (100%) that meaningful communication behaviors are important (20%), very important (33%), or critically important (47%) for a leader in creating meaning within an organization. A leader's ability to promote team to serve a common purpose is perceived as slightly less significant (97%) by follower respondents reporting the behavior as important (17%), very important (43%), and critically important (37%). Follower respondents saw encouragement of shared leadership as important (37%), very important (33%), or critically important (17%), respectively.

With the top mean score of 5.60 in this domain category, behaviors that create a trusting environment are imperative whereas, behaviors that encourage leadership are less critical as represented by the lowest mean score of 4.53. In aggregate, 41% of follower respondents perceived relationships domain critically important with a mean score of 5.17 (very important). Table 6 presents data that shows the degree followers perceive leader behaviors related to relationships help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Table 6

Relationship Domain Related Behaviors - Perceived Degree to Which Relationships Help a Leader to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning.

<u>Relationship Domain</u>	Not	Marginally	Somewhat		Very	Critically
	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization.	0%	0	0	3%	33%	63%
Behaves in a way that shows she/he cares about the team members.	0%	0%	3%	7%	47%	43%
Communicates in a clear, meaningful way.	0%	0%	0%	20%	33%	47%
Continuously promotes our team's moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose.	0%	0%	3%	17%	43%	37%
Encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks.	0%	0%	13%	37%	33%	17%

n=30

Perceived Importance of Vision. Vision is defined as a bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding meaning to the organization,

sustaining higher levels of motivation and withstanding challenges (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2009; Landsberg, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992). For purposes of this study, behaviors related to vision are characterized by the following behavioral statements:

- Engages team members in creating a vision for the future.
- Behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions.
- Communicates the organization's vision in a way to team members enthusiastically.
- Promotes innovation that aligns with the organization's vision.
- Demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions.

Follower respondents unanimously agreed (100%) engaging followers in creating a vision for the future is important (20%), very important (43%), or critically important (37%), resulting in a mean score of 5.17 for vision domain (very important). Behaviors associated with decisions that reflect the organizational vision are perceived by 97% of follower respondents as important (27%), very important (37%), and critically important (33%). Returning similar results, leader behaviors of enthusiastically communicating vision to followers as 96% perceived this behavior to be important (37%), very important (27%), and critically important (33%). With similar results, followers perceived promotion of innovation aligned with the vision domain as overall less important (mean score 4.87) than previous behaviors with 97% of respondents perceiving this behavior to be important (27%), very important (50%), and critically important (20%). Finally, 93% of follower respondents perceived a leader's demonstration of thoughts toward the future

through conversations and actions as important (33%), very important (43%), and critically important (20%) with a mean score of 4.80 (important). Table 7 presents data that shows to what degree followers perceive leader behaviors related to vision help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Table 7

Vision Domain Related Behaviors - Perceived Degree to Which Vision Helps a Leader to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning.

<u>Vision Domain</u>	Not	Marginally	Somewhat		Very	Critically
	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Engages team members in creating a vision for the future.	0%	0%	0%	20%	43%	37%
Behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions.	0%	0%	3%	27%	37%	33%
Communicates the organization's vision in a way to team members enthusiastically.	0%	0%	3%	37%	27%	33%
Promotes innovation that aligns with the organization's vision.	0%	0%	3%	27%	50%	20%
Demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions.	0%	0%	3%	33%	43%	20%

n=30

Perceived Importance of Wisdom. This study defines wisdom as the ability to utilize cognitive, affective, and reflective intelligence to discern unpredictable and unprecedented situations with beneficial action (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kekes, 1983;

Pfeffer, 2010; Spano, 2013; R.J. Sternberg, 1998). For purposes of this study, behaviors related to wisdom are characterized by the following behavioral statements:

- Takes action by doing the right thing in a variety of organizational settings.
- Considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization.
- Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings.
- Demonstrates compassion with team members.
- Integrates personal values with organizational values in decision making.
- When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations.
- Behavior reflects an understanding of life's complexities.
- Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization.
- Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization.
- Elevates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members.

The highest mean score of 5.40 in this domain category was attributed to behaviors associated with “Doing the right thing.” The lowest mean score (4.00) contained within the wisdom domain was generated from responses associated with elevating the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations. In

aggregate, only 27% of follower respondents perceived the wisdom domain as critically important correlating to a mean score of 4.00 (very important). Aligning with the character domain of ethical behavior, responses were captured 70% as critically important, where 60% of respondents believed doing the right thing was critically important. The survey resulted in a low level (17%) of those who perceived demonstration of compassion with team members as critically important to the creation of personal and organizational meaning.

All follower respondents (100%) felt behaviors for doing the right thing and considering past experiences when dealing with complex issues were important (7% and 23% respectively), very important (33% and 40% respectively), and critically important (60% and 37% respectively). Similarly, followers perceived leader behaviors associated with showing concern for others (97%) and demonstrating compassion (97%) as important (17% and 10% respectively) very important (50% and 70% respectively) and critically important as (30% and 17% respectively). Leader integration of personal and organizational values with decision making is deemed notable with a significant number of follower respondents (93%) perceiving the behavior as critically important (33%), very important (30%), and important (30%). Followers also believed keeping overall goals of the organization as part of the conversations was central to creating meaning depicted by 97% rating it important (37%), very important (33%), and critically important (27%).

Wisdom domain responses reflected an increased number of responses in the somewhat important category and marginally important category. Followers rated an understanding of life's complexities as somewhat important (17%) with the remainder of

the responses, (83%) distributed between critically important (33%), important (30%), and very important (20%). Reflecting this trend, “Bringing personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations” follower respondents indicated it was somewhat important (17%) or marginally important (7%). Remaining respondents (77%) a range from important to critically important, specifically responding 17% important, 33% very important and 27% critically important. The display of expertise by a leader also reflected 17% as somewhat important and the remainder (83%) falling among important (30%), very important (33%), and critically important (20%). Elevating the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations was the only behavioral category in the survey that received a response of marginally important (7%), followed by 27% responding that it was somewhat important. The remaining responses (67%) were allocated to important (37%), very important (20%), and critically important (10%). Table 8 presents data illustrating to what degree followers perceive leader behaviors related to wisdom help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Table 8

Wisdom Domain Related Behaviors - Perceived Degree to Which Wisdom Helps a Leader to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning.

