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Overcoming Failure: Characteristics of Leaders Who Have Successfully Recovered from a Significant Setback

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OVERCOMING FAILURE: CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERS WHO HAVE SUCCESSFULLY RECOVERED FROM A SIGNIFICANT SETBACK

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By
Richard Leo Hunt

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OVERCOMING FAILURE: CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERS WHO HAVE SUCCESSFULLY RECOVERED FROM A SIGNIFICANT SETBACK

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The purpose of this research was to study the characteristics of leaders who have experienced a setback or failure and have bounced back to success. A qualitative research design employing an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology was used. Semi-structured interviews with open ended questions allowed the respondents to share valuable insights into the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of their individual experiences. The results suggest that after experiencing a setback, a process develops where feelings and thoughts are experienced immediately following the event that is followed by a period of coping and adapting, a transition to a resilient state, and behavioral changes that lead to bouncing back.
CHAPTER I: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Failure, the quintessential word that simultaneously conjures up images of hopelessness and perseverance, ironically encompasses the possible consequences that can simultaneously exist when a risk is taken or not taken. Failure can beget more failure and lead to a series of disappointing outcomes or imbue profound growth in character and wisdom that serve as the preconditions to success that would have otherwise not been achieved. Experiencing a failure can stymie the greatest of effort or spring forth the will to persevere through a multitude of subsequent setbacks. There is a hypocritical undertone when speaking of failure: it is inevitable and experiencing it can lead to deep learning if reflected on properly, but avoid it all costs because there is an overwhelming expectation of negative consequences. Edmondson (2011) affirms the consequential facet of failure in stating that “failure and fault are virtually inseparable in most households, organizations, and cultures. Every child learns at some point that admitting failure means taking the blame” (p. 50). The idea of fault summons feelings of potential punishment. There is a fear of failure that drives a deeply rooted motivation to evade it, feel high levels of anxiety from it, and take a stance of prevarication when questioned about it.

Bennis, Sample, and Asghar (2015) inform the reader on the etymology of the word fail. They explain that fail is derived from the French word faillir, which means “to almost do” and faillir is derived in turn from the Latin word fallere, which means to deceive or “lead into error” (p. 8). These definitions imply that when people fail, they do not follow through with their intentions, and those who believed that they would were in some way deceived. Therefore, even though the idea of embracing and learning from
failure is pervasive in current literature, there can be a sense of shame felt by people who experience a failure, and this emotional response can cause them to suppress their feelings, deflect the responsibility of the failure, neglect to learn from the valuable lessons, and thwart the possibility for future success. But what, then, about leaders who do bounce back from a failure? How do they overcome the potential pitfall that failure offers? As Winston Churchill so eloquently said, “Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts” (cited in Walter, 2013, para. 3).

**Leadership Failure**

Bennis et al. (2015) assert that, “Failure is inevitable along the leader’s journey” (p. 9). Leaders are in a position where decision making is a necessary component to their role and these decisions have some level of risk; therefore, leaders are more likely to experience failure than others. Failure, to some degree, is unavoidable for anyone in a leadership position. This beseeches an analysis of causality and strikes a chord of curiosity to understand the causes of failure so that the risk can be detected early and create a process to prevent failure. However, this pushes against the philosophical underpinning that supports the necessity for failure to provide valuable learning. This tension can potentially favor an apathetic acceptance of failure, which can inhibit the effort necessary to learn from it. Much of the learning relates to the cause of the failure so that a process can be put in place for an individual not to repeat the same or similar failure in a given situation.

At first glance, the lessons from failure appear to be highly individualized and situational. Yet established leaders have proven themselves to have basic skill sets. Understanding the extent to which these may be related to prior failure could increase the
likelihood that some generalized explanations of failure have been identified. Thus, taking time to understand the causes of failure can be advantageous for leaders. The learning that is afforded from failure is indispensable when it leads to positive action. “Although heavy focus on one’s failure is dispiriting, it can have beneficial effects if it identifies possible causes and suggests corrective changes” (Bandura, 1991, p. 253). Common causes identified in the literature are cognitive biases, poor emotional intelligence, and ethical issues.

**Cognitive Biases**

What if a leader fails despite good intentions? A failure can result from errors in judgment and decision making. These errors are sometimes rooted in systematic ways of thinking that vary from logical and rational thought processes. Such systematic deviations in thought are referred to as cognitive biases: “narrow thinking about the future, about objectives, and about options” (Soll, Milkman, & Payne, 2015, p. 69). The authors further state that these biases can unknowingly lead to a tendency in favor or against something or someone and can “be motivated when driven by an intense psychological need, such as a strong emotional attachment or investment” (p. 69). The implication is that leaders are generally unaware of their cognitive biases and have good intentions. Leaders can experience failure due to poor decision making that is ultimately rooted in one or more cognitive biases and their motivation is not questioned from an ethical or moral point of view. A list of common cognitive biases that can affect leaders’ decision making follows:

1. Confirmation bias: A tendency to gravitate toward information that confirms what people already believe and downplay information that disconfirms their beliefs.
2. Fundamental attribution errors: People tend to attribute success to their own skills and insights while downplaying luck and external factors.

3. Normalization of deviance: This is the tendency over time to accept anomalies—particularly risky ones—as normal and downgrade the importance of near misses.

4. Outcome bias: Successful outcomes can cause too much focus on the results instead of the complex processes that created them.

5. Overconfidence bias: Successes can cause people to believe that they are better decision makers than they actually are. (Gino & Pisano, 2011; Soll et al., 2015; Tinsley, Dillon, & Madsen, 2011)

Leaders can be unaware of their cognitive biases and their inability to think rationally and clearly as result of the biases. Before decisions are made, positive and negative outcomes should be considered and risk assessed. Assessing risk includes considering the probability of the outcome and consequences of the outcome—both positive and negative. An honest assessment of both possible outcomes should be considered: the reward of a good outcome and severity of a bad outcome (Tinsley et al., 2011). In other words, what are the consequences and what are the positive and negative effects of the possible consequences?

As an example, if the gas light comes on indicating a low fuel level while traveling to a destination by car, it may depend on the situation as to whether or not a person stops for fuel. Certain questions may be considered in the person’s mind before a decision is made. Is the amount of fuel left in the tank known or estimated? How much further is it to the destination? What is the estimated distance that could be traveled based
on the known or estimated fuel left in the tank? This first set of questions is an attempt to assess the risk of running out of fuel before reaching the destination. If the risk is high, more questions will be asked. If a stop for fuel is made, is it likely that the arrival time will be after the scheduled appointment? What are the consequences of being late? If the negative consequences of being late are high, then the person may downplay or ignore questions about the consequences of running out of fuel (e.g., Soll et al., 2015)

There is an interplay between a person’s thoughts and emotions that can lead to a bias and result in a poor decision. Additionally, the absence of all relevant data and information needed for systematic decision making can lead to a certain type of bias called a heuristic, especially under pressure and time constraints. Eberlin and Tatum (2005) state that decision heuristics are (a) subject to errors and biases, (b) highly useful in making decisions, and (c) vulnerable to systematic and predictable errors (p. 1043).

Although errors in judgement and decisions that result from cognitive biases are predictable, they are not apparent to the decision maker due to aforementioned factors such as time constraints and pressures. Cognitive biases are not the only human element where leaders mean well, but do represent an important class of faulty decisions that can lead to failure.

Low Emotional Intelligence

Leaders can also experience failures where their behavior is rooted in emotional and behavioral issues. When leaders have poor Emotional Intelligence (EI), working relationships may suffer. EI encompasses the following five skills: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-regulation, (c) motivation, (d) empathy, and (e) social awareness (Goleman, 2015). Bradberry and Greaves (2009) simplify the categories of EI with (a) personal competence
consisting of self-awareness and self-management skills and (b) social competence that includes social awareness and relationship-management skills.

