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Strategies to Enhance Leadership Development of Midlevel Managers

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Organizational executives annually invest more than $50 billion in leadership development worldwide. Nonetheless, human resources (HR) managers are concerned that leadership development initiatives prove inadequate in delivering learning outcomes equal to the investment, leaving midlevel managers ill-prepared to lead. Guided by experiential learning theory, this qualitative multiple-case study was conducted to explore strategies HR managers use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. A purposeful sample included three HR managers from three organizations located in a west coast metropolitan area in Canada who successfully implemented leadership development strategies. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and organizational documents. Informed by Yin's five-step case-study approach, four themes emerged: (a) employ multichannel learning, (b) cultivate a leadership mindset, (c) conduct coaching support, and (d) collaborate for enhanced leadership development outcomes. A key recommendation is for HR managers to create a supportive organizational culture by ensuring sufficient resources are allocated for leadership development initiatives. The implications for positive social change include the potential for skilled leaders to help community agencies flourish by expanding cooperative social bonds, enhancing trust and respect, and strengthening shared values and social responsibility.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Al, for his unwavering support,

encouragement, and love during this doctoral journey.

Acknowledgments

I would like to offer my gratitude and thanks to Dr. Boyd Johnson for his mentorship, support, and guidance, which significantly contributed to my successful completion of this doctoral study. I also would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Rocky Dwyer and Dr. Theresa Neal, whose comments and reviews added considerable value to this study. Finally, I thank my colleagues for their advice and help as I worked to accomplish my lifelong goal of achieving a doctoral degree.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Executives in fast-paced contemporary organizations face challenges when ensuring that managers develop the advanced leadership capabilities needed to achieve current and future corporate objectives. Leadership development is a vital and evolving human resources (HR) practice area (Ardichvili et al., 2016). HR professionals can offer meaningful and substantive value by providing relevant leadership development initiatives that are effective and aligned with strategic priorities. The aim of this study was to explore the strategies used by HR managers to enhance leadership development of midlevel managers.

Background of the Problem

Although executives invest in leadership development, managers remain inadequately prepared to lead effectively. By 2018, annual worldwide investments in employee development approached $366 billion (Training Industry, 2020; Vogel et al., 2021), and leadership development surpassed $50 billion (Kellerman, 2016). In Canada, spending on professional leadership and management development neared $1 billion in 2019 (Government of Canada, 2020). Nevertheless, most leadership development initiatives fall short of delivering learning outcomes commensurate with the investment (Cohen, 2019; Salicru, 2020). Inadequate development could disrupt a manager's capacity to lead change, cope with complexity, engage with team members, or assume responsibility for results (Vince & Pedler, 2018). Stakeholders could perceive insufficiently prepared managers as untrustworthy, ethically deficient, incapable, or

unskilled (French, 2016). These adverse outcomes might cause financial damage and reputational loss for managers and the organizations they lead.

Expanding, strengthening, and leveraging leadership capacity could better equip managers to meet future challenges (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Salicru, 2020). Given the trends toward increased complexity, interconnectedness, fast-paced change, and technological advancement (Ardichvili et al., 2016), it is crucial for HR managers to implement effective, forward-looking leadership development strategies to prepare midlevel managers for executive assignments. Therefore, this study's focus was to explore the successful strategies that HR managers use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers.

Problem Statement

While executives and HR professionals invest in leadership development, the strategies used to prepare midlevel managers for advanced leadership are perceived ineffective (Cohen, 2019; Day & Dragoni, 2015). By 2019, Canadian executives were investing nearly $1 billion in professional leadership and management development initiatives (Government of Canada, 2020). The general business problem is that some HR managers use inadequate approaches to enable midlevel managers to develop advanced leadership capabilities that could improve individual and organizational performance and results. The specific business problem is that some HR managers lack strategies to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies that some HR managers use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. The target population included HR managers from at least two organizations located in a west coast metropolitan area in Canada, who have successfully used strategies to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. Findings from this study could contribute to positive social change by serving as a leadership development guide for HR managers to use in their local organizations. As midlevel managers, employees, and other stakeholders enhance their leadership capabilities, they may communicate more effectively, initiate teamwork changes to improve business performance, and foster healthy workplaces. When managers are skilled leaders, they can create conditions for employees and the local community to thrive. Leaders might source new business opportunities that could create jobs, increase compensation, and potentially expand local tax revenues. Also, capable leaders may encourage employees to serve by volunteering in ways that benefit vulnerable community members.

Nature of the Study

Guercini (2014) indicated that the qualitative method is appropriate for (a) an investigation into a complex, socially based phenomenon and (b) developing thick and rich data that may increase understanding about the phenomenon. HR managers predicate leadership development initiatives on the complexities of social business relationships at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Epitropaki et al., 2017). Also, through this research study, I sought to uncover meaningful insights about leadership

development. Therefore, I selected a qualitative method for my study. A quantitative

method is useful when a researcher wants to test one or more hypotheses to confirm

theories related to the phenomenon (Dasgupta, 2015). I did not choose a quantitative

method because I was not testing a hypothesis. A mixed-method approach includes

qualitative and quantitative elements to concurrently collect, explore, examine, interpret,

and synthesize statistical, descriptive, and textual data to integrate complex findings

(Uprichard & Dawney, 2016). I did not choose a mixed-method approach because I did

not examine statistical data or test a hypothesis in my study.

I chose to use a multiple-case study design to explore strategies used to enhance

the leadership development of midlevel managers within a real-world business context.

Yin (2018) suggested that researchers could uncover approaches to real-world situations

through case study research. I considered applying other research designs for my study.

Grounded theory research involves developing a theory that helps explain a phenomenon

(Locke, 2015). I did not choose grounded theory because I was not endeavoring to

develop a theory. The phenomenological approach is beneficial for the study of lived

human experiences (Gill, 2014). The phenomenological approach was not appropriate for

this study because I was not exploring the everyday lived experiences of being a leader.

Narrative research involves exploring the meaning embedded in participants' personal

stories describing significant events or experiences (Gill, 2014). I did not explore the

meaning of stories related to a personal event or experience, so narrative research was

unsuitable. Researchers use ethnography to explore the meaning of a homogeneous

society within a distinct cultural context (Rogers, 2014). An ethnographic design was not

suitable because I was not exploring a societal or national culture.

Research Question

What strategies do HR managers use to enhance the leadership development of

midlevel managers?

Interview Questions

I asked participants the following semistructured interview questions:

1. What strategies did you use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel

    managers?

2. How did these strategies provide support for leadership development?

3. How did you assess the strategies you described regarding their effectiveness for

    leadership development?

4. What strategies did you use to encourage managers to become responsible for

    their development as a leader?

5. What strategies did you use to help managers gain insights from reflecting on

    recent leadership experiences?

6. What strategies did you use to encourage managers to try out new leadership

    capabilities?

7. For the strategies you described, what external agents, if any, did you use to

    support managers in their leadership development?

8. What documents can you describe that were used in any leadership development

    strategies?

9. What other information can you provide regarding successful strategies that you have used to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was experiential learning theory, developed by David Kolb in 1984 (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Experiential learning theory is a holistic perspective on the notion that individuals develop personally and professionally by appraising and reflecting on their experience and then considering new possibilities leading to ongoing mastery (Kolb, 2015). Kolb conceptualized the experiential learning theory as a four-stage cyclical framework. First, in the concrete experience stage, individuals attend to a present moment experience to apprehend and integrate what happened. Second, during reflective observation, individuals engage in sensemaking to discover the meaning embedded within their concrete experience. Third, during the abstract conceptualization stage, individuals integrate their reflective observations into cogent, sensible theories that can aid their development. Fourth, during active experimentation, individuals apply and assess their theories in a comparable experience.

Kolb's experiential learning theory is a seminal theory used to explore the leadership development process (Vogel et al., 2021). Experiential learning is a critical component of adult learning and informs various approaches and methods used to develop leadership (Becker & Bish, 2017; Corriveau, 2020; Hezlett, 2016; Vogel et al., 2021). I used Kolb's experiential learning theory because the framework emphasizes learning from experience and is an appropriate lens to explore successful leadership development strategies used by HR managers.

Operational Definitions

Experiential learning: A holistic, active learning process in which a person synthesizes and transforms their experience into reliable knowledge that brings about individual development (Ruhi, 2016).

Leadership: A meaningful personal and interpersonal process of developing and exercising insight, character, and competence to influence others ethically in support of shared goals (Newstead et al., 2019).

Midlevel manager: All intermediate managers above the front-line personnel level and below the executive level (Kieran et al., 2020).

Professional development: A collection of intellectual knowledge, expertise, and learning intended to enhance professional and workplace skills and promote career advancement (Mackay, 2017).

Reflective learning: The thoughtful, analytical consideration of an experience that integrates theoretical knowledge and professional practice creating the potential for deep transformational change (Tsingos et al., 2015).

Sensemaking: A retrospective, dynamic process instrumental in shaping human behavior by constructing meaning from events and creating a springboard to further action (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are research components that strengthen a study's rigor and dependability by specifying criteria for the interpretation of

the data and the research scope (Morse & McEvoy, 2014). This subsection indicates the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations for this study.

Assumptions

An assumption is a factor relevant to a study that is not validated but accepted as authentic and truthful (Grant & Radcliffe, 2015). The first assumption was that participants would respond to the interview questions fully, honestly, and to the best of their ability. The second assumption was that HR managers would grant access to internal documents related to strategies for leadership development. The third assumption was that because I have some prior knowledge about strategies to enhance leadership development, the research results could be biased. It was my responsibility to remain neutral while conducting this study.

Limitations

A limitation is a potential weakness that may have an impact on the interpretation of research findings (Singh, 2015). The first limitation was the potential that I may not gain access to confidential corporate documents related to leadership development, limiting my secondary data collection method to review of public documents only. The second limitation was that I was using two data collection methods: interviews and member checking and a document review in my case study.

Delimitations

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), delimitations restrict the scope of a study, effectively creating boundaries. I delimited the geographical area for this study to a west coast metropolitan area in Canada. An additional delimitation was that I restricted

the population and sample to HR managers who have used strategies to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. HR managers who acknowledge that leadership development is critical to conducting their business may offer established and effective strategies.

Significance of the Study

The information in this study could provide HR managers with effective strategies they can use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. Managers who enhance their leadership capacity could increase their ability to adapt to and lead effectively within complex business situations. Managers engaged in their communities could create positive change in social institutions through improved leadership.

Contribution to Business Practice

This study's findings may contribute to business practice by providing clear strategies HR managers can use to equip midlevel managers with advanced leadership capabilities in preparation for future executive leadership roles. By developing their leadership, managers could strengthen goal alignment and achievement, potentially leading to increased rewards, career satisfaction, and job-related meaningfulness. When people are satisfied at work, the organization may have lower turnover rates and higher employee retention (Lee et al., 2018). As a result, leaders could save on recruitment, onboarding, and training costs while simultaneously growing business operations and building a more resilient workforce.

Other contributions could include managers learning the types of leadership experiences that aid development (see Hezlett, 2016), that leadership development could

create useful or undesirable results (see Vince & Pedler, 2018), and that successfully

exercising leadership verifies development (see Botke et al., 2018). Findings from this

study may provide evidence to support the notion that leadership development evolves

throughout an entire career and occurs predominantly by experiencing and learning how

to make meaning from those experiences. Consequently, the experiential learning

strategies selected for leadership development could enable leaders to enhance workforce

engagement, increase productivity, and foster a positive organizational culture.

Implications for Social Change

When organizational leaders expand business operations, increase their

workforce, or improve employee salaries, leaders may indirectly contribute to raising

additional taxes that could benefit the community. Also, community organizations need

accomplished leaders to help them achieve their mission. Civic-minded executives could

encourage developing leaders to become more involved within their local community

through volunteerism, board or committee membership, or leading capital projects for

community agencies. Individuals may become empowered and enabled to make a

positive difference in their communities through leadership development.

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A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

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I conducted a literature review of scholarly materials related to leadership

development, including academic journal articles, books, and professional writings. The

relevant research studies used in this literature review are from databases related to

organization development, HR, and business. I used keywords such as *leader*, *leader*

development, *leadership*, *leadership development*, *employee development*, *manager*

development, *experiential learning*, *experiential learning theory*, and *Kolb* to search for relevant articles. Except for seminal research, literature searches focused on publications between 2015 and 2020. I completed a literature review that contains 97 references, of which 92 (95%) are peer-reviewed articles and published since 2015.

The purpose of this research study was to explore strategies that some HR managers use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. I chose Kolb's experiential learning theory as the conceptual framework for this study. Kolb's research on experiential learning has been cited extensively in scholarly publications. In a Google Scholar search, there were nearly 40,000 citations for Kolb's (2015) benchmark volume on experiential learning since 2015. Also, a search of the combined terms *Kolb*, *experiential learning*, and *leadership development* yielded almost 2,500 citations since 2015. The significant number of citations for Kolb's work suggests that researchers in adult learning and leadership development recognize experiential learning theory as a valuable and practical conceptual framework.

I organized the main themes stemming from my analysis and synthesis of the relevant literature into three parts: (a) experiential learning theory including Kolb's four-stage cycle, (b) the topic of leadership development, and (c) leadership development and experiential learning strategies. In the first part, I considered Kolb's experiential learning theory and cycle, along with situational considerations relating to experiential learning, and two alternative frameworks, action learning, and transformative learning theory. In the second part, I reviewed the literature relevant to leadership development, including perspectives on leadership development, individual leadership development, and

multilevel leadership development. The third part consists of an exploration of experiential learning strategies that enhance leadership development.

Experiential Learning Theory

Situated in the social constructivist philosophy (Lundgren et al., 2017; Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015; Steffens, 2015), experiential learning is a central concept in the field of adult development. Kolb's (2015) experiential learning theory is based, in part, on the fundamental assumption that the process of experiencing is essential for a person to learn, change, and develop into a fully functioning adult. Likewise, Burch et al. (2016) noted that roughly 70% of adult development occurs because people have gained insight from their experiences. In the ordinary course of adulthood, people undergo meaningful life events that might naturally cause thoughtful reflection and practical wisdom. Thus, adults could be predisposed to learn effectively from experience because they have gained value from previous life lessons. The main challenge for HR managers tasked with midlevel managers' leadership development is to design strategies that capture and use learners' experiences for their best advantage and highest developmental value.

Kolb (2015) described experiential learning as a holistic process that integrates perception and cognition with experience and behavior. Other researchers loosely conceptualized experiential learning as learning by doing (Haney et al., 2020) or as a learner-centric, active, and personally engaging process (Blair, 2016; Burch et al., 2016; Morris, 2020). Liu et al. (2021) commented that effective experiential learning results from conscious and intentional developmental experiences. Similarly, Brailas et al. (2017) remarked that experiential learning happens when an individual senses a deeply

held personal engagement with the experience and has a serious intent to take action. While varied experiential learning descriptions abound, there is widespread agreement among scholars that Kolb developed the preeminent experiential learning theory (Burch et al., 2016; Burns & Danyluk, 2017; Leal-Rodríguez & Albort-Morant, 2019; Morris, 2020; Schenck & Cruickshank, 2015). Kolb's theory is communicated most clearly through the four stages of the experiential learning cycle.

The four primary stages of Kolb's experiential learning cycle are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015). Kolb (2015) suggested that people could own, value, and trust their learning when using the experiential learning cycle as a referent guide for understanding their experience. Typically, a person uses the experiential learning cycle by beginning with one specific authentic experience and then proceeding through each stage to reflect, analyze, consider new possibilities, and then modify their future responses to similar experiences (Heinrich et al., 2015; Tomkins & Ulus, 2016).

Nevertheless, not every person will process their experiences by moving through a predictable cycle. Helyer (2015) observed that learners are unlikely to progress through the experiential learning cycle in a stepped and orderly way because the learning process is individual and iterative. Likewise, Richards (2018) remarked that the start and endpoints for Kolb's cycle might depend on factors like individual learning preferences or the learning context. Kolb (2015) considered criticisms such as this and acknowledged that while the experiential learning theory represents a dynamic process in which each stage is significant, individuals may not explicitly follow the experiential learning cycle

in order. For this reason, sound strategies for leadership development need not simultaneously focus on all four stages of the experiential learning cycle. Legitimate strategies may emphasize one or more stages. HR managers could employ multiple experiential learning strategies to provide a comprehensive leadership development program for midlevel managers. Also, proactive learners could choose a mix of strategies they believe will best support their leadership development. Because leadership development strategies will center on one or more experiential learning stage, it is useful to explore how learning develops during these stages.

Concrete Experience

Concrete experience is the first stage of the experiential learning cycle. Scholars define a concrete experience as a pure, tangible, and present moment occurrence (Kolb, 2015; Stirling et al., 2017) that learners enter into without bias (Matsuo & Nagata, 2020; Morris, 2020). Concrete experience is the starting point for learning (Burns & Danyluk, 2017; Ruhi, 2016) and includes expected and unexpected experiences (Matsuo & Nagata, 2020). The nature of a midlevel managers' role is inherently experiential, dealing with routine and nonroutine events daily; therefore, a broad definition of experience was necessary for this leadership development study.

According to Morris (2020), the straightforward and holistic characterization of concrete experience, as described by Kolb, may be unclear and insufficient. However, few researchers have detailed the boundaries of a concrete experience (Morris, 2020). Perhaps the hands-on, practical, and uncontrived nature of a concrete experience seems obvious. Still, Morris (2020) argued that additional clarification might help scholars

meaningfully discuss this initial step in the experiential learning cycle. Although concrete experience requisites remain vague in the literature, some scholars include topics such as the influence of emotions during a concrete experience and the potential impact of active or passive experiences on learning.

During the concrete experience stage, learning begins to occur through felt emotions. Emotions can stimulate or inhibit learning (Matsuo & Nagata, 2020). The characteristics that facilitate learning during a concrete experience include introspection and empathy (Stock et al., 2018), being nonjudgmental and adaptable (Ruhi, 2016), and feeling immersed in the experience (Stirling et al., 2017). Anxiety and apprehension about engaging in an experience may inhibit learning (Burns & Danyluk, 2017; Clancy & Vince, 2019; Heinrich & Green, 2020). Accordingly, the felt emotions of midlevel managers during leadership development experiences could impact their development. To facilitate learning, HR managers should ensure that midlevel managers show optimal emotional engagement levels during leadership development experiences.

Active, context-rich concrete experiences might create optimal conditions for realistic and genuine experiential learning. According to Morris (2020) and Spanjaard et al. (2018), the efficacy of passive concrete experiences such as reading an article or listening to a speaker is doubtful. Still, a learner might be fully engaged in a less dynamic, calmer experience if the subject matter is thought-provoking or complex, and focused attention is necessary (Rodgers et al., 2017). Thus, the learner determines if their experience is engaging and active enough to hold learning value (Morris, 2020). There are two practical implications for leadership development from this research. First,

midlevel managers' feedback on preferred strategies is imperative. Second, HR managers might consider customizing strategies to suit the learning needs of individual midlevel managers.

Reflective Observation

The second stage of the experiential learning cycle is reflective observation. Researchers have described reflective observation as an introspective thinking process (Lindh & Thorgren, 2016), an informal learning and development process (Lundgren et al., 2017), or an intentional metacognitive process that leads to sensemaking (Knapp et al., 2017; Lundgren et al., 2017). When people reflect, they pair their concrete experience with relevant existing knowledge and then consciously observe and evaluate their thinking, emotions, and behavior (Knapp et al., 2017; Lindh & Thorgren, 2016; Morris, 2020). For example, as midlevel managers engage in reflection, they can create new interpretations of their experiences and might use those insights to consider improved ways of handling complex workplace issues. This two-step process, experiencing and reflecting, forms the essence of critical thinking or meaning making (Morris, 2020).

In Kolb's experiential learning cycle, reflection is identified as separate and apart from concrete experience. Nevertheless, in practice, the two stages are combined because people cannot consciously exit their experience to engage in reflection (Helyer, 2015). People engage with reflective observation by conceptually bracketing their concrete experience to create a psychological separation between the experience and reflection stages (Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016; Seaman et al., 2017). So, the first two stages in the experiential learning cycle function as inseparable phenomena.

The importance of reflective observation for leadership development cannot be overstated and might provide the most significant learning source for managers (Adelopo et al., 2017; Helyer, 2015; Lundgren et al., 2017; "On reflection," 2016; Kowalski & Russell, 2020). Tsingos et al. (2015) asserted that reflection should be an occupational requirement because it supports deep level self-awareness, metacognition, and critical thinking. Furthermore, managers who pair reflection with reasoning become better equipped to deal with workplace complexity (Lindh & Thorgren, 2016). Lundgren et al. (2017) highlighted that reflection might influence short- and long-term choices, potentially contributing to organizational change. However, in the absence of reflection, a manager's learning might be truncated, and their development lessened (Girvan et al., 2016). The research suggests that reflection is a significant experiential learning method. HR managers should design programs that incorporate reflection into the strategies they use for leadership development.

Matsuo and Nagata (2020) proposed that Kolb's model should include a critical reflection cycle similar to that found in Mezirow's (1978) transformative learning theory. Likewise, Morris (2020) commented that critical reflection would help learners better accept ambiguity and consider the context of specific conditions when confronting a challenging workplace problem. Also, learning to reflect collectively and welcoming diverse perspectives can enhance overall individual and group results (Matsuo, 2015b; Ruhi, 2016; Stock et al., 2018). Because some executives assign a higher value to taking action than to reflective learning and thinking, midlevel managers might believe that reflecting is time wasted. Leadership development programs should include strategies

that will help midlevel managers improve critical and collaborative reflection and convince managers of the benefits of doing so.

Abstract Conceptualization

The third stage in the experiential learning cycle is abstract conceptualization. Abstract conceptualization is a creative action-oriented thinking process where people conceptually apply their new insights and mental models to probable future experiences (Kolb, 2015; Stirling et al., 2017). During the abstract conceptualization stage, people could analyze the ideas they generated during reflection, make critical connections, and then recombine their innovative ideas with their existing viewpoints (Ruhi, 2016; Stirling et al., 2017). Managers who use abstract conceptualization can imagine adaptive behavioral approaches, think of realistic plans, and use if-then techniques to prepare for future responsibilities (Helyer, 2015; Honig & Hopp, 2019). When managers use the insights gleaned during reflection to imagine practical solutions for existing problems, they apply abstract conceptualization. To illustrate, consider how difficult it would be for an HR manager to prepare leadership development strategies without first using abstract conceptualization to imagine the process and outcomes for midlevel managers.

Abstract conceptualization is a low-risk, creative endeavor. So, it is an advantage for midlevel managers to use abstract conceptualization because they can freely question assumptions and expectations before taking action on an issue or problem (Helyer, 2015; Morris, 2020). By embracing abstract conceptualization, midlevel managers can reframe issues to innovate, design, and potentially improve outcomes (Honig & Hopp, 2019; Morris, 2020). Also, any planned problem resolution at this stage is theoretical, so there

is little risk of injury to their career or professional credibility (Morris, 2020). Abstract

conceptualization is essential for leadership because leaders must think about and devise

theoretical plans before deciding which practical tactics will be implemented, such as

those in strategic plans. However, midlevel managers may dismiss theoretical thinking as

mere speculation instead of regarding it as a critical aspect of leadership development.

HR managers should ensure that strategies for leadership development include abstract

conceptualization.

Active Experimentation

The purpose of active experimentation, stage four in Kolb's experiential learning

cycle, is twofold. First, during active experimentation, employees make decisions about

their newly imagined actions or approaches and then apply the potential solutions

(Helyer, 2015; Morris, 2020; Stirling et al., 2017). Second, by actively experimenting,

employees will likely pay close attention to which actions or approaches help achieve

better workplace outcomes (Helyer, 2015; Morris, 2020). One example of an active

experimentation strategy for leadership development might be to lead a pilot project.

Because a pilot project has a limited scope, midlevel managers can try out, assess, and

modify new leadership stances before a large-scale implementation of the project begins.

Because midlevel managers might function outside their comfort zone, they could

perceive higher career and credibility risks during the active experimentation stage

(Morris, 2020). To balance stress and facilitate learning, managers could reframe the

inherent risk of taking action with the anticipation of testing new solutions or behaviors

to discover if they produced improved outcomes (Honig & Hopp, 2019; Morris, 2020;

Stock et al., 2018). Midlevel managers may find the hands-on aspect of active

experimentation compelling. Moreover, midlevel managers can decrease their stress and

increase their leadership development by using and repeating the experiential learning

cycle until they have identified successful approaches.

Situational Considerations Relating to Experiential Learning

Experiential learning strategies could improve leadership development outcomes.

Matsuo (2015a) suggested that people derive optimal learning advantages when

experiencing all stages of the cycle. However, some circumstances might modify learning

results. The capacity for learning from experience and the experiential learning context

are situational factors that could impact leadership development.

Capacity for Learning From Experience

The benefits of engaging in experiential learning are not guaranteed. However,

experiential learning offers significant value for achieving leadership development

outcomes (Burch et al., 2016; Yeo & Marquardt, 2015). Benefits include improved

cognitive ability (Heinrich et al., 2015), an expanded achievement orientation (Munge et

al., 2018), and increased openness to new experiences (Girvan et al., 2016). The

following strategies may optimize learning from experience. First, as managers face

progressively more demanding, high-performance experiences, they integrate new

learning into existing patterns and evolve, develop, and change (Girvan et al., 2016;

Richards, 2018). While balanced stress levels can aid development (Buchanan, 2017),

Hezlett (2016) argued that high stress levels would inhibit leadership development.

Additionally, Griffith et al. (2017) noted that when people are working in excessively

complex situations, their cognitive resources may become exhausted, leaving them with

less ability to learn from experience. As a result, overwhelmed managers may find the

second strategy, guided mindfulness, useful.

Guided and mindful attention in moving through each learning stage can awaken

new perspectives and encourage meaning-making (Griffith et al., 2017; Heslin &

Keating, 2017; Peterson & Kolb, 2018). Furthermore, Griffith et al. (2017) suggested

that, as a learning strategy, guided mindfulness could promote the self-awareness,

situational awareness, and social awareness needed to improve a manager's capacity for

leading in a complex environment. In short, guided mindfulness could optimize the

experiential learning outcomes for leadership development.

Experiential Learning Context

A key question to be addressed is to what extent HR managers should consider

the context when designing leadership development strategies. Contextual factors that

influence a learning environment vary widely. Contextual factors could include: (a) the

organizational culture, the technologic environment, and the economy (Hondzel &

Hansen, 2015; Yeo & Marquardt, 2015), (b) whether the manager is working locally or

internationally (Human & Ungerer, 2016), (c) language and cultural differences (Revens

et al., 2018), and, (d) the roles, responsibilities and required subject matter expertise for

individuals and group members (Girvan et al., 2016; Rodgers et al., 2017).

HR managers should find out how employees perceive the learning context before

they select experiential learning strategies. A manager's perception of the situational

context (timing, circumstances, and conditions) is essential and helps to shape how they

assess and address their concrete experiences (Burns & Danyluk, 2017; Leal-Rodríguez, & Albort-Morant, 2019; Morris, 2020; Rodgers et al., 2017; Yeo & Marquardt, 2015). If managers perceive the context as inconvenient or problematic, they may forgo the opportunity to learn. However, when a midlevel manager grasps the situational context, stress levels could lessen, while learning, motivation, and engagement could increase. The learning context must inform the strategies used for leadership development. HR managers should be mindful of the context and consider midlevel managers' perceptions before positioning specific experiential learning strategies as helpful for leadership development.

Action Learning

Researchers have used other conceptual frameworks, such as action learning, to understand leadership development. Revans introduced action learning in the late 1940s (Volz-Peacock et al., 2016). Several principles that undergird action learning include (a) individuals are purposeful, active agents who direct their learning (Doherty, 2016; Yeo & Marquardt, 2015); (b) unsolved complex or urgent problems trigger action learning (Elliott & Pedler, 2018; Roupnel et al., 2019; Yeo & Marquardt, 2015); and (c) collaboration with others, astute questioning, and trust facilitate action learning (Smith et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2017; Volz-Peacock et al., 2016). Because action learning is an applied approach, learners can receive support and scrutiny from others while applying new knowledge to resolve real-time organizational issues. The significance of using collaboration and problem-solving for action learning distinguishes it from Kolb's experiential learning theory.

There are similarities between action learning and experiential learning. The cognitive processes of reflection and sensemaking and the communication aspects of dialogue and feedback are common to both frameworks (Yeo & Marquardt, 2015). Regarding leadership development, Day and Dragoni (2015) characterized action learning as an experience. Similarly, Hezlett (2016) advised that action learning is a practice area within the experiential learning framework. Considering Hezlett's assertion, action learning might be positioned accurately as an experiential learning strategy. As a result of the similarities between action learning and experiential learning, researchers reported comparable leadership development strategies.

Advocates acknowledged the shortcomings of action learning for leadership development. The purposeful focus on group problem solving could inhibit midlevel managers from developing the self-knowledge needed for leadership development (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Roupnel et al., 2019; Yeo & Marquardt, 2015). Also, rigid group processes, delimiting problems too narrowly, and organizational power dynamics may constrain leadership development (Brook et al., 2016; Yeo & Marquardt, 2015). While action learning has merit for leadership development, HR managers might mitigate the disadvantages of collaborative group-level strategies by combining them with the individual-level strategies common to experiential learning. Then, HR managers could offer action learning as an experiential learning strategy to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers.

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory is another framework researchers used to understand leadership development. Transformative learning theory was introduced by Mezirow (1978) in the late 1970s. The basis of transformative learning is that people evaluated their enduring assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and mindsets, and then reflected on transforming those perspectives to achieve meaningful change and personal growth (Buchanan, 2017; Mezirow, 1978). Mezirow based transformative learning theory on the cognitive techniques of introspection and reflection as the primary strategy for adult learning.

In short, Mezirow (1978) explained that adults learn because they experience dissonance between their existing or programmed knowledge and the knowledge required to navigate a current life experience successfully. The internal state of dissonance initiates one of two conditions: assimilating new and previous information that results in reinforcing a person's existing state, or accommodating new information so that perceptions, assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors can change (Coyer et al., 2019; Henriksen & Børgesen, 2016; Mezirow, 1978; Robinson & Levac, 2018). By using transformative learning strategies to resolve cognitive dissonance stemming from new leadership experiences, midlevel managers could grasp the need for change but remain unaware of how to implement self-development.

Some conditions can strengthen transformative learning. Rational strategies like critical reflection (Adelopo et al., 2017; Coyer et al., 2019) and objective and subjective perceptual reframing (Robinson & Levac, 2018) could foster change. Participating in

group debates may also support behavioral change by challenging people to refine their assumptions, beliefs, and reasoning (Robinson & Levac, 2018). These conditions support perceptual change and may indirectly support developmental change. The value of Mezirow's theory for leadership development is that it emphasizes critical reflective thinking. However, Mezirow's theory is inadequate as a framework for this study on leadership development because it only deals with cognitive awareness. Kolb's experiential learning theory is a better fit as a conceptual framework because the cycle melds experience and reflection with behavioral change.

Leadership Development

Executives support leadership development to achieve expected and ancillary gains in employee performance and organizational results. The overarching intention of leadership development is to help managers better adapt to their work circumstances to create enhanced results (Garavan et al., 2016; Naz et al., 2016) with fewer counterproductive outcomes and less personal stress (Garavan et al., 2016). Also, executives view leadership development as a primary source of competitive advantage (Cohen, 2019; Day, 2000). Considering the potential return on investment, executives remain keen to capitalize on leadership development initiatives.

Academics responded to the interest in leadership development by expanding their research inquiries. In 2010, Avolio et al. revealed that the topic of leadership development was under-represented in leadership literature. More recently, leadership development has become a promising and emerging field of academic scholarship (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Vogel et al., 2021). According to Yoo et al. (2019), the primary themes

in four major HR development journals published between 2010 and 2017 were leadership and leadership development. Similarly, leadership development was the second most prevalent topic published in the Leadership Quarterly between 2010 and 2019 (Gardner et al., 2020). Researchers' ongoing interest suggests that exploring leadership development experiences and strategies have merit. Also, since the leadership development field is growing, researchers might add new and varied opinions to the academic conversation.

Researchers approached the topic of leadership development from various perspectives. Some researchers used an individual level of analysis to discuss leadership development (Day, 2000). Individual-level approaches were grounded in traditional leadership models such as trait or personality theories (Cohen, 2019; Cullen-Lester et al., 2017) and allowed researchers to differentiate between leaders and followers (Day, 2000). Leadership development at the individual level underscored improvements in self-efficacy, self-awareness, and a manager's knowledge, skills, and ability (KSA; Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2020). Individual managers require personal and professional growth to develop as a leader. Nevertheless, the exercise of leadership is inherently a complicated social and relational endeavor. So, a multilevel approach that includes individual, group, and organizational approaches may provide a more comprehensive developmental experience.

Researchers who identified leadership development as a multilevel inquiry (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Seibert et al., 2017; Subramony et al., 2018) considered the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational leadership contexts (Day, 2000; Day &

Dragoni, 2015; Epitropaki et al., 2017). A multilevel approach to leadership development

included, for example, formal and informal experiential strategies (Cullen-Lester et al.,

2017; Seibert et al., 2017) that could build authentic relationships, social and technical

competence, and collective leadership capacity (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Subramony et al.,

2018). For this study, I used a multilevel perspective on leadership development.

Perspectives on Leadership Development

In business practice and academia, the terms leadership development and

management development might be used interchangeably. Likewise, leadership

development and leader development could be considered reciprocal terms. According to

Day (2000), researchers have interconnected the terms leadership development and

management development, yet they are distinct and unique concepts. Day explained that

the focus of management development is to improve KSAs and problem-solving

expertise, whereas leadership development expands the shared capacity for meaningful

engagement. In short, Day asserted that management development should focus on

improving task performance, while leadership development should emphasize enhanced

relationships and role performance.

Becker and Bish (2017) concurred with Day (2000) that the purpose of

management development is to help managers become proficient in critical areas of

management expertise. However, Becker and Bish included leadership as a component

under the umbrella concept of management development. The implication is that

leadership development and management development could be interchangeable terms.

The distinction between leader development and leadership development also needs clarification. In the extant literature, scholars referred to leader development as an individual, intrapersonal process that generates human capital for the organization (Day, 2000; Day & Dragoni, 2015; Roupnel et al., 2019; Vogel et al., 2021). More specifically, leader development is an experiential process leading to self-awareness (Elkington et al., 2017; Hanson, 2013), a KSA instructional process (Eva et al., 2019), a process creating leadership capacity (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Martin et al., 2020), and a life-long learning process (Liu et al., 2021; Roupnel et al., 2019). Executives support and managers undertake leader development expecting it to result in leadership (Day, 2000).

The social context of the organization could influence leadership development. Elkington et al. (2017) noted that the social and relational nature of leadership development might create an organizational culture where leaders emerge from all organization levels. Furthermore, leadership development may facilitate business and organizational networks and generate social capital (Day, 2000; Day & Dragoni, 2015; Roupnel et al., 2019; Vogel et al., 2021). The social capital value created through leadership development includes improved follower trust, enhanced cooperation, commitment, and respect (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Day, 2000).

In practical terms, the organizational functions of leader development and leadership development continue to be closely linked. The concepts are complementary without having a formal cause and effect relationship (Day, 2000). Elkington et al. (2017) asserted that leader development is essential for leadership development. Some

researchers go further in their assessments and stress that leadership development is not possible without performing leader development (Hanson, 2013; Roupnel et al., 2019).

Three main implications resulted from the evidence on leader and leadership development. First, the considerable financial investment executives make to provide midlevel managers with leadership development could rightly be considered a human capital cost. Therefore, the return on investment would accrue during the midlevel managers' career with the organization. In other words, while the financial outlay for leadership development occurs in the present, the social and human capital value created accumulates over time. Second, because leader development is an integral part of leadership development, plans and programs should include individual and multilevel developmental opportunities. Third, the individual level seems to correspond best with leader and management development, whereas multilevel development corresponds appropriately with leadership development. Since leader and leadership development are interrelated concepts, I considered individual leadership development and multilevel development next.

Individual Leadership Development

The effectiveness of individual leadership development depends, in part, on how midlevel managers or learners view themselves and the effort they would expend for personal and professional development. Leadership development outcomes are measured differently from leadership effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness is measured by performance results, whereas leadership development outcomes focus on personal and professional growth and change (Day & Dragoni, 2015). Because leadership development

outcomes are not quantifiable, it could be helpful to review relevant factors in personal and professional growth.

One issue that leadership development researchers pondered centers on what it is that develops during the learning process. The following individual-level factors commonly appeared in the literature. First, self-awareness is a prime research interest. Second, the issue of leader identity development emerged through discussions on leadership experiences and leader-follower relationships. Third, researchers commented on the sensemaking or meaning-making process.

Developing an authentic self-view is part of the leadership development process. Researchers identified self-awareness as a person's deep insight into and appreciation for their aptitudes, contributions, limitations, choices, biases, and influence (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Griffith et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2021). As individuals grow and develop, their understanding of self and others becomes nuanced, complex, and congruent (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Day & Dragoni, 2015). Furthermore, high levels of emotional intelligence may support positive changes in self-awareness (Rubens et al., 2018). Knowing oneself is a crucial area of leadership expertise. However, it can be challenging to teach and learn.

Self-awareness is essential because if midlevel managers cannot identify personal leadership gaps, they will be reluctant to develop in those areas (Griffith et al., 2017). Several researchers commented that taking advantage of multisource feedback, like a 360-degree evaluation, would help build self-awareness (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Cumberland et al., 2016; Day, 2000; Day & Dragoni, 2015). Nevertheless, multisource

feedback can be challenging for midlevel managers. To benefit from feedback, a learner must be willing to nonjudgmentally receive the feedback, accept the comments as constructive, and take action. Griffith et al. (2017) suggested that a mindful approach might be helpful. Also, learners could engage in a reflective sensemaking process. Through reflection, a learner can evaluate an experience, uncover the socio-relational context, and recognize the personal changes needed to manage effectively. Midlevel managers have complex responsibilities and are in continuous contact with stakeholders from all levels of the organization. Therefore, managers must develop a clear and deep self-awareness so that unacknowledged gaps do not impede their daily performance. Personal benefits could include self-confidence, resilience, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, which can support coping in new or complex roles.

Leaders begin to form productive relationships with followers during the process of leader identity formation. Researchers noted that developing a leader identity is a dynamic process of identifying with and acquiring leadership attributes over time (Epitropaki et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, a midlevel manager could evolve their leader identity and gain credibility as they progress through their career. Day and Dragoni (2015) explained that as a socially constructed notion, a person's leadership identity begins to form when they make a claim of leadership standing by, for example, sitting at the head of the conference table or directing a project meeting. There is mutual recognition of leadership when others accept the leader's claim and begin to follow, thereby starting a leader-follower relationship.

Yeager and Callahan (2016) researched the effect of young leaders' experiences on their leadership identity. The findings revealed that four factors supported leadership identity development. First, relationships with superiors, peers, and coaches strengthened leadership identity. Second, emerging leaders who had a positive leadership example to follow had a more reliable identification with leadership. Third, Yeager and Callahan found that behaving authentically as a leader was instrumental in identity formation. Fourth, the motivation to lead reinforced, and was reinforced by, a person's leadership identity. Yeager and Callahan's research suggests that education, mentoring conversations, and leadership coaching could be helpful strategies for leadership development. Also, leaders must self-identify as such if they are to continue developing leadership.

According to Day (2000), facilitating solutions for complex problems is an essential aspect of leadership. Lang (2019) explained that leaders should engage in prospective sensemaking by routinely scanning the situational environment for potential problems, interpreting and making meaning of the incoming data, and taking appropriate action. Likewise, as midlevel managers engage in leadership practice, they could encounter unfamiliar experiences that they are ill-equipped to handle. They might notice inconsistencies between the situation or experience, their underlying expectations, and their existing mental models on how the world works (Lang, 2019; Odden & Russ, 2019) and what actions they should take. Those inconsistencies may cause uncertainty and tension that needs resolution. During sensemaking, managers can gain understanding by comparing what they thought they would experience with what happened. Their new

insights, combined with their existing mental models, form an updated perspective, and provide clarity.

Midlevel managers can engage in prospective and retrospective sensemaking individually or collectively. Collective sensemaking is a social process, and through it, managers can provide colleagues with accurate situational information (Lang, 2019). Kieran et al. (2020) suggested that managers invite colleagues to meet and apply their knowledge to solve challenging, nonroutine, or ambiguous situations. The potential outcomes from collective sensemaking include precise assessments of current situations, understanding the actions taken, and increased trust between colleagues. Furthermore, as part of an experiential learning reflective process, sensemaking could prove beneficial for leadership development.

Multilevel Leadership Development

The primary research considerations regarding multilevel leadership development included (a) the socio-relational context that might influence leadership development, and (b) collective leadership development. Leadership development is a complex endeavor situated within the social context of an organization. Elkington et al. (2017) noted that leadership development plans should accommodate the social context and provide opportunities for leaders to succeed where they work. Day (2000) emphasized that attempts to develop leaders without considering their broader relational network and social context is unwise. The risk is that the leader will not develop the capabilities to handle more complex challenges in the future (Day, 2000). Leaders work in several business units or organizations during their careers. Each situation would offer a distinct

social and relational context. Therefore, an over-reliance on creating leadership strategies carefully tailored to a specific context may inadvertently create entrenchment into a narrowly focused leadership approach. Midlevel managers may find that an adaptive approach to the social context provides added career longevity in a leadership role.

The social context of their workplace could influence a midlevel manager's leadership development choices and their career success. Cohen (2019) asserted that the organizational social context had a direct impact on the effectiveness of its' leaders. Each business unit has a unique social context where people informally ascribe value to some leadership attributes and disparage other attributes (Cohen, 2019). When a manager displays or does not display valued leadership attributes, they are socially rewarded or penalized accordingly (Cohen, 2019; Elkington et al., 2017). In practical terms, midlevel managers might concentrate on developing leadership attributes that are highly prized. Also, managers could neglect to develop needed but not valued attributes. Consequently, those in charge should ensure that the social context aligns with and supports appropriate leadership development attributes and learning strategies.

The individual leader with many followers perspective is dominant in leadership development research (Eva et al., 2019). However, because of the trend toward online work, nontraditional workgroups, and complex job assignments, research on collective or group leadership development is gaining acceptance (Eva et al., 2019; Megheirkouni & Mejheirkouni, 2020). Still, collective leadership development research continues to focus on an individual leader who functions within a collective group. Eva et al. (2019) advocated that the individual perspective on collective leadership development is

inadequate and should move to a multiple perspective framework. The researchers

contended that using a framework that specified multiple perspectives would bolster

research on leadership development for collectives.

Eva et al. (2019) proposed a framework that combined multiple perspectives on

collective leadership development. The suggested framework included the following five

perspectives: (a) person-centered, (b) social network, (c) social-relational, (d) socio-

material, and (e) institutional. Although the premise is valuable, the proposed model

becomes overly complicated by integrating five perspectives, each with different

theoretical foundations. Also, most of the suggested leadership development approaches

for collective leadership development were customary and already in use. The suggested

approaches ranged from dialogic (for example, communication skills development or

giving and receiving useful feedback) to strengthening weak ties within the collective by

examining the nature of its in- and out-groups.

It is noteworthy that researchers discussed the value of social capital in the

leadership development literature. Individual and collective leadership development helps

managers build personal and organizational social capital (Elkington et al., 2017).

Furthermore, leaders could amass social capital resources because of the social

relationships and mutual responsibilities of people in a networked or collaborative group

(Day, 2000; Subramony et al., 2018). In terms of leadership development, social capital

may increase with advanced leadership capabilities. As such, leadership development

should be prioritized and could be considered an essential strategy to create social capital.

Leadership Development and Experiential Learning Strategies

Midlevel managers might refer to experiential learning as learning by doing. Experiential learning has gained broad acceptance as a practical leadership development framework in HR development and academic fields. Using an experiential learning framework, the central leadership development goals for midlevel managers included (a) developing leadership competencies, (b) critically reflecting on experiences, and (c) decision making (Holden, 2018). Midlevel managers, executives, HR managers, or other organizational representatives should determine overarching objectives and ancillary goals.

Providing opportunities for leadership development is essential. Job-related and individual factors may facilitate or hinder leadership development. Moreover, midlevel managers should assume ownership for their professional development and career advancement by making choices about the leadership problems that they want to resolve and what leadership lessons they want to learn (Blair, 2016; Morris, 2020; Poell, 2017). When given a choice, managers gravitate to the professional development strategies that support sensemaking and align with the work that they perform (Becker & Bish, 2017; Girvan et al., 2016; Matsuo, 2015a). Leadership development strategies that utilize Kolb's experiential learning theory appear to be appropriate to satisfy managers' preferences. In this part, I discuss literature from researchers who applied leadership development strategies from an experiential learning perspective.

Adult learners tend to choose experiential learning strategies that are self-directed and require active engagement (Becker & Bish, 2017; Buchanan, 2017). However, some

less active approaches may be valuable because managers can effectively learn through the experience of others, for example, by modeling. Becker and Bish (2017) posited that professional development plans should take advantage of the full experiential learning cycle so learners could gain the maximum benefit. Progressing through the learning cycle (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) could offer learners evidence that they were learning from their experiences.

Although the concepts of learning and development are not identical, they are inseparable (Austin, 2015; Matsuo, 2015b; Richards, 2018). Learning creates a motivational state that makes development possible (Fowler, 2017). In other words, learning is integral to the professional development process for midlevel managers (Girvan et al., 2016; Haemer et al., 2017). Furthermore, midlevel managers need to engage in leadership development while continuing to get their work done (Day, 2000; Volz-Peacock et al., 2016). Leadership development is the result of a series of experiential learning interventions that combine to create a comprehensive learning and development plan. The leadership development strategies that HR managers choose or recommend should allow midlevel managers to learn while conducting business.

Technology and Leadership Development

Virtual work is increasingly becoming the standard operating system for organizations worldwide. Technological advancements allow people to work securely from most locations. Day (2000) commented that virtual interactions should complement, not replace, in-person communication. Working online might hinder a midlevel

manager's ability to discuss new ideas with colleagues and employees. With an online forum, managers could collaborate across the organization and readily access needed documents and materials. Also, people may notice a shift in their mental models and habits as it becomes easier to have discussions online.

The increase in virtual work and the availability of sophisticated and affordable technology tools means that midlevel managers may need to adapt and learn to lead people in a virtual environment. Executives should ensure that the technology infrastructure and online media platforms and applications encourage networking, facilitate asynchronous discussion, and are user-friendly (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Megheirkouni, 2018; Walker, 2018). Inadequate technological infrastructure can make it challenging to apply technology for learning and development programs (Megheirkouni, 2018). Other barriers to learning online might include time constraints, user skill levels, and available online leadership development programs.

HR managers could adapt leadership development strategies for online delivery or redesign them for distance learning. Examples of strategies that could be delivered virtually include: (a) online coaching using social media, (b) leadership blogs, (c) gaming and simulations, (d) learning circles, and (e) user facilitated discussion boards (Walker, 2018). Online synchronous and asynchronous leadership development programs might be an acceptable resource. However, since leadership development is a socially constructed practice, pairing online initiatives with in-person consultations may offer superior advantages.

Formal Strategies for Leadership Development

Formal learning opportunities are typically structured, have organized learning goals, and occur in a formal setting (Becker & Bish, 2017). Researchers identify informal learning as anything that occurs outside of a formal setting (Becker & Bish, 2017). There is considerable agreement that experiential learning can take place in formal and informal settings (Becker & Bish, 2017; Boak & Crabbe, 2019). Also, experiential strategies facilitate learning concepts that are difficult to formalize (Corriveau, 2020; Liu et al., 2021), like leadership development. Researchers have identified strategies that are effective for leadership development but may not have discussed the effect strength (Liu et al., 2021). Common formal experiential learning strategies that have worked for leadership development included formal education, ongoing professional development, and complex roles with challenging work assignments.

Promote Formal Education and Professional Development. Leadership development programs in higher education have thrived (Liu et al., 2021). The purpose of higher education is to prepare individuals for their adult work life (Awaysheh & Bonfiglio, 2017; McKim et al., 2017). Midlevel managers may have pursued various educational backgrounds, depending on their profession. However, formal post-secondary education may be essential for advancement into senior leadership roles. Formal professional development initiatives can support leadership development, as well. Except for a diploma or degree, there is little difference between a formal university course and a formal course offered in a training and development conference room.

McKim et al. (2017) commented that in higher education courses, students should take on the task of acquiring and applying knowledge. The researchers termed this "knowledge" and "knowing." The main criticism that McKim et al. (2017) leveled at higher education instructors is that while students graduate with an abundance of cognitive knowledge, they lack practical knowing. McKim et al. (2017) posited that a leadership development curriculum based on an experiential learning framework prepared students for professional leadership practice. Liu et al. (2021) would concur. Liu et al. (2021) noted that four elements set apart successfully instructed leadership development courses. First, instructors should establish and promote a learning community or network. Second, they must use appropriate experiential exercises that will engage the students in learning. Third, they ought to design a research-based course to ensure credibility. Fourth, students should assume leadership roles in various parts of the course. Students who actively participate in leadership opportunities might strengthen their leader identity and create readiness for advanced leadership concepts.

Plan for Complex Roles and Challenging Work Assignments. One way to facilitate leadership development is by offering complex leadership roles and planning challenging job assignments. When the job assignments align with leadership development goals, task experience and leadership development are enhanced (Day, 2000). Moreover, midlevel managers may pursue and accept stretch assignments at work to simultaneously gain specialized task experience in their profession and develop leadership competencies (Hezlett, 2016; Matsuo, 2015a). Day (2000) indicated that executives awarded approximately 31% of promotions to people who were ready for a

developmental challenge. Dedicated goal orientation and demonstrated learning readiness can motivate an individual to master and apply the learning gained through on-the-job experiences.

Informal Strategies for Leadership Development

To maintain a resilient organization, the pace of leadership learning needs to keep pace with the rate of organizational change. So, HR managers might choose informal learning strategies for leadership development because they have more flexible timing than a prearranged formal course. One of the advantages of informal learning is that it combines learning with and from more experienced colleagues alongside learning from tasks (Becker & Bish, 2017). Furthermore, managers stated that informal learning was vital to their ongoing development (Becker & Bish, 2017). Common informal experiential learning strategies that were successful for leadership development included coaching, reflective practice, and networking.

Expand Leadership Coaching Practice and Multisource Feedback. The purpose of coaching is to provide individual support and mentoring from an outside, experienced perspective. Coaches may assume multiple functions such as a learning facilitator, assessor, feedback correspondent, and confidant. In short, coaches aim to help individuals solidify their leadership competencies (Roupnel et al., 2019). The value of coaching is to create a psychologically safe environment where the learner is free to speak up and evaluate their thinking without being judged (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Roupnel et al., 2019).

Psychological safety creates the space for interpersonal trust and confidence to develop (Day & Dragoni, 2015). Roupnel et al. (2019) stated that for the coaching relationship to work, the manager and coach must (a) rank equally, (b) focus on personal and professional development goals, (c) identify critical incidents to discuss, (d) utilize reflection, and (e) use dialogue and conversation. The coaching information that Roupnel et al. advocated aligns with the experiential learning cycle. The coaching relationship could be a valuable source for vetting ideas stemming from the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation stages.

Colleagues are a source of support and feedback. Managers could leverage high-quality peer relationships to provide the midlevel manager with emotional support while conducting a mutually beneficial coaching practice (Parker et al., 2015). Therefore, peer coaching may be a viable and effective learning strategy for leadership development.

Facilitate Reflective Practice. Self and group reflection emerged as necessary components for leadership development. Sparr et al. (2017) suggested that the combination of requesting and receiving feedback and using reflection could improve employee learning confidence levels and enhance performance outcomes. According to Girvan et al. (2016), managers can support employees by scheduling opportunities for targeted reflection. In high trust work environments, targeted reflections for individuals or groups can deliver significant learning value because members reflect on prepared questions or thinking prompts linked to their developmental needs (Girvan et al., 2016; Walker, 2018). When groups reflect together, they may grapple with problems from a broader context that could foster leadership development.

Build Relational Networks. Networking is an essential leadership development strategy. A network includes people with strong and loose ties, but they are willing to support each other with information and resources so that all in the network can succeed (Megheirkouni, 2016). Managers should develop various types of networks, for example, task, career, and social support networks (Megheirkouni, 2016). A network might help a midlevel manager develop leadership because the colleagues (a) act as a sounding board, (b) challenge the soundness of ideas and plans, and (c) offer sage advice and guidance (Megheirkouni, 2016).

Midlevel managers can generate social capital by leveraging their interpersonal relationships and social networks. According to Day (2000), one of the primary leadership development tasks is to become competent with interpersonal relationships. A leader's social awareness and capability can influence trust, respect, empathy, and collaboration, for example. Mackay (2017) noted that two-thirds of professionals value social networks to enhance their professional development. Executives should support managers in building a formal and an informal social network as a strategy to increase their leadership capacity.

Creating and employing useful strategies to support employees to enhance their leadership development is a worthwhile endeavor. Genuine engagement with leadership development strategies may meaningfully enhance leader identity, increase social capital, expand self-awareness through coaching and reflection, and apply changes that strengthen leadership now and in the future.

Transition

In Section 1, I have introduced the foundation of the study, background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, significance of the study, and the literature review. I used current literature to provide a discussion on Kolb's experiential learning theory, including the four stages of the experiential learning cycle, leadership development, and experiential learning strategies used to enhance leadership development.

In Section 2, I reiterate the purpose statement and discuss the role of the researcher, participants, the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I introduce and present the findings, discussed the applications of this study to professional practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further research.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I describe how I approached this research study on strategies used for leadership development. I begin by reiterating the purpose statement, and then I describe the role of the researcher, the participants, the research method and design, population and sampling, and ethical research. Next, I describe data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data organization technique, and data analysis. I conclude by reviewing methods for accomplishing reliability and validity for this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies that some HR managers use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. The target population included HR managers from at least two organizations located in a west coast metropolitan area in Canada, who have successfully used strategies to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. Findings from this study could contribute to positive social change by serving as a leadership development guide for HR managers to use in their local organizations. As midlevel managers, employees, and other stakeholders enhance their leadership capabilities, they may communicate more effectively, initiate teamwork changes to improve business performance, and foster healthy workplaces. When managers are skilled leaders, they can create conditions for employees and the local community to thrive. Leaders might source new business opportunities that could create jobs, increase compensation, and potentially expand local tax revenues. Also, capable leaders may encourage employees to serve by volunteering in ways that benefit vulnerable community members.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher has a significant role when conducting qualitative research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). A researcher conducting a qualitative study is responsible for the generation and analysis of data (Arriaza et al., 2015). Previous researchers have asserted that the main role of the qualitative researcher is that of data collection (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018; Twining et al., 2017). As the primary researcher for this inquiry, I had an integral role in the data collection process.

I had not researched the leadership development topic, and it was not a professional work focus of mine. I was familiar with strategies used for leadership development because of my professional background as an educator in organizational behavior and HR. Also, I had previously instructed a leadership development course.

Researchers bear an ethical responsibility to protect human subjects (Bromley et al., 2015; Twining et al., 2017). According to the Belmont Report, the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice undergird and guide research involving human participants (Wessels & Visagie, 2017). The purpose of the principle respect for persons is to protect vulnerable populations, particularly those with compromised autonomy or a diminished decision-making capacity, such as children under the age of majority, individuals with a developmental disability, or elderly people. I followed the ethical principles found in the Belmont Report when conducting this study. Furthermore, I completed the required web-based training on protecting human research participants offered by the National Institutes of Health (Certification number: 1853004).

A researcher's personal bias can originate from life experience, values, preconceived notions, or an established philosophical stance (Roulston & Shelton, 2015; Smith & Noble, 2014). Yin (2018) argued that a qualitative researcher might be familiar with the issues they are exploring. However, excessive familiarity with the topic could generate researcher bias. Smith and Noble (2014) posited that bias can occur, intentionally or unintentionally, in any research design and during each research stage. Furthermore, Smith and Noble noted that although bias could impact the reliability and validity of study results, it is difficult to eliminate bias. Berger (2015) argued that a researcher could lessen bias by becoming aware of the potential for using a subjective lens to understand the data. My familiarity with some strategies used for employee development may have resulted in preconceived notions or expectations that could result in potential bias in this study. Using an interview protocol can support researchers in minimizing bias and increasing the efficacy of data collection (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017; Smith & Noble, 2014). The interview protocol provides a uniform data collection guide for a researcher and may contribute to research reliability (Yin, 2018). I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) as a consistent data collection guide in my study to reduce bias and increase data collection efficacy.

Participants

Researchers should seek out and select qualified participants who can help answer the research question (Gentles et al., 2015; Grossoehme, 2014; Morse & McEvoy, 2014). I selected participants who are HR managers working in separate organizations who have successfully used strategies to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers.

I gained access to qualified participants through my professional network, social media platforms such as LinkedIn, corporate websites, or professional associations. I acquired potential participants' names and contact information, such as email addresses and telephone numbers, through their social media profiles or organizational websites.

Qualitative researchers should build a relationship with each participant based on trust and respect (Berger, 2015; Chase, 2017; Morse, 2018). A productive working relationship begins with the initial contact between the researcher and the participant. I contacted each qualified potential participant by telephone or via email to introduce myself and invite their voluntary participation in the study. Researchers can develop a rapport with participants by explaining clearly the procedures used during the study and answering their questions (Chase, 2017). I explained the study procedures and answered any questions potential participants had.

Research Method and Design

Researchers base methodological decisions on the research question and the nature of the phenomenon under investigation (Saxena, 2017). Researchers recommend a qualitative research method to analyze a social phenomenon using textual data acquired through conversation (Grossoehme, 2014). A qualitative method is appropriate to explore strategies for leadership development. After reviewing various choices, I determined that a multiple-case study was the most relevant research design for my study.

Research Method

Researchers can select one of three possible research methods: qualitative, quantitative, or mixed (Yin, 2018). A qualitative method is a descriptive approach that

helps researchers interpret socially contextual experiences and grasp the meaning people derive from their experiences (Gehman et al., 2018). Qualitative researchers explore and interpret verbal, textual, or visual data related to a multidimensional social phenomenon (Bansal et al., 2018; Baškarada, 2014). Using inductive theorizing, a qualitative researcher seeks to uncover fresh ideas that could enhance existing knowledge (Bansal et al., 2018). For example, participant interviews may enable a qualitative researcher to acquire information that could reveal rich and full descriptions of the phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Sousa, 2014).