<u>Wisdom Domain</u>	Not	Marginally	Somewhat		Very	Critically
	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Takes action by doing the "right thing" in a variety of organizational settings.	0%	0%	0%	7%	33%	60%
Considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization.	0%	0%	0%	23%	40%	37%
Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings.	0%	0%	3%	17%	50%	30%
Demonstrates compassion with team members.	0%	0%	3%	10%	70%	17%
Integrates personal values with organizational values in decision making.	0%	0%	7%	30%	30%	33%
When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations.	0%	0%	3%	37%	33%	27%
Behavior reflects an understanding of life's complexities.	0%	0%	17%	30%	20%	33%
Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization.	0%	7%	17%	17%	33%	27%
Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization.	0%	0%	17%	30%	33%	20%
Elevates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members.	0%	7%	27%	37%	20%	10%

n=30

Perceived Importance of Inspiration. This study defined inspiration as a bridge from the present to the future created by a collaborative mindset, adding meaning to the organization, sustaining higher levels of motivation and withstanding challenges (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2009; Landsberg, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 1993; Nanus, 1992). For purposes of this study, behaviors related to inspiration were characterized by the following behavioral statements:

- Recognizes and honors achievements of teams and team members.
- Engages in activities that build confidence among team members.
- Empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem-solving
- Works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams.
- Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organizations leading edge.

The highest mean score of 4.93 (important) was associated with the domain of inspiration was the inspirational behavior of recognition and honors of achievements. The lowest mean score of 4.53 (important) was associated with the leader's encouragement of innovation to advance the organizations leading edge. In aggregate 29% of respondents scored inspirational behaviors as very important with only 19% scoring them as critically important.

Follower respondents scored recognition as being important (23%), very important (40%), and critically important (30%) driving the overall mean score to 4.93, the highest mean score in this domain. Eighty-six percent of follower respondents felt a leader who builds confidence in followers falls within a range of important (13%) to

critically important (20%) with the majority (50%) perceiving it as very important to the leader's ability to create organizational meaning. The behavior of empowerment encouraging risk was perceived by the majority (33%) of follower respondents as being important with 20% perceiving it as somewhat important, 13% as very important and 27% as critically important. A leader's ability to create enthusiasm within teams had a broader distribution across the rating scale with 13% rating it as only somewhat important and 17% rating it as critically important. The majority (30%) of follower respondents perceived enthusiasm as important. Finally, the leader's encouragement of innovation to advance the organizations leading edge was perceived by 33% as important and 40% as very important with 13% perceiving it as critically important. Table 9 presents data that shows to what degree followers perceive leader behaviors related to inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Table 9

Inspiration Domain Related Behaviors - Perceived Degree to Which Inspiration Helps a Leader to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning.

<u>Inspiration Domain</u>	Not	Marginally	Somewhat		Very	Critically
	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important	Important
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Recognizes and honors achievements of teams and team members.	0%	0%	7%	23%	40%	30%
Engages in activities that build confidence among team members.	0%	0%	13%	13%	53%	20%
Empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving.	0%	7%	20%	33%	13%	27%
Works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams.	0%	0%	13%	30%	40%	17%
Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organizations leading edge.	0%	0%	13%	33%	40%	13%

n=30

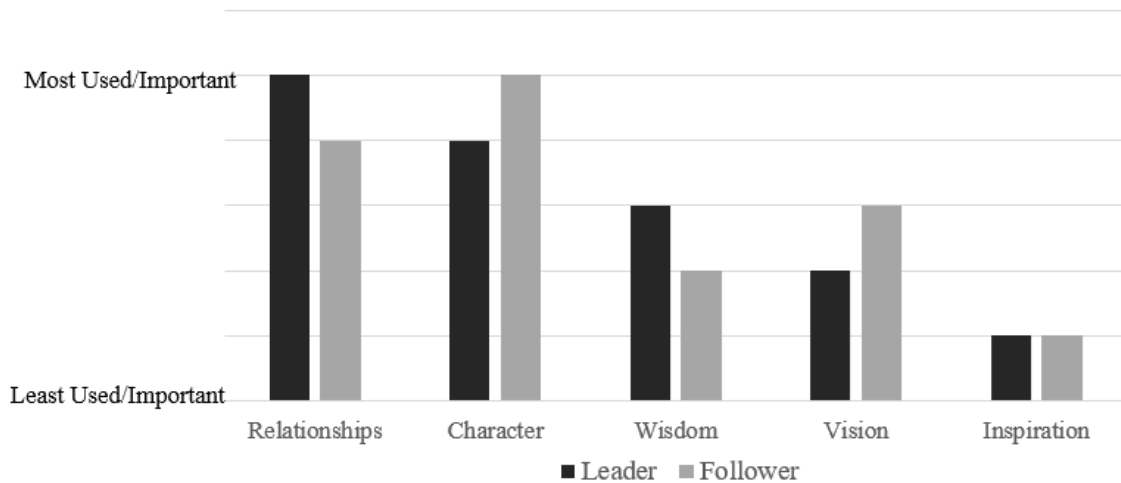
Data Analysis Overview

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered during the study was compared in summary providing a view into both the leader and follower perceptions highlighting variances where notable. Table 10 provides a comparison of leader and follower ranking of the five domains of meaning comparing what behaviors exemplary small business owners use to create personal and organizational meaning and how followers perceived

the importance of each of the five domains in the creation of personal and organizational meaning.

Table 10

Summary of Leader/Follower Perceived Domain Importance



Highest Frequency/Mean Score. The highest leader response frequency was related to the domain of relationships. Thirty-four percent of all references by small business owner leaders were linked to the relationship domain. The relationship domain had seven themes emerge identified as team cohesiveness, communication, trust, respect/fairness, active listening, collaboration, and development. Small business owner leaders inferred relationships were critically important to them personally and to business success. There was a sense that followers were those with whom they placed a significant amount of trust. This finding is similar to follower responses, where relationships was represented by the second highest mean score. Followers were asked questions associated with the relationship domain including creation of trust; care, meaningful communication, unity, and shared leadership. Overall, 41% of followers

believed the relationship domain was critically important with a mean score of very important.

Second Highest Frequency/Mean Score. The second highest leader response frequency was related to the domain of character. Twenty-two percent of all references by small business owner leaders were linked to character. Five themes emerged for character: humility, moral compass, honesty, availability, and authenticity. Small business owner leaders most frequently referenced humility (42%) as determined by coding interview transcripts. Leaders expressed they were down to earth and humility was an observed behavior within their organization. This finding is compared to follower responses where character was the highest mean score indicating followers perceived character as critically important in creation of meaning. Followers were asked questions associated with the character domain including ethical behavior, trust, active listening, a display of concern for their well-being, and optimism. Forty-seven percent of followers believed the character domain was critically important as represented by data for the domain.