People with a high degree of self-awareness can accurately detect emotions, understand how those emotions manifest, and how their emotions affect themselves and others (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Goleman, 2015). Being self-aware includes knowing one’s own strengths, weaknesses, motivations, goals, and values. Leaders who lack in self-awareness are generally unaware of their strengths and weaknesses and may accept challenges that require impressive skills in areas where they are weak, ultimately failing to meet organizational objectives. Low self-awareness leads to inaccurate self-assessments, being resistant or be unaccepting of feedback, having low self-confidence, and not asking for help when needed at critical times (Goleman, 2015). Bradberry and Greaves (2009) advise that, “Self-awareness is so important for job performance that 83 percent of people high in self-awareness are top performers, and just 2 percent of bottom performers are high in self-awareness” (p.26). In non-leadership roles and in forgiving environments, low self-awareness can be relatively inconspicuous and possibly interpreted as a characteristic of one’s personality. However, an effect of low self-awareness is poor self-management and this can be detrimental in a leadership capacity.

Self-management is a natural extension of self-awareness and entails conscientious choices about actions and behavior (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Being unaware of one’s own weaknesses, emotions, moods, motivations, and impulses makes it practically impossible to manage them. Goleman (2015) declares that self-regulation “frees us from being prisoners of our feelings” (p. 12). It is about controlling our impulses, emotional reactions, judgments, verbal responses, and exercising restraint when
the situation calls for it. Leaders who lack self-management in these areas create an environment of distrust and unfairness (Goleman, 2015). Outbursts of anger and mood swings affect the leader’s ability to think clearly and influence employees. Low impulse control often leads to poor decisions. Goleman draws a connection between impulse control and leadership derailment by stating:

Many of the bad things that happen in companies are a function of impulsive behavior. People rarely plan to exaggerate profits, pad expense accounts, dip into the till, or abuse power for selfish ends. Instead, an opportunity presents itself, and people with low impulse control just say yes. (p. 13)

The inability to handle change and uncertainty in the work environment is another effect of a deficiency in self-management. Rapid change in the absence of self-control can cause a negative emotional reaction resulting in panic, poor communication, and a lack of rational thinking. Rigidity, which is the inability or unwillingness to adapt to change or something new, is a characteristic of leadership identified with failure (Burke, 2006; Chaffee & Arthur, 2002). Without sufficient self-management, there is an inability to use an awareness of emotions to stay flexible and direct behavior positively (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). The absence of personal competence in the areas of self-awareness and self-management materializes as the inability to lead one’s self properly, the generation of poor decisions, and the creation of a negative environment, e.g., the combination of other people and situations that are chaotic, uncontrolled, lacking in moral underpinnings, and driven by crowd mentality.

Social competence includes social awareness and relationship management. Social awareness refers to individuals recognizing others’ emotions and behavior while
attempting to understand their situation; it is an outward focus using observation skills instead of focusing inward. For leaders, it is about having empathy toward others and “thoughtfully considering employees’ feelings—along with other factors—in the process of making intelligent decisions” (Goleman, 2015, p. 16). However, leaders should not fear making tough decisions and providing negative feedback when needed. Performance feedback, even when negative, is important for employees so they can be fully aware of such things as goal progression and if course changes are required. A leader can have high expectations of others and hold them accountable when necessary while continuing to exercise empathy.

An essential communication skill that should be practiced and continuously improved is listening. When leaders lack good listening skills, it is a characteristic of poor social awareness. Leaders who are preoccupied with their own thoughts, electronic devices, or anything other than the people upon whom they should be focused and listening during a conversation, subconsciously communicate that others are not important enough to warrant their attention (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Goleman, 2015). This negatively affects the relationships that leaders have with others in the organization and can lead to employee resentment, poor teamwork, missed deadlines, poor performance, and leadership derailment.

Relationship management is the culmination of the other EI skills. Leaders who understand and manage their own emotions, have an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, control their impulses, exercise empathy, and listen well to others tend to have better working relationships (Goleman, 2015). However, the inverse is also true: a deficiency in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, and social skills can result in
poor working relationships between leaders and their employees. Leaders with these EI deficits are less adept at leading teams and have less influence over others which can result in poor organizational performance. Leaders who lack in personal and social competence are at risk for experiencing leadership failure.

**Ethical Matters**

Leaders should conduct themselves in an ethical manner. However, there can be confusion as to what constitutes ethical behavior. Howard and Kover (2008) posit that a person’s actions and how their actions affect others is the measure of ethical behavior. They also state the following: “Ethical refers to behavior considered right or wrong according to our beliefs—no matter the culture or society” (p. 8). The implication is that individuals can construct their own ethical code based on their beliefs and there will be differences in what constitutes ethical behavior. Kanungo (2001) cites Thomas Aquinas’ criteria to judge ethical behavior as the motive for the behavior, the behavior, and the social context within which the behavior occurred.

Leaders should act authentically and in an ethical manner with regard to honesty and integrity. A leader’s behavior could be action based or consequence based. “Depending on which school of thought we adhere to, we may answer differently to whether an action is ethical or not” (Howard & Kover, 2008, p. 40). A Kantian perspective is one of right action that does not depend on the consequences. The action should be considered universal and unconditional. In other words, it is acceptable for everyone to do it regardless of the conditions. A person must be treated as the end and not the means to an end. Stated differently, using persons and performing unethical acts against them just because it might help others is not acceptable. Intention is an important
factor from a Kantian perspective. If a person does a "good" deed, but it is for selfish reasons, this would not be considered right action. Utilitarian principles state that the end justifies the means. However, the end result should not be for self-serving purposes, but should be the greatest possible good for the most number of people. The greatest good must be of a high standard (Howard & Kover, 2008). Regardless of the ethical school of thought to which one chooses to adhere, a leader’s behavior should be called into question any time deceit, abuse, etc., are used to influence another’s behavior for self-serving purposes. If an action degrades the relationship with others, then it must be questioned within an ethical framework. An ethical transgression can result in leadership failure.

For leaders to be truly effective, they should not cut ethical corners. “One compromise can lead to another as we let our standards slip” (Howard & Kover, 2008, p. 12). Research cited by Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011) suggests that when we accept minor ethical infractions, we will continue to accept increasingly major infractions as long as they are only slightly more serious than the preceding one. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel provide an example where this was true for an experiment regarding auditors who were twice as likely to allow suspiciously high estimates of a jar’s contents when the numbers rose incrementally as opposed to abruptly. Leaders must be diligent not to allow themselves to step on this slippery slope and be very aware if they do so as to get off it quickly. Leaders are allowed to make mistakes, but when it comes to ethical issues, they are highly visible. “An ethical leader is a role model, visibly setting the standard, communicating openly to others, and creating and strengthening a culture of ethical behavior” (King & Rothstein, 2010, p. 236).
When leaders are dishonest, they lose credibility, squander the faith of followers, and their hard earned respect vanishes. While organizational constraints may exist that deter complete transparency of all matters, leaders must be open and candid. Honest leadership involves a wide set of behaviors. However, acting in an unethical manner through dishonesty degrades relationships by causing a lack of trust. Leaders are viewed as unreliable and lose the impact needed to influence others and lead an organization. For a leader, when a major ethical offense has occurred as a result of the slippery slope or one of dishonesty, failure is predictably imminent.

The Problem Defined

Current literature examines causes for leadership failure from several perspectives, but are varied and draw little connection to subsequent actions. A review of the literature shows there is limited empirical research that attempts to understand the causes of leadership failure within the context of resilience. Addressing deficits in the research from the perspective of common themes for the causes of failure can be fruitful for improving an understanding of how leaders can eventually recover from their failures.

