2014

Learning Strategies and Leadership Behaviors of Small Business Leaders in Northeast Florida

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Suggested Citation
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Learning Strategies and Leadership Behaviors of Small Business Leaders in Northeast Florida

by

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A dissertation submitted to the College of Education and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

June 2014
Dedication

This study is dedicated to my children, Kennedy, Pierce, and Finn. I had the joy of being the daughter of a doctor and hope to impart my passion for continuous learning and discovery to you.
Acknowledgements

I have always had an insatiable appetite for acquiring new knowledge and a passion for my studies. The completion of a dissertation is not a solo endeavor. My academic studies at the doctorate level and through the dissertation process would not have been possible without the guidance and support of many people.

I wish to thank Dr. Warren Hodge for serving as my initial chair process. Your willingness to meet with members of Cohort 18 provided me the opportunity to truly align my passion with my topic and develop solid research questions. I am extremely grateful for Dr. Francis Godwyll’s willingness to serve as my chair during a very challenging part of my study. I began to question whether I would every complete my goal of earning my doctorate degree. I appreciate your honest feedback, support, and ability to challenging my thought process. Additionally, I wish to thank my committee members Dr. Sandra Gupton, Dr. Luke Cornelius, and Dr. Pingying Zhang. I appreciate your feedback on my topic and your willingness to contribute your time to my study.

Thank you to my fellow Cohort 18 members. This has been a challenging journey, but I always knew I had friends experiencing the same highs and lows. I am particularly grateful to Gail Patin for providing clarity during a challenge and her continual encouragement. Of course, I must mention Heather Griffin for her friendship and support. I knew I could always count on you for a quick response to a text or phone call when I felt beyond overwhelmed.

To my mom and dad, I am so appreciative of your love and support during this journey. Your belief in me never wavered as you made many sacrifices to support my academic goal. Thank you, Mom, for your willingness to “move” to Florida and care for your granddaughter so I
could focus on my studies. I am particularly grateful for the push you gave me to get out the door and back on campus when Kennedy was only 10 days old. I thank you dad for being my #1 cheerleader and serving as a true example of a scholar. It may sound silly, but I often thought of the pen set my grandfather gave you upon your graduation from Columbia University with your doctorate.

To my greatest supporter, my husband Steve, I cannot begin to express how much your love and support has meant to me. You are my strength. I am so grateful for the sacrifices you have made as a result of my desire to earn my doctorate degree. To my beautiful daughter, Kennedy, thank you for your gorgeous smile and curious eyes. You will never remember how many hours you spent cradled on my lap as I researched and wrote. To my baby boys, Finn and Pierce, my unexpected yet extremely needed final motivators, thanks for providing me the strength and focus at the end to follow through on my commitment.
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Abstract

The intent of this study was to examine the leadership behaviors and learning strategies of Successful Small Business Leaders (SSBLs) in Northeast Florida. Information gathered during this study may help current and future small business owners develop, maintain, and make their organizations more productive through the use of the learning strategies and leadership behaviors employed by SSBLs. Through a two-prong approach, the study examined both leadership and learning. The study addressed the following two questions: 1) What learning strategies are used most by successful small business leaders? and 2) What leadership behaviors are exhibited most by successful small business leaders?

The Delphi method was selected as the research approach for this study because it provides the most flexible approach to seeking the perspective of SSBLs. The Delphi method uses a group of experts who anonymously discuss and respond to the research issue. A two-phase Delphi study design utilized both participant surveys and interviews. An analysis of the data collected during Phase 1, or the survey phase, identified seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies. Examination of the seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies by the participants demonstrated agreement among the behaviors and strategies identified. However, participants did not reach an agreement in the ranking of the leadership behaviors or learning strategies.

The study contributes to the research of leadership behaviors and learning strategies of leaders as the focus was solely on those in a small business setting. The best practices and other data discovered during this Delphi study on small business may be used to better define and understand the characteristics of SSBLs.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Small businesses are frequently referred to as the backbone of the American economy. An estimated 27.2 million small businesses were operating in the United States in 2011 (Baylor Business Review, 2011, *The State of...*). The Small Business Association (SBA) defines small businesses as those with 500 employees or less. Small businesses employ approximately one half of the American private-sector workforce. In 2009, there were approximately 26.8 million small businesses in the United States employing 56.3 million workers (Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2012). Small businesses employ approximately 50% of the private sector workforce in the United States. Put another way, half of private sector jobs are with small businesses or firms with fewer than 500 employees (Headd, 2010).

According to the Small Business Administration (SBA), businesses with fewer than 500 people created 65% of new jobs between 1993 and 2009. Despite the vital role small businesses play, little is known about their distinct learning and leadership strategies. It is essential to understand the learning and leadership strategies of small businesses because of their influence on the economy in the United States. “Small businesses drive innovation, create 21st century jobs and increase U.S. competitiveness” (Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2012, p. 5). Therefore, it is important to examine small businesses to better understand what behaviors are most likely to facilitate their success and contribution to the community.

An analysis of data released by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC) in 2011 indicated an increase in commercial and industrial lending. However, loans to small businesses have consistently decreased since June 2008 (Fenton, 2011). A loss of capital to a small business inhibits growth and, thus, affects job creation. With small businesses accounting for approximately
50% of the private sector employment, it is important to examine successful small business leaders, especially during a recession or an economic downtown.

Small businesses operate in a dynamic environment with consistent challenges and changes. A 2011 survey of small business owners indicated that growing the business (27%), finding time to develop and run the business (16%), and finding the right talent (4%) were concerns that kept small business owners up at night (Dennis, 2005).

Despite the economic downturn, 83% of small business owners remain passionate about their work (Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2012). Seventy-five percent of respondents to a national survey indicated providing jobs and opportunities for their community was a passion behind their continued drive (Citibank, 2012). Owners felt they had made positive contributions by generating jobs and spurring economic growth through their small businesses (LoCascio, 2001).

In Northeast Florida, which includes Clay, Duval, and St. Johns counties, the focus area for this study, there are approximately 23,830 business establishments, 77% of which are small businesses that account for approximately 40% of the employment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2011). The downturn of the economy has influenced many small businesses in this part of the state. In 2006, the unemployment rate in Northeast Florida was 3%, but it peaked at 12% in April, 2010 (BLS, 2011). During the same period, the number of small business establishments in Duval County declined approximately 6% (BLS, 2011). However, in Northeast Florida, a significant proportion of small businesses continued to thrive and grow during the recession.

This purpose of this study was to better understand those businesses that have thrived
during the economic downturn. The principal question of the study was this: What are the learning strategies and leadership behaviors of successful small business leaders in Northeast Florida?

**Statement of the Problem**

Small businesses are important contributors to a strong economy (Acs, Tarpley, & Phillips, 1998; Baumol, 2005; Berry, 2012; Collin & Allen, 2002). The development and growth of small businesses are particularly relevant during a recession. Approximately 50% of small businesses continue to operate past 5 years, which means that 50% fail (More than Half, 2011). This statistic corroborates information from the SBA Office of Advocacy, which found:

- that seven out of 10 new employer firms survive at least 2 years, half at least 5 years, a third at least 10 years, and a quarter stay in business 15 years or more. Census data report that 69 percent of new employer establishments born to new firms in 2000 survived at least 2 years, and 51 percent survived 5 or more years. Survival rates were similar across states and major industries. Bureau of Labor Statistics data on establishment age show that 49 percent of establishments survive 5 years or more; 34 percent survive 10 years or more; and 26 percent survive 15 years or more. (2011, p. 1)

In his book, which SBA references on its website, Ames (1983) listed eight reasons why small businesses fail. They include,

- Lack of experience
- Insufficient capital
- Poor location
- Poor inventory
- Over-investment in fixed assets
- Poor credit arrangements
- Personal use of business funds
- Unexpected growth

Recently Goltz (2011) listed the following reasons for failure:

- Not enough demand for the product or service
- Owners who cannot get out of the way
- Out-of-control growth
- Poor accounting
- Lack of a cash cushion
- Operational mediocrity
- Operational inefficiencies
- Dysfunctional management
- Lack of a succession plan
- A declining market

While the challenges described by the SBA and the reasons for failure listed by Ames (1983) and Goltz (2011) are substantive and legitimate, this study focuses on learning strategies and leadership behaviors that may be among the principal reasons why some small businesses succeed while others fail to understand the learning strategies, leadership knowledge, and skills used by successful small business leaders. Results from the study could assist in developing other private- and public-sector organizations. The results from the study could also be helpful to communities as small business success directly impacts the growth and development of the community (Berry, 2012; Collin & Allen, 2002).
Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify essential leadership behaviors exhibited and learning strategies used by leaders of successful small businesses in Northeast Florida. The two goals are to determine what learning strategies are used most by successful small business leaders, and what leadership behaviors these leaders believe are most important.

Conceptual Framework

Several learning and leadership theories framed this study. Among these theories are adult learning theory (Brookfield, 2000; Illeris, 2003, 2004, 2009; Knowles, 1984, 2010; Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007), cognitive learning theory (Bruner 1961; Piaget, 1952), experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), reflective practice (Schon, 1983), emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2001, 2006), transactional and transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985, 1991, 1993; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Yukl, 2002), change theory (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Fullan, 2011), and systems theory (Senge, 1999; 2006; Vaill, 1996; Yukl, 2002). Since none of these theories singly provides a complete framework for the study, relevant principles and concepts were selected from each theory as needed.

The following two sections present a brief summary of several learning and leadership theories which frame this study. The learning theories presented include andragogy or adult learning theory, cognitive learning theory, critical reflection including Schon’s reflective practice. Transactional and transformational leadership, change theory, and systems theory are the leadership theories presented.

Learning

An understanding of the learning habits of small business leaders demands a
consideration of andragogy, which is a theory of adult learning developed by Malcolm Knowles (1968). Knowles contrasted andragogy, the science of teaching adults, with pedagogy, the science of teaching children. Andragogy focuses on six assumptions related to the motivation of adult learning: the need to know, prior experience as the foundation for learning, readiness to learn, relevance of the learning experience, content-oriented learning, and internal motivation as the most potent form of motivation (Merriam et al., 2007). Andragogy posits that adult learners should be self-directed and make decisions about their own learning.

Before the development of cognitive learning theory, changes in behavior were the metric for determining whether learning had occurred. Cognitive learning theory defined learning as a change in people's mental structures and brain-based processes rather than changes in observable behaviors (Kolb, 1984). Cognitive learning theories explained the mental processes that enable individuals to learn and use knowledge (Piaget, 1954). Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) viewed learning as an active and dynamic experience rather than a static experience. Tennant (1993) found learning through activity to be more meaningful for adults. McCall (2004) and Mintzberg (2004) found experience to be the primary source of learning to lead. Therefore, and with the perspectives of these scholars in mind, it is important to understand the foundation of both cognitive and experiential learning theories when investigating the learning behaviors of successful business leaders.

Adults develop meaning through critical reflection; change occurs when the nature of their assumptions, biases, beliefs, or values are challenged (Mezirow, 1991; Schon, 1983). Critical reflection influences change and growth. Schon (1983) was the first to describe the reflective practitioner as an individual engaged in continuous learning through action. Mezirow (1991) further elaborated on reflection as a key component of learning and defined the process as
transformational learning. This is a process set in motion with a disorienting dilemma, which requires three elements: experience of the learning, critical reflection, and action. The leader of a learning organization must follow this process in order to change his or her mental models, develop personal mastery, and employ systems thinking.

**Leadership**

Burns (1978) first introduced the concept of transformational leadership as a process in which leaders motivate followers to do more than expected. Bass (1985) further developed the theory and contrasted two types of leadership behavior—transformational and transactional. Transformational leaders are characterized by their ability to integrate creativity, persistence, and energy into the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders instill confidence and loyalty; they trust and motivate their employees (Yukl, 2002). In contrast, transactional leaders focus on the goals of the organization and use rewards and punishments to influence the behavior of followers (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 2002). Basically, transactional leaders develop an agreement with their followers by explaining what they will receive if a task is performed correctly and what will happen if a task is done incorrectly.

Transformational leadership was a key component of Senge's (2006) theory of a learning organization. He defined leadership as a process for nurturing people's capacity for learning. Those organizations that consistently lead each sector focus on continuous learning and development within all areas of the business. These are known as learning organizations, which are organizations that value learning and emphasize continuous improvement. Learning organizations, as analyzed by Senge (2006), are defined by five disciplines: developing personal mastery, changing mental models, building a shared vision, participating in teams, and systems thinking. Significant resources are used to develop workers at all levels to support dynamic
growth and innovation (Mumford, Eubanks, & Murphy, 2007). Learning organizations, especially small businesses, are able to learn more quickly than the competition thus building competitive advantage.

According to Senge (2006), there are seven action imperatives of a learning organization. First, a learning organization provides continuous learning opportunities. Second, a learning organization promotes inquiry and dialogue across all parts or systems. Third, leaders of learning organizations encourage collaboration and team learning. Fourth, these leaders create systems to capture the shared learning opportunities. Fifth, individuals within a learning organization are oriented towards a shared collective vision. Sixth, the organization connects to its environment and finally individual and organization strategic leadership for learning influences growth and development.

Organizations may encounter barriers or inhibitors during the dynamic process of pursuing the seven action imperatives. Members of the organization may be unable to recognize and change existing mental models. The power or influence of the individual may limit time spent in collaboration or on team learning efforts. Additionally, individuals within the organization may lack the skills or readiness for a system-wide learning.

Incorporating the disciplines of a learning organization is particularly challenging for a small business on a tight budget. Learning organizations invest heavily in training and development. The leaders within each system of the organization have the most influence on the development of a successful and dynamic learning organization. The small business leader must understand the relationship between the five disciplines of a learning organization and the impact on performance. Therefore, this study focused on identifying leadership behavior and learning strategies used by small business leaders to help their workers develop their “voice” (Covey,
Research Questions

The primary research question was this: What are the learning strategies and leadership behaviors of successful small business leaders? The ancillary questions are:

1. What learning strategies do successful small business leaders say they most often use?
2. What leadership behaviors do successful small business leaders say they most often use?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of the present study, the following commonly accepted definitions were used.

**Continual learning**—“Learning that is always ongoing or occurs in dispersed intervals, . . . what we see when people engage complex situations and use imaginative and creative solutions in response to the system” (Vaill, 1996, p. 5).

**Entrepreneur**—“An individual who establishes and manages a business for the principal purposes of profit and growth” and who is characterized by innovation (Schumpeter, 1942; Carland, Hoy, Boulton, & Carland, 1984).

**Leadership**—“The process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.” Leaders demonstrate mastery in “motivating power,” “empathy,” “integrity,” and “intuitive ability” (Covey, 2004; Goleman, 1998, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Yukl, 2002, p. 7).

**Leadership behavior**—Set of appropriate behaviors defined as those necessary and appropriate in the actions of good leaders (Levi, 2007).

**Learning strategy**—“Varied set of processes whereby individuals and groups of
individuals acquire knowledge or skill, change attitudes, become better informed about something familiar, or discover, inquire about, or become more aware of something new” and which results in a change or inner shift in people's behaviors and outer shift in people's strategies, practices, and systems (Davis, 2004, p. 53; Senge, 1999)

**Northeast Florida**—The focus area of this study that includes the counties of Clay, Duval, and St. Johns.

**Small business**—“Independently owned and operated, is organized for profit, and is not dominant in its field” (SBA's definition, 2012). The size determinants of small business vary by industry but are generally fewer than 500 employees.

**Small business leader**—An individual who has established and managed a small business for the principal purpose of achieving personal goals for three or more years, experienced growth within the business, and participated in community activities (Acs et al., 1998; Baumol, 2005; Carland et al., 1984).

**Successful small business**—For the purpose of this study, success was defined as those businesses that survived for at least three years and have 500 or fewer employees (Carland et al., 1984).

**Significance of the Study**

This study aimed to identify what leadership behaviors and learning strategies successful small business leaders in Northeast Florida used to survive during the economic downturn. This study was based on participants’ perceptions of their leadership behaviors and learning strategies. Information from the study may help current and future small business owners develop and maintain their organizations and make them more productive through the use of learning strategies and leadership behaviors employed by successful small business leaders. A
The key characteristic of a learning organization is learning from best practices (Garvin, 1993). Small business success is critical for local economies and brings positive attention to communities. This study intended to identify a repertoire of leadership and learning strategies that some small business leaders could use to improve or develop successful businesses. The new knowledge may benefit the entire community by extending the literature on leadership and learning in small businesses and by providing useful information for private and public organizations.

**Assumptions**

Several assumptions undergirded this study. The first assumption was that small business leaders' learning activities influence behavior. The second assumption was that the way is leaders learn consistent with andragogical principles and practices. Third, leaders’ receptivity and attitude towards change affect learning. The study further assumed that both leadership and learning require critical reflection that does not occur in isolation. Finally, this study assumed that the Delphi method was an appropriate research process for collecting consensus data on effective learning strategies and leadership behaviors from successful small business leaders.

**Summary and Organization of the Study**

The study employed the Delphi method, a structured communication technique, to gather data from successful small business leaders. Small businesses were identified as those entities “independently owned and operated, is organized for profit, and is not dominant in its field (SBA's definition, 2012),” employs 500 or fewer employees, and have been in business for three or more years. Leaders’ within the small businesses were identified and asked to complete three rounds of questionnaires to address learning strategies and leadership behaviors. The Delphi method provided the opportunity to synthesize participants' responses based on consensus.

This study is organized into five chapters. The purpose of Chapter 1 was to introduce the
study. It explained the importance of the study, which was the need to better understand the learning strategies and leadership behaviors of successful small business leaders in Northeast Florida. One outcome of the study may be an effective leadership and learning profile for small business leaders. Chapter 1 also addressed the statement of the problem, the purpose of the research study, the conceptual framework, the research questions, definition of terms as they relate to the research study, the significance of the study, and the assumptions of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on small business, dimensions of learning, adult learning, cognitive learning, experiential learning, reflective practice, dimensions of leadership, behavioral leadership, transformational leadership, learning organizations, holistic leadership, and emotional intelligence.

Chapter 3 outlines the research method and procedures of this study including a discussion of the participant selection process. The Delphi method was chosen to study and examine the data collection and analysis processes.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed analysis of the data obtained during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this research study. The analysis resulted in identifying key learning strategies and leadership behaviors of small business leaders. Through the insight, experiences, and preferences of expert Delphi panelists and interviewees, the research study was able to explore the learning and leadership best practices of SSBLs.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of findings and the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the Delphi study and in-depth interviews. Additionally, Chapter 5 presents several implications and recommendations for practice as well as suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Current literature does not specify the learning strategies and leadership behaviors of successful small business leaders (SSBLs). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discover, through a Delphi study, the learning strategies and leadership behaviors SSBLs believe are vital to their success. Chapter Two reviews the literature on small business, dimensions of learning, adult learning, cognitive learning, experiential learning, reflective practice, dimensions of leadership, behavioral leadership, transformational leadership, learning organizations, holistic leadership, and emotional intelligence. Relevant theories were selected for this study based on literature identified as appropriate to frame studies on leadership and learning. These theoretical perspectives contributed to the framework within which this study is constructed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of a concept map and summary.

Overview of Small Business

The Small Business Administration (SBA) defines small business as those firms with 500 employees or fewer (2011). Between 1993 and 2009, businesses with fewer than 500 people created 65% of new jobs (SBA, 2011). Research by the SBA's Office of Advocacy showed small businesses constitute 50% of private sector employment (Headd, 2010). There has been a 49% increase in the number of small businesses in the United States since 1982 (Office of Advocacy, 2012). In 2009, there were approximately 27 million small businesses in the United States employing approximately 57 million workers (Office of Advocacy, 2012). Additionally, small businesses outperformed large firms in new job creation (Small Business Economy, 2011).

In Northeast Florida, small businesses account for approximately 40% of overall employment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2011). Small businesses are an important component of a strong economy in a community. This is of particular importance in Northeast
Florida where a large percentage of the overall employment is in small businesses. Seventy-five percent of respondents in a national survey of small businesses indicated providing jobs and opportunities for their community were passions behind their continued drive and success (Citibank, 2012). With small businesses providing the greatest share of new job creation (Headd, 2010), it is important to understand the learning strategies and leadership behaviors of small business leaders. Small businesses have stimulated economic growth in a community, created jobs, and driven innovation (Acs et al., 1998; Baumol, 2005; Chi Research, 2003; Cope, 2003).

Studies by the SBA have demonstrated the importance of small business in the American economy. Acs et al. (1998) addressed the question of whether small firms are important and suggested two contributions in the United States. First, small businesses are an integral part of the economic renewal process in our nation (Acs et al., 1998). Small businesses focus on change and competition. They “play a crucial role in experimentation and innovation that lead to technological change and employment growth” (Acs et al., 1998, n.p.). Areas with the greatest small business growth are associated with innovation and the use of technology (Cope, 2003). Small businesses actively pursue innovation and technological advances (Baumol, 2005; Chi Research, 2003) thus providing the United States and local economies the ability to define and renew the market structure.

Small businesses also provide opportunities for women, minorities, and immigrants to enter the economic and social mainstream (Acs et al., 1998) and consequently provide individuals’ access to the American Dream regardless of background. The American Dream provides for economic growth, equal opportunity, social well-being, and upward mobility (Acs et al., 1998; Efrat, 2008; Miller, 2011). Business ownership plays a role in improving an individual's standard of living (Lowrey, 2004; Moutray, 2008) and job satisfaction (Lange, 2009;
Schjoedt, 2009). All individuals are invited to participate through our democratic economic system.

**Entrepreneur Versus Small Business Leader**

The terms *entrepreneur* and *small business leader* are often used synonymously. However, they are different in certain ways. Carland, Hoy, Boulton, and Carland (1984) defined an entrepreneur as an individual who establishes and manages a business for the purposes of profit and growth. Drucker (1985) defined entrepreneurship as the process of using existing resources in a new capacity through the use of innovation. An entrepreneur conducts business in new ways, causing discontinuity, and provides a new product or service to society (Schumpeter, 1942). Schumpeter (1942) believed innovation was the key concern of an entrepreneur. Building on Schumpeter's work, Bull and Williard (1993) defined entrepreneur as an individual who carries out a new combination of practices under conditions of task-related motivation, expertise, expectation of personal gain, and a supportive environment while causing discontinuity. Gartner (1990) found the majority of participants in his study described innovation, growth, and uniqueness as the important characteristics of entrepreneurship. Risk-taking is not considered a defining characteristic of entrepreneurship as it is inherent in ownership not in entrepreneurship (Carland et al., 1984; Schumpeter, 1942). For the purpose of this study, “an entrepreneur is an individual who establishes and manages a business for the principal purposes of profit and growth” and who is characterized by innovation (Carland et al., 1984).

On the other hand, not all small businesses owners are entrepreneurs (Carland et al., 1984). Small business owners' primary motivation is making a living and having more leisure time (Jenkins & Johns, 1997). Runyah, Droge, and Swinner (2008) studied the characteristics of small business owners and found that business owners often have an emotional attachment to the
business. They also found that successful business owners were strongly attached to their businesses and devoted to balancing work and family. Small business owners operated their businesses to achieve personal goals and general income for their family. Carland et al. (1984) suggested small businesses are independently owned, not dominant in their field, and not focused on creating new or innovative products or services. Small business leaders tend to have less of a preference for innovation (Carland et al., 1984; Runyan, Droge, & Swinney, 2008; Stewart, Watson, Carland, & Carland, 1998), and, as Carland et al. (1984) suggested, the key difference between an entrepreneur and small business leader is the focus on profits and growth versus a focus on achieving personal goals and general income.

**Small Business Leadership**

SSBLs need a robust leadership style that reflects transactional and transformational knowledge and skills (Valdiserri & Wilson, 2010). The combination of characteristics from both transactional and transformational leadership creates a foundation for SSBLs. “Small business leaders establish the working atmosphere of their business through their leadership style” (Valdiserri & Wilson, 2010). It is the SSBL's role to influence how employees achieve goals (Peters, 2005). Vladiserri and Wilson (2010) found transformational and transactional leadership styles have a significant impact on small business organizational profitability and success.

The specific balance between leadership styles associated with small business leadership is not defined in existing literature. The leadership style is dependent on the goals and objectives of the organization. Innovation and growth are key components of successful small business or entrepreneurial ventures. Bolman and Deal (2008) describe a simple structure for small businesses where leadership is practiced through direct supervision and oversight. Command and control, direct supervision, or Theory X leadership style does not support innovation and
creativity (McGregor, 2006; Mumford, Eubanks, & Murphy, 2007). Therefore, the leader must maintain focus on the organization's goal while providing flexibility and delegation of tasks to provide the opportunity for innovation and growth. Small business leadership requires a robust leadership style, balancing transactional and transformational approaches, such as a focus on the day-to-day tasks of running a business and leading employees to go beyond desired levels of achievement.

Small business leaders must be able to attend to the day-to-day strategic and management operations. Transactional leadership focuses solely on the goals of the organization and uses a system of rewards and punishments to attain compliance of followers (McGregor, 1960). The emphasis tends to be on achievement of objectives and the leader is passive. A small business leader must demonstrate qualities of transactional leadership while at the same time employing transformational leadership principles and practices to motivate and inspire employees.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) claimed leadership is comprised of observable practices. Their model for exemplary leadership provides a prescriptive model for leadership practice (1995). The model consists of five practices to support the leader’s efforts to accomplish stated objectives: Model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (1995). Through modeling the way, leaders find their voice and share it (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Covey (2004) described this process as recognizing and developing the leader’s true voice. A leader's voice is expressed through vision, discipline, passion, and conscience.

Successful leaders establish a shared vision and share it with others, empowering followers to focus on the results (Covey, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). In order to be successful, the leader must develop a clear vision of the future (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Being a
leader requires the existence of followers and inspiring those followers to accept the leader's vision as their own. Leaders must not only create a vision but eloquently share the vision with others. “Leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 11). The leader must enlist the support of followers and enable them to become enthusiastic about the vision. Very little is possible without an overwhelming shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

The third exemplary leadership practice is to challenge the process. Leaders must be willing to innovate and improve thus challenging the process. All examples of leadership achievement involve a change in the status quo (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Leaders are intimately involved in challenging the process in order to find new and better ways of doing things. Leaders willingly engage in experimentation and innovation involving risks that may result in failure or success (Mumford, Eubanks, & Murphy, 2007). However, leaders constantly challenge the process and learn from their failures as well as successes (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

The fourth leadership practice acknowledges that successful leadership and accomplishment is not a solo endeavor. Exemplary leaders enlist the support of their followers and enable them to act (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Excellence is derived through providing autonomy and fostering innovation (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Followers are provided opportunities to experiment and develop new products or services. Followers are enabled to act promoting teamwork, trust, and collaboration to achieve productivity through people (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Northouse, 2013; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Senge, 1990, 2006).

Kouzes and Posner's (2012) final practice is to encourage the heart through a process of supporting, rewarding, and recognizing followers. Successful leaders acknowledge followers’ need for recognition and foster a strong sense of community. “Leaders provide people with a positive sense of direction that encourages them to reach inside and do their best” (p. 284).
In *Encouraging the Heart* (1999), Kouzes and Posner expanded on the fifth exemplary leadership practice and presented seven essentials of encourage. The first essential emphasized the importance of leaders establishing and communicating clear expectations and standards they expect everyone to meet. Leaders should remain positive, optimistic and expect the best was the second essential. Kouzes and Posner (1999) suggested that if leaders expect someone to fail, the person probably will fail, but if leaders expect someone to succeed, he or she probably will succeed. The third essential directed leaders to pay attention and notice what people are doing right. The fourth essential acknowledged the importance of providing followers affirmations. It is vital to avoid blanket or canned praise. Recognition should be personalized as all employees want to be acknowledged for their efforts and successes. The fifth essential encouraged the use of storytelling. The authors suggested that leaders should use stories of individuals who overcome obstacles and adversity to achieve success. The use of celebrations was the sixth essential. Celebrations are an effective way to acknowledge the accomplishment of a peer and come together as a community. Additionally, celebrations are effective ways to support the organizational goals and values and provide examples for peers to emulate. Finally, Kouzes and Posner (1999) created the acronym DWYSYW to represent the seventh essential. It stands for “Do What You Say You Will,” which demonstrates the importance of setting a good example.

**Dimensions of Learning**

Small business owners are tasked with the responsibility of serving many roles within the organization. In order to successfully accomplish the multitude of roles, the small business owner must develop the habit of learning. This section presents a review of the literature on adult learning theories including andragogy, cognitive perspectives of learning, experiential learning, and reflective practice. Andragogy is an important adult learning theory that is applicable to
small business leaders. The cognitive perspective of learning provides insight into the mental process by which learning occurs and the unique characteristics of learning in adulthood. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory suggested a process of learning by doing and grasping new information through experience, reflecting on the experience, and creating new knowledge. Yaganeh and Kolb (2004) suggested a process of mindfulness experiential learning to increase knowledge while reducing automaticity. All three learning theories—andragogy, cognitive, and experiential—support reflection as a key part of the learning process. The importance of reflection as a learning strategy is expanded on in Schon's *The Reflective Practitioner*, which presents methods for continuous learning through action and reiterates the importance of reflection (1983). In sum, andragogy, and cognitive and experiential learning theories provide insight into the small business owner's role as learner.

**Andragogy**

The term andragogy was first used by a German teacher, Alexander Kapp, to describe the educational paradigm used by Plato (Ozuah, 2005). Knowles (1980), who developed the theory and applied it to adults, defined andragogy “as the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 43). Knowles observed that the learning process for adults differed from that of children. The responsibility for learning shifts from the teacher to the adult learner (Illeris, 2009). According to the theory, as a person ages, there is a shift from dependency to self-directedness and autonomy during the learning process (Ozuah, 2005).

Knowles’ definition of andragogy focused on the characteristics of the adult learner rather than on adult learning theory (Merriam et al., 2007). He developed six assumptions to guide adult learning practice and explicated the first four assumptions in his book, *Self-Directed Learning* (1975). The fifth and sixth assumptions were added later and stated that the most
influential source of motivation is internal and that adults need to understand and justify each learning experience (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007).

The first assumption, self-concept, suggested that as a person ages, he or she matures and engages in self-directed learning. Adults have a deep need to be self-directed in their learning experiences. The second assumption focused on adults’ use of prior experiences. This assumption suggested life experience as the best source for adults' learning. Third, readiness of adults to learn is related to their social roles. Whether or not an adult is ready to learn is dependent on his or her current life circumstances. Fourth, adults prefer acquiring and immediately applying new knowledge. The time perspective shifts from storing information for future application to immediacy of application (Ozuah, 2005).


Mezirow (1991) incorporated Knowles' definition of andragogy in his theory of transformational learning. Transformational learning is comprised of three parts—experience, critical reflection, and action. The transformational learning process is often set in motion by a disorienting dilemma, life challenge, or transition leading to a change. The disorienting dilemma causes the learner to identify a need. The principal focus of Mezirow's (1991) transformational learning theory was that change is brought about by critical reflection on one's assumptions, beliefs, biases, and values. Critical reflection or reflective discourse is required for growth. The
transformational learning process occurs sequentially through three stages—experience, critical reflection, and action.

In contrast, Illeris (2009) found transformational learning occurs simultaneously in the cognitive, emotional, and environmental dimensions of learning. He described three dimensions of learning—cognition, emotion, and environment (2004, 2009). His internal environment for a learner included cognition and emotion. The cognitive dimension included the learner's knowledge and skills, the emotional dimension included the learner's feelings and emotions, and the learner's external environment included interactions with people as they learn and cooperate in the learning process (Brookfield 2000; Illeris, 2004, 2009). Illeris (2004, 2009) also defined learning as a lifelong interaction between cognition, emotion, and social content. He observed that “it is no longer possible to make your choice of life course once and for all when young, and then expect to spend the rest of your life accomplishing it” (Illeris, 2009, p. 54). Learning is an integrated process of the whole person—thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving (Kolb, 1984). When learning is perceived through this holistic approach to life situations, it supports learning as a continuous and lifelong endeavor (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb (1984) and Jarvis (1987) emphasized the role of experience in the learning process, in particular adult learning. However, Jarvis noted that not every experience leads to learning. Brookfield (2002) used the term “lost innocence” to describe an educational endeavor that does not result in learning or reward for effort. Similar to Illeris, Jarvis (2006) approached learning as a holistic change in a person when experiences involved emotion, thought, and action. He then linked the whole person—body, mind, self, and life history—through the learning process.

Another theory that explicated andragogy was developed by Brookfield (2000). He outlined four unique strands of adult learning (2000). Strand 1 asserted an adult’s capacity to
think dialectically and to become aware of how context influenced understanding. Strand 2 was the capacity to employ logic. “A logic that is practical is a logic that springs from a deep understanding of the context of the situation” (p. 92). Strand 3 was the capacity for realizing how one may know what one knows. This is also known as meta-cognition or thinking about one's own mental processes. Finally, Strand 4 described the capacity for critical reflection thus reaffirming Mezirow’s and Freire's emphasis on reflection.

**Cognitive Perspectives on Learning**

Before the development of cognitive perspectives, learning was built on concept of a change in observable behaviors. Cognitive learning theories explained the mental processes that enable individuals to learn and use knowledge. Learning is thought to be an active experience incorporating the learners' prior knowledge and accumulation of new knowledge (Merriam et al., 2007). One's ability to learn is dependent on how new stimuli are perceived, organized, stored, and retrieved. Cognitive learning theory defined learning as a change in mental structures and brain based processes rather than changes in observable behaviors (Kolb, 1984).

The underlying principle of cognitive learning theories involved interacting with the environment and the formation of schema or organizational structure (Bruner, 1961; Piaget, 1952). Individuals are continuously interacting with their environment and collecting and organizing information. Learners' organize the information in a way that makes sense to them. Schema is the knowledge people retain in an organized system or structure (Piaget, 1952). It serves as an active storage system that adapts and changes as new information is received, organized, and processed; then, learners make meaning through connecting new information to existing schema. Mezirow (1991) described learning as the process of changing schemas at the individual level.
Piaget (1952) used the terms *assimilation* and *accommodation* to describe the process of taking in new information. Assimilation occurs when an individual is able to absorb new knowledge and fit it into the existing schema without making changes. When information does not fit, the individual must create a new schema or alter an existing schema to accommodate the new information. Learning occurs as a result of balancing the two processes of assimilation and accommodation (Kolb, 1984). Therefore, learners understand information differently based on what makes sense to them (Eggan & Kauchak, 2009; Merriam et al., 2007). However, it is possible for a learner to create meaning by connecting schema improperly. A learner with more rich and in-depth experiences has a larger schema and attaches different meaning to new information. Resistance to new ideas may result from a conflict between existing knowledge and prior experience (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Kolb, 1984). This resistance may also lead to hesitation during the accommodation process on the part of the adult learner. This is a challenge unique to adult leaders as they tend to have more experience and, therefore, larger schemas.

**Cognitive development in adults**

Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1972) focused on learning and cognitive development in children. The cognitive development perspective studies the processes that people use to acquire information, understand, and think about their world. Their work laid the foundation for studying cognitive development in adults and helped explained the gap that exists between pedagogy and andragogy. Piaget proposed that all people passed through a series of four stages including sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational (1972). His work focused on the cognitive changes that occur when children move from one stage to another. Piaget believed people began the formal operational stage in adolescence. The formal operational stage is that stage in which people begin to think abstractly and use formal operations for
problem-solving (1972). People are able to test their understanding through hypothesizing and trying out various solutions.

Vygotsky's (1972) “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) suggested that children perform best working just slightly above present functioning with proper assistance. Knight and Sutton (2004) found cognitive development continued into adulthood and applied Vygotsky's ZPD theory to learning in adulthood. Vygotsky's theory supported the use of presenting opportunities to learn with an instructor and more-skilled peers. Building on Vygotsky's work, Knight and Sutton (2004) found that adult learners with the proper support think and perform at higher levels. Their findings supported the use of mentoring, coaching, and developmental relationships in adult learning.

Generally, adults have more prior knowledge than children (Merriam et al., 2007). Therefore, adult cognitive development accounts for a much larger schema. It is important for learners and adult instructors to create learning opportunities that consider prior experience and knowledge. Cognitive learning theory suggests that the more connections are made to existing, altered, or newly created schema, the richer the learning experience. In adult learning, experience is seen as a resource and stimulus for the learning process (Merriam et al., 2007). As previously noted, both positive and negative experiences influence adult learning.

Building on Piaget's (1952) theory of cognitive learning, Bruner (1961) developed an approach called “discovery learning.” The discovery approach to learning posited that in order to truly acquire new knowledge, the learner must discover new information. Learners move beyond the experience or material to create new insights. Similarly, Kolb (1984) developed experiential learning by building on Piaget and Bruner's work, thus creating an approach to learning through experience.
Experiential Learning Theory

People have a vast array of experiences that may be used for learning. Experiential learning is based on the work of Lewin's feedback method, John Dewey's theory of learning through experience, Bruner's work on “discovery learning,” and Piaget's model of cognitive development (Kolb, 1984). Dewey believed all genuine education comes about through experience (Denise, White, & Peterfreund, 2008). He argued against the “spectator theory of knowledge” and observed that education should enable an individual to reflect, act, and learn through an active process (Denise et al., 2008).

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory defined learning as a transformational process. He explained that “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). The experiential approach to learning combined the cognitive processes, environmental considerations, and the learner's experience. Kolb's (1984) model of learning from experience suggested a learner grasps new knowledge from an experience and through a process of reflection and experimentation creates meaningful knowledge. Consistent with Kolb's work, Tennant (1993) also found learning through activity to be more meaningful for adults, and according to DaRue and Ashford (2010), it is important to understand how adults learn through experience and how to enhance their ability to learn from experience.

Kolb (1984) identified four different learning modes—concrete experience (CE), abstract conceptualization (AC), reflective observation (RO), and active experimentation (AE). Concrete experience and abstract conceptualization are ways of grasping experience while reflective observation and active experimentation are methods for transforming experience. Experiential learning theory is a cyclical process of these four learning modalities. To be effective, the learner
must have the ability to move through all four stages (Kolb, 1973). The first stage, concrete experience (CE), is doing or having the experience. In the second stage, reflective observation (RO), the learner reviews or reflects on the experience. Reflection itself is not enough to ensure learning. The third stage is abstract conceptualization (AC), during which the learner reaches conclusions and draws lessons from the experience. The fourth stage, active experimentation (AE), provides the learner the opportunity to plan out the next experience and apply what was learned. Learning is a continuous process generating ideas that are formed and reformed through experience (Kolb, 1973, 1984).

In addition to the four learning modes, Kolb (1973, 1984) identified four learning styles that emphasized the learning abilities of an individual. Based on prior experience, cognitive ability, and environmental influences, people learn in different ways. Kolb's four learning styles included converger, diverger, assimilator, and accommodator. The converger prefers using learning opportunities to find solutions to problems. There is a tendency for the converger to be more focused on finding practical applications of concepts and theories than on working with people. The diverger learns through feeling and watching. Divergers, who are idea-generators, tend to learn better when they observe and use creative methods to solve problems. Assimilators learn through watching and thinking. An assimilator has an aptitude for breaking large chunks of information into understandable sections. Assimilators often need time to think during the learning process. This is different from accommodators who learn through doing and feeling. They require hands-on activities and use an experimental approach to learning. They are attracted to new challenges and experiences and often rely on gut instinct during the learning process. These learning styles show how a person learns best, but an individual is not limited to any one learning style.
Jarvis (1987, 2006) elaborated on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model to include both experimental learning and reflective practice. Experimental learning is an outcome of experimenting with the environment while reflective practice is thinking about and monitoring one's actions as the event occurs. Schon (1983), Jarvis (2006), and Illeris (2009) viewed reflective practice as a requisite component of learning.

The primary source of learning to lead is experience (McCall, 2004; Mintzberg, 2004). Individuals engaged in the same experience will retain different information depending on their prior knowledge and whether they learn from the experience. Experience does not equal learning (McCall, 2004). According to McCall (2004), what an individual learns from an experience is dependent on what she or he brings to the experience and people who have sufficient experience learn more (Mintzberg, 2004). There is the possibility that an individual can engage in a learning experience and come away with nothing. McCall (2010) further noted the importance of “focusing attention on learning from experience, not just having it” (p. 13). Learning must be kept at the forefront of a leader’s thoughts so that more learning can occur (McCall, 2010). Small business leaders who focus solely on the day-to-day operations may unknowingly miss the opportunity to engage and learn from an experience.

**Mindful experiential learning**

Experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) is a framework for understanding how individuals learn from experience. Kabat-Zinn (2006) described mindfulness as an awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose to the experience moment by moment. Yaganeh and Kolb (2009) further developed a definition of mindfulness as applied to learning “as a state in which an individual focuses on the present and direct experience, is intentionally aware and attentive, and accepts life as continuous emergent process of change” (p. 14). According to these authors,
Mindfulness is a method for developing intentional acts during the learning process to reduce automaticity, which is the state of being able to complete tasks without conscious thought. It is also the state of being self-regulating, involuntary, and spontaneous. Automaticity effectively reduces learners' cognitive loads (Eggan & Kauchak, 2009), creativity (Yeganeh & Kolb, 2009), and repetition of mistakes (Mezirow, 1990).

Yeganeh and Kolb (2009) suggested mindfulness experiential learning as a method for deepening learning through experience. “Mindfulness can put the control of learning back in the learner's hand” (p. 15). The authors described the use of mindfulness as a method for supporting learners' efforts to maximize their learning experience potential.

Combining mindfulness with experiential learning reduces an individuals' automaticity and increases intentional practice. The underlying assumption of intentional practice involves developing the power of the individual to learn from experience. Experiential mindfulness results in increased learning capacity and creativity as the adult learner develops the ability to engage the entire learning cycle—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting during an experience.

DaRue and Ashford (2010) described a similar process as “mindful engagement.” These authors proposed a three-part process for mindful engagement described as the approach-action-reflection framework. Effective learning occurs when experience occurs alongside effective reflection. Therefore, the core of the mindful experiential learning process is reflection.

Mezirow (1991) described “action learning” as a framework for learning that incorporates action, reflection, and building one's own theories as a part of workplace learning. He also developed a theory of transformative learning to explain how adults make sense of their life experience (Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 1991). “Transformative learning develops
autonomous thinking” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) and focuses on individuals becoming more reflective and critical while being more open to the perspective of others. The aim of transformative learning is change brought about by critical reflection on the origins and nature of our assumptions, biases, beliefs, and values (Freire, 1974; Mezirow, 1997, 2000). Similar to Mezirow's concept of “action learning,” Merriam et al. (2007) identified experience, critical reflection, and development as key components of transformational learning.

Other key elements of transformative learning include change of beliefs, change of attitudes, and transformation of entire perspectives or frame of reference. According to Merriam et al. (2007), frames of reference are the lenses through which individuals experience, interpret, and filter the world. Mezirow (1997, 2000) identified two frames of reference—habit of mind and point of view. Habits of mind are broad assumptions that filter our experiences. Habit of mind involves habitual ways of thinking and acting which are influenced by cultural, social, educational, economic, or political views (Mezirow, 1991). Habits of mind are extremely difficult to change and are less malleable than point of view. Points of view are frequently reviewed and adjusted and include our attitudes, beliefs, and judgments (Mezirow, 1991). Learners' frame of reference may be challenged through critical reflection. In sum, transformative learning occurs when life experience or prior knowledge, critical reflection, and developmental change occur simultaneously.

Reflective Practice

Reflection is exceedingly important for adult learners. Freire's work focused on praxis, which he defined as “reflection and action on the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1974, p. 36). Praxis is also the process of constant thinking and analyzing. Freire viewed this continuous cycle of reflection as the highest form of learning. As several researchers have noted, a critical
The reflective phase of learning is described as reviewing the “lived experience” (Kempster, 2006), the “crucible of leadership” (Bennis, 2002), or as being a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983). "Piaget (1969), Freire (1974), Dewey (1958), and Lewin (1951) all stressed that the heart of learning lies in the way we process experience, in particular, our critical reflections on experiences and the meanings we draw from them" (Turesky & Gallagher, 2011, p. 7). Importantly, reflective practice allows a leader to make decisions while challenging complex situations (Merriam et al., 2007). The goals of a reflective practice are to observe, analyze, interpret, explore alternatives, then take action. This process reduces the likelihood of committing the same mistakes.

In an organizational setting, Argyris and Schon (1978) looked at improving professionals' practice through a process of taking action and simultaneously reflecting on the action. They called this process “theories of action.” According to theories of action, espoused theories were the beliefs or actions a leader felt he or she could take in to a situation (Argyris & Schon, 1978). In The Reflective Practitioner, Schon (1983) described how the process for reflective thought is used in professional learning. He described two forms of reflection—reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Learners alter their behavior in the process of doing, also known as reflection-in-action. A leader with the ability to connect emotionally and cognitively with a situation and act swiftly demonstrates reflection-in-action. In contrast, reflection-on action involves reviewing a learning event or challenge after it has occurred. The learner intentionally thinks about the learning event to evaluate the experience, identifies how different actions may
have altered the result, and then changes actions for the future (Merriam et al., 2007). Reflection-on-action requires a willingness and purposeful action from a learner to regularly engage in the reflective practice. In support of Schon's work, McCall (2010) noted the importance of providing opportunities for reflection both during and after the developmental opportunity.

In order to be successful in developing a reflective practice, the leader reflects on actions in his or her role. Reflection should become a part of a leader's daily practice. Reflection on the part of the leader may be thought of as “white space” or opportunities to think and reflect without pressure to make decisions (Argyris, 1998). Garvin (1993) found learning required time for reflection and space absent of immediate action. Through the reflection process, the leader is able to analyze action and remove cognitive dissonance or disagreement between thoughts. People have a natural drive to reduce dissonance by altering existing cognitions or adding new ones to create consistency. This cognitive process occurs for leaders during a period of reflection. The focus should be on avoiding repeating the same experience without learning from it.

To reduce this likelihood, Baird, Holland, & Deacon (1999) described four keys for successful reflection:

1. focus on a few critical issues;
2. reflect in close temporal proximity to the action;
3. follow a structured process;
4. return to action quickly.

Vaill (1996) concurred with Baird et al. (1999) by citing the impossibility of learning everything. Leaders, according to Vaill (1996), must consciously select from different experiences to determine where their efforts should be focused.
Learning Relative to Small Business Leaders

Successful leadership requires continuous lifelong learning (Senge 1999, 2006; Vaill, 1996). Spicer and Salder-Smith (2006) found organizational learning and performance are related in small businesses. Two key competencies necessary for successful leadership are the ability to learn and adapt to change (Argyris, 1978, 1993; Fullan, 2011; Yukl, 2002). Leaders must first pursue personal development before directing change efforts within their organization. Leadership learning may occur in an institutional or formal learning environment, where training programs are designed to develop leadership knowledge and skills. However, this form of learning poses limitations for the participant. Formal learning environments may result in the learner becoming a passive participant in the experience and unable to find “meaning making” (Merriam et al., 2007). Many times, curricula delivered in these environments do not meet the learning needs of the leader (Vaill, 1996). According to Senge (1999), “Learning always occurs over time and in 'real life' contests, not in classrooms or training sessions” (p. 24). Sexton, Upton, Wacholtz, and McDougall (1997) studied the learning needs of entrepreneurs and found entrepreneurs are more reactive than proactive in their learning, desire specific as opposed to general information, prefer information that assists them with solving their immediate needs, and prefer learning from experienced professionals.

Effective leadership learning builds on what the leader already knows (Gibb, 1997). The learning process includes both learning while completing the leadership tasks and reflecting on the experience. Experiential learning is the process of making meaning from direct experience (Kolb, 1975; Lewin, 1997). The learning process focuses on the individual and his or her direct involvement with the experience as it occurs. Vaill (1996) viewed leadership learning as a “similarity to performers as they learn by performing it” (p. 139). Kempster (2006) described
leadership development as situated learning and the notion of apprenticeship as an opportunity for the leader to develop through becoming a part of the naturalistic experience. This may occur via an apprenticeship or learning from accomplished individuals. Kempster (2006) captured Schon’s (1983) concept of reflection in action through his emphasis on “becoming” as a part of leadership. He also used the word “becoming” to explain a continuous cycle of learning and the way some individuals influence the leadership development process.

Organizational settings, and specifically business settings, are dynamic and require the leader to engage in continual learning (Vaill, 1996), build on prior experience (Bennis, 2002; Gibb, 1997; Kempster, 2006), and engage in a process of reflection (Bennis, 2002; Schon, 1983; Vaill, 1996). The role of a small business leader is a continual learning experience because to attain success, small business leaders must remain competitive and innovative in their industry. Vaill (1996) described the process as “leaderly learning,” “the kind of learning that a managerial leader needs to engage in as an ongoing process in the job” (Vaill, 1996, p. 127). It is not about figuring out how to do something but rather finding creative and innovative solutions to challenges (Vaill, 1996).

Jones, McPherson, and Thorpe (2010) explained the importance small business leaders and organizational learning play in improving business performance. They suggested that in order for learning and transformation to occur, small business leaders must have access to resources, be motivated, and engage in reflective practices (Jones et al., 2010). Gray (2002) noted that many small business leaders do not have the time to reflect, but reflection provides small business owners the opportunity to challenge existing beliefs and add value to the learning process. Self-awareness brought about through reflection leads to a transformative experience and fundamental changes to personal learning (Mezirow, 1991). Critical reflection and
reflexivity for learning and development of successful small business leaders (SSBLs) are critically important (Anderson & Thorpe, 2004). Cope (2003), suggested that learning through reflection enhances the learning process and allows the SSBL to challenge prior beliefs. Consequently, this reflection moves the small business owner away from simply learning from routine and towards double-loop learning or questioning the underlying learning processes (Argyris & Schon, 1978).

Successful small business leaders (SSBLs) engage in learning throughout their careers. Houle (1913), the first to articulate the importance of self-reflection and a learning orientation, proposed that individuals with a learning orientation will be in an almost constant state of self-development. For a leader, learning may be the most important competency that supports success. While formal learning environments may not be the best use of time for a small business owner, it is imperative that continual learning be a habitual practice. As SSBLs learn, they should apply and practice new knowledge and skills, which means they should be open and receptive to learning opportunities and demonstrate a willingness to apply new knowledge.

The role of a small business owner is partially defined by continual learning. Successful business leaders practice a constant cycle of learning through reflection and practice. Because continual learning is so important, Vaill (1996) warned of the dangers of focusing on day-to-day tasks of running a business at the expense of engaging in learning activities. “Managerial leadership is not learned; managerial leadership is learning” (Vaill, 1996, p. 126). SSBLs practice their dynamic role of leadership by reading, reflecting, and problem-solving. This process is repeated constantly.
Dimensions of Leadership

Bass (1990) identified leadership as the single most important component of organizational success or failure. There are multiple definitions of leadership, and the study of leadership involves numerous theories and classification systems. Many leadership theories describe leadership as a process of influence. Northouse (2013), for example, defined leadership as a “process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). However, leadership theories also focus on the relationship between leader and follower (Northouse, 2013).

Leadership and management are terms frequently used synonymously. However, there is a distinction between leadership and management. People commonly refer to small business owners as leaders and managers or critical staff who oversee employees. The terms are used in reference to the hierarchical scale of the organization or titles rather than the role or activities of each person. Individuals on top are considered leaders with some followers who serve as managers. Generally, management tends to the day-to-day operations of an organization. Kotter (2001) finds the function of management involves organizing, planning, and problem-solving while the leader focuses on setting a direction, influencing change and motivation. Therefore, leaders and managers have many overlapping functions (Northouse, 2013). While it is important to understand the characteristics of good managers, the focus of this study is on leadership.

Historical Perspective

The study of leadership developed from the beginning of organized communities, and the focus on studying leadership theory in an organizational context was first noted during the shift from an agricultural to an industrial society. The drive to understand leadership in an organizational context began with the Industrial Revolution and with the early development of
leadership theories. Initially, leadership theories focused on efficiency and effectiveness, and the earliest leadership and management theories developed were classified as classical management theory.

Classical management theory is comprised of two different perspectives—scientific management and administrative management (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011). Taylor (1911) focused on effectiveness and efficiency and searched for the best way to complete each task. Taylor established four principles of scientific management—scientific job analysis, selection of personnel, management cooperation, and functional supervising (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011). The purpose of management was to increase workers’ production. Conversely, scientific management viewed workers as instruments to manipulate rather than human beings to develop and motivate.

Another view of administrative management focused on directing and coordinating the functions of the entire organization. Fayol, Gulick, and Weber were key contributors to administrative management theories. Fayol proposed and explained five functions and principles of management (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011), which involved analysis and creation of a framework for the management role in organizations. By focusing on the role of management, administrative management theorists believed they could increase efficiency in organizations. Similar to Fayol, Gulick focused on the role of management and “coined the acronym POSDCoRB, which identified seven functions of management: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting” (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011, p. 6).

Weber’s concept of bureaucracy is another well-known theory of administrative management. According to Weber (1947), the bureaucratic form of an organization created an administrative routine where an ideal bureaucracy is characterized by a hierarchical organization,
division of labor, rules, competency, and impersonality. The primary focus of the classical approach to management was an efficiently designed workplace. However, the administrative management theories failed to consider workers' social and psychological needs, and this failure led to the development of the human relations movement (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011).

The human relations approach to leadership was initially defined and developed by Mayo and Warner at the Hawthorne Plant of Western Electric in the 1920s and 1930s (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011). The Hawthorne studies investigated the work place and its effect on both leaders and followers (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011). The results of Mayo's study suggested that there are human and social elements operating in the workplace. These findings emphasized the importance of understanding human behavior and proposed that people alter or manipulate their behavior in response to observation. The importance of the Hawthorne studies shifted the focus of the study of leadership theory towards understanding how meeting the needs of workers increased effectiveness and performance within an organization.

**Behavioral Leadership**

The behavioral science approach shifted the study of management and leadership towards understanding the relationship between a leader's actions and the follower's capacity and responses to leaders' actions. Behavioral theories sought to understand effective and ineffective leadership behaviors. Researchers studied how the individuals related to the organization (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011). For example, Chester Barnard (1938) focused on the functions of the executive. Barnard's cooperative system emphasized the two organizational elements—effectiveness and efficiency (Barnard, 1938). He defined effectiveness as the degree to which the common purpose of the organization is achieved; he defined efficiency as the satisfaction of individual motives of employees (Barnard, 1938). Barnard saw leadership as serving in a role to
accomplish goals with and through people by balancing the interests of effectiveness and efficiency. He believed the organization's and individual's goals must be met in order to achieve overall balance.

The earliest studies in behavioral leadership were conducted in Iowa and Michigan (Lewin, Lippett, & White, 1939; Likert, 1959). Referred to as the Iowa Studies, participants in the study were trained to act as authoritarian, democratic, or laissez-faire leaders (Lewin et al., 1939). The study was conducted to understand the influence of leadership styles on group behavior. The researchers found that democratic leadership was the most effective (Lewin et al., 1939) because authoritarian leadership resulted in aggression and lowered subordinate satisfaction. They found that laissez-faire leadership created the most aggression in subordinates. The Michigan Studies extended the study of leadership behaviors to employee job satisfaction and productivity (Likert, 1959; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011). The studies also led to the development of two different leadership behaviors, in which Likert (1959) identified two leadership styles—production-centered leadership and employee-centered leadership.

Argyris (1993) and Maslow (1970) studied individual behaviors. They believed that individuals sought different kinds of self-fulfillment as they grew older. In order to be effective and to avoid dysfunctions, organizations must be cognizant of workers' needs and support individual growth and development. Argyris (1993) proposed an individual and organization conflict theory: Individuals desired growth and abhorred conflict because conflict created frustration and led to dysfunction. Furthermore, Argyris found that the impersonal nature of an organization's structure decreased productivity but increased effort towards meeting organizational objectives. On the other hand, Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory suggested that leaders have a responsibility to create an environment where individuals' needs
are met and opportunities for growth are afforded. According to Maslow (1970), barriers that block needs satisfaction should be minimized or removed completely; this action would satisfy workers’ needs and as a result motivate them to work more effectively. Maslow's hierarchy of needs laid the foundation for further research and theory development in the behavioral science approach to leadership.

Another theorist who contributed to the behavioral science approach to leadership was McGregor (1960), who developed a theory of leadership based on the idea that individuals with satisfied needs worked more effectively. Theory Y assumed that under proper conditions people are motivated to seek responsibility and perform productively. Through empowerment of workers, a leader could create an environment wherein followers could increase their productivity. Conversely, for the organization to achieve its goals, the interaction between the leader and followers must be supportive. Theory Y aligned with the human relations approach to leadership and viewed motivation as the key to increasing individual performance in organizations. In contrast, Theory X assumed individuals dislike work and unless supervised and controlled will avoid it (McGregor, 1960). Theory X more closely resembled the classical era approach to leadership where workers were treated like machines in order to achieve organizational goals.

Fiedler is another researcher whose ideas helped explain behavioral leadership (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011). His contingency theory viewed a leader's effectiveness as the result of being chosen as the right leader for the situation. The theory considered the relationship between leadership style and favorableness of the situation. Contingency theory posits that some leaders are better in specific situations than others. There are three factors that are considered in determining the favorableness of a situation—leader-member relationship, task structure, and
position power. All three factors must be present in order for the situation to contribute to the leader's effectiveness (Hershey & Blanchard, 1988).

Hershey and Blanchard were two other behavioral theorists who viewed leader effectiveness as the ability to adapt to the situation; their theory was more flexible than Fiedler's contingency theory. The underlying concept of situational leadership holds that there is no best style of leadership (Hershey & Blanchard, 1988). Effective leaders are judged by their willingness to adapt to the situation and their ability to attend to the circumstances of each situation. Situational leadership theory looks at the leadership task and relationship behaviors relative to the job and psychological maturity of the followers to identify the most appropriate leadership style to exhibit. The four possible leadership styles are directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2011).

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership, focuses on the importance of leadership behavior in the midst of organizational change and development, is an exceptional form of leadership that influences followers to exceed expectations (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2007). Transformational leadership also emphasizes leader influence, change, and the transformation of followers (Northouse, 2007). Transformational leadership theory was built on the ideas presented by Burns (1978) and emphasizes follower development and intrinsic motivation. Burns' (1978) suggested that transformational leadership is represented by followers' willingness to transcend self-interest to achieve a common purpose.

Transformational leaders engage with followers as whole persons. According to Bass (1985), the extent to which a leader is transformational is measured by his or her influence on followers. He further defined transformational leadership to include 4 Is—idealized influence,
individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. Idealized influence occurs when the leader motivates followers by modeling respect and trust. Individual consideration occurs when the leader attends to followers' needs, paying particularly attention to the individual contribution of each follower. Transformational leaders also provide intellectual stimulation through nurturing and developing people to think independently. Followers are encouraged to challenge existing methods and develop new and innovative approaches to challenges. Finally, a leader practices inspirational motivation when he or she inspires followers to achieve common goals and in so doing motivates the entire organization.

Burns (1978) depicted transformational and transactional leadership on opposite ends of a continuum, with individuals who offered tangible rewards for work as transactional and those who emphasized higher order and intrinsic needs as transformational. Bass (1985) further developed the theory by contrasting transformational and transactional leadership behavior. The two theories described the components of motivational influence and leaders' impact on followers (Yukl, 2002). Transformational leaders develop loyalty and trust, and they motivate their followers to do more than expected. They also instill confidence in their followers and lead by example (Yukl, 2002). In contrast, transactional leaders focus solely on the goals of the organization and use a system of rewards and punishments to attain compliance from followers. The two theories may be compared to McGregor's (1960) X and Y theory of leadership where Theory X presents concepts and principles consistent with transactional leadership, and Theory Y presents concepts and principles consistent with transformational leadership. Transactional leaders focus on achievement of objectives and tend to be passive leaders. Their primary focus is establishing the rules and guidelines to ensure compliance. In contrast, transformational leaders develop followers, focus on intrinsic needs, individualize their attention to follower concerns,
and support continued learning and development (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership was one example of a transformational leadership model. Their model for exemplary leadership was prescriptive in its approach to influencing and developing follower behavior. There are five fundamental practices that describe the activities of successful leaders—model the way, inspire a share vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (1995).

The Learning Organization

With an emphasis on change, transformational leadership is a key component of leaders' capacity to change individuals and organizations and is a cornerstone for learning organizations. Senge (2006) defined leadership as a process for nurturing people's capacity for learning. In good organizations, leaders understand the importance of continuous learning and support a culture of learning at all levels (Yukl, 2002). According to Senge (1999), “Organizations will enter a new domain of leadership development when we stop thinking about preparing a few people for 'the top' and start nurturing the potential for leaders at all levels to participate in shaping new realities” (p. 568). He described this process as essential for leading a learning organization. Vaill (1996) used the phrase “leaderly learner,” and Handy (1995) used the wheel of learning to describe the ongoing role a leader fulfills to support the learning of others, which, according to Senge, reflects a passion for learning that inspires others around them (Senge, 1999). Leaders who model learning play pivotal roles in learning organizations (Lunenburg & Orenstein, 2011).

Handy (1995) described subsidiarity and incidental leading as two key components that sustain the momentum of learning within an organization. The leader managers provide individuals and groups with as much power as their competence permits (Handy, 1995). Leaders are responsible for defining individual boundaries and creating environments for both individuals
and groups to learn from every event (Handy, 1995), which requires reflection by everyone in the organization.

Yukl (2002) observed that individual learning should be a highly regarded practice that would ensure the effectiveness of the organization. However, in a true learning organization, learning does not occur independently. Handy (1995) warned against the limitations of the “lonely learner.” Individual and group collaboration are essential and integral in learning organizations (Handy, 1995; Senge, 1990, 2006; Yukl 2002). When people learn from each other, what they learn is richer and provides numerous opportunities for experimentation and further learning. In an environment of continuous change (Vaill, 1996), leading others through creative learning is necessary for organizational success. Innovative solutions to challenges are reached through curiosity and experimentation of the group (Fuqua & Newman, 2005; Handy, 1995; Vaill, 1996).

Leaders should encourage experimentation (Handy, 1995) and risk taking. Successful leaders encourage groups to engage in collective learning leading them towards developing innovative and creative solutions (Fuqua & Newman, 2005; Yukl, 2002). Leaders should leverage learning failures (Handy, 1995; Yukl, 2002) and treat mistakes as an opportunity to learn. Leaders must willingly repeat the learning process to achieve success (Vaill, 1996). A discussion following an unsuccessful experimentation enriches the learning process (Handy, 1995).

Small business leaders should routinely assess the learning needs of their followers and develop plans and opportunities. For their continual learning, it is the small business leader’s responsibility to continuously seek resources to enable learning. McCall (2010) believed the growth of self and others is an imperative part of leadership.
Successful small business leaders should engage in a process of continuous environmental scanning in order to remain competitive in their industry. The process is initiated first at the leader level. He or she initially identifies personal deficiencies before considering them elsewhere in the organization and pursues personal development before leading change initiatives (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Anderson and Anderson (2010) described this as conscious change leadership. Conscious change leaders are more apt to identify content change in their organizations ahead of their competition (Anderson & Anderson, 2010) and are apt to be passionate and committed to their followers and in so doing build change momentum (Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Fullan, 2011; Heath & Heath, 2010; Kotter, 2001; Lewin, 1997). The process of environmental scanning and continuous critical reflection should continue despite a strong competitive market presence.

Change efforts begin with a process of reducing the forces that keep an organization in its current state. Different theorists have referred to this as unfreezing (Lewin, 1997), directing the rider (Heath & Heath, 2010), change management (Kotter, 2011), or the content and process phase of change (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). The leader is responsible for creating the vision to guide the change effort (Heath & Heath, 2010; Kotter, 1996). Change is more manageable when people know the why behind the what (Heath & Heath, 2010). During this “unfreezing” phrase, the leader develops followers' knowledge and skills. This may involve “scripting the critical moves” (Heath & Heath, 2011) to provide specific behaviors for the followers or developing strategies to achieve the vision (Kotter, 1996). According to Heath and Heath (2011), the leader must look at the “bright spots” to locate what's working and find a way to institutionalize it throughout the organization. Providing followers with “bright spots” helps focus their efforts and provides examples that help achieve successful end results.
Change engenders an opportunity to develop new habits. When behavior is habitual, it frees the individual to engage in other tasks (Heath & Heath, 2011). Goleman et al. (2001) observed that “a leader must rehearse a new behavior until it becomes automatic” (p. 51). However, there are dangers in developing automaticity without reflection; as a result, a leader must be mindful and work to prevent negative behaviors from becoming obstructive. This means that mindfulness and reflection must be integral to all learning endeavors.

Change efforts may result in failure; in turn, learning from failure may prove to be far more beneficial than success without understanding. Bennis (2002) found that an individual's ability to find meaning in a negative event is one of the most reliable indicators of true leadership. Continuous learning maintains an ongoing willingness to change, so change is a big part of the learning process. Whether learning from failure or success, the purpose of learning is change. Both formal and informal learning processes in an organizational environment lead to change.

Spicer and Sadler-Smith (2006) and Jones, MacPherson, and Thorpe (2010) acknowledged the relationship between organizational learning and small business growth and performance. They found active approaches to learning create a process to continually challenge, review, and revise routines. Through the adoption of learning organization competencies, small businesses are more likely to flourish as effective change agents whose actions transform their organizations.

**Holistic Leadership**

A more holistic approach to leadership development that has implications for leaders of small businesses has been investigated by Bennis, (2005), Mintzberg, (2004), and McCall, (2010). Holistic leadership goes beyond the knowledge taught in corporate leadership training or
business schools. Quatro, Waldman, and Garvin (2007), proposed a framework that includes four domains of holistic leadership development—analytical, conceptual, emotional, and spiritual. The domains are presented within a three-category classification scheme. The most successful leaders understand the interdependence of the four domains (Quatro et al., 2007).

According to Quatro et al. (2007), the analytical domain of leadership emphasizes cognitive abilities and skills of leaders while the conceptual domain also includes cognitive abilities as well as creativity and innovation. Analytical leadership is developed through academic or formal learning activities while conceptual leadership development requires learning through experience and develop systems thinking (Senge, 2006) that provides intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1997). The emotional domain emphasizes how leadership visions are shared and the emotional needs of followers. Emotional intelligence enhances the ability of the leader to use emotional contagion to influence followers. The leader who is attuned to emotional issues is more aware of and understands emotions and how to effectively manage. Finally, the spiritual domain involves supporting followers’ needs to connect to a higher order, spiritual purpose. Spiritual leadership recognizes the value of spirituality and self-actualization for both leader and followers. Leaders who understand the interconnection between all four domains develop a potent and effective leadership style. Leadership development is a highly individualized process but should be viewed as a holistic process of adaptation to the world (Turesky & Gallagher, 2011). This study acknowledges the importance of the holistic leadership, especially as it relates to the way successful small business leaders view analytical, conceptual, and, especially, emotional intelligence.
Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

In addition to the leadership behaviors addressed in the preceding sections, emotional intelligence is a relatively recent leadership attribute and behavior that has gained the attention of leadership in both the public and private sector (Goleman, 1998, 2006). Argyris (1962) was among the first researchers who developed the concept of “interpersonal competence,” which is consistent with Thorndike's (1920) definition of “social intelligence” as the ability to understand and manage men and women. “Interpersonal competence” is similar to “interpersonal intelligence,” which Gardner defined as an individual's ability to relate to and understand others (2011). In 1990, Salovey and Mayer further expanded Thorndike's definition and coined the phrase “emotional intelligence” as a label for the skills that include awareness of self and others and the ability to handle emotions and relationships. Salovey and Mayer (1997) also developed a four-branch model of emotional intelligence that includes a) identifying emotions, b) using emotions to facilitate thought, c) understanding emotions, and d) managing emotions. Goleman (1998), who popularized the concept of emotional intelligence, attributed most change effort failures to ineffective managers who lacked the skills to handle social challenges (2006). Goleman viewed emotional intelligence as a set of personal and social competencies including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill (1998). Self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation are defined as self-management skills while empathy and social skill are considered relationship management skills. The overarching idea behind emotional intelligence is that those individuals who are in tune with their own emotions and the impact of their emotions on others will be more effective leaders (Northouse, 2007). Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, and Boyle (2005) went so far as to suggest that emotional intelligence is the key determinant in leadership effectiveness.
Several researchers such as McCall (2010) and Quatro et al. (2007) noted the importance of developing an “executive temperament” capable of handling the stresses, pressure, and frustrations of a leadership role. Emotionally intelligent leaders are able to attend to their emotional needs as well as the needs of their followers through effectively monitoring their own emotions and understanding the impact of positive and negative moods. Effective leaders understand how to stimulate emotional contagion and use it to inspire and motivate their employees (Goleman, 1995; Quatro et al., 2007). They use different moods to energize and influence followers' behavior and believe that positive emotions and emotional intelligence are associated with multiple successful outcomes (Anand, 2000; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008).

Other researchers such as Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2001) found “primal leadership” or emotional leadership to be the primary role of the leader. Primal leadership requires leaders to reflect on how their emotional leadership influences the mood and actions of followers (Goleman et al., 2001). Since emotions are contagious, the leader's moods and behaviors influence the moods and behaviors of everyone else in the organization (Goleman et al., 2001). Schoenewolf (1990) defined emotional contagion as “a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes” (p. 50). Emotional contagion is the process of absorbing the emotional expressions of another person as your own and assuming the emotional expression (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993).

Barsade (2002) furthered the research on emotional contagion by exploring the ripple effect of contagion on group behavior. He found that positive and negative moods and behaviors continuously influence a group's moods, judgments, and behaviors (2002). Positive moods create positive environments, and, as Isen (1990) found, positive environments influenced cognitive
abilities of individuals and increased flexibility in thinking thus leading to creative thinking and problem solving. Likewise, George and Zhou (2007) discovered that both negative and positive moods influenced creativity, and that naturally occurring negative moods that receive support and feedback from a manager do not have a detrimental impact on creativity or cognitive ability.

In additional to a strong emotional intelligence, small business leaders need to maintain positive dispositions. Fredrickson (2009) found that through building positivity, participants in her study were able to broaden their minds and achieve goals beyond self-imposed limitations. Fredrickson’s (1998, 2001, 2003) broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions offered an overarching theoretical explanation and corroborative support for emotional intelligence by linking the cumulative experience of momentary positive emotions to the development of inner resources for long-term success and well-being. According to the theory, positive emotions expand cognition and behavioral tendencies.

The broaden-and-build theory is based on four major findings:

1. Positivity broadens one's vision, perspective, and problem-solving skills.
2. Positivity builds social resources to solidify bonds and build new ones.
3. Positivity develops psychological resources and fuels resilience and optimism.

Positive emotions and emotional intelligence also contributed to successful experiential learning by fostering reflection (Kok et al, 2008; Mayer et al., 2002). A leader's outlook requires a balance between maintaining an opportunistic outlook and understanding the reality of the current situation. Leadership behavior must remain rooted in reality while remaining upbeat (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2001). Collins (2004) described this as the “Stockdale
Principle,” which says that people must not confuse a belief in persevering with comprehending the realities of a situation. This principle supports the idea that a leader with high emotional intelligence understands the influence of positive moods and the potential for becoming overly optimistic (George, 2000).

*Favorable perspective* is a more apt term to describe the disposition required of a successful small business leader because the term captures the encouraging and affirming consideration of a situation. The overall experience must remain positive yet grounded. To quantify a favorable perspective, Fredrickson (2009) described a positivity ratio of 3-to-1, which says that for every negative experience, one should compensate it with three positive experiences to alleviate stress and develop the best frame for thinking, which helps avoid the consequences of negativity. Fredrickson (2009) found that through maintaining the proper positivity ratio, individuals were able to broaden their minds and achieve goals beyond prior self-imposed limitations.

Other authors have discussed the impact of negativity as well. Covey (2004), for example, described negative elements as “6 cancers”—cynicism, criticism, comparing, competing, complaining, and contending. To avoid the cancers Covey (2004), suggested an 8th habit—“find your voice and inspire others to find theirs” (p. 293). He defined voice as finding and following passion, which Handy (2002) described as the driving force of creativity. Creative individuals, or fleas as Handy described them, are different from other people and destined to make a difference. He defined the three characteristics of fleas as being independent, being motivated by passion rather than monetary values, and having the ability to ride through setbacks or negative capacity, which is the ability of an individual to ride through setbacks and failures and learn through trial and error (Handy, 2002).
Likewise, Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, and Conway (2009) suggested that people with positive emotions build resources and are able to develop to their greatest potential. Positive emotions increased an individual's ability to learn and innovate. Bennis (2002) found that an individual's ability to find meaning in a negative event is one of the most reliable indicators of true leadership. This ability, called ego resiliency, is developed through positive emotions and helps individuals to bounce back from adversity rapidly (Cohn et al., 2009). Small business owners with awareness of their ego resilience and other emotional states during an experience furthered their understanding and development. Experiential learning is one of the best ways to develop small business leaders. Through practical experience, small business owners with ego-resiliency develop positive emotions, thus allowing them to bounce back more efficiently from setbacks.

**Conceptual Framework**

The two research dimensions of this study include leadership and learning. Through a review of literature, relevant theories used to frame this study were associated either with learning strategies, leadership behavior, or both learning strategies and leadership behavior. Key concepts of mindfulness, reflection, and positivity were associated with both learning strategies and leadership behavior. These concepts were seen repeatedly throughout the literature on behavioral, transactional, transformational, and holistic leadership, as well on as on emotional intelligence, andragogy, cognitive perspectives, experiential theory, and change. The literature review suggested that best practices associated with learning and leadership may be important for all small businesses but are used only by successful business leaders (Carter & Donohue, 2012; Rice, 2012). The review of literature also supported three elements on which successful businesses focus—growth, innovation, and change.
Figure 1 shows the key concepts identified in the literature and used to connect major variables in the study. It shows the interconnectedness of learning strategies and leadership behaviors that small business leaders use to develop mindfulness, reflectivity, and positivity. These practices help the small business owner develop habits of learning and leadership that result in best business practices. Best practices, in turn, help them become successful small business leaders who influence and nurture innovation and change within the business environment. These efforts result in satisfied customers, satisfied and productive employees, a vibrant and nurturing community, and a strong productive economy.
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: A visual relationship of the key concepts identified in the literature on the learning strategies and leadership behaviors of successful small business leaders.
**Chapter Summary**

Small businesses are the backbone of the American economy. The purpose of Chapter 2 was to review the literature on learning and leadership, particularly as that literature relates to small business leadership. The chapter began with an overview of small businesses and distinguished between entrepreneurs and small business leaders. This distinction is important because the focus of the study is on small business leaders who are concerned with achieving personal goals and not on individuals who have established and managed a business solely for growth and profit. This chapter also discussed the literature on several dimensions of learning and leadership, including transformational and holistic leadership and the connection between emotional intelligence and leadership. A description of the study’s conceptual framework and its role in linking relevant concepts concluded the chapter. Chapter 3 describes the methods used to conduct the study.
Chapter 3: Research Methods and Procedures

The purpose of the study was to identify leadership behaviors and learning strategies used by successful small business leaders (SSBLs) in Northeast Florida. The primary research questions were

1. What learning strategies do successful small business leaders say they most often use?
2. What leadership behaviors do successful small business leaders say they most often use?

The study has the potential to identify leadership strategies and learning best practices used by SSBLs that may extend the literature on leadership and learning in small businesses. This chapter identifies and explains the research methods and procedures used in the study. Specifically, the chapter explains the Delphi method and addresses the research design, population, the instrument, reliability and validity issues, online data collection procedure, data management, data analysis, ethical considerations, and delimitations and limitations of the study.

Research Design

During the 1950s, the RAND Corporation designed the Delphi method, a research technique for forecasting and problem-solving complex issues (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). “Project Delphi” was a code name for an Air Force sponsored study that first used the Delphi method with seven expert participants. The study was designed to gather expert forecasts from a variety of specialists to determine Soviet Union threats to the United States during the Cold War (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

The use of the Delphi method has expanded since that time and has been applied to problems in a variety of settings. Wilhelm (2001) noted the use of the Delphi method to study issues and problems in other areas, including workplace skills and competencies; trends in education; business challenges; curriculum development; and teachers and school leader
behavior.

Sackman (1975) described the Delphi method as structured anonymous brainstorming. The method was designed to collect expert thinking to achieve group consensus through a series of questionnaires distributed iteratively (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The Delphi method uses an anonymous panel of experts who deliberate research issues through a series of questionnaires without direct interaction among the group members. Dominance by one member in the group is avoided through the assurance of anonymity and the absence of direct interaction by other participants (Dalkey, 1967). The anonymous nature of the method prevents groupthink by reducing the likelihood of one or a few individuals' opinions or beliefs becoming the dominant position of the group (Wilhelm, 2001). Additionally, anonymity provides a forum for open expression of ideas during the study (Wilhelm, 2001). This openness is important because participants are provided the opportunity for ideas to be considered solely on their merits. The method has several characteristics and steps that differentiate it from other research methods.

The first step of the Delphi method is an investigation of a topic where there is a “lack of agreement or incomplete state of knowledge concerning either the nature of the problem or the components which must be included in a successful solution” (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975, p. 5). Reliance on the knowledge of experts is the second step (Quade, 2011). A panel of experts is used to collect opinions, beliefs, or perspectives on one or several issues (McKenna, 1994). Identifying the most knowledgeable respondents is critical for the success of the Delphi method as the study draws upon the current knowledge of experts. Sackman (1975) criticized the way in which expertise is defined in Delphi studies while Lang (2000) noted that the quality of a Delphi study outcomes is dependent upon the strength of the participant panel. For the purpose of this study, an expert was defined as a participant who met the four criteria
outlined under the population and participation section of this proposal. The method provided the researcher the opportunity to select participants with targeted backgrounds to address the research questions. The Delphi method approach focuses on the ideas generated by a knowledgeable participant pool (Hasson & Keeney, 2011). Through the process of selecting respondents with expertise in small business learning and leadership, the iterative process collects quality information that provides answers to the research questions based on the participants’ perceptions.

The third step of a Delphi study requires that participants read and respond to questions and issues anonymously (Gibson, 1998; McKenna, 1994). Participants are provided feedback from the research in between each round. A Delphi study is comprised of a series of questionnaires (Delbecq et al., 1975) interspersed with controlled opinion feedback (Adler & Ziglio, 1996). Each group of questions is referred to as a round. The researcher collects the data from each round and composes a structured summary. The use of two or more rounds with a structured summary between rounds (McKenna, 1994) is the fourth step in a Delphi study.

Iqbal and Pipon-Young (2009) described the Delphi study as a series of idea generation and collate rounds that end in an evaluative phase. The first round questionnaire is qualitative and includes open-ended questions inviting participants to brainstorm (Iqbal & Pipon-Young, 2009; Powell, 2003). A broad range of perspectives and ideas is collected through the participation by a panel of experts (Gibson & Miller, 1990). The participants’ responses to the first round guide the creation of questions for subsequent rounds and questionnaires. The next round includes questions to further clarify the prior rounds responses (Gibson & Miller, 1990). The questions for Round 2 are constructed from responses collected during the first round, at which time a Likert style survey is constructed to rate the responses (Iqbal & Pipon-Young,
2009; Powell, 2002). The responses from each round are analyzed, summarized, and then reported back to the panel of experts. The purpose of each sequential round is to provide respondents the opportunity to review their responses alongside results from the prior round and from other respondents.

A Delphi study provides participants the opportunity to understand the diversity of opinions on a topic (Iqbal & Pipon-Young, 2009). Participants become aware of the pooling of knowledge and differing viewpoints (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The process stimulates thinking about complex questions and issues (Linstone & Turoff, 2011). Respondents have a window of time to respond to the questionnaires. Removing the requirement of an immediate response leads to deeper reflection and insight on the topic before composing a written response (Wilhelm, 2001). Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson (1975) found respondents' written communication skills were critical for the success of the Delphi method. Therefore, careful selection of the expert panel is critically important for a successful study.

The fifth step is the movement towards a consensus of opinion (Quade, 2011). Iqbal and Pipon-Young (2009) described the Delphi method as an exploration of consensus. Wilhelm (2001) believed Delphi studies provide the opportunity to reach a consensus of expert opinion and answers to research questions through a singular process, and Linstone and Turoff (2011) further clarified that the goal of a Delphi study was to achieve a stability of responses rather than consensus. McKenna (1994) further recommended the use of descriptive statistics and frequency distribution to identify patterns of agreement. In this study, the identification of patterns of agreement should verify that the Delphi study was successful in discovering the most common perceptions of what learning strategies and leadership behaviors are most often used by successful small business owners.
The use of both qualitative and quantitative feedback is the sixth step of the Delphi method. It includes the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data through participants' responses to three asynchronous group communications. Creswell (2007) promoted the use of mixed methods research when the researcher seeks to build on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data, and Tappio, Paoniemi, Varho, and Vinnari (2011) further supported the “unholy marriage” of qualitative and quantitative data collection within a single study to form a scenario or systemic description of events. The mixed method approach is useful for establishing coherent scenarios (Tappio, Paoniemi, Varho, and Vinnari, 2011). The collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data create a more complete picture of the phenomenon being studied (Pipon-Young, 2009). For this study, that means a more complete picture of learning strategies and leadership behaviors used by successful small business leaders.

Delbecq et al. (1975) presented three critical conditions necessary for a successful Delphi study. First, the respondents have adequate time to complete the study. The minimal amount of time required for a Delphi study is 45 days (Delbecq et al., 1975). Second, participants must exhibit strong written communication skills, which support the selection of knowledgeable and motivated participants. The Delphi method stimulates thought on complex issues while guarding against information overload (Linstone & Turoff, 2011). According to Delbecq et al. (1975), “The quality of responses is very much influenced by the interest and commitment of the participants. Delphi studies require especially high participant motivation since other people are not present to stimulate and maintain motivation” (p. 85). In this study, meticulous selection of participants was paramount.

**Population and Participants**

According to the Delphi literature, participants are individuals whose judgments are being
sought (Delbecq et al., 1975; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Wilhelm, 2001). Successful small business owners in Northeast Florida were sought to participate in this study. The decision to interview successful small business owners was based on the assumption that there are learning strategies that SSBLs use and leadership behaviors they practice that have not been carefully studied if at all. Wilhelm (2001) noted the importance of developing a procedure to locate appropriate experts and identifying criteria necessary for identifying those experts. The study did not target a specific demographic group, and individuals under the age of 18 were not allowed to participate in the study. The primary selection criterion was whether each participant was a small business leader. This means that gender, ethnicity, and age below 18 were variables used during the recruitment process. Therefore, in this study, the criteria used to identify a panel of participants were the following:

- A current leader of a successful small business with small business defined as those who have established and managed a small business for the principal purpose of achieving personal goals for three or more years, experienced growth within the business, and participated in community activities (Acs et al., 1998; Baumol, 2005; Carland et al., 1984)
- A leader whose enterprises have survived for a specific period of time (Carland et al., 1984). For the purpose of this study, the time period is 3 years or more.
- A leader with at least 3 years of experience leading a successful small business
- A leader of a business with a maximum of 500 employees on active payroll

Expertise was the key requirement in the selection of members for the panel (Adler & Ziglio, 1996; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Wilhelm, 2001). According to Skulmoski, Hartman, and Krahn (2007), expertise requirements consist of “i) knowledge and experience with the issues
under investigation; ii) capacity and willingness to participate; iii) sufficient time to participate in the Delphi; and, iv) effective communication skills” (p.4). Consequently, the strength of the participant panel in a Delphi study is reflected in how the expertise requirements are met and determines the quality of the outcomes (Lang, 2000). How an expert is defined not only influences the make-up of a panel but also affects the sample size needed to make the research reliable (Baker, Lovell, & Harris, 2006). Delbecq et al. (1975) indicated the generation of new ideas does not increase with a larger group and thus suggested limiting participation in a Delphi study. The size of a participant panel varies with each study, but Adler and Ziglio (1996), Delbecq et al. (1975), and Linstone and Turoff (1975) found good results may be obtained with a panel as few as 10-15 individuals. Linstone (1975) followed up indicating “a suitable minimum panel size is seven” (p. 296). Delbecq et al. (1975) and Gustafson (1975) recommended using the minimally sufficient number of participants and verifying the results through follow-up explorations. Analyses reported by Brockhoff (2002) implied that the performance of group experts did not appreciable improve beyond groups sizes of 7-10 participants. Brockhoff (1975) and Boje and Murnighan (1982) used groups of five, seven, and nine to determine the impact of the number of panelists has on a Delphi study. Neither Brockhoff (1975) nor Boje and Murnighan (1982) found a consistent relationship between panel size and effectiveness criteria. Opinions of researchers varied on the size of panelists for a Delphi study. Therefore, SSBLs in Northeast Florida were identified and selected as explained below. The final number of participants in this study included 4 Delphi survey, or Phase 1, participants and 4 interviews, or Phase 2, participants.

The first round of recruitment used the Reference USA database accessible through the University of North Florida’s Library. An initial sample of 809 small businesses was drawn from
seven industries—food and beverage, financial, wholesale distribution, retail, engineering and construction, manufacturing, and service. The list of businesses was selected on basis of the following search parameters:

- Located in Clay, Duval, or St. Johns County
- Established between 1934-2009 (Lee, Lim, & Lim, 2003).
- Privately owned
- Minimum of 2 and a maximum of 500 employees

Then, as shown in Table 1, a proportionate sample of 50 businesses and their leaders was selected from a population of 809 based on criteria used to identify the expert panel. The 50 addresses were obtained from the Florida Department of State, Division of Corporations, from respective county chambers of commerce databases and the businesses’ websites. The 50 successful small business leaders were asked to participate in the study via an invitation letter (see Attachment B) sent to their places of business. The initial recruitment round resulted in a single participant. An email address was collected via the initial recruitment letter and used to send the informed consent form and Round 1 questionnaire. The participant did not respond to the Round 1 survey nor the two reminder emails sent.

Table 1
*Population and Sample of Small Business by Industry*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th><em>Total Businesses</em></th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>Targeted Business Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food &amp; Beverage</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering &amp; Construction</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>13 %</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>14 %</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale &amp; Distribution</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>16 %</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>32 %</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>809</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The total number of businesses (809) is specific to the first column industries located in Northeast Florida. However, there are numerous other businesses in other categories that are not
listed.

Upon completion of the first round of recruitment, it became apparent to the researcher, a second round of recruitment with new procedures was necessary. The second round of recruitment used the same search parameters for inclusion in the study. However, the second round of recruitment used purposeful sampling with the option to use snowball sampling to choose the panel of eligible experts (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Through contacting Jax Chamber of Commerce, North Florida District Office of the Small Business Administration, and CoWork Jax, the researcher created a list of 68 small businesses which met the parameters for inclusion in the study. All potential participants were contacted through telephone communication. If potential participants were unavailable, a message was left via voicemail or an administrative assistant. The researcher received six follow-up calls from potential participants who received voicemails. When contact was made with potential participants, an email address was requested to send further information and an invitation to participate in the research study. The second round of recruitment resulted in fifteen potential Delphi survey, or Phase 1, participants indicating interest in the research study. Of the fifteen potential Phase 1 participants, five completed the Round 1 survey in its entirety. Four Phase 1 participants completed all three rounds of the Delphi survey.

The interview, or Phase 2, participants were recruited through contacting Jax Chamber of Commerce, North Florida District Office of the Small Business Administration, and CoWork Jax. The Phase 2 panel included a panel of four successful small business leaders. Only 1 of the initial Phase 1 panelists was included in a follow-up interview due to her unique responses on the Delphi survey. These small business leaders are referred to as the interview panel, or Phase 2.
Instrumentation

In a Delphi study, questionnaires with broad questions are distributed to participants (Delbecq et al., 1975). During each subsequent round, responses from the prior round are used to revise the questionnaire before it is administered (Delbecq et al., 1975). Distribution of the questionnaire could be achieved by regular mail or via an online system, which, according to Chou (2002), improves efficiency and effectiveness while benefitting the participants. For these reasons, Qualtrics was used to administer and collect participants' responses during each round of the study. Qualtrics provides participants a direct link to the questionnaire and the opportunity to respond online within a designated timeframe. Participants may complete the questionnaire at their convenience during the established timeframe.

The questionnaire (Appendix A) used in Round 1 was divided into 2 sections. Section 1 questions requested participants' background and demographic information, and Section 2 questions were open-ended and specific to the learning strategies and leadership behaviors of successful small business leaders. On December 2, 2013, the Round 1 survey was sent to the 15 potential participants with a requested completion date for the following week. On December 5th, a reminder email was sent to potential participants and again on December 9th. The Round 1 survey was closed on December 16th, two weeks after the initial Round 1 survey was sent to potential participants. Only five participants completed the Round 1 survey in its entirety and would be moving forward with the study.

The survey used in Round 2 was built on the feedback and responses received during Round 1. The Round 2 survey presented a list of seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies developed from Round 1 responses. Participants were provided the opportunity to rate each of the categories identified by the Round 1 survey. Participants were asked to rate the
findings rather than to rank them to avoid forced ranking. Through allowing participants to rate each category, a mean was produced for each category individually thus providing a group ranking overall.

The Round 2 questionnaire used a Likert-type scale for respondents to review the prior round findings. The researcher asked participants to rate on a 5-point scale the level of importance for each of the categories (1 = not at all important; 2 = not important; 3 = neither important nor unimportant; 4 = important; 5 = very important) for both leadership behaviors and learning strategies. The Round 2 survey also included an area for participants to include additional comments. The researcher requested completion of the survey within the week. All five participants completed the Round 2 survey within the designated timeframe.

Round 3 presented the list of leadership behaviors and learning strategies developed from Round 1 and Round 2 responses alongside the group’s mean computed for each category. Round 3 provided participants an opportunity to change individual ratings, justify individual ratings, and make additional comments. Five unique surveys were created to provide participants their prior rounds responses alongside the group’s mean. Additionally, participants were provided a chart listing the leadership behaviors and learning strategies in order of the overall group ranking from Round 2. Participants were asked to discuss their overall reflections on the findings from the Delphi study for both leadership behaviors and learning strategies.

**Interviews**

The interviews or Phase 2 began upon completion of Round 3 of data collection. The researcher contacted potential interviewers by telephone or via email. She introduced herself and provided a brief overview of the study and the purpose of the interview. All four of the potential interviewees agreed to participate in the study. An email was sent providing a brief introduction
to the study and a copy of the informed consent form. Additionally, potential interviewees were provided the opportunity to schedule the interview at their convenience via email.

Two formats were used for the interviews. The first format included asking the participants the same questions from the Round 1 Delphi questionnaire. Upon addressing the Round 1 questions, the interviewees were provided a copy of the results from the Delphi study and asked to discuss their overall reflections on the findings from the Delphi study for both leadership behaviors and learning strategies. The second format provided a copy of the results from the Delphi study and asked the interviewees to discuss their overall reflections on the findings. Format 1 was used for interviewees 1 and 3 while format 2 was used for interviewees 2 and 4.

Validity and Reliability

While “reliability is a necessary characteristic for validity” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005), validity refers to the extent to which the research design measures the intended situation or conditions (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). In a Delphi study, validity is maximized through the selection of a panel of experts. Expertise is the key requirement in the selection of members for the panel (Adler & Ziglio, 1996; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004; Wilhelm, 2001). The quality of the study's outcome is dependent upon the strength of the expert participants (Lang, 2000; Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). Clayton (1997) advocated recruiting a Delphi panel that is larger than recommended to address possible validity concerns due to attrition. Gnatzy, Warth, von der Gracht, and Darkow (2011) found the use of the real-time or computer-based Delphi studies increased the efficiency of the process, accommodated to availability of experts, and decreased the dropout rate. Linstone and Turoff (1975) noted that the pooled judgment of a group had far greater “validity” than the judgment of a single individual.
The validity of the data is further reinforced through the Delphi method by providing respondents the opportunity to review responses from each round and make adjustments to their initial position. Eisner (1998) described this as consensual validation in which a group of competent individuals agreed upon the description and interpretation of a situation. Elsewhere in the qualitative literature, such an opportunity for review is referred to as member checks (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002).

The use of multiple iterations or rounds, structured response and feedback, and panel feedback support were used to ensure the validity of the study (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Additionally, an audit trail was developed; this is “a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study” (Patton, 2002, p. 31). This procedure further ensured the accuracy of the findings and ensured the successful measure of leadership behaviors exhibited and learning strategies used by SSBLs.

Litwin (1995) and Skulmoski et al. (2007) encouraged the use of a pilot study to validate the instrument and questions. A pilot study was conducted to validate the Delphi questionnaire (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007). Forty-four graduate business students and small business owners were given the *Instrument Evaluation Checklist* (Appendix D) and asked to evaluate and provide feedback about Parts A and B of the questionnaires. The feedback provided from the pilot study participants confirmed that the questions were clear and relevant to leadership behaviors and learning strategies of successful small business leaders. Pilot participants also provided an estimate on the time it took participants to complete the survey (Skulmoski et al., 2007).

Reliability refers to the consistency or stability of results and extent to which the study can be replicated (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Iqbal and Pipon-Young
(2009) found the reliability and validity of a Delphi study improved when the items are produced through the expert participants' responses. Use of experts is fundamental to reliability and is a defining component of consensus methods of research (Baker et al., 2006). Lang (2000) also addressed the challenges of evaluating the accuracy and reliability of the Delphi method because the technique is based on determining the opinion of the expert participants’ perceptions. However, the Delphi method has been found to enhance reliability through the interactive nature of the approach combined with avoidance of groupthink (Hasson & Kenney, 2011). Be that as it may, and in addition to the research, two research assistants were asked to rate Round 1 responses and review the researcher’s coding process to ensure accurate interpretation and synthesis of the data from that round. There was no need to code data from Rounds 2 and 3 because data from those rounds were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Data Collection**

The conventional Delphi method seeks to develop consensus and identify areas of divergence among the expert participants. The responses to the questionnaires are quantified, summarized, and synthesized to reflect the group’s consensus and identify areas of agreement and disagreement (Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Wilhelm, 2001). The participants then have the opportunity to reevaluate their responses in light of the group response from the prior round. Participants of this study were asked to provide opinions and perspectives on the key learning strategies and leadership behaviors of successful small business leaders.

Gupta and Clarke (1996) noted that one of the disadvantages of the Delphi method is sloppy execution. The delivery of the questionnaires and collection of responses through an online method guarded against this potential disadvantage. The electronic delivery of the Delphi questionnaires improved the efficiency of this study and supported anonymous interaction of
participants. This study includes three rounds. It was determined after completion of the third round that a fourth round was unnecessary.

The use of an online tool like Qualtrics improves communication and efficiency of the traditional mail or fax-based Delphi method (Eggers & Jones, 1998). During each round of the study the questionnaire was administered online through Qualtrics, an online survey program. The use of Qualtrics provided participants a direct link to the questionnaire and the opportunity to respond online within a designated time frame. Participants were reminded via a follow-up email to complete the questionnaire if a response had not been received during the one-week time frame. Reminder emails were only sent for the Round 1 survey. All participants responded to the Round 2 email within the one-week time frame. Additionally, Qualtrics provided the researcher the opportunity to express her appreciation to participants after each round and upon completion of the study.

Round 1 of the study included an open-ended questionnaire that addressed the research questions. Wilhelm (2001) indicated that statements within Round 1 questionnaire should be comprised of 20-25 words. Reaching consensus proves more difficult if too many words are used (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The qualitative aspect of the Round 1 survey elicited a wide range of responses. The purpose of the first round was to determine the initial position on the issue (Wilhelm, 2001), and it provided an opportunity to go beyond what is currently known or believed by providing participants an open forum (Iqbal & Pipon-Young, 2009). Participants were able to respond without restrictions and provided commentary to support and explain the thinking that led to their responses. Round 1 generated a bank of learning strategies and leadership practices. The results were used to create a more structured questionnaire for Rounds 2 and 3. Round 1 was considered the most important step of a successful Delphi study because it
generated the data to be sifted and analyzed in later rounds (Lang, 2000; Linstone, 1975).

Descriptive statistics were used to quantify the Round 1 results. A Likert scale was used to rank participants’ responses during Rounds 2 and 3. Round 3 asked participants to evaluate and rank each leadership behavior and learning strategy and provide support for their position. Additionally, participants were asked to provide a reflection of the overall results from Round 2.

The Round 1 invitation letter and survey (see Attachment E) was sent via email to those potential panelists who indicated interest in participating in the study during the recruitment phase. The letter was sent to 15 potential participants who were asked to click on one of two options: (1) "By clicking here, I confirm I am at least 18 years old and understand and accept the above information. I agree and consent to participate in this study," in which case participants were navigated to the questionnaire. (2) "No, I do not wish to participate in this study," in which case participants were navigated to a page thanking them for their consideration. Participants who chose to continue with the study were given 7 days to complete the questionnaire. Those who did not respond within that time frame received a reminder letter (Appendix F) via email. Of the 15 potential participants who received the Round 1 invitation letter and survey, 10 responded to the survey with only 5 participants completing the survey in its entirety.

Several categories of data for learning strategies and leadership behaviors were developed from Round 1 responses via content analysis and the constant comparative method. Participants were only able to see the aggregate responses. Those participants who chose to continue with the study, and were navigated to Round 2 questionnaire, received instruction to complete Part A of the questionnaire by rating leadership behaviors using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all important, 2 = Not Very Important, 3 = Neither Important nor Unimportant, 4 = Important, and 5 = Very Important). For Part B of the questionnaire, participants were instructed
to rate the learning strategies identified using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all important, 2 = Not Very Important, 3 = Neither Important nor Unimportant, 4 = Important, and 5 = Very Important). After completing Parts A and B of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide additional comments on their ratings and submit the responses by clicking "Finish" at the end of the questionnaire.

The responses from Round 2 were collected and analyzed, and the results were used to create the Round 3 questionnaire. Then the Round 3 invitation letter (see Attachment H) was sent via email requesting the participants' continued participation in the study. The letter asked participants to click on one of two options: (1) "By clicking here, I confirm I am at least 18 years old and understand and accept the above information. I agree and consent to participate in this study," in which case participants were navigated to the questionnaire. (2) "No, I do not wish to participate in this study," in which case participants were navigated to a page thanking them for their consideration. All participants chose to continue with the study and were provided 7 days to complete the questionnaire. All participants in Round 3 responded during the designated time frame. Therefore, there was no need to send a reminder letter.

During Round 3, four participants were asked to review their ratings for each of the seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies alongside the average response of participants. Participants were asked to explain their rationale for rating the categories. The Round 3 questionnaire was divided into three parts. During Part A, participants reviewed their responses for each characteristic of leadership behavior and were provided the opportunity to change their individual ratings, justify the individual ratings, and make additional comments. During Part B, participants reviewed their responses for each characteristic of learning strategies and were provided the opportunity to change their individual ratings, justify the individual ratings, and
make additional comments. Part C provided participants two charts listing the leadership behaviors and learning strategies in order of the overall group ranking from Round 2. Participants were asked to discuss their overall reflections on the findings from the Delphi study for both leadership behaviors and learning strategies. They then submitted their responses by clicking "Finish" at the end of the questionnaire. Round 3 continued the process of synthesizing the data and identifying areas of convergence and divergence.

**Data Management**

Data collection and management were facilitated through the use of Qualtrics, which stored the data in a systems security infrastructure via an enhanced SSL encryption package. After each round, the data was downloaded in an Excel spreadsheet and .pdf file and transferred to a pen drive stored on UNF’s protected server, Osprey Skydrive. Data stored on the website was secured by Qualtrics during and following each round. The panelists' responses from each round were recorded and stored in a secure database after completion of each survey.

The data were archived through Qualtrics’ storage option and export function. Upon completion of the study, the data will be exported via an Excel file and stored on UNF’s protected server, Osprey Skydrive, for a period of three years before being destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

Content analysis and the qualitative constant comparative method, which is integral to grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997), were used to analyze the five participants’ responses from Round 1. Content analysis is a process used to make sense of a large volume of textual information. Content analysis involves the analysis of communication to identify patterns and themes within qualitative data. The textual information is categorized to derive meaning from qualitative data. The words and phrases used most often in the textual information reflect
important ideas from the participants (Patton, 2002). Grounded theory focuses on the process of generating a theory through steps and procedures which take the researcher as close to the real world as possible (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The constant comparative method involves the interaction of the researcher, the data, and the developing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). A key characteristic of the constant comparative method is theoretical sensitivity on the part of the researcher. A theoretical sensitive researcher delves deeply into the data through a process of asking questions throughout a continuous cycle to develop an understanding of the phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Grounded theory also emphasizes a disciplined process of removing the researcher's biases while involving the researcher's analytical thinking, curiosity, and creativity (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Patton, 2002). The researcher maintained a systematic log or journal detailing every step of the research process, including suggestions for other ways of organizing the data, which may lead to different findings (Patton, 2002).

Open-ended questions posed during Round 1 iteration served as the initial data collection phase. The purpose of qualitative data analysis during Round 1 was to recognize patterns and themes in the responses. The analysis process included developing a coding scheme (Patton, 2002). A three-step coding procedure was used to organize the data—open, axial, and selective. The first step, open coding, involved reviewing the data line by line and naming and categorizing the information. During the second step, axial encoding, the data was organized into categories and relationships between the categories were considered. Then axial encoding was used to examine the relationship between codes and relate categories to their subcategories (Patton, 2002). The last step, selective encoding, resulted in the identification of seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies exhibited by SSBLs. The researcher discussed and
identified themes and patterns in the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Data collected during Rounds 2 and 3 were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The analysis included the calculation of the mean and standard deviation to identify convergence and divergence of opinions and responses. This process was used to identify when stability in the responses was achieved. This method is consistent with the purpose of a Delphi study, which is to locate a stability of responses (Linstone & Turoff, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

Every effort was made to protect the rights of all participants and ensure confidentiality throughout the entire study. All collected data was stored on UNF's secure server. The researcher and her dissertation chair have access to the data; UNF’s IRB and federal regulators reserve the legal right to access and audit all research records associated with this study. All data will be destroyed three years after the study has been completed. Participants accessed the questionnaire through a secure link to Qualtrics, thus concealing all identifiable information including IP and email addresses.

Each participant was informed of the voluntary nature of the study, purpose of the study, the intended use of the data, and any foreseeable risks. Informed consent was obtained via the Qualtrics questionnaire, which means participants were given the following options on the first page of the questionnaire:

a. By clicking here, I confirm that I am at least 18 years old and understand and accept the above information. I agree and consent to participate in this study

b. No, I do not wish to participate in this study.

Interview participants were emailed a copy of the Interview Informed Consent before the interview and provided a copy at the interview.
As required by the University of North Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course and received approval of the study by completing and submitting the requisite application. All University of North Florida and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines were followed regarding the protection of human subjects.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The study experienced several limitations. One limitation was geographical; participants were limited to small business leaders in Northeast Florida including Clay, Duval, and St. Johns counties. Therefore, it may be inappropriate to generalize the results of the study to all small business owners beyond the setting of the study. A second limitation may have been participants' unwillingness to contribute to the study, and, if they did participate, the extent to which their responses represented what they actually believe. The researcher had no control over the accuracy of the participants' responses on the questionnaires. As Iqbal and Pipon-Young (2009) observed, “Another panel may reach different conclusions, and it cannot be concluded that the only or correct issues have been identified” (p. 600). A third limitation was the participants’ access to the internet for completion of the online surveys for Phase 1 of the study. This limited participation to those individuals who regularly used computers and were proficient with accessing the internet.

The study had several delimitations as well. Participants were delimited to small business leaders in Northeast Florida; thus, the leadership behaviors and learning strategies were determined by what they said and believed and not by observation or an assessment instrument. A third delimitation was the focus on successful small business owners as defined by the SBA. While it would be advantageous to study small business owners, this was not the focus of the
study. Finally, the definition of success was the third delimitation. Success is a subjective experience based on one's expectations and actual outcomes. For the purpose of this study, success was defined as those businesses that survived for three (3) years and have 500 or fewer employees (Carland et al., 1984).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 described the research methods and procedures of this study. The Delphi method was chosen to study and examine the data collection and analysis processes. The Delphi method design consisted of three rounds of data collection. Round 1 was exploratory in nature. Subsequent questionnaires included the paired responses from Round 1 and a Likert-style survey instrument used to rate responses and determine the level of agreement or disagreement between participants. The participants in the study were five SSBLs purposively selected from Northeast Florida. The participants' responses were collected through Qualtrics, an online data collection tool. Data collection and management through Qualtrics supported the anonymous quality of the Delphi method. In addition to the Delphi, or Phase 1, participants, four interview, or Phase 2, participants participated in the study.

In summary, the study sought expert knowledge from SSBLs in order to identify their key leadership behaviors and learning strategies. Through the insight, experiences, and preferences of expert respondents, the study explored best practices of learning and leadership in small business organizations. The study has the potential to contribute to the existing literature on learning strategies and leadership behaviors. Chapter 4 will present an analysis of the findings.
Chapter 4: Results, Analysis, and Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify leadership behaviors and learning strategies used by successful small business leaders (SSBLs) in Northeast Florida. The primary research question is this: What are the learning strategies and leadership behaviors of successful small business leaders? The ancillary questions are

1. What leadership behaviors are exhibited by successful small business leaders?
2. What learning strategies are used by successful small business leaders?

The purpose of this Delphi research study was to gain consensus of perceptions regarding the leadership behaviors and learning strategies used by SSBLs. The Delphi method collects the responses of experts in a systematic way (Wilhelm, 2001). The Delphi method is a technique used to identify and explore a convergence of opinion (Dalkey, 1967).

The Delphi method was selected as the research approach for this study because it provides the most flexible approach to seeking the perspective of SSBLs. The Delphi method uses a group of experts who anonymously discuss and respond to the research issue. This method was the most suitable for this research for three reasons. First, the Delphi method is an approach that supports moving towards the most reliable form of consensus of expert opinion in a particular field where current knowledge is minimal (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Wilhelm, 2001; & Delbecq et al., 1975). Second, the Delphi method is a credible method for encouraging respondents to participate anonymously. Third, the Delphi method supports the use of the internet to garner current knowledge and relevant insights from experts in near real-time application.

In addition to the Delphi method study, as the researcher, I conducted four in-depth interviews with small business leaders. The Delphi survey served as the initial data collection
process to gain an understanding into the leadership behaviors and learning strategies used by SSBLs and constituted Phase 1. The in-depth interviews served to delve deeper into those characteristics identified by the Delphi survey to corroborate the findings and constituted Phase 2.

**Pilot Test**

The purpose of the pilot test of this study was to enhance reliability and to determine through the pilot study of participants’ feedback the revisions required prior to administering the survey to the selected population of the Delphi study. The pilot test comprised two parts including review of the Round 1 survey and completion of an Instrument Evaluation Checklist (Appendix D) between October 9, 2013, and October 31, 2013. The Instrument Evaluation Checklist was created to ensure instrument reliability and validity (Litwin, 1995). The pilot study included 44 participants who were either small business leaders who were outside the parameters of the study or MBA students. The small business leaders who participated in the study were contacted directly by the researcher for participation in the study. These leaders fell outside the parameters of the study due to geographic location or length of time in business (fewer than 3 years). The MBA students were recruited via business professors within the Coggin College of Business. The professor sent the survey links to the students to complete voluntarily.

The pilot study was not performed for the purpose of data analysis. However, data collected was of sufficient quality that it could have been used in the study. To assure data integrity and keep the pilot and main Delphi study information separate, two unique surveys were created.

The pilot round was successful and produced valid data through the use of the web-based survey instrument, Qualtrics. Additionally, the pilot study provided a rehearsal for the Round 1 survey instrument and data collection process. It provided realistic data and feedback and the
opportunity to strengthen the main Delphi study through several changes. Listed below are some of the more important lessons learned from the pilot test.

1. Proper permissions and acknowledgements were accomplished in keeping with IRB Guidelines

2. Data were easily transferrable to Microsoft Excel and SPSS from Qualtrics if necessary although Qualtrics provides a report including basic statistical analysis.

3. The demographics questions proved to include all relevant areas.

4. Qualitative information gathered from the open-ended questions included thick description and rich information.

5. Estimated time for completion of the survey appeared to be incorrect as the survey took less time than anticipated.

6. Two typos were noted and corrected before the Round 1 survey was sent to participants.

**Description of Participants**

The process of obtaining nine small business leaders who qualified to participate in the study took three months. A complication of the research was finding participants who met all the criteria and had the time and willingness to commit to the study. Locating qualified participants proved to be more challenging than anticipated. I discovered during telephone conversations with potential participants that many were enthusiastic about the study but did not have the time to commit or were hesitant to share details regarding their business practices.

The study included two groups of participants to complete the study. Phase 1, or the main Delphi study, comprised three sequential rounds of surveys that were completed by a panel of five successful small business leaders. These small business leaders were referred to as the
Delphi panel and determined representative of successful small business leaders. The Delphi panel consisted of three females and two males; all panelists were white. The ages of the Delphi panel ranged from two panelists between 36-45, one panelist between 46-55, and two panelists older than 56. The panelists were representative of two industries with four panelists in the service industry and one in web development. The number of years of experience leading a small business varied from 3 to 26 years with the average being 11 years. The number of employees also varied between 6 and 31 employees with the average being 19 employees.

Phase 2 of the study included a panel of four successful small business leaders who participated in interviews. The interview panel was set up as an additional step to the initial three-round Delphi study. Only one of the Delphi panelists was included as a follow-up interview; due to her unique responses on the Delphi survey, the researcher felt it was necessary to delve further into her responses. The other three members were small business leaders in Northeast Florida who were recommended by other small business owners to the researcher as exemplary small business leaders. These small business leaders were referred to as the interview panel and determined representative of successful small business leaders.

The interview panel consisted of two females and two males; all panelists were white. The ages of the interview panel varied with two panelists between 36-45 and two panelists between 46 and 55. The panelists were representative of three industries with two panelists in the retail industry, one panelist in the service industry, and one panelist who selected “other” and described the business as consulting. The number of years of experience leading a small business varied from 3 to 17 years with the average being 9 1/2 years. The numbers of employees also varied between 4 and 300 employees.

Among the participants on the interview panel was Stephanie. She is the owner of a
rapidly growing daycare in St. Johns County which fosters the Reggio Emilia approach in early education. She is a leader in developing the premier green childcare learning center in Northeast Florida. Finn, another panelist, is the owner of a running specialty store with two locations in Northeast Florida. He is innovative and seeks continuous improvement within his store and from followers. His stores have been recognized in the top 50 stores in the United States for their area of specialty. Kennedy runs a consulting company supporting the interests of executive and life coaches. She is continuously learning and demonstrates creativity in developing solutions to challenges. Her business is constantly expanding and she fosters a true team spirit within her business. Pierce is the CEO of an aftermarket parts distributor in Northeast Florida. He focuses on modeling leadership behaviors and supporting the growth of his followers. Additionally, he focuses on knowing what is going on outside the four walls of his business and consistently looks for growth opportunities within his field.

Since the panelists were selected based upon their position as small business leaders and referrals, I did not know the race of the participants beforehand. Additionally, purposeful sampling was used for the interview phase of the study to seek panelists who were referred by other small business leaders as exemplary. Each interview panelist was reviewed to verify that he or she met the selection criteria posed for Delphi panelists as well.

The Delphi panel for this study successfully represented the community of interest. The study was of proper size with sufficient representation of the small business community. A Delphi study may have as few as three or hundreds of members. Analyses reported by Brockhoff (2002) imply that the performance of a group of experts does not appreciably improve beyond group sizes of 7-10 participants. Brockhoff stated that “a general positive relationship between group size and group performance cannot be recognized” (p. 310). The optimal size and
composition for a Delphi study is unknown (Armstrong, 2000; Cantrill, 1996; Powell, 2003). Powell (2003) indicated the sample size varies based on the scope of the problem and resources. “The Delphi does not call for expert panelists to be a representative sample for statistical purposes. Representativeness, it seems, is assessed on the qualities of the expert panel rather than its numbers” (p. 378). The criteria for identifying experts for this study, as outlined in Chapter 3, ensured the panelists were indeed experts in their field. Linstone and Turoff (1975) noted it is the panel as a whole and not one individual member who determines the degree of consensus on the subject of interest. In this Delphi study, five Delphi panelists and four in-depth interviewees’ responses formed the data for analysis.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the best practices and strategies used by successful small business owners with regard to leadership behaviors and learning strategies. The Delphi method was used as an investigative research approach to identify the key leadership behaviors and learning strategies used by small business leaders and determined by engaging expert panelists from the small business community. Data was collected through multiple iterations of Delphi surveys and in-depth interviews. The Delphi surveys served as the initial data collection method with in-depth interviews used to delve deeper into the data and corroborate the findings from the Delphi surveys. The first round of the questionnaire provided open-ended questions to the panelists and served as the initial brainstorming forum. During Rounds 2 and 3 of the Delphi survey, panelists were asked to rate and confirm their responses. The in-depth interviews, or Phase 2, of the study provided further insight into the responses from the Delphi surveys. Data gathered during the in-depth interview phase were coded based upon the categories presented from the Delphi survey results. From the research and analysis of the Delphi survey
and interview data, the researcher was able to present information that may be employed to improve small business leadership.

This section of the dissertation presents the main Delphi study and in-depth interview data collection results and the analysis of the information collected during the process. The main Delphi survey study process began in December 2013 and concluded in March 2014. The Round 1 survey was sent to fifteen participants on December 2, 2013. The Round 2 survey was sent to five participants on January 20, 2014. On February 19, 2014, the Round 3 survey was sent to five participants. Data analysis was concluded in March 2014. The main Delphi study comprised of three sequential rounds of surveys completed by a panel of five successful small business leaders through Qualtrics forming the Delphi survey panel, or Phase 2, of the study.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in March 2014 with data analysis completion during the same month. The first interview was conducted on March 4, 2014; the second interview was conducted on March 5, 2014. The third and fourth interviews were conducted approximately two weeks later on March 21, 2014 and March 24, 2014. The in-depth interviews were completed with four successful small business leaders comprising the interview panel, or Phase 2, of the study. The interviews were conducted in the interviewees’ offices except for one which was conducted at a location of the business leaders choosing, and he opted for Starbucks.

**Delphi Survey Analysis**

The response rate for Round 1 was 33%. Of the 15 participants who agreed to participate, 9 completed the survey. However, only five completed the survey in its entirety. The survey was administered initially on December 2, 2013. The length of time to complete the survey was extended twice with reminder emails sent on December 5 and December 9, 2013. Reminder calls were placed to those participants who had incomplete surveys or had not responded to the
emailed survey.

The Round 2 survey was administered on January 21, 2014. The response rate for the survey was 100% by the five panelists continuing on from Round 1. According to Adler and Ziglio (1996), a response rate above 66% demonstrates a high level of participant interest. The length of time to complete the survey was never extended. There were no withdrawals from participants during the Round 2 survey.

The Round 3 survey was administered on February 19, 2014. The response rate for the survey was 80%. The length of time to complete the survey was extended once for two participants. Of the two participants who received an extension, one participant completed the survey within the week. The other participant did not complete the survey despite two email reminders sent at seven-day intervals and one voicemail message left as a reminder to complete the survey. No further communication was received from this participant. Participant withdrawal is a concern with Delphi studies and attrition amongst participants occurs as they move from one round to another (Clayton, 1997). Therefore, there was one withdrawal from participation during the Round 3 survey.

**Round 1 Survey.** Panelists in the Round 1 survey responded to two open-ended questions. The first question focused on learning strategies used by small business leaders to help run or manage their business. The second question focused on leadership behaviors used by small business leaders to assist in leading and managing their business. The qualitative constant comparative method, which is integral to grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997), was used to analyze responses from the Round 1 survey. The constant comparative method involves the interaction of the researcher, the data, and the developing theory (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The responses to open-ended questions posed during the Round 1 survey were analyzed to
identify patterns and themes found in the responses from Round 1. The researcher's task in data analysis was to apply techniques that reduce the data to meaningful themes relevant to the research questions. A three-step coding procedure was used to organize the data—open, axial, and selective.

Prior to beginning step one, open coding, I read through the data several times without naming or categorizing the information. I postponed completion of step one an additional day to provide myself the opportunity for thinking space. The following day, I began the open coding process. During step one, open coding, I read through the data line-by-line naming and categorizing the information. I jotted down notes after each line clearly identifying any leadership or learning characteristics identified. Reviewing the data line by line allowed similar categories and themes to emerge.

During step two, axial coding, I organized the data into categories and looked for relationships between the categories. Axial encoding is the process of examining the relationship between codes or relating categories to their subcategories (Patton, 2002). Using the notes from open coding, I reviewed each line of data alongside the leadership or learning category identified. I went through the axial coding process twice. I then created a chart listing each of the identified categories and the responses from panelists which fit within each category. Many of the responses overlapped and fell into multiple subcategories. Initially, I developed six management categories, thirteen leadership categories, and six learning categories. Upon review, I realized the management categories fit within the leadership categories with many overlapping characteristics identified by the panelists. I used different colors of pen to identify the various categories and then listed each of the categories. This process allowed emergent themes and ideas to be identified and combined many of the categories. There were several responses that I set aside to
evaluate further, responses which did not immediately fall within any of the categories identified. As I continued to immerse myself in the data, the proper categories emerged as new categories or themes were identified or expanded. I read the categories or themes multiples times and made needed adjustments.

The last step, selective encoding, led to the development of the main idea of this study. The researcher fleshes out details and creates the story line of the theory (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Through selective encoding, I determined that the management categories fell nicely within the leadership category of transactional leadership. Additionally, I identified several overlapping leadership categories. Through the process of meaning-making, seven leadership behavior categories or themes were identified alongside six learning categories or themes. I stepped away from my data for a period of three days before returning to review each of the characteristics listed in each subcategory. At this point, I labeled or developed a word or phrase to capture the essence of the characteristics listed in each category. The final seven leadership behaviors included the following themes:

• **Enlist the Support of Followers:** Leading through example by modeling the desired behaviors encourages team involvement when trying to solve problems and keeps staff happy.

• **Inspire a Shared Vision:** A leader develops and clearly communicates the vision of the business and desired results, meets regularly with staff to discuss goals and review progress, develops a culture and provides support, and inspires followers to accept the vision as their own which enables them to become enthusiastic about the vision.

• **Leader as Chief Educator/Encourager:** A leader spends instructional time with staff, supports training and continuous learning, invests in employees, develops a team through coaching and mentoring relationships, and empowers employees to undertake learning opportunities.

• **Leadership as a Dialogue:** A leader communicates with peers, employees, and clients; uses storytelling to share experiences with team from prior situations; involves team in problem solving; and holds regular meetings to discuss goals.
• **Leader as Learner**: A leader asks questions of clients, peers, and employees, uses reflection as a method to investigate issues before making decisions; spends time observing day-to-day operations to identify opportunities for improvement; takes an active role in the community; and actively participates in networking, educational, and personal development.

• **Transactional Leadership**: A leader focuses on day-to-day operations and tasks including organizing, planning, delegating, staffing, budgeting, decision-making, and problem-solving.

• **Transformational Leadership**: A leader motivates and inspires employees, encourages employees to think and learn independently, empowers employees to make decisions, and enables followers to go beyond perceived limitations.

The final six learning strategies included the following themes:

• **Collective Learning**: Learning which occurs as part of a team, learning from small groups, listening and communicating with employees, and discussing challenges with other like owners

• **Experiential Learning**: Learning which occurs through direct experience and which involves a process of experimentation to develop meaningful and applicable knowledge

• **Formal Learning**: Learning which occurs by leading or participating in formal learning opportunities including workshops, courses, and professional development activities

• **Networking**: Learning from industry leaders, reaching out to others in the same fields with experience, discussing challenges with other like owners, attending meetings with organization of the same interest, and attending functions supporting or providing learning opportunities within the community

• **Reflective Practice**: Learning which occurs by processing an experience through critical reflection, documenting success and failure, or continuous improvement through actively reviewing progress on a consistent basis

• **Self-Directed/Informal Learning**: Learning directed by the individual including but not limited to listening, watching, or reading motivational, leadership, or management books/presentations, reading successful and unsuccessful strategies, and learning from acclaimed business leaders

Two independent reviewers were sent a copy of the seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies categories to determine whether the responses for each category aligned. The reviewers received a copy of Round 1 open coding (Appendix I), axial coding (Appendix J), and
selective coding (Appendix K) spreadsheets as well as a copy of the draft of Round 2 survey (Appendix M). The first independent reviewer was an executive with a biotechnology firm who has completed an MBA from Haas Business School, University of California, Berkeley and a PhD from Stanford University. He has more than 10 years of experience leading and managing teams including an in depth knowledge of leadership development. No edits or changes were identified by the first independent reviewer. The second independent reviewer is an executive with a nonprofit organization in Northeast Florida with an EdD in Educational Leadership. She is intimately familiar with leadership, learning, and the Delphi method. The second reviewer noted that the coding strategies were very transparent and easy to follow. Additionally, she noted how she particularly liked the way each theme was labeled to capture the essence of the panelists' responses and insight. Therefore, both independent reviewers agreed that the categories or themes aligned with the responses from the panelists.

**Round 2 Survey.** The five panelists in the Round 2 survey were asked to rate the level of importance for each of the proposed leadership behaviors and learning strategies categories. To evaluate the importance of each category, a 5-point Likert-type scale was used. The values assigned to each of the 5-point rating scale were 1 = Not At All Important, 2 = Not Very Important, 3 = Neither Important nor Unimportant, 4 = Important, and 5 = Very Important. Panelists were also provided an optional text box to include any further elaboration regarding their ratings for leadership behaviors and learning strategies used by successful small business leaders. Data collected during the survey process was retrieved for statistical analysis. The Qualtrics report was used to analyze the quantitative data including the frequencies, means, and standard deviations for each category. The overall means from the panelists' responses were then used to rank each of the categories for leadership behaviors and learning strategies (Table 2).
**Round 3 Survey.** Panelists in the Round 3 survey were provided a summary of the results gathered from the Round 2 survey. Five unique surveys were created for each panelist. Each unique survey presented the Round 2 survey results alongside the panelist's response. Panelists were asked to review their responses and had the opportunity to change their initial rating or enter “NC” for no change. Panelists were provided the opportunity to discuss which of the leadership behaviors and learning strategies they found to be most important as well as least important and provide an explanation. Additionally, panelists were provided an open text box to share their overall reflections from the findings of the Round 2 survey and share any insight they had not yet had the opportunity to share.

**Interview Analysis**

Phase 2, or the interview phase, of the study provided further insight into the responses from the Delphi panelists. I opted to transcribe the interviews myself as I viewed this as an opportunity to hear the interview multiple times and glean further insight into the interviewees’ responses. Upon completion of the transcription, I listened to the interview two additional times to edit any minor typos and add additional nonverbal indicators from my interview notes. Similar to the initial open coding process, I read the transcript line by line adding notations and identified categories or themes developed from the Delphi surveys. The transcripts were coded based upon the categories presented from the Delphi survey results. Additionally, I highlighted for further analysis any portions of the transcript that appeared to identify new themes.

After completing a minimum of four readings of each transcript, I created a chart listing in individual rows the leadership behaviors and learning strategies identified during the Delphi survey. I included an additional row for any new themes which were identified during the in-depth interview phase. I then listed comments from the interviewees which aligned with each
category. Similar to the Delphi survey coding process, I found several responses which overlapped between categories. During my review of the transcripts alongside the chart, I discovered the new themes identified during the interviews easily that fell within the categories created during the Delphi survey. Upon completion, I reviewed the chart a second time to flesh out the details from the data.

**Presentation of the Data**

The presentation of the findings is organized around the 2-phases of the research study: first addressing the data collected through the Delphi survey panelists and then from the interviewees. Throughout the three rounds of the Delphi survey and interviews, the participants were asked to share their expertise and opinions on the leadership behaviors and learning strategies used by successful small business leaders. The key to qualitative data analysis from this Delphi study was the identification of themes or categories that were found within the text from the responses to the open-ended questions from Round 1 survey. As Creswell (2007) noted, the researcher is “primary” in the analysis of qualitative information. This Delphi method provided the opportunity to gather panelists’ opinions and insights on the questions posed with the researcher being the primary analyst. Results from the Delphi survey and in-depth interviews were used to synthesize the data into seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies used by successful small business leaders.

**Phase 1 Delphi Survey**

**Round 1 Survey.** Five successful small business leaders contributed to identify 30 leadership behaviors and 30 learning strategies used by small business leaders to lead or manage their businesses. These behaviors and strategies were provided by individual respondents’ open-ended questions using their own terms and descriptions. The qualitative constant comparative
method, which is integral to grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997), was used to analyze responses from the Round 1 survey. A three-step coding procedure was used to organize the data—open, axial, and selective. The data was organized into categories and relationships between the categories were sought. Through examining the relationship between codes and relating categories, several themes emerged from the data. Using the systematic method provided by open, axial, and selective coding, I reviewed the data and identified the formation of seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies.

**Round 2 Survey.** During this phase, panelists were requested to rate the seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies identified using a 5-point Likert-style scale. Table 2 presents the data by category or theme for leadership behaviors and learning strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Behavior</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enlist the support of followers</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a shared vision</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership as a dialogue</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader as learner</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional leadership</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader as chief educator/encourager</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Strategies</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Learning</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential Learning</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Practice</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Learning</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Directed/Informal Learning</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Values are mean scores on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all important, 5 = very important); N=5.

Consensus was achieved on 12 (92%) themes. During this round, the highest level of consensus was achieved by the theme *Enlist the Support of Followers* (100%) under the leadership
behaviors category and Networking (100%) under the learning strategies category. The theme categories with the lowest level of consensus in this round for the Leadership Behaviors category were Leaders as Learner, Transactional Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Leader as Chief Educator/Encourager. The lowest level of consensus was reached for the Learning Strategies categories Experiential Learning and Reflective Practice.

Self-Directed/Informal Learning is the only theme under the category Learning Strategies which did not reach consensus. Consensus was based on a standard deviation of 1.0 or less with a range of 0.0 to .84 (See Table 2). The ratings for Self-Directed/Informal Learning ranged from 2 to 5 with a mean of 3.8 and standard deviation of 1.10 based on a 5 point rating scale.

Round 3 Survey. During Round 3 no changes were made by Delphi panelists with regards to leadership behaviors. Therefore, all themes achieved consensus when analyzed across the panelists for leadership behaviors. A review of the entire data set illustrates that all items were rated at or below a standard deviation of 1.0, the predetermined consensus range. Analysis across the category of leadership behaviors indicates that all themes achieved consensus based on a standard deviation of 1.0 or less with a range of 0.0 to .55.

During the Round 3 survey data analysis phase, panelists' responses were reviewed within the context of the Delphi panel as a whole as well as individually to note differences between agreement with ratings and rankings of the themes identified for leadership behaviors and for learning strategies. Additionally, qualitative data was provided via five open-ended questions to panelists to further elaborate upon their positions. During this phase, panelists were presented with the agreed upon leadership behavior and learning strategy theme rankings. Panelists had the opportunity to review their ratings alongside the group's rating. Upon reviewing their ratings, panelists had the opportunity to review their previous ratings, agree to a change, and/or provide
Panelists agreed *Enlist the Support of Followers* as the highest rated theme in leadership behaviors of successful small business owners. However, several panelists provided feedback regarding the overall rankings of the leadership behavior themes. One panelist rated both *Enlist the Support of Followers* and *Leadership as a Dialogue* as 5s, or very important, based on the Likert scale but indicated in the open-ended question that she would place *Leadership as a Dialogue* above *Enlist the Support of Followers*. The panelist felt “listening to your staff and most importantly your customers” was paramount to the success of a small business leader.

Another panelist rated both *Enlist the Support of Followers* and *Transformational Leadership* as 5s but indicated in the open-ended question that he would place *Transformational Leadership* above *Enlist the Support of Followers*. He stated transformational leadership “is truly empowering your team, trusting them, and allowing them to grow which in turn grows your business.” In another text box he noted “the part I disagree with is that I think transformational should rank higher.” Furthermore, the panelist felt *Transactional Leadership* was the least important Leadership Behavior theme identified. He stated “if you excel at the transformational than your team takes care of the day to day” suggesting that leaders who focused on transformational leadership didn’t have to worry about the day to day operations within the business. Another panelist felt *Inspire a Shared Vision* should rank above *Enlist the Support of Followers* noting “as a leader, we all want to feel a part of the team. The more they are part of this vision; they become more part of the team. People want to work for something they can feel a part of and have influence over.” While the consensus is noted via the ratings of the Leadership Behavior themes, there does not appear to be a consensus reached regarding the overall rankings of the themes.
Panelists agree *Networking* as the highest rated theme in Learning Strategies of successful small business owners and all small business leaders benefit from networking. No disagreement was noted in the open-ended question regarding the overall rankings for the Learning Strategy themes. Several panelists noted learning as taking place in all different formats and that methods can be found which catered to all needs. The majority of panelists recommended the importance of reinforcing learning in the small business environment.

Table 3 presents the findings from the Round 3 data after panelists had the opportunity to revisit their initial ratings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Strategies</th>
<th>Revised Mean</th>
<th>Revised SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective learning</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Directed/Informal learning</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential learning</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective practice</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal learning</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Values are mean scores on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all important, 5 = very important); N=5.

Upon completion of Round 3 survey, there was one change to a panelist’s rating for a learning strategies theme. One panelist changed her initial rating for *Self-Directed/Informal Learning* from a 2 to a 4 creating an overall mean of 4.4 with a standard deviation of .45 (See Table 2). This rating change provided consensus for the theme and shifted the ranking to second alongside *Collective Learning*.

**Phase 2 In-Depth Interviews**

During step one of the interview analysis, I read through each interview transcript twice. In order to begin the process of analyzing the interview data collected, I first quickly browsed
through all the transcripts as a whole and took notes on my first impressions. I then went through a process of re-reading each transcript carefully and slowly line by line. During step two, I read through each transcript a third time and began the coding or labeling process of relevant words, phrases, sentences, and sections I found to be important. I focused on items that were repeated several times, items that the interviewee designated as being important, reinforced data collected during the Delphi survey phase, or supported information gathered and presented during my review of literature (Patton, 2002). For step three, I considered each of the codes created and reviewed them alongside the seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies identified during the Delphi survey phase of this study. These categories form the core of the study. Many of the codes were combined thereby dropping some of the initial codes. I was unable to locate any outlier codes or those that did not fit within those categories previously identified. Before moving forward, I read through each transcript one more time to seek out any relevant information which may have previously been overlooked. During this process, I attempted to maintain an unbiased, open-minded, and creative mindset.

Upon completion of my final reading of each transcript, I encountered a case of analysis paralysis where I found myself uncertain where to begin analyzing the interview transcripts. Through looking at the patterns and themes, I completed a process of sense-making. “Because each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique” (Patton, 2002, 433). Patton (2002) warns against forced analysis or a perfectionist approach. I felt confident in my approach to the analysis. However, I was stumbling when it came to the reporting of the qualitative data in order to get a sense of the whole. I created several different outlines for the presentation of the qualitative data and ultimately decided it was best to organize the data question by question.
Leadership behaviors determine and influence a leader’s effectiveness and efficiency. What leadership behaviors do you believe are important and effective in helping you lead and manage your business?

Influential Leadership Behaviors

An analysis of the data from the interviews supported the Delphi survey results that concluded that *Enlist the Support of Followers* was the most influential leadership behavior. Leaders who *Enlist the Support of Followers* lead through example by modeling the desired behaviors, encourage team involvement when trying to solve problems, and keep staff happy.

The owner of a running store, Finn, described the way he models the characteristics or qualities he values to his staff: “The biggest thing I try to relay to my employees and to my staff is the personality or the characteristics I believe in. Like really helping people. Trying to have that mentality.” Finn also testified to the importance of *Leader as Chief Educator/Encourager* and *Transformational Leadership* as key leadership behaviors:

I do allow them or I give ownership you know to a lot of my employees. You know like everybody has a good idea. You know how many people like to execute on them or are brave enough to execute on them? So we really try to enforce that too. Instead of coming to me with an idea tell me how you are going to execute that idea. (Personal Communication, March, 24. 2014)

Before being presented the results of the Delphi study, Pierce, the president and CEO of a leading auto parts company, listed important qualities a leader should have and model to followers: hubris, checking his or her ego, listening to people, being patient, and pausing before make some kind of decision. Upon review of the Delphi survey data, Pierce noted modeling as the most important, but he also affirmed *Enlist the Support of Followers* and pointed out the
importance of “getting out from behind the desk” to know what is going on in order to model and to support followers. Looking at the Delphi survey data, Pierce felt Leader as Learner was another key leadership behavior and was placed a little low from his perspective.

Stephanie, the director and owner of a preschool, exemplified the importance of Enlist the Support of Followers through keeping her staff happy and team involved. She works to go above and beyond what other owners in her field are doing:

For us it's really important to keep our employees happy. That one is very important for us. If they need special times off we all pitch in together and work. That keeping our employees motivated and encouraging them is very important for us. (Personal Communication, March, 6, 2014)

At another point in the interview, Stephanie explained why dialogue between peers, employees, and clients was important:

For our business, listening to my employees and discussing challenges and how things go on a daily basis is how we make things better. Communicating and discussing with my employees [is important] because if you're not doing that first and foremost. (Personal Communication, March, 6, 2014)

As Stephanie noted the importance of Leadership as a Dialogue, she clearly stated the importance of team involvement when trying to solve problems.

Kennedy, a small business owner who supports executive and life coaches, agreed that Enlist the Support of Followers is important, but he pointed to Leader as Chief Educator/Encourager as the most influential leadership behavior:

A leader in my experience is when you have someone that leads and they are really encouraging the team, really supporting them, really being that cheerleader for them. It
engages the team and they become invested and they become invested in what they're supporting. (Personal Communication, March 21, 2014)

Although Kennedy really felt strongly that Leader as Chief Educator/Encourager was the most influential leadership behavior, the rest of the interviewees felt Enlist the Support of Followers was the most influential leadership behavior.

Please discuss which of the leadership behaviors is least important and why.

Least Important Leadership Behaviors

The interviewees identified Transactional Leadership and Shared Vision as the least important of the leadership behaviors identified by the Delphi survey results. The results from the interviews contradict the findings of the Delphi study participants. However, the interviewees were able to fully support their positions and perspectives.

Without hesitation, Pierce and Stephanie indicated Inspire a Shared Vision as the least important leadership behavior. Both noted that having a vision was not unimportant but that it was not a high priority within their business. Stephanie remarked, “Inspire a Shared Vision was a monthly or quarterly thing and not something which worked in my day-to-day” leadership practices. Pierce was more candid and expressed his thoughts on vision statements:

We certainly get this whole vision thing around here. But I also am probably jaded by the companies that have these nice vision or mission statements and it doesn't really mean anything to them. It's just kind of something to have. So I may have gone too far to the other side of that. (Personal Communication, March 5, 2014)

Kennedy and Finn identified Transactional Leadership as the least important leadership behavior identified by the results of the Delphi survey data. Kennedy explained her concerns with transactional leadership:
The least important to me would be the transactional leadership. Because, just in my opinion, when I find clients that work with me that are focused on the day-to-day, they start to become micromanagers and they start to really try to take things over. They aren't letting people shine. They aren't letting them really be the best that they can be and then it becomes frustrating for the team. (Personal Communication, March 21, 2014)

Finn felt that staying focused on training his team and making sure his customers were happy was more a priority than transactional leadership:

Transaction leadership, you know focusing on day-to-day operations or tasks. That kind of stuff is not my big thing. I'm always kind of like as long as the customer is happy, like I am happy. Some of that other stuff can kind of slide by. You know, maybe we didn't take the trash out today. Or maybe we didn't do something correctly. You know, I don't get upset about that stuff because I think it's like small and petty sometimes. You know, I want it done, but it's not the most important. (Personal Communication, March, 24, 2014)

Successful small business leaders interviewed found Inspire a Shared Vision and Transactional Leadership as the least important leadership behaviors exhibited by small business leaders. While the results of the interviews do not agree or align with the Delphi survey data rankings, they do provide additional insight into the key leadership behaviors of successful small business leaders. Small business leaders interviewed felt both leadership behaviors were important. However, they placed higher priority on the other leadership behaviors identified by the Delphi survey participants.

A large part of leadership effectiveness is based on how leaders learn, what they learn, and how they apply what they learn. In your day-to-day practices as a business leader, what learning strategies could you identify that help you run or manage your business
successfully? Please discuss which of the learning strategies is most important and why.

*Important Learning Strategies*

An analysis of the data from the interviews supported the Delphi survey results regarding *Networking* and *Collective Learning* as the most influential learning strategies of successful small business leaders. However, the interviewees were split on placing priority or ranking of networking and collective learning. Finn was quick to identify that “many of our great ideas are probably developed through mentors and maybe through our business partner relationships.” Finn elaborated on the importance of developing relationship with other store owners:

> You know the wheel works but maybe we can make it a bit faster somehow. So those are the really big things. I really work with a lot of mentors around me from inside the industry, mostly other store owners. You know, I was coming back from St. Pete, and I was on the phone for maybe two hours with different store owners. You know, hey, this is what I have going on. What do you think? You know, bouncing ideas off of each other. (Personal Communication, March, 24, 2014)

Pierce noted that he attended many meetings where “the meeting agendas I can live without but they give an opportunity for learning. The networking and talking with someone that is doing what we're doing is invaluable.” He reiterated that a lot of small businesses do not learn “outside the four walls type of learning,” and this learning from networking is vital in a small business.

Stephanie explained that her business is “really big on trying to support other small businesses or female family owned business.” She described times when she has met with other people who want to start their own preschools and chatted with them about the process and walked them through her business plan. Stephanie called it “paying that forward and helping other small businesses.” However, Stephanie ranked *Collective Learning* higher than *Networking*
in her business environment. She noted the importance of collective learning in her preschool:

“Listening to my employees and discussing challenges and how thing go on a daily basis is how we make things better.” Kennedy agreed that *Collective Learning* was the most important learning strategy because of the importance of making sure everyone is on the same page: “Even if they may not be participating in all of the activities, at least they know what the other person is doing.”

Finn also discussed the importance of collective learning as an important learning strategy used by successful small business leaders. He has developed a modeling approach to training and teaching his employees within his store:

Teaching the employees. That is one of the things that we do with our employees. You know, when we teach them, we give them a point of view of everybody. I believe that the best way to learn is to teach. That's why teachers are so smart and brilliant is, you know, because they just keep teaching it over and over again so they got it down to a science.

When we get a new person in, every employee has to teach them to go through the process, but then they have to turn around and reteach that. They have to be like, okay, I'm going to go through the process with you and teach them. I think teaching is one of the biggest things and getting everybody's perspective on it. (Personal Communication, March, 24, 2014)

Additional learning strategies identified by the interviewees included willingness for continued learning. Kennedy stated that “just learning how to be a better leader, that's important because you want to always be engaging your team.” Pierce described “outside the four walls type of learning” as perhaps another way to describe networking. However, the phrase also captures a leader's willingness to get outside the physical business and engage in learning
opportunities. Additionally, Pierce suggested small business leaders need to “get out from behind the desk” and learn what's happening within the business from followers.

Please discuss which of the learning strategies is least important and why.

Least Important Learning Strategies

An analysis of the data from the interviews supported the Delphi survey results regarding Formal Learning and Self-Directed/Informal Learning as the least important learning strategies based on the rankings established by the Delphi survey participants. Stephanie said that “it really depends on what kind of business you are as to where some of these are going to rank.” She mentioned she was unable to spend a lot of time out of her business engaged in formal learning or networking opportunities. However, she reiterated the importance of supporting “other small business or female family owned business” through less formal networking methods.

Pierce noted that his company has become a little more active with formal learning. However, he would not place it higher in the rankings. He found formal learning to be important, but putting the learning into practice was another challenge:

Our big trade show APEX out in Las Vegas is this big, gigantic trade show. I've really made it a habit to go to some of the workshops and professional development things and I enjoy them. Putting them into practice is another thing. You know we are probably too informal as a business, but that is why networking is more important to us. (Personal Communication, March, 5, 2014)

Finn felt Self-Directed/Informal Learning was the least important learning strategy listed because “people won't take the time to listen and watch, take the initiative and apply the information.”

Likewise, Kennedy felt that self-directed or informal learning “lent itself to interpretation sometimes, and errors can pop up from that.” She was particularly concerned that self-directed or
informal learning often led people to do things in different ways which could result in conflict.

In summary, it is important to know the key leadership behaviors and learning strategies of successful small business leaders. The results of the Delphi survey participants did not create an exhaustive list. However, the interview participants confirmed many of the leadership behaviors and learning strategies important for successful small business leaders. Additionally, the results of the study provided insight into the leadership behaviors and learning strategies found to be important in the specific setting, small business leadership. These included the leadership behaviors and learning strategies deemed to be most important from the perspective of the participants including a value of learning and continuous improvement as well as the existence of a habit of learning. Also, the study confirmed that small business leaders enjoy making changes within their company, reviewing the changes, and seeing growth. Furthermore, it was found that a robust style of leadership balancing transactional and transformational leadership was a key component of small business leaders’ style.

**Chapter Summary**

Described in Chapter 4 was a detailed analysis of the data obtained during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this research study. In summary, this research study sought the expert knowledge from Successful Small Business Leaders (SSBLs) and resulted in identifying key learning strategies and leadership behaviors of small business leaders. Through the insight, experiences, and preferences of expert Delphi panelists and interviewees, the research study explored learning and leadership best practices of SSBLs.

The study was conducted in two phases including multiple iterations of a Delphi survey and in-depth interviews. Results from the Delphi study identified seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies used by SSBLs. The interview phase corroborated the findings of the
Delphi panelists. However, Phase 2 identified differences in the rankings of the leadership behaviors and learning strategies. Additionally, the interview phase provided rich, detailed descriptions and further insight into the 13 themes identified.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the analysis and the conclusions that I have drawn from the analysis of the Delphi study and in-depth interviews. Additionally, I present several implications, recommendations for practice, and suggestions future research.
Chapter 5: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The motivation to engage in this research was initiated by the desire to understand the ways in which successful small business leaders engaged in learning and leadership. I expected the answers to the research questions would offer new knowledge to the field. This study appears to be the first of its kind to use an expert group to identify the leadership behaviors and learning strategies of small business leaders. This study was designed to be completed in two-phases including a Delphi surveys and in-depth interviews. Five small business leaders participated in the Delphi survey, and four small business leaders participated in the in-depth interviews. Through the investigation and synthesis of information gathered using the Delphi method survey and interviews, this research provided insight into small business leadership. The findings of this study are informative as the investigation led to the identification of seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies employed by successful small business leaders.

Summary of Results

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, I conducted a Delphi survey using an online survey collection tool, Qualtrics, to identify the key leadership behaviors and learning strategies of successful small business leaders. Using a three-round process, the Delphi participants identified seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies used by successful small business leaders (in order of highest to lowest rating):

Leadership Behaviors

- Enlist the support of followers
- Inspire a shared vision
- Leadership as a dialogue
- Leader as learner
• Transactional leadership
• Transformational leadership
• Leader as chief educator/encourager

Learning Strategies

• Networking
• Collective learning
• Self-directed/Informal learning
• Experiential learning
• Reflective practice
• Formal learning

In Phase 2 of this study, interviews were conducted with people who were selected to participate in the study based on their knowledge and expertise as small business leaders. The interviews served to corroborate the findings of the Delphi survey and provide additional insight into the leadership behaviors and learning strategies of successful small business leaders.

Taken together, both phases of this study answered the two research questions posed and provided additional insight into the leadership behaviors and learning strategies of successful small business leaders.

Research Questions

Question 1: What leadership behaviors are exhibited most by successful small business leaders?

During Round 1 of the study, five small business leaders were provided an open-ended questionnaire that addressed this research question. The purpose of the first round was to determine the initial position on the issue (Wilhelm, 2001) and provide an opportunity to go
beyond what is currently known or believed by providing participants an open forum.

Participants were able to respond without restrictions and provide commentary to support and explain the reasoning behind their responses. Seven leadership behaviors emerged from the Delphi participants’ Round 1 responses. During Round 2, participants were asked to rate the leadership behaviors via a five-point Likert scale. The seven leadership behaviors were ranked based on the ratings provided from the Delphi participants during Round 2. Participants were then asked to review their ratings for each of the seven leadership behaviors and provided the opportunity to change their ratings during Round 3. Participants were asked to justify any change in their ratings and make additional comments if they chose. Through this 3-round process, the Delphi survey participants identified and ranked seven leadership behaviors: *Enlist the Support of Followers*, *Inspire a Shared Vision*, *Leadership as a Dialogue*, *Leader as Learning*, *Transactional Leadership*, *Transformational Leadership*, and *Leader as Chief Educator/Encourager*.

Four small business leaders with extensive knowledge about small business leadership participated in Phase 2 of this research study, in-depth interviews. During the interview, interviewees were asked to list leadership behaviors used by successful small business leaders. The interviewees corroborated the findings of the Delphi survey participants. The interviewees noted the importance of all seven leadership behaviors and confirmed *Enlist the Support of Followers* as the key leadership behavior exhibited by successful small business leaders.

*Question 2: What learning strategies are used most by successful small business leaders?*

Addressing the second research question followed the same general process used for the first research question. Delphi survey participants were asked to respond to the research question via an open-ended question posed during Round 1 of the Delphi study. Participants were asked to
help identify the key learning strategies used by successful small business leaders. From the participants’ responses to the Round 1 Delphi survey, six learning strategies emerged from the data. During Round 2, Delphi survey participants were asked to rate each learning strategy using a 5-point Likert-style scale. These ratings were then used to rank the learning strategies which were presented to participants during Round 3 of this study. Delphi survey participants were asked to review their ratings alongside the group's rankings of each learning strategy during Round 3. Participants were provided the opportunity to change their ratings and provide an explanation for the changes. A single participant did opt to change her initial rating for Self-Directed/Informal Learning thus increasing this learning strategy’s overall ranking in the results. Therefore, the Delphi survey participants identified the six learning strategies used by successful small business leaders as Networking, Collective Learning, Self-Directed/Informal Learning, Experiential Learning, Reflective Practice, and Formal Learning.

The four successful small business leaders reviewed the results of the Delphi method survey and provided additional insight into the rankings. The interviewees confirmed the Delphi participants’ findings regarding Networking and Collective Learning as the two most important learning strategies for successful business leaders. However, the interviewees also concurred with the original Delphi method survey findings regarding Formal Learning and Self-Directed/Informal Learning as the lowest ranking learning strategies. This does not suggest these are invalid or unimportant learning strategies employed by successful small business leaders. These findings indicated that these two learning strategies were of lower importance than the other learning strategies identified in the study. However, this result does not limit the possibility that the differences may be attributed to another source such as industry, years of experience, or leadership style.
Implications for Small Business Leaders

The findings of this study have practical implications for small business leaders and are relevant for developing successful small business leaders. Several additional findings identified by this study are especially important for small business leaders. For example, small business leaders value learning and continuous improvement. There appears to be a habit of learning which exists but may not be in the conscious awareness of the small business leader. Small business leaders in this study listed learning activities but did not immediately recognize them as learning strategies or regular practices. These small business leaders were unaware of their ongoing efforts as though the learning was unintentional in nature. Learning became an integrated part of the whole person (Kolb, 1984). This was particularly evident in the small business leaders’ discussion of reflection as a key learning strategy while the practice appeared to be unintentional (Mezirow, 1991; Brookfield, 2000; DaRue & Ashford, 2010). Furthermore, respondents noted the enjoyment they had through making changes within their companies, reviewing those changes, and seeing growth. A reflective practice allows a leader to make decisions while challenging complex situations (Merriam et al., 2007). Small businesses leaders appear to be involved in many unintentional learning opportunities but have developed the ability to learn and adapt quickly. Learning is a continuous and lifelong endeavor by the small business leaders (Kolb, 1984). This commitment to lifelong learning supports the notion that the primary source of learning to lead is experience (McCall, 2004; Mintzberg, 2004). Small business environments are dynamic and require the leader to engage in continual learning (Vaill, 1996), build on prior experience (Bennis, 2002; Gibb, 1997; Kempster, 2006), and engage in a process of reflection (Bennis, 2002; Schon, 1983; Vaill, 1996).
Another implication is the demonstration of a robust leadership style by successful small business leaders. Successful small business leaders demonstrated a robust leadership style that reflects transactional and transformational knowledge and skills (Valdiserri & Wilson, 2010). As small business leaders described the leadership behaviors exhibited by successful small business leaders, they found it pertinent to include transactional leadership but focused primarily on transformational processes to inspire and motivate employees. The specific balance between leadership styles associated with small business leadership is not defined in existing literature. The implications from this study suggest successful small businesses leaders rely more heavily on transformational processes. For example, the Phase 2 interview participants felt *Inspire a Shared vision* was ranked too high but then recanted stories of sharing their passion for their work and sharing it with others. This suggests that small business leaders may articulate their vision through embedded actions. Successful small business leaders didn't appear to maintain written vision statements. However, they effectively share their vision with their followers. *Inspire a shared vision* is one of the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Small business leaders’ value their team, think about their influence, and reflect on the impact of their actions. Therefore, successful small business leaders demonstrate qualities of transactional leadership while at the same time incorporating elements of transformational leadership.

Finally, successful small business leaders exhibit a key awareness of the importance of creating a team and having the team on board. Small business leaders recognize the importance of modeling the desired behaviors and encouraging team involvement in solving problems. They foster an environment for continuous learning and improvement of all employees. Senge (2006) defined leadership as a process for nurturing people's capacity for learning. In good organizations,
leaders understand the importance of continuous learning and support a culture of learning at all levels (Yukl, 2002). Small business leaders are able to Enlist the support of their followers and enable them to act thus leading to more happy and productive employees (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Application of Conceptual Framework to Findings

The purpose of the original conceptual framework (Figure 1) was to organize the key ideas and concepts presented in this study. The conceptual framework was created during the literature review process and used by the researcher as an abstract way to represent the possible explanations for the research or a working framework. Figure 2 presents the original conceptual framework alongside the revised conceptual framework as indicated by the results of the study.

![Figure 2. Revised Conceptual Framework: A visual relationship of the key concepts identified in the literature as well as the results of the study as identified by the researcher.](image-url)
The study indicated the Delphi study or Phase 1 participants aligned with the original conceptual framework. This is likely due to the nature of the Delphi study to encourage participants towards agreement. It may also be attributed to the investment of the participants in the study. Rather than taking time to review the results of the Round 2 survey and revise responses, participants may have been more willing to simply seek agreement rather than suggest an alternative or revise their initial ratings.

The interview or Phase 2 participants demonstrated a high degree of variations in their responses to the same questions posed to the Phase 1 participants. The interviewees agreed with the identification of the seven leadership behaviors and six learning strategies. However, the ranking of each of these characteristics demonstrated the results were more individualized and contextualized. The interviews results in thick and rich details from the participants who frequently stories of their experiences as aligned with the interview questions. Therefore, the conceptual framework differs for the Delphi survey versus interview participants.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations to this study that need to be addressed. The first, and most troublesome, limitation was the response rate. The response rate for the study was much less than expected. During the initial recruitment process only 1 of the 50 targeted population responded to the invitation to participate in the study. The second recruitment process netted 15 potential participants of which only 5 completed the survey in its entirety. Although the sample was small, the participants were able to provide insight into the leadership behaviors and learning strategies of successful small business leaders and are reflective of what the participants actually believe. Ultimately, the small size of the sample decreased the quantity of data collected for analysis. However, the 2-phase quality of the study provided for corroboration of the Delphi survey
findings via the completion of in-depth interviews.

The second limitation focused on the geographical area for the study. For the purpose of this study, participants were limited to Northeast Florida including only the three counties of Clay, Duval, and St. Johns. Due to the unique nature of the study, I initially felt it was important to focus on small businesses within close proximity to the location of the study. However, it appears that the study would have benefited from using a more extended area to recruit participants. This may also lead to more diverse perspectives during the initial data collection of the Round 1 Delphi survey. Additionally, this limitation does not negate the validity of the Delphi method but does bring to question the broader application of these best practices beyond the community noted.

Another limitation of the study was the sampling process used during the first recruitment phase of the study. The initial strategy was to develop a random sample of successful small business leaders who met the criteria to participate in the study. Through the use of the Reference USA database 50 businesses were randomly contacted via an invitation letter posted by mail. As noted this resulted in a single participant. This may be due to the informal nature of a letter received by mail. The timing of the second recruitment process of purposeful sampling and snowball technique during the holiday period created another limitation to the study. Initially 15 participants confirmed intent to participate in the study over the telephone. Only 5 of these 15 participants completed the survey in its entirety. This may be due to the timing of the Round 1 survey just weeks before the winter holidays, a lost or “spammed” email to complete the survey, or the format of the online survey including multiple pages rather than a single page.
Reflections from the Field

The experience of being in the field was frequently exhilarating and provided insight into small business leaders. At other moments, it required challenging mental labor and feeling frustrated. I felt prepared when I entered the field but quickly realized there were many areas where I required additional study. I believe this is all part of the process for a doctoral student. I am sure there are many lessons which if I had learned earlier would have made the writing and revision process of my dissertation less painful. However, I must note that it was this process which provided me the most insight and opportunity to delve deep into my field.

My two greatest lessons were timing and following my researcher’s gut. Timing is extremely important in the completion of a dissertation but particularly in a Delphi study. When using a computer-based survey tool, it is imperative to provide participants regular communication and a quick turnaround for the next round. Timing refers not only to the timeliness of the data collection process but also to time needed for me to complete each step. My greatest moments of productivity followed time that I allotted myself for reflection. It is imperative for a researcher to schedule time to simply think without distraction, to marinate on the study and imagine all possible angles. Additionally, I learned the importance of following my researcher’s gut. Several times, I silenced my inner researcher’s voice when I felt something was askew. I wish I had been more confident in myself as a researcher from the beginning and driven forward with a willingness to take more risks in my pursuit for my passion—adult learning and small business leadership.

Recommendations

The current research investigated the leadership behaviors and learning strategies of successful small business leaders. The Delphi method research is investigative, and the analysis
of the data suggests the study successfully investigated the area of leadership behaviors and learning strategies. The identification of seven leadership behavior characteristics and six learning strategy techniques of successful small business leaders suggests ongoing research needs to occur to understand these characteristics more fully. While these characteristics have been identified, it is important to develop an understanding of how to develop and apply these characteristics for other small business leaders.

There is much knowledge to be gained through research on successful small business leaders. Future research on successful small business leaders would benefit from delving deeper into the learning styles they exhibit. Many of the learning strategies identified through this study indicated the unintentional nature of learning, learning that did not appear to result from a conscious effort. This may be attributed to small business leaders’ subconscious knowledge of the impact of learning in their environment. Therefore, future research would benefit from delving deeper into the learning styles of small business leaders.

Additionally, it is recommended that the interview questions be revised to provide participants an opportunity to describe specific situations where they demonstrated each leadership behavior or used each learning strategy. The interview questions should be designed to involve more storytelling. This may be achieved by a researcher who is a skilled interviewer with experience at eliciting the stories and rich description from interviewees.

Finally, I would recommend the possibility of completing the round 1 Delphi survey as an interview rather than via an online data collection tool. Such a forum has the potential to increase the rich data and details leading into the multiple round Delphi study. While it negates several of the key characteristics of a Delphi method, the benefit of meeting face to face and the possibility of more detailed input during Round 1 would benefit a future study.
Each of these suggested recommendations of this study could benefit future research on successful small business leaders who are interested in developing their leadership behaviors and learning strategies.

**Conclusion**

The identification of the key leadership behaviors and learning strategies of successful small business leaders may be used to support other small business owners. The information gathered during this study has looked beyond those characteristics identified by corporate leaders and focused solely on those in a small business setting. The best practices and other data discovered during this Delphi study on small businesses may be used to better define and understand the characteristics of successful small business leaders.

This study took a unique look at small business leaders and provided them the opportunity to share which leadership characteristics and learning strategies they deemed most important and effective. It provided the opportunity for successful small business leaders to identify these characteristics that they may or may not have previously considered leadership behaviors or learning strategies. The study concluded that small business leaders rely upon both leadership behaviors and learning strategies consistently to support the development of their business. Many of these leadership behaviors and learning strategies overlapped. For example, the existence of the leadership behavior of strong communication skills overlapped the learning strategies of networking and collective learning. However, there were key characteristics, leadership behaviors, and learning strategies which small business leaders deemed as best practices and specific to a small business setting.

It was found the learning practices of small business leaders were unintentional. The practice or habit of learning was created through developmental relationships, mentoring, and
networking. These relationships with people doing the same thing were deemed most important by small business owners.

A contribution of this study was the advancement of knowledge of the Delphi method. The Delphi method attracts a certain type of participant, and it may be an appropriate method for gaining information from a relatively sophisticated, computer literate, and educated population. Inherent in the Delphi method is the opportunity for every participant to have a voice and avoid group think. In this study, the flexibility of the Delphi method provided the opportunity to include a second panel of interview, or Phase 2, participants to further evaluate and corroborate the findings of the Delphi panelists. It was through the combination of the Delphi survey panel and interview participants that the richest responses were acquired creating rich information on the learning behaviors and leadership behaviors deemed important by small business leaders.

My intention for this dissertation study was to be open to the potential identification of best practices in leadership and learning for small business leaders. I was surprised by the level of interest expressed by my Phase 2, or interview, participants. All four participants have requested a copy of my final study via email. Two of my interview participants have been in regular communication via texting regarding where I was in the completion process. This suggests that my findings may be useful for Successful Small Business Leaders (SSBLs). In reflection on the cumulative years of work to support this process, I am amazed by the learning that has occurred. The journey of constructing this dissertation facilitated a personal process of transformation. I hope this work inspired a sense of curiosity amongst others to delve into the leadership and learning of successful small business leaders.
Appendix A: Round 1 Questionnaire
Section 1: Business Type and Demographics

1. Which of the following industry categories best describes the type of business your company is engaged in? Select one.
   ___ Engineering and Construction
   ___ Food and Beverage
   ___ Financial
   ___ Manufacturing
   ___ Retail
   ___ Service
   ___ Wholesale and Distribution
   ___ Other ________________

2. Please indicate how many employees are in your business. _______

3. Please indicate the number of years you have lead or managed this business. _______

4. Please indicate your sex. Select one.
   Female
   Male
   Prefer not to respond

5. Please indicate your age. Select one
   Age 25 or less
   26-35 years of age
   36-45 years of age
   46-55 years of age
   56 or older

6. Please indicate with which of the following ethnicities you most closely identify? Select one.
   White
   Black or African American
   Hispanic
   American Indian or Alaskan Native
   Asian
   Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   Multi-racial
   Other, please specify ________________
Survey Question #1

In the current economic climate successful small business leaders are expected to be effective. A large part of their effectiveness is based on how they learn, what they learn, and how they apply what they learn. In your day-to-day practices as a business leader, what learning strategies could you identify that help you run or manage your business successfully? Please list six (6) of these learning strategies. Examples of learning strategies include but are not limited to: (1) takes an active role when presented opportunities to learn, (2) learns from experience, and (3) uses imagination.

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6.
Survey Question #2

Leadership behaviors determine and influence a leader’s effectiveness and efficiency. Please list six (6) leadership behaviors you believe are important and effective in helping your lead and manage your business. Examples of leadership strategies include but are not limited to: (1) communicates purpose and direction, (2) spends time teaching and coaching, and (3) seeks differing perspectives when solving problems.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.
Thank You

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to participate in this phase of this important study. After the results from all participants have been analyzed and classified, you will receive a condensed list of the learning strategies and leadership behaviors. At that time I will ask you to select what you consider to be the most important six (6) learning strategies and leadership behaviors and to provide a brief statement (a sentence or two) about why you consider each item important. During the final phase of study, and after the lists of strategies and behaviors from Phase 2 have been condensed and analyzed, I will ask you to select and rank your final top six (6) strategies and behaviors. Again, thank you for agreeing to participate in this important study, the information from which I am sure will assist you with improving your business.
Appendix B: Participant Invitation Letter
Date:
Dear Business Leader:

I am a doctoral candidate at University of North Florida's Doctorate Program in Educational Leadership. I am seeking small business leaders who are willing to participate in a study entitled, “Learning Strategies and Leadership Behavior Competencies of Small Business Leaders.” The purpose of the study is to identify learning strategies and leadership behaviors exhibited by successful small business owners.

The leaders I am seeking for the study are those who meet the following three criteria:

1. Current leader of a small business with small business defined as “one that is independently owned and operated, and is organized for profit.”
2. At least 3 years of experience leading a small business
3. A maximum of 100 employees with a minimum of 15 employees on payroll

The study will involve three rounds of data collection using Qualtrics, an online survey program. Although I, my dissertation chair, and other authorized personnel might be able to link your identity to your responses, identifiers will not be included in any publication or report that comes from this research. Therefore, any data you submit will be confidential and your identity will be protected. You will have two weeks to respond to this invitation and indicate your interest or disinterest in participating in the study.

I want you to know that participation in this study is voluntary. But as a participant you will be asked to commit to completing and returning three (3) fifteen-minute questionnaires within 3-5 days. The information you provide will be used in the study and later published, although in aggregate form.

The potential benefits for participating in the study will include the opportunity to engage in active reflection on learning strategies, leadership behaviors, they may have on small business productivity and performance. Should you so desire, you may also receive a copy of the results after the study has been completed. To receive a copy of the results, please feel free to write me at

If you choose to participate in the study, please send your email address to <insert survey link> and I will send you the first 15-minute questionnaire. Please submit your email address by <date>.

If you know of other individuals who meet the criteria for the study and who may be interested in participating, please forward the contact information to me or have the participant contact me directly at

Please know that I appreciate your assistance in what I consider an important study that could provide invaluable information for you and other business leaders.

Thank you for your time and consideration and for your professional courtesy.

Terikay Rumancik
Doctoral Candidate
Phone:
Email:

Dr. Warren Hodge (Dissertation Chair)
University of North Florida
College of Education
Phone:
Email:
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form
Dear Participant:

My name is Terikay Rumancik, a doctoral candidate at the University of North Florida in the College of Education and Human Services. I am conducting a research study to examine leadership behaviors and learning strategies used by small business owners. The study is significant because the findings could provide information which may help current and future small business owners develop, maintain, and make their organizations more productive.

I am requesting that you participate in three rounds of data collection using Qualtrics, an online survey program. You will be provided the following options on the first page of the questionnaire:

(a) I agree and consent to participate in this study.
(b) No, I do not wish to participate in this study.

All participants must be at least 18 years to take part in the study. Although researchers and other authorized personnel might be able to link your identity to your responses, identifiers will not be included in any publication or report that comes from this research. Therefore, any data you submit will be confidential and your identity will be protected. As a participant, you will be asked to complete three (3) fifteen-minute questionnaires and return them within 3-5 days.

Data from this study may be published. However, as I have indicated above, your identity will not be linked in any way to your participation in the study. Your name and participation will be kept strictly confidential. There are no foreseeable risks and no compensation for your participation. Your participation is voluntary, and you will be free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study, the information you provide up to that point will be destroyed. Should you desire a copy of the results, please call me or send a message via my email address.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or if you would like to contact someone about a research-related injury, please contact the chair of the UNF Institutional Review board by calling or emailing irb@unf.edu.

Please print a copy of the consent document for your records. Should you have questions or concerns about my request, please direct them to me or my dissertation chair.

Sincerely,

Terikay Rumancik
Doctoral Candidate
Phone:
Email:

Dr. Warren Hodge (Dissertation Chair)
University of North Florida
College of Education
Phone:
Email:
Appendix D: Instrument Evaluation Checklist – Stage 1
Dear Participant:

After completing the questionnaire, please answer the 12 questions below. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact my advisor Dr. Warren Hodge or me, by phone or email.

Thanks for your assistance.

Cordially,

Terikay Rumancik

Questions:  YES  NO

1. Are there any typographical errors?  
2. Are there any misspelled words?  
3. Do the item numbers make sense?  
4. Is the type size big enough to be easily read?  
5. Is the survey too long?  
6. Does the survey format flow well?  
7. Are the items appropriate for the respondents?  
8. Is the vocabulary appropriate for the respondent?  

How long did it take to complete the questionnaire?  __________

Thank you for completing the survey! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Appendix E: Round 1 Email
Dear Business Leader:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a study entitled, “Learning Strategies and Leadership Behavior Competencies of Small Business Leaders.” The purpose of the study is to identify learning strategies and leadership behaviors used by successful small business owners.

The study will involve three rounds of data collection using Qualtrics, an online survey program. As a participant, you will be asked to commit to completing and returning three (3) fifteen-minute questionnaires within 3-5 days. Please visit the following website <insert link> to access the Round 1 questionnaire.

**This survey is estimated to take between 10-20 minutes.**

You will find additional instructions on the questionnaire. Here are some tips that may help you navigate this survey.

1. This survey may be completed in more than one session. In order to do so, please follow the steps listed below so the responses you put in will be saved.

   Be sure to save the email I sent as it contains the link that will take you back to your survey. After you enter your responses for any given question, you must click the “Save/Next” button or the “Previous” button in order to save your responses. If you close out of the program before doing this, your responses will not be saved. After saving your responses, as noted above, you may simple close the web tab/page by clicking the “X” button (usually in the top right hand corner of the web tab/page) to leave the survey. Use the link in the email to return to your save survey responses.

2. Do not click the “Finish” button until you are completely finished and ready to submit your responses.

3. If you have any questions/issues/concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at or . You may contact me at any time (even early morning or later in the evening). I want to make this experience as easy as possible for you.

Please know that I appreciate your assistance in what I consider an important study on leaders of successful small businesses. Your expertise is invaluable. Please complete and return the questionnaire no later than <insert date>.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Terikay Rumancik
Doctoral Candidate

Dr. Warren Hodge (Dissertation Chair)
University of North Florida
College of Education
Phone: Phone:
Email: Email:
Appendix F: Reminder Email
Date:
Dear Business Leader:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study entitled, “Learning Strategies and Leadership Behavior Competencies of Small Business Leaders.” The purpose of the study is to identify learning strategies and leadership behaviors used by successful small business owners.

The Round 1 questionnaire was sent to you via email link on <insert date>. Please visit the following website <insert link> to access the Round 1 (2 or 3) questionnaire. I appreciate your participation in this research study.

You will find additional instructions on the questionnaire. Please complete and return the questionnaire no later than <insert date>.

Please know that I appreciate your assistance in what I consider an important study on leaders of successful small businesses. Your expertise is invaluable.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Terikay Rumancik
Doctoral Candidate
Phone: 
Email: 

Dr. Warren Hodge (Dissertation Chair)
University of North Florida
College of Education
Phone: 
Email: 
Appendix G: Round 2 Email
Date:
Dear Business Leader:

Thank you for your continued participation in a study entitled, “Learning Strategies and Leadership Behavior Competencies of Small Business Leaders.” To remind you, the purpose of the study is to identify learning strategies and leadership behaviors used by successful small business owners.

As a reminder, the study involves three rounds of data collection using Qualtrics, an online survey program. Please visit the following website <insert link> to access the Round 2 questionnaire.

This survey is estimate to take between 10-20 minutes.

You will find additional instructions on the questionnaire. Here are some tips that may help you navigate this survey.

1. This survey may be completed in more than one session. In order to do so, please follow the steps listed below so the responses you put in will be saved.

   Be sure to save the email I sent as it contains the link that will take you back to your survey. After you enter your responses for any given question, you must click the “Save/Next” button or the “Previous” button in order to save your responses. If you close out of the program before doing this, your responses will not be saved. After saving your responses, as noted above, you may simple close the web tab/page by clicking the “X” button (usually in the top right hand corner of the web tab/page) to leave the survey. Use the link in the email to return to your save survey responses.

2. Do not click the “Finish” button until you are completely finished and ready to submit your responses.

3. If you have any questions/issues/concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at or . You may contact me at any time (even early morning or later in the evening). I want to make this experience as easy as possible for you.

Please know that I appreciate your assistance in what I consider an important study on leaders of successful small businesses. Please complete and return the questionnaire no later than <insert date>.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Terikay Rumancik     Dr. Warren Hodge (Dissertation Chair)
Doctoral Candidate     University of North Florida
Phone:      College of Education
Email:      Phone:
            Email:
Appendix H: Round 3 Email
Date:
Dear Business Leader:

Thank you for your continued participation in a study entitled, “Learning Strategies and Leadership Behavior Competencies of Small Business Leaders.” To remind you, the purpose of the study is to identify learning strategies and leadership behaviors used by successful small business owners.

Please visit the following website <insert link> to access the Round 3 questionnaire. This is the final round of data collection using Qualtrics, an online survey program.

**This survey is estimated to take between 10-20 minutes.**

You will find additional instructions on the questionnaire. Here are some tips that may help you navigate this survey.

1. This survey may be completed in more than one session. In order to do so, please follow the steps listed below so the responses you put in will be saved. Be sure to save the email I sent as it contains the link that will take you back to your survey. After you enter your responses for any given question, you must click the “Save/Next” button or the “Previous” button in order to save your responses. If you close out of the program before doing this, your responses will not be saved. After saving your responses, as noted above, you may simply close the web tab/page by clicking the “X” button (usually in the top right hand corner of the web tab/page) to leave the survey. Use the link in the email to return to your save survey responses.

2. Do not click the “Finish” button until you are completely finished and ready to submit your responses.

3. If you have any questions/issues/concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at or . You may contact me at any time (even early morning or later in the evening). I want to make this experience as easy as possible for you.

Please know that I appreciate your assistance in what I consider an important study on leaders of successful small businesses. Your expertise is invaluable. Please complete and return the questionnaire no later than <insert date>.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Terikay Rumancik
Doctoral Candidate
Phone:  
Email:  

Dr. Warren Hodge (Dissertation Chair)  
University of North Florida  
College of Education  
Phone:  
Email:
Appendix I: Round 1 Open Coding Data
LEADERSHIP

Listening to your customers (MGMT-communication)
Communicating effectively with your staff (MGMT - communication)
Instructional time with staff for improvements (LDR - day)
Training continuing to grow in area(s) (LDR - day)
Spending time observing day to day operations for opportunities for improvement (LDR - day)
Keeping staff happy (LDR - personnel/investing/motivate) intrinsic or extrinsic (7)

Communicate the desired end result and allow the team to determine the method to achieve the result (LDR - vision/empower)
Share past experience with the team when a similar situation presents itself (MGMT - experience)
do corps & LDR - exp/learning)
Tell stories I have learned about to the team when a similar situation presents itself (LDR -
exp/training/day/problem solving)
Ask questions of clients (MGMT - communication & LDR - learning)
Ask questions of peers (LDR - learning/learning) internal or external (7)

Listen (MGMT - communication)

Researches/reflects on issues at hand and makes a decision (MGMT - directing/decisive &
LDR - reflection/action)
Stands behind that decision (MGMT - decisive)
Empowers team members to think and learn on their own (LDR - empowerment/learning/learning)
- transformational
Provides an environment of continual learning and improvement (LDR -
empowerment/learning/learning)
Invests in employees success/training/networking (LDR - teams/learning/learning)
Takes an active leadership role in the community by sitting on boards, lecturing, etc. (LDR -
networking)

Develops and clearly communicates the vision of the business (LDR - vision)
Develops his team by coaching and mentoring (LDR - learning/learning)
Gets his team involved when trying to solve problems (LDR - problem
solving/empower/creativity/learning)
Establishes a culture and manages fairness to maintain that culture (LDR - shared culture)
Understands the financial reports of the business and manages the cash to ensure healthy
financial reports (MGMT - budgeting)

Plans for growth and profitability (LDR - goal-setting)

Delegates out responsibilities (MGMT - division of labor)
Try to do anything I ask my employees to do (LDR - example)
Include staff when making decisions (LDR - team)
Continually have meetings to discuss our goals (MGMT - coordinating & LDR - vision)
Give employees power to make decisions (LDR - empowerment)
Hiring good, talented people (MGMT - staffing)
Rewarding my employees (LDR - motivation) intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (7)

LEARNING

Learning from experience (reflective)
Reaching out to others in my field with experience (networking)
Reaching out to and attending meetings with organizations with my same interest
(networking)
Taking courses (formal)
Listening to motivational and management audio books (self-directed/informal)
Researching our competition (environmental scanning)

I read other successful and unsuccessful strategies (self-directed/informal)
I discuss challenges with other like owners (networking/experiential/collective)
I discuss challenges with team (team learning/collective)
I do presentations about strategy and ideas emerge from the audience (active - ??)
I document my own success and failures (reflective)
I attend functions that offer learning opportunities (formal/networking)

Actively seeks learning opportunities, seminars/workshops (formal)
Learns from industry leaders (networking/collective)
Learns from experience (experiential/reflective)
Learns from clients (experiential)
Learns from acclaimed business leaders e.g. Jack Welch (self-directed/informal)
Learns from small groups such as employees or other businesses generally in the same
vertical (collective/networking)

Learn from experience (reflective/experiential)
Read books on leadership (self-directed/informal)
Attend industry seminars on how to run my particular business (formal)
Seek advice from other successful business owners in my industry (collective/networking)
Work with a business coach (formal)
Use my imagination (innovation/creativity)

Listen to my employees (reflective possibly collective)
Listen to my clients (reflective)
Allow learning opportunities presented specifically by my industry (formal)
Allow learning opportunities in my community when beneficial (networking/formal)
Try to improve each year by reviewing the previous year (reflective)
Read books, watch videos on pertinent information (informal/self-directed)

Learn vs. adopt (7)
Appendix J: Round 1 Axial Coding Data
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>MANAGEMENT CHARACTERISTICS/BEHAVIORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MGMT-Communication</td>
<td>Listening to your customers (MGMT-communication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicating effectively with your staff (MGMT – communication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ask questions of client (MGMT – communication &amp; LDR – learning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGMT-directing/decisive</td>
<td>Research/reviews on issues at hand and MAKES A DECISION (MGMT – directing/decisive &amp; LDR – reflection/action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stands behind that decision (MGMT – decisive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGMT-budgeting</td>
<td>Understands the financial reports of the business and manages the cash to ensure healthy financial reports (MGMT – budgeting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGMT-division of labor</td>
<td>Delegates out responsibilities (MGMT – division of labor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGMT-coordinating</td>
<td>Continuously have meeting to discuss our goals (MGMT – coordinating &amp; LDR – vision/goal-setting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGMT-staffing</td>
<td>Hiring good, talented people (MGMT – staffing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS/BEHAVIORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LDR-development</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDR-personnel/investing/motivating</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDR-vision</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDR-empower</td>
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</table>

Give my employees power to make decisions (LDR – empower) |

LDR-experiential | Share past experience with the team when a similar situation presents itself (MGMT – expert de corps & LDR – [exp]/learning) |
| | Tell stories I have learned about the team when a similar situation presents itself (LDR – exp/learning/exp/problem solving) |
| LDR-learning | Share past experience with the team when a similar situation presents itself (MGMT – expert de corps & LDR – [exp]/learning) |
| | Tell stories I have learned about the team when a similar situation presents itself (LDR – exp/learning/exp/problem solving) |
| | Ask questions of peers (LDR – learning/learning) internal or external (?) |
| | Invests in employees success/training/networking (LDR – teams/learning/investing) |
| | Gets this team involved when trying to solve problems (LDR – problem solving/empower/creativity/team) |
| | Include staff when making decisions (LDR – team) |

LDR-problem solving | Tell stories I have learned about the team when a similar situation presents itself (LDR – exp/learning/exp/problem solving) |
| | Gets this team involved when trying to solve problems (LDR – problem solving/empower/creativity/team) |

LDR-learning | Ask questions of client (MGMT – communication & LDR – learning) |
| | Ask questions of peers (LDR – learning/learning) internal or external (?) |
| | Invests team members to think and learn on their own (LDR – empowerment/learning/investing) |
| | Provides an environment of continual learning and improvement (LDR – empowerment/learning/investing) |
| | Develops his team by coaching and mentoring (LDR – learning/investing) |

LDR-reflection | Research/reviews on issues at hand and MAKES A DECISION (MGMT – directing/decisive & LDR – reflection/action) |

LDR-networking | Takes an active leadership role in the community by sitting on Boards, lecturing, etc. (LDR – networking) |

LDR-shared culture | Establishes a culture and manages business to maintain that culture (LDR – shared culture) |

LDR-goal-setting | Plans for growth and profitability (LDR – goal-setting) |
| | Continuously have meeting to discuss our goals (MGMT – coordinating & LDR – vision/goal-setting) |

LDR-misc | Try to do anything I ask my employees to do (LDR - example) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING BEHAVIORS/CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from experience (reflective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I document my own success and failures (reflective)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learns from experience (experiential/reflective)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learns from experience (reflective/experiential)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen to my employees (reflective possibly collective)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen to my clients (reflective)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Try to improve each year by reviewing the previous year (reflective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching out to others in my field with experience (networking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaching out to and attending meetings with organizations with our same interest (networking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I discuss challenges with other like owners (networking/experiential/collective)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attend functions that offer learning opportunities (networking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learns from industry leaders (networking/collective)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learns from small groups such as employees or other businesses generally in the same vertical (collective/networking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek advice from other successful business owners in my industry (collective/networking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend learning opportunities in my community when beneficial (networking/format)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Directed/Informal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening to motivational and management audio books (self-directed/informal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read other successful and unsuccessful strategies (self-directed/informal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learns from acclaimed business leaders e.g. Jack Welch (self-directed/informal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read books, watch videos on pertinent information (informal/self-directed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read books on leadership (self-directed/informal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking courses (formal)</td>
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<td>Activity seeks learning opportunities, seminars/workshops (formal)</td>
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<td>Work with a business coach (formal)</td>
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<td>Attend industry seminars or how to run my particular business (formal)</td>
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<td>Attend learning opportunities presented specifically by my industry (formal)</td>
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<td>Attend learning opportunities in my community when beneficial (networking/format)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective</td>
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<tr>
<td>I discuss challenges with team (team learning/collective)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I discuss challenges with other like owners (networking/experiential/collective)</td>
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<td>Learns from industry leaders (networking/collective)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learns from small groups such as employees or other businesses generally in the same vertical (collective/networking)</td>
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<td>Seek advice from other successful business owners in my industry (collective/networking)</td>
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<td>Listen to my employees (reflective possibly collective)</td>
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<td>Experiental</td>
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<td>I discuss challenges with other like owners (networking/experiential/collective)</td>
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<td>Learns from experience (experiential/reflective)</td>
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<td>Learns from experience (reflective/experiential)</td>
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<td>Researching our competition (environmental scanning)</td>
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<td>I do presentations about strategy and ideas emerge from the audience (active - ???)</td>
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<td>Learns from clients (experiential)</td>
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<td>Use my imagination (innovation/creativity)</td>
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Appendix K: Round 1 Selective Coding Data
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS/BEHAVIORS (7)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enlist the support of followers</td>
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<td>Inspire a shared vision</td>
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<td>Leadership as a dialogue</td>
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<td>Leader as chief educator/encourage</td>
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<td>Leader as learner</td>
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<td>Transactional Leadership</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING BEHAVIORS/CHARACTERISTICS (6)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
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<td>Networking</td>
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| Collective | Discuss challenges with team (team learning/collaborative) |
|           | Discuss challenges with other like owners (networking/collaborative) |
|           | Learn from the industry leaders (networking/collaborative) |
|           | Learn from other successful business owners (networking/collaborative) |
|           | Attend learning opportunities presented specifically by my industry (formal) |
|           | Attend learning opportunities in my community when beneficial (networking) |

| Experiential | Learn from experience (reflective/experiential) |
|             | Learn from others in my industry (networking/experiential) |
|             | Attend learning opportunities presented specifically by my industry (formal) |
|             | Attend learning opportunities in my community when beneficial (networking) |

| Misc. | Reflecting on competition (environmental sensing) |
|      | Presentations about strategy and ideas emerge from the audience (active - ??) |
|      | Learn from clients (experiential) |
|      | Use my imagination (innovation/creativity) |
Appendix L: Round 1 Delphi Survey
Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

My name is Terikay Rumanik, a doctoral candidate at the University of North Florida in the College of Education and Human Services. I am conducting a research study to examine leadership behaviors and learning strategies used by small business owners. The study is significant because the findings could provide information which may help current and future small business owners develop, maintain, and make their organizations more productive.

I am requesting that you participate in three rounds of data collection using Qualtrics, an online survey program. You will be provided the following options on the first page of the questionnaire:

(a) I agree and consent to participate in this study.
(b) No, I do not wish to participate in this study.

All participants must be at least 18 years to take part in the study. Although researchers and other authorized personnel might be able to link your identity to your responses, identifiers will not be included in any publication or report that comes from this research. Therefore, any data you submit will be confidential and your identity will be protected. As a participant, you will be asked to complete three (3) fifteen-minute questionnaires and return them within 3-6 days.

Data from this study may be published. However, as I have indicated above, your identity will not be linked in any way to your participation in the study. Your name and participation will be kept strictly confidential. There are no foreseeable risks and no compensation for your participation. Your participation is voluntary, and you will be free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study, the information you provide up to that point will be destroyed. Should you desire a copy of the results, please call me or send a message via my email address.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or if you would like to contact someone about a research-related injury, please contact the chair of the UNF Institutional Review Board by calling or emailing rb@unf.edu.

Please print a copy of the consent document for your records. Should you have questions or concerns about my request, please direct them to me or my dissertation chair.

Sincerely,

Terikay Rumanik
Doctoral Candidate
Phone:
Email:

Dr. Warren Hodge (Dissertation Chair)
University of North Florida
College of Education
Phone:
Email:

Participant Consent

Participant Consent

Please select one of the following:

- I agree and consent to participate in this study
- No, I do not wish to participate in this study

Section 1: Business Type and Demographics

Which of the following industry categories best describes the type of business your company is engaged in? Select one.
- Engineering and Construction
- Food and Beverage
- Financial
- Manufacturing
- Retail
- Service
- Wholesale and Distribution
- Other

Please indicate how many employees are in your business.

Please indicate the number of years you have led or managed this business.

Please indicate your sex. Select one.
- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to respond

Please indicate your age. Select one.
- Age 25 or less
- 26-35 years of age
- 36-45 years of age
- 46-55 years of age
- 56 or older

Please indicate with which of the following ethnicity you most closely identify. Select one.
Please indicate with which of the following ethnicity you most closely identify. Select one.

- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Multiracial
- Other, please specify

Section 2: Survey Questions

Survey Question 1

In the current economic climate successful small business leaders are expected to be effective. A large part of their effectiveness is based on how they learn, what they learn, and how they apply what they learn. In your day-to-day practices as a business leader, what learning strategies could you identify that help you run or manage your business successfully? Please list six (6) of these learning strategies. Examples of learning strategies include but are not limited to: (1) takes an active role when presented opportunities to learn, (2) learns from experience, and (3) uses imagination.

Survey Question 2

Leadership behaviors determine and influence a leader’s effectiveness and efficiency. Please list six (6) leadership behaviors you believe are important and effective in helping you lead and manage your business. Examples of leadership strategies include but are not limited to: (1) communicates purpose and direction, (2) spends time teaching and coaching, and (3) seeks differing perspectives when solving problems.
Appendix M: Round 2 Delphi Survey
Letter & Consent

Dear Business Leader,

Thank you for your continued participation in a study entitled, “Learning Strategies and Leadership Behavior Comparisons of Small Business Owners.” The purpose of the study is to identify learning strategies and leadership behaviors used by successful small business owners.

As a reminder, the study involves three rounds of data collection using Qualtrics, an online survey program. The second round should take much less time as I am asking you to rate the categories. First, however, you will need to acknowledge your consent to participate then you can proceed to rating the categories.

This survey is estimated to take between 10-20 minutes.

You will find additional instructions on the questionnaire. Here are some tips that may help you navigate this survey.

1. This survey may be completed in more than one session. In order to do so, please follow the steps listed below so the responses you put in will be saved.
   - Be sure to save the email I sent as it contains the link that will take you back to your survey. After you enter your responses for any given question, you must click the “Save-Next” button or the “Previous” button in order to save your responses. If you close out of the program before doing this, your responses will not be saved. After saving your responses, as noted above, you may simply close the web tab/page by clicking the “X” button (usually in the top right hand corner of the web tab/page) to leave the survey. Use the link in the email to return to your saved survey responses.

2. Do not click the “Finish” button until you are completely finished and ready to submit your responses.

3. If you have any questions/issues/concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at or
   - You may contact me at any time (even early morning or later in the evening). I want to make this experience as easy as possible for you.

Please know that I appreciate your assistance in what I consider an important study on leaders of successful small businesses. Please complete and return the questionnaire no later than Monday, January 27th.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Terikay Rumanoli
Doctoral Candidate
Phone: 
Email: 

Dr. Warren Hodge (Dissertation Chair)
University of North Florida
College of Education
Phone: 
Email: 

Participant Consent
To print this informed consent page, look for a print icon at the top of the web browser or under the "File" drop down menu.

Please select one of the following:
- By clicking here, I confirm that I am at least 18 years old and understand and accept the above information. I agree and consent to participate in this study

Block 1 - Leadership

Below are 7 categories created from your responses from the first survey regarding leadership behaviors used by successful small business leaders. As expert consultants for this study, I am asking you to please rate the level of importance of each of these proposed categories.

Leadership behaviors used by successful small business leaders include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>1=Not At All Important</th>
<th>2=Not Very Important</th>
<th>3=Neither Important nor Unimportant</th>
<th>4=Important</th>
<th>5=Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elicit the support of followers: Lead through example by modeling the desired behavior, encourage team involvement when trying to solve problems, and keep staff happy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a shared vision: Develop and clearly communicate the vision of the business and desired results, meets regularly to discuss goals and review progress, develop a culture and provides support, and inspires followers to accept the vision as their own and enable them to become enthusiastic about the vision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership as a dialogue: Communicates with peers, employees, and clients, uses of storytelling to share experiences with team from prior situations, involves team in problem solving, and holds regular meetings to discuss goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader as chief education/encourager: Spends instructional time with staff, supports training and continuous learning, invests in employees, develop team through coaching and mentoring relationships, and empowers employees to undertake learning opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader as learner: Leader asks questions of clients, peers, and employees, uses reflection as a metacognitive tool before making decisions, spends time observing day-to-day operations to identify opportunities for improvement, takes an active role in the community, and actively participates in networking, educational, and personal development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional leadership: Focuses on day-to-day operations and tasks including organizing, planning, delegating, staffing, budgeting, decision-making, and problem-solving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational leadership behaviors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please include any additional comments regarding your ratings for leadership behaviors used by successful small business leaders. (optional)

### Block 2 - Learning

Below are 8 categories created from your responses from the first survey regarding learning strategies used by successful small business leaders. As expert consultants for this study, I am asking you to please rate the level of importance of each of these proposed categories.

Learning strategies used by successful small business leaders include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Strategy</th>
<th>1=Not At All Important</th>
<th>2=Not Very Important</th>
<th>3=Somewhat Important or Not Important</th>
<th>4=Important</th>
<th>5=Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collective Learning: Learning which occurs as part of a team, learning from small groups, listening and communicating with employees, and discussing challenges with other like owners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential Learning: Creates meaning through direct experience which involves a process of experimentation to develop meaningful and applicable knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Learning: Leading or participating in formal learning opportunities including workshops, courses, and professional development activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking: Learn from industry leaders, reaching out to others in the same field with experience, discussing challenges with other like owners, attending meetings with organizations of same interest, and attending functions supporting or providing learning opportunities within the community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Practice: The method through which we process an experience through critical reflection, documenting successes and failures, or continuous improvement through activity/reviewing progress on a consistent basis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Printable PDF preview](https://infost.qmtrix.com/Control/PrintSurvey.php?action=GetSurveyPrintPreview&ID=44)
Appendix N: Round 3 Delphi Survey
Letter

Dear Business Leader,

Thank you for your continued participation in a study entitled, “Learning Strategies and Leadership Behavior Competencies of Small Business Leaders.” Just to reaf, the purpose of the study is to identify learning strategies and leadership behaviors used by successful small business owners.

Please note that this is an individualized survey which includes your unique ratings from your round 2 survey. A key strength of the Delphi survey is the opportunity to review your results alongside the group’s results. In an anonymous way. You may choose to change your rating in any given category or keep your rating the same. As this is the third round, it may take additional time to complete.

This survey is estimated to take between 15-30 minutes.

You will find additional instructions on the questionnaire. Here are some tips that may help you navigate this survey:

This survey may be completed in more than one session. In order to do so, please follow the directions below on the responses you put in will be saved.

1. Be sure to save the link that you will be sent back to your survey. After you enter your responses for any given question, you can click the “Save/Next” button or the “Previous” button in order to save your responses. If you close out of the program before doing this, your responses will not be saved. After saving your responses, as noted above, you may simply close the web tab/page by clicking the “X” button (usually in the upper right hand corner of the web tab/page) to leave the survey. Use the link in the email to return to your saved survey responses.

2. Do not click the “Finish” button until you are completely finished and ready to submit your responses.

3. If you have any questions/Issues/concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at:
   You may contact me at any time (even early morning or later in the evening). I want to make this experience as smooth as possible for you.

Please know that I appreciate your assistance in what I consider an important study of leaders of successful small businesses. Your expertise is invaluable. Please complete and return the questionnaire no later than [insert date].

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Terikay Rumanoli
Doctoral Candidate
Email:

Dr. Francis Godwill (Dissertation Chair)
University of North Florida
College of Education
Phone:
Email:

Participant Consent

Leadership Behavior

Below are the 7 categories created from your responses from the first survey alongside your ratings from the second survey. As expert consultants for this study, I am asking you to please review your ratings. If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below your rating box. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below each of your ratings. As a reminder, your initial question was to list leadership behaviors used by successful small business leaders.

As a reminder, below is the rating scale used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>Neither important nor unimportant</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Average of responses of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enlist the support of followers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead through example by modeling the desired</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behaviors, encourage team involvement when</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trying to solve problems, and keep staff happy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below.

Inspire a shared vision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Average of responses of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop and clearly communicate the vision of</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the business and desired results, meets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regularly to discuss goals and review progress,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>develops a culture and provides support, and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inspires followers to accept the vision as</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their own and enable them to become</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enthusiastic about the vision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership as a dialogue</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Average of responses of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicates with peers, employees, and clients, use of storytelling to share experiences with team from prior situations, involves team in problem solving, and holds regular meetings to discuss goals.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader as client/teacher/encourager</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Average of responses of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spends instructional time with staff, supports training and continuous learning, invests in employees, develops team through coaching and mentoring relationships, and empowers employees to uncover learning opportunities.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader as learner</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Average of responses of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader asks questions of clients, peers, and</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactional Leadership</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Average of responses of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on day-to-day operations and tasks including organizing, planning, delegating, staffing, budgeting, decision-making, and problem-solving.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformational Leadership</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Average of responses of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivates and inspires employees, encourages employees to think and learn independently, empowers employees to make decisions, and enables followers to go beyond perceived limitations.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please discuss which of the leadership behavior is most important and why? Please discuss which of the leadership behavior is least important and why?

Learning Strategies:

Below are the 6 categories created from your responses from the first survey alongside your ratings from the second survey. As expert consultants for this study, I am asking you to please review your ratings. If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below your rating box. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NC" in the text box located below each of your ratings. As a reminder, your initial question was to list learning strategies used by successful small business leaders.

As a reminder, below is the rating scale used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>Neither important nor unimportant</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collective Learning</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Average of responses of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning which occurs as part of a team, learning from small group, listening and communicating with employees, and discussing challenges with others like owners</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NC" in the text box located below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiential Learning</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Average of responses of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creates meaning through direct experience which involves a process of experimentation to develop meaningful and applicable knowledge</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NC" in the text box located below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Learning</th>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Average of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading or participating in formal learning opportunities including workshops,</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courses, and professional development activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below.

If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below.

If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below.

If you wish to change your rating please put it in the text box below. Additionally, comments may go in that box as well. If you do not wish to change your rating or put any comments please put "NO" in the text box located below.

Please discuss which of the learning strategies is most important and why? Please discuss which of the learning strategies is least important and why?
Review of Results

Please discuss your overall reflections (surprises, clarifications, concerns, expansion of ideas) from the findings of the Delphi survey regarding leadership behaviors. For example, do you agree with the ratings or would you reorder in a certain way?

Please discuss your overall reflections (surprises, clarifications, concerns, expansion of ideas) from the findings of the Delphi survey regarding learning strategies. For example, do you agree with the ratings or would you reorder in a certain way?

What else would you like to say that you have not had the chance to share?
Appendix O: IRB Email RE: Interviews
Hi Terikay,

Your reviewers responded and indicated that the changes you are proposing are not considered substantive enough to require a formal amendment for your exempt study. Therefore, you do not have to submit any updated documentation to initiate the changes you outlined. This determination only applies to the changes you outlined in your email. If you want to make additional changes, please contact us so we can find out if an amendment will be required before you initiate your changes. As always, feel free to contact me if you have questions. Thank you so much and have a great day!

Sincerely,

Kayta Champagne, CIP
Research Integrity Coordinator
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
University of North Florida

From: Terikay Rumanick (mailto:)
Sent: Tuesday, February 04, 2014 2:09 PM

[Quoted text hidden]

[Quoted text hidden]
Appendix P: Interview Questions
1. Leadership behaviors determine and influence a leader’s effectiveness and efficiency. What leadership behaviors do you believe are important and effective in helping you lead and manage your business?

**REVIEW R3 LEADERSHIP DATA**

2. Please discuss which of the leadership behaviors is most important and why? Please discuss which of the leadership behaviors is least important and why?

3. A large part of leadership effectiveness is based on how leaders learn, what they learn, and how they apply what they learn. In your day-to-day practices as a business leader, what learning strategies could you identify that help you run or manage your business successfully?

**REVIEW R3 LEARNING DATA**

4. Please discuss which of the learning strategies is most important and why? Please discuss which of the learning strategies is least important and why?

5. Please discuss your reflections (surprises, clarifications, concerns, expansion of ideas) from the findings of the Delphi survey regarding leadership behaviors and learning competencies.

6. What else would you like to say that you have not had the chance to share?
Appendix Q: Interview Informed Consent
Dear Participant:

My name is Terikay Rumancik and I am a student in the Educational Leadership (Ed.D.) doctoral program at the University of North Florida (UNF). I am conducting a research study entitled “Learning Strategies and Leadership Behavior Competencies of Small Business Leaders.” The purpose of the study is to identify learning strategies and leadership behaviors used by successful small business leaders.

I invite you to take part in this study as you are identified as a leader expert in a nonprofit human services or funding organization. You will be asked to take part in an interview that will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour. No one other than myself will know your identity and I will maintain your individual responses with the strictest confidentiality. I will not share your name, the name of your organization or other identifying information.

As a direct benefit for taking place in the interview, I will provide you with a final copy of the Delphi results from the early part of the study. Additionally, others may benefit from the information we learn from the results of this study. There are no foreseeable risks for taking part in this study. Participation is voluntary and there are no penalties for skipping questions or withdrawing your participation. Thus, you may choose to withdraw from this study at any time with no penalty or loss of benefits you would otherwise be entitled to receive.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me or my professor, Dr. Francis Godwyll. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of North Florida’s Institutional Review Board Vice Chairperson, Dr. Krista Paulson, at or

I thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Terikay Rumancik                               Dr. Francis Godwyll

I_________________________________________ (print name) attest that I am at least 18 years of age and agree to take part in this study. A copy of this form was given to me to keep for my records.

Signature: ___________________________________________  Date: __________________________
Appendix R: Phase 1 Delphi Survey – Leadership Behaviors
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Behaviors</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enlist the support of followers: Lead through example by modeling the desired behaviors encourages team involvement when trying to solve problems, and keep staff happy.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a shared vision: Develops and clearly communicates the vision of the business and desired results, meets regularly to discuss goals and review progress, develops a culture and provides support, and inspires followers to accept the vision as their own and enable them to become enthusiastic about the vision.</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership as a dialogue: Communicates with peers, employees, and clients, use of storytelling to share experiences with team from prior situations, involves team in problem solving, and holds regular meetings to discuss goals.</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader as learner: Leader asks questions of clients, peers, and employees, uses reflection as a method to investigate issues before making decisions, spends time observing day-to-day operations to identify opportunities for improvement, takes an active role in the community and actively participates in networking, educational, and personal development.</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional leadership: Focuses on day-to-day operations and tasks including organizing, planning, delegating, staffing, budgeting, decision-making, and problem-solving.</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational leadership: Motivates and inspires employees, encourages employees to think and learn independently, empowers employees to make decisions, and enables followers to go beyond perceived limitations.</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader as chief educator/encourager: Spends instructional time with staff, supports training and continuous learning, invests in employees, develops team through coaching and mentoring relationships, and empowers employees to undertake learning opportunities.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix S: Phase 1 Delphi Survey – Learning Strategies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Strategies</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Networking</strong>: Learning from industry leaders, reaching out to others in the same fields with experience, discussing challenges with other like owners, attending meetings with organizations of the same interest, and attending functions supporting or providing learning opportunities within the community.</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective Learning</strong>: Learning which occurs as part of a team, learning from small groups, listening and communicating with employees, and discussing challenges with other like owners.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiential Learning</strong>: Creates meaning through direct experience which involves a process of experimentation to develop meaningful and applicable knowledge.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflective Practice</strong>: The method through which we process an experience through critical reflection, documenting success and failure, or continuous improvement through actively reviewing progress on a consistent basis.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Learning</strong>: Leading or participating in formal learning opportunities including workshops, courses, and professional development activities.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-directed/Informal Learning</strong>: Learning directed by the individual including but not limited to listening, watching, or reading motivational, leadership, or management books/presentations, reading successful and unsuccessful strategies, and learning from acclaimed business leaders.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Assessing to learn and learning to assess. Society for Organizational Learning.


Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology:


Fredrickson, B. L. (2003). The value of positive emotions: The emerging science of positive psychology is coming to understand why it's good to feel good. *American Scientist, 91*, 330-335.


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