Third Highest Frequency/Mean Score. The third highest leader response frequency was related to the domain of wisdom. Eighteen percent of all references by small business owner leaders were linked to wisdom. This included five themes identified as experience, simplicity, innovation, tenacity, and consistency. Small business owner leaders spoke of experience most frequently (33%). They felt experience helped them as leaders of their respective organizations. Experience provided leaders the ability to respond to business issues in an effective manner. One leader expressed doubt that wisdom was a must for his business. This finding is contrasted by follower

responses where vision was reported as the third highest mean score, indicating follower's perceived vision as critically important in creation of meaning. Followers were asked questions associated with vision including collaboration on the creation of the vision, behaviors reflective of the vision, communication of the vision, promotion of innovation, and thinking toward the future. Overall, 41% of followers believed the vision domain was very important, with an overall mean score of important.

Fourth Highest Frequency/Mean Score. The fourth highest leader response frequency was related to the domain of vision. Sixteen percent of leader references were connected to vision. Emerging vision domain themes included: shared vision, co-created vision, business breakthrough, and clarity. They articulated the importance of a shared vision and intimated they had observed benefits of a having one. Further, one leader expressed he did not have to sell his organization's vision to his followers because they were engaged. This finding is substantiated by follower responses which reported wisdom as fourth highest mean score, indicating follower's perceived wisdom as *important* in creation of meaning. Followers were asked questions associated with the wisdom domain that included: doing the right thing, considering past experience, display of concern for others, compassion, personal and organization values, organizational goals, understanding of life's complexities, expertise, and quality decision making. Thirty-six percent of followers believed the wisdom domain was very important with an overall mean score of important.

Lowest Frequency/Mean Score. The lowest leader response frequency was related to inspiration. Only 10% of all references by small business owner leaders were linked to the inspiration domain. Three inspiration domain themes emerged and

included: flexibility, passion, and connection. Small business owner leaders most frequently spoke of flexibility (47%). Leaders clearly enjoyed flexibility afforded them as a result of being a small business. Flexibility was extended to the followers in terms of work-life balance and potential. Additionally, followers reported inspiration as the lowest mean score indicating it is less important in creation of meaning compared to the other four domains. Followers were asked questions associated with inspiration which included: recognition, building confidence, empowerment, enthusiasm, and innovation. Although 29% of followers indicated that inspiration was very important, the overall mean score reported inspiration as important.

Summary

Chapter IV provided a restatement of the study purpose, research questions, the summation of methodology, data collection process, population, target population, sample, and associated demographic data. This chapter focused on the presentation and analysis of data obtained through a mixed-methods case study. Qualitative data was collected from three exemplary small business leader owners who agreed to participate in a personal interview to identify behaviors used to create purpose and organizational meaning. Interrater reliability ensured validity and reliability of the coded interview responses. Qualitative interview data were reported in terms of response frequency and themes relating to domains of character, relationships, vision, wisdom, and inspiration. Quantitative data obtained from 30 followers of participating exemplary small business leader owners were collected through use of an online survey. Survey questions were presented in a forced-choice format in which the participant selected the best of six options that identified the degree to which they perceived the specific leader behavior presented helped to create personal and organizational meaning. Response data were analyzed to establish leader behaviors followers deemed most important in developing organizational meaning. The behaviors exemplary small business owner leaders perceive as the most important behaviors to create purpose and organizational meaning using the five domains of character, relationship, vision, wisdom, and inspiration, as well as the follower perceived leader behaviors most critical for creating purpose and organizational meaning.

Domains of relationships and character respectively were identified as being used most by the leaders in creation of purpose and organizational meaning. The same

domains were perceived as most important by followers with character receiving the highest mean score and relationships receiving the second highest mean score. The domains of wisdom and vision also are perceived at varying levels of importance by the leaders and followers. The inspiration domain is perceived as important but least important in the creation of purpose and organizational meaning by both the leaders and the followers.

Chapter V will report qualitative and quantitative findings in greater detail, present major findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions. These conclusions will lead the reader to implications for action and recommendations for further research. Chapter V ends with concluding remarks and reflections.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Chapter V represents an overview of this study inclusive of purpose statement, research questions, a summary of research methods, population, target population, and sample. Following the research overview major findings are presented in addition to unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for actions, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to identify and describe behaviors that exemplary small business owner leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration.

In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning.

Research Questions

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

Methodology

This study was a replication of the original meaning makers thematic research team study by Bartels (2017), Flint (2017), Hansell (2017), Herrera (2017), Hodge (2017), Jackson (2017), Mancuso (2017), Prosser (2018), Thompson (2018), and Villanueva (2017). A mixed-methods case study was used to develop an in-depth analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. Data were triangulated to identify behaviors exemplary small business owner leaders used to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers and to what degree followers perceived leader's behaviors as helping to create meaning. Qualitative data were collected through personal interviews with three exemplary small business owner leaders using a structured interview script developed by original meaning makers thematic team. Interviews were recorded with participant's permission and transcribed using NVivo transcription software. Transcribed interviews were analyzed and coded for themes and patterns using QSR International's NVivo. Use of a third-party coder provided consistent findings and established good qualitative reliability.

Following separate qualitative interviews, each exemplary small business owner leader provided a list of at least followers to the researcher to create a pool of 36 participants that would be invited to participate in an online survey using SurveyMonkey® to collect quantitative data. The survey was developed by the original meaning makers thematic team and was replicated for purposes of this study. The survey questions were presented in a forced-choice format where the participant selected best of six options that identified the degree to which they perceived a specific behavior presented helped to create personal and organizational meaning. An email invitation to

participate was sent to each identified follower and included a link to the survey on SurveyMonkey®. Participation in the survey required participants to authorize partaking and acknowledge informed consent.

Population

Population for this study included exemplary small business owner leaders. Eliadis (2016) described exemplary small business owner leaders as serving as a business strategist to establish and execute on a vision for the business and later, on business strategy in response to potentially turbulent market conditions. In addition, these same exemplary small business owner leaders served as the functional expert for multiple departments within their business. Exemplary small business owners are required to have business expertise that is broad and diverse (Eliadis, 2016).