Post-Failure Experience

What happens to leaders’ cognitive and emotional states after experiencing a failure? How does failure affect their attitude and behavior? What is the Post-Failure Experience (PFE) or the immediate after-effects of failure for a leader? Failure can summon extreme negative emotions such as deep sadness, dejection, and grief. Leaders may be extremely disappointed, lose self-esteem, become depressed, feel a sense of shame, or become disillusioned after failure. For some, failure and the resulting bitter disillusionment “affects leaders’ fundamental sense of themselves or their assumptions
about the world” (King & Rothstein, 2010, p. 363). Failure can lead to a loss of identity and self-confidence. It can result in anger, bitterness, and resentment.

There is evidence that failure impacts the affective and cognitive domains of anyone that experiences a major setback. In the context of Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura (1989) states that “ordinary social realities are strewn with difficulties. They are full of impediments, failures, adversities, setbacks, frustrations, and inequities….Self-doubts can set in quickly after some failures or reverses” (p. 1176). A search of the literature reveals little research that has been conducted on the PFE of those in a leadership capacity. To the extent that this issue has been addressed, it is typically mentioned in research on resilience.

**Resilience**

Regarding self-regulation, Bandura (1991) proposes that through systematic self-observation, a self-diagnostic function can arise where an understanding of how thoughts affect emotional states and motivation can be gained. Specifically, Bandura states “When people observe their thought patterns, emotional reactions, and behavior and the conditions under which reactions occur, they begin to notice recurrent patterns….The self-insights gained can set in motion a process of corrective change” (p. 250). This process of corrective change is critical if failed leaders are to overcome a negatively oriented mindset established during the period immediately following their failure. Self-regulatory systems are foundational for decisiveness and determination (Bandura, 1991).

Resilience is characterized by what follows the PFE. For leaders who have suffered a failure or significant setback and have undergone some marked period of a PFE, but then find a way to regain their affective and cognitive states to at least the same
level as before the initial experience, those individuals have experienced resilience. Leaders may develop self-defeating attitudes after experiencing failure. They must employ an act of will or volition to overcome these prevailing attitudes. Keller (2008) defines volition as “the act of using the will…which refers to a process for converting intentions into actions” (p. 84). Kuhl (1994) states that volition relates to four functions: (a) planning, (b) initiation of new behaviors, (c) impulse control, and (d) disengagement from intentions that are completed or cannot be acted upon (p. 316). Zhu (2004) contends that “Volitions are construed as special kinds of mental action by which an agent actively and mindfully bridge the gaps between deliberation, decision, and action” (p. 177). Volition is a cognitive engagement leading to intention formation, planning, and preparation for action.

King and Rothstein (2010) refer to resilience as a process over time involving learning and self-development after an adversity. The authors state that “Resilience is about how a person weather a storm and the learning that results, how he or she deals with a major loss, and the processes that lead to personal choices, career recovery, and personal growth and integrity” (p. 365, emphasis in original). King and Rothstein share their process model in terms of three domains: (a) affective which is the emotional self-regulation that provides a sense of well-being, (b) cognitive which contains beliefs, worldviews, and expectations that lead to coherence, and (c) behavioral which includes problem solving and goal setting (p. 375). The reactive and self-regulatory factors in each domain signify characteristic changes in feelings, thoughts, and actions that when implemented successfully, lead to positive outcomes of resiliency.
How easy is it for a leader to gather the evidence of a situation objectively and balance the needed optimism with the right dose of realistic pessimism after experiencing a failure? Is there a transformation in the affective and cognitive domains that lead to behavioral changes? There is extensive research on resilience, but most of it is outside the managerial field and very few articles explicitly deal with resilience in the workplace (King & Rothstein, 2010); accordingly, more research is needed in how resiliency relates to leadership and success after instances of failure.

**Bouncing Back**

When leaders who have experienced failure bounce back, they have undergone behavioral changes and have taken action to re-engage themselves in a way to once again achieve success. At this point of the process, the interplay between affective (regulation of emotion) and cognitive (belief in capabilities or self-efficacy) factors have led them to overcome potential self-limiting appraisals and have a sense of empowerment and control to overcome their failure. Bandura (1989) emphasizes that “people can effect change in themselves and their situations through their own efforts” (p. 1175). Bandura explains that people’s beliefs about their capabilities, or self-efficacy, is central to exercising control over a situation and function as important determinants of cognitive, affective, and conative factors.

Huitt and Cain (2005) affirm that conation is “the mental process that activates and/or directs behavior or action” (p. 1). Gerdes and Stromwall (2008) posit that “Conation is action derived from instinct, purposeful mode of striving, volition. It is a conscious effort to carry out self-determined acts” (p. 1). (While conation and volition are related, within the context of this research, volition is about the human will, intention,
preparation for action, and is an element of conation.) Self-efficacy affects people’s beliefs about their abilities, how much effort they will exert toward goal attainment, and the amount of stress, anxiety, or depression they will experience when taking action to pursue anticipatory, i.e., goal oriented outcomes.

An agentic approach, where people exercise control over themselves and their actions to create change in their circumstances, has the following features: (a) intentionality, a commitment to bringing about a future course of action; (b) forethought, which provides direction, guidance, and meaning to the anticipation and expectation of a future event; (c) self-reactiveness, where ongoing performance is compared to goals resulting in self-regulation and motivation, and (d) self-reflectiveness, a meta-cognitive activity verifying the soundness of one’s thinking (Bandura, 2001).

From this, bouncing back can be defined as that which occurs after a decision has been made on a course of action to achieve a goal and planning for the goal attainment which involves conducting self-evaluation while engaged in the necessary actions to remain adaptive and perform self-reflection to evaluate one’s performance. King and Rothstein (2010) propose that perseverance, determination, and self-efficacy are important characteristics in the behavioral domain of resilience. If leaders are truly going to overcome their setback, bounce back, and achieve their new goal, then there will most likely be a heightened sense of self-evaluation and self-reflectiveness during this action oriented phase. Bandura (1989) puts it succinctly: “After people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks” (p. 1179).
Based on the literature review, there is an implication that bouncing back is a distinctive phase from resiliency in leaders’ response to failure. Resilience is predominantly a cognitive and emotional state of positivity and optimism that is an effect after a transition from the PFE. Bouncing back is a conative and behavioral state that results from the thoughts and feelings that increase motivation to take action and gain a sense of agency. Stated differently, it is about self-control, i.e., directing behaviors and actions, to initiate and bring about positive personal change.

**Current State of Resilience Research**

An examination of research literature on resilience has revealed two main areas of focus: (a) children in poverty stricken and problematic environments, e.g., mentally ill parents, and (b) adults experiencing traumatic and life altering events, e.g., military personnel suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Substantial research has been conducted on children and resilience related to the following: poverty (Garmezy, 1991), parenting quality and intellectual functioning (Masten et al., 1999), cultural differences in response to disaster (Grotberg, 2001), genetic and environmental interactions (Rutter, 2012), effects of IQ (Masten & Coastworth, 1998), and protective factors in youth (e.g., Werner, 1995), just to name a few. Rutter (1987) describes protective factors as “mechanisms that protect people against the psychological risks associated with adversity” (p. 316). Examples of protective factors are high self-esteem, family cohesion, and social support (Rutter, 1987). Additionally, numerous articles are focused on resilience in adults that have experienced traumatic events (Bonanno, 2004; Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli, & Vlahov, 2007) and military personnel regarding PTSD (Pietrzak et al., 2010; Seligman, 2011; Seligman, 2012).
There are few research studies related to resiliency and business leadership; however, some research has been conducted regarding resilience training for leaders within organizations as a component of psychological capital (e.g., Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). Thus, a review of the literature reveals that current research on failure and resilience is limited. No empirical research was found linking the conative, behavioral, and agentic factors of bouncing back to leadership resilience. Therefore, research is needed that explores these issues and the mechanisms behind bouncing back from an in-depth perspective and with a broader, more interpretive (sociological) cast.

**Purpose**

This study brings together explicitly the issues just enumerated in *The Problem Defined* above. Leaders who have experienced a failure or significant setback are highly susceptible to suffering negative consequences within the affective and cognitive domains (e.g., depression and self-doubt) and this discriminative distinction (while recognized in the literature) is mainly underrepresented as a separate phase during the entire process of overcoming failure. Through self-observation and self-diagnosis, a transformative sense of volition can arise within failed leaders that paves the way to a degree of balanced optimism and coherence needed to set goals, plan for success, and fully embody the nature of resiliency. Self-efficacy beliefs regarding their ability to achieve success instill a sense of agency and conation within failed leaders that motivates the necessary behavioral changes in order to bounce back and return to success. The current state of resilience research is weighted heavily with articles focusing on children who have overcome extremely adverse conditions and adults who have experienced
traumatic events, but research is sparse on the topic of failed business leaders exhibiting resilience and overcoming failure.

Thus, this study investigates leadership failure, its causes, immediate effects, resilience, and the act of returning to success. Results from this study could help gain a better understanding of the linkage between these steps and could positively affect leaders who suffer similar setbacks or leadership training focusing on these characteristics. The research design is qualitative, employing interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology utilizing semi-structured interviews. The population of this study is leaders within the United States who have experienced a failure or significant setback and then rebounded to a position of equal or higher status. Sampling was purposive, beginning with one of convenience and will subsequently take advantage of snowball and opportunistic leads (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The sample size was 10 and was dependent up on the availability of the target population. Interviews were guided, topical in nature, and allow the phenomena to unfold from each participant’s (emic) perspective (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 144). Interviews were recorded and transcribed using computer software. The analysis process began with open coding where conceptual categories are created followed by axial coding where “the codes are clustered around points of intersection, or axes” (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 215). Accordingly, the Central Research Question is: What are the perceptions of business leaders who have overcome a failure or significant setback regarding resilience and rebounding to subsequent success?
Research Questions

Leaders who have experienced a failure and overcame their setback have gone through a process that includes (a) undergoing some degree of post-failure experience, (b) resiliency or transforming themselves to prepare for success, and (c) acting in some way to bounce back and realize success again. This process would be determined by and interacting with changes in the affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains. The following questions are framed within the context of the aforementioned process:

1. How do leaders perceive the determining factors of their failure?
2. What are the feelings and thoughts of leaders who have experienced failure?
3. How does resilience manifest as an adaptation or coping mechanism in leaders who have experienced a failure?
4. What is the process of bouncing back from a failure to achieve success again?
5. What do leaders learn about themselves during the process of failing and bouncing back?

This study attempted to uncover leaders’ understanding of why they failed, their experience after failure, how resilience took hold, and how they took action. The literature is replete with leadership failure and causes. Only the most common themes that appeared to be connected to the majority of explanations that are applicable to the scope of this study are included. King and Rothstein (2010) propose a model of resilience involving the affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains. For the current research, the author uses the King and Rothstein model as a guide to propose the process of the leader’s experience immediately after failure, the adaptive process of resilience, and the bouncing back and engagement necessary to once again achieve success.
Significance of the Study

The current study investigates leadership failure, failed leaders’ PFE, resilience, and bouncing back as a process of overcoming their setbacks. Although research is acknowledged in the areas of failure and resilience, the absence of empirical evidence regarding these phenomena makes this research significant. Generally, some research on leadership failure exists with contributing factors identified in the literature. However, the literature discovered on leaders’ PFE and bouncing back is typically subsumed in the research on resilience. In the current study, these topics are examined for their separate dynamics as well as their overall effects.

First, the current study affords the opportunity to investigate causes of leadership failure and leaders’ PFE from their perspective. The PFE is of interest because there are affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences after a failure has been experienced and it is necessary to understand these effects to identify the volition necessary to transition to a state of resilience, specifically from the perspective of business leaders.

Second, while resiliency has been studied to a substantial degree regarding children and military personnel, there is limited research on business leaders and how they change their mindset from within a PFE through a sense of volition, coherence, and balanced optimism to a state of resilience. This study further analyzes resiliency from the viewpoint of business leaders.

Third, bouncing back from failure is proposed as a distinctive step from resiliency. This study examines the conative aspects of bouncing back to success and the affective, cognitive, and behavioral evolution of the failed leader to an agent of change.
Fourth, current research on resilience is primarily focused on children who have overcome unfavorable developmental conditions and adults who have suffered through trauma with very little research on the specific topic of failed business leaders who have bounced back and overcame failure.

Fifth, a qualitative design with an IPA methodology was used for this research. To the author’s knowledge, the current study is the only qualitative research utilizing IPA focusing on business leadership, failure, and a process viewpoint outlining the PFE, resilience, and bouncing back to success.

**Limitations**

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of business leaders on why they failed, what they experienced after the failure, how they transitioned to resilience, and their process of bouncing back. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data that represent a detailed account of each participant’s experience. However, several limitations to the research follow.

First, the fact that the researcher is a business owner and has experienced setbacks is a bias. While IPA acknowledges the researcher’s viewpoint as a fundamental aspect of the interpretation of the data, the researcher must control voice and any inclination to inject personal feelings into the participants’ recount of their individual experiences.

Second, there is a concern that participants did not fully disclose all the details of their experiences due to possible extenuating circumstances surrounding their failure and subsequent actions, embarrassment, or other feelings of self-consciousness that could impede full disclosure of relevant information.
Third, this study was limited to business leaders within a specified geographical area. While it is recommended that a fairly homogenous group be selected for an IPA study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2007), caution regarding transferability and generalizability is warranted.

Fourth, a limitation exists within the qualitative design of this study. Since the author provides interpretation of the results, the findings are subject to interpretation by other researchers.

**Summary**

It is certain that leaders will make decisions regarding important aspects of business and just as certain is the fact that they will lack all the data and information necessary to make a risk-free decision with a guarantee of success in every instance. Mistakes will be made, setbacks will be incurred, and failure will be known to even the most well-intentioned leaders. The cause of a failure is of great importance: understanding the factors that led to a failure offers an opportunity for learning. But, the learning is not enough. How do some leaders endure and prevail in the wake of failure?

Leaders who have experienced a failure may undergo a period of disappointment, depression, and grief. Leaders may question their identity, lose self-esteem, and become disillusioned after failure. Their feelings and thoughts about themselves and what they thought they knew can spiral downward to the point of apathy and listlessness. How do they overcome this period of dejection and discouragement?

Through the process of self-observation, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can be monitored and assessed in how they affect motivation. With a sense of volition, leaders
can transition to a state of resilience. Resilience is about adapting to the failure and gaining emotional stability, balanced optimism, and coherence through self-regulation which leads to behaviors involving goal setting and planning for success.

Bouncing back requires an inclination to act purposively and managing energy toward goal achievement. This conative faculty along with self-efficacy can lead to a sense of value, positive expectations, and determination. As motivation increases to the point of action and engagement in goal directed behaviors, a sense of agency is dominant where leaders feel in control of their own destiny. The central research question for this qualitative study utilizing an interpretive phenomenological analysis as a framework summarizes the purpose of this investigation: What are the perceptions of business leaders who have overcome a failure or significant setback regarding resilience and rebounding to subsequent success?
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to investigate leaders’ perceptions of failure and how they overcame it. Specifically, the research focused on the contributing factors of leadership failure, leaders’ experience after failure, resilience unfolding, and the process of bouncing back to success. In an effort to find themes across a leadership sample that correspond to the suggested phases that characterize the post-failure recovery process, the researcher attempts to ascertain leaders’ insights on their individual experiences. Results from this study shed light on leaders’ thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding the process of overcoming failure and could help others surmount similar setbacks. Additionally, understanding these characteristics aids in the development of leadership training modules involving resiliency and overcoming failure. The strategy for this study was qualitative, utilizing semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions from the perspective of IPA as the primary data collection method. The central research question captures the essence of this study: What are the perceptions of business leaders who have overcome a failure or significant setback regarding resilience and rebounding to subsequent success?

A variety of strategies were utilized to locate the research material for this chapter which included the Western Kentucky University (WKU) online library resources. Journal articles and books were the primary source of information. Google Scholar and EBSCO Host were the databases of choice for finding relevant sources. Keywords such as business, leadership, failure, derailment, bouncing back, self-regulation, and resilience were the primary search terms. Another approach was networking with the chair, committee members, WKU professors, and professional relationships such as
workplace management and peers through face-to-face meetings, digital communications, and telephone conversations where topics about leadership failure, effects, and resilience were discussed. Finally, the reference lists in key sources identified were then perused for additional sources beyond those found through the above search strategies.

**Business Leadership**

Though leadership eludes a clear and concise definition, it is possible to capture aspects of it of which can be observed as effects on people in a given environment. Just as people who serve in a leadership role have certain characteristics that can be recognized and differentiated, leadership can also be identified in much the same way. Bass (1995) enlightens the reader as to the difficulty of defining leadership by stating “There are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (p. 38). Leadership is a multifaceted process that involves many factors. However, the author will attempt to characterize leadership in this context.

Hughes, Ginnet, and Curphy (1995) assert that many researchers disagree on what constitutes leadership and proclaim “Most of the disagreement stems from the fact that leadership is a complex phenomenon involving the leader, the followers, and the situation” (p. 41). Some situations require a given set of leadership competencies, skills, and characteristics and leaders who are deficient in these necessary attributes are at risk for failure.

Areas of importance covered in this review regarding business leadership are transformational leadership, goal setting and achievement, and leadership coaching. Transformational leadership is a style of leadership where leaders work closely with
reports to raise the entire organization to higher level of performance, create a clear, unified vision, and drive the necessary changes to achieve desired outcomes. Goal setting is an important skill that is indispensable for a leader to achieve certain outcomes and can have detrimental effects if not conducted properly. Leadership coaching is a method of helping a leader improve overall effectiveness and prevent derailment.

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership refers to a process where the leader connects with followers in a positive way by (a) being attentive to followers’ needs, (b) increasing the level of followers’ motivation, (c) raising overall morality, (d) helping followers reach their fullest potential, (e) focusing on the collective good, (f) communicating a clear vision and high expectations, and (g) achieving the goals of both leaders and followers and ultimately, the organization (Burns, 1978; Bass 1998). This differs from transactional leadership which describes a system of exchanges between leaders and followers, i.e., offering promotions or bonus incentives for employees that meet or exceed goals.

Another difference noted by Bass (1998) is between pseudo-transformational leadership and authentic transformational leadership. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) refer to pseudo-transformational as inauthentic leadership that is concerned only with the leader’s self-satisfying interests that are imposed on followers to the point of potentially leading an organization to a destructive outcome (p. 185). This does not mean that individuals cannot express their individuality or pursue their own goals. Bass and Avolio (1993) state that:

The inclusion of assumptions, norms, and values which are transformationally based does not preclude individuals pursuing their own goals and rewards. This
can occur at the same time where there is alignment with a central purpose and the coordination required to achieve it. Leaders and followers go beyond their self-interests or expected rewards for the good of the team and good of the organization. (pp. 117-118)

Inauthentic leaders give the impression of having transformational characteristics and argue that they are working for the good of the organization, but do not lift the morals of followers, cannot be trusted, do not have the moral basis, and are not genuine (Avolio, 2010; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Zhu, Avolio, Riggio, & Sosik, 2011).

Transformational leadership has been characterized by four factors: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Idealized influence is where leaders provide a strong vision, act as a role model, and have very high moral and ethical standards. Leaders that communicate high expectations and motivate members to commit to the organizational mission exhibit inspirational motivation. Leaders intellectually stimulate followers by encouraging creative problem solving, innovation, and thinking independently. Individualized consideration is when leaders are careful listeners, supportive, and encourage followers’ overall growth through coaching and advising. In general, transformational leaders are perceived as better engaged, legitimately concerned with the well-being of followers, and committed to the growth of the organization.

Organizational outcomes. Brown and May (2010) studied the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational outcomes. The authors investigated the degree to which an organization could change and benefit from
transformational leadership training. Organizational outcomes and productivity are measured against transformational training elements.

Brown and May (2010) chose a large manufacturing organization that failed to meet certain productivity expectations to undertake a program to increase transformational leadership behaviors amongst their line leaders. Exploratory surveys, interviews, and a pre to post experimental design were chosen. Questionnaires (678 completed with 660 usable) were obtained from the 712 employees chosen for the study. Hypotheses were tested using correlation analysis and linear regression. Hypotheses included finding a positive relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational outcomes.

Results from the Brown and May (2010) research showed that transformational leadership was significantly correlated with productivity and satisfaction. Also, the training program increased transformational leadership behaviors. Limitations of this study include a lack of generalization because the study focused on one industry.

**Emotional intelligence.** Research has been conducted suggesting a strong linkage between transformational leadership and emotional intelligence (EI). Barling, Slater, and Kelloway (2000) conducted an exploratory study of potential relationships between the degree of transformational leadership factors amongst managers and characteristics of EI that include (a) understanding own emotions, (b) managing own emotions, (c) emotional self-control, (d) understanding others’ emotions, and (e) managing relationships.

Barling et al. (2000) administered questionnaires to 60 managers from a large pulp and paper organization. The managers completed the Bar-On EI questionnaire and the Seligman Attributional Style Questionnaire while their subordinates completed the
Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which measured the degree of transformational leadership about their manager. To be included in the data set, the managers were required to complete both questionnaires and at least three subordinates had to complete the MLQ per manager with 49 sets of data that met the requirements. The relationships between the transformational leadership factors and EI characteristics were tested using multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA).

Results from Barling et al. (2000) research showed that when the EI scores were separated into high, medium, and low scoring groups and the management attributional style separated into transformational, management by exception, and laissez faire, the following relationships were revealed: (a) knowing and managing own emotions along with displaying emotional self-control were associated with idealized influence, (b) understanding others’ emotions was associated with inspirational motivation, and (c) understanding others’ emotions was associated with individualized consideration. In contrast, management by exception and laissez faire were not associated with EI. Weaknesses of this study include a relatively small sample size and the use of the Bar On EI scale where components outside the scope of the research were included, e.g., mood and stress management.

Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) compared transformational leadership to inauthentic leadership characteristics with the four factors of transformational leadership and are summarized in Table 1. The results suggest there is a correlation between leaders’ morals and performance. Zhu et al. (2011) state that “Followers would pay greater attention to and emulate the moral attitudes, emotions, values, and behaviors of authentic transformational leaders because…they consider these leaders exemplary role models
Table 1

*Comparison of Transformational and Pseudo-Transformational Leader Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformational Leadership Factors</th>
<th>Transformational Leadership Characteristics</th>
<th>Pseudo-transformational or Inauthentic Leadership Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idealized Influence</td>
<td>Believes in unity</td>
<td>Spreads “we vs they” mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shares uplifting values</td>
<td>Has self-centered values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote ethics</td>
<td>Unethical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational Motivation</td>
<td>Spreads empowerment</td>
<td>Seek power and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has shared organizational goals</td>
<td>Has self-serving goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeks harmony</td>
<td>Feeds off fears and insecurities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Deceitful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share information</td>
<td>Intolerant of conflicting views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creative problem solving</td>
<td>Controlling and narrow-minded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Consideration</td>
<td>Altruistic</td>
<td>Selfish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provides growth opportunities</td>
<td>Attempts to enhance personal status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coaches and mentors</td>
<td>Exploits others for personal gain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

who are typically more successful in terms of sustaining higher levels of performance (p. 808). Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, and Jacobs (2012) developed an instrument to measure destructive leadership behavior (DLB) and assert that employees tend to respond positively to transformational, authentic, and ethical leadership styles whereas deviant leader behaviors are more likely to create negative attitudes in employees toward the leader and organization. This is because the deviant behaviors exhibited the leader violates the expectations of “appropriate leader conduct” (Thoroughgood et al., 2012, p. 239). There was strong evidence suggesting that the leader has a profound effect on the organization’s culture, values, ethical framework, employee performance, and success. A
transformational leadership style has a framework that is amenable to high performance and success; however, a more pseudo-transformational style where self-serving, deceitful, selfish, and deviant behaviors create an environment that is subject to poor organizational performance and failure.

**Goal Setting and Achievement**

Decades of research on goal setting strongly suggest a positive relationship between performance and the skillful setting of goals (Latham & Locke, 1979, 2002, 2006). To answer why goal setting is an effective tool for leaders, Latham and Locke (2006) give the following explication:

Why are goals so effective? A goal is a level of performance proficiency that we wish to attain, usually within a specified time period. Thus goal setting is first and foremost a discrepancy-creating process, in that the goal creates constructive discontent with our present performance. For example, if people discover that their performance is below the goal that has been set, countless studies show that, given commitment to the goal, they are likely to increase their effort or change their strategy in order to attain it. (p. 332)

This explanation succinctly brings to light how a stated goal illuminates the gap between a current state and a desired future state and how an awareness of that gap can motivate performance levels and strategies to achieve the desired future state.

Key moderators identified by Locke and Latham (2006) are (a) feedback, which people need to track their progress; (b) commitment to the goal, enhanced by self-efficacy (which was also identified to mediate or partially mediate other potentially motivating variables) and viewing the goal as important; (c) task complexity because task
knowledge tends to be harder to obtain for complex tasks; and (d) situational constraints where work load and available resources can affect performance (p. 265). When people are confronted with a goal, they tap into their knowledge and skills; they use deliberate planning, and develop task strategies using both cognitive and behavior mechanisms that serve to direct attention and effort towards goal relevant activities (Latham & Locke, 2002).

Latham and Locke (1979) described a scenario where a logging crew with relatively no mechanization had a leader who set a specific production goal for the day or week and had higher productivity compared to two other logging crews that had more mechanization, but no goals (p. 70). In the face of criticism by managers that attributed this higher productivity to the Hawthorne Effect, Latham and Locke conducted another study with twenty independent logging crews that had similar sizes and mechanization, all with leaders that stayed on the job. Half the crews were randomly selected to receive goal training while the other half did not and served as the control group. They visited all twenty crews equally to control for the Hawthorne Effect and after twelve weeks the crews that had set goals performed significantly higher than the control group.

**Employee engagement, optimism, and performance.** In addition to performance, research conducted on goal setting, employee engagement, and optimism has shown positive results. Medlin and Green (2009) conducted a study on goal setting, employee engagement, workplace optimism, and individual performance. The authors assessed possible relationships between these variables and the degree to which performance could ultimately be effected by goal setting.
Medlin and Green (2009) utilized a survey method with prior developed scales to measure the constructs of goal setting, employee engagement, and individual performance. A new scale was developed for workplace optimism. Data were collected from 426 employees which included full-time employees (72 percent) and part-time employees (28 percent). Hypotheses were tested using a structural equation modeling methodology. Hypotheses included (a) goal setting positively impacts employee engagement, (b) employee engagement positively impacts workplace optimism, and (c) workplace optimism positively impacts individual performance.

Results from the Medlin and Green (2009) study show that the data support the stated hypotheses that goal setting leads to engaged employees resulting in higher levels of workplace optimism which led to an increase in individual performance. Limitations of the study include a convenience sample instead of a random sample which could affect generalizability of the results.

**Employee effort and performance.** Setting goals has also been shown to influence employee effort. Fu, Richards, and Jones (2009) conducted a multisource, longitudinal study on the effects of goal setting salesperson effort and new product sales. Company assigned goals, self-set goals (SSG), and self-efficacy are modeled as antecedents to selling effort and new product sales.

Fu, Richards, and Jones (2009) collected data from 802 salespeople in three waves with 143 usable responses. Five constructs were measured: assigned goals, SSG, self-efficacy, selling effort, and new product sales. The hypotheses were tested using seemingly unrelated regressions. Hypotheses included (a) assigned goals positively influence self-efficacy, (b) assigned goals positively influence SSG, (c) self-efficacy
positively influences SSG, (d) self-efficacy positively influences selling effort, (e) assigned goals influence selling effort with an inverted U-shaped relationship, (f) SSG influence selling effort with an inverted U-shaped relationship, (g) SSG will fully mediate assigned goals, and (h) self-efficacy, SSG, selling effort, and assigned goals positively affect new product sales.

Results from the Fu, Richards, and Jones (2009) study support the hypotheses that assigned goals positively influence self-efficacy and SSG. Also, self-efficacy was found to positively effect SSG and selling effort. Additionally, SSG influenced selling effort with an inverted U-shaped relationship and fully mediated assigned goals. However, the analysis did not support the hypothesis that assigned goals influence selling effort with an inverted U-shaped relationship. Lastly, assigned goals and effort positively influenced new product sales, but the relationship between self-efficacy to new product sales was not significant. Rather, the relationship was fully mediated by SSG. This could be because the salespeople may have had uncertainty about the new product and implies the importance of SSG, which were positively influenced by self-efficacy.

The overall all implication is that effort and product sales are directly or indirectly influenced positively by assigned goals, self-efficacy, and SSG; however, when the SSG is too low or too high, effort is lower. The level of the SSG is important for personal performance: a SSG that is too low results in low effort because it does not challenge enough; however, if the SSG is too high, then effort tends to be low because the SSG is perceived as unrealistic, unbelievable, and self-efficacy beliefs are lower. Research supports goal setting for leaders and organizations to increase performance, but there can be unforeseen negative consequences when goals are not set correctly and appropriately.
Potential negative effects of goals. There is strong evidence from an abundance of research that setting goals can have a positive impact on an organization; however, when goal setting is not conducted with a sound methodology, undesirable outcomes can occur. Latham and Locke (2002) outlined ten potential pitfalls in goal setting and ways to overcome them. These potential pitfalls, if not corrected, can be the reason for missed objectives and a significant failure: (a) lack of requisite knowledge, (b) conflicting goals within a group, (c) negatively framed goals, (d) punishment for failing to achieve a goal, (e) relying on previous success strategies, (f) money as a motivator, (g) goal is tied to self-esteem, (h) ignoring other performance areas, (i) stretched too far, and (j) ever increasing difficult goals.

The first potential problem is when a leader lacks the knowledge needed to achieve a performance goal. In this case, it is best to give specific learning goals that support the performance goal. Second is when goals are conflicting among members of a group. The behavior of the members of a group will respond differently if the goal is presented competitively instead of cooperatively. Third is when the goal is framed in a negative perspective instead of positively and viewed as a threat. Fourth is when punishment is used when the goal is not attained. Errors and failures will always occur when setting and pursuing difficult and challenging goals. A fear of failure can discourage a person from setting and achieving a goal.

Fifth is when people rely too heavily on past strategies from previous successes and then misapplying them to even more challenging goals. One way to counteract the misapplication of past strategies to a current situation is to set sub-goals that support the longer-term goal. The sixth potential problem lies with money as a motivator to attain a
goal. People are more likely to overstate their performance when they are just shy of attaining their goal. They may focus too heavily on making the numbers look good instead of the results. People can also find ways to make an easy goal appear to be difficult when motivated by monetary gain.

A seventh issue is when a goal is tied to self-esteem which can lead to irrational and risky behavior. Thus, the goal may not be abandoned even in the face of overwhelming evidence that it should be. An eighth potential problem is when performance that isn’t perceived as part of the goal is ignored. It must be clear as to what outcomes are necessary for the goal attainment. A ninth possible concern is when people have stretched too far with the number of goals set and they experience increasing stress. The final potential pitfall is when unattainable goals are set for people who have reached or attained a challenging goal in the past. When progressively harder and harder goals are set for those who have a record of achieving goals, it can be perceived as punishment. High performing individuals and groups should be allowed to participate or set their own goals.

Ordóñez, Schweitzer, Galinsky, and Bazerman (2009) examined risks associated with improper goal setting that included (a) having too many goals, (b) inappropriate time lines, (c) goals that are too challenging, (d) promotion of unethical behavior, (e) psychological effects of goal failure, (g) not having learning goals, (h) creating a competitive environment, (i) diminishing intrinsic motivation, (j) not individualizing goals, and (k) having too narrow of a focus. Ordonez et al. stress the importance of learning how to set and when to set goals through training and risk mitigation. Many of these risks were addressed in Latham and Locke (2002).
Schweitzer, Ordonez and Douma (2004) reported results that supported three hypotheses where people overstated performance for specific and unmet goals, unmet reward goals, and falsely claimed goal attainment when failing to reach by a small margin compared to those that failed to reach by a large margin. The researchers stressed the importance of setting high ethical standards and vigilance in monitoring performance. Goal setting is a well-researched and useful tool for attaining desired outcomes, but can have detrimental consequences for a leader when misused or misunderstood. Coaching is a method to help leaders with strategies such as goal setting to improve performance.

**Coaching the Leader**

Coaching can help business leaders to improve in areas such as strategic thinking, goal setting, goal achievement, self-efficacy beliefs, and resilience. The coaching process involves building a personal and confidential relationship with the client along with increasing awareness, responsibility, and self-belief. The coach does not have to be an expert in the client’s field. Feedback assessments are used to help the client become more self-aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. This leads to recognizing opportunities for improvement in several areas. In some cases, it is not only beneficial, but necessary for a leader to receive coaching to prevent derailment and failure.

As described by Downey (2003), leaders that have direct reports are responsible for managing their achievement of organizationally aligned goals and lead them by being “role-models for the desired values and behaviors” (p. 107). The leader is also responsible for the work environment and the level of employee engagement. Coaching can help the leader be more positively engaged, set goals, work towards the achievement of the goals, and experience higher job satisfaction. Therefore, coaching is a way to build
strong, nurturing relationships between leaders, managers, and employees. Can coaching avert a potential leadership failure?

**Effectiveness of coaching.** Evers, Brouwers, and Tomic (2006) studied the effects of management coaching on outcome expectancies (a given behavior will produce certain outcomes) and self-efficacy beliefs in three domains: (a) setting one’s own goals, (b) acting in a balanced way, and (c) mindful living and working. The authors chose a quasi-experimental design with an emphasis on using an experimental group and control group. The authors were not able to find research of this type in the management coaching literature.

The method employed by Evers et al. (2006) used the GROW model of coaching where “G” stands for goals, “R” stands for reality, “O” stands for options, and “W” stands for will power. The coaches focused on the needs of the participants and did not dictate the objectives in any way. The coaches were free to set the agenda along with the choosing the individual coaching methods. All participants were from federal government agencies. The experimental group and control group consisted of 30 managers each. The researchers matched the groups as closely as possible for several factors including male to female ratio, age, years as manager, and years in present position. A 35 question survey with a 10-point scale was used to measure the three domains of behavior for both outcome expectations and self-efficacy beliefs. Participants were sent the questionnaires by mail or e-mail. The first measurement was taken before coaching started and the second measurement took place after coaching had ended which was four months later. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the data between the questionnaire data before and after coaching.
Evers et al. (2006) reported that the experimental group scored significantly higher for (a) outcome expectancies within the domain of acting in a balanced way and (b) self-efficacy beliefs for the domain of setting one’s own goals. No significant differences were found between the groups for the other variables measured. This implies that coaching can effect positive behavioral changes and increase the self-efficacy beliefs of those in a management role. The limitations of this study include participant selection and self-reporting.

Goal setting and emotional intelligence. Leadership coaching has also been shown to have a positive effect on the emotional intelligence (EI) of managers. Grant (2007) conducted a study on coaching skills for managers in order to investigate the effects on goal focused coaching and EI. The goal of the researcher was to “extend previous research and compare the effect of two coaching skills training programmes, of the type often used in workplace settings, on participants’ coaching skills and levels of emotional intelligence” (p. 260).

Grant (2007) chose a 13-week program and a short intensive two-day training course to compare for this study. For the 13-week program, there were 23 participants of various professions such as human resources, managers, and lawyers chosen who were studying goal-focused coaching to use within their workplace setting. For the two-day program, 20 mid-level and sales managers in the transport and printing industries were chosen. Self-report measures were selected for the goal-focused coaching skills and EI. A pre-post design was utilized and participants completed the questionnaires before and after the coaching program. Paired t tests were used to test for significance.
Grant (2007) found that both the goal-focused coaching and EI measures increased significantly from pre to post-training in the 13-week program. For the two-day program, the goal-focused coaching increased significantly from pre to post-training, but not for the EI measures. Both groups were equivalent on the pre-program training measures, but the results from the 13-week program were significantly higher for both goal-focused coaching and EI measures than the intensive two-day training. The results imply that leaders can benefit from coaching with respect to goal setting and EI, especially when coached over a longer period of time (13 weeks compared to two days). Limitations of the research included potential self-report bias where participants may have over or underrepresented certain responses.

**Goal attainment, resilience, and well-being.** In subsequent work, Grant, Curtayne, and Burton (2009) conducted a study on executive coaching to study its effects on goal attainment, resilience, depression, anxiety, stress, and workplace well-being. The authors hypothesized there would be an increase in goal attainment, resilience, and workplace well-being with a decrease in depression, anxiety, and stress. This study is focused on the potential positive aspects in behavior and cognitive abilities especially during times of change.

The method used by Grant et al. (2009) was a randomized controlled trial where two groups received coaching, but at different start times. Both groups attended a training workshop, but only group 1 began receiving coaching immediately afterwards and members of group 2 were put on a waitlist. In ten weeks, group 1 participants completed coaching and the members of group 2 began their coaching sessions. Forty-one participants completed all questionnaires and the four coaching sessions. The participants
were selected from the nursing sector of a health care agency that took part in a leadership development program in Australia. The GROW model of coaching was deployed for this research. The coaches had a predetermined list of seven goals that were in alignment with the organization and the participants selected two of the seven. The participants rated the goals on difficulty and level of achievement. Questionnaires were used to measure the other variables before and after coaching. A 360-degree feedback process was also used to help raise the awareness of the participants’ leadership styles, thinking styles, and leadership behaviors. The participants rated themselves along with a minimum of five others that included peers, direct reports, or their own manager. A repeated measures ANOVA was used to compare the data between the groups before and after coaching was received.

Grant et al. (2009) reported results that showed significant improvements for goal attainment, resilience, and workplace well-being. Levels of depression, anxiety, and stress did not decrease significantly for group 2, but a one-tailed t test did show a significant decrease in stress for group 2. Open-ended questions were also asked that focused on positive benefits from the program and positive outcomes that merged into the workplace. The responses where categorized and most participants listed an increase in confidence, increase in management skills, and an ability to better cope with change and stress as their responses.

For the Grant et al. (2009) research, the limitations of this study include participant selection, self-reporting, and no measures of organizational change were captured. For participant selection, the members were senior level executives and mostly female. Most had been nurses in the health care industry. From this, the results may not
generalize to other populations. The self-report limitation may have contributed to a demand characteristic effect where the participants felt obligated to report positive effects. Organizational effects were of interest to the authors, but no measures were taken.

**Management development.** Berg and Karlsen (2012) conducted a study on coaching as a methodology for management development. Berg and Karlsen assert that “coaching is a training process that can develop self-confidence, self-efficacy, and contribute to actions that create results” (p. 178). This approach to management improvement can be accomplished through the achievement of personal or organizational goals.

Berg and Karlsen (2012) utilized a qualitative methodology with a case study. The research was exploratory in nature regarding the aforementioned phenomenon. Berg and Karlsen strove to understand the manager’s perception of a given situation and what leadership behavior the manager chose. The researchers chose 14 participants from a multinational corporation that consisted of middle managers and project managers that were involved in a training program to develop a more coaching-focused leadership style. The training program entailed five two-day seminars. Berg and Karlsen conducted a pre-training study on the participants and their supervisors. Also, halfway through and at the completion of the training program, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews. The data were then analyzed.

Berg and Karlsen (2012) structured the results according to a model that consists of the following four levels: (a) reaction, (b) learning, (c) behavior, and (d) results. The researchers found that for the reaction level the managers were very satisfied with the
tools they learned such as feedback, goals, and emotional intelligence. For the learning level, the participants reported that the most important new insight was positive self-talk, based in self-management and self-coaching. At the behavior level, setting clear goals, prioritizing, delegating, and giving feedback and praise were rated highly. Finally, participants reported higher self-efficacy, which Berg and Karlsen argue increases the likelihood of success. Overall, Berg and Karlsen observed through qualitative case studies that participants’ goal setting and achievement increased as measured by subordinates and coaches.

Limitations of this study include potential errors in self-reporting where the participants may be biased to show appreciation and positive results for the training. Also, participants, being employees, may have wanted to appear as good as possible and may underreport negative aspects about themselves for career advancement (Berg & Karlsen, 2012).

**Self-efficacy and performance.** Baron and Morin (2010) studied executive coaching for the effects on self-efficacy and performance. The researchers’ goal was to determine if there was a “positive relationship between coaching a self-efficacy related to supervisory coaching behaviors” (p. 19). The researchers also explored links between some individual and situational variables previously researched in the literature. The researchers hypothesized that coaching, utility judgment, learning goal orientation, affective organizational commitment, and work-environment support have a positive relationship with self-efficacy.

Baron and Morin (2010) chose one division of an international manufacturing company with junior and mid-level managers attending an eight-month leadership
development program. The leadership development program consisted of classroom seminars, action learning groups, and executive coaching. Executive coaching was conducted by internal coaches. The researchers used a one-group pretest posttest design with coachees receiving different intensities of treatment. Questionnaires were used to collect data on learning goal orientation, organizational commitment, pre-training self-efficacy, and post-training self-efficacy. Descriptive statistics, hierarchical regression analysis, and paired $t$ test analysis was used to analyze the data.

Results from the Baron and Morin (2010) research showed there was a significant increase from pre-training to post-training self-efficacy. Coaching, utility judgment, affective organizational commitment, and work-environment were found to have a positive relationship with self-efficacy while learning goal orientation did not. Limitations of this study include the absence of a control group and the absence of performance measurements.

Evidence strongly suggests that leadership coaching can have a significant positive impact on leaders and their abilities. Leadership coaching can target very specific characteristics, such as EI skills or increase overall leadership capabilities, thus helping to avert potential failure.

**Failure**

Leaders, by virtue of their position, are expected to make decisions. At this organizational level, there is inherent risk in the choices that are made regarding situations that leaders face which require a decision to be reached. The possible outcomes of any given decision affect a variety of stakeholders and it is practically inevitable that some will be affected negatively. “Executives today work in a moral mine field. At any
moment, a seemingly innocuous decision can explode and harm not only the decision maker but also everyone in the neighborhood” (Messick & Bazerman, 1996, p. 9). The landscape upon which leaders navigate is wrought with opportunities to stumble down a path of failure.

**Leading Change**

A common situation for leaders that happens in practically all business environments is leading a change initiative within an organization. Leaders who are deficient in their abilities to drive change efficiently and effectively in how business is conducted in order to cope with new environmental conditions, markets, and government regulations have a relatively high probability of experiencing some degree of failure.

For an organization to improve, it must be open to the idea and implementation of change initiatives. The business leader is expected to look into the future and with reasonable accuracy, predict what changes need to be made to thrive in the market. Heifetz and Linsky (2011) state that leading an organization through change is especially risky “because change that truly transforms an organization, be it a multibillion-dollar company or a ten-person sales team, demands that people give up things they hold dear: daily habits, loyalties, ways of thinking” (pp. 99-100). Kaufman’s (1975) insightful analysis of organizational change and resistance to change provides an extended explication of these processes.

**Leadership competencies.** Battilana, Gilmartin, Sengul, Pache, and Alexander (2010) conducted an exploratory study on the relationship between planned change activities and leadership competencies. The study focused on the likelihood that different activities involved in planned organizational change would be emphasized depending on
the different leadership competencies. The authors adopted a task-oriented and person-oriented model for leadership competencies. On change activities, the authors stressed communicating the need for change, support of the change, and evaluation of the implementation.

The method employed by Battilana et al. (2010) was an empirical analysis of 89 clinical managers belonging to the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom. Each participant designed, planned, and initiated a change project. Before the change was initiated, 360-degree feedback sessions were conducted. Phone surveys were carried out after their projects were completed.

Battilana et al. (2010) reported that leaders who are more effective at person-oriented behaviors are more likely to focus on communicating the need for change. The authors also found that leaders who are more effective at task-oriented behaviors are more likely to focus on mobilizing support for the change and evaluating the effectiveness of the change. Limitations of this study include high correlation between independent variables and self-reporting bias. The authors emphasize “that when dealing with the role of leadership in change implementation, change should be considered as a complex multi-dimensional task” (p. 434).

**Change complexity.** Jacobs, Witteloostuijn, and Christe-Zeyse (2013) attempted to develop a framework through investigating barriers and enablers of change. This was done through the context of contingency-based approaches where organizations used tools such as Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) and stakeholder analysis. The authors studied cross disciplinary organizations.
Jacobs et al. (2013) analyzed current field research in organizational change. The authors summarized their work in propositions. Jacobs et al. found that organizational change carries inherent risk, a complexity typically underestimated by change agents. Both external factors and the internal environment within the organization work together to determine managerial practices. The implication is that a one-size-fits-all approach to change is not feasible in organizations. Organizational change can challenge the organization’s identity, require a contingency perspective such as SWOT analysis; while general patterns exist, each situation is unique. Limitations of the study included the absence of performance measurements.

**Leadership styles.** Pardo-del-Val, Martinez-Fuentes, and Roig-Dobon (2012) conducted a study on the effects of leadership styles and organizational change. The leadership styles studied were participative and controlling. Organizational change includes factors of resistance to change, rate of change, and change performance. Pardo-del-Val et al. utilized questionnