AN APPROACH TO ALIGNING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITH ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY MANAGEMENT

Kelly Eugene Garrett

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Supervisor of Dissertation:

Robert Moore, Lecturer

Dean, Graduate School of Education:

Pamela L. Grossman, Dean and Professor

Dissertation Committee:

Robert Moore, Lecturer

Todd Henshaw, Senior Fellow, The Wharton School

Mike Barger, Chief Operating Officer, Corporate University
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Sharon Elizabeth Garrett, for it would not have been possible for me to complete this work without her support. Sharon’s willingness to sacrifice the many hours we were apart to allow me to pursue this dream makes this accomplishment hers’ as much as mine. I love you and am very proud of you for what we have accomplished together.
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This dissertation investigated approaches which key informants and practitioners have used to successfully align leadership development and strategy management. The subjects interviewed in this study were familiar with organizations that made significant investments in leadership development programs and overcame the challenges associated with aligning leadership development with strategy management. The study explored how the participants described their approaches to aligning leadership development with strategy management via semi-standardized interviews from a targeted population of key informants and practitioners with significant experience as business executives, consultants, and academic leaders focused on the processes of leadership development and strategy management in organizations. Six key findings emerged from this study regarding the alignment of leadership development with strategy management: 1) leadership development in organizations should be differentiated to fit varying roles, yet integrated throughout the organization through similar and shared competencies, 2) leadership development competencies should be connected to and leveraged within the organization’s strategy management processes, 3) organizations should have a formal approach that aligns leadership development, not only with the company’s current strategic management objectives, but also with where the company was headed, 4)
leadership development competencies should be aligned with the beliefs and behaviors of senior executives, 5) leadership development competencies should be linked to the organization’s key results through a strategic framework, 6) developing leadership competencies that lead to specific results was an ongoing process best achieved through action-learning. Regardless of the business sector or size of the organization, the findings of this study indicated that a successful approach to facilitating the alignment of leadership development with strategy management was an approach that incorporates leadership, culture, teamwork, and alignment: the components of organizational capital.
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Most organizations seemingly struggle with developing the leadership needed to achieve strategic success. Even organizations that have clearly defined leadership development programs struggle with finding an approach that aligns leadership development with strategy management. Yet organizations around the world continue to heavily invest in the quest to align leadership development and strategy management efforts. Spending globally on leadership development has increased, and as noted by Gillian Pillans (2015, pg. 12), “research organization Bersin estimates the global market for training and development to be $130 billion, of which 35% ($45.4 billion) is spent on leadership and management development.” Despite the fact that organizations are emphasizing strategic alignment with leadership development practices, there is currently a lack of scholarly research on mechanisms through which leadership development can support organizational goals and strategies, or the implications of alignment in terms of return on investments in leadership development (DeRue and Myers, 2014).

This difficulty seems to center on the relationship between leadership development and strategy management and the complexities in aligning the former with the latter. Currently, the field of leadership development studies lacks a theoretical or empirical basis for explaining how organizations can achieve strategic alignment with leadership development practices, or why strategic alignment enhances the value of leadership development to the organization (DeRue and Myers, 2014). Many who work in this field assume that organizations that utilize a formal approach to aligning leadership development with strategy management, such as an organizational capital approach, seem to experience greater success in achieving that alignment than organizations who do not.
have a clearly defined approach. It appears that most organizations traditionally use both formal and informal approaches to leadership development. Formal developmental experiences are activities designed with the intended purpose of leadership development, which would include leadership training programs and interventions (DeRue and Myers, 2014). Formal approaches tend to consist of individual-focused leadership training programs designed around leadership traits. McKee (2014, pg. 27) defines traits as psychological or physical characteristics and/or consistent ways of responding to situations that are enduring and distinguishing personal characteristics that may be inherited, learned, or developed. The traditional formal approach of developing individual leadership traits has encountered significant barriers that not only prevent the application of these individually learned traits, but also prevents alignment with the organization’s strategy management. These barriers may include everything from individuals’ lack of motivation to organizational factors such as time constraints, lack of managerial support, and a lack of opportunity to apply the new skills (DeRue and Myers, 2014).

Informal developmental experiences occur within the normal context of everyday life and are often not designed for the specific purpose of leadership development. Informal learning refers to learning that takes place outside of organized, structured learning processes such as institutionally based degree or training programs (DeRue and Myers, 2014). The daily activities of informal leadership development approaches appear to help with building the desired competencies. McKee (2014, pg. 26) defines competencies as the capabilities or abilities that include both intent and action, and that can be directly linked to how well a person performs on a task or job. While informal
approaches primarily included learning leadership competencies versus traits, these experiences still consist of individual-focused leadership development. When a person demonstrates a competency, he or she is acting intentionally and behaving in a way that leads to successfully accomplishing the task (McKee, 2014). Formal training that is planned and informal experiences that are unplanned can both serve as developmental triggers (DeRue and Myers, 2014). However, leadership competency models have limitations: they tend to be backward-looking, overly complicated and present an ‘idealized’ view of leadership that is rarely borne out in practice (Pillans, 2015). Simply designing formal programs that teach leadership traits or relying on the informal learning of leadership competencies through life experiences are not effective indicators of an individual’s ability to align those traits or competencies with the organization’s strategy management efforts. Individual leader development focuses on an individual’s capacity to participate in leading-following processes and generally assumes that developing an individual’s leadership KSA’s (knowledge, skills and abilities) will result in more effective leadership (DeRue and Myers, 2014).

Leadership development refers to the building of mutual commitments and interpersonal relationships that are necessary for leading-following processes to unfold effectively within a given social context (DeRue and Myers, 2014). Organizations may likely seek to create an architecture for leadership development that enables employees to learn the right competencies at the right time (McKee, 2014). Understanding the mechanisms by which leadership development efforts can be shaped to both support and broaden organizational strategies will contribute significantly to the field’s understanding of the organizational-level impact of leadership development (DeRue and Myers, 2014).
However, many corporate learning and development organizations see leadership development as puzzle pieces representing initiatives and programs that should somehow fit together, but the pieces end up being from different puzzles. Leader development focuses on individuals and the development of human capital, leadership development attends to the interpersonal dynamics of leadership and focuses on the development of social capital (DeRue and Myers, 2014). Because of the dearth of research on leadership development, prior reviews on the existing literature have been forced to acknowledge the importance of leadership development, but then go on to narrowly focus on individual leader development (Day, 2000; McCauley, 2008; DeRue and Myers, 2014). This narrow focus on leader development is unfortunate because both leader and leadership development are necessary but insufficient for understanding and explaining how leadership capacity is developed, especially as organizations embrace more collective and shared models of leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003; DeRue and Myers, 2014). Leading scholar and leadership development practitioner Annie McKee (2014, pg. 245) observed that “far too many leadership development programs are simply a waste of time, the competencies and models that are taught often do not lead to more effective leadership, and the learning methods that are employed do not support learning or retention of knowledge.” Yet for many organizations, it remains unclear what the critical knowledge gaps are related to leadership development, and where the future research needs to focus in order to help organizations more effectively identify and develop future leadership talent (DeRue and Myers, 2014).

One might argue that leadership development should begin and end with the business’s strategies and objectives in mind. The ultimate purpose of leadership
development is to deliver strategy over the long term (Pillans, 2015) and it appears that
the best companies create enterprise-wide standards, practices, and metrics for leadership.
Without an integrative understanding of the inputs, processes, and outcomes associated
with leadership development, organizations are forced to speculate or rely on intuition as
to what to develop, how to develop it, where and when it should be developed, and who
is ready (or not ready) for development (DeRue and Myers, 2014). Additionally,
researchers have suggested that the best companies include flexibility in centralized
leader development programs to address specific business needs and customize
developmental solutions for business units to better ensure senior management support
and engagement (Council, 2004; Fulmer, 2005; Salob & Greenslade, 2005; Saslow,
2004).

Though most observers probably agree that the best companies are committed to
leadership development, and in linking leadership development to their strategy, there is
no consensus about how exactly to align leadership development to strategy management.
Few scholars consider the purpose of leadership development or how the leadership
development is aligned (or not aligned) with the organizational strategy (DeRue and
Myers, 2014). Annie McKee, for example, has stated that “so-called ‘competencies’
observed in some organizational models often include a mixture of observable behaviors,
personal values, vague terms more related to personality, and even allusions to
organizational values. Although all of these might be valuable in certain situations, they
are not competencies, and it is hard to link these confusing mixtures directly to
performance” (McKee 2014, p. 245).
Even companies that are committed to leadership development struggle to develop a formal approach or mechanism for aligning leadership development with strategy management. In a review of best-practices research on leadership development, McCauley (2008) underscored how, in best-practice organizations, leadership development practices are closely tied to the vision, values, and goals of the business, and that leadership development is a core part of the organization’s strategic planning process (DeRue and Myers, 2014). Leadership studies are still an emerging discipline and the concept of leadership development will continue to evolve (Daft, 2005). Many scholars have attempted to broadly define leadership in order to indicate what ideal leadership development programs might look like. For the purposes of this study, the definition of leadership development is the ability to anticipate and envision the future, think strategically, and initiate changes that will create a competitive advantage for the organization in the future (Daft, 2005).

Scholars and practitioners have also indicated the importance of aligning leadership development programs to the organization’s strategy. However, in many companies the popularity of the competency model approach has led human resources professionals and others to cobble together models that are ineffective for people and jobs in today’s organizations (McKee, 2014, pg. 245). Yet gaps still remain in the literature about an effective approach to facilitate the alignment of leadership development with strategy management. “Our field lacks a coherent and integrative framework for organizing the existing literature on leadership development,” said DeRue and Myers (2014). Without an approach or visible framework to align leadership development with the strategy, how
do organizations expect to achieve the alignment of leadership development with strategy management?

Conceptual Framework
This dissertation seeks to add to the scholarly understanding of these issues and to inform practitioners by identifying an approach to aligning leadership development with strategy management. The conceptual framework for this dissertation focused on three main areas: leadership development, strategy management and the alignment of leadership development to strategy. In this study the conceptual framework of leadership development includes the process of developing the [right] leadership competencies that can be supportive of individual and organizational effectiveness. Developing the right competencies required by the organization through the leadership development process should be aligned with the organization’s strategy management framework or approach (McKee, 2014, pg.245).

The objective of strategy management is to achieve better alignment of corporate policies and strategic priorities. At its best, strategy is a living, breathing process that includes multiple activities, frameworks, and linkages (McKee, 2014). One such framework that attempts to link leadership development to strategy management is performance management. Performance management is defined by McKee (2014, pg. 245) as providing processes and programs to identify, measure, and plan for the development of employees’ skills. The development of employees’ skills, such as leadership development, should be linked to both corporate policies and strategic priorities.
Contextual Framework

In the context of this study, alignment is defined as a process requiring the common understanding of the organization’s purpose and goals, then linking the organizational goals with employees’ personal goals. The inability of many organizations to identify a formal approach that facilitates the alignment of leadership development and strategy management appears to be primarily due to a lack of common knowledge about best practices on the topic. There is little research on how leadership development can be effectively aligned with the strategic priorities of organizations, or what the value of that strategic alignment might be for the organization (DeRue and Myers, 2014).

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the approaches to leadership development used by organizations in today’s contemporary operating environment. This exploration occurred through the study of two categories of research participants: Key Informants and Practitioners. Both the Key Informants and Practitioners were learning and development leaders who had knowledge of, or currently worked for and with, organizations engaged in making significant investments in leadership development programs, had seemingly overcome the challenges associated with developing an approach to leadership development and strategy management, and had facilitated aligning leadership development with strategy management. This study examines the approaches to aligning leadership development and strategy management reported by the Key Informants and Practitioners from eleven organizations.

The Key Informants were comprised of former leaders of learning and development organizations. They served in a variety of roles as learning and development executives, such as Chief Learning Officers and Vice Presidents of Leadership Development. The
Key Informants were influential executive education consultants who focused on the leadership development of executives within client organizations and/or were from renowned academic institutions noted for their global executive leadership development programs. Their combined tenure in global executive education and/or consulting exceeds seventy-five years of experience, literally spanning hundreds of companies and thousands of executives. Prior to entering academia, these Key Informants had more than fifty years of previous experience as practitioners of learning and development or strategy management executives in multi-national conglomerates, broadcast communications companies, or financial services firms.

The Practitioners were learning and development executives in companies that have made significant investments in the leadership development process and were actively involved with the leadership development process in those companies. The Practitioners represented companies from different industries and were comprised of varying sizes. These companies appeared to focus on attempting to align their leadership development approaches with strategy. The Practitioners represented the spectrum of for-profit, publically-held multi-national conglomerates; for profit, privately-held, multi-national professional services firms; and privately-held, not-for-profit healthcare providers. Their organizations were categorized as large-market companies with annual revenues ranging from $4.2 billion to $179 billion. The positions held by the Practitioners included a regional Chief Operating Officer, a Vice President of Executive Talent Development, Vice Presidents of Global Learning and Leadership Development, and a Director of Business Leadership. Lastly, the Practitioners possessed more than seventy-five years of collective practical experience as learning and development professionals.
In order to gain a better understanding of the purposes and approaches used by this population of research participants a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted as a qualitative means of gathering insights into the perceptions and experiences of two categories of study participants. Interview data were analyzed and coded using NVivo methodology to identify, compare, and contrast common themes. The primary or overarching research question explored in this dissertation is “How do learning and development leaders conceptualize and enact leadership development with respect to organizational strategy management?”

Three specific research questions guided the development of interview protocols for the two categories of participants:

1. What are learning and development leaders’ stated approaches to leadership development efforts in organizations?

2. How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy management, and what do they identify as the mediating influences—supports as well as obstacles—on outcomes?

3. How do learning and development leaders describe the current alignment of leadership development and strategy in their own organizations, and what future steps do they plan to take to achieve better alignment?

The research questions were designed to explore how the Key Informants and Practitioners described the elements of their organization’s approach and how they described their experiences. Using qualitative methods helps to uncover deeper understandings of how the study participants described their roles in organizational
efforts to leadership development programs, and how the participants experienced the forces that seemed to enable or prevent such an alignment. The results of this detailed qualitative research study serves to inform the learning and development community about aligning leadership development with strategy management by adding to the body of knowledge, and seeks to address an important gap in the existing literature. This gap focuses on the lack of a consistent conceptual framework or formal approach that companies may put into practice in order to successfully align their leadership development competencies with their strategy management efforts.

First, this study addresses this gap through a review of existing literature on leadership development competencies, a formal strategy management framework, and an approach to aligning leadership development with strategy management. Next, this study shares the data gathered from the research participants through the qualitative, semi-structured interviews in order to learn how the Key Informants and Practitioners describe their experiences with aligning leadership development and strategy management. Lastly, this study analyzes the findings from the participant data in order to identify a formal approach to better facilitate the alignment of leadership development and strategy management in organizations. The goal is that this study may serve to assist practitioners to develop a broader and more nuanced understanding of the promises and pitfalls of attempting to align leadership development with strategy management.
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Contemporary organizations operate in environments characterized by rapid change and increasing complexity (DeRue and Myers, 2014). Chapter 1 stated the purpose of this dissertation was to explore the approaches to leadership development used by the participants’ organizations in today’s contemporary operating environment. The fundamental research question focused on leadership development approaches and the alignment of leadership development with strategy management in those organizations. Organizations of all sorts—public and private, large and small—confront futures riddled with uncertainty, complexity, and potential for disruption (Thomas, 2008). This type of competitive environment creates the need for constant change in organizational strategy, thus creating the need to develop strategic leaders. The result is organizations around the world and across a broad array of domains—industry, government, military, not-for-profit, health care, and education—are adapting their strategies, structures, and practices with the intent of becoming more agile and responsive to these dynamic environments (DeRue and Myers, 2014).

A published research report from the Corporate Research Forum (CRF) titled “Leadership Development—is it fit for purpose?” references the rapid changes that are disrupting leadership development efforts in organizations today. In the report, CRF Researcher Gillian Pillans (2015, pg. 17) poses the question, “So what are the implications of our rapidly changing world for today’s – and tomorrow’s – leaders? The research questions in this dissertation were designed to better understand those implications by exploring the participants descriptions of their experiences with, and their organizations’ approaches to, aligning leadership development with strategy
management. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to identify an organizing framework for the inputs, processes, and outcomes associated with leadership development and synthesize key insights from existing literature (DeRue and Myers, 2014).

Clearly, in today’s environment, the challenge of developing or reestablishing a clear strategy is often primarily an organizational one and depends on leadership (Porter, 1996). There appears to be a general consensus among scholars and practitioners that leadership development is of paramount importance to organizations’ strategic success. But leaders do not become leaders on talent alone. No matter how intellectually or emotionally gifted or economically advantaged or socially privileged, no one is prepared for all the uncertainty and newness that organizational life will throw at them (Thomas, 2008). The crucial issue for practice is rethinking leadership development with strategic challenges (McCall, 2010). What worked in the past to develop effective leaders is not necessarily effective today.

Kaplan and Norton (2004b) have seen organizations use two approaches to define the role for leadership: a process for developing leaders, and a leadership competency model that defines leadership characteristics. A continuum of leadership development, which best serves the strategic needs of the organization and spans the careers of leaders, requires organizations to focus on both a leadership development process and leader competencies. Conger (2010) also indicates the role and scope of formalized approaches to leadership development have changed dramatically in the last two decades. The best programs are designed around an understanding that leadership development is a continuous, lifelong process rather than a single event or program. These programs must
be well designed in content and process, tightly aligned to the organization’s strategy, and supported by talent systems. The literature seems to indicate that leadership development initiatives can no longer simply focus on the desirable characteristics and competencies of leaders but must also focus on leading for strategic success. The best initiatives strive to advance the strategic and cultural objectives of the organization while simultaneously developing a deep bench of leadership talent (Conger, 2010). Furthermore, according to Conger (2010), in the best cases, leadership development initiatives can facilitate a common and widespread understanding of the organization’s vision and culture and clarify the leadership roles and responsibilities to advance both.

Despite this increased focus on leadership development, McKnight, Kaney, and Breuer (2010) state that most executives today lack the leadership ability required for four critical strategy implementation tasks. The four tasks are: (1) informing and educating employees of the need for change, (2) motivating employees to do what’s required to effect change, (3) putting into place the arrangements that encourage mission-critical work units to realign their work with the new strategy and one another, and (4) building organizational capabilities called for by the strategy. These shortcomings indicate a lack of understanding of the organizational capital components of the organization and the effect of leadership development and strategic alignment on the organization. The lack of effective communication and a strategic focus on leadership development leads to the poor alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy management.
Beer, Voelpel, Leibold, and Tekie (2005) stated that to compete successfully, an organization’s strategy must be aligned with that of its environment and at the same time the organization must have the capabilities to fit its strategy. What this means is that successful organizations must have effective leaders who develop, communicate, facilitate, and align the company’s strategy with stakeholders, customers, internal processes, and intangible assets. Effective leaders enable their organizations to confront the tensions that prevent alignment and, through a collaborative process, reshape alignment at several levels: between environment and strategy, strategy and organization, organization and the leadership team, and between key people. To accomplish this alignment, leaders have to be open to learning about how their decisions and behaviors fit the environment, strategy and organization. For an organization to perform effectively, its business strategy must be aligned with environment, its organizational capabilities with strategy, its organizational design and culture with capabilities, and its leadership behavior with organizational design. The alignment and synergy of these elements is crucial for organizational success.

Michael Beer and Russell A. Eisenstat of Sloan Management School (2000) developed a list of six “silent killers” of strategy. Those killers of strategy mentioned most often were: (1) An ineffective management team (100 percent of the cases they studied), (2) poor vertical communication (83 percent), (3) top-down or laissez-faire senior management style (75 percent), (4) unclear strategy and conflicting priorities (75 percent), (5) poor coordination across functions, businesses, or borders (75 percent), and (6) inadequate down-the-line leadership skills and development (66 percent). The referenced study seems to indicate gaps between the focus on leadership development
programs, the stated theoretical importance of aligning leadership development to the
organizational strategy, and the practical application of an approach to help facilitate
aligning leadership development with the strategy to assess strategy and performance
management.

Elaborate models such as the McKinsey 7-S framework and the eight components of
implementing strategy have been offered to help guide the decisions for strategy
management (Rausch, Halfhill, Sherman, and Washbush, 2001). The McKinsey 7-S
framework model includes seven factors or “levers” relevant to implementing strategy
within organizations. The seven “levers” includes the structure, systems, style, staff,
skills, strategy, and shared values of the organization. Rausch et al, 2001) indicated that
structure refers to the organization’s arrangement of units, jobs, and positions. Systems
refers to the policies and procedures of the organization. Style refers to the culture and
leader behaviors. Staff refers to those stakeholders who are employed by the
organization. The skills “lever” embraces the leadership decision making competencies
required for effectively meeting the challenges to achieving the strategy. Shared values
are the overarching goals and values common among the various components of the
organization. The final “lever” is the formulation and implementation of a strategy that
ensures the most effective allocation and deployment of available resources to achieve
the organization’s goals.

Rausch et al (2001) depict the eight components of implementing strategy as:
building a capable organization; allocation of resources; developing appropriate policies;
ensuring continuing improvement toward best possible practices; seeing that staff
members receive the support they need; aligning the rewards system with the strategy, ensuring an appropriate culture; and providing the leadership necessary for all of the other activities and core decisions. When comparing the eight components model to the 7-S model, it quickly becomes apparent that the action agenda in the eight activities will build each of the seven “levers” of the McKinsey model. Most of the elements of these two models concentrate on showing what an organization needs and what has to be done to establish implementation strategies that can help and organization adapt effectively to changing situations and environments (Rausch et al, 2001). The models so not, however, provide many insights on the specifics of how to make the many detailed, practical decisions.

A third model discussed by Rausch et al (2001) was the strategy concept I: five Ps for strategy model. The fives Ps are strategy as: a plan, a ploy, a pattern, a position, and a perspective. Strategy as a plan is the obvious way most organizations look at strategy, as a plan. Strategy as a ploy, widely used in competitive strategies and games, refers to actions meant to confuse an opponent or induce an opponent to abandon a plan. Strategy as a patter is defined as a “stream of activities” that requires leadership for a strategy that is both proactive and adaptive in a changing environment. Strategy as a position refers to “positioning” the organization in terms of physical location, market niche, products, or services to best apply resources to achieve its objectives. Strategy as a perspective means the way members perceive the organization and its mission through ideology, shared values, or culture. The five Ps for strategy model provides a different perspective than the McKinsey 7-S or eight components models by looking at the relationship between what was planned versus the actual outcome. These three models tend to focus mostly on what
needed to be done or what had happened in regard to strategy formulation and execution in organizations. These models seem to be focused more on strategy development and implementation than on strategy management, which is an ongoing endeavor. While leadership development appears to be incorporated at some level as a subcomponent within one of the considerations of each model, none of them seem to clearly provide an approach to facilitating the alignment of leadership development and strategy management. However, a strategy management approach that seemingly incorporates all of the elements of the McKinsey 7-S, the eight components, and the five Ps for strategy models is the Balanced Scorecard framework.

Kaplan and Norton (1992, 1996, 2001b, 2006a) defined the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) as a framework to facilitate the translation of the business strategy into controllable performance measures. More specifically, the BSC was labelled as a comprehensive system of strategically aligned performance measures (Decoene and Bruggeman, 2006). An alignment framework such as the BSC provides executives with a comprehensive framework that can translate a company’s vision and strategy into a coherent and linked set of performance measures (Kaplan and Norton, 2006b). The name “Balanced Scorecard” derives from the idea that measurable statistics form the basis of a scorecard approach, and metrics are applied to elements important to the organization’s success. The metric categories form a balanced set of measures to assess organizational performance. Since its inception, the BSC approach has been adopted by numerous organizations with fairly consistent and positive results (Thompson and Mathys, 2008).
Performance measures are considered strategically aligned when they are closely linked with a company’s specific strategy and value drivers (Decoene and Bruggeman, 2006). The measures on the BSC are being used by executives to articulate the strategy of the business, to communicate the strategy of the business, and to help align individual, organizational, and cross-departmental initiatives to achieve a common goal. The goal of using the BSC to link performance measures and operational actions to the business strategy is to motivate employees to achieve the organizational objectives (Kaplan and Norton, 1996; Nanni, Dixon and Vollman, 1992; Decoene and Bruggeman, 2006). Properly constructed scorecards contain a unity of purpose, because all the measures are directed toward achieving an integrated strategy (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). This unity of purpose is achieved through four linked perspectives of the BSC framework: (1) financial, (2) customer, (3) internal processes, and (4) learning and growth.

The Balanced Scorecard Perspectives
The organization establishes objectives, measures, and targets for each of the four perspectives, focusing on the following four questions. Financial: to succeed financially, how should we appear to our shareholders? Customer: to achieve our vision, how should we appear to our customers? Internal Processes: to satisfy our shareholders and customers, at what processes must we excel? Learning and Growth: to achieve our vision, how will we sustain our ability to change and improve? By covering each of these four areas, the organization attains a more balanced perspective of what needs to be considered in the effective development of the strategic plan (Thompson and Mathys, 2008).
Financial objectives represent the long-term goal of the organization: to provide superior returns based on the capital invested in the unit. Every measure selected should be part of a link of cause-and-effect relationships that culminate in improving financial performance. Financial measures indicate how well a company is performing with respect to its profitability targets (Decoene and Bruggeman, 2006). However, although financial measures provide an excellent review of past performance and events in the organization, this detailed financial review has no predictive power for the future. This focus on short-term gains at the expense of long-term value creation may lead to sub-optimization of the organization’s resources (Niven, 2006).

In the Customer Perspective, companies identify the customer and market segments in which they have chosen to compete (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). Customer-related measures indicate a company’s success in attracting and retaining its targeted customers (Decoene and Bruggeman, 2006). The customer perspective enables companies to align core customer outcome measures such as satisfaction, loyalty, retention, acquisition and profitability to targeted customers and market segments. However, these outcome measures have some of the defects of traditional financial measures in that they are lagging measures (Kaplan and Norton, 2006b). This is like driving by rearview mirror (Niven, 2006).