Based on a Small Business Administration 2010 research study, there were 27.9 million small businesses with 21.5% (5,998,500) who employed followers (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2012). Small Business Association Office of Advocacy defined a small business as “an independent business having fewer than 500 employees” (2012). Small business is further defined as being for-profit organizations, located in the United States, contributing to United States economy, independently owned and operated, and not a market leader on a national basis (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2012). The identified population of small business was large and geographically dispersed. Narrowing of the population was required, and identification of a target population was necessary.

Target population

According to the Small Business Administration, there were 78,503 small businesses in Orange County, California (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014).

The target population for this study was identified as exemplary small business owner leaders in Orange County, California within professional, scientific, and technical services sector as defined by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code (NAICS, 2017). The target population was further narrowed to those in consulting businesses. According to NAICS sector code, 54161 included businesses that primarily provided advice and assistance to businesses and other organizations on business issues (NAICS, 2017). There were 2,751 consulting firms in Orange County, California employing 16,193 followers in the county with an average follower headcount of six (Factfinder.census.gov, 2016).

The study further restricted the sample population to those who are considered exemplary small business owner leaders. This study considered an exemplary leader to be one who demonstrated at least five criteria as defined by meaning makers thematic research team (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mautz, 2015; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017):

- Evidence of successful relationships with followers
- Evidence of leading a successful organization
- Minimum of five years of experience in the profession
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings
- Recognition by peers
- Membership in a professional association in their field

A target population of small business management consulting firms was established using the Orange County Business Journal *2018 Book of Lists* and was based upon small businesses categorized in the publication as those that conduct management consulting and met the definition of a small business.

Sample - Qualitative

A homogeneous sample is typically used to describe a subgroup of the target population in depth (Patton, 2015). In this case study, purposeful sampling used a homogeneous sampling strategy that included exemplary small business owners as more narrowly defined by type of consulting business. The sample included business management consulting companies and businesses primarily providing advice and assistance to management on operational strategic and organizational planning business issues (NAICS, 2017). Small business management consulting companies were identified using the Orange County Business Journal *2018 Book of Lists*. Each identified company was validated by the researcher for five of six exemplary criteria. Data were collected from business specific websites: LinkedIn, Better Business Bureau, Orange County Chamber of Commerce, and internet searches using Google to determine if businesses met criteria of exemplary small business owner leaders as defined by original meaning makers thematic team members. Management consulting small business owner leaders were recorded in an Excel workbook, and exemplary criteria for each qualifying small business owner leaders was added. Those firms meeting exemplary criteria were invited to participate in the study. The first three qualified small business owner leaders who agreed to participate were directly contacted by the researcher to confirm an understanding of the study and research process. Following an initial conversation,

participation was reaffirmed, and three exemplary small business owner leaders were determined as the study sample.

Sample - Quantitative

A sample for the quantitative phase of this study was established with input from each exemplary small business owner leader who participated in the qualitative phase of the study. Each exemplary small business owner leader identified 12 or more followers within their small business. Following the qualitative interview with an exemplary small business owner leader, a review of quantitative-phase criteria for follower participation was presented. Specifically, quantitative-phase criteria for followers required that the follower is in a management or equivalent level position and reported directly to the small business owner leader. The sample size for quantitative data collection was limited to 12 followers of each exemplary small business owner leader. Exemplary small business owner leaders were provided a scripted e-mail invitation to forward to the 12 selected followers. The email invitation described the study and included a hyperlink to the online survey. Of 36 follower invitations extended, 30 followers agreed to participate, agreed to informed consent, and completed the survey.

Major Findings

Finding 1: The Five Domains of Meaning Making in Concert

The collective use of the five domains; character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration, are fundamental to creating personal and organizational meaning. Exemplary small business owner leaders, without hesitation, expressed their use all five domains behaviors as essential to the creation of personal and organizational meaning. Followers perceived the behaviors demonstrated by their leaders that related to character,

vision, relationship wisdom, and inspiration, as a whole, helped to create personal and organizational meaning.

Finding 2: Character and Relationship Domains

Character and relationship are the top two domains used by exemplary leaders, and they were perceived as most important by followers. Follower ratings reflected character as the most important leader behavior of the five domains. The character domain follower responses reflected overwhelming perceived importance placed on the domain of character in exemplary small business owner leaders in their use of creating personal and organizational meaning. Character behaviors were relied upon by exemplary small business owner leaders when balancing their values and ethical standards in day-to-day business activities. Small business owner leaders expressed a passion for rich and meaningful relationships with followers and followers valued the follower-leader relationships and perceived the behavior by their leaders as very important.

Finding 3: Vision

Establishing a co-created vision contributes to personal and organizational meaning. Both exemplary small business leaders and followers perceived the behavior of participating and co-creating the vision of particular value. Exemplary small business owner leaders also used vision to eliminate confusion in their organizations and to provide organizational clarity.

Finding 4: Wisdom

Exemplary leaders used a limited definition of wisdom to create personal and organizational meaning. The research found small business owner leaders relied most on

past experiences for wisdom. Leaders agreed wisdom was demonstrated by the theme of experience. Followers resoundingly rated their leader's wisdom behavior of “doing the right thing” as critically important.

Finding 5: Inspiration

Although exemplary leaders believed the use of inspiration is important to creating meaning, they rely least on inspiration behaviors. However, exemplary leaders recognized they do not rely as heavily on inspiration as a leadership behavior as they do the other domains. Follower perception of their leader's use of inspiration is reflective of their small business owner leader's lack of reliance on inspiration as a leadership behavior.

Unexpected Findings

A plethora of variables impacted a leader's effectiveness in creating organizational meaning. Two unexpected findings included: character as the most important domain for followers; and the level of importance of inspirational behaviors for both followers and leaders in the creation of personal and organizational meaning.

Importance of Character

Followers perceived the character domain behaviors as the most important of all domains. Followers explicitly (100%) rated two behaviors in the domain of character as being critically important. These critically important behaviors were “behaving in an ethical manner when dealing with others” and “actions with others show that he/she can be trusted.” Challenges small businesses face with unethical client requests may have caused this unequivocal response. Two leaders referenced business situations in which clients requested business actions that the leader deemed unethical thereby, jeopardizing

the client relationship. The follower response may have reflected the discomfort of being in an ethical dilemma with a client and the scrutiny felt through observed ethical behavior and values-based decision-making of their leaders who were willing to lose a client rather than to behave in an unethical manner. Follower ratings reflected they value relationship behaviors. However, ratings captured for relationship do not reflect that followers value relationships to the same extent leaders do.

Importance of Inspiration

The final unexpected finding was the low use of inspiration by leaders. Leaders considered inspiration as contributing to meaning, but to a lesser extent than character, relationship, wisdom, and vision. Contrary to the low use of inspiration, research has shown inspiration as an essential behavior toward creation of meaning (Bartels, 2017; Flint, 2017; Hansell, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Hodge, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Mautz, 2015; Mancuso, 2017; Prosser, 2018; Thompson, 2018; Villanueva, 2017). Experts agreed, inspiration is a necessary leadership attribute that captured the heart and created a desire in followers to work as a team toward something greater than the team itself (Newland, 2015).

Conclusions

Based on the research and findings of this study, six conclusions of how exemplary small business owner leaders create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration have been developed and are presented in this section.

Conclusion 1: The Five Domains

It was concluded, based on the findings, that leaders who use the five domains of meaning character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers. The search for personal meaning is a biological human need to rise to a higher purpose and create meaning in life (Klinger, 1998). Over one-third of an average American's life is spent in the workplace (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). With so much of the average person's time devoted to work, the search for meaning has naturally moved into the workplace. It is imperative that small business owner leaders use all five domains in their quest to create personal and organizational meaning.

Conclusion 2: Character

It was concluded that followers perceived character as the most important domain behavior in creating personal and organizational meaning. A leader is counted on to do the right thing and to resolve pressing anomalous issues serving as an example for his followers (Monk, 2017). Research found that high levels of employee engagement and the creation of meaning are linked to high levels of character in leadership (Leavy, 2016; Mautz, 2015).

Conclusion 3: Vision

The research concluded that leaders must actively engage followers in co-creating a vision. A core element of the five domains of meaning and the creation of personal and organizational meaning is a co-created vision that ignites passion in a leader and their followers. Articulating a vision of a future that provides clarity of a desired future state and the process by which it will be achieved is a foundational leadership behavior (Yukl

& Uppal, 2013). A leader's clear articulation of this co-created vision increased an employee's experience of meaning at work (Dik, Byrne & Steger, 2013; Walumbwa, Christensen & Muchiri, 2013)

Conclusion 4: Relationships

Based on the literature and findings of this research, it was concluded that small business owner leaders and their followers sought out and experienced deep and meaningful relationships within their organizations in order to create personal and organizational meaning. Weisman (2016) proposed humans innately sought out relationships and proposed not having relationships was life ending. Work relationships helped leaders and followers feel supported, respected, and appreciated. These types of relationships serve as a source of meaning (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

Conclusion 5: Wisdom

This research concluded that wisdom was acquired through learning, meaningful life events and experiences, and is an essential leader behavior used to create meaning and advance the greater good. Based on the findings of this research and literature review, wisdom was a vital leadership competency used to create personal and organizational meaning. Those who are wise pursued an ideal life through virtuous actions for others, including the use of leadership behaviors that created intrinsic well-being and meaning (Yang, 2008).

Conclusion 6: Inspiration

It is concluded that small business owner leaders who have inspirational behavioral skills are efficacious in creating personal and organizational meaning. Leaders have an opportunity to focus on inspiration as a core leadership capability.

Inspiration is central to a leader's behaviors and specifically, to the creation of personal and organizational meaning (Kaufman, 2011). Secretan, (2009) established a foundation for inspirational leadership by focusing on a "very deep place," the soul (p. xxix).

Implications for Action

Implication for Action 1: Transform Entrepreneurial Business Degree Curriculum

It is recommended that a transformational change in the core curriculum of business degree programs occur. Further, adding a required introductory course in meaning making and the five domains of meaning within the college's core curriculum of entrepreneurial-focused business degrees. A search for course offerings with a focus on the creation of personal and organizational meaning within the business degree curriculum of California State Colleges within Orange County, California was conducted by the researcher. California State Fullerton's Mihaylo College of Business and Economics' core curriculum for the Bachelor of Arts and Masters of Business Administration degree programs with entrepreneurship concentration required one course related to leadership. The syllabus description summarized the course as "leadership roles, organizational development and human resource management of new ventures. Setting up systems to improve venture performances that comply with related laws and regulations" (California State University Catalog, para.1). Courses related to meaning are available within the institution. However, they were found in religion and philosophy department course offerings and were not suggested by entrepreneurship business degree curriculum as recommended courses.

Implication for Action 2: Enhance Small Business Support Services

It is recommended that the researcher collaborate with other meaning makers thematic researchers to develop an education module based on the five domains and their impact on creating purpose and organizational meaning for leaders and their followers to be made available on Small Business Administration (SBA) learning center website. Of the 63 learning modules currently available on the SBA website, there is one learning module related to follower recruitment and retention. The key drivers that the SBA suggested for retention included perquisites, monetary rewards, and professional development. The five domains of meaning education module must be replicated on similar small business resource web sites including the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) which has 325,000 business owner members. An introduction of the five domains of meaning would be of significant value to entrepreneurs and their followers as the research illustrated that engagement and retention are strongly correlated to meaning.

Implication for Action 3: Feedback Assessment

It is recommended an annual feedback tool to assess the small business leader's behaviors compared to behaviors of the five domains of meaning be developed to assist in a leader's individual development. The assessment would take the form of an annual leadership assessment completed by their followers. The assessment provides feedback for small business leaders in which their use of the five domains would be evaluated. The feedback would be used to create a leadership development plan and encourage growth in the use of the five domains. A leader needs to continually assess their success in demonstrating the five domain behaviors. Their followers can contribute greatly by

sharing observations of the leader's behaviors on a regular basis. A clear understanding of follower perceptions will help the leader understand where to focus their personal development.

Implication for Action 4: Enhance Human Resources Professional Development

It is recommended that professional development for human resource professionals include courses in meaning making and the five domains of meaning as core leadership competencies. There is a multitude of professional development opportunities for the discipline of human resources. The most prevalent certification is offered through the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). SHRM is a widely used resource by human resources professionals for a broad range of information and professional development in human resources. Enhancing the curriculum of the SHRM certification to introduce human resource professionals to meaning making is essential.

Implication for Action 5: Expand Existing Leadership Competency Models

The research associated with meaning making can further enhance a leader's strength through leadership development in the area of creating organizational meaning and establish a mechanism for developing leaders worldwide. Over the past few decades, research and development taxonomies of managerial behavior have contributed to the establishment and refinement of several leadership competency libraries (Korn Ferry, 2014). Competency models such as Korn Ferry, Lominger International, and Global Novations identified competency clusters which are sets of competencies used in concert for key leader skillsets. The use of character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and

inspiration is ideally suited for the creation of a competency cluster for the creation of personal and organizational meaning.

Recommendations for Further Research

The meaning makers study of leader behaviors used to create purpose and organizational meaning using five domains of meaning; character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration has the potential to positively inform and transform unlimited leaders and followers. The following recommendations are possible target populations and topics for future research.

Recommendation 1. Replicate the Study in Micro Business Segment

This research was specific to small business as defined by the Small Business Association as an employer with 500 or fewer employees. That value of this study would be enhanced by replicating this mixed-methods case study within the micro business industry. Micro businesses are described as having up to five employees including the owner. According to a study by the Association for Enterprise Opportunity (n.d.) micro-business represented 92% of all United States businesses. The magnitude of individuals employed by micro businesses is profound with over 41.3 million people representing 31% of all private sector employment.

Recommendation 2: Replicate the Study with Female Small Business Owner

Leaders

Gender as an additional lens would expand current findings, and therefore, it is recommended the meaning makers mixed-methods case study be replicated purposefully with only female small business owner leaders. While random, the sample population of this study was comprised of male exemplary small business owner leaders. Further

research could replicate the study with female exemplary small business owner leaders. According to Kiplinger (2011) women are typically cautious about expanding their companies too quickly. For example, women, when compared to men, are more averse to being overextended, often taking a more measured approach to financial dealings” (Kiplinger, 2011, para 3). These differences may magnify how women small business owners create purpose and meaning in their businesses.

Recommendation 3: Replicate Study with an International Small Business.

Cultural differences matter in the workplace and simple things, such as motivation, can be significantly different depending on ethnicity and cultural upbringing of a follower (Molinsky, 2016). A small geographic footprint within the United States was used for this study. Expanding this mixed-methods case study sample to include multinational businesses increases the body of knowledge related to the five domains and use in the creation of purpose and organizational meaning. According to Alex Pattakos Ph.D., globalization, worldwide interconnectedness and transparency have created an awareness and desire to create a more humanistic and meaningful approach to work (2018). Targeting a small business with an international footprint would provide insight into how leaders might create personal and organizational meaning making in diverse multicultural organizations.

Recommendation 4. A Future Study of Character and Managing Unethical Client Requests in the Small Business Environment

Modeling character and managing unethical client requests impacted a leader’s ability to create organizational meaning. The leaders in this study expressed pressure by

clients to conduct practices not aligned with personal ethics. Specifically, this experience was mentioned by two-thirds of the leaders interviewed in this study and both expressed this as a test of character and ethical business standards. To understand the prevalence of this occurrence in small business and how small business owners manage this conflict a future phenomenological study is warranted. Findings could assist in preparing small business owner leaders for ethical client challenges. Character was selected by followers as the most important behavior related to the five domains.

Recommendation 5. Future Study of Leader-Follower Relationships in Small Business

Leaders in this study articulated how important follower relationships were to them and their business. Followers viewed relationships as being important in creating personal meaning, although it was not identified by followers as being the most important behavior in creating organizational meaning. A phenomenological study to understand the types of relationships followers find most effective toward creating meaning in the workplace would add to the body of leadership research and assist the small business owner leader in refining their approach to leader-follower relationships.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

The scope of people who could be positively impacted by the five domains of meaning making is so significant that it overwhelms me at times. I have over thirty-five years of experience working in human resources within a corporate environment, and I have instinctively known there was a disconnect for many followers, which resulted in a missed opportunity for both them and the company. I wonder, how many people could be positively impacted? I wondered, what my company would be capable of if

employees came to work each day with excitement and commitment. It was not until I began my doctorate journey and I was immersed with organizational leadership experts who provided me with the connection between leadership and meaning that I realized that meaning was the missing link in most organizations where I have worked. When I was introduced to the five domains of meaning I felt enlightened. My research journey has also exposed me to the spiritual meaning of leadership. Leaders have a tremendous responsibility for followers in their care, and this responsibility must be taken to heart.

I believe that the five domains of meaning making can be transformational for small businesses as well as large corporate environments. The framework can easily be adopted and weaved through the leadership employment life cycle beginning with the use of behavioral interview questions, reward and recognition programs, performance management, and leadership development strategies. Measuring the impact of the framework through follower surveys and correlating results to the organization's performance can assist in validating the organizational value of the framework. The five domains; character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration will be instrumental in developing leaders and creating personal and organization meaning in any organization who chooses to commit to the theory.

This dissertation journey has validated my commitment to helping to develop leaders create meaning in the workplace. I am committed to a growth mindset. The knowledge I have gained in a discipline that I believed I was familiar with is staggering. I am committed to learning all the things that I thought I knew but did not. Lastly, I am committed to personally using character, vision, relationships, wisdom, and inspiration to create personal and organizational meaning for myself and the follows I touch each day.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - BUIRB APPLICATION APPROVED AS SUBMITTED: MARGARET
OHLHAVER

From: MyBrandman <my@brandman.edu>
Date: Thu, Oct 18, 2018 at 4:48 PM
Subject: BUIRB Application Approved As Submitted: Margaret Ohlhaber
To: mohlhav Student <mohlhave@mail.brandman.edu>
Cc: Petersen, Cindy <cpeterse@brandman.edu>, buirb <buirb@brandman.edu>, Devore, Douglas <ddevore@brandman.edu>

Dear Margaret Ohlhaber,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at BUIRB@brandman.edu. If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: <https://irb.brandman.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf>.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,
Doug DeVore, Ed.D.
Professor
Organizational Leadership
BUIRB Chair

APPENDIX B - CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

National Institutes of Health – Protecting Human Research Participants



Screen capture of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) certification in protecting human research participants, which was provided to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Brandman University. This certifies that doctoral candidate Margaret Ohlhaber has successfully completed the "Protecting Human Research Participant's Training.

APPENDIX C - Introduction Letter to Leaders



November, 2018

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student in the Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership Program in the School of Education at Brandman University, and I am conducting a study on how exemplary small business owner leaders create meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration.

You were chosen for this interview because you are an exemplary small business owner leader. I am asking for your assistance in this research study by participating in an interview which will take 30-60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded and will be scheduled for a time and location convenient for you. If you agree to participate in an interview, you may be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the interview. All information will remain in locked files accessible only to the researchers. No employer, supervisor, or agency, will have access to the interview information. You will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time.

I believe this study of how small business owners create meaning for themselves and their followers will be beneficial and make a positive impact in this important sector. The culminating research will be published in my doctoral dissertation for Brandman University. As the research investigator, I am available at mohlhave@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 714-623-8657, to answer any questions or concerns you may have. Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Peggy Ohlhaber
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
3112 McKinley Way
Costa Mesa, CA 92626
(714) 623-5786
mohlhave@brandman.edu

APPENDIX D - INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE



November, 2017

Dear _____,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Brandman University. The main investigator of this study is Peggy Ohlhaber, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate because you fit the criteria of an exemplary small business owner leader. Approximately three leaders will be enrolled in this study. Participation should require about two hours of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this replication of a thematic, mixed-method case study is to identify and describe the behaviors that exemplary small business owner leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration. In addition, it is the purpose of this study to determine the degree of importance to which followers perceive the behaviors related to character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration help to create personal and organizational meaning. Results from the study will be summarized in a doctoral dissertation.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, you will be invited to participate in a one-to-one interview and asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experience as an exemplary small business owner leader and how you use character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration to create meaning. The interview will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are no known major risks to your participation in this research study. The interview will be at a time and place convenient for you and may be rescheduled, since the nature of your organization involves dynamically changing environments. Some interview questions may cause mild emotional discomfort if sharing your experience involves significant personal involvement.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for your participation; nonetheless a potential benefit may be that you will have an opportunity to identify future best practices of utilizing character, vision, relationships, wisdom and inspiration to create meaning for other exemplary small business owner leaders. The findings of this study are intended to contribute to the creation of development programs for small business owner leaders related to creating meaning in the workplace.

ANONYMITY: If you agree to participate in the interview, you can be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the interview. All information will remain in locked files, accessible only to the researchers. No employer will have access to the interview information. You will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. You are also encouraged to ask any questions that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. Feel free to contact me at mohlhave@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 714-623-8657, to answer any questions or concerns you may have. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or your rights as a participant, you 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

Sincerely,

Peggy Ohlhaber
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
3112 McKinley Way
Costa Mesa, CA 92626
(714) 623-8657
mohlhave@mail.brandman.edu

APPENDIX E - RESEARCH PARTICIPANT'S BILL OF RIGHTS



BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

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

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

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

APPENDIX F - Informed Consent Form



INFORMED CONSENT

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

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Peggy Ohlhaber

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

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

I understand that:

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings, transcripts and notes taken by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be destroyed.

The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research the behaviors that leaders use to create personal and organizational meaning for themselves and their followers through character, vision, relationship, wisdom and inspiration. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the coaching experience in which I participated. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

If I have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Peggy Ohlhaber at mohlhav@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 714-623-8657; or Cindy Petersen, Ed.D. at cpeterse@brandman.edu.

My participation in this research study is voluntary. I 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 I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that 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, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-9937.

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

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

Date:

Signature of Principal Investigator, Peggy Ohlhaber

Date

APPENDIX G - AUDIO RELEASE FORM



RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Meaning Makers: A Mixed Method Case Study of Exemplary Small Business Owner Leaders and the Strategies they Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

I authorize Peggy Ohlhaber, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give Brandman University, and all persons or entities associated with this study, permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the identifier-redacted information obtained during the interview may be published in a journal or presented at meetings and/or presentations. I will be consulted about the use of the recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any rights and royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use obtained from the recording.

By signing the form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release any and all claims against and person organization utilizing this material.

_____ Signature of Participant or Responsible Party	_____ Date:
_____ Signature of Principal Investigator, Peggy Ohlhaber	_____ Date

APPENDIX H - INTERVIEW SCRIPT

“My name is Peggy Ohlhaber and I am the Chief Human Resources Officer at Pacific Premier Bank. I am also a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the area of Organizational Leadership. I am replicating a research study to determine what behaviors are used by exemplary leaders to create effective organizations.

The original thematic research study conducted approximately 36 interviews with leaders like yourself. The information you provide along with the information provided by others, will assist in providing a clear picture of the thoughts and strategies that exemplary leaders use to create effective organizations and will add to the body of research currently available. I am also inquiring from a sample of your team using a survey instrument to obtain their impressions as well.

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

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation research)

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

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

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

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

1. “Here are five leadership behaviors that research suggests are necessary in an exemplary leader. Looking at these, would you agree that these are all important?
 - a. **VISION:** The leader exhibits foresight with a compelling outlook of the future.
 - b. **RELATIONSHIPS:** The leader communicates a common purpose through listening, respect, trust, and acknowledgment of one another.
 - c. **CHARACTER:** The leader displays a moral compass of ethics and integrity while being reliable, transparent, and authentic.

- d. INSPIRATION: The leader empowers followers by exuding enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope.
- e. WISDOM: The leader accurately interprets and responds to complex, ambiguous, and often unclear situations

If “Yes”

“Realizing that they are all important, do any jump out as being absolutely essential?”

- a. Vision
- b. Relationships
- c. Character
- d. Inspiration
- e. Wisdom

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

If “No”, “not really”, or if participant hedges, ask:

“Which of them do you believe do not fit into the group of important behaviors?”

- a. Vision
- b. Relationships
- c. Character
- d. Inspiration
- e. Wisdom

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

2. “The first behavior on the list is Vision (pointing to Vision on the card). Based upon the success of your leadership, it is clear that you have established a vision for your organization. Are there things that you recall having done to develop vision for yourself and your organization?”
 - a. Are there some that seemed to work better than others?”
 - b. Why do you think they (it) worked as well as they (it) did?”
 - c. “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”
 - d. How do you ensure that your team buys into your vision?”
3. “The second item on the card is establishing relationships. This involves being a good listener and establishing trust among your team members.
 - a. Are there specific things you have done to develop relationships, among the members of your organization?”
 - b. Are there some that seemed to work better than others?”

- c. Why do you think they (it) worked as well as they (it) did?”
 - d. “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”
4. “If you take a look at the cared, one of the five important leadership behaviors in character and leading with a moral compass. This includes integrity, reliability and authenticity. What kinds of things do you do to demonstrate your character as the leader of your organization?”
- a. What behaviors do you look for in your peers or employees that demonstrate that character?
 - b. “How do you communicate the importance of these behaviors to your staff members?”
 - c. “Are there challenges that you face as you deal with these issues on a daily basis?”
 - d. “Are there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of a particular strategy?”
5. “As stated on the care, an inspirational leader empowers staff by exuding enthusiasm, encouragement, and hope. Tell me about some of the things you do to inspire your staff to be all they can be?”
- a. Are there some that seemed to work better than others?”
 - b. Why do you think they (it) worked as well as they (it) did?”
 - c. “Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative, from the use of that particular strategy?”
6. “The fifth item on the cared is Wisdom. As the card states, responding effectively to unclear, complex issues are called for here. Can you describe a time when your organization faced a very complex or unclear situation?”

If “Yes”

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

If “No”

“If a situation like this did arise in the future, how do you think you would go about clarifying the situation to put your staff’s mind at ease and feel ready to go”?

7. “Of all the things we have spoken about today – vision, relationships, character inspiration and wisdom – are there absolute *musts!* That you believe are essential behaviors for an exemplary leader to have?”

If “Yes”

“What are those behaviors and why do you believe they are so critical?”

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

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

1. “Would you expand on that a bit?”
2. “Do you have more to add?”
3. “What did you mean by...?”
4. “Why do you think that was the case?”
5. “Could you please tell me more about?”
6. “How did you feel about that?”

Generic probes can be used to encourage an interviewee to say more about a question you have asked.

APPENDIX I - SURVEY OF LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO
PERSONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL MEANING

Introduction: The success of any organization may depend in large part on the quality of interactions among the leader and the team members and associates. What determines the quality of these interactions is tied closely to the perception that these people have of the leader's behaviors in five areas: vision for the organization; relationships between the leader and team members; character of the leader; inspiration the leader provides; wisdom of the leader.

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

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

In the Informed Consent language below, "Student" refers to the researcher who requested you complete the survey.

INFORMED CONSENT

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

Student: Peggy Ohlhaber

THE FOLLOWING WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE ELECTRONIC SURVEY:

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

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

Each participant will use a three-digit code for identification purposes. The researcher will keep the identifying codes safe-guarded in a locked file drawer to which the researcher will have sole access. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

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

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

If you have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please contact the student at mohlhave.brandman.edu or (714) 623-5786 or the faculty advisor Dr. Keith Larick at (916) 212-5410.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the “agree” button indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the “disagree” button. The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate.

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

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

Please enter the code provided to you by the researcher.

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

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

- 1 = *Not important* in our organization; its absence would have no effect upon the leader's overall effectiveness nor our organization's culture.
- 2 = *Marginally important* to have but not necessary in our organization; its absence would have little effect upon the leader's effectiveness or the cultural health of our organization.
- 3 = *Somewhat important* for a leader in our organization; this is a leadership behavior that would have a positive effect upon how we function and would contribute in some positive ways to our organizational culture.
- 4 = *Important* for a leader in our organization; this is a leadership behavior that is good for the organization and its absence in the leader would be a definite deterrent in the organization's overall effectiveness as well as culture.
- 5 = *Very important* for a leader in our organization; would contribute significantly to our overall effectiveness and enhance our organizational culture in some very positive ways.
- 6 = *Critically important* in our organization; an absolute must; its absence would severely inhibit the leader's effectiveness and the overall health of our organizational culture.

LEADER BEHAVIORS	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Continuously promotes our team's moving together as one unit to serve a common purpose. (relationships)						
2. Creates an environment of trust among leaders and team members in the organization. (relationships)						
3. Behaves in a way that shows she/he cares about the team members. (relationships)						
4. Communicates in a clear, meaningful way. (relationships)						
5. Encourages team members to share leadership when performing tasks. (relationships)						
6. Behaves in an ethical manner when dealing with others. (character)						
7. Actively listens when communicating with others. (character)						
8. Responds to challenging situations with optimism. (character)						
9. Actions with others show that he/she can be trusted. (character)						
10. Actions show concern for the well -being of others. (character)						
11. Works with team members in a way that generates enthusiasm within teams. (inspiration)						
12. Recognizes and honors achievements of teams and team members. (inspiration)						
13. Encourages team members to innovate in order to advance the organization's leading edge. (inspiration)						
4. Engages in activities that build confidence among team members. (inspiration)						
15. Empowers team members to take reasonable risks when problem solving. (inspiration)						
16. Demonstrates thinking toward the future through conversations and actions. (vision)						
17. Communicates the organization's vision in a way in team members enthusiastically. (vision)						
18. Engages team members in creating a vision for the future. (vision)						
19. Behavior reflects organizational vision when making decisions. (vision)						
20. Promotes innovation that aligns with the organization's vision. (vision)						
21. Elevates the quality of decision making by discussing similarities of past situations with team members. (wisdom)						
22. Demonstrates compassion with team members. (wisdom)						
23. Behavior reflects an understanding of life's complexities. (wisdom)						
24. Integrates personal values with organizational values in decision making. (wisdom)						
25. Brings personal knowledge to the table when responding to complex situations within the organization. (wisdom)						
26. Considers past experiences when responding to complex situations within the organization. (wisdom)						
27. Displays expertise when working in a variety of situations within the organization. (wisdom)						
28. Shows concern for others in a variety of organizational settings. (wisdom)						
29. When working with teams and team members, continuously keeps the overall goals of the organization as part of conversations. (wisdom) 146						
30. Takes action by doing the "right thing" in a variety of organizational settings. (wisdom)						

Part 2 Directions: Please supply the following information. The information will be used only to assist in understanding the results of this inquiry. Enter the code provided to you by the person who asked you to complete this survey.

1. Your gender: Female Male
2. Your age category: 20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61 or over
3. Your time with the organization: 0- 5 yrs. 6-10 yrs. 11-20 yrs. 21 years or over
4. Your time with the current leader: 0-2 yrs. 3-5 yrs. 6-10 yrs. 11 yrs. or over

Thank you for your time. It is very much appreciated

APPENDIX J – TRANSCRIPTIONIST CONFIDENTIALITY FORM



RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Meaning Makers: A Mixed-Method Case Study of Exemplary Small Business Owner Leaders and the Strategies they Use to Create Personal and Organizational Meaning

I, _____, agree to serve as a transcriptionist for the above titled research study, I understand that my role during the study is only to transcribe the audio for each on -on-one interview. I understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality of the study participants; therefore, I will not share any information about the individuals participating in the above study that will connect them to any data gathered and transcribed during the one-on-one interviews or presorted in the final dissertation.

_____ Signature of Participant or Responsible Party	_____ Date:
_____ Signature of Principal Investigator, Peggy Ohlhaber	_____ Date