The quantitative researcher uses numerical procedures for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data and making statistical generalizations (Baškarada, 2014). A quantitative study is appropriate for testing hypotheses and conducting statistical analyses (Twining et al., 2017). Furthermore, in a quantitative study, a researcher identifies in advance the variables and relationships between variables that they are examining (Twining et al., 2017). Guercini (2014) indicated that quantitative techniques could help researchers acquire data expediently, extrapolate meaning, and draw conclusions without considering organizational actors or the context. For some applications, researchers may prefer to examine the data separately from study participants to promote objectivity (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Saxena, 2017).

Gibson (2017) explained that using a mixed method links qualitative and quantitative techniques, approaches, concepts, or language within one study. Researchers using a mixed method contemporaneously conduct statistical and textual analysis of the data (Gibson, 2017; Uprichard & Dawney, 2016). According to Uprichard and Dawney

(2016), the preferred mixed-method outcome for researchers is to obtain data synthesis from multiple methods that could lead to deep, meaningful analysis. However, in practice, the integration of qualitative and quantitative data to advance knowledge may be challenging to attain (Mertens et al., 2016; Uprichard & Dawney, 2016).

Neither the quantitative method nor the mixed method was suitable for this study because I did not use numerical procedures to test hypotheses or conduct a statistical analysis. A qualitative method was optimum because I collected nonnumerical data and full descriptions of a phenomenon. I applied the qualitative method because it was effective in answering the research question.

Research Design

I considered the choice of research design from the qualitative options available carefully. I selected a case study design because it was appropriate and valid for social science research (Yin, 2018). A case study design is suitable for business and organizational management research (Baškarada, 2014). Yin (2018) described a case study as an in-depth inquiry into a present-day phenomenon within its current context. A researcher can gather comprehensive information using a case study design when exploring bounded cases (Elman et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). I wanted to explore a phenomenon to collect comprehensive data using multiple data collection methods. I concluded that the multiple-case study design was appropriate for my objective.

I considered but did not select other qualitative research designs. Ethnography is a research design used to study patterns of social interactions to discover how group cultures are maintained (Kalou & Sadler-Smith, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

When conducting an ethnographic study, researchers typically immerse themselves in the environment to make meaning from peoples' perspectives and customs (Rogers, 2014). In this study, there was no need to discover how to maintain a group's culture. Therefore, ethnography was inadequate for this study.

Phenomenology is the study of how individuals experience and make meaning from aspects of their lives (van Manen et al., 2016). Researchers apply the phenomenological approach to explore peoples' perceptions and the meaning derived from their perspective (Degand, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015; van Manen et al., 2016). Phenomenology was inappropriate for this study because I was not seeking to explore the lived experiences of individuals.

Narrative research focuses on individual behavior relating to communication (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers use a narrative research design to explore participants' spoken or written stories or accounts and the meaning extrapolated from the events, activities, and results (Jones, 2016). This study did not entail storytelling from participants; therefore, using a narrative research design was not suitable.

Grounded theory refers to a theoretical concept that emerges from the extant data (El Hussein et al., 2017). Researchers use a grounded theory design to create new theories grounded in the collected data (Walsh et al., 2015). Because I did not aim to create a theory from the research, a grounded theory design was unhelpful.

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), researchers who apply a qualitative research design need to determine the point of data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new information is gathered (Grossoehme, 2014) and no new themes emerge (Fusch &

Ness, 2015). Qualitative researchers use data saturation as a criterion for ending data collection and analysis because additional data are redundant and will not surface new themes (Morse, 2015; Saunders et al., 2018). Conducting interviews and using an interview protocol are standard techniques to gather qualitative data (Twining et al., 2017). To ensure data saturation, I conducted participant interviews and member checking and reviewed organizational documents until no new information and no new themes emerged.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study included HR managers in a west coast metropolitan area in Canada, who have used successful strategies to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. Qualitative researchers deliberately select an appropriate sample from the population (Gentles et al., 2015; Gentles & Vilches, 2017). From the common sampling processes used in qualitative research, I considered using criterion sampling, snowball sampling, and purposeful sampling. According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), researchers use criterion sampling when participants must share a similar lived experience. I was not studying differences in lived experiences. Therefore, a criterion sample was not suitable. Researchers use snowball sampling to recruit participants through a referral process (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). A snowball sampling technique may be helpful when the researcher has limited access to the population (Gentles et al., 2015). Snowball sampling was not needed because I have access to the population through professional HR groups.

Gentles et al. (2015) indicated that a purposeful sample is beneficial for case study research. Researchers use purposeful sampling to identify and select participants who can provide practical knowledge that will address the study's purpose and answer the research question (Baškarada, 2014; Palinkas et al., 2015). To create a purposeful sample, a researcher predetermines the participant inclusion criteria (Grossoehme, 2014; Palinkas et al., 2015). For this multiple-case study, I used purposeful sampling to select participants who met the established criteria. The participant criteria included (a) employment as an HR manager in the west coast metropolitan area of Canada, and (b) HR managers who have used successful strategies to enhance leadership development of midlevel managers.

It is challenging to determine the sample size a priori for a qualitative study, so researchers use the notion of data saturation (Sim et al., 2018; Twining et al., 2017). Data saturation refers to achieving informational redundancy in the data collection process (Gentles et al., 2015). Data saturation is a threshold point that occurs when no new information emerges, no further coding is feasible, and no additional themes are generated (Fusch et al., 2017; Hennink et al., 2017).

A large sample does not ensure data saturation (Fusch et al., 2017). Case study researchers typically use small sample sizes (Elman et al., 2016). When interviewing small samples, data saturation is possible because saturation is about the depth and quality of collected data and not the number of participants or interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gammelgaard, 2017; Hennink et al., 2017; Malterud et al., 2016). For this multiple- case study, I gathered in-depth and quality data from a minimum of two

participants and documents until no new data or information emerged. I continued to collect data from additional participants and documents, until I reached data saturation.

A case study researcher exercises minimal control over the interview setting and typically defers the time and place to the preference of individual participants (Yin, 2018). Interviewees may be more disposed to offer their views when the researcher has minimized participant discomfort and has considered their needs carefully in the interview process (Berger, 2015; Chan et al., 2017). I ensured that the interview settings were comfortable, and I conducted the interviews at a time and place convenient to participants.

Ethical Research

Researchers must use ethical principles and practices when conducting research using human subjects (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). Ethical principles are applied by ensuring the informed consent and withdrawal rights of participants and protecting data (Chan et al., 2017; Wallace & Sheldon, 2015; Wessels & Visagie, 2017). The purpose of obtaining informed consent is to safeguard and protect the privacy, rights, and wellbeing of participants (Wessels & Visagie, 2017). Although an organization may grant permission to conduct case study research on-site, it is essential to obtain written and informed consent from individual participants (Chan et al., 2017; Greenwood, 2016).

According to Saxena (2017), the process of obtaining informed consent includes providing participants with information on the study's purpose, assuring confidentiality, and safeguarding anonymity during and after data collection by using codes instead of personally identifying information. To obtain informed consent, I contacted potential

participants by email to confirm that they would participate in the study. The participant

consent form outlined the following: (a) background information, (b) procedures, (c)

voluntary nature of the study, (d) risks and benefits of being in the study, (e) payment, (f)

privacy, (g) contact information for questions, and (h) consent to participate. Participants

provided their consent to participate and willingness for audio recording by replying "I

consent," to the email.

Researchers must inform participants of their right to withdraw from the study

without penalty (Chan et al., 2017; Greenwood, 2016; Wessels & Visagie, 2017). I

advised participants that they may withdraw from the research study at any time without

consequences. Participants could provide notification of withdrawal from the study by

sending me an email message, mailing a letter, or by a telephone call. Additionally,

because participation was voluntary, no compensation or incentives were offered for

taking part in the study. I offered a $10 gift card to thank participants for taking time to

share their expertise.

Academic researchers have a responsibility to follow ethics protocols and

approval processes implemented by their institutions' research ethics committees (Goroff

et al., 2018; Greenwood, 2016; Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). I adhered to ethical standards

and codes of conduct through integrity, fairness, respect, and protecting participants from

potential adverse effects stemming from participation in the study. For the wellbeing of

participants, data collection for this study began after receiving approval from Walden

University's IRB. The Walden IRB approval number is #05-26-21-0579785.

Personally identifying information on organizations and participants should be removed or concealed by utilizing a coding or numbering system (Grossoehme, 2014; Saxena, 2017). I assigned a pseudonym or a case identification code such as C1 or C2 to each organization. I kept the names of each participant private and coded responses using the pattern P1, P2, P3, and so on. Researchers need to store data securely to maintain participants' privacy and confidentiality during and after the research process (Goroff et al., 2018; Grossoehme, 2014). I have stored all raw data and records safely in a locked cabinet in my home office and will shred or destroy paper and electronic documents 5 years after the study concludes.

Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative researchers are the main instrument used for data collection since they hear, observe, and critically reflect on the data (Fusch et al., 2017; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018; Stewart et al., 2017). As the primary data collection instrument, I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews and member checking and reviewed public documents related to strategies used for leadership development of midlevel managers.

Researchers use semistructured interviews to collect perspectives and insights from participants who possess distinctive knowledge about the research question (Blakely & Moles, 2017; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Semistructured interviews are essential for case study data collection because the researcher can ask open ended questions and prompt for additional details or refocus the interview if needed (Arsel, 2017; Baškarada, 2014; Saxena, 2017). The first data collection technique I used was semistructured

interviews. John-Baptiste et al. (2016) recorded their case study interviews. Rosenthal (2016) advocated that researchers record interviews for data analysis. Renz et al. (2018) stated that audio recording and interview notes are useful for data collection. I audio recorded the interviewees' responses using a digital audio recorder to aid in data collection and analysis. Also, I compiled handwritten notes of interview responses.

Morse (2015) posited that to strengthen trustworthiness and prevent bias, researchers should adhere to an interview protocol. By following an interview protocol, researchers can generate thick descriptions, draw correct inferences, and develop themes from the collected data (Morse & McEvoy, 2014). As noted in Arsel (2017), interview protocols are necessary to help the researcher outline and manage the process, conduct uniform interviews, and maintain their attention on asking questions. I used an interview protocol to outline the process, create consistency among interviews, and maintain my focus on answering the research question. The interview protocol (Appendix A) listed the steps in the interview process and the interview questions that I asked the participants.

Member checking is an important validation method that helps ensure that the researcher understood the meaning that participants intended to convey (Birt et al., 2016; Chase, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017). Yazan (2015) argued that aside from increasing validity, it is a researcher's ethical obligation to minimize misunderstanding or the misrepresentation of interview comments. To validate data collected from interviews, I conducted member checking with each participant. I scheduled a supplemental interview with each participant to perform member checking. By sharing with each participant my interpretation of their interview responses, an interviewee can confirm, correct, or

augment their contribution. If I misinterpreted interview comments or interviewees had

additional remarks, I amended the transcribed data. Therefore, member checking

strengthens the validity and reliability of the interview process for this study.

Collecting data from multiple sources could reduce bias and bolster the reliability

and validity of research findings (Brooks & Normore, 2015; Yin, 2018). I chose to

review company documents as a second data collection technique. A document review is

a procedure used to collect, examine, and analyze digital and print textual data relevant to

a specific line of inquiry (Brooks & Normore, 2015; Gross et al., 2015). It is important to

recognize that documents are initially produced for a specific purpose, audience, and

time, and contain contextualized social facts (Brooks & Normore, 2015; Gross et al.,

2015). For this study, I planned to review internal company documents such as policies,

procedures, or manuals that are focused on strategies for leadership development.

However, since data collection occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, organizations

were understandably hesitant to permit access to corporate documents. Therefore, I

limited the secondary data collection method to reviewing publicly available documents

such as organizational websites, published papers, and information from news sources.

Data Collection Technique

Qualitative data is available in diverse forms, including spoken words, written

text, and visuals (Bansal et al., 2018). Researchers collect evidence for qualitative studies

through interviews, observation, documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts

(Sutton & Austin, 2015; Yin, 2018). By collecting data from several sources, a researcher

engages in methodological triangulation (Brooks & Normore, 2015). Triangulation

strengthens the trustworthiness of the collected data (Morgan et al., 2016). I used

methodological triangulation in this study by collecting data from multiple sources. The

data collection techniques for this research study are semistructured interviews and

member checking, and a review of documents related to strategies for leadership

development. Data collection began after Walden University's IRB granted its approval.

An interview protocol delineates the interview process researchers use to conduct

an interview (Arsel, 2017). Arsel (2017) indicated that an interview protocol should begin

with introductions, a description of the research purpose, an explanation for how the

interview will proceed, and an invitation to ask questions about the interview process.

The interview protocol for my study outlined procedures for the interview process,

including instructions about informed consent, a list of the interview questions, and

information about member checking. The interview protocol must be used for each

interview to ensure that participants answer identical questions, thereby minimizing bias

(Fusch & Ness, 2015; McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Yazan, 2015). For this study, I

conducted each interview using the same protocol (Appendix A).

After obtaining the contact information of potential participants, I contacted them

by telephone or via email and sent an invitation to participate in my study and the consent

form. Upon receiving a return email from the participant, I scheduled the date and time to

conduct the interview. Before the interview, I emailed a reminder message to the

participant confirming the date and time.

At the beginning of the interview, I (a) introduced myself and restated the purpose

of my research study, (b) reviewed the consent form, (c) noted the minimal risks inherent

in participating, (d) explained the withdrawal procedure, and (e) answered any questions the participant had. Next, I confirmed with the participant that they had previously provided their consent by email.

Sutton and Austin (2015) discussed that what is said and done in an interview should be documented through handwritten notes, audio, or video recording. I audio recorded each interview, which I transcribed at a later time. I asked permission to turn on the audio recorder. For each semistructured interview, I began by asking question 1 and continued until I had addressed all 9 questions. The interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Immediately following the interview, I reiterated my request for a member checking interview and arranged a suitable appointment time. To conclude the interview, I voiced my appreciation for the participant's time and expertise. Next, I collected available documents from public sources such as organizational websites, published papers, and news sources.

Interviewing is an established and effective technique for gathering in-depth evidence for qualitative case studies (Allen et al., 2015; Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2018). The advantages of conducting semistructured interviews are that the researcher can focus on answering the research question, and follow-up probes can elicit clearer, more in-depth responses (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Saxena, 2017). The disadvantages include the time consuming and costly aspects of conducting interviews and that interviewees may have limited availability for a meeting (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Ward et al. (2015) suggested that researchers might assume that conducting interviews face-to-face is the correct way. By using face-to-face interviews, a researcher can observe participants' nonverbal cues and cultivate interpersonal trust (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). While face-to-face interviews offer an important and valid form of qualitative data collection (Yin, 2018), telephone interviews are an acceptable alternative (John-Baptiste et al., 2016; McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Morse & McEvoy, 2014; Ward et al., 2015). For this study, I conducted the initial interviews by telephone at a time convenient for the interviewee. I conducted the member checking interviews via the telephone and email. I planned to conduct, at a minimum, two interviews. I discontinued collecting data from interviews and member checking and document reviews when I reached data saturation.

Case study researchers perform document reviews to confirm, augment, and triangulate data uncovered through other data collection techniques (Allen et al., 2015; Mackieson et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). To conduct a document review, researchers systematically analyze a collection of printed or electronic records that relate to answering the research question (Brooks & Normore, 2015; Mackieson et al., 2019). For this study, I reviewed publicly available company documents that related to strategies used for leadership development. These materials could provide evidence to clarify, corroborate, or refute previously collected data.

One advantage of reviewing internal company documents is that the data obtained cannot be readily accessed through other means like observation (Morse & McEvoy, 2014). Some documents like those found on a corporate website, for example, are easily

accessible but may not present information suitable for answering the research question. I collected public and nonconfidential company documents. There are two main disadvantages to using a document review as a data collection technique. First, documents may espouse an ideal but not reflect reality (Baškarada, 2014). Second, if participants select the documents, the choice could be subjective (Baškarada, 2014). For this study, I selected relevant company documents that were available in the public domain. Therefore, the quality and quantity of documents varied among the participants.

Member checking is a process that researchers use to increase rigor in qualitative research by validating the analyzed interview data with the participant (Birt et al., 2016; Smith & McGannon, 2018). Chase (2017) described member checking as a robust way to ensure the data collected through an interview is accurate, trustworthy, and valid. To perform member checking, the researcher provides each participant with a transcribed summary of their response to each interview question. The participant reviews the summary to check if the researcher's interpretation of their comments is accurate or if the data requires additions or corrections (Chase, 2017; Morse, 2015; Morse & McEvoy, 2014). I performed member checking by reviewing with each participant a transcribed summary of my interpretation of their response to each interview question. During a subsequent interview, the participant could confirm, correct, or supplement their answers. Upon receiving participant feedback, I amended the transcribed interview accordingly and use the revised version for data analysis.

One advantage of using member checking is that this technique lessens the risk of misinterpreting data and bolsters the credibility of the collected data and results (Morse &

McEvoy, 2014; Smith & McGannon, 2018). The main disadvantage is that interviews and member checking is the only data collection technique where participants confirm their input in a second meeting (Morse, 2015). Also, as Morse (2015) remarked, it is impractical and unrealistic to ask interviewees to recall and provide an accurate evaluation of what they previously said. I relied on the discretion of each participant to convey their assessment as accurately as possible during the member checking process.

Data Organization Technique

Case study researchers organize and properly store research to maintain the chain of supporting evidence, ensure data integrity, and add to the reliability of the study (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2018). Maher et al. (2018) commented that organizing and managing qualitative data effectively is a precondition for data analysis and disseminating results. Yin (2018) suggested that the raw data be stored separately from the written report. Accordingly, I created a research database to store documents in digital format on a password protected universal serial bus (USB) drive to maintain the security and future retrieval of raw data.

The digital research database included transcribed summaries from interview responses, digital interview recordings, member checking summaries, company documents that were obtained in electronic formats, and other documents used for the study. Using a generic coding system instead of personal identifiers helps to protect participants' privacy (Morse & Coulehan, 2015; Saxena, 2017). I labeled each digital file using an alphanumerical code that denotes each participant, for example, P1 or P2. I created a separate inventory log to track the available documents and files. As the sole

person with access to the collected raw data and analysis, I securely stored the password

protected USB drive and hard copies of documents that could not be scanned in a locked

file cabinet and will continue to do so for 5 years. After that time, I will delete electronic

data and destroy physical data.

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers use triangulation to bolster the validity of research

findings (Kern, 2018; Yin, 2018). Triangulation involves examining the same

phenomenon from diverse viewpoints (Kern, 2018). Yin (2018) noted that a researcher

could achieve triangulation by using various data sources, multiple investigators,

different perspectives or theories, or multiple methods. Case study researchers draw on

methodological triangulation to reinforce the credibility of the data collected, analyzed,

and reported (Morgan et al., 2016; Sousa, 2014; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018).

By converging perspectives, methodological triangulation may overcome the

inadequacies associated with using a single data collection method (Sousa, 2014). For

methodological triangulation to be meaningful and trustworthy, researchers must analyze

and report on all the data collected from multiple sources of evidence (Brooks &

Normore, 2015; Morse, 2015; Yazan 2015; Yin, 2018). The data analysis process for this

study employed methodological triangulation. I analyzed and reported on all data

collected from semistructured interviews and member checking and company documents

relevant to strategies used for leadership development, such as policies, procedures, or

manuals.

Qualitative data analysis involves an iterative, reflective, and recursive process (Baškarada, 2014; Chase, 2017; Gibson, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017). Yin (2018) delineated a five-step approach that qualitative case study researchers use for data analysis. The steps include (a) compiling the data gathered from all sources, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling and arraying the data into patterns or themes, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) concluding the analysis. For my study, I used Yin's 5-step approach to analyze all collected data.

Following Yin's (2018) analysis approach, I began by transcribing and compiling the collected data from interviews and member checking, and the documents submitted by participants. I used a voice-to-text word processor capability to transcribe the spoken data into documents. I reviewed the assembled documents to become familiar with the content. Furthermore, I noted any initial thoughts I have on the combined data. Next, I uploaded all data into NVivo, which is a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) program.

As Yin (2018) emphasized, QDAS can assist the qualitative researcher in data analysis. QDAS programs such as NVivo facilitate the efficient assembly, organizing, synthesizing, and analysis of the collected data (De Felice & Janesick, 2015; Houghton et al., 2016; Maher et al., 2018). Nowell et al. (2017) suggested that using a QDAS program could enhance the depth and rigor of data analysis. I used NVivo software to assist me with the data analysis.

To disassemble the data, I evaluated and logically separated the data according to codes. I determined the initial codes based on my review of the data, the conceptual

framework, and the literature. After I determined and applied the initial codes to the textual data, NVivo quickly located corresponding words and phrases. In this way, the software program helped me disassemble the data into smaller analysis units.

Qualitative researchers reassemble data by categorizing the coded text iteratively until meaningful patterns and themes emerge (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I reorganized and recombined the coded data according to the emergent broad and ancillary themes uncovered within the entire data set. Researchers interpreted the data to uncover constructive evidence that addresses the research question (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). First, I interpreted data by exploring relationships among the thematic data to uncover significant higher-level concepts. Second, I interpreted the concepts according to the literature and conceptual framework to discover clear and meaningful insights for addressing the research question. The final analysis step was to conclude the data analysis by answering the research question and reporting the findings.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative case study researchers conceptualize reliability and validity differently from quantitative researchers (Baškarada, 2014). Qualitative researchers signify reliability by using the term dependability (Morse, 2015). They convey validity by using the concepts of credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Morse, 2015). I ensured the reliability and validity of my study by addressing its dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Reliability

Baškarada (2014) suggested that reliability means that another researcher could use the same processes and protocols to replicate a study, and the findings should be consistent with the original study. Likewise, Morse (2015) posited that dependability occurs when processes for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data are consistently applied and are repeatable. Korstjens and Moser (2018) indicated that research dependability connoted the stability of findings over time. Similarly, Elo et al. (2014) stated that dependability refers to data stability across time and in various contexts. Therefore, dependability is predicated on qualitative researchers using clearly delineated protocols, transparent and consistent processes, and good record keeping to generate stable and repeatable findings.

The protocols and processes that I used to address dependability included an interview protocol, member checking, and an audit trail. An interview protocol standardizes the data collection process during the interview (Baškarada, 2014) and adds to the consistency and dependability of the research. I prepared and used an interview protocol (Appendix A) to conduct each interview. Morse (2015) explained that member checking helps the researcher to confirm those interview responses are correctly understood and are, therefore, more stable and dependable. I conducted a member checking interview with each interview participant to ensure the correct interpretation of their interview responses. Researchers increase the dependability of qualitative research by using an audit trail that explains the research process and decisions so that future researchers can follow the same steps to achieve consistent results (Elo et al., 2014;

Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lub, 2015). I created and will maintain for the appropriate

time, research records related to this study to create an audit trail. By using the

combination of an interview protocol, member checking, and an audit trail, I addressed

the dependability of this study.

Validity

Validity relates to the degree to which the research is represented accurately (Lub,

2015). In a qualitative study, a researcher addresses validity through credibility,

transferability, confirmability, and data saturation (Morse, 2015). The credibility of

qualitative research rests on the truthfulness of the findings (Elo et al., 2014; Lub, 2015).

To ensure research credibility, I employed methodological triangulation by conducting

interviews and member checking and reviewing relevant company documents. Baškarada

(2014) asserted that participant interviews are an essential source of qualitative evidence.

Member checking allows participants to provide systematic feedback on their interview

comments (Lub, 2015). As an element of triangulation, member checking is considered a

way to limit data misinterpretation, thereby increasing credibility (Morse & McEvoy,

2014). In the document review, the researcher determines if the conclusions drawn from

interviews and member checking align with the documentary evidence (Lub, 2015).

When a researcher confirms conclusions and findings drawn from multiple data sources,

their research is deemed credible (Lub, 2015). By using multiple data sources, I

confirmed the credibility of my research.

Transferability refers to the extent to which research findings may apply to other

contexts (Elo et al., 2014). Ultimately the reader and future researchers have the

responsibility to determine if the findings are transferable. However, the researcher is accountable to deliver thick descriptions and report results clearly and transparently (Elo et al., 2014; Lub, 2015). Lub (2015) asserted that researchers should keep an audit trail to assist in developing thick descriptions. Accordingly, I created research records as an audit trail.

Confirmability demonstrates the objectivity of the researcher (Morse, 2015). The use of overlapping methods through triangulation and accurate record keeping could strengthen confirmability. Furthermore, by acknowledging bias or preconceived notions, a researcher could demonstrate objectivity. The strategies I used for confirmability included methodological triangulation, keeping accurate records, and mitigating bias.

In qualitative studies, researchers typically seek multiple quality sources that have rich information (Hennink et al., 2017). Data saturation refers to the point in data collection where no new insights, issues, or themes emerge (Hennink et al., 2017; Fusch & Ness, 2015). The researcher employs the concurrent and iterative process of data collection and analysis to confirm data saturation (Gentles et al., 2015; Hennink et al., 2017). The techniques used for this study to ensure data saturation are interviews, member checking, and a review of relevant documents. A researcher can use the member checking process to confirm interview data and integrate additional participant comments (Morse & McEvoy, 2014). The document review process allows a researcher to uncover information that confirms, augments, or refutes previously collected data (Brooks & Normore, 2015; Owen, 2014). To ensure data saturation and research quality, the iterative

process of data collection and analysis continued until new information from participants

has ceased and repetitive themes emerged in data analysis.

Transition and Summary

In this section, I have provided details about the qualitative research process for

this multiple-case study on strategies that enhance the leadership development of

midlevel managers. I began by reiterating the purpose statement. Next, I covered the role

of the researcher, provided information about participants, and discussed the research

method and design. Then, I considered the population and sample and ethical research. I

followed with a discussion on the instruments and techniques for data collection, data

organization, and data analysis. Section 2 concluded with information on research

reliability and validity.

In Section 3, I will introduce the section, present the findings, and discuss the

application to professional practice. I will offer implications that may apply to social

change and convey my recommendations for action and recommendations for further

research. I will close the section with a personal reflection on the doctoral study process

and concluding remarks.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

This section comprises the findings of this research study on leadership development strategies, the professional practice applications, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and future research recommendations. Also, I offer a brief personal reflection and concluding remarks.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies that some HR managers use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. I conducted semistructured interviews and member checking with three HR managers from three organizations located in a west coast metropolitan area in Canada. The data for this study were collected from participants who offered their perspectives on leadership development strategies and publicly available organizational documents related to leadership development. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) employ multichannel learning, (b) cultivate a leadership mindset, (c) conduct coaching support, and (d) collaborate for enhanced leadership development. Participants viewed the leadership development strategies discussed as fundamental approaches that assist midlevel managers in conceptualizing and applying leadership within their organizational context. In the next section, I present the findings and an analysis of the four themes.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: What strategies do HR managers use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers? I applied methodological triangulation when I selected the data sources. The data sources I used to address the

research question included semistructured interviews and member checking and a review of organizational documents in the public domain, such as organizational websites, published papers, and news sources. One limitation that I encountered during data collection was that I could not gain access to confidential corporate documents related to leadership development. Therefore, I limited my secondary data collection method to reviewing publicly available documents only.

The research study participants included three HR managers from three organizations who had successfully used leadership development strategies with midlevel managers. I reached data saturation when participants provided no new data in the third interview, and no new themes emerged. I used the labels C1, C2, and C3 to identify cases, and P1, P2, and P3 to identify participants and ensure confidentiality. I used data analysis software to assist me in coding and analyzing data. The analysis revealed four major themes regarding strategies for leadership development: (a) employ multichannel learning, (b) cultivate a leadership mindset, (c) conduct coaching support, and (d) collaborate for enhanced leadership development. I considered the literature review evidence in conjunction with the major themes developed from the data analysis. The following is a discussion of the themes and the conceptual framework, experiential learning theory.

Theme 1: Employ Multichannel Learning

The focus of the first theme is employing multichannel learning for leadership development. Traditionally, learning and development initiatives delivered in a face-to-face format are assumed to offer higher impact learning (Singh et al., 2021) than

programs delivered online. The benefits of face-to-face instruction are well recognized and include socialization, networking, and meaningful instructor-learner dialogue (Singh et al., 2021). However, technological advances, mobile devices, and sophisticated online learning platforms now allow HR managers to use multiple channels to design leadership development programs tailored to suit learner preferences and the organizational context. Also, with the required limits on in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, a new emphasis on hybrid working, a blended approach using in-person and online learning, is increasing sharply in popularity and could deliver superior results than using a single approach (Singh et al., 2022; Summerfield, 2022; Zagouras et al., 2022). For this study, multichannel learning signifies the blend of channels used for content delivery, such as in-person or online formats, combined with preferences for leadership development content.

The HR managers in this study collectively indicated that they prefer using a multichannel approach to facilitate leadership development. Participants were thoughtful about which formats they choose for instructional design of leadership development content and resources. For example, P2 noted they consider and preplan the best way to approach leadership development. They partner with an external vendor to meld leadership best practices with managers' needs and the organizational context to create a customized synchronous face-to-face and asynchronous online program. As a result, midlevel managers can access information pertinent to their leadership development and role almost anytime, from almost anywhere.

Participants described a plethora of formats, programs, and resources used to deliver learning content. The strategies that work well in one organizational context may not be effective in another (Megheirkouni, 2018). Therefore, the mix of leadership development strategies will differ among organizations and potentially among individual learners. Some strategies offered during the interviews were shared within the participant group. For example, P1 said their leadership program includes coaching. Similarly, P3 noted they provide coaching for high potential midlevel managers and senior leaders. P2 discussed coaching as an expensive strategy they use ad hoc based on managers' developmental needs and budget.

Participants also discussed strategies unique to their organization and centered on the situational context or shared values. For example, P3 explained that leadership development strategies are created to relieve the situational pain points midlevel managers face. P1 noted that, after a training session, managers' leadership development can be strengthened by teaching followers what they have learned, integrated, and applied. Therefore, HR managers generate a concise digital teaching manual and slide deck so that midlevel managers can access materials at a moment's notice to provide followers with just-in-time training.

As noted earlier, participants use a range of delivery formats and approaches to deliver learning content for leadership development. The core delivery formats included: (a) onsite or in-person, (b) online or mobile, (c) synchronous, or (d) asynchronous. Table 1 provides details on the learning formats and approaches participants use to offer leadership development to midlevel managers.

Table 1

Multichannel Learning Formats Used For Leadership Development

Onsite or in-person		Online or mobile	
Synchronous	Asynchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Instructor-led workshops	Individual professional development plans	External vendor-led seminars	Academic courses
Peer discussion groups	Desk sets of frequently asked questions for situational leadership dilemmas	Academic courses	Individual peer mentoring
Coaching development seminars		Formal group coaching	Micro-learning modules
Individual coaching		Informal group leadership discussions	Podcasts
Group coaching		Leadership assessments and 360° feedback processes	Workshop slide decks or recordings
Leadership assessments and 360° feedback processes			Digital materials including checklists, guidebooks, manuals, frequently asked questions for coaching conversations

Note. Some learning formats apply to multiple categories.

All participants commented that their leadership development programs are

organized and customized according to hierarchical levels of leadership responsibility.

For example, P2 commented that they identify "specific leadership pathways for different

levels of leadership." Likewise, P3 asserted that they adapt their core leadership

development program to better apply to the frontline, midlevel, or senior organizational

leaders. P1 noted that for their leadership accountability program, midlevel and senior

leaders are separated into groups by experience levels. Additionally, P2 and P3 said that factors such as skill proficiency, job function, department, or location could influence the selection of leadership development programs for individual managers.

In the literature, Day (2000) cautioned that too much separation between frontline, midlevel and senior leaders during leadership development initiatives may limit exposure to challenges senior leaders face, thereby inhibiting the leadership growth of less experienced learners. The risk is that midlevel managers may be less equipped to cope with business complexity, accelerating change, or increased competition, thereby limiting managers' ability to take on senior or executive leadership roles. However, Kjellström et al. (2020) suggested that when leadership development initiatives do not target concrete needs and expectations, learners can experience serious adverse consequences that could impede professional growth. The viewpoint of Kjellström et al. (2020) aligns with this study's findings and reinforces the notion that as leaders mature, their learning needs and goals change. Midlevel managers may benefit from collaborating with others at the same hierarchical level who are experiencing similar complexities and challenges in their leadership roles.

Young or emerging leaders might need leadership development initiatives focused on their role and hierarchical level. I reviewed the C1 documentation and noticed that the organization offers an introductory leadership development program to emerging leaders so they can begin to upskill for future promotions. Likewise, in their documentation, C2 suggests they were developing emerging leaders to build capacity for known and

unknown future opportunities. P2 reinforced the viewpoint and noted that "one of the biggest parts of leadership development is new leader onboarding."

Equipping emerging leaders for upcoming responsibilities is supported in the literature. Yeager and Callahan (2016) remarked that as emerging leaders experience leadership development, their motivation to take on new leadership roles reinforces their nascent leader identity. Day and Dragoni (2015) noted that a robust leader identity boosts leadership skills acquisition. Similarly, Kjellström et al. (2020) commented that emerging leaders start to form a leader identity when they recognize the reciprocal relationships among self-development, leader role development, and leadership development. Therefore, the literature supports offering a specialized leadership development experience to emerging leaders to help them assimilate a leader identity that could foster skill development and build individual and collective leadership capacity.

Participants referred to combined approaches when they talked about their leadership development programs. For example, in a C2 document, P2 explained that their leadership initiatives are customized, combined, and aligned across the enterprise for optimal results. P1 suggested that their leadership program, leader accountability coaching, and mindset training are interconnected. Also, for P1, their leadership development program is effective because it strategically blends program content. Blending leadership development approaches is in line with recent literature. Walker (2018) suggested that instructional designers who use a multifaceted approach to leadership development can help cultivate enlightened leaders capable of thinking critically, taking sophisticated actions, and contending with business complexities.

Additionally, Kjellström et al. (2020) recognized that an amalgam of techniques—for example, networking, coaching, supportive mentoring relationships, informal meetings, and training—could work in concert to improve leadership competencies.

In contrast, some researchers indicated that leadership development approaches operate independently. For example, Day (2000) discussed 360-degree feedback, executive coaching, mentoring, networking, and job assignments as different developmental techniques. However, in a later article, Day et al. (2021) suggested that the leadership development field has evolved since Day's earlier article was published. The authors encouraged practitioners to think in less discrete terms and embrace a more dynamic approach. To that end, the findings from Theme 1 suggest that HR managers would do well to conceptualize leadership development more broadly and choose multichannel approaches optimal for the growth of their midlevel managers.

Theme 2: Cultivate a Leadership Mindset

The second theme, cultivate a leadership mindset, is a constructive leadership development strategy. The nature of a leader's mindset is a foundational lens that develops over time to orient and guide a leader's thinking, processing, and behavioral actions (Crane, 2021; Day et al., 2021; Gottfredson & Reina, 2021; Heslin & Keating, 2017). A leader's mindset is important because it can affect how they approach situations (Crane, 2021) and influence the work practices of followers, such as collaboration, motivation, and communication (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). The notion of mindset might explain why leaders who have similar experiences could perceive and interpret them differently from each other (Gottfredson & Reina, 2021). Researchers have

acknowledged that mindset is essential for leadership development (Crane, 2021; Gottfredson & Reina, 2021; Heslin & Keating, 2017). Nonetheless, according to Gottfredson and Reina (2021), only 12% of the 153 organizations surveyed for their study included mindset in their leadership development curriculum. All participants in this study commented on areas pertinent to cultivating a leadership mindset, such as self-awareness and reflection.

Participant 1 indicated that an essential component for leadership development is to increase managers' self-awareness and shift their mindset to "learn more about purpose, choice, and deep self-understanding." For P1, an individual manager's mindset is likened to "an oxygen mask":

If I help myself and learn more about who I am—what my purpose is and what drives me in this life—and if I start to comprehend that everything that I do is a choice (and we're blessed to live in a society where we have a choice), then I can get to a place where I have this great knowledge of myself. And when I can lead myself, then I can better lead others.

Furthermore, according to P1, their mindset training initiative transformed the C1 organizational culture by creating a common frame of reference between departmental leaders. This finding aligns with the literature. Scholars observed that managers primed through experience to develop a leadership mindset tend to align their outlook with the organizational context (Hastings & Schwartz, 2022; Heslin & Keating, 2017).

Other participants remarked that self-reflection and self-awareness are relatively new professional practices for their managers. Nonetheless, P2 and P3 acknowledged that

self-awareness is significant for leadership development. As reported by P2, leader–

follower conversations can help leaders gain some insight about themselves and others.

P2 offered that they "push leaders in the direction of … more conversations," adding they

urge leaders to "check in on people" and "be self-reflective about yourself and others."

P3 noted they are a fast-moving organization, and speed can create barriers to reflecting

and self-awareness. However, they build formal reflection time into the leadership

development program for their organization. To illustrate, P3 said they ask managers,

"for example, to take 15 minutes to think about what's happened." P3 added, "Overall,

there's an opportunity to build in this area." The more that self-awareness becomes a

normative workplace practice, the more opportunity there will be for an intentional pivot

toward building a positively focused leadership mindset.

While scholars support mindset as an important factor for leadership

development, they differ in their views regarding the types of mindset to promote. Some

researchers focused on the concept of fixed and growth intelligence mindsets (as

originated by Dweck, 2006) in their research on experiential leadership development

(Heslin & Keating, 2017; Liu et al., 2021). Others referred to multiple mindsets in their

research. For example, Gottfredson and Reina (2021) discussed four mindset types

beneficial for leadership development: (a) fixed and growth, (b) goal orientations, (c)

implemental and deliberative, and (d) prevention and promotion. Alternatively, Crane

(2021) explored mindsets focused on two categories: individual contributors and

collaborative leaders. The mindset pairs aligned with identified categories and included:

(a) performance or learning, (b) implementation or deliberative, (c) prevention or

promotion, and (d) inward or outward orientations. And lastly, Hastings and Schwartz (2022) included the notion of a global mindset in their discussion. As HR managers enhance their leadership development strategies with mindset development, they should first delineate what types of mindsets are desirable and best suit their organizational culture. Second, they will need to design experiences that support managers in acquiring the preferred mindsets.

According to participants, self-awareness and mindset development benefits included empathy and a willingness to have open, honest conversations with coaches, mentors, and followers. As P1 stated, "the idea is to help people have that deep understanding of self so that they could be more empathetic leaders. And that they understand where people were coming from so that they could have more open and honest conversations." Gottfredson and Reina (2021) summarized decades of mindset research into three primary reasons why mindset development is essential. First, mindsets are foundational for reasoning and decision making. Second, a positive mindset can influence perception and improve effectiveness. And third, if a manager is willing, their mindset can be changed through small, discrete interventions.

The Theme 2 findings showed that furthering mindset growth for midlevel managers is an essential and valid strategy for leadership development. As HR managers cultivate a leadership mindset within the midlevel manager group, they could experience an increase in managers' leadership engagement, performance, and effectiveness.

Theme 3: Conduct Coaching Support

The third Theme, conduct coaching support, is a leadership development strategy all participants encouraged. Midlevel managers might learn how to distill on-the-job experiences into productive actionable leadership values, attitudes, and actions by employing coaching support. P2 indicated that midlevel managers receive coaching support based on their responsibilities and "the situation they are going through". Similarly, P3 explained that they use a 70-20-10 model for leadership development. This model shows that 70% of leadership development is learned from experience, 20% from relationships, like coaching, and 10% from formal programs. The literature confirms that managers' experiences, like new and challenging work assignments or solving complex problems, provide opportunities to develop leadership competencies, especially when coaching interactions support learning (Day, 2000; Day & Dragoni, 2015; Parker et al., 2015; Pugh, 2020). Furthermore, the results from a search of relevant leadership development literature confirmed that coaching is considered a top intervention for leadership development (Vogel et al., 2021).

Participants mentioned that the overarching aim of coaching was to provide midlevel managers with feedback that would help them become more self-aware, accountable, and mature as a leader. For example, P3 pointed out that they were,

> going to target some of our high potential employees and provide them and their
> leaders with more coaching and look at their specific development path and plan.
> We'll ask more questions, create that plan with them, and ensure that we've taken

advantage of the different assessment tools we offer, such as feedback, if it relates

to their development.

P3 specified that they use 360-degree assessments, in-house surveys, and comments from

executives to provide midlevel managers with valuable feedback for their leadership

coaching sessions. P3 commented that "taking time to reflect on the feedback that they've

gotten" is a challenge because they work in a high-end, fast-paced industry. Immediate

feedback is essential when expectations of leaders include high-performance outcomes

(Griffith et al., 2017) because it promptly corrects or reinforces behavior (Yeager &

Callahan, 2016) so they can achieve optimum results. Church et al. (2021) cautioned that

leadership appraisals, like a 360-degree assessment, should be chosen carefully and used

for their intended purpose. Also, coaches should direct developmental feedback toward

leadership attributes that can be changed, for example, skills or competencies but not

personality traits (Church et al., 2021). Based on these findings, HR managers should

carefully consider which assessments are suitable for leadership development or if there

are other means to obtain relevant feedback for midlevel managers.

Providing midlevel managers with a sense of psychological safety or trust in the

coaching relationship is vital so they can voice opinions, have candid conversations, and

develop a leadership identity (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Parker et al., 2015). P1 offered the

following thoughts on psychological safety:

I think that's a big thing in business right now. This concept of psychological

safety. Do I work in a place and for people where I can take risks and try new

things? And do we look at failure as success if you learn from it and move on

from it fast? I will say that psychological safety is at the root of it. And it needs to

be driven by the executive and senior management level that gets to set the tone.

According to Day and Dragoni (2015), improving self-awareness and leadership identity

are core indicators of leadership development. Although participants did not use the term

leadership identity, they used other phrases that approximated this concept. For example,

P2 expressed that part of coaching was asking midlevel managers to define what it means

to be a leader at their level. P1 had previously asked managers how they needed to be to

show up as a leader in a specific situation. And P3 commented that managers should be

familiar with their leadership style and how that or other styles might apply in various

situations. These tactics might help midlevel managers form their identity as a leader.

Participants also noted that coaching conversations could provide situationally

driven or just-in-time learning for midlevel managers. Coaching for situational leadership

was affirmed by two participants. P2 explained that they designed their leadership

program according to (a) the situational or developmental needs of managers and teams

and (b) what they could legally require from managers or teams in a unionized

environment. P1 added another aspect about situational coaching conversations:

And I think the big thing is that coaching conversations always goes back to

asking how the situation applies to you? What's in it for you? What does this

situation mean for you? And then pairing their response with coaching within

your culture.

Learning to have productive coaching conversations was not exclusive to managers receiving coaching. When managers coach followers, others could perceive them as more engaged with and accountable for leading. P1 expressed that

> when individual leaders are being coached or coaching others, they're doing it
> with the sense of … asking questions and probing in a way that's pushing you to
> think about how you own this situation. It's not about anyone else.

P1 goes on to say, "it's building accountability" for self, others, and results.

Findings from Theme 3 confirm that cultivating a supportive coaching relationship is needed and can help managers reflect on their leadership role, almost as an outside observer of their own actions. Furthermore, by developing high-quality coaching relationships, HR managers can facilitate active learning, increase psychological safety, and decrease feelings of risk-taking (Parker et al., 2015). P2 expressed the value of coaching relationships for leadership development: "The biggest win is when you get them into a coaching discussion, so whether it's peer learning groups created specifically for the program, or it's during one-on-one coaching. That's where the secret is."

Theme 4: Collaborate for Enhanced Leadership Development

All participants contributed comments about learning in collaboration with others. Participants noted that they used cohort learning and peer-learning groups and, in C2, built an organization-wide community of learning. Managers considered it necessary to commit to the group and their leadership development to make collaborative learning work. And the benefits, according to participants, were shared problem solving, increased energy and enthusiasm, and engagement with their colleagues. As P1 mused, "managers

collectively began to tap into the leadership tools and frameworks they learned and then engaged and productive conversations." And P3 offered that their managers were "interacting with people outside of their department, so cohort learning was bringing together midlevel leaders throughout the company and within their region, talking about the specific goals that were working on, and what actions they can do." Leaders might characterize collaborative interactions as a shared sensemaking encounter that could lead to shared objectives, mutual support, and collective accountability (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Pattinson et al., 2018). Furthermore, there could be social capital results stemming from collaborative learning initiatives.

Some scholars characterize leadership endeavors as socially constructed because there is a reciprocal interpersonal influence between leader-leader or leader-follower relationships, attitudes, and actions (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Day, 2000; Wallace et al., 2021). Therefore, midlevel managers should expend considerable effort in building an internal and external network of collaborative relationships to strengthen their leadership identity and role. Those peer and colleague relationships might provide well-connected leaders with significant social capital benefits such as trust, respect, and information sharing (Day, 2000; Elkington et al., 2017). Furthermore, researchers recognize that effective external work relationships that accept reciprocity norms can lead to better individual and collective outcomes (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Day, 2000).

According to Cascio (2019), successful leadership development initiatives must optimize learning by aligning with the organizational culture. All participants contributed their thoughts on developing collective leadership capacity within the context of their

organizations. P2 identified that buy-in and support from the executive team were key

success factors for leadership development. Managers may become discouraged if they

perceive executive leaders do not support their development efforts with investments of

time, money, and other resources. And, their perceptions about these circumstances could

negatively shift their capacity for leadership development (Zaccaro et al., 2018).

Findings Related to Experiential Learning Theory

The experiential learning theory outlined by Kolb (2015) is a four-stage cyclical

framework consisting of the following stages: (a) concrete experience, (b) reflective

observation, (c) abstract conceptualization, and (d) active experimentation. Learning from

experience is not a spontaneous process (Day, 2000). Therefore, managers may not

adequately learn from their experiences unless they take an active role in reflecting,

designing new ways to approach situations, and testing the new approaches. Participants

in this study provided their comments on successful leadership development strategies. I

organized participants' comments into ancillary and broad themes. As shown in Table 2,

I noted the broad and ancillary themes with specific stages of experiential learning. In the

following discussion, I will explore this study's findings in relation to experiential

learning theory.

Table 2

Emergent Themes Compared to Conceptual Framework

Emergent themes		Stages of experiential learning			
Broad themes	Ancillary themes	Concrete experience	Reflective observati-on	Abstract conceptua-lization	Active experime-ntation
Employ multichannel	Program design	X	X	X	X

learning					
	Program content	X	X	X	
Cultivate a leadership mindset	Self-awareness		X		
	Mindset	X	X		
Conduct coaching support	Coaching	X	X	X	X
	Psychological safety		X	X	X
	Accountability	X			X
Collaborate for enhanced leadership development	Collaboration	X	X	X	X
	Organizational culture	X		X	X

Note. X denotes where the study findings best correspond to experiential learning stages.

The findings from Theme 1 employ multichannel learning, aligned with results from research conducted by Boak and Crabbe (2019). Boak and Crabbe's research confirmed that multichannel learning is a valid experiential learning strategy. The researchers gathered data from 215 mature managers to learn which experiences (except for formal education or training) they considered critical for leadership development. The results from Boak and Crabbe's investigation included the following experiences: taking on challenging work, being coached and coaching others, receiving feedback, networking, and learning from role models. Additionally, they reported that personal reflection, support, and feedback helped learn leadership. Participants in this study made similar observations about formats they used for successful leadership development (P1, P2, and P3). By using a multichannel learning strategy, managers can efficiently and

effectively move through and complete the experiential learning cycle and boost their leadership development.

Heslin and Keating's (2017) discussion on the role of mindsets in experiential leadership development suggested that leaders will better apprehend lessons learned from experience when they commit to mindset development and reflection. Furthermore, the researchers indicated that leadership identity strength influences leadership development. Heslin and Keating's research supports this study's Theme 2, findings on cultivating a leadership mindset as an effective strategy for leadership development. Kiersch and Gullekson's (2021) research results on guided self-reflection for leadership development supported this study's Theme 2 findings that self-awareness is helpful in cultivating a leadership mindset. Informed by experiential learning theory, Kiersch and Gullekson found that, as a developmental practice, reflection is effective in improving self-awareness, empathy, and courage, all qualities required for leadership development. Researchers have acknowledged that reflection and observation are key aspects of experiential learning (Becker & Bish, 2017; Buchanan, 2017) and contribute to developing a leadership mindset (Kiersch & Gullekson, 2021).

The findings from Theme 3, conduct coaching support, relates to every stage of the experiential learning cycle. Page and Margolis' (2017) research highlights coaching practice as a strategy applicable to leadership learning. The researchers commented that coaching is a value-added strategy that, when added to experiential learning, upholds the wisdom of learners seeking to understand themselves and their leadership (Page & Margolis, 2017). Furthermore, coaching support as a formal learning intervention is

effective for short- or long-term experiential learning (Day, 2000) and can improve leadership development outcomes (Day et al., 2021; Roupnel et al., 2019). Theme 3 aligns with previous research that coaching support is a favorable intervention to facilitate experiential leadership development.

Collaboration can be an influential intervention at all stages of the experiential learning cycle. The findings from Theme 4, collaborate for enhanced leadership development, is supported through research conducted by Page and Margolis (2017). According to Page and Margolis, collaboration helps individuals engage in experiential learning, particularly abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. They suggest that psychological safety is important for learning in a collaborative setting. In Roupnel et al.'s (2019) research, scholars suggested that effective collaborative learning occurs best within secure relationships. Roupnel et al.'s (2019) assertion aligns with comments from P1 in this study's findings.

The findings of this study on strategies that enhance the leadership development of managers are consistent with prior experiential learning research. Experiential learning provides a dynamic and effective framework that HR managers can use to understand and evaluate leadership development strategies.

Applications to Professional Practice

Leadership development initiatives remain a costly endeavor for organizations. The findings of this study are noteworthy for the professional organizational practice of midlevel managers who encounter leadership challenges. The study aimed to explore leadership development strategies helpful for midlevel managers. As the demand for

expert mature leadership increases in our organizations, it is critical that midlevel managers acquire the mindset, competencies, and skills commensurate with the need. And HR managers should design developmental experiences that can accelerate midlevel managers' advancement into senior leadership roles. The results of this study revealed that to strengthen and enhance leadership development, HR managers could employ multichannel learning, cultivate a leadership mindset, conduct coaching support, and ensure collaboration. Applying these strategies might help HR managers improve their professional success by delivering dynamic leadership development initiatives that can activate midlevel managers' potential and increase their leadership capacity.

The participants in this study provided valuable comments and reflected on what made their leadership development programs effective and where there might still be gaps. The findings of this study could apply to HR professionals who also experience gaps in their leadership development programs. Failure to appropriately address the discrepancies and attend to the leadership development needs of midlevel managers may result in decreased job satisfaction, increased turnover among the midlevel manager level, and managers who are less capable of handling workplace dilemmas.

The literature review uncovered evidence that supported experiential learning for leadership development. This study's findings revealed strategies aligned with the literature and are valid for expanding the leadership capacity of midlevel managers. For midlevel managers who commit to building first-rate careers, engaging with the experiential learning process is essential. It stands to reason that not all managers will engage in leadership development and experiential learning with the same enthusiasm or

commitment. However, assuming the 70-20-10 rule (as noted in P3's remarks on coaching) is sound, managers ought to examine and reflect on their experiences and then imagine, create, and implement acceptable alternatives that could alleviate workplace difficulties and optimize business opportunities.

As emerging leaders accept new assignments or complex roles, they can experientially design and develop their identity as a leader. Day and Dragoni (2015) suggest that acquiring a leadership identity is an iterative process that occurs over time. If novice leaders fail to affirm and grow their leadership identity, they may be ill-equipped to accept promotions or lead others through organizational change. However, as emerging leaders strengthen their leadership identity, they may be positioned to accept increased future responsibilities and confidently enjoy a meaningful leadership identity.

Socially connected organizational leaders could straightforwardly gain access to the resources they need (Wallace et al., 2021) to accomplish their goals. Leaders can gain social capital through their social networks and by creating collaborative relationships, engaging with coaching practices, and working across boundaries (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017; Day, 2000). According to Elkington et al. (2017), social capital assets are noneconomic. However, organizational leaders should not underestimate the value of leveraging relationships with diverse stakeholders, resolving conflict, or marshaling resources appropriate to resolve complex business problems.

Implications for Social Change

The findings and recommendations from this study might contribute to positive social change efforts by providing effective guiding strategies for community leaders

inclined to improve their leadership capabilities. Leaders in the nonprofit sector might value the significance of helpful leadership development strategies that encourage coaching, self-awareness, and a leadership mindset. These strategies might reinforce overarching values in nonprofit organizations, such as collaboration, mindfulness, and citizenship. According to Wallace et al. (2021), leaders who engage in the development process are more likely to acquire strong social bonds resulting in increased trust and mutual respect. These interpersonal competencies are essential for supporting a team, establishing values and goals, and generating a shared sense of purpose (Wallace et al., 2021). Furthermore, nonprofit leaders can better prepare their midlevel managers for upcoming service opportunities by tapping into the leadership development strategies offered in this study.

Retired managers or managers working in the local community could personally benefit from honing their leadership competencies by engaging with the development strategies noted in this study. Day et al. (2021) suggested that people, regardless of status, can use workplace or everyday experiences for developing leadership, resulting in clarity about and accountability for vocational and life choices. For example, retirees with mature leadership skills could become esteemed and dependable volunteers on civic boards and committees or offer leadership mentoring for school-age youth in their communities. Individuals who enlist in leadership development using the strategies from this study might enhance their capacity for positive social change in their community.

Recommendations for Action

Based on this study, HR managers could employ multichannel learning, a leadership mindset, coaching support, and collaboration to enhance leadership development outcomes within the midlevel manager group. Executives and HR managers responsible for facilitating leadership development could consider implementing the following recommendations.

The first recommendation involves creating an organizational culture that supports leadership development. Executives can demonstrate their support in at least two tangible ways: (a) providing the resources that aid development, such as challenging workplace assignments, coaching, and feedback mechanisms, and (b) delivering the technological resources that can facilitate online conversations and multichannel learning.

A second recommendation is to assist emerging and midlevel leaders in developing a leadership mindset. It will take time for leaders to develop a leadership mindset: time spent in reflection, becoming more self-aware, exploring assumptions, and making changes. Therefore, executives must allow developing leaders to carve out time for these critical routines.

The third recommendation is to provide informal and formal collaboration and networking opportunities between colleagues. Collaboration might lessen the functional or hierarchical barriers that impede business operations and profitability. Additionally, dynamic and productive relationships might help leaders generate shared goals and action plans and form an organizational norm of collaboration.

I plan to publish this research study in ProQuest. Through undergraduate and graduate lectures, I intend to disseminate this study's results in academic settings. Furthermore, I look forward to designing leadership development courses for emerging and midlevel leaders in a cross-cultural professional context. I anticipate sharing the findings from this study with HR professionals as opportunities arise.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research aimed to explore strategies that HR managers use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers. I used interviews and member checking, and document reviews to collect data. Because I conducted data collection during the Covid-19 pandemic, HR managers understandably declined to allow access to review internal documents. Therefore, I limited my secondary data collection method to a review of public documents. Future researchers could benefit by exploring strategies used in a single national or multinational organization that grants them advance access to internal leadership development documents. Alternatively, researchers could include a third data collection method like a focus group to broaden and enhance the findings. Moreover, future researchers could expand the findings from this study by using a different or larger geographic area. Additionally, increasing the number of participants might provide contrasting viewpoints that could increase the richness of collected data.

Several research recommendations could extend the findings from this study. First, researchers could investigate leadership development strategies for specific professional groups, such as entrepreneurs, bank managers, or hospital administrators. Second, researchers could think more broadly about leader self-development and

investigate strategies to help an emerging leader adopt an effective leadership identity. Third, since previous researchers identified various mindsets that aid leadership development, new research could shed light on which mindsets are optimal. And, fourth, future researchers could use this study as an initial reference point to investigate if there are gendered preferences in leadership development strategies or if there are strategies that optimize leadership development within virtual or cross-cultural team settings.

Reflections

I chose the topic of strategies for leadership development because I noticed that some HR managers wonder which best practices to apply so that emerging leaders can maximize their opportunities for success. Also, emerging and midlevel leaders appear to lack confidence as they take on more complex roles and projects. I was interested to understand how HR managers approached leadership development successfully.

Prior to this study, I was familiar with the leadership topic and some leadership development strategies. However, I had not conducted formal research about leadership development. During data collection, I ensured that I listened with an open mind and maintained an impartial and evenhanded approach during data analysis. I was thankful that participants were keen to share their leadership development expertise with me. The doctoral study research process was more time consuming than I imagined and required considerable dedication and a long-term commitment. Although my investment in the process was significant, I plan to use my newfound insights and knowledge to bolster my teaching career, expand my writing and consulting practice, and strengthen my professional network.

Conclusion

The leadership skill and competence of midlevel managers could significantly influence business growth and success. Without effective leadership development, managers may be unable to lead their people, guide change efforts, cope with business complexities, or take advantage of future profitable business opportunities (Vince & Pedler, 2018). Furthermore, deficient leadership development may cause managers and their organizations to suffer financial hardship and an unfavorable reputation in the business community. Therefore, executives and HR managers must implement effective leadership development strategies to empower and support managers in their leadership roles. The results of this study revealed four leadership development strategies: employing multichannel learning, cultivating a leadership mindset, conducting coaching support, and collaborating for enhanced leadership development. Managers who use these strategies can mature their leadership mindset while acquiring and employing sophisticated leadership competencies to enhance performance outcomes and contribute to peoples' personal and professional lives within workplaces and the community.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Organization Pseudonym: _____ Organization Code: _____

Participant Identification Code: _____Date:_____ Time: _____

1. Conduct the introductions

2. Restate why I am conducting this research (the purpose)

3. Confirm with the participant that they retained their electronic copy of the consent form

4. Review the consent form, noting minimal risks inherent in participating and the withdrawal procedure.

5. Respond to participant questions or concerns.

6. Confirm with the participant that they indicated their consent by returning the email with the words, "I consent."

7. Ask permission to record the interview. Start the audio recording.

8. Introduce the participant using their identification code for the recording. Also, state the interview date and time.

9. Begin the interview with the first question. Continue the interview until I ask all of the questions.

   a. What strategies did you use to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers?

   b. How did these strategies provide support for leadership development?

   c. How did you assess the strategies you described regarding their effectiveness for leadership development?

d. What strategies did you use to encourage managers to become responsible for their development as a leader?

e. What strategies did you use to help managers gain insights from reflecting on recent leadership experiences?

f. What strategies did you use to encourage managers to try out new leadership capabilities?

g. For the strategies you described, what external agents, if any, did you use to support managers in their leadership development?

h. What documents can you describe that were used in any leadership development strategies?

i. What other information can you provide regarding successful strategies that you have used to enhance the leadership development of midlevel managers?

10. Conclude the interview.

11. Discuss with the participant how we will proceed with the member checking process. Arrange supplemental interview to conduct member checking.

12. Ensure the participant has contact information for follow up questions or concerns.

13. Offer thanks to the participant for their time and contribution.

14. This completes the interview protocol