Internal business process measures indicate the level of a company’s performance with respect to activities that are critical to meet customer and financial objectives (Decoene and Bruggeman, 2006). Companies typically develop their objectives and measures for this perspective after formulating objectives and measures for the financial
and customer perspectives (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). The process of deriving objectives and measures for the internal business process perspective represents one of the sharpest distinctions between the BSC and traditional performance measure systems. The customer outcomes relate to reaching financial goals, whereas internal processes relate directly to meeting either customer or financial outcomes or both (Thompson and Mathys, 2008). The objectives established in the financial, customer, and internal business process perspectives identify where the organization must excel to achieve breakthrough performance. However, objectives in the learning and growth perspective are the drivers for achieving excellent outcomes in the first three perspectives (Kaplan and Norton, 1996).

The financial, customer, and internal business process objectives on the BSC will typically reveal large gaps between existing capabilities of people, systems, and procedures that will be required to achieve the targets for breakthrough performance. The gaps between the capabilities of people, systems, and procedures are articulated in the learning and growth perspective of the BSC (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). This final set of performance measures related to learning and growth are often the most difficult to select (Lipe and Salterio, 2000). According to Marr and Adams (2004), the learning and growth perspective of the balanced scorecard has long been considered its weakest link, and Kaplan and Norton admit that this is so and concede this perspective is the ‘black hole’ of their balanced scorecard (see their response to “Letters to the Editor,” Harvard Business Review, May 2004). Despite the critical influence the learning and growth perspective has on the other three perspectives, few organizations have easily figured out how to populate this perspective with meaningful and strategically relevant performance
measures for this perspective. Some companies tend to plug the gap with either human resource related measures (such as staff training metrics, absenteeism levels, etc.) or, particularly in the engineering and technology sectors, innovation measures (such as R&D investment and its results). A recent study shows that a third of balanced scorecard users do not even have a learning and growth perspective (Speckbacher, Bischof, and Pfeiffer, 2003).

The objectives and measures in the learning and growth perspective of the Balanced Scorecard are really the enablers of the other three perspectives (Niven, 2006). These enablers for learning and growth come primarily from three sources: employees, systems, and organizational alignment (Kaplan and Norton, 2006b). These sources are part of the framework for the learning and growth objectives that describe how the people, technology, and organizational climate combine to support the strategy (Kaplan and Norton, 2004a). Using a strategic framework such as the BSC with learning and growth objectives to support strategic advantage today is derived less from the management of physical and financial assets and more from how well companies align such intangible assets as knowledge workers, R&D, and IT to the demands of their customers (Kaplan and Norton, 2006b).

The learning and growth perspective of the BSC shows how an organization can align its intangible assets to its strategy (Kaplan and Norton, 2004b). Intangible assets are defined as those key value drivers whose essence is an idea or knowledge, and whose nature can typically be defined and recorded in some way. Hall (1992) splits intangible assets into intellectual property (those assets for which the organization has property
rights) and knowledge assets (those assets for which the organization does not have property rights). Itami (1991) calls them invisible assets and includes technology, consumer trust, brand image, corporate culture, and management skills (Marr & Adams, 2004). However, it is important to realize that the concept of intangible assets is discussed from various perspectives, including accounting, strategy, human resource management, information systems, and knowledge management, among others (Marr, 2004). Nevertheless, there has recently been a general convergence toward a three-pronged overall framework consisting of human capital, organizational (or structural) capital, and relational capital (Marr and Adams, 2004). This framework is represented in the learning and growth perspective of the BSC as the intangible assets categories of human capital, information capital and organizational capital. The intangible assets must be aligned with the objectives for the internal processes and integrated with each other so there are synergies among them (Kaplan and Norton, 2004a).

The three categories of intangible assets are defined as follows. Human capital, which are strategic competencies, consists of the availability of skills, talent, and know-how to perform activities required by the strategy. Information capital, which is strategic information, consists of the availability of information systems, knowledge applications and infrastructure required to support the strategy. Organizational capital consists of four components: the organization’s culture – awareness and internalization of the shared mission, vision, and values needed to execute the strategy; leadership – the availability of qualified leaders at all levels to mobilize the organization toward its strategy; alignment – alignment of goals and incentives with the strategy at all organizational levels; teamwork – the sharing of knowledge and staff assets with strategic potential.
Although all organizations attempt to develop their people, technology and culture, most do not align these intangible assets with their strategies. However, little has been documented in the literature regarding the planning of intangible assets such as human capital (Zula and Chermack, 2007). Therefore, Kaplan and Norton’s BSC framework provides a valuable tool to identify and align the organization’s human capital requirements. According to Kaplan and Norton (2004a), there are four primary steps in achieving human capital readiness alignment.

The first step is to identify strategic job families. All jobs are important to the organization, but some jobs have a much greater impact on the strategy than others. The next step is to build a job competency profile. One way to do this is to interview those who best understand the job requirements of a job family and create a competency profile detailing the knowledge, skills and values required by successful occupants in a position. Use the profile when recruiting, hiring, training and developing people for that position.

Once the organization identifies strategic job families and develops the appropriate competency profile, leaders should assess human capital readiness. Drawing from approaches ranging from self-assessments to 360-degree feedback, evaluate an individual’s performance and potential in these critical jobs families. This provides individuals with a clear understanding of their objectives, meaningful competency and performance feedback, and a practical approach for future personal development. Lastly, the organization establishes a human capital development program. Under the strategic family model, the organization concentrates HR programs on the critical few jobs that are
pivotal to the strategy. Closing the competency gaps in strategic job families should be the basis for reporting on strategic human capital readiness.

In spite of this, it appears that none of the four steps in human capital readiness specifically includes an emphasis on leadership development. A common lament among executives is that their organizations suffer from a shortage of leadership talent. Possessing the leadership talent to lead the direction, intensity, and speed of strategic and organizational change will be the key driver of corporate success in the years ahead (Conger, 2010). Organizations need leaders who know how to lead transformational change in order to execute the strategy. However, if an organization’s human capital strategy does not develop the leadership necessary to provide the capability to mobilize and sustain the process of change required to execute the strategy, the BSC framework becomes a powerful tool for aligning skills and the organizational competencies to strategy (Kaplan and Norton, 2005) through the component of organizational capital.

Organizational Capital
According to Kaplan and Norton (2004a), organizational capital provides the capability for integration and alignment of intangible and tangible assets with the strategy by changing employees’ behavior based on the organization’s strategy. Organizational capital is typically built on four components. The first component is culture, which are the attitudes and behaviors that characterize the functioning of an organization; an organization’s culture should support the organization’s strategy.

The second component of organizational capital is leadership. The leadership required to manage transformational change is a core requirement for becoming a
strategy-focused organization. Two primary approaches have typically been used to define the role of leadership, the leadership development process and the leadership competency model. The first approach, leadership development process, focuses on how leaders are developed in an organization. The leadership development process uses objective, verifiable indicators for leadership development within the organization, such as key positions without successors or number of external hires. The second approach, the leadership competency model, typically focuses on describing the appropriate traits of a leader. However, many companies focused on leadership competencies may not leadership development programs.

The third component of organizational capital is alignment. Alignment requires all employees to be empowered in the same direction. First, leaders must create awareness of the high-level strategic objectives to all employees in ways they can understand. Next, leaders must ensure that individuals and teams have local objectives and rewards that contribute to achieving targets for high-level strategic objectives. Lastly, leaders are held accountable for ensuring that the local objectives and rewards for individuals and teams are sufficiently aligned with the high-level strategic objectives.

The fourth component of organizational capital is teamwork and knowledge sharing. Among and within organizations there is no greater waste than a good idea used only once and creating a teamwork environment enables the sharing of best practices throughout the organization. Companies must generate, organize, and develop knowledge, then distribute it through a “push” system or by providing easy access when teams of employees are searching for existing information relevant to their immediate
strategic needs. Of the four organizational capital components, the leadership and alignment components greatly influence culture and teamwork. Due to the influence of the leadership and alignment components of organizational capital, and the role leadership and alignment play in enhancing organizational success, these two area are the focus of the next section.

Most organizations’ leadership development initiatives tend to focus on four main categories. Conger’s (2010) formal leadership development initiatives can be organized into four general categories: (1) individual skill development, (2) socialization of the corporate vision and values, (3) strategic interventions that facilitate a major strategic shift throughout an organization, and (4) targeted action learning designed to address specific organizational challenges and opportunities. Individual skill development has the oldest roots of the four approaches. Its primary aim has been to help managers learn the essential concepts and skills of leadership. The second approach seeks to socialize the corporate vision, values, and mission of an organization throughout its leadership ranks to facilitate alignment throughout the organization. The third approach—facilitating a major strategic change—is the least common of the four but potentially the one with the most significant payoffs for the organization. These educational experiences focus on building a cadre of change agents who are engaged in implementing organizational initiatives that facilitate and accelerate major strategic change. The emphasis is on having participants take ownership for leading change initiatives at their level of the organization. The fourth approach—action learning—uses team-based projects that explore opportunities or dilemmas facing the organization as a development vehicle for mid- to senior-level leaders (Conger, 2010). Since a goal of this study is to consider an organizational capital
approach to aligning leadership development with organizational strategy management, this study focuses on the third approach, strategic interventions that facilitate a major strategic shift throughout an organization.

According to Conger (2010), a more collaborative form of leadership is required to successfully implement strategic change initiatives. As a result, some organizations are deploying leadership development interventions to address strategic shifts and the leadership capabilities required for their successful implementation. However, there are some common problems with strategic leadership initiatives. Some examples of common strategic leadership problems include:

1. Poor modeling by corporate leaders. Given the overriding emphasis on the strategic direction of the organization, these programs tend to raise expectations about the organization’s senior leaders. They raise expectations that senior leaders will model the very behaviors and mind-sets the program aims to instill in others. Poor communication of initiatives and failing to modify behaviors by senior leaders only reinforces old behaviors on the part of employees.

2. Entrenched managers and the legacy of past relations, which can limit the strategy’s impact. Because strategic intervention designs rely on local managers and their work group, resisting managers can block the impact of learning initiatives in their units. Such managers can create intractable problems for a strategic intervention initiative.

3. Competing initiatives that distract sponsor support away from the strategy. The initial momentum created by strategic initiatives may begin to wane as time passes. Senior
leaders may turn their attention elsewhere even if they consider the program important. Therefore, employees will see it as a one-time event or fad.

4. The lack of consistent reinforcement of the strategic initiatives. Many of these strategic development initiatives lack systematic follow-up and reinforcement. The daily challenges and time demands of a major change effort, added to one’s regular work, can make individuals less supportive of subsequent events that require additional time and energy.

Despite these potential pitfalls, Conger (2010) indicates that strategic leadership initiatives facilitate efforts to communicate and implement the corporate strategy, to build strategic unity throughout the organization, and to create a cadre of change agents. They simultaneously build leadership capabilities while facilitating progress toward critical strategic objectives. Certain design elements, however, are critical for success. The first element is to ensure that a clear strategic framework drives the leadership development program content and design. The foundational feature of these programs is a clearly articulated strategic framework that guides the organization’s collective efforts.

The second element is to ensure that the strategy is translated into corresponding leadership behaviors and mind-sets and company capabilities and culture. Once the new strategy is clear, a critical event must take place: clarifying the behaviors and mind-sets that company leaders must embody to implement the strategy successfully and to create a noticeable competitive advantage in behavior, organizational capability, and culture. Third, the organization must design the curriculum to elicit group discussions between units and across levels.
Because strategic implementation efforts require a complicated transition from abstract ideas to clearly defined directives and goals, facilitated group discussions are essential for determining how an organization’s strategy can unfold to become an effective course of action. The fourth element is to deploy trained facilitators to provide critical process assistance. The facilitators ideally not only enhance the group process but also challenge and push participants to think in different ways. They can serve as nonthreatening providers of information across the organization. Facilitators can bridge gaps in information and disseminate information more broadly through their sessions with participants.

Next, and most importantly, is to cascade the learning experiences down and across multiple levels and operations. This ensures that all levels of the organization have a consistent understanding of the organization’s strategic direction, the leadership demands in light of that direction, and the implementation steps essential to moving forward. This is called “cascading initiatives.” In other words, there are similar initiatives running at each level of the organization’s hierarchy, often in tandem. Cascading initiatives powerfully helps translate what a particular vision or change initiative means to leaders at each level. By cascading an initiative down into the organization, frontline leaders can determine the most appropriate local structures, strategies, and tactics for their level and in turn feel a greater sense of ownership. Cascading can also ensure better integration across levels when senior leaders actively participate in conveying their own understandings to those below them.
By discussing the vision, encouraging comments, answering questions, and incorporating feedback, senior leaders demonstrate their commitment to the change agenda and model for others the types of behavior necessary for interactions with the next level. The final element requires leaders to put in place continuous or real-time feedback mechanisms. Leaders must be able to monitor the reactions of program participants to implementation challenges and to track the progress of initiatives in meeting objectives and timelines. This ensures that the information gathered provides an accurate picture of how the program is being received and adapted.

The strategic leadership development process demonstrates how leaders are developed, but it does not indicate what competencies those leaders should possess. Kaplan and Norton’s (2004a) leadership competency model focuses on the specific competencies desired from leaders. It identifies the traits that leaders should exhibit to contribute to superior performance. From their Balanced Scorecard database, Kaplan and Norton (2004a) classify the desired competencies into three general categories. The first competency category is creates value: the leader delivers bottom-line results. The second competency category is executes strategy: the leader mobilizes and guides the process of change. The final competency category is develops human capital: the leader builds competencies and sets high standards for the organization.

The first two categories, the leader who creates value and executes strategy were just discussed in the section about leaders who enhance organization capital by reinforcing the agenda for culture change. The third role, developing human capital, supports objectives that enhance the organization’s capabilities and reinforces its values (Kaplan
In the knowledge-based global economy, intangible assets like human capital account for nearly 80 percent of an organization’s value (Kaplan & Norton, 2006b). Has the significant amount of research, time and money that has been invested in the search for a “holy grail” of leadership attributes really comprised on only three desirable leadership competencies? This quest was described by Intagliata, Smallwood, & Zenger (2000, pg. 12), “This holy grail, when found, would identify a small set of attributes that successful leaders possess, articulate them in ways that could be transferred across all leaders, and create leadership development experiences to ensure that future leaders possess these attributes.” The research appears to be inconclusive about the attributes that may be universally applied across the spectrum of leadership.

Organizations require leaders with varied skill sets that need to be applied in the context of the organizations’ vision, mission and strategy. Each organization requires a distinctive brand of leadership suited to the desired results that define strategic success.

Intagliata et al. (2000) propose that the key to organizations getting a much better return on their investment in leadership development may depend on their ability to develop distinctive leadership brands. Leadership in a company is branded when the unique attributes and specific business results are integrated for all leaders within a firm. According to Intagliata et al. (2000), leaders who develop only common attributes of leadership do not establish brand. What is missing is the notion that these attributes need to be ones that clearly link to business results. Since business results are firm specific, leadership brand is always specific to a specific firm. When the attributes the leaders demonstrate are linked to desired results, distinctive branding follows. If this distinct
culture is aligned with the business strategy and tightly linked to the desired business results the organization is trying to achieve, it can be a source of competitive advantage. Leadership brand occurs when leaders at every level are clear about which results are most important, develop a general consistency about how they will achieve these results, and build attributes that align with the achievement of these results. Why then do companies not develop a distinctive leadership brand?

Intagliata et al. (2000) indicate that despite the significant investments many organizations have made in competency modeling efforts, the models produced have not helped them reach their goal of developing the leaders they want and need. There are five fundamental reasons for this lack of success in developing competency models. The first reason is that competencies are focused more on behavior than results. Most organizations that have competency models take the approach of defining each competency in terms of how leaders are expected to behaviorally demonstrate it, but stop short of explaining why demonstrating the competency has business relevance. As a result, competencies often end up being perceived as all about style, not substance.

The next reason is that competencies are too generic. Firms tend to identify the same attributes for successful leaders. These generic competencies do not take into consideration the specific behaviors that a particular group of leaders, in a particular industry, in a particular organization, with a particular business strategy need to demonstrate to succeed. The third reason is that competencies are linked to the past and not the future. This is potentially problematic because, even when done well, these models may identify what successful leaders did to get to where they are, but not what
they need to do to continue moving the company forward. Additionally, insufficient attention is paid to competency application. It is not uncommon for organizations to invest more time and energy in developing competency models than they do in practically applying them.

This results in leaders getting feedback about their competencies but, not being provided with practical development ideas or training programs to close performance gaps. Feedback on competencies may be used to guide or manage the behavior of middle managers but are not then applied at the senior executive level. The competencies used to direct the personal development of employees may not be included in the performance management feedback process. The fifth and final reason is competency models are owned by HR more than line management. Too many times, the work of developing competency models is delegated to others, while the senior executives who need to model the competencies stay far too distant from its development. What can organizations do to avoid these common mistakes? Establishing and adhering to leadership development competency standards which align with the strategy are essential.

To Intagliata et al. (2000) the likelihood of competency models producing a strong leadership brand is enhanced when the model is measured against five fundamental standards. The first standard is that competencies must be linked to the organization’s key result areas and balanced across them. In order for an organization’s competency model to support the accomplishment of its desired results, the two have to be linked. A key way to strengthen the results-connectedness of an organization’s competencies is to ensure
that they support the accomplishment of desired results that are balanced across multiple stakeholder groups.

The second standard is that competencies must be aligned with current strategy, organization capabilities and values. Competency models must be current and able to support where the company is headed, not just reflect what made it successful in the past. The likelihood of an organization’s leadership competency model helping drive the accomplishment of desired business results can be further enhanced to the extent that it identifies and includes specific leader behaviors that contribute to strengthening the organization’s core capabilities essential for successful strategy execution. Leadership competency models need to be updated periodically as an organization changes its strategy and as it successfully develops certain core capabilities and identifies that other capabilities may be needed to move its performance “to the next level.”

The third standard requires competency expectations to be differentiated to fit with varying employee roles—yet integrated from top to bottom. Two aspects of the architecture of an organization’s competency are particularly critical in enhancing branded leadership. The first focuses on the extent to which competency expectations are similar and shared throughout the organization. In competency model terms, this can be accomplished by creating a competency architecture that highlights a limited number (typically 6-8) of core competencies that all employees (from the CEO to the mail room clerk) share as an expectation to guide behavior. These core competencies need to be carefully selected so that they focus on the most critical few areas of organizational capability that are essential in executing the strategy of the business. An organization’s
A competency model is focused on providing direction to individuals regarding what they need to do and how it must be aligned with the way in which the organization overall is trying to compete and win in its marketplace. The second aspect of a competency architecture that can enhance leadership brand distinctiveness involves defining each core competency in a manner that provides different expectation levels that match with the different demands of people’s roles (e.g. individual contributor, manager, executive).

The fourth standard is competency model expectations must be aligned with the beliefs of senior executives and modeled in their personal behavior and commitment. In order for an organization’s competencies to create a strong leadership brand that can help to enhance the value of the company, it is critical that its senior executives are a walking advertisement for the brand. An organization that talks accountability cannot have top executives that shift the blame and point fingers when things go wrong. The way to help increase the likelihood of strong alignment between an organization’s competency model and the on-the-job behavior of its senior executives is to make sure they are an integral part of the competency development process from the beginning.

The fifth and final standard is competencies must be connected to and leveraged within the organization’s enabling systems. Organizations cannot consider leadership development as a separate system from strategy management. If its leadership ideas and philosophy are to lead to the development of a strong leadership brand, then they must be embedded deeply into not only the world of human resources (HR) but more broadly within its systems for doing business.
Next, Intagliata et al. (2000) posit that many organizations have leadership competency models. Few, however, are leveraging the potential contribution these models can make to create a distinctive leadership brand. When an entire leadership hierarchy gets focused on delivering the same results and has developed models identifying relevant attributes to deliver these results, they gain and can sustain a competitive advantage. Branding is not just about generic attributes but about developing attributes that lead to a set of specific outcomes that are aligned with the organization’s strategy, core capabilities and values. Maintaining the alignment between an organization’s leadership competencies and its strategy, core capabilities and values is an ongoing endeavor. Leaders must recognize that as their environment changes and new challenges or opportunities arise, they must make the necessary adjustments to ensure they continue to maintain proper alignment.

To operate effectively, organizations need to ‘fit’ or align themselves with their environment, strategies, capabilities and leadership skills (Beer et al., 2005). Strategic alignment is the dominant principle in creating value from intangible assets. The strategy map and BSC enable organizations to describe intangible assets, align and integrate them to the strategy, and measure the assets and their alignment. The intangible assets must be aligned with the strategy in order to create value (Kaplan and Norton, 2004b).

The BSC framework not only translates the strategy to operational terms but it also aligns the organization to the strategy by focusing employees on their role in accomplishing the company mission (Gumbus, 2005). When BSCs are properly done, the cards at each level align employees’ efforts because the cards are relevant,
understandable, and controllable at the local level (Atkinson and Esptein, 2000; Gumbus, 2005). A properly aligned Balanced Scorecard can be a means for linking elements within the organization and creating an aligned and integrated performance system (Thompson and Mathys, 2008). This alignment allows corporate-level synergies to emerge in which the whole exceeds the sum of the individual parts (Kaplan and Norton, 2001b). Executives do not dispute the need to align and integrate their intangible assets (Kaplan and Norton, 2004a). This is particularly true of intangible assets such as leadership development. But how can an organization achieve the strategic alignment of intangible assets such as leadership development?

Alignment generally requires two sequential steps: (1) create awareness and (2) establish incentives. First, leaders must communicate the high-level strategic objectives in ways that employees can understand. Second, leaders must ensure that individuals and teams have local objectives and rewards that, if achieved, contribute to achieving targets for high-level objectives. Therefore, successful alignment requires organizational leaders to create awareness through intrinsic motivation and establish incentives through extrinsic motivation (Kaplan and Norton 2004a).

Leaders create intrinsic motivation by appealing to employees’ desire to work for a successful organization that makes a positive contribution to the world (Kaplan and Norton, 2006a). Communication of vision, mission, and strategy is the first step in creating intrinsic motivation among employees (Kaplan and Norton, 2006a). Clearly understanding the vision, mission, and strategy enables employees to align their performance with the desired organizational outcomes. Creating awareness about the
vision, mission, and strategy helps identify the leadership competencies required to effectively align employee performance to the organization’s goals. In other words, effective strategic alignment processes make managers aware of the meaningfulness of their work for the company (Decoene and Bruggeman, 2006).

Extrinsic motivation should reinforce the strategic message (Kaplan & Norton, 2006a). There are two principal tools used to create extrinsic motivation. The first is to align employees’ personal objectives and goals with the strategy, and the second is to link incentive compensation to targeted scorecard measures (Kaplan and Norton, 2006a). For instance, linking the demonstration of leadership capabilities through successful performance, then providing incentives to employees who improved their performance in the achievement of strategic goals, is an example of extrinsic motivation. Predicating rewards based upon performance improvement rather than only goal attainment will support a more collaborative relationship between leader and employee (Thompson & Mathys, 2008).

However, according to Decoene and Bruggeman (2006) there has been little research on the impact of BSC-based compensation plans. Ittner, Larcker, and Meyer (2003a) showed that a subjective BSC-based compensation plan (i.e., a compensation plan that does not attach weightings to the BSC performance measures) distorted superiors’ performance evaluations. Concretely, superiors’ performance evaluations were affected by financial performance measures only and not by non-financial performance measures. Decoene and Bruggeman (2006) expect that a BSC-based compensation plan has a positive effect on organizational performance because it combines strategically
aligned and controllable operations-based performance measures with extrinsic rewards. The key is to have a process such as the BSC to align leadership development, organizational performance, employee motivation and rewards to the strategy. Once processes are aligned with outcomes, leaders’ attention can be focused upon aligning unit and individual performance goals with reinforcement structures supporting the goals of the organization (Thompson and Mathys, 2008). But what can organizations do to effectively communicate strategic goals to employees in order to motivate them and enhance their performance? Through a properly aligned BSC, the process called “cascading” emerges. The cascading process enables better alignment of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of employees to the organizational strategy.

Aligning the Strategy
A BSC’s cascading process aligns superiors’ and managers’ objectives (Kaplan & Norton, 1996; Decoene and Bruggeman, 2006). The cascading process facilitates strategic alignment in multiple directions of an organization, particularly downward to the employees. As such, managers who work toward their personal objectives contribute to the achievement of the organizational objectives (Decoene and Bruggeman, 2006). However, in large, complex organizations, the numbers of employees and logistics requirements involved in effectively communicating the strategy and its importance can be daunting. An organization can cascade the BSC top-down or bottom-up, but ultimately scorecard reporting, analysis, and decision making should be flowing in both directions (Kaplan and Norton, 2006b). As a result of the cascading process, the BSC includes strategically aligned, non-financial and operations-based performance measures (Decoene and Bruggeman, 2006). Starting with an enterprise BSC and Strategy Map is the textbook
approach for aligning middle- and lower-level organizational units with corporate-level strategy (Kaplan and Norton, 2006b). A Strategy Map is a convenient tool used to clearly demonstrate strategic alignment up and down an organization. Since alignment is not a one-time event, a comprehensive and managed alignment process helps the enterprise achieve synergies through integration. The Strategy Map provides the means to communicate the strategy, demonstrate alignment, manage performance measures, and sustain alignment on an ongoing basis.

According to Kaplan and Norton (2004a), the strategy map creates alignment and integration by providing a common point of reference for the enterprise strategy, with sufficient detail to be meaningful, measurable, and actionable. It illustrates the cause-and-effect relationships that link desired outcomes between the intangible assets and the strategy and identifies the specific capabilities in the organization’s intangible assets that are required for delivering exceptional performance. Few organizations, however, exploit the potential competitive advantages from aligning and integrating their intangible assets. In a Kaplan and Norton (2004a) survey of HR executives on strategic alignment, only one-third of the organizations reported a strong alignment of HR priorities with the enterprise strategy. The survey also found that the fundamental management processes designed to create alignment were not used as intended, and few HR organizations integrated planning with strategy, assigned relationship managers, or linked budgets to strategy. By using strategy maps, the leaders that manage the organization’s most important intangible assets can become more tightly aligned to the organization’s strategy. Strategy maps also better enable the alignment of intangible assets and the
strategically significant performance measures developed to enhance organizational success.

According to Decoene and Bruggeman (2006), empirical evidence shows that there is a positive effect of strategically aligned BSC performance measures on organizational performance. Ittner and Larcker (2003) point out that “not linking (non-financial) performance measures to the business strategy is one of the reasons for not benefitting from (non-financial) performance measurement.” Braam and Nijssen (2004) conducted a questionnaire survey in Dutch business-to-business companies and found that the BSC affects organizational performance only if the performance measures are strategically aligned. Moreover, their results showed that mechanistic BSC use—i.e., the use of BSC without a clear link to corporate business strategy—even decreased organizational performance. Ittner, Larcker, and Randall (2003b) investigated the performance implications of the BSC in financial services firms. Their results showed that, to achieve improved organizational performance with the BSC, it is important to align the performance measures with the strategy.

Decoene and Bruggeman (2006) further state that found that the inclusion of more non-financial performance measures in the four perspectives of the BSC was positively correlated with perceived organizational performance. Ittner and Larcker (1998); Banker, Potter, and Srinivasan, 2000) showed that non-financial performance measures—e.g., customer satisfaction—are drivers of future organizational performance. Non-financial performance measures are better predictors of future organizational performance that financial performance measures, because the former contain additional, forward-looking
information that is not reflected in financial performance measures. This type of information helps employees focus on the long-term performance consequences of their actions. As a result, the inclusion of more non-financial performance measures in the BSC is expected to lead to improved future organizational performance. A significant level of scholarship has linked the management of a firm’s human resources to its performance, highlighting the criticality of a ‘People Development’ dimension (Maltz, Shenhar, and Reilly, 2003; Delery & Doty, 1996). Maltz et al (2003) also referred to a study by Youndt, Snell, Dean and Lepak (1996), who note, “The effective management of human capital, not physical capital, may be the ultimate determinant of organizational performance.”

This led to a Maltz et al. (2003) empirical study on major performance measures in organizations. The study employed a two-step process: a pilot study of field interviews with a group of selected CEOs and other executives, followed by a mail survey to 1,610 alumni of a major university who were identified as senior managers within their organizations. This process resulted in 180 completed, usable surveys from executives and senior managers representing 36 industries, with the most highly represented industries consisting of telecommunications (38 responses), electronic manufacturing (21), financial services (18), construction (10) and engineering services (8). Of these respondents, 63 percent (113 out of 180) listed the “Quality of leadership development” as a baseline development measure. Similarly, 58 percent of respondents (105 out of 180) listed “Depth and quality of strategic planning” as a baseline development measure. The ability to effectively measure firm performance is critical to the firm’s survivability and the efficient management of the firm (Maltz et al., 2003; Parsley, 1992). Furthermore,
Maltz et al. (2003) believe it is critical that any prescriptions for performance measurements should be simple, dynamic and flexible over time; foster improvement; and be linked to the organization’s strategy, goals and objectives. Goals and strategies that are not translated into measures of performance and that are not well-linked lead to an unfocused and uncoordinated effort for reaching goals across the organization (Thompson and Mathys, 2008).

Therefore, the strategy map provides the visual framework for integrating the organization’s objectives. Further, the strategy map identifies the specific capabilities in the organization’s intangible assets that are required for delivering exceptional performance (Kaplan and Norton, 2004a). An organization’s strategy map and BSC should tell the story of its strategy, a story that differentiates the organization from competitors (Kaplan and Norton, 2004a). Because an organization’s intangible assets may easily represent more than 75 percent of its value, then its strategy formulation and execution need to explicitly address their mobilization and alignment (Kaplan & Norton, 2004b). As Kaplan and Norton (2006b, pg. 287) further stated:

“Strategy execution is not a matter of luck. It is the result of conscious attention, combining both leadership and management processes to describe and measure the strategy, to align internal and external organizational units with the strategy, to align employees with the strategy through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and targeted competency development programs, and finally, to align existing management processes, reports, and review meetings with the execution, monitoring and adapting of the strategy.”

Strategy Execution

Management theorist Peter Drucker once observed that, “When it comes to strategy, most of what we do is talk about it. At some point strategy has to devolve into action”
(McKnight et al, 2010, p. 107). Bossidy and Charan (2002) define execution as a discipline for meshing strategy with reality, aligning people with goals, and achieving the results promised as a central part of a company’s strategy and its goals and the major job of any leader in business. Yet strategy execution remains elusive for some companies because they rely on an approach to planning that is based on faulty assumptions (McKnight et al, 2010). No strategy, however brilliant, can be implemented successfully unless the people who have the most important jobs know what they need to do differently, understand how and why they should do it, and have the necessary resources (Bradley, Dawson, and Montard, 2013).

According to Daft (2005), a study that looked at the time executives in various departments spent on long-term, strategic activities found discouraging results regarding the executives’ ability to focus on strategy management. In the companies studied, 84 percent of finance executives’ time, 70 percent of information technology executives’ time, and 76 percent of operational managers’ time is focused on routine, day-to-day activities (Wah, 1999). Another study found that, on average, senior executives in today’s organizations spend less than 3 percent of their energy on building a corporate perspective for the future, and in some companies, the average is less than 1 percent (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994). Creating strategy in today’s environment of complexity, ever-changing priorities, and conflicting agendas is a daunting task (Bradley et al, 2013). The commitment to spend the amount of time sufficient to develop a strategy, clearly communicate the strategy throughout the organization, and develop leadership capable of executing the strategy becomes more critical in the type of environment just described. Of paramount importance to achieving organizational success in this complex
environment is aligning leader development to the strategy. But that is easier said than done, because leaders with the necessary competencies and experience to expertly align and execute strategy do not simply develop overnight.

Research shows that experts in most fields require ten years of learning and development before they reach a state of true expertise. This means senior leaders must appreciate the long time horizons required to truly develop their leadership talent. They must look beyond the simple solutions such as a three-day training program or the one-time administration of a 360-degree feedback. Supplementing them must be the organization’s talent management processes, performance management and reward systems, culture and core values, and behaviors of the senior team (Ready & Conger, 2007). Research is needed that explores how robust the program design and derailment factors are in terms of truly influencing positive outcomes. We must move from seeing leadership development as an event to an ongoing process without an actual end (Conger, 2010).

Summary
The available literature clearly indicates that many organizations struggle with an effective leadership development process that manages performance. It is clear that senior executives believe there is a critical need to align intangible assets such as leadership development with organizational strategy management. While developing leadership that achieves results has become a priority, many organizations still struggle with developing performance measures for leadership development, even those who use a framework such as the BSC to support their approaches. When all three components in the learning and growth perspective—human, information, and organization capital—are aligned with the
strategy, the entity has a high degree of organization readiness. Culture, leadership, alignment, and teamwork reinforce the changes in organizational climate required to execute the strategy (Kaplan & Norton, 2004a).

The strategy map and BSC perspectives provide the framework to align the organization’s leader development and performance measures with the strategy. Creating a strategy map helps senior teams come into unparalleled alignment about priorities, initiatives, and results (McKnight et al, 2010). Without identifying the appropriate leadership competencies for the organization, developing a sustained leadership development process, and successfully aligning leadership performance with the strategy, most organizations do not achieve success. The literature appears to theorize that aligning leadership development with the strategy will enhance organizational performance, but it does not clearly indicate exactly how or if organizations actually achieve alignment. The literature also seems to indicate that even organizations who engage in using a strategic framework, like the BSC, still do not experience a great deal of success in aligning leadership development with their strategies.

Additional research was required to explore some of the common themes and challenges identified with aligning leadership development with strategy. The primary research question explored in this dissertation is: How do learning and development leaders conceptualize and enact leadership development with respect to aligning with strategy management?

There are three fundamental research questions that emerge to be investigated through a series of semi-standardized interviews:
1. What are learning and development leaders’ stated approaches to leadership development efforts in organizations?

2. How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy management, and what do they identify as the mediating influences—supports, as well as, obstacles—on those efforts?

3. How do learning and development leaders describe the current alignment of leadership development and strategy management in their own organizations, and what specific steps do they plan to take in order to achieve better alignment?

Prior research relied on quantitative methods rather than conducting in-depth qualitative research. The purpose of this study is to explore how key stakeholders experience the common themes and challenges associated with aligning leadership development with strategy management.
CHAPTER 3: Methodology

As previously stated in Chapter 1, the literature indicates that there are gaps between the focus on leadership development programs, the stated theoretical importance of aligning leadership development to the organizational strategy, and the practical application of an approach to facilitate aligning leadership development with the strategy management. Therefore, the research questions for this study were designed to explore how the participants described the elements of leadership development and organizational strategy management. The research questions also sought to understand how participants described their observations and experiences related to leadership development and strategy management. Because this research seeks to learn from the experiences and expertise of others, it readily led to the use of qualitative research methods. This research seeks to add to the understanding of these issues and to inform practitioners by identifying an approach to aligning leadership development and strategy management.

The conceptual framework for this study focused on three main areas: leadership development, strategy management and the alignment of leadership development to strategy management. The purpose of a conceptual framework is to learn from the experience and expertise of others as you cultivate your own knowledge and perspective (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012).

Qualitative techniques allow researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives (Berg, 2009). To be genuinely qualitative research, a study must take account of the theories and perspectives of those studied rather than relying entirely on established theoretical views or the researcher’s perspective (Maxwell, 2013). Using qualitative
methods allowed me to uncover deeper understandings of how the study participants described leadership development approaches, how they conceptualized their own roles in helping enable their organizations to align leadership development and strategy management, and how they experienced the forces that seemed to enable or prevent such an alignment. The results of this detailed qualitative research fills an important gap in the existing literature and helps to deepen our understanding of the promises and pitfalls of aligning leadership development efforts with overall strategy management efforts.

This study used qualitative research methods to interview a targeted population of research participants who have significant experience as business executives and/or academic leaders, significant experience with leading learning and development responsibilities focused on the process of leadership development, and significant experience as thought leaders in the field of leadership development. These leaders, learning leaders and thought leaders have observed or experienced both success and challenges in facilitating the alignment of leadership development and strategy management. The primary research question the study explored was: How do learning and development leaders conceptualize and enact leadership development with respect to organizational strategy management? From this primary research question evolves the three fundamental research questions which were further explored.

1. What are learning and development leaders’ stated approaches to leadership development efforts in organizations?

2. How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy, and what do they identify as the mediating influences—supports, as well as, obstacles—on their efforts?
3. How do learning and development leaders describe the current alignment of leadership development and strategy management in their own organizations and what specific steps do they plan to take in order to achieve better alignment?

The research questions were designed to explore and uncover deeper understandings of how the study participants described their leadership development approaches, how they conceptualized their own roles in helping enable their organizations to align leadership development and strategy management, and how they experienced the forces that seemed to enable or prevent such an alignment.

Research Design
This study used a qualitative research approach as the best method for achieving the purpose of this study. The nature of the design of this qualitative research was exploratory. In the early part of qualitative fieldwork, the evaluator is exploring—gathering data and watching for patterns to emerge (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, in several qualitative research approaches, the collection of data and its analysis are aimed at providing a holistic understanding of the issues studied (Erikson & Kovalainen, 2008).

What people actually say and the descriptions of events observed remain the essence of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). More importantly, it provides an understanding of the meaning that these things, actions, and events have for the people who are involved in them and the perspectives that inform their actions (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, Maxwell (2013) stated that understanding the particular contexts within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions, is one of the intellectual goals in selecting participants for qualitative research studies. This study focused on a small group of purposefully selected participants who met the earlier stated
criteria. The participants were engaged via semi-standardized interviews in order to explore the research questions in depth in order to collect and analyze the data. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples, selected purposefully to permit in-depth inquiry into and understanding of a specific phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Participant Selection
Due to the time-constrained nature of this qualitative study, purposive sampling was utilized as the primary method of data collection. The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, people or cases are chosen for a specific purpose or to generate theory, and the number of people or cases is necessarily limited because of the more intensive, time-consuming character of qualitative data collection and analysis (Remler and Van Ryzin, 2015). The purposive sampling population was comprised of the 4 Key Informants and 7 Practitioners. Purposive samples are selected in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study (Berg, 2009). The participants included eleven leaders in two distinct categories, Key Informants and Practitioners, who were a mixture of academics, consultants, C-Suite executives, learning and development executives, and executives with front-line responsibilities. There were four Key Informants and seven Practitioners.

Key Informants
The four Key Informants were considered subject-matter experts in the areas of leadership development and/or strategy management. The intent of the Key Informant interviews was to confirm who the key stakeholders were within an organization’s leadership development and strategy management efforts, as well as to uncover their
experiences with approaches to leadership development and strategy management. A common qualitative sampling strategy is studying a relatively small number of special cases that are successful at something and therefore a good source of lessons-learned (Patton, 2002).

Each of the Key Informants, while they may primarily work in executive education and/or consulting today, were leaders of learning and development organizations earlier in their careers. They served in a variety of roles as learning and development executives, such as Chief Learning Officers and Vice Presidents of Leadership development. Their responsibilities for leadership development efforts were identical to the practitioner’s responsibilities as current leaders. Today, the Key Informants are influential executive education leaders who are focused on leadership development of the executives within client organizations. They also lead consulting engagements with client organizations who value their backgrounds and experiences in leadership development. The four Key Informants represented renowned academic institutions noted for their global executive development programs and consulting expertise. Their combined tenure in global executive education and/or consulting exceeds seventy-five years of experience, literally spanning hundreds of companies and thousands of executives.

Prior to entering academia, these Key Informants had more than fifty years of previous experience as practitioners of learning and development or strategy management executives in multi-national conglomerates, broadcast communications companies, or financial services firms. Table 1 below describes the four Key Informants with their Research Participant numbers in parentheses and a brief synopsis of their careers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Informant (Research Participant 6)</th>
<th>Ivy League Academic, Executive Education Consultant, former Chief Learning Officer of a Global Conglomerate.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant (Research Participant 9)</td>
<td>Ivy League Academic, Executive Education Consultant, former Chief Learning Officer of a Global Software Company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant (Research Participant 10)</td>
<td>Global Leadership Development Consultant, former Chief Learning Officer of a Global Broadcast and Communications Company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant (Research Participant 11)</td>
<td>Dean of Executive Education at an Ivy League Institution; former Chief Learning Officer of a Global Investment Bank.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

Practitioners

This study also focused on Practitioners who were learning and development executives in companies that have made significant investments in the leadership development process but have used differing methods in conducting those processes. These learning and development leaders were also actively involved with the leadership development process within their companies. The Practitioners represented companies that were comprised of different industries and were of varying sizes. These companies were focused on strategy management and attempted to align leadership development with their approaches to strategy management, but experienced varying degrees of success in doing so. Each of the Practitioners’ companies seemingly had an approach to assessing the alignment of their leadership development and strategy management efforts.

The seven Practitioner participants represented the spectrum of for-profit, publicly-held multi-national conglomerates; for profit, privately-held, multi-national professional services firms; and privately-held, not-for-profit healthcare providers. Their organizations were categorized as large-market companies with annual revenues ranging
from $4.2 billion to $179 billion. The positions held by practitioners included a regional Chief Operating Officer, a Vice President of Executive Talent Development, Vice Presidents of Global Learning and Leadership Development, and a Director of Business Leadership. This group of Practitioners possessed more than seventy-five years of collective practical experience as learning and development professionals. Table 2 below describes the Practitioners, their Research Participant numbers, and a brief synopsis of their professional backgrounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practitioner (Research Participant 1)</th>
<th>Leadership Development Executive in a large-sized Global Pharmaceutical Company.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner (Research Participant 2)</td>
<td>Global Leadership Development Executive in a large-sized Global Conglomerate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner (Research Participant 3)</td>
<td>Partner in a privately-held Global Strategy Management Consulting Firm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner (Research Participant 4)</td>
<td>Executive-Leadership Development Executive in a publicly-traded Global Information Technology Company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner (Research Participant 5)</td>
<td>Global Leadership Development Executive in a large-sized Global Conglomerate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner (Research Participant 7)</td>
<td>Senior Executive of a Regional Not-for-Profit Healthcare Provider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner (Research Participant 8)</td>
<td>Leadership Development Executive in a Regional Not-for-Profit Healthcare Provider.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Given the extensive learning and development backgrounds, as well as the collective expertise, of both the Key Informants and Practitioners this group was well situated to provide their perspectives as leaders, learning leaders, and thought leaders to this study.

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Methods of Data Collection

The method of data collection used in this study was semi-standardized interviews.

The study candidates were initially contacted through telephone calls or emails using the Letter of Invitation in Appendix C. After making initial contact with the study candidates, and upon obtaining their consent to participate in this study either via a confirming email or telephone conversation, the dates and times for conducting the research interviews were scheduled with the research participants. Prior to conducting the actual interviews, the research participants were provided an Informed Consent form in Appendix A. The Informed Consent form advised the research participants of their rights regarding confidentiality and their voluntary participation in this research study. The Informed Consent form also provided the research participants information about the purpose of the study, the type of research intervention, how participants were selected, the procedures and risks associated with the study, the benefits of participating in the study, and how the results of the study might be shared upon completion. Overall, this method of participant selection provided a sample population of 11 key participants in the study.

The semi-standardized interviews were conducted via audio-recorded conversations with the research participants using the internet service UberConference. The interviews were scheduled one-on-one with the four Key Informants and seven Practitioners who comprised the Learning and Development executives and Strategy Management executives identified as participants for the focus of this study. The research participants were each asked the general interview questions according to the Interview Protocol in Appendix E, with each interview lasting approximately one hour. This type of interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and special topics
The semi-standardized interviews were used as the means of gaining an in-depth understanding about the participants’ experiences with aligning leadership development and strategy management. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions (Berg, 2009).

The Semi-Structured Interview Guide in Appendix D was constructed in the manner described above in the previous paragraph. The general interview questions were crafted and sequenced to first gain a better understanding about how the research participants’ organizations established the goals and expectations of leadership development programs. The next sequence of questions then sought to gain a better understanding of how participants’ organizations leadership development programs goals had or had not met expectations. The last sequence of questions were designed to better understand how important it was to the participants’ organizations to align leadership development programs with strategy management, then to uncover the approaches used by the organizations to facilitate the alignment of leadership development and strategy management. The Interview Protocol in Appendix D was crafted to enable the research participants to share their experiences by responding to the general interview questions. The Interview Protocol was also designed to encourage the research participants to provide in-depth responses to follow-up, probing questions asked as the way to gain a deeper understanding of those experiences.

The use of audio-recorded interviews provided the means to ask the general interview questions prepared in the interview protocol listed in Appendix D. The audio-
recording method also allowed for capturing the information provided during the probing of the research participants’ experiences beyond the answers provided to the general interview questions. Audio-recording, then transcribing, these experiences shared by the research participants provided the raw, in-depth data required for an analysis of the information gained from the interviews. The information sought through the interview questions was intended to elicit responses from the research participants that indicated how organizations made decisions about leadership development and who was involved in those decisions. The study also sought information about how organizations developed the goals and expectations of leadership development, who developed those expectations, and whether or not those expectations were met. Lastly, the study sought information sought about if aligning leadership development with strategy management was important to organizations, how alignment occurred, who or what facilitated alignment, and how alignment was measured, if and when it was achieved. This leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis
Once the raw data was collected and reviewed from the research participant interviews, the next step was to analyze the data to identify core meanings. Content analysis is used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2002). Qualitative data need to be reduced and transformed in order to make them more readily accessible and understandable and to draw out various themes and patterns (Berg, 2009). The core meanings found through content analysis are often called patterns or themes (Patton, 2002). Interviewing the participants was the primary
method of data collection and analysis as the researcher in this study. In order to mitigate
the potential for any bias or predisposition in categorizing the data, it was important to
allow patterns or themes to emerge from the exploration of the participants’ stories and to
not ask questions that biased the participants’ answers in any way. Avoiding the potential
for bias or predisposition was accomplished by focusing on the interview protocol when
asking the research questions, recording the participants’ responses to the questions, then
using a professional transcription service to ensure accuracy in capturing those responses,
and using inductive analysis to identify and categorize general patterns in the analysis of
the data gathered from the interviews.

According to Patton (2002), qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward
exploration, discovery, and inductive logic. Inductive analysis begins with specific
observations and builds toward general patterns. Categories or dimensions of analysis
emerge from open-ended observations as the inquirer comes to understand patterns that
exist in the phenomenon being investigated. Using inductive data analysis allowed the
study to uncover deeper understandings of how study participants described their
companies’ leadership development processes, how they conceptualized their own roles
in helping enable their organizations to align leadership development and strategy
management, and how they experienced the forces that seemed to enable or prevent such
an alignment.

Inductive analysis contrasts with the hypothetical-deductive approach of experimental
designs that require the specification of main variables and the statement of specific
research hypotheses before data collection begins (Patton, 2002). This study was not a
comparison of the participants to each other or to support a theoretical hypothesis, but to
explore, uncover, explain the meaning, and better understand the purpose of the experiences of the participants. The strategy of inductive design was to allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the cases under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be (Patton, 2002). This allowed the key terms or dimensions to emerge from the participants’ experiences rather than forcing those experiences into a predetermined set of categories that supported some predetermined theory.

The qualitative analyst seeks to understand the multiple interrelationships among dimensions that emerge from the data without making prior assumptions or specifying hypotheses about the linear or correlative relationships among narrowly defined, operationalized variables (Patton, 2002). The emergence of these patterns and themes through inductive analysis will allow me to identify the key terms for coding the data for analysis. The main categorizing strategy in qualitative research is coding (Berg, 2009). The coding categories were based upon the participants’ meaningful responses to the interview questions that allowed categories to emerge that openly captured their perspectives. Categorizing analysis begins with the identification of units or segment of data that seem important or meaningful in some way; this involves reading the data and developing your own coding categories, based on what data (including the participants’ terms and categories) seem important (Maxwell, 2013).

The coded data was initially analyzed and labeled through two primary categories, organizational and substantive. Organizational categories are broad areas or issues that serve as useful ways of ordering the data and will serve as part of the coding framework for data analysis. Organizational categories function primarily as bins for sorting the data
for further analysis (Maxwell, 2013). The organizational categories for this study emerged from an analysis of the raw data provided by the transcripts from the research participants’ interviews. When the raw data was analyzed key words or phrases emerged from the interview transcripts that appeared to be common to a majority of the research participants. For example, one of the general interview questions asked of the research participants was “Where to organizations get the goals and expectations of leadership development?” When the interview transcripts of the participants’ statements were analyzed, the organizational category of leadership development as a process emerged frequently among the comments, such as from two Practitioners, Research Participant #5 and Research Participant #7.

Research Participant #5, the director of Global Leadership Development in a large-sized conglomerate based in the United States, described leadership development as a process in their organization’s approach:

“[The company’s] approach leadership development is designed to address the ongoing leadership development needs of a new manager, somebody who’s in the process of transitioning from an individual contributor to a people leader for the first time, and then a more experienced manager, somebody who’s leading a global organization from a business, or functional perspective, and then finally up through our strategic leader level, typically a director who is running a line of business and managing all aspects of that organization. It’s meant to be an iterative [process for] individuals acquiring and broadening their skill sets and levels of responsibility.”

Research Participant #7, the Chief Executive Officer of a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, shared that:

“A significant amount of the leadership within the organization has been through at least three leadership development steps in the development process [as part of their career development].
Once the organizational categories were identified in the coding framework, the focus became analyzing the substance of the participants’ experiences and identifying substantive categories of data. Substantive categories explicitly identify the content of the person’s statement or action—what they actually did or meant (Maxwell, 2013). Substantive categories are primarily descriptive, in a broad sense that includes description of participants’ concepts and beliefs; they stay close to the data categorized and do not inherently imply a more abstract theory (Maxwell, 2013). The substantive categories of data emerged through a further analysis of the research participants’ interview transcripts and how the participants described their experiences within the organizational categories. Using the examples from the organizational category identified in the previous paragraph about where organizations got the goals and expectations of leadership development, the participants usually described during the interviews how those goals and expectations were developed.

Noting the total number of comments about how organizations developed the goals of expectations from the leadership development process, led to identifying the substantive category of leadership development as a process driven by the needs of the business. This substantive category was evident in the example comments provided by the comments from two Key Informants, Research Participant #6 and Research Participant #9. Research Participant #6, an executive education consultant and professor with an Ivy League university, as well as the former Chief Learning Officer of a large-sized, global conglomerate, stated:

“[The goals and expectations of leadership development] sort of drive the initiatives and goals that are embedded in business plans, operating plans, and the firm’s strategy. Companies need to be developing designs for this learning and
development work that is linked to the drivers of the business (growth, global mindset, more customer driven focus, etc.).”

Another example comment came from Research Participant #9, an executive education consultant and former Chief Learning Officer of a global software company, who indicated that:

“All organization exists to do two things: execute current strategy, or given exogenous factors, the market changes, competition changes, or whatever, and to develop new strategy. And an organization basically, in order to do either one of those two things, needs a leadership development process driven by the needs of the business.”

Since the purpose of this study was to gain a holistic understanding of the issues studied, and not necessarily to support existing theory, it was not possible to know in advance what actions or experiences were described by the participants. If this was the case, then a deductive analysis of the data and perhaps the use of a theoretical coding and categorization would have been more pertinent.

Validity and Limitations of the Study

The distinction between organizational categories and substantive or theoretical categories is important, because beginning qualitative researchers often use mostly organizational categories to formally analyze their data and do not systematically create and apply substantive or theoretical categories in developing their conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). This is why this study used the coding framework of the organizational and substantive categorizing of the data. According to Remler and Van Ryzin (2015), the process of analysis and interpretation in qualitative research largely occurs within the mind of the researcher. Good qualitative researchers learn to approach their subjects with an open mind, to be transparent in their methods, to look for cases that disprove as well
as prove their assumptions, and to support their conclusions with evidence. Remaining
cognizant of the requirements of a good qualitative researcher, this study constantly
maintained an awareness of the two specific researcher threats of bias and reactivity
during the participant interviews.

The subjectivity of the researcher is commonly referred to as bias, which is the first
concern of validity. Qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding how
a particular researcher’s values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and
conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding the
negative consequences of these (Maxwell, 2013). Of greatest concern were the
researcher’s biases regarding leadership development and strategy management. The
researcher was very passionate about both topics and had definite opinions about what
“right looks like” for both individuals and organizations. The need to remain
dispassionate about leadership development and strategy management when conducting
the study was necessary to minimize any potential influence on the participants during
the interviews and helped to avoid asking leading questions of the participants.

The influence of the researcher on the setting or individual studies, generally
known as “reactivity,” is the second problem that is often raised about qualitative studies
(Maxwell, 2013). The only influence the researcher hoped to have on the participants
was to gain their trust, which enabled them to open up and willingly share their
experiences with me during the interviews. However, Maxwell (2013) goes on to state
that what the informant says is always influenced by the interviewer and the interview
situation. Being aware of this influence certainly helped minimize the effect of reactivity
on the collection of data through the semi-standardized interviews with the participants.
What is important to understand is how you are influencing what the information says and how this affects the validity of the inferences you can draw from the interview (Maxwell, 2015).

To ensure validity, qualitative research needs to be a very well documented process (Berg, 2009). The Informed Consent Form provided in Appendix A and Appendix B, along with the Participant Letter of Invitation in Appendix C, are the artifacts that document the validity of this qualitative research study. Additional artifacts maintained as documentation of the qualitative research approach to this study were the Semi-structured Interview Guide in Appendix D, which included the research questions asked of the participants, and Appendix E, which was the protocol used when conducting the study interviews. The analysis of the data gathered from the research participant interviews is covered in detail in Chapter 4 of this study. Berg (2009) further indicated that verification involves assuring that all of the procedures used to arrive at the eventual conclusions have been clearly articulated. Conclusions drawn from the patterns apparent in the data must be confirmed (verified) to assure they are real and not merely wishful thinking on the part of the researcher. This may be accomplished by the researcher carefully checking the path to his or her conclusion (i.e., retracing the various analytic steps that led to the conclusion).

In addition to ensuring the validity of the results of this qualitative inquiry, it was important also to address the potential limitations of the study. There were three primary limitations relative to this study. The first limitation was researcher bias, the second was the influence of the researcher on the study participants (reactivity), and the third was the seemingly small sample size of participants. The first two primary limitations, researcher
bias and researcher influence on the participants, were discussed earlier. The final limitation, the seemingly small sample size of participants, was only a factor if the intent of this study was to apply the findings of this study to the general population. Purposeful samples should be judged according to the purpose and rationale of the study: Does the sampling strategy support the study’s purpose (Patton, 2002)? The primary purpose of this study was to uncover deeper understandings of how the study participants described leadership development processes, how they conceptualized their own roles in helping enable their organizations to align leadership development and strategy management, and how they experienced the forces that seem to enable or prevent such an alignment. The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size (Patton, 2002).

Although the researcher would not characterize himself as an experienced qualitative researcher, he had previously conducted two qualitative studies using purposive sampling and semi-standard interview questions. The first study included 32 participants, and the second study included 22 participants. Each study was conducted similarly to this research study as exploratory research, and they were designed to explore and uncover deeper understandings of how the participants described, conceptualized, and experienced their environments. There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). What is important in qualitative inquiry is for the researcher to be aware of potential biases and limitations, and then take the necessary steps to mitigate their impact on the study. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the
inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be
done with the available time and resources (Patton, 2002).

Summary

An exploratory research design was used as the approach best suited for achieving the
purpose of this study. The research protocol in Appendix E was designed to explore how the participants described their observations and experiences with organizations’ approaches to aligning leadership development and strategy management. The research questions used in Appendix D sought to better understand how the participants described their observations and experiences related to leadership development and strategy management in their organizations. Semi-standardized interviews were used as the means of gaining an in-depth understanding about the participants’ experiences with aligning leadership development and strategy management as a qualitative research approach to better inform practitioners about identifying a formal approach to aligning leadership development and strategy management.

Two distinct categories, Key Informants and Practitioners, who were a mixture of academics, consultants, C-Suite executives, learning and development executives, and executives with front-line responsibilities. The Key Informants and Practitioners served as purposive samples in order to optimize the time and resource limitations of research study. The organizational and substantive categorizing of the data were used to ensure both the validity of the results and address the potential limitations of the study. Inductive data analysis helped to uncover the deeper understandings presented in the next chapter about how study participants described, conceptualized, and experienced organizations’ efforts to align leadership development and strategy management.
CHAPTER 4: Presentation of the Research Data

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology utilized to learn more about the observations and experiences of learning and development executives pursuant to their efforts in aligning leadership development and organizational strategy management. This chapter will report the results of the study using inductive analysis (specific observations or general patterns in the data), to identify the broad areas or issues (organizational data) and explicit content of what the study participants actually did or meant (substantive data) in order to identify common themes. Organizational data categories function primarily as bins for sorting the data for further analysis (Maxwell, 2013). Substantive categories explicitly identify the content of the person’s statement or action—what they actually did or meant (Maxwell, 2013). Substantive categories are primarily descriptive, in a broad sense that includes description of participants’ concepts and beliefs (Maxwell, 2013).

These common themes emerged from the participants’ approaches to leadership development within their organizations and how they conceptualized their roles in aligning leadership development and organizational strategy management. The common themes that emerged also helped to understand how the participants experienced the process of trying to bring about the alignment of leadership development and strategy management, and whether they were successful in doing so or not. This analytical approach helped gain a deeper understanding of the key informants’ and practitioners’ perspectives in their roles as leaders, learning leaders, and thought leaders.

This chapter focuses on the research participant’ responses to the interview questions that were designed to elicit material that was used to answer the research
questions initially posed in Chapter 1. The primary purpose of the interview questions was to identify common themes among the participants’ experiences with aligning leadership development and strategy management. However, the interview questions also provided important clues about the participants’ processes of aligning leadership development and strategy management. The clues emerged where the participants’ views and experiences not only converged, but also where their views and experiences diverged.

This chapter describes the participants’ experiences with aligning leadership development and strategy management in their organizations. The data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with participants, who were selected and recruited in order to capture the views both of key thought leaders and practitioners in a range of organizational settings. This chapter briefly reviews the main research questions identified previously in Chapter 1. Participants’ responses to interview questions are analyzed to identify the key themes and subthemes that emerged from the data provided by the participants, the Key Informants and Practitioners.

Chapter 5 will compare and contrast the data provided by the Key Informants and Practitioners to further develop the meaning and implications of this study. The discussion of the research findings begins with an analysis of the first research question.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was “What are learning and development leaders’ stated approaches to leadership development efforts in organizations?” The Key Informants and Practitioners, all of whom were learning and development leaders currently engaged in leadership development with organizations, were asked about organizational approaches
to leadership development. The general interview questions in the Semi-Structured Interview Guide, Appendix D, were designed to explore with both categories of participants their experiences with the processes used for leadership development within organizations. There were three general questions regarding leadership development posed to each research participant.

The first general interview question about leadership development initially explored the processes of where organizations got the goals and expectations of leadership development, who was involved in those processes, what decisions were made, and how the decisions were made. The second general interview question about leadership development explored how organizations developed the expectations and goals of leadership development, what were the stated expectations and goals, and where those expectations and goals were developed. The third general interview question about leadership development explored how those expectations and goals were developed.

After interviewing the Key Informants and Practitioners, three common themes regarding research question one were identified. These themes indicated that seemingly successful approaches to leadership development in organizations were: (a) a process driven by the needs of the business, (b) a context-specific competency framework, and (c) an action-learning process. The operational definition of each theme is provided in the following respective sections.

No significance in importance was attached to the order of the themes, other than they were the most frequently cited by the participants. It should also be noted that 10 out of the 11 participants made statements regarding the common themes in their responses to this question. This phenomenon is quite interesting, since one might have
expected to observe a variety of answers, with differing perspectives, to occur between the key informants and practitioners. Both the Key Informants and Practitioners cited observations of and/or experiences with leadership development as a process driven by the needs of the business. Nearly 100% of the research participants indicated that leadership development was a process that occurred throughout an employee’s career and not a singular event or series of training courses. The participants were also nearly unanimous in their comments about the leadership development process was ideally focused on developing the leadership competencies required by the needs of the business. In the opinions of the participants, developing generic competencies derived from the latest one-size-fits-all theory would not necessarily meet the needs of their specific organizations within their specific business sectors.

The observations and experiences of the Key Informants and Practitioners regarding leadership development as a process driven by the needs of the business segued into the next issue with nearly 100% consensus, that leadership development requires a context-specific framework for particular to the organization. The context-specific frameworks cited by the research participants started with a leadership development process that included the leadership competencies required by the needs of their specific organizations. These leadership competencies included the context of the specific leadership roles, cascaded throughout all levels of the organization, and were specific to that organization and were specific to the needs of the business. Also included in the nearly 100% consensus was the common issue of leadership development as an action-learning process.
The Key Informants and Practitioners indicated that leadership development was best achieved through the experiences of performing in positions with leadership responsibilities. The research participants indicated that while theories of leadership development could be studied in classroom training environments or learned through executive education courses, the practical application of leadership development by actually performing in a leadership position, was far more effective in their experiences. These perspectives on leadership development remained fairly consistent among and between the participants regardless of their organizations or business sectors. Another potential observation from the research participant interviews was the expectation of a wide variety of answers, or some disparity in responses between participants in different industries, but that phenomenon did not occur. The responses among Key Informants and Practitioners, regardless of industry or organization, were very similar. It was possible that such a broad consensus emerged from among the research participants because organizations focused on effective leadership development took similar approaches to leadership development regardless of their business sector. Common terms and phrases were cited by the research participants, even though their organizations approached the leadership development process based upon the needs of their specific businesses. Examples of the common terms and phrases described by the participants during their interviews were: culture, behavior, teamwork, action-learning, leadership development as a process, context-specific, needs of the business, performance-oriented, and linked to the strategy. These terms and phrases emerged as the stated themes that became evidence of the common approaches taken by the participants and their organizations, even though they came from disparate business
sectors. The stated themes may have evolved as artifacts of the way the interview questions were framed. The questions were framed to enable the research participants to describe their observations, experiences, and processes, along with their organizations’ stated approaches. This qualitative research approach allowed the participants the freedom to describe their experiences rather than being forced to respond to a specific number of questions with a limited number of answers in a quantitative survey. This process led to more convergence on the approaches to leadership development within their respective organizations in the themes from Research Question 1 (RQ1) than perhaps the other two research questions. The discussion of the themes that emerged from RQ1 starts with the discussion of Theme A.

**Theme A: Process driven by the needs of the business**

*Leadership development should be a process driven by the needs of the business.* Many participants stated their belief that any approach to leadership development should be linked to the strategic business goals of their respective organizations. Linking or aligning leadership development to the strategic business goals of an organization appeared to be an ongoing process that was based upon the ever-changing nature of today’s complex business environment. The research participants’ seemed to indicate that the senior leadership any company, with input from leaders at all levels of the organization, should guide an organizational approach to leadership development that was driven by the achieving the strategic initiatives needed for the organization to reach its performance objectives.
Key Informants

The initial data gathered focused on how the Key Informant Research Participants described their experiences with this theme. In response to the question—“Where do organizations get the goals and expectations of leadership development?”—Research Participant #6, an executive education professor at an Ivy League university and a consultant to Fortune 100 firms, mentioned:

“[The goals and expectations of leadership development] sort of drive the initiatives and goals that are embedded in business plans, operating plans, and the firm’s strategy. Companies need to be developing designs for this learning and development work that is linked to the drivers of the business (growth, global mindset, more customer driven focus, etc.).”

In response to the same question about where organizations got the goals and expectations of leadership development, Research Participant #9, an executive education consultant and former Chief Learning Officer of a global software company, stated that:

“Any organization exists to do two things: execute current strategy, or given exogenous factors, the market changes, competition changes, or whatever, and to develop new strategy. And an organization basically, in order to do either one of those two things, needs a leadership development process driven by the needs of the business.”

Additionally, when asked the same question about where organizations got the goals and expectations of leadership development, Research Participant #10, a global consultant for leadership development with Fortune 100 companies and former Chief Learning Officer at a global broadcast communications company, indicated “they should get them from the aspirations of the organization. So if an organization has certain objectives, then that should translate into leadership development goals, leadership development competencies.”
The importance of the leadership development process being driven by the needs of the business was emphasized by Research Participant #6, further commented in response to the question about from where to organizations get the goals and expectations of leadership development during a consulting engagement with a major Wall Street financial firm:

“That firm was able to have some concrete goals for its leadership development efforts that came from the strategy and operating plans of the firm. Plus they had a sort of a fact base and an information base [about the goals and expectations of the leadership development program] that came from diagnostic work [regarding the leadership development needs of the business].”

Research Participant #10 further commented on role of stakeholder involvement at all levels of the organization as part of the leadership development process being driven by the needs of the business during the interview by stating:

“Part of leadership development’s role is to …require the active participation of the line managers. So it’s that willingness to ensure that something happens on the part of the line manager it the biggest determinant, I think, of success or failure [with leadership development efforts].”

**Practitioners**

Research Participant #1, a senior manager in a large-sized, global organization in the pharmaceutical sector, indicated that leadership development must be driven by the needs of the business by stating:

“Leadership development really matters to us given the amount of change in the industry and the amount of growth going on for the business, so if we want better leadership, we’re going to have to really unlock leadership development. When you think about leadership development, we needed some core guiding principles …to codify and give ourselves clear playbooks or clear rules of the road in these areas that are increasingly important for the enterprise.”
Research Participant #1 (RP1) was actively involved in facilitating the development of the company’s core guiding principles. RP1 started by conducting a survey of the organization’s human resource leadership management team, the business unit presidents, and top 200 rising executives. RP1 then engaged the executive committee in a conversation regarding the survey feedback. This process resulted in the development of six core guiding principles which became the company philosophy regarding leadership development. The six core guiding principles for leadership development were: 1) leader behaviors and achieving results matter, 2) strong performance creates in a performance culture, 3) leadership was best learned through experience, 4) invest in high potential and high performance, 5) hold leaders accountable for building great teams, 6) provide feedback on performance and improvement (RP1, 12/2015). These core guiding principles became the framework for leadership development throughout the organization. The principles were communicated through the organization’s strategy management process, which included both the performance management process and the Balanced Scorecard framework.

Research Participant #2, a senior manager in a large-sized, global conglomerate, shared the customer-focused approach their organization used to design leadership development efforts:

“For our organization, the way we think about our leadership development plans, actually brings it back to what our customers need. Learning and development leaders look at the implications of that business plan for the organization …leadership development process inside the organization [and] it’s integral to our business strategy.”
The need to adapt leadership development as a means to respond to a complex, ever-changing business environment was evident in comments provided by Research Participant #8, a Vice President of Leadership Development for a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider:

“Our senior leadership also knew that we had to do something differently [with leadership development] because in our industry, with an ever changing, highly complex environment …requires us to ensure that we have the right leaders who can serve in an ever-changing environment and who can be flexible and quite agile … to be able to run the business.”

When asked a follow on question regarding how organizations develop the expectations and goals of leadership development, Research Participant #5, the Director of Global Leadership Development in a large-sized, global conglomerate explained:

“We would draw data from the Organizational Health Index survey, then revisit what the strengths or gaps were, and explore options …that could be leveraged to develop the organization against [the leadership development gaps. The organization went through a process to develop a new core competency model and at that time we also created the leadership programs that were deployed throughout the enterprise.”

The Organizational Health Index survey referred to by Research Participant #5 (RP5) was administered by a third party in order to compile data regarding leadership development needs within the organization. The survey went collectively to managers at all levels within the organization as an informed approach of identifying leadership development strengths and gaps. Upon completion of the survey, RP5 indicated that two major gaps existed from an organizational perspective. The first major gap was a need to emphasize innovation within the organization. The second major gap was the need to develop a priority focus on the customer base. In order to address the two major gaps
identified through the Organizational Health Index survey, the organization developed a new leadership development model comprised of three dimensions: 1) people orientation, 2) customer orientation, and 3) execution orientation. The consensus among the executive leadership team was that a leadership development approach comprised of the three dimensions would address the organization’s needs for innovation within the organization and to develop a priority focus on the customer base.

Many of the Practitioners also indicated that stakeholders from various levels of the organization should have input on the leadership development process in order to meet the needs of the business. Research Participant #5 followed up on previous comments by further stating in regard to stakeholders at all levels of the organization providing input for leadership development needs, “We used that organizational health index to inform a collective approach [to our leadership development efforts]. Based on that business input, we then designed [specific leadership development] programs in response to the survey feedback.” Research Participant #7, a senior executive of leadership development in a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, mentioned their organization’s approach as “A succession planning process that involves over 500 people in the organization so we can both identify competencies that could lead to leadership, but in addition to that, we identify leaders that we want to develop and invite to our leadership [development] program.”

Research Participant #3, a partner in a large, privately-held management consulting firm, shared the firm’s approach about using various stakeholders within the organization to design leadership development programs that were driven by the needs of the business:
“A very senior partner who had a reputation within the organization as a leader, as a business driver and as a thought leader …generated and pulled together a team. [It] was a very integrated and dispersed team to make sure there was representation across the organization and within the sub-units of the organization. [The teams] had various hierarchies …very senior leaders in some work groups, but also had groups that were driven by the most junior staff. So there was a rather global and integrated group of participants in developing the solution.”

Research Participant #3 (RP3) explained the process involved an integrated team with a great deal of diversity: organizationally, geographically, functionally, and generationally. This highly integrated and diverse team successfully balanced the leadership development program framework based on the needs of the business across the entire enterprise (12/2015). The framework was comprised of five leadership competency areas based upon the needs of the business: 1) technical acumen, 2) business acumen, 3) global acumen, 4) building relationships, and 5) whole leadership. Whole leadership included the ability to be self-led, to lead teams, and to be a leader in the industry segment in which one consults. RP3 indicated that due to the multiple stakeholder approach the leadership development framework was clearly communicated across the firm in a timely manner and regular feedback sessions occur monthly from program participants regarding the effectiveness of the leadership development program.

Research Participant #1 described the approach his/her organization had taken for including stakeholders at different levels of the organization.

“I did a survey [regarding the leadership development needs of the organization] to the 40 folks that are the top HR [leaders] and our executive committee and our operating team, so the top 10 [leaders] of the organization. Then to all of the business unit presidents, there’s about 22 in that group. And then I sent the survey out as well to …about the top 200 [leaders] seen as our brightest. The data from that survey became …focused discussions with HR leadership, and then
ultimately, with the enterprise leadership teams [about the leadership development requirements within the organization].”

Research Participant #8 further shared the approach their organization used to involve various stakeholders to determine an approach to leadership development driven by the needs of the business.

“There were several focus groups conducted with senior leaders …actually more than 100 across the organization to determine what our challenges are, what our strengths are, where our gaps are so that we can determine how we can build our leadership skills. Focus groups were also conducted across the organization and an analysis was done of our markets, what our strategy is, which we call [omitted], and what we need to do as a leadership team and as an organization to get there. So through three of those: surveys, one-on-one interviews, and those focus groups, we were able to build a program to find competencies that would help determine what we need to do to thrive in this industry.”

Summary

The research study participants’ shared their experiences regarding the theme of leadership development as a process being driven by the needs of the business. The participants also indicated that stakeholders providing input from all levels of the organization to better inform senior leadership about the needs of the business was a key component of the leadership development process. This helped to gain a deeper understanding of how the participants experienced the leadership development process within their respective organizations. The next theme that emerged from the data was the approach of a context-specific framework for leadership development in the organization.

Theme B: Competencies specific to the needs of the organization.

The next theme to emerge from the interviews was that the participants experienced leadership development efforts included a context-specific framework for leadership development competencies specific to the needs of the organization. This theme emerged
from the question “How do organizations develop the expectations and goals of leadership development? Organizations appear to have different and distinct needs based upon their industry, their markets, and their operating environments. A context-specific framework of leadership development may encompass the specific job level of employees in supervisory or management positions, the business segment in which employees work and the company competes, and the geographic location in which the company operates and employees work. A context-specific framework also includes the specific leadership development competencies needed by the organization to perform well and the ability to align leadership development with strategy management.

**Key Informants**

In response to a question about how organizations develop the expectations and goals of leadership development, the theme of a context-specific framework was clearly stated by Research Participant #6, an executive education consultant and professor at an Ivy League university, who said:

“The practices and patterns that were distinctive in my experience included the need to pay attention to the business context and position in the organization, and structure leadership development at more senior levels more like a strategic initiative versus a program. This is critical in designing customized versus generic learning and leadership development work.”

Research Participant #6 (RP6) indicated that distinguishing between a strategic initiative and a program occurs when the leadership development goals are context-specific to the needs of the organizational level of the specific management position held by an employee and the needs of the business. The leadership development efforts were customized to the context of the skills and competencies unique to the level of the
leadership position within the firm, then connected to the needs of the business. This customized approach appears to make a more powerful connection between the contextual needs of leadership development and the needs of the business than generic or “off-the-shelf” programs (RP6, 01/2016).

Research Participant #9, an executive education consultant and former Chief Learning Officer for a global technology company, further indicated the theme of a context-specific leadership development competency framework specific to the needs of the organization by mentioning:

“\text{In theory, if you’re working in a firm that’s global and in retail, it ought to have a slightly different stance than if you’re a high tech [firm] and more regionally focused. But in the context of all of these companies, they would probably have different needs depending upon what markets they’re in and what their strengths and weaknesses are.}”

The context referred to in Research Participant #9’s (RP9) comments means the combination of geographic location, business size, and industry sector may require different leadership development competencies that would be specific to that organization. These companies would probably have different needs depending upon what markets they compete in and what are their particular strengths and weaknesses (RP9, 02/2016).

In further regard to a context-specific approach for determining leadership development competencies in organizations, Research Participant #10, a global leadership development consultant and former Chief Learning Officer of a global communications company, was very explicit:

“The old theory used to be give them any old leadership, and leadership development works because it’s like the Hawthorne effect, you pay attention,
things get better. But now it’s much more specific. Organizations have got very different needs and they want those needs met in a less generic way. So they don’t need a spoonful of marketing, half a teaspoon of finance, plus two tablespoons of leadership skills and team development. They want something that is tailored to them and their needs and the particular sector, the particular problems that they’re confronting.”

The old theory referenced by Research Participant #10 (RP10), the Hawthorne effect, was developed through a series of experiments by Elton Mayo at the Western Electric Company between 1924 and 1932. These studies involved studies that demonstrated when workers perceived that management cared about them, and/or when they felt they were getting special treatment, both morale and productivity improved (McKee, 2014, pg. 431). RP6 seemed to imply that organizations that are simply providing generic leadership development opportunities, not a leadership development framework based upon competencies that are context-specific to the needs of the leaders’ positions and needs of the business, are well behind the times. In today’s complex business environment, a framework of leadership development competencies are needed that are context-specific to the leadership roles of the various levels of leaders within the business, as well as context-specific to the needs of the business based upon the company’s size, geographic markets, and industry sector.

**Practitioners**

The Practitioner research participants were also very forthcoming in describing their organizations’ approaches to a context-specific leadership development framework. Research Participant #2, a senior manager of global leadership development for a large-sized global conglomerate, explained their organization’s context-specific leadership development framework in this way:
“We look at the implications of that business plan for the organization and talent development, which include both workforce planning and the talent development or leadership development inside the organization. And then, ultimately, also in terms of skills and technical competencies. So out of that comes what we call a learning playbook, and that learning playbook is saying what are the competencies that we need to build into our organization that we may not have embedded in the company today. So, depending on what the particular leadership competency is, it’s integral to our business strategy.”

The distinction between workforce planning, talent development and leadership development mentioned by Research Participant #2 (RP2) was fairly basic. Workforce planning was described as planning for the recruitment and retention of employees within the organization, essentially ensuring that positions are adequately staffed to the appropriate levels. Talent development was described as providing the knowledge and skills needed for employees to become proficient in their jobs or to prepare for the future levels of responsibility. Leadership development was described as the framework for the context-specific competencies for a particular leadership job within the company and the specific competencies needed to meet the needs of a specific business unit. RP2 followed up by stating:

“You can’t say that leading in an aircraft engine division and leading in a small appliances division are the same thing. They’re not the same thing, it’s a different pace, a different [business] cycle, a different technology. There’s a domain element of leadership that makes a leader either effective or somewhat less effective if they’re not in the right domain.”

The domain element referred to by RP2 in the previous quote was intended to further clarify the previous comments about context-specific leadership development competencies meeting the specific needs of the business. The domains, or specific business sector, of an aircraft engine division or a small appliances division, are very
different from both the business needs and leadership competencies perspectives. The leadership development competencies required for success as a leader in one business domain may not be fungible with the competencies required in another, separate business domain. There do not appear to be universal, one-size-fits-all leadership development competencies in today’s complex business environment. RP2 implied that the domain element, that context-specific leadership development competencies developed for the specific leadership role and business unit in which a leader works, are what the business needs for leaders to perform effectively and achieve positive results.

Research Participant #5, a senior director of global leadership development in large-sized, global conglomerate, described their organization’s leadership development approach in this way:

“Essentially from an organizational perspective, there were two major gaps that were validated to exist within the organization. One was an emphasis on innovation and the second was not having a priority focus on our customer base. So as a result of that …the executive team developed a new leadership model which was essentially comprised of three dimensions, being wholly informed by the organization health index and the input of our executive leaders. So today we have three concurrent priorities ranging from people orientation, customer orientation, and execution orientation.”

As was mentioned previously by RP5, the two major leadership development gaps were identified through the Organizational Health Index survey, in which 2,000 leaders across the enterprise participated. The data gathered from that extensive survey identified two consistently common gaps cited by the participants, a lack of emphasis on innovation and not having a priority focus on the customer base. The survey feedback on the lack of emphasis on innovation indicated that leaders at all levels of the organization felt that sufficient amounts of time were not being dedicated to developing new products or
procedures that added value. Since a large part of the organization’s business was comprised of research and development, discovering that its first-line leaders did not believe innovation was not emphasized was a real wake-up call for the executive leadership.

The survey feedback also indicated a lack of prioritizing the customer base in order to focus on priority customers. While the organization was sending the message that all customers were important to the business, there was not clear indication about on which customers, in any particular business unit, were the focus of that business unit. The executive leadership of the organization developed context-specific leadership development competencies comprised of the people orientation, customer orientation, and execution orientation. The people orientation leadership development competencies were specific to the context of leading people, teams, and business units within the organization.

These competencies included an emphasis on employee innovation, which included products and/or procedures that added value to the organization. The customer orientation leadership development competencies were context specific to focusing on prioritizing the customer base being served by the organization and in meeting priority customer’s needs. The execution orientation leadership development competencies were specific to the context of leaders being able to apply innovation and customer focus in order to achieve the required results in a specific business unit.

In further response to the question on how do organizations develop the expectations and goals of leadership development, Research Participant #1, who worked for a large-sized pharmaceutical company, shared this experience:
“In the past the organization would just build leadership development [competencies] on whatever senior leadership was thinking at the time. Now everyone, even programs in the field, is making leadership development competency-based, so it does give us that common framework for diffuse practices. This framework is for the leadership development competencies specific to the company.”

Research Participant #3 (RP3), a partner in a large-sized management consulting firm, explained their organization’s context-specific framework in this manner:

“There needed to be a solution, a leadership development program, what the firm called the [leadership development] framework to be used across the entire enterprise. Executive management did an internal review to see what were the …discriminators in people’s success in terms of delivering services to clients, in terms of their success as far as ultimately driving revenue, and then also success in developing themselves within the organization …that informed the refresh of the leadership development professional framework.

RP3 went on to explain that the leadership development framework was context-specific in the five competencies introduced back in Theme A on pages 9 and 10: 1) technical acumen, 2) business acumen, 3) global acumen, 4) building relationships, and 5) whole leadership. However, RP3 indicated the competencies framework also included specific competencies based upon the context of a leader’s organizational level or business unit. As a leader grew in experience level and tenure with the firm, the performance expectations changed, so the leadership development competencies were adjusted to compensate for those factors. When a leader was promoted to another business unit, the leadership development competencies required were specific to the context of that business segment.
Research participant #8, a senior executive with a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, expressed their organization’s approach to a context-specific leadership development framework in this manner:

“Our organization gleaned information from an associate engagement survey that …we also needed to do something to better serve, lead, guide, and motivate our leaders so that they could perform. We’ve defined what it takes to be a leader of the future for our organization. There are four leadership competencies that we define to develop our leaders …based on the ever-changing healthcare industry that we’re working in. Those four competencies are: drive change, catalyze innovation, serve patients, and nurture talent.”

Research Participant #7, a senior executive with a regional, not-for-profit, healthcare provider, indicated the organization’s focus on the context-specific leadership development by commenting:

“All around the organization, on the physician professional side, as well as our non-physician leaders and our clinical leaders, we emphasize leadership development. The senior leadership team sat down and were interviewed by outside resources to assess the competencies that we felt were required of leaders today. Those were synthesized and as a result of that we created a leadership development continuum to assure that those leadership competencies could be developed.”

The leadership development competencies indicated by Research Participant #7 (RP7) were specific to the context of a role within the organization, which included physicians, non-physicians in executive or supervisory roles, and clinical leaders. The competencies were also context-specific to the leadership levels of the organization, whether the leaders performed at the executive-level, mid-level, or entry-level. The leadership development competencies also included the contexts of self-leadership for individual performers and team or project leadership for leaders in those roles as well.
Research Participant #4, a senior executive of executive leadership development in a large-sized technology company, shared an approach which focused more on the executive-level context:

“Our philosophy is to test leadership at the executive level ... and so that approach is really a couple of things. One is to test [executive-level leaders] in different scenarios, whether it’s testing them in front of analysts, testing them on how they do with [communicating] their external brand, testing them in the context of a whole new job, which really stretches them, giving them the experiences that we think they will need to prepare for the next level [of corporate leadership].”

The executive-level leadership development competencies described above by Research Participant #4 (RP4) were placed in the contexts of shaping strategy, operationalizing strategy, ability to build and develop an executive team, and executive-level communications. It was important to RP4’s organization to place potential executive-level leaders in the context of those roles in order to better understand how the candidates might perform as senior executives.

While the Key Informants inferred that leadership development competencies specific to the organization were part of a context-specific framework, all of the Practitioners indicated their organizations had identified leadership development competencies that evolved from a context-specific framework. These competencies were specific to their organizations and were not derived from some generic checklist or the latest fad in literature. While some of the terms expressed by the participants, such as Organizational Health Index, might be considered off-the-shelf tools or generic concepts, the information obtained from the use of those tools or concepts were described by the participants specific to their organizations. That information was then applied within the specific contextual needs of the organization. Four of the seven Practitioners (Research
Participants #1, #3, #5, and #8) shared the leadership development competencies that were contextually-specific to their organizations.

Research Participant #1, a leadership development executive with a large-sized, global pharmaceutical company, shared that their organization had six core principles for talent management, with two principles focused on leadership development:

“We organize behaviors into two guiding frameworks, one which focuses on our shared values, and one which is our core leadership competencies, our leadership attributes and behaviors. This framework is our shared definition and our common framework for leadership. Even more importantly, it’s our shared commitment. We needed leaders to make it relevant to the work for them, the work for their teams, and basically, we wanted to do a leader-led approach to performance management.

We’ve actually built a leadership curriculum that tiers by level. Leadership 101 is …for people managers …Leadership 201 is for senior managers …and then we have a Leadership 301, which is basically …for senior executives. And we’re connecting 201 and 301 into other bigger, broader cultural initiatives …to unlock some of this innovation and collaboration …by making sure there’s a pervasive common framework.”

Research Participant #5, a director of global leadership development for a large-sized, global conglomerate, spoke in terms of “three dimensions” to the context-specific leadership development competencies in the organization:

“The company developed a new leadership competency model which was essentially comprised of three dimensions. It is critical that our leaders were aware of the expectations at the highest levels and also were aware of the changing requirements that we saw across the organization. The three dimensions of leadership development competencies were: people orientation, the intent is to build a highly energized and committed high-performance organization; customer orientation, it’s to lead market-driven, science-powered innovation; and execution orientation, to drive a performance culture which delivers extraordinary results. Then the leadership development team, which included human resources, redesigned our leadership development programs at each level of the organization so they were aligned to each of the three dimensions….”
The other Practitioner who mentioned context-specific leadership development competencies during the interviews was Research Participant #8 (RP8), a leadership development executive with a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider:

“We’ve defined what it takes to be a [organization name] leader of the future …for our organization. There are four leadership competencies that we define to develop our leaders and they are held accountable and evaluated on these leadership competencies. Those four leadership competencies include: drive change, catalyze innovation, serve patients, and nurture talent.”

The interesting aspect of RP8’s comments was that the identified competencies were stated as verb phrases rather than as nouns, as one might expect. Stating the competencies as verb phrases indicated that leadership development was more the ability or competency to accomplish the needs of the business rather than to simply be considered competent.

The remaining three Practitioners (Research Participants #2, #4, and #7) indicated that their organizations had context-specific leadership competencies for their organizations, but they did not actually mention the specific competencies during the research interviews. Research Participant #2, a leadership development executive in a large-sized global conglomerate, did share:

“What our company calls a learning playbook …is saying what are the competencies that we mean to build into our organization …because we want to shape the culture with the capabilities that are unique to the culture. We know that [the culture] is a framework [for our leadership development competencies].”

Research Participant #4, a senior executive for executive leadership development in a large-sized technology company, indicated that:

“We have a couple of frameworks. One is an executive framework, where every good executive should understand how good they are at shaping strategy, how
good they are at operationalizing strategy, how good they are at building and developing a team, how good are their executive communication [skills], and how mature they are as an executive.”

Lastly, Research Participant #7, the CEO for a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, summarized the participant interviews on context-specific leadership development competencies by saying:

“We are committed to lifelong learning, and as a consequence, we have a five-step process to develop leaders. [The first step starts with the] Inquiring Leaders, which was a program for aspiring supervisors, all the way [through the steps] to [step five which was] all the way up to executive leadership. That’s part of the ongoing leadership [development] competencies that we articulated and that allows our leaders to use it at their own pace.”

**Summary**

Throughout the research interviews, the participants consistently described this theme as part of the leadership development process within their organizations. The participants described the need for a framework of leadership development competencies that were specific to the context of their business sector. The participants implied that some leadership development competencies regarded as common in a global conglomerate may not meet the specific business needs of a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, or even every business division within the global conglomerate. The participants also implied that while overall leadership development competencies should be context-specific to an organization’s business needs based upon its industry sector, the competencies should also be context-specific to the organizational leadership level of a specific leader. Developing leadership competencies were specific to the context of executive-level, mid-level, and entry or frontline-level leaders.
However, while the research participants indicate leadership development was context-specific to a specific organization within a business or industry sector and specific leadership level within an organization, leadership development was a process with best achieved through experiential learning. Actually developing processes that provided opportunities for individuals, at all levels of an organization, to perform as leaders and demonstrate the actions of leaders, evolved as the next common theme from the participant interviews.

**Theme C: An action-learning process**

The primary question posed to the research participants for this theme was “Where do organizations develop the expectations and goals of leadership development?” Theme C seemed to evolve from the follow on question “How did those expectations and goals develop?” The research participants described their observations and experiences with leadership development in organizations as a process with an action-learning orientation. For the most part, the participants seemed to feel that while there was a time and place for learning leadership through events such as training courses and formal education, leadership development was a process best achieved through action-learning. Actually performing in leadership positions and the experiences gained through those actions had the most significant impact on leadership development.

Therefore, Theme C evolved as *Leadership development is a process with an action-learning orientation*. An action-learning orientation indicates that leadership development is a process best learned through performing in, and experiencing, leadership positions. The developmental experience of serving in leadership positions with various levels of organizational responsibility appears to provide employees better
learning opportunities and a deeper understanding of the experience-based performance requirements in leadership development. An action-learning orientation in leadership development includes focusing on a culture of behavior change in the organization as a result of the action-learning process. Based upon the Research Participants’ descriptions, an approach to leadership development in an action-learning context is particularly pertinent. This theme appeared from data specifically introduced by a Key Informant (Research Participant #6) and substantiated by several Practitioners (Research Participants #1, #2, #5, #7, and #8).

**Key Informants**

Research Participant #6 (RP), an academician and consultant, introduced the transition from the theme of a context specific framework to the theme of action-learning orientated leadership development by indicating that:

“Competency models are necessary, but not sufficient. Too often competency models are ‘thin’ checklists and too abstract. The competency model must be a bridge to the drivers of the business with an emphasis on 2-3 capabilities needed in the business that are used to structure the work, particularly [to] action learning.”

RP6 also provided a glimpse about the importance of an action-learning orientation in leadership development through a culture of behavior change as part of a global mindset in organizations:

“Leadership development requires an emphasis on learning in real time. It requires framing skills combined with case examples and a willingness to work with live issues ... [like] a global action learning project which became a vehicle for developing sort of a global mindset in a leadership team.”
The comments from RP6 indicated that effective leadership development processes involve some type of learning journey in an action-learning context specific to the needs of the business and industry sector. Without a culture that provides an action-learning orientation, organizations may struggle with developing the desired leadership competencies that can change or develop the behaviors required to meet the needs of the business. Through action-learning in leadership development and organization can identify the specific competencies within the necessary context in which its leaders operate. This action-learning orientation helps to shape the culture of the organization and change behaviors as indicated by Research Participant #10 (RP10).

RP10, a consultant for leadership development to global organizations, seemed to sum up the Key Informants’ experiences with action-learning with this statement:

“As far as I’m concerned, the real issue is that where leadership development impinges upon the prevailing culture, it takes a lot longer and it’s a lot harder to shift that culture and engender new behaviors. So what you need to say is, ‘What do we want around here [and] what do we want to see happening differently?’”

**Practitioners**

The data derived from the Practitioners also seemed to support the action-learning oriented theme. Five Research Participants (#1, #2, #5, #7, and #8) indicated this theme by stating their organizations’ action-learning orientation and experience-based approaches. This quote from Research Participant #1 (RP1), a leadership development executive with a large-sized, global pharmaceutical company, provided a clear indication of their organization’s experience-based and action-oriented learning focus:

“We believe that leadership development is primarily experience-based, not program-based. Our efforts should be about brokering or architecting experience pathways to be bringing the best out of leaders. We leverage experience to
develop leaders. We believe that leadership really matters and we believe that leadership is learned primarily through experience, including stretch assignments and cross-company moves.”

RP1’s description of experience-based, action-learning was fairly common among the rest of practitioner interviews. An action-learning orientation to leadership development in organizations not only met the needs of the business, but also supported the development of individuals within the organization. Research Participant #2, a senior manager of global leadership development in a large-sized conglomerate, followed up by indicating action-oriented learning in this way:

“We as a company kind of look at it [leadership development] as like 20 percent of someone’s development is in a formal educational experience, and then 80 percent of their learning is actually on the job with things that we expect them to accomplish …solve a tough challenge, but then actually recognize that is part of their learning journey, part of the development the company is enabling for them.”

An action-learning orientation in leadership development processes support the personal development of leaders at all levels of the organization, which has a positive impact on the business needs of the organization. The research participants indicated that action-learning was about the performance development of the individual as part of a learning journey as a leader. This experiential-learning journey helped to develop the desired leadership competencies and capabilities that led to the behavior changes required by the business. Action-learning reinforces the culture of the organization through developmental experiences at all levels of the organization, which inspires the behavior changes both individually and collectively. Action-learning in leadership development
processes reinforces that leaders at all levels need to learn how to think, not be told what to think, in the context of the business environment in which their organizations operate.

As such, Research Participant #5, a global leadership executive in a large-sized conglomerate, described their organization’s action-learning orientation:

“We approach leadership development … [as] designed to address the ongoing leadership development needs of a new manager, somebody who’s in the process of transitioning from an individual contributor to a people leader for the first time, and then a more experienced manager, somebody who’s leading a global organization from a business, or functional perspective, and then finally up through our strategic leader level, typically a director who is running a line of business and managing all aspects of that organization. The intent is to be nominated in and then perform and move to the next role or two, and then to be nominated to the next level …perform and move into the next role or two. It’s meant to be iterative [for] individuals acquiring and broadening their skill sets and levels of responsibility.”

Action-learning enables the leadership development that not only provides the necessary experience in current roles, but prepares individuals for future leadership roles. This process enables leaders, at all levels of the organization, to better understand the performance requirements of those executives and managers serving at higher levels in the business. Research Participant #7, a senior executive with a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, supported this logic by making the following comment:

“A significant amount of the leadership within the organization has been developed internally, including the incoming CEO, who’s been through at least three [leadership development career] steps in her development process to become the CEO. But throughout the organization, a number of people are advancing in their roles because they had developed those competencies to be able to execute the requirements of those positions [by demonstrating the ability to perform the duties of those positions through action learning].”

Additionally, Research Participant #8 (RP8), a leadership development executive with another regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider said:
“Currently this program, the Leader of the Future Program ... doesn’t just simply introduce leaders to the concepts of leadership in the classroom, but it applies to ... [daily] activities, so that they do not lose sight of what their [leadership] responsibilities are ... unless they can in some way learn how to apply healthy leader concepts ... which ties [into] the four competencies I mentioned before. There have been several people who have said the application of what they’ve learned has literally changed their lives because they are demonstrating healthier behaviors, are finding a different level of balance in their daily lives ....”

Not only does this type of action-learning in leadership development benefit the organization in a business perspective, but it provides a sense of accomplishment and deeper meaning to the leaders who benefit from the learning experience. In RP8’s comments above, there is a therapeutic quality to the way of talking about the effects of such leadership development processes on the people who go through them.

The Practitioners also seemed to indicate a culture of behavior change was inherent in their organizations’ action-learning approaches to leadership development. Research Participant #1 commented that, “we organize behaviors into two guiding frameworks, which are our shared values and ... our leadership competencies, our leadership attributes and behaviors. We’ll be able to see the behaviors in [our] leaders [change over time].”

The culture of behavior change being inherent in action-learning for leadership development was also indicated by Research Participant #8, a leadership development executive in a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, who shared:

“Our leaders are challenged to build action plans that will still build in, not only our leadership competencies for our leaders, but what we call shared values and behavioral competencies. We’ve built an infusive program into our culture, but now we’re stepping it up a notch.”
Research Participant #2 (RP2), a global leadership development executive in a large-sized, global conglomerate, described the organization’s culture of behavior change more deeply:

“Our leadership development is about shaping cultures through both individual and collective change. We want to shape the culture with the [leadership development] capabilities that we have and that we need and that we want to grow. When those capabilities are unique to the culture, we’ll develop it ourselves. When it’s not really unique to our culture, but we know that it’s a framework, then we do that.

We actually expect a behavior change and we talk about it …regardless of the level. There has to be a change in the organization and you have to be a part of that change. So, the first thing that we look for is ‘what are the behavior changes and is the person actually applying that knowledge to their work environment?’ What we try to do is inspire them to do that, actually make the change in their behaviors, and they will become more inspired when they actually do that and drive forward.

One thing that comes immediately to mind is that in a large organization, people naturally gravitate to structure to solve problems rather than behaviors to solve problems or networks to solve problems. And I think probably in a less volatile or less uncertain, complex or ambiguous world that may have been okay. It’s a much more subtle behavioral change that the company’s made up of the behaviors of the people in the company …and the ability to do that is probably the most basic measure of the success of leadership development for the company.”

RP2 indicated shaping both the individual and collective cultures through changed behaviors was important the organization. As a global conglomerate, there was not only disparate business units in the company, but a great deal of geographic cultural diversity among the workforce. Yet the organization strove to create shared attitudes, beliefs, and customs that were considered the correct way to feel, think, and act as members of the organization. These shared values contributed to the unique environment of the individual performer and/or business unit that led to the acceptable behaviors needed to drive change solve problems.
The leadership development framework within the organization created a cultural approach to problem solving that was responsive the changing business environments encountered by individual leaders and collective business units. Ultimately, the organization sought to create a leadership development approach through a culture of behavioral change. Behavior change for both individuals and collective units was facilitated through action-learning. Action-learning encouraged developing leadership behaviors that changed from simply identifying problems that needed to be solved, then relying on the organizational hierarchy for direction, to actually addressing and solving the problems as individual leaders or collective business units. RP2’s organization developed the desired organizational culture through a context-specific framework for leadership development. The context-specific framework was driven by the needs of the business and oriented toward action-learning that encouraged the behavior changes in performers necessary to achieve the desired business results.

Summary

The Key Informants and Practitioners in this study responded to the primary question about “What are learning and development leaders’ stated approaches to leadership development efforts in organizations?” This primary research question was designed to explore the participants’ experiences and processes used for leadership development within their organizations. In order to elicit their experiences and processes, there were three general interview questions regarding leadership development posed to each research participant.

The first general interview question explored where organizations got the goals and expectations of leadership development, who was involved in those processes, what
decisions were made, and how the decisions were made. The second general interview question explored how organizations developed the expectations and goals of leadership development, what were the stated expectations and goals of the organizations, and where those expectations and goals were developed. The third general interview explored how those expectations and goals were developed.

Three common themes regarding leadership development in the participants’ organizations were identified. These themes seemed to indicate that leadership development in organizations was: (a) a process driven by the needs of the business, (b) a context-specific competency framework, and (c) an action-learning oriented process. The stated themes in RQ1 may have evolved as artifacts of the way the interview questions were framed and led to more convergence on the participants’ organizational approaches to leadership development than divergence. There appeared to be less convergence and more divergence among the research participants’ responses to Research Question 2.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 was “How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy, and what do they identify as the mediating influences—supports, as well as, obstacles—on their efforts?” This question was designed to ask the research participants how they experienced the forces that enabled or prevented the alignment of leadership development and strategy management. The research participants were asked to describe their efforts to align leadership development and strategy management and to identify the mediating influences that facilitated the process of attempting to effect this alignment, along with the supports and
obstacles they encountered. Overall, four themes evolved from the study as mediating influences that support the alignment of leadership development and strategy management: (a) the alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy management is critical to the business, (b) an approach that facilitates alignment, (c) active involvement from senior leadership, and (d) mediating influences that were identified as obstacles to aligning leadership development and strategy management. As with the previous research question, no significance or importance was attached to the order of the themes, other than the frequency in which they were cited by the Key Informants and Practitioners.

Every research participant indicated the alignment of leadership development and strategy management was critical to the business, although some of the Key Informants (Research Participants #9 and #11) exhibited some skepticism about the alignment process in most organizations. Theme B, an approach that facilitates alignment, was stated by the majority of the research participants (Research Participants #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #10, and #11). Each of these participants indicated some type of approach that facilitates alignment and accountability as a mediating influence in their interview responses. This theme also includes the notion that organizational culture had a mediating influence in aligning leadership development and strategy management. Theme C, active involvement from senior leadership, was also cited throughout the study (Research Participants #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #10, and #11) as a positive mediating influence.

The final mediating influences explored during the interviews with the participants were those which imposed obstacles to aligning leadership development and strategy management.
management. There were no consistent themes that emerged from the interviews on this topic, but the participants did share the obstacles they observed or experienced in attempting to align leadership development and strategy management in organizations. This data is shared in Theme D, *mediating influences that were identified as obstacles to aligning leadership development and strategy management.*

**Theme A: Alignment is critical to the business**

In response to the interview question “How important is it to align the leadership development program with the overall strategy of the organization?” the majority of the research participants responded with the first theme that emerged: *the alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy management is critical to the business.* Most participants indicated that they found it desirable to successfully align their leadership development efforts with the organization’s strategic goals in order to facilitate better strategy management. This theme was cited by nearly every research participant, among both the Key Informants and Practitioners, in nearly the same terms by both groups of participants.

**Key Informants**

When queried about the importance of aligning leadership development and organizational strategy management during the research interviews, Research participant #6 (RP6), an executive education consultant and professor with an Ivy League university, indicated that, “it’s sort of meaningless if that doesn’t happen.” Research Participant #9 (RP9), an executive education consultant and former Chief Learning Office of a global software company, said, “I think I would argue that it ought to be critical.” Research
Participant #11 (RP11), the Dean of Executive Education at an Ivy League university and former Chief Learning Officer of a global investment bank, said that:

“The expectation is that [leadership development] is aligned, however, the traditional process is not connected to the strategy, but is individualized from within. When alignment works, it starts with understanding the strategy and how [leadership development] fits.”

Aligning leadership development with strategy management is critical to organizations. The global environment, the speed of business, the VUCA [Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous] environment require alignment.”

These three Key Informants’ (RP6, RP9, and RP11) experiences seemed to confirm the importance of aligning leadership development with the organizational strategy. RP11 in particular indicated the importance of the alignment of leadership development with strategy management in today’s global business environment, but it was Research Participant #10 (RP10), a global leadership development consultant and former Chief Learning Officer of a global communications company, who seemingly summed up the importance of this theme by stating:

“It’s absolutely critical. [Companies] see it as a long-term, continuous process that starts before any discrete event and continues long afterward. It’s about being in alignment and working together [to meet the needs of the business].

I really believe that good leadership development can be transformative. It can change an organization for the better. It can put in place structures and strategies and competencies that help organizations remake themselves for the modern world.”

**Practitioners**

The Practitioners in the study also seemed to support the importance of this theme in sharing their experiences. Research Participant #1 (RP1), a leadership development executive in a large-sized, global pharmaceutical company, shared that, “it’s very
important to connect the organization’s leadership development work and initiatives, into the cadence of the way the business strategy is set. Good leadership development is part of good strategy management.” Research Participant #2 (RP2), a global leadership development executive in a large-sized conglomerate, said that, “aligning leadership development with the overall strategy is critically important. For us, they almost can’t exist independently.” Research Participant #3 (RP3), a partner in a global management consulting firm, indicated that, “aligning leadership development with the firm’s strategy was almost an inherent part of the conversation from the very beginning because our strategy and the [leadership development] framework is very much driven to …further strategic outcomes for the company.”

The importance of aligning leadership development and strategy management theme was further indicated by Research Participant #4 (RP4), an executive leadership development senior executive with a large-sized technology company, who said it was “very important, and essential to our business.” Research Participant #5, (RP5), a global leadership development executive with a large-sized conglomerate, followed with “it is critical. From our perspective, everything begins with our business objectives and then we wholly focus our [leadership development] approach on meeting those objectives.” Research Participant #8 (RP8), a leadership development executive in a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, felt that “[it is] incredibly important.” While every Practitioner responded that aligning leadership development with the overall organizational strategy was important. Yet none of them had yet to reveal why alignment was important, although this quote from Research Participant #7 (RP7), a senior executive in another
regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, provided a glimpse about why alignment was important:

“The alignment of leadership development with the strategy is imperative because the strategy that guides the organization can only be executed by competent leadership, and so alignment ensures that the organization has the competent leadership able to execute strategy is paramount. Leadership development …helps empower those people and gives them the skills that they need to be able to move the strategy into action. So I don’t think you uncouple them because one depends on the other. You can have the worlds’ best strategy …it’s whether or not you can implement it or not that matters.”

Summary

The general consensus among both the Key Informants and Practitioners was very clear, aligning the leadership development process with the overall strategy of the organization was critical to businesses. The Key Informants indicated that the alignment of leadership development with the overall strategy was not only critical, but in today’s VUCA business environment was a continuous process that enables organizations to effect the changes that allows them to become more competitive in their industry sectors. The Practitioners clearly indicated that their organizations approached the alignment of leadership development with their organizations’ overall strategies as essential and the processes occurred simultaneously. The Key Informants seemed to vaguely indicate that the alignment of leadership development with the overall strategy should be part of an organization’s culture. However, the Practitioners seemed to indicate quite clearly their organizations’ approaches were due to cultures that facilitated alignment.

Theme B: Organizational culture facilitates alignment

In response to the follow on question “In what way is the alignment of leadership development with the overall strategy important?” the participants’ described a theme
that indicated *organizations should have an organizational culture approach that facilitates alignment*. The data gathered about this theme seemed to focus on the importance of an approach that facilitates alignment. There were a variety of approaches indicated in this theme, but one approach, organizational culture, was mentioned more frequently than other approaches. The other approaches mentioned that may be included within organizational culture included terms such as: teamwork, accountability, performance management, customer focus, and scenario planning.

The terms included in the previous paragraph appear to be more the values and behaviors that were developed over time and contributed the unique environments of the participants’ organizations. Each of these additional terms mentioned by the Key Informants or Practitioners appeared to contribute to valid organizational cultures rather than specific approaches that facilitated the alignment of leadership development with the overall strategy. Since those terms appeared to be supportive of organizational culture, therefore culture of the organization evolved as a mediating influence that supported the alignment of leadership development with strategy management observed by Key Informants or experienced by Practitioners. The participants that mentioned culture as a positive mediating influence also appeared to feel very strongly about culture as an approach for facilitating alignment within the organization. One unique cultural approach mentioned by a Key Informant (RP6), an executive education consultant and professor at an Ivy League university, was an approach named “outside-in thinking.”

**Key Informants**

RP6 coined the term “outside-in thinking” to describe a recommended approach to facilitating the alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy:
“Integrating ‘outside-in thinking’ [into the organization’s culture, along with the] use of market data and customer trends, gives a strategic focus. We found it very powerful to have customer data for actual real-time customers embedded in the work. It sort of raised the stakes and helped the executives become aware that what they really needed, as a leader, was to develop additional kinds of cognitive skills, as well as interpersonal skills, to learn about customers. I’ve found the customer focus actually more powerful than a competitor focus.”

An organizational culture such as the one described by RP6 requires a leadership development approach that includes teamwork among a firm’s leadership and a focus on customers rather than competitors. Creating a customer-focused culture makes more sense than focusing on the competition, since being proactive in meeting customer expectations likely leads to more business growth, than reacting to competitive influences in the marketplace. Building a leadership team held accountable to focus on customers helps with performance management and creates the desired organizational culture. The desired organizational better facilitates the alignment of leadership development and strategy management.

RP10, a global leadership development consultant, described the cultural importance of teamwork in achieving alignment by stating that when, “the partnership between the business strategy team and the [leadership] development team is a good, active partnership, the alignment occurs.” An organizational culture approach that incorporated teamwork, performance management, and scenario planning appeared to be evident in this description offered by RP9, an executive education consultant and former Chief Learning Officer of a global technology company:

“We should be developing our people to either execute the strategy we have in place or to help us really scan the market and respond to develop new strategies. That should be self-evident, that’s all we should be doing as a company …one
person’s strategy is the other person’s tactic …but everyone has some rough alignment.”

The theme of organizational culture facilitating the alignment of leadership development with the overall strategy continued with RP11, a Dean of Executive Education at an Ivy League university, who shared this observation:

“The expectation is that all [leadership development efforts] are aligned [with the strategy], however the traditional process is not [always] well-connected to the strategy, but is individualized from within the organization. Everything from facilitators with learning and [leadership] development priorities to performance management objectives help to facilitate alignment.”

The idea of organizational culture as an approach that facilitates the alignment of leadership development with strategy management was further indicated by RP6, an executive education consultant and professor at an Ivy League university, through a concept termed “informed opportunism:”

“What happens is whoever is within the company, working this leadership development work, it’s more driven around a strategy I would call ‘informed opportunism.’ But this ‘informed opportunism’ is very much driven by the savvy-ness of the internal person driving leadership development …and their ability to partner with savvy outsiders …and these two parties working together to sort of figure out a way using this logic of ‘informed opportunism’ to structure efforts, to drive leadership development forward.”

“Companies that are making a shift from a product to a more customer or solutions-driven business model …the more you can link the leadership and learning activities to the firm by adding depth to its changing value proposition, I’ve found that to be very powerful …emphasis on this more customer-driven and solution-driven value proposition …that became a way of kind of connecting the leadership development efforts to something that touched the business.”

In the first paragraph of the quote, RP6 seemed to be describing “informed opportunism” as an organizational culture where the executive or manager accountable
for leadership development partners with a team that helps to identify how to align the leadership development process with the strategy framework. The second paragraph of RP6’s quote provides an example of an organizational culture that includes ‘informed opportunism” and customer focus as the means to facilitate the alignment of leadership development with strategy management to change the leadership behaviors that help to drive value to customers.

RP10 concluded the Key Informant descriptions of organizational culture as an approach to facilitate the alignment of leadership development with the overall strategy by stating:

“The organization just launched our company beliefs program and one of the beliefs is ‘customers determine our success. So ‘customers determine our success’ is not only tangible to our business results, but it’s ‘customers determine our
success’ by also [identifying] what are [customer’s] future needs, who are going to be our future customers?”

“We as a culture are share the belief that leadership creates the future for the organization and is based on decisions and how informed we are on what the external market forces are, so each one of those things build the leadership development model that is helpful for us and each one of those pieces align together with the business strategy.

I think that’s where shaping the culture for the future enables a business outcome for the future. Our leadership development is about shaping cultures through both individual and collective change.”

The organizational culture described by RP2 seemed to indicate the success of the business, both short-term and long-term, focused on the needs of customers. Being customer-centric helped the firm’s executive leadership make strategic decisions about where the business needed to go to meet customers’ needs, then establish a leadership development process that aligned with those business needs. Not only did RP2 feel the culture helped to facilitate the alignment of leadership development with the current strategy, the culture also shaped the future individual and collective leadership development needs of the organization. The organizational culture facilitated the leadership development approach that recognizes the need for change and establishes the behaviors necessary to drive the business toward meeting customer expectations.

The organizational culture of a focus on customers was evident in comments from Research Participant #5 (RP5), the director of global leadership in a large-sized conglomerate, who shared that “from our company’s perspective, strategy begins with our business objectives and direction, then wholly focuses our leadership development approach on meeting those business objectives by including a customer-orientation focus.”
Research Participant #3 (RP3), a partner with a global management consulting firm, indicated that customer focus was an important part of the organizational culture that helped to facilitate leadership development by stating:

“The [leadership development] framework itself has generated a lot of enthusiasm internally, so much so that when our folks were back out working with clients, and the clients were struggling with leadership development problems, a lot of our folks immediately said ‘Well, you should how we do it here.’ So when they find a client who might be able to use that [leadership development framework] as a solution, they’ve got a place to go now for support.”

“We have a coaching culture and another professional framework [that] we expect our staff to have at whatever level [they are in the organization]. So in that sense, the whole leadership development is very much an extension of our strategy for prevailing in the marketplace.”

An organizational culture approach to aligning leadership development with strategy management continued with Research Participant #1 (RP1), a leadership development executive with a large-sized pharmaceutical company, who commented:

“You’ve got to be connected into the over-arching strategic framework …so it’s better to be tied into when we’re talking about the business …and the leadership [development] frameworks are helping the work of setting strategy. Good leadership development …is a part of good strategy management …part of my work in creating the frameworks we use in strategy management.”

“Our company is decentralized, so at the top we have a culture we try and build as an organization. And that culture facilitates leadership development that is aligned with our strategy.”

Research Participant #8, a leadership development executive with a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, described their organization’s approach as:

“We’ve built an infusing program into our culture, but now we’re stepping it up a notch. We have 250 different organizations, each of which have different cultures. [We have] to think about how to align all of those cultures, have folks agree on what culture, what patient experience they want to provide each of our patients. And through our performance management program [we have] the capability to cascade goals [throughout the different organizations]. The cascading function
allows us to further customize goals …that can help with the alignment for leadership development.”

Then Research Participant #7, a senior executive with another regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, shared the organizational culture that facilitated leadership development in their organization as:

“We do strategy, I think, a little uniquely …and that is scenario planning. We looked at four potential scenarios of the future and looked at what could happen in the future. As a consequence, we said here are the competencies that we need in order to be successful in any one of these four environments, recognizing that any one of the four could be a blended environment. So then we would set out to develop the competencies we needed to be successful in those [environments] and those [competencies] were linked specifically to leadership development, so that we would be developing …the skill sets that they required in order for us to be successful in a new environment and to help us remain competitive.”

Lastly, Research Participant #4 described their organization’s cultural approach to aligning leadership development with the overall strategy by indicating that “We always teach our strategy in any [executive leadership development] session we do.”

**Summary**

The data gathered from the participants seemed to indicate that the alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy management was critical to their business. Culture was a key component of the organizational approach used to facilitate the alignment of leadership development and strategy management, regardless of the industry or size of the organization. The participants used terms such as teamwork, accountability, customer focus, and performance management to describe their observations and experiences with organizational culture in approaches to alignment. However, the analysis of the research data indicated those terms appeared to be
components of organizational culture, rather than specific approaches to facilitate the alignment of leadership development with the overall strategy of organizations. Another term that evolved from the research data was leadership. Leadership was considered an important component of organizational culture by the participants which led to the next common theme.

**Theme C: Active involvement from senior leadership**

The discussions about culture within the organizations led to another follow up question posed to the research participants regarding the importance of aligning leadership development programs with the overall strategy. “If aligning leadership development and strategy is important in organizations, what specific efforts have organizations you observed undertaken to achieve this alignment?” In response to this question, *active involvement from senior leadership was a key mediating influence to supporting the efforts to align leadership development with strategy management in organizations*, was the third theme identified as a positive mediating influence observed or experienced by the participants that supported their efforts to align leadership development with strategy management. The importance of senior leadership involvement for aligning leadership development and strategy management was indicated throughout the interviews with both Key Informants and Practitioners.

**Key Informants**

Research Participant #10, a global leadership development consultant described the importance of active involvement from senior leaders as a mediating influence supporting alignment by stating, “the alignment has to be facilitated by the chief executive, or whoever it is, who has to remember that if you want people to behave in a certain way,
you have to create alignment between leadership development and strategy management.”

Research Participant #11, the dean of executive education at an Ivy League university, indicated that active involvement of senior leaders as a mediating influence for alignment starts “at the board level, to connect [leadership development] with performance management, however, it should be the CEO who is accountable for the alignment and the CLO executes it.” Based upon an experience consulting with a firm seeking the align leadership development with strategy management, Research Participant # 6, an executive education consultant and Ivy League professor, shared:

“There was sort of a direct connection to the drivers of the business through CEO involvement. The company had an internal steering committee of senior managers, and it was really the ability between, in this case, the steering committee and the consulting group to really conceptualize a road map and sort of make the connections between leadership development and strategy management because the connections weren’t emerging directly out of the firm’s business plans. I began to see that the really critical task was again the ability to kind of connect the dots based on the context needs of the business.

I found that these were more emergent strategies, you know, that drove the leadership development work. But the starting point was not a kind of deductive competency model, if you will. The starting point was high creativity and integrative thinking, from the top down through the strategy, to kind of bridge connections between whatever executive leadership knew about the formal needs of their leaders with the needs of the business.”

The active involvement of senior leadership in making the connections between leadership development and strategy management were also evident in the many of the Practitioner comments as a key mediating influence for achieving alignment of the two efforts within their organizations.
Practitioners

Research Participant #1, a leadership development executive in a large-sized pharmaceutical company, indicated the need for senior leadership involvement as a key mediating influence for achieving the alignment of leadership development and strategy management by stating: “alignment begins with the senior management on the intention for leadership development and on the business plan, because it would be the senior team holding the business unit managers accountable, and I would just be the enabler for that work.” Research Participant #2, the senior manager of global leadership development with a large-sized conglomerate, said that, “each leader’s responsibility, all the way from our CEO, through the organization, is that the leadership development learning playbook has to be aligned to the business strategy playbook. And the learning and development strategy is not just supporting only HR, it’s actually supporting the business on an enterprise-wide basis.”

For Research Participant #3, a partner in a global management consulting firm, the experience went back to the head of the organization being personally involved as a positive mediating influence in aligning leadership development and strategy management by stating: “The CEO’s personal involvement in [leadership development] made sure the outcome of the process was going to support the over-arching strategy of the organization to succeed in the marketplace.”

Senior leadership involvement in the experience of Research Participant #4, an executive responsible for C-suite leadership development in a large-sized technology company, occurred as a positive mediating influence because “we actually just hired somebody who was responsible for making sure that [executive leadership development]
aligns to our strategy. We also now have a Chief Strategy Officer, so I would say our strategy function hasn’t been a strength, but now it is.” In the words of Research Participant #5, the director of global leadership development in a large-sized conglomerate, senior leadership involvement is accountable as a positive mediating influence for achieving the alignment of leadership development and strategy management:

“I’m accountable as a corporate leader of learning and leadership development. However, I report up through Talent Management to our ultimate leader of HR, so that’s a shared responsibility. But ultimately the accountability would sit with the CEO and we’re executing the alignment of leadership development with strategy management against those expectations.”

When asked during the interviews about who was responsible for the alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy management, Research Participant #7, a senior executive in a regional, not-for-profit healthcare provider, shared, “the leadership team, but specifically, the alignment of leadership development with the strategy was the responsibility of the Chief Leadership Officer, in conjunction with the COO with the President and CEO providing overall support.” The need for senior leadership involvement to support alignment with leadership development as a key positive mediating influence was also indicated by Research Participant #8, a senior manager of leadership development in a regional healthcare provider, who shared:

“Originally each of the sites did separate strategic plans. That is no longer the case. The company has all become one, so now we have leaders overseeing the entire system with different functions. We have discussions about what we might be doing [with leadership development] and how this might align [with strategy management] in order to establish performance targets. And those targets are reviewed by the senior leaders of the organization and [managers are] held accountable to achieve alignment with leadership development and strategy management.”
Summary

The experiences described by both the Key Informants and Practitioners during the research interviews clearly seemed to indicate the importance of an organization’s senior leadership being actively involved in facilitating the alignment of leadership development with strategy management. Regardless of the industry sector or size of the company, senior executive leadership from the C-suite appeared to be a key mediating influence in achieving alignment. When senior executives supported the efforts to align leadership development with strategy management by including the rest of the management team at all levels of the organization, and held them accountable, alignment appeared to occur more effectively. Senior leadership involvement appeared to be the primary mediating influence for achieving alignment, so the study next focused on exploring the mediating influences against achieving the alignment of leadership development with strategy management in the participants’ experiences.

Theme D: Common obstacles to achieving alignment

Interestingly, neither the Key Informants nor the Practitioners seemed to indicate consistent themes when discussing mediating influences that were obstacles to aligning leadership development with strategy management in their experiences. Perhaps this was due to the fact that in the case of the Key Informants they were asked to facilitate alignment in the organizations with which they worked. It was also possible that the Practitioners did not describe many obstacles to overcome that prevented the alignment of leadership development with strategy management because they worked in organizations that seemingly overcame those obstacle. However, both categories of
research participants did indicate there could be some obstacles to consider in achieving the organizational alignment of leadership development with strategy management. The types of obstacles cited by the research participants seemed to vary somewhat based upon their recent observations or the main obstacle they had encountered during their recent attempts to align leadership development and strategy management. *It appears there were no common mediating influences that were obstacles to aligning leadership development and strategy management within the research participants’ organizations.*

**Key Informants**

In describing what organizations struggle with as obstacles in aligning leadership development and strategy management, Research Participant #9 (RP9), an executive education consultant and former Chief Learning Officer in a large-sized technology company offered:

> “I think a lot of organizations struggle to understand how to engineer strategy, if that makes sense. In other words, I think a lot of folks understand the vision component of strategy and I think a lot fewer people understand the execution component of strategy. But I think the first part of the problem is understanding what they needed to do, in order to get where they wanted to go in aligning leadership development with the strategy.”

RP9 seemed to indicate that a possible obstacle to achieving the alignment of leadership development with strategy management in some organizations was their inability to really understand what the organization’s strategy was and what the specific leadership development competencies were needed to successfully execute the strategy.

Research Participant #10, a global consultant in leadership development and former Chief Learning Officer of a global media company, made this observation: “the real issue is the partnership between the business strategy team and the [leadership] development
team. With a good partnership, then I think alignment occurs. I don’t think a company should run any leadership development program that hasn’t been tested and aligned with the strategy.” Another perspective on the obstacles encountered by organizations as mediating influences that prevent alignment came from Research Participant #6 (RP6), an executive education consultant and Ivy League professor, who offered:

“The observations I’m going to offer are no in priority order, so don’t take them as rank order. First, organizations struggle with whether the people leading the initiative or effort actually have a point of view that they can communicate. They sometimes have a leadership development program or a competency model, but they don’t really have a point of view around what leadership development is, why it’s important, and how it bridges to the strategy. So I think they worry about the leadership development point of view … and that’s not strong enough to align with the strategy.

A second thing I think they struggle with is in designing executive education interventions. Specifically, the leadership development programs haven’t had enough depth in certain targeted competency areas. So the program tends to be too wide open versus too focused and not being able to pinpoint the strategic areas where the company needs to go deep with developing competencies.”

RP6 appeared to be saying was that most organizations encounter obstacles because the senior leadership cannot either effectively lead the alignment or cannot successfully communicate the need to align leadership development with strategy management. Even in the instances when those organizations had a leadership development competency model, the senior leadership team was not effective in demonstrating the importance of those competencies in successfully executing the strategy. RP6 also seemed to say that obstacles to aligning leadership development with strategy management occurs when the process of developing the competencies needed to align with the strategy are not focused on the specific needs of the business and too general in nature.
During the research interviews, it also appeared that the Key Informants had observed varying mediating influences that were obstacles to alignment in organizations, such as not clearly understanding or communicating the strategy, not creating a leadership development partnership within the organization, and struggling to effectively communicate the importance of leadership development competencies required by the needs of the business. It was interesting that while some of the Practitioners indicated their organizations used, or had used, an approach like the Balanced Scorecard framework for strategy management that was previously discussed in Chapter 2, those organizations also experienced potential obstacles to aligning leadership development with strategy management.

**Practitioners**

Even in organizations where learning and development executives had backgrounds or experiences in working with approaches such as the Balanced the Practitioners described obstacles as mediating influences. Research Participant #4, a senior executive for executive leadership development in a large-sized technology company, shared experiences with obstacles regarding strategy management frameworks:

“The Balanced Scorecard is a great framework that lots of companies use to articulate their strategies. It’s not a strategy formulation tool, it’s more of a strategy translation tool. I think it’s always just a kind of leap for people to say ‘how well does this fit with our leadership development process?’ If you teach general leadership skills, as an example, of course they should link to the strategy, but sometimes people still have the frame of reference that it’s just leadership, what does any of this have anything to do with driving a business?”
Research Participant #2, the director of global leadership development in a large-sized conglomerate, mentioned an approach similar to the Balanced Scorecard framework, but that framework could have still posed an obstacle to alignment:

“I wouldn’t call it the Balanced Scorecard, but I think that ultimately we’re balancing those things [leadership development and strategy management] together. And we’re really reluctant to put it on something like a Balanced Scorecard without having some objective view of where that information is coming from.”

Research Participant #1 also indicated some obstacles in achieving alignment due to the lack of a clear approach:

“No, not one particular way for achieving alignment. It’s actually one of the things I want to figure out. We’ve got performance management as part of the leadership development work, and we also have something called our Balanced Scorecard, so every unit, either a business or a function, has a Balanced Scorecard that has financial and non-financial targets. None of that is sufficient, I want something else …and I’m not quite sure what it is yet.”

Surprisingly, these three Practitioners seemed to indicate that even when using a well-recognized framework similar to the Balanced Scorecard as an approach to facilitate alignment, obstacles to the alignment of leadership development and strategy management still existed. The other Practitioners, whose organizations did not use approaches similar to the Balanced Scorecard framework, also shared obstacles their organizations had encountered in achieving alignment. Research Participant #5, the director of global leadership development in a large-sized conglomerate, indicated that effective communications regarding the operational definitions of terms:

“One of the challenges is gaining alignment on the terminology that’s being used within a conversation. If we have 27 individuals and we use a term, we cannot operate under the assumption that everybody’s leveraging that term with the same definition. So we go through a painful process to always define what the term is to
make sure we’re making decisions from the same point of view. And I would say that continues to be a challenge because across our industry and across the various regions … we have found that when we thought we had alignment, sometimes we truly didn’t, so we have to come back and revisit the alignment of leadership development and strategy.”

Research Participant #8, a senior manager for leadership development with a regional healthcare provider, shared the different types of obstacles encountered by their organization in overcoming the alignment of leadership development with strategy management:

“I think the struggles we face are primarily two. One is the pace in which our organization moves. It tends to be very deliberate and we need to be able to move at a pace that is aligned with the pace in which the industry moves. The second one would be capacity in terms of people and time available. With all we’re trying to achieve, we do face a huge challenge with the capacity to get the alignment done with the people and time available for the effort.”

When asked what their organization struggled with, Research Participant #7, a C-suite executive with a regional healthcare provider, responded that capacity can also be an issue for their organization by, “having too many priorities on our plates. We have an appetite for doing lots of things and it was very hard for us to step back and not attempt to do everything we wanted to do regarding leadership development and strategy management.”

Summary

This section the study focused on Research Question 2 and how the participants described the mediating influences they had observed or experienced in aligning leadership development with strategy management. Neither the Key Informants or the Practitioners described common themes emerged from the interviews, which indicated
that obstacles as mediating influences appeared to vary and were specific to their organizations. The participants described overcoming, or attempting to overcome, obstacles such as understanding and effectively communicating the strategy, not designing leadership development competencies specific to the organization, struggling to ensure the entire organizations communicates with the same operational definitions, and struggling with having enough people or time to create the capacity to achieve alignment. The ability to recognize and overcome these obstacles was critical to their organizations eventually achieving the alignment of leadership development and strategy management. In order to better understand how the research participants overcame those mediating influences that posed obstacles to their organizations, Research Question 3 focused on how the participants described their current state of the alignment of leadership development and strategy management.

Research Question 3
Research Question 3 asked the research participants to specifically describe their organization’s current alignment of leadership development and strategy management, along with the specific steps they intended to take to achieve better alignment. This research question focused on asking the research participants to conceptualize their own roles in describing the current alignment of leadership development and strategy management in their organizations, along with the specific steps they can take to achieve better alignment. The participants were asked a specific question about what mechanism or approach organizations used to facilitate the alignment of leadership development and strategy management, two common themes evolved from the participant data gathered. The two common themes were (a) standard competency models were not robust enough
to facilitate the alignment of leadership development and strategy management in organizations, and (b) the alignment of leadership development and strategy management is best facilitated by a key leader.

These two themes were cited by every Key Informant and a majority of the Practitioners. This general consensus was due to the realization among the participants that so-called “standard” leadership competencies based on the latest leadership buzzwords or executive education fads were not specific enough to meet the needs of their business. In this chapter’s earlier discussion of Research Question 1, the participants indicated the theme of a context-specific framework of leadership development competencies specific to the needs of a particular business. The key words stated in this theme from Research Question 1 were about identifying context-specific leadership development competencies for the organization. Research question 3, Theme A, appears to support the participants’ contention that standard competency models are not robust enough to facilitate the alignment of leadership development with strategy management. Theme A appears to indicate that simply applying “standard” competency models does not support alignment, nor are “standard” competency models specific enough to achieve better leadership development.

**Theme A: Standard competency models are not sufficient**

The specific question posed to the research participants was “What mechanism or approach do organizations use to facilitate the alignment of leadership development with strategy management?” The participants seemed to reach an overall consensus that *standard competency models were not robust enough to facilitate the alignment of leadership development and strategy management in organizations*. Every Key Informant
(Research Participants #6, #9, #10, and #11) stated that identifying specific leadership development competencies for specific leadership roles helped to achieve the alignment of leadership development and strategy management. However, the most successfully developed leadership roles were those that did not focus on the “standard” competency models recommended by the latest leadership fad or most recent book on the topic of generic leadership competency models.

The most successful organizations seem to identify the leadership development competencies that were specific to the organization that were aligned with the leadership roles required to effectively manage the strategy. While the Practitioners also indicated that standard competency models were not sufficient enough to facilitate the alignment of leadership development with strategy management in their organizations, however, their exemplary quotes were not as vociferous as those provided by the Key Informants. Therefore, Theme A was primarily focused on the exemplary quotes from the Key Informants.

When the Key Informants were asked what mechanisms or approaches organizations used in aligning leadership development and strategy management, Research Participant #6, an executive education consultant and Ivy League professor, was the most eloquent of the Key Informants, stating that, “setting leadership development goals, in my experience, often involves discovery, finding a pathway. The approach to alignment is emergent and exploratory in character versus setting clear goals for a program. RP6 seemed to indicate that an approach that facilitated the alignment of leadership development with strategy management had to exist within the organization, but there was not always a direct path to achieving alignment within that approach. Particularly
when it came to establishing the leadership development competencies specific to the needs of the business, the leadership team charged with identifying those competencies had allow them to emerge in alignment, rather than forcing the function via some prescriptive formula.

Research Participant #11, the dean of executive education at an Ivy League university, stated that, “frequently organizations can’t answer the question about the leadership development competencies specific to the needs of the organization, so the focus is on “standard” competencies, which are developed on an ad hoc basis, rather than as a comprehensive program based on a strategic needs assessment.” Once again, “standard” competency models are not robust enough to meet the specific needs of a business, so the organization’s ability to align its leadership development efforts with the strategy would be comprised.

Similarly, Research Participant #9, an executive education consultant and former Chief Learning Officer with a global technology company, responded that standard competency models were not robust enough by stating:

“So who knows what makes a great leader? Companies think it’s all these traits that are inherent in people or maybe can be learned by people, but I think the first part of the problem is understanding what the business needs, in order to get it where it wants to go from a strategy standpoint.”

Research Participant #10, a global leadership development consultant, also indicated that standard competency models were not robust enough. RP10’s response indicated the importance of organizations identifying the context-specific competencies for their businesses, then using that approach to align with the strategy management efforts:
“I think the alignment of leadership development with strategy management is important work. Although we’ve been formally developing leaders for decades, it feels almost now that we’re getting to the point where we have a clearer understanding of the specific content required for the process …but the processes that help determine the content [do not] help ensure that alignment going to end up doing what it’s supposed to do in the context of the business.”

Research Participant #6 seemed to sum up the theme of standard competency models not being robust enough in this comment:

“Well, many organizations have competency models, but I would say in nine out of ten cases, the competency models are sort of flat-footed and not really that important. They tend to be generic, so you end up with sort of a very one-dimensional checklist which is not robust in the sense it has good behavioral indicators and it’s not tied to the needs of the business.”

But that kind of combination was very critical in this emergent way. The leadership development competencies were sort of customized to the context of the business the firm was playing in. A much more action-driven, experiential-driven process of learning new leadership skills is required and those kinds of processes and programs are invented in this emergent way. They really provide customized and tailored solutions, as opposed to kind of off-the-shelf efforts.

Competency models can be very robust if they’re wedded to the strategy of a business and the people inside the organization who are responsible for leadership development are seen as kind of strategic partners or strategic thinkers.”

**Summary**

The research participants’ descriptions of the most successfully developed leadership roles in this theme were those that did not focus on the “standard” competency models recommended by the latest leadership fad or most recent book on the topic of generic leadership competency models. Both the Key Informants and Practitioners seemed to indicate that the most successful organizations seem to identify the leadership development competencies that were specific to the organization and were effectively aligned with the firms’ strategy management efforts. The Key Informants, primarily due
to their experiences consulting with a variety of organizations, shared the most exemplary quotes cited in this theme. However, while the Practitioners also alluded to the fact that standard competency models were not sufficient enough to facilitate the alignment of leadership development with strategy management in their organizations, their exemplary quotes did emerge more in Theme B than in Theme A.

Theme B: Alignment is facilitated by a key leader

After the primary research question about what mechanism or approach do organizations use to facilitate the alignment of leadership development and strategy management, this follow up question was posed to the research participants, “Who is responsible for that alignment?” The participants’ responses to the follow up question led to Theme B, which was the alignment of leadership development and strategy management is best facilitated by a key leader within the organization. This theme was clearly stated by both the Key Informants and Practitioners in the study. The Key Informants appeared to have experienced the alignment leadership development and strategy management primarily through the direct efforts of a key leader within the organizations for which they had consulted or delivered executive education. The Practitioners described this concept as a process that was facilitated by a key leader within their organizations who had the primary responsibility for coordinating the alignment of leadership development and strategy management with other leaders throughout their companies.

The Practitioners described varying states of current alignment within their organizations; some felt they had achieved it, whereas others did not. The Practitioners also did not necessarily describe the specific steps they had taken to achieve alignment,
but indicated there was some type of organizational approach that facilitated alignment. Those Practitioners who felt their organizations were aligned seemed to believe a process was already in place to achieve alignment, while those Practitioners who were seeking better alignment also believed an organizational approach existed that would help to achieve better alignment.

**Key Informants**

When the Key Informants described how they experienced the specific steps taken by organizations to achieve the alignment of leadership development and strategy management, their descriptions included comments about a key senior leader in the organization directly facilitating the approach to achieving alignment. Research Participant #9 (RP9), an executive education consultant and former Chief Learning Officer for a global technology company observed:

“I’ve seen an approach that facilitates alignment work well in two environments, one where there is somebody who is a leader who feels an intellectual or moral obligation to give back to the leadership development in the organization and creates opportunities for alignment. And the other one is where people who are hungry for leadership development and create opportunities for the alignment with strategy management. I’ve seen very few organizations that have it institutionalized and structured formally.”

RP9’s comment about their experience of very few organizations having institutionalized a formal structure or approach for aligning leadership development with strategy management highlighted the role of a key leader within the organization as best facilitating alignment. The notion of a key leader within the organization facilitating the alignment was also evident in the comments provided by Research Participant #11, the dean of executive education at an Ivy League university, who indicated:
“The expectation is that all leadership development competencies are aligned with strategy management, however, the traditional processes of leadership development are not connected to strategy, but individualized within it. When it alignment works, it starts with understanding the strategy and how their leadership development role fits.”

Research Participant #10, a global leadership development consultant, described the role of a key leader within the organization facilitating alignment as:

“The people who are designing leadership development approach are working inside the business, rather than outside. They’re being judged on the knowhow and the insight of people within the business who have in-depth knowledge and experience in the way the business operates. So it’s that sort of concrete, tangible understanding of the way the organization works is how you build alignment.”

Research Participant #6 described an experience of a key leader being responsible for facilitating the alignment of leadership development with strategy management in this way:

“It’s more the ability of this initiating leader inside the company at the micro level who’s driving leadership development, it’s their ability to kind of link these sort of live issues that touch the strategy. It was the power of some type of learning journey, some type of action-learning effort, some type of experiential exercise that was very directly business relevant where executives were immersed in new situations. The approach to facilitating alignment was more a question of creativity by whoever was the point person, executive, or manager responsible for leadership development, to connect the dots, to kind of bridge connections between whatever they knew about the formal needs of their leaders to the needs of the business.”

The concept of a key leader involved with the leadership development process facilitating alignment with strategy management appeared to be very clear in the descriptions provided by the Key Informants. The concept of a key leader within the organization being responsible for facilitating alignment appeared to be primarily due to the Key Informants’ experiences consulting with organizations that were struggling with aligning
leadership development with strategy management. Another potential contributing factor to the Key Informants’ responses was the number of consulting and/or executive education engagements that had experienced with organizations struggling with approaches to identifying context-specific leadership development competencies or effective strategy management. Theme B was also clearly described by the majority of the Practitioners in the study. Many of the Practitioners described the key actions taken to achieve alignment within their organizations through terms such as coordination, collaboration, and communication. However, these actions appeared to again primarily fall to a key leader within the organization who was accountable for achieving alignment, but not necessarily the most senior leader responsible for alignment, within their organizations.

**Practitioners**

In response to the question about who was responsible for the alignment of leadership development and strategy management within their organization, Research Participant #1, a senior manager of leadership development in a large-sized pharmaceutical company, indicated the responsibility for alignment:

> “Would probably initiate out of my group. I would need and want to align with the senior management on the intention and the plan, because it would not be me holding the managers and the businesses accountable as much as the senior team holding them accountable. I would just be the enabler for that work. I’ve got the performance management process and I have the balanced scorecard process to help facilitate alignment.”

Research Participant #2, a senior manager for global leadership development with a large-sized conglomerate, described the responsibility for aligning leadership
development with strategy management would key individual leaders of a specific geography or business responsible for learning and development:

“It is the learning leader’s responsibility inside a geography to make sure that their learning playbook aligns to what the business needs. The learning playbook has to be aligned to the business playbook. The learning playbook is aligned to the region playbook. And the learning and development strategy is not just supporting HR, it’s actually supporting the business.”

The approach of using a learning playbook for the leadership development competencies specific to a geographic region or business unit being aligned with the business playbook appeared to be indicative of a formal approach to alignment, even though RP2 described the responsibility for alignment assigned to the learning leader within the geography.

Research Participant #5, a senior manager for global leadership development with another large-sized conglomerate, described the responsibility for facilitating alignment of leadership development and strategy management in their organization with this approach:

“We have an internal managing process of monthly meetings with the CEO, so the staff comes together. There are also quarterly meetings where a more extended audience would be included, and that would also include me. So in my role, I’m accountable for aligning leadership development with the strategy as a corporate leader of learning and leadership development.”

A key leader within the organization facilitating the alignment of leadership development and strategy management was also indicated by Research Participant #7, a senior executive with a regional healthcare provider, as, “the responsibility of the Chief Leadership Officer, in conjunction with the COO. Finally, Research Participant #8, a
The manager of leadership development with another regional healthcare provider, described the role of a key leader facilitating alignment as:

“I would say that it would fall to me for my piece of the pie and the leaders to whom I report. But ultimately, it’s going to be up to me to figure out in partnership with some of those other key leaders of learning for our residency program, the key leader of learning for our clinically-based programs. We sit down at the table and build awareness about what our strategy is, what our skills are as a leadership team based upon what we know. We have through our performance management program the capability to cascade goals and ... the cascading function allows us to further customize goals ... that can help with alignment for leadership development.”

RP8 not only described who was responsible for aligning leadership development with strategy management within their organization, but also shared what was actually done to align the entire organization. The approaches indicated by most Practitioners appeared to include terms mentioned in other themes as well, such as leadership, teamwork, and performance management. The experiences of RP 2, RP5, RP7 and RP8 also seemed to indicate that the approach to aligning leadership development with strategy management has become of the organizations’ cultures.

While the descriptions provided by the Practitioners in the study appeared to support the roles of a responsible leader within their organizations facilitating the alignment of leadership development and strategy management, those responsible leader also had to take specific actions that included coordination, collaboration, and communication with other leaders throughout the organization to effectively achieve alignment. There appeared to be a general consensus about those steps, but there did not appear to be a consensus on the current alignment of the Practitioners’ organizations. Research Participant #1, despite mentioning the company’s Balanced Scorecard (BSC), did not
indicate achieving alignment between leadership development and organizational strategy through the BSC framework. Research Participants #5, #7, and #8 appeared to indicate a sense of alignment, primarily achieved through an approach of a series of regularly scheduled meetings with every level of the organization represented, from the CEO to business unit or geographic area managers. Only one Practitioner, Research Participant #2, appeared to clearly indicate an approach that achieved some semblance of alignment of leadership development and strategy management within their organization.

Summary

This chapter focused on reporting the data that emerged from the semi-standardized interviews with the study participants, both Key Informants and Practitioners. Three research questions were explored in this qualitative research study. Research question 1 was “What are learning and development leaders’ stated approaches to leadership development efforts in organizations?” Research Question 2 was “How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy, and what do they identify as the mediating influences—supports, as well as, obstacles—on their efforts?” Research question 3 posed, “How do learning and development leaders describe the current alignment of leadership development and strategy management within their own organizations, and what specific steps do they plan to take in order to achieve better alignment?”

The Key Informants and Practitioners, all of whom were learning and development leaders currently engaged in leadership development within their organizations, were interviewed to learn about their organizational approaches to the leadership development process. From these interviews, three common themes regarding leadership development
processes within these organizations were identified. These themes indicated that successful approaches to leadership development in organizations were: (a) a process driven by the needs of the business, (b) a context-specific framework, and (c) action-learning oriented. The research study participants’ shared their experiences regarding the themes to gain a deeper understanding of how they described their experiences with the leadership development processes within their respective organizations. The participants indicated that stakeholders providing input from all levels of the organization to better inform senior leadership about leadership development needs was a key component of the leadership development process.

A context-specific framework indicated that leadership development competencies should be specific to each organizations’ needs. Organizations have different and distinct needs based upon their industry, their markets, and their operating environments. A context-specific framework of leadership development may encompass the specific job level of employees, the business segment in which employees work, and the geographic location in which employees work. A context-specific framework also includes the specific leadership development competencies needed by the organization to perform well and the ability to align its leadership development process with strategy management.

An action-learning orientation indicates that leadership development is a process best learned through performing in, and experiencing, leadership positions. The developmental experience of serving in leadership positions with various levels of organizational responsibility appears to provide employees better learning opportunities and a deeper understanding of the experience-based performance requirements in leadership development. An action-learning orientation in leadership development includes focusing
on a culture of behavior change in the organization as a result of the action-learning process. There were additional approaches indicated in this theme, but one approach, organizational culture, was mentioned more frequently than other approaches.

The research participants next described their efforts to align leadership development and strategy management by identifying the mediating influences that facilitated the process of attempting to effect this alignment, along with the supports and obstacles they encountered. Overall, four themes evolved from the study as mediating influences that support the alignment of leadership development and strategy management: (a) the alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy management is critical to the business, (b) an approach that facilitates alignment, (c) active involvement from senior leadership, and (d) mediating influences that were identified as obstacles to aligning leadership development and strategy management. Most participants indicated that they found it desirable to successfully align their leadership development efforts with the organization’s strategic goals in order to facilitate better strategy management. This theme was cited by nearly every research participant, among both the Key Informants and Practitioners, in nearly the same terms by both groups of participants.

The culture of the organization evolved as a mediating influence that supported the alignment of leadership development with strategy management in observed by Key Informants or a part of Practitioners’ organizations. The participants that mentioned culture as a positive mediating influence also appeared to feel very strongly about culture as an approach for facilitating alignment within the organization. Another theme consistently mentioned included the importance of senior leadership involvement for aligning
leadership development and strategy management and was indicated throughout the interviews with both Key Informants and Practitioners.

Neither the Key Informants nor the Practitioners seemed to indicate consistent themes when discussing mediating influences that are obstacles to aligning leadership development and strategy management. However, both categories of research participants did indicate there are obstacles in achieving organizational alignment. The types of obstacles cited by the research participants seemed to vary somewhat based upon their recent observations or the main obstacle they had encountered during their recent attempts at work to align leadership development and strategy management. It appears there are no common mediating influences that are obstacles to aligning leadership development and strategy management in organizations. The mediating influences which are obstacles vary and appear to be specific to an organization.

Lastly, the research participants were asked to specifically describe their organization’s current alignment of leadership development and strategy management, along with the specific steps they intended to take to achieve better alignment. There were two main themes to evolve from the data gathered from the participants: (a) standard competency models are not robust enough to facilitate the alignment of leadership development and strategy management in organizations and (b) the alignment of leadership development and strategy management is best facilitated by a key leader. Every Key Informant stated that organizational roles help to achieve the alignment of leadership development and strategy management.
However, both the Key Informants and Practitioners indicated the most successful roles are those that do not focus on the “standard” competency models recommended by the latest leadership fad or most recent book on the topic of generic leadership competency models. Successful organizations seem to identify the leadership development competencies that are specific to the organization that are aligned with the roles required to effectively manage the strategy. The Key Informants appeared to experience the organizational concept of aligning leadership development and strategy managements primarily through the direct efforts of a key leader within the organization. The Practitioners described this concept as a process facilitated by a key leader within the organization who had the primary responsibility for coordinating the alignment of leadership development and strategy management with other leaders.

The Practitioners described varying states of current alignment within their organizations; some felt they had achieved it, whereas others did not. The Practitioners who felt their organizations had some type of alignment, did not necessarily describe the specific steps they had taken to achieve alignment. This appeared to primarily stem from the lack of a specific organizational approach, designed to facilitate the alignment of leadership development with strategy management, being used in their organizations. Those Practitioners who felt their organizations were aligned seemed to believe an approach was already in place to achieve alignment. Those Practitioners whose organizations were seeking alignment also seemed to believe an approach was in place to achieve alignment. However, neither group seemed to be able to clearly describe the approach their organizations were taking to achieve alignment, but those approaches appeared to have evolved as inherent parts of the organizational cultures.
Chapter 4 focused on what this study discovered from the research participants’ descriptions of their experiences and the common themes that evolved from the interviewees’ responses to the three primary research questions. The next chapter of this dissertation provides a discussion on the findings of the study, the potential implications for practitioners, and any conclusions about the need for further research on the topic of an approach to aligning leadership development with strategy management.
CHAPTER 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to explain the meaning of the participants’ experiences with aligning leadership development and strategy management, so we can better understand how to successfully align leadership development and strategy management in organizations. Chapter 4 focused on uncovering the common themes and/or subthemes reported by the Key Informants and Practitioners. The qualitative data that emerged from those themes and/or subthemes was coded as categorical responses to the research study questions. The coding categories were based upon the participants’ meaningful responses to the interview questions that allowed categories to emerge that openly captured their perspectives. Categorizing analysis begins with the identification of units or segments of data that seem important or meaningful in some way; this involves reading the data and developing unique own coding categories based on what data (including the participants’ terms and categories) seem important (Maxwell, 2013).

The coded data emerged from the semi-standardized interviews by citing what the participants actually said or did in their responses to the following research study questions posed in the previous chapter. The research questions were designed to explore how the Key Informants and Practitioners described the elements of their organizations’ approaches and how they described their experiences. Using qualitative research methods helped to uncover deeper understandings of how the study participants described those experiences, how they conceptualized their own roles in helping their organizations align leadership development with strategy management, and how they experienced the forces that enabled or prevented alignment. The results of this study serves to inform the learning and development community about a formal approach to aligning leadership
development with strategy management. This study also seeks to add to the existing body of knowledge that may serve to assist practitioners with a better understanding of the promises and pitfalls encountered when attempting to align leadership development with strategy management in their organizations.

Research question 1 was “What are learning and development leaders’ stated approaches to leadership development efforts in organizations?” The three primary themes that emerged from the data were: a process driven by the needs of the business, a context specific framework, and action-learning oriented. These themes also included participant comments regarding stakeholder involvement from various levels of the organization, business specific leadership competencies, and a culture of behavior change.

Research Question 2 was “How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy, and what do they identify as the mediating influences—supports, as well as, obstacles—on their efforts?” Three themes were identified as: the alignment of leadership development and strategy management are critical to the business, an approach that facilitates alignment, which includes organizational culture, and actively involved senior leadership.

Research question 3 posed “How do learning and development leaders describe the current alignment of leadership development and strategy management in their own organizations, and what specific steps do they plan to take in order to achieve better alignment?” The themes from this question were: standard competency models are not robust enough and alignment is best facilitated by a key leader.
The analysis provided here in Chapter 5 includes the findings that uncover a deeper understanding of how the participants described organizations’ approaches to leadership development, how the participants conceptualized their own roles in aligning leadership development and organizational strategy management, and how they experienced the forces that enabled or prevented such an alignment. The analysis was conducted within the context of the three main research questions and framed by the findings that emerged from the data gathered from the research participants. Upon analysis, the data appears to support the premise of Intagliata et al (2000), which indicates that organizations require leaders with varied skill sets that need to be applied in the context of the organization’s vision, mission and strategy. Each organization requires a distinctive brand of leadership suited to the desired results that define strategic success. Here is the analysis and findings of each main research question.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was “What are learning and development leaders’ stated approaches to leadership development efforts in organizations?” As Jay Conger (2010) indicated, the best programs are designed around an understanding that leadership development is a continuous, lifelong process rather than a single event or program. The best initiatives strive to advance the strategic and cultural objectives of the organization while simultaneously developing a deep bench of leadership talent.

Finding # 1: Leadership development in organizations must be differentiated to fit varying roles, yet integrated throughout the organization with similar and shared competencies.
According to Intagliata et al. (2000), competency expectations must be differentiated to fit with varying employee roles—yet integrated from top to bottom. Two aspects of the architecture of an organization’s competencies are particularly critical in enhancing branded leadership. The first focuses on the extent to which competency expectations are similar and shared throughout the organization. In competency model terms, this can be accomplished by creating a competency architecture that highlights a limited number (typically no more than 6-8) of core competencies that all employees (from the CEO to the mail room clerk) share as an expectation to guide behavior. These core competencies need to be carefully selected so that they focus on the most critical few areas of organizational capability that are essential in executing the strategy of the business. The participants in this study provided evidence of this architectural approach by identifying three to six core competencies integrated within their leadership development processes.

Some of the Practitioners did not specifically indicate what the core competencies were in their organizations. However, the lack of specificity does not lessen the importance of using an approach to integrate similar and shared core leadership development competencies throughout the organization. When Practitioners stated that shared leadership development competencies existed in their organizations, an approach that used a guiding framework to identify three to six core competencies specific to the organization was clearly indicated. Intagliata et al. (2000) stated that a competency architecture that can enhance leadership development distinctiveness involves defining each core competency in a manner that provides different expectation levels that match with the different demands of people’s roles (e.g. individual contributor, manager, executive). The data indicated that successful organizations used a formal approach to
identify the specific leadership development competencies necessary throughout all levels of the organization required to successfully achieve performance goals.

**Finding #2: Leadership Development competencies must be connected to and leveraged within the organization’s strategy management processes.**

This approach is supported by Intagliata et al. (2000), who state that competencies must be connected to and leveraged within an organization’s enabling systems. It is important to note that it will not work for an organization to consider leadership development as a separate system. If its leadership ideas and philosophy are to lead to the development of a strong leadership brand, then they must be embedded deeply into not only the world of HR but more broadly within its systems for doing business. When an entire leadership hierarchy gets focused on delivering the same results and has developed models identifying relevant attributes to deliver these results, they gain and can sustain a competitive advantage.

The study participants indicated that leadership development processes drive the success of the initiatives and goals that are embedded in an organization’s business plans, operating plans, and strategies. Companies need to link the leadership development competencies to the drivers of the business through the strategy management approach. The strategy management approach comes from the aspirations of the organization, which should translate into the leadership competencies specific to the organization’s leadership development approach. Most, if not all, of the participants indicated that the organization’s strategy had implications on the leadership development process within the organization. Their organizations identified the particular leadership development competencies integral to achieving the business strategy. The Practitioners’ organizations
connected and leveraged their strategy management processes as a common framework for shared definitions of leadership development across the enterprise. The strategy management framework connected the leadership development competencies at all levels of the organization by providing performance expectations regardless of position or seniority. The evidence provided further indicated the importance of considering leadership development as a system connected to and leveraged with strategy management processes, both for today and the future, and not as separate systems.

Most of the organizations defined not only the leadership development competencies currently required for strategy management, but also looked to identify leadership competencies for the future. Identifying both the current and future leadership competencies created a leadership development continuum that was created through a connection with the strategy management framework.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 was “How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy, and what do they identify as the mediating influences—supports, as well as, obstacles—on their efforts?” Intagliata et al. (2000) also offer insight into the findings from research question 2 with their strategically aligned leadership competency model. Competency models that produce a strong leadership brand must be closely aligned with the strategy of the business and with the organization’s core capabilities and values. Leadership competency models need to be updated periodically as an organization changes its strategy and/or as it develops certain core capabilities and identifies that other capabilities may be needed to move its performance “to the next level.” Therefore, the descriptions to align leadership
development with strategy provided by the participants in this study revealed two primary findings to this question.

**Finding #3: Organizations must have an approach that aligns leadership development, not only with the company’s current strategic management objectives, but also with where the company is headed.**

Competency models must be aligned with current strategy, organizational capabilities and values. They must be current and able to support where the company is headed, not just reflect what made is successful in the past (Intagliata et al., 2000). Data provided by the study participants indicated that good leadership development processes can be transformative to an organization by putting in place competencies and strategies that remake the organization for the contemporary operating environment. Not aligning leadership development competencies with both current and future strategy management objectives was considered an absolutely critical, continuous process. Aligning the elements of leadership development and strategy management were required by the global environment and the speed of business in the world today. An organization was considered meaningless if it able to align leadership development with strategy management.

A formal approach to aligning leadership development and strategy management to where the company was headed was deemed very important, and essential to long-term success of the organization. From the Practitioners’ perspectives, the alignment process began with the strategy management objectives, then focused on the leadership development process required to develop the competencies required for meeting those objectives. The importance of connecting leadership development with the business
strategy because successful leadership development efforts were a critical part of good
strategy management and cannot exist independently. An approach that aligns with both
the current and future strategy management objectives should be an inherent part of the
strategy and the development of the leadership development competencies that drive
successful strategic outcomes. Aligning strategy management with leadership
development assures an organization of competent leadership that is able execute the
strategy. Ensuring this alignment developed competencies that empowered leaders and
gave them the skills to implement and successfully execute strategy management.

An approach that facilitates the alignment of leadership development with strategy
management is best achieved when the organization’s senior leadership believes in
aligning the two processes, then models the appropriate behaviors for the rest of the
organization to emulate. The beliefs and behaviors of senior leadership that enable the
alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy management leads to
finding number four from the study. The likelihood of an organization’s competency
model helping to drive the accomplishment of desired business results includes specific
leader behaviors that contribute to strengthening the organization’s successful strategy
execution (Intagliata et al, 2000).

Finding #4: Leadership development competencies must be aligned with the beliefs
and behaviors of senior executives.

Competency model expectations must be aligned with the beliefs of senior
executives and modeled in their personal behavior and commitment. It is critical that
senior executives are a “walking advertisement” (Intagliata et al, 2000). The way to help
increase the likelihood of strong alignment between an organization’s competency model
and the on-the-job behavior of its senior executives is to make sure they are an integral part of the competency development process from the beginning. This finding was supported in the study with evidence from the study participants’ comments on senior leadership involvement and behaviors. This alignment should start with the chief executive, who should remember that if people are expected to behave in a certain way, the desired behaviors should be modeled by senior leadership. Active involvement of senior leadership starts at the board level, in order to connect leadership development with strategy management; however, it should be the CEO who is accountable for the alignment and the CLO, or another designated learning and development leader, who executes the alignment of leadership development and strategy management.

There should be a direct connection to the drivers of the business through executive leadership in order to better enable the alignment of leadership development competencies and strategy management. Senior executives’ abilities in modeling the leadership development competencies are critical to holding the organization’s subordinate leaders accountable for effectively aligning the competencies with strategy management. An important part of a leader’s responsibility in each organization, from the CEO throughout all levels of the organization, was aligning leadership development competencies to support the over-arching strategy of the organization to succeed in the contemporary operating environment. Senior executives had regular discussions about the competencies required to be developed through the leadership development process and how those competencies align with strategy management.

The executives modeled the appropriate behaviors through formal approaches that included shared leadership competencies and guiding values. Through these shared
values and behavioral competencies senior leadership was able to better align leadership
development with strategy management and make it a part of the organizational culture.
The culture of the study participants’ organizations created environments where senior
executives’ beliefs and behaviors were aligned with the leadership development
competencies. A culture that created a formal approach to alignment led to behavioral
changes in people at all levels of the organizations. This alignment of leadership
competencies with the beliefs and behaviors of senior executives paved the way for the
successful alignment of leadership development and strategy management in these
organizations. The involvement of senior leaders in designing leadership development
competencies was important to the participants because those competencies should be
developed by the people working inside the business, not by outsiders. Senior leaders
who have in-depth knowledge and experience with the strategy management of the
organization and had an understanding about the competencies the organization needs
helps to build alignment.

The ability to align leadership development competencies with the beliefs and
behaviors of senior executives connects the formal needs of leaders at all levels with the
needs of the business. Senior executives’ beliefs and behaviors create alignment by
sharing their knowledge and experience in the way the business operates through the
identification of common leadership development competencies. The power of the senior
executives sharing their knowledge and experience was a learning journey for leaders at
all levels of the organization. The executives and other leader became involved in
business relevant action-learning experiences that served to connect the required
leadership development competencies with the needs of the business. Connecting the
needs of the business with leadership development competencies through action-learning led by senior executives also enabled the successful alignment of leadership development with the organizations’ strategy management. In order to better understand the formal approach used to achieve the alignment of leadership development and strategy management in their organizations, the study participants were asked to describe the current state of alignment within their organizations.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was “How do learning and development leaders describe the current alignment of leadership development and strategy management in their own organizations, and what specific steps do they plan to take in order to achieve better alignment?”

The data provided from this study indicated that both groups of participants believed it was very important for learning and development leaders to identify the pertinent leadership development competencies connected to the needs of the business. The participants also felt the learning and development leaders should be able to describe the effective state of alignment of leadership development with strategy management, and the steps that were needed to ensure or sustain alignment. Leadership development requires the ability to clearly identify the strategic direction in which the organization must travel and an emphasis on learning in real time which leadership competencies are required to align those competencies with the strategy management needed to head in the right direction. Intagliata et al (2000) stated that leadership development competencies should be linked to the organization’s key result areas and balanced across them. The best companies seem to have a formal approach to successfully achieve the alignment of an
organization’s competency model that supports the accomplishment of its desired results, based upon the needs of the business.

**Finding #5: Leadership development competencies should be linked to the organization’s key results through a strategic framework.**

The organizations with the best leadership development processes link the competencies to key results through action-learning. Too many organizations settle for generic competency models as a “one size fits all” solution. These competency models may seem sufficient from a theoretical standpoint, but if the competencies are not linked to the organization’s key results, the likelihood of achieving those results are diminished. Organizations have competency models, but in 9 out of 10 cases, they tend to be too static. A more action-learning, experiential driven process with customized and tailored solutions, as opposed to off-the-shelf solution, are required. Competency models can be very robust if they are wedded to the strategy of a business and the people inside the organization who are responsible for leadership development are seen as strategic partners or strategic thinkers (RP#6, 12/2015).

The participants in the study stated that their organizations linked leadership development competencies to key business results. Most of their organizations’ key business results focused on serving and satisfying customers, therefore the approaches taken included linking leadership development competencies that focused on customers. Most companies appear to believe that customers determine their success, so there is a tangible need to determine customers’ needs as part of linking leadership development competencies to this key result. These organizations begin the process with the business
objectives and directives, then focus on developing the competencies in the leadership development process.

For example, Research Participant #3 (12/2015) indicated that customer focus was important by stating, “The [leadership development] framework itself has generated a lot of enthusiasm internally. So much so that when our folks were back out working with clients, and the clients were struggling with leadership development problems, a lot of our folks immediately said ‘You should see how we do it here.’ When they find a client who might be able to use the [leadership development framework] as a solution, they’ve got a place to go now for support.” The use of a strategic framework that is tied into the leadership development competencies is part of good strategy management (RP#1, 12/2015). A strategic framework linking key results to the required leadership development competencies also facilitates cascading the key results and competencies throughout the organization. Cascading assists with aligning leadership development with strategy management throughout the organization. The best organizations appear to develop the leadership competencies necessary to be successful in their future operating environments, link those competencies to their leadership development processes, then align those leadership development competencies with key strategic results through the strategy management approach.

The evidence provided by the study participants appears to indicate the importance of linking leadership development competencies with the organization’s key results. This linkage is the approach used by learning and development executives to describe the current alignment of leadership development and strategy management within their organizations. The specific steps taken by learning and development executives to
achieve alignment is an ongoing process. The research participants indicated that the need to align leadership development and organizational strategy management was driven by an ever-changing business environment. The business environment necessitated the need to regularly revise the key results needed by the business. Taking the actions that applied the specific leadership competencies needed by the business to meet the desired business results was an ongoing effort for the organizations. Therefore, it was important for the organizations to approach leadership development as a continual, action-learning process.

**Finding #6: Developing leadership competencies that lead to specific results is an ongoing and action-learning process.**

To the extent it is learned, leadership is learned from experience and these experiences are powerful because of the challenges they present (McCall, 2010). However, it is not uncommon for organizations to invest more time and energy in developing [leadership] competency models than they actually do in applying them [through action-learning] (Intagliata et al, 2000). These attributes need to be ones that clearly link to business results. Leaders must recognize that as their environment changes and new challenges or opportunities arise, they must make the necessary adjustments to ensure they continue to maintain the proper alignment of leadership development competencies and key strategic results through effective strategy management. The organizations that appear to be best at maintaining the proper alignment appear to view developing leadership competencies as an ongoing and action-learning process action learning uses team-based projects that explore opportunities or dilemmas facing the organization as a development vehicle (Conger, 2010).
Too often competency models are “thin” checklists and too abstract. The competency model must be bridged to the drivers of the business with emphasis on 2-3 capabilities needed in the business that are used to structure the [leadership development competencies through] action learning (RP#6, 12/2015). Further data from the study participants indicated that leadership development was primarily experience-based and was primarily learned through experience such as developmental assignments (RP#1, 12/2015). The best organizations also appear to view leadership development an ongoing, experienced-based process for leaders throughout the organization.

Certain experiences matter more than others. These experiences can be classified roughly as early work experiences, short-term assignments, and major line assignments (McCall, 2010). Research Participant #5 (1/2016) provided this evidence as support:

“We approach leadership development [as] designed to address the ongoing leadership development needs of a new manager, somebody who’s in the process of transitioning from an individual contributor to a people leader for the first time, and then a more experienced manager, somebody who’s leading a global organization from a business, or functional perspective, and then finally up through our strategic leader level, typically a director who is running a line of business and managing all aspects of that organization. The intent is to be nominated in and then perform and move to the next role or two, and then to be nominated to the next level [so they are prepared to] perform and move into the next role or two. It’s meant to be iterative [for] individuals acquiring and broadening their skill sets and levels of responsibility.”

The evidence cited within this chapter supports the six findings indicated by the participants in this study. The analysis of both the literature and data from the study participants supports helps to uncover a deeper understanding of how the participants described organizations’ approaches to leadership development, how the participants conceptualized their own roles in aligning leadership development and organizational
strategy management, and how they experienced the forces that enabled or prevented such an alignment.

This research study led to six primary findings: (1) leadership development in organizations must be differentiated to fit varying roles, yet integrated throughout the organization with similar and shared competencies; (2) leadership development competencies must be connected to and leveraged within the organization’s strategy management processes; (3) organizations must have an approach that aligns leadership development, not only with the company’s current strategic management objectives, but also with where the company is headed; (4) leadership development competencies must be aligned with the beliefs and behaviors of senior executives; (5) leadership development competencies must be linked to the organization’s key results; and (6) developing competencies that lead to specific results is an ongoing and action-oriented process.

These six findings are all part of a comprehensive approach to aligning leadership development and organizational strategy management. What is the comprehensive approach that facilitates the alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy management? What are the implications of these findings? I believe the implications of the findings from this study for practitioners, especially those who are seeking to align the processes of leadership development and organizational strategy management, is to use an organizational capital approach to facilitate alignment.

**Implications of the study for Practitioners**

Kaplan and Norton (2006a) defined organizational capital as a category of intangible assets with four components: culture, leadership, alignment, and teamwork. Culture was
described as the attitudes and behaviors that characterize the functioning of an organization and support the organization’s strategy. Leadership was described as managing the transformational change required to become a strategy-focused organization. Alignment was described as all employees being empowered in the same direction. Teamwork was described as companies generating, organizing, developing, and sharing the knowledge relevant to immediate strategic needs. This study indicates the four components of organizational capital were evident from the explicit and implicit comments provided by the research participants.

Nearly half of the research participants explicitly referred to culture when describing their organizations’ approaches:

“At the top we have a culture we try and build, and that’s almost explicitly done …as an organization …on [our] strategy. We organize behaviors into two guiding frameworks …which are our shared values, our leadership competencies, our leadership values and behaviors. This framework is our shared definition and our common framework for leadership. Even more importantly, it’s our shared commitment.” (Research Participant #1, 12/2015)

“We want to shape the culture with the capabilities that are unique to the culture. Our leadership development is about shaping cultures through both individual and collective change. We want to shape the culture with the [leadership development] capabilities that we have and that we need and that we want to grow. That’s where shaping the culture for the future enables a business outcome for the future.” (Research Participant #2, 12/2015)

“Where leadership development impinges upon prevailing culture, it takes a lot longer and it’s a lot harder to shift that culture and engender new behaviors. So what you need to say is, ‘What do we want to change around here …what do we want to see happening differently?’” (Research Participant #10, 1/2016)

“We have what we call shared values and behavioral competencies; we’ve built an infusive program into our culture, but now we’re stepping it up a notch. We have 250 different organizations, each of which have different cultures. [We have] to think about how to align all of those cultures.” (Research Participant #8, 1/2016)
“We have a coaching culture. The whole leadership development is very much an extension of our strategy for prevailing in the marketplace.” (Research Participant #3, 12/2015)

The evidence implied that organizational culture was an important component to the research participants’ approaches to aligning their organizations’ leadership development and strategy management processes. The culture of these organizations also indicated there was a two-way relationship involved in the continuum of strategy development and leadership development. The leadership development executives were involved in the process with the strategy development executives from the start. There was an ongoing dialogue between the leadership development and strategy management executives, which in effect, created a top-down and bottom-up process for achieving alignment.

The next component of organizational capital explicitly described by nearly all of the study participants was leadership. Not only did the participants describe leadership in the context of organizational capital, they broadened their descriptions to include the purpose of why their organization is engaging in leadership development: the role that leadership development plays in enabling an organization to achieve its strategic objectives and performance goals. Explicit descriptions of the organizational capital component of leadership included:

“We look at the implications of the business plan for the organization …and then, ultimately also in terms of …leadership development within the organization. Depending upon what the particular leadership competency is, it’s integral to our business strategy.” (Research Participant #2, 12/2015)

“Leadership really matters to us given the amount of change in the industry and the amount of growth going on for the business, so if we want better leadership, we’re going to have to really unlock leadership development.” (Research Participant #1, 12/2015)
“We’ve defined what it takes to be a leader of the future for our organization. There are four leadership competencies that we define to develop our leaders … based on the ever-changing industry that we’re working in. We were able to build a program to find competencies that would help determine what we need to do to thrive in this industry.” (Research Participant #8, 1/2016)

“The senior leadership sat down and were interviewed by outside resources to assess the competencies that we felt were required of leaders today. Those were synthesized and as a result of that we created a leadership development continuum … to ensure that those leadership competencies could be developed.” (Research Participant #7, 1/2016)

Again, the evidence from the Practitioners indicates the organizational capital component of leadership, along with the purpose of leadership development, were key elements in their organizations’ approaches to aligning leadership development and strategy management. Thus far, the evidence provided by the participants in this study appears to indicate that the organizational capital component of culture enables the attitudes and behaviors that enable the execution of the organization’s strategy. There was also evidence provided from the participants that the component of leadership, and the purpose of leadership development, were important to managing the change required of strategy-focused organizations. Alignment was the next organizational capital component described by the participants that was a mediating influence for successful approaches to aligning leadership development and strategy management.

In order to facilitate alignment, employees must be empowered in the same direction (Kaplan and Norton, 2006a). A majority of the study participants either implied or explicitly stated that alignment, described as setting the organization’s direction by empowering employees, emanated from senior leadership and included a strategy management framework:
“We actually just hired [a senior executive] responsible for making sure that [leadership development] aligns to our strategy.” (Research Participant #4, 1/2016)

“The chief executive, or whoever it is, has to remember that if you want people to behave in a certain way, so you create alignment.” (Research Participant #10, 1/2016)

“[The organization] needs and wants to align with the senior management on the intention and the plan. It’s very important to connect leadership development work and initiatives, into the cadence of the way the business strategy is set. Good leadership development …is part of good strategy management.” (Research Participant #1, 12/2015)

“That was almost an inherent part of the conversation from the very beginning, because the head of the organization was personally involved. His personal involvement in [leadership development] made sure our strategy and the development of the [leadership development] framework was very much driven to support the overarching strategy of the organization to succeed in the marketplace.” (Research Participant #3, 12/2015)

“From our perspective, everything begins with our business objectives and then we wholly focus our [leadership development] approach on meeting those objectives. Ultimately the accountability [of alignment] would sit with the CEO and we’re executing against those expectations. We approach leadership development [as] designed to address the ongoing needs of a new manager, somebody who’s in the process of transitioning from an individual contributor to a people leader for the first time. And then a more experienced manager, somebody who’s leading a global organization from a business or functional perspective, and then finally up through our strategy leader level, typically a director who is running a line of business and managing all aspects of that organization. It’s meant to be iterative for individuals acquiring and broadening their skill sets and levels of responsibility.” (Research Participant #5, 12/2015)

“The strategy that guides the organization can only be executed by competent leadership, so aligning that to ensure you have the competent leadership to be able to execute the strategy is paramount. The leadership development …helps empower those people and gives them the skills that they need to be able to move the strategy into action.” (Research Participant #7, 1/2016)

“Now we have leaders overseeing the entire system with different functions. We have discussions about what we might be doing [with leadership development] and how this might align [with strategy management]. (Research Participant #8, 1/2016)
“We should be developing our people to either execute the strategy that we have in place or to help us really scan the market and respond to develop new strategies. One person’s strategy is the other person’s tactic … but everyone has some rough alignment.” (Research Participant #9, 1/2016)

The final component of organizational capital described by the participants was teamwork. Again, teamwork was described as generating, organizing, developing, and sharing the knowledge relevant to immediate strategic needs (Kaplan & Norton, 2006a).

A majority of the participants stated implicitly that teamwork was evident in their approaches to aligning leadership development and strategy management:

“...The real issue is the partnership and where the partnership between the business and the [leadership] development team is a good, active partnership, then I think alignment occurs.” (Research Participant #10, 1/2016)

“A very senior partner … generated and pulled together a team. [It] was a very integrated and diverse team to make sure there was representation across and within the sub-units of the organization. So there was a rather global and integrated group of participants in developing the solution [to aligning leadership development and strategy management]. (Research Participant #3, 12/2015)

“We have a succession planning process that involves over 500 people in the organization so we can both identify competencies … but in addition to that, we identify leaders that we want to develop.” (Research Participant #7, 1/2016)

“Close to 25,000 folks have engaged in it, meaning they’ve been building their own leadership plan, applying it to the work for themselves and their teams, conducting meetings with their teams. This is a shared and clear blueprint for what we mean by leadership. Even more importantly, it’s our shared commitment.” (Research Participant #1, 12/2015)

“We have leaders overseeing the entire system with different functions … the key leaders of learning for our residency program, the key leader of learning for our clinically-based programs, the key leader of our Institute of Innovation. We have the capability to cascade goals and that starts with senior leadership. The cascading function allows us to further customize goals to and through each level to the front line of the organization. That can help with the alignment for leadership development.” (Research Participant #8, 1/2016)
“We actually completed an organizational health index survey. Our CEO and the next seven members of the Office of the Chief Executive identified what leadership expectations they would have for the next generation of leaders. The CEO sponsored the project, the Senior Vice President of HR became the Program Manager, and then the Talent Management Center executed the activity. We would have open dialogue through the process and essentially align as to the best path forward. We redesigned each of our leadership development programs tied to a business objective and those programs are fully aligned with the strategic outcomes expected. We’re cascading this across the organization.” (Research Participant #5, 12/2015)

Summary

The six research findings served to uncover a deeper understanding of how the study participants described organizations’ approaches to aligning leadership development and strategy management. From the analysis of those six findings came the implications for practitioners that an organizational capital approach helps to facilitate the alignment of leadership development and strategy management. Evidence of the four components of organizational capital was consistently apparent in the approaches explicitly and implicitly described by nearly every Practitioner and more than half of the Key Informants in this study. Regardless of the type or size of the organization included in the study, the evidence pointed to a successful approach for facilitating the alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy management as one which includes organizational culture, leadership, alignment, and teamwork.

This study also implies that any organization, whether it uses the Balanced Scorecard or any other strategy management framework, may benefit from an organizational capital approach for aligning leadership development and strategy management. This study is not meant to imply this approach is the holy grail of approaches for aligning leadership development and strategy management. “This holy
grail, when found, would identify a small set of attributes that successful leaders possess, articulate them in ways that could be transferred across all leaders, and create leadership development experiences to ensure that future leaders possess these attributes (Intagliata et al, 2000).” However, when it comes to facilitating the alignment of leadership development and strategy management, an organizational capital approach appears to be very effective based upon the evidence provided by the participants in this study. The evidence provided by the Key Informants and Practitioners in this study was only the starting point for an organizational capital approach. Further research on formal approaches to aligning leadership development and organizational strategy management is recommended.

**Recommendations for further research**

The organizational capital approach identified in this study is merely a starting point for Practitioners to consider in their approach to aligning leadership development and strategy management. The evidence from this study appears to indicate the commonality of organizational capital components within the approaches of companies of varying sizes and industries. Purposive sampling was used due to the validity of the vast depth and tremendous breadth of experience with leadership development and strategy management across the population of research participants in this study. However effective purposive sampling may be as a qualitative research study technique, the study still includes a relatively small sample size, given the potential population involved with aligning leadership development and strategy management. Therefore, I recommend the need for further research on this topic. Most of the research previously conducted in this field has focused on the theoretical and tends toward quantitative studies. Additional
qualitative research is needed from practitioners to learn more about their actual experiences.

Are there other common formal approaches to aligning leadership development and organizational strategy management? There is very little research on how leadership development can be effectively aligned with the strategic priorities of organizations, or what the value of that strategy alignment might be for organizations (DeRue and Myers, 2014). Why is it that organizations still continue to seek a “holy grail” of a few common leadership competencies rather than identifying those specific competencies needed by their organizations? Why do more organizations not seem to understand the value of seeing leadership development as a continuum rather than a series of singular events?

Why do companies that use the Balanced Scorecard strategy management framework still struggle with developing meaningful leadership development goals as part of their strategies? Why do most organizations still struggle with understanding the difference between the strategy planning process and strategy management? And even when organizations seem to understand the difference between the two processes, why do they still seem to struggle with an approach to align the processes of leadership development and strategy management?

This dissertation sought to add to the scholarly understanding of these issues and informed practitioners of an approach to facilitate the alignment of leadership development and organizational strategy management. The purpose of this study was to attempt to address some of these questions from a practitioner’s viewpoint. This study used a conceptual framework applied to a targeted population of leaders, learning leaders, and thought leaders, classified as Key Informants and Practitioners, to gain a better
understanding of their approaches to aligning leadership development and strategy management. By gaining a better understanding of the approaches taken by these Key Informants and Practitioners, this dissertation identified an organizational capital approach to aligning leadership development and strategy management and effectively addressed the main research question: How do learning and development leaders conceptualize and enact leadership development with respect to organizational strategy management? A formal approach using the Organizational Capital framework may be a recommended approach for practitioners to adopt within their organizations.
APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Researcher: Kelly E. Garrett, doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania

Principal Investigator: Robert Moore, Ph.D., Lecturer, the University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education

Name of the Organization: University of Pennsylvania

This electronic version serves as your copy of the informed consent form

Introduction

I am a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, Chief Learning Officer Program. I am also a full-time working professional in the areas of leader development and strategy management. I am inviting you to participate in the research that I am conducting by participating in an interview with me. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can feel comfortable speaking with anyone about this research.

Purpose of the research

This research will explore how learning and development professionals describe their expectations of leader development programs within their organizations and their efforts to align those programs with strategy management. This study seeks to answer three questions:
1) What are learning and development leaders’ stated approaches to leadership development efforts in organizations?

2) How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy management, and what do they identify as the mediating influences—supports, as well as, obstacles—on their efforts?

3) How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy management, and what specific steps do they plan to take in order to achieve better alignment?

**Type of research intervention**

The research will be conducted in a one hour interview with each participant. Ideally, the interviews will take place in person, but depending on the participants’ locations and timing of their schedules, may also be completed by telephone or videoconferencing.

**Participant selection**

Participants in this study are senior leaders of organizations—generally, within one to two levels of the C-suite, and are chief learning officers, learning and development executives, directors of strategy, and past participants in the organizations’ leader development programs. After discussion with my contact at your organization, it was determined that your experience and role within the organization would fit the profile of the participants I am seeking for my research.

**Voluntary participation**
While I am hopeful that you are willing to participate in this study, your participation is voluntary.

**Procedures**

I will be contacting you to schedule a date and time for a one hour interview. The date and time will be convenient for you, and I will make arrangements to either travel to your location or arrange an alternate method of conducting our meeting (i.e. telephone, skype, or videoconference). I will be the only person present with you during our interview. If you do not feel like answering any of the questions or wish to stop the interview at any time, you may simply say so.

In order for me to focus on our interview, and to ensure I am accurately capturing all of your stated information, I will be recording our interview with a digital audio recorder that will be transcribed by a third party upon completion. I will be the only person listening to the recording. The digital recording will be stored on my personal computer in a secure file until I have transcribed the information. Upon transcription, the file will be deleted. The transcribed file will be used for my data analysis and will be secured in a locked file cabinet when not in use. Your identifiable information, such as your name or your organization, will not be disclosed in this research. Your interview will not be discussed with nor disclosed to your employer.

**Risks**

There are no identified risks to participants with this research study.

**Benefits**
Better understanding of the issues encountered at organizations that have made significant investments in leader development, the challenges of facilitating the alignment of leader development with strategy, and the challenges associated with developing a framework for evaluating strategy management is an important contribution to scholarly research, as it largely remains unexplored quantitatively. Additionally, this information may serve to better inform practitioners about a potential strategy management framework to better align leader development programs with strategy that achieves better outcomes. Your participation in this research study will help, as it will begin to help understand your views and experiences.

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality**

This study is being conducted across multiple organizations, in a variety of industries, with approximately 10-20 senior leaders. It seeks to identify trends, themes, and unique experiences through qualitative research findings. Your identifiable information, such as your name, job title, or organization, will not be used. It is possible that a statement made by you to support a theme may be used, but your identifiable information will not be associated with any such statements. I will not share any of your information with your company or anyone else.

**Sharing the results**

The findings of this research will support my doctoral dissertation. It will be a public document held by the University of Pennsylvania. While there are no current plans for
publication, the findings may be shared more broadly through future publications and/or at conferences to help contribute to the knowledge gained in this important subject area.

**Right to refuse or withdraw**

This is reconfirmation that participation is voluntary and includes the right to withdraw.

**Who to contact**

If you would like to contact the Chairperson of my dissertation committee, listed here as the Principal Investigator, you may contact Dr. Robert Moore by telephone at 215-898-1920 or via email at moorerob@gse.upenn.edu.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board, a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm.
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Aligning Leadership Development with Organizational Strategy Management

Prior to signing this Informed Consent Form, I received a thorough explanation of the research process, purpose, benefits, and potential risks associated with this study by Mr. Kelly E. Garrett, a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. I am aware that I may withdraw from this study at any time without consequences. I understand that I can omit responses to any questions or request that any portion of the interview may not be used in the study.

All information shared in this research will be kept confidential. The data will be coded such that neither my name nor any personally identifying information will be disclosed or published without my express permission. I understand that only the Principal Investigator, Mr. Garrett, and confidential transcribers will have access to the interview data, which will be securely maintained.

If at any time I have comments or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research participant, I may contact Mr. Garrett by telephone at 717-873-9490 or email at kegarrett@comcast.net; or I may contact Dr. Robert Moore, the Principal Investigator and dissertation chair, telephone at 215-898-1920 or email at moorerob@gse.upenn.edu.

I have read the consent form and the study has been explained to me. My signature indicates I agree to be included in the research study described above.
Dear,

I am a student at the University of Pennsylvania working on a doctorate in Education. I am conducting a research study entitled: Aligning Leader Development with Strategy and Evaluating Organizational Strategy Management. The qualitative research in this study seeks to identify the how individuals describe the outcomes of leader development programs, how they conceptualize their roles in helping their organizations align leader development and strategy, and how they experience the influences that enable or prevent such an alignment.

Your participation will involve a semi-standardized interview that will take approximately one hour. The interview will be audio recorded for accuracy. A short follow-up interview or phone call may be necessary for clarification of your comments. Your participation will be kept confidential, your name will not appear on any document related to the study, and your participation will remain anonymous in perpetuity.

Your participation in the study is voluntary. Should you choose to withdraw from participation at any time, you may do so without demur. The results of the study will be published as a dissertation, but your name will not be associated with any results. This research does not pose any foreseeable risk to any of the participants in the study. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation may help to provide organizations nationwide the opportunity to assess a framework to
align leader development with strategy and evaluate strategy management. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me.

Sincerely,

Kelly E. Garrett
APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured Interview Guide

General Interview Questions

1. Where do organizations get the goals and expectations of leadership development?
   a. Who was involved in those discussions? What issues were raised?
   b. Were the programs developed in-house or did they adopt an off-the-shelf framework?
   c. In either case, who was involved and how were decisions made?

2. How do organizations develop the expectations and goals of leadership development?
   a. What are the stated expectations and goals of leadership development programs?
   b. Where did those expectations and goals develop?

3. How did those expectations and goals develop?
   a. In what specific respects have the leadership development programs met expectations?
   b. In what specific respects has it not met the stated expectations?

4. How important is it to align the leadership development program with the overall strategy of the organization?
   a. In what way is this important?

5. If aligning leadership development and strategy is important in organizations, what specific efforts have organizations you’ve observed undertaken to achieve this alignment?

6. What mechanism or approach do organizations use to facilitate the alignment?
   a. Who is responsible for that alignment?
   b. What did they actually do to align leadership development with strategy?
   c. How did they measure alignment?
   d. What did they struggle with?
APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

Introduction

1. The researcher introduces himself.
2. The researcher thanks the participant.
3. The researcher explains the purpose of the study.
4. The researcher explains the interview process.
5. The researcher reassures the participant on the confidentiality of the study.
6. The researcher asks for permission to audio record the interview.
7. The researcher turns on the digital audio recorder.

Opening the Interview

8. The researcher reminds the participant the study is voluntary and his/her withdrawal is permitted without any consequences.
9. The researcher asks the participant about any questions or concerns before opening the interview.
10. The researcher proceeds with the interview opening.

The Interview Process: Asking the research questions

11. The researcher asks the participant the primary research questions along with follow-up questions.

Primary research question 1: What are learning and development leaders’ stated approaches to leadership development efforts in organizations?
12. The researcher thanks the participant for answering question one and moves on to question two.

Primary research question 2: How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy management, and what do they identify as the mediating influences—supports, as well as, obstacles—on their efforts?
13. The researcher thanks the participant for answering question two and moves on to question three.
Primary research question 3: How do learning and development leaders describe their efforts to align leadership development with strategy management, and what specific steps do they plan to take in order to achieve better alignment?

14. The researcher thanks the participant for answering question three.

Opportunity for additional participant thoughts and questions

15. The researcher provides the participant the opportunity to provide any further responses.

16. The researcher asks the participant about any further questions or concerns.

Concluding the interview

17. The researcher asks the participant for permission to contact them with any follow-up questions for the sake of clarification.

18. The researcher reassures the participant about the confidentiality of the study.

19. The researcher offers to share the results of the study with the participant.

20. The researcher thanks the participant and concludes the interview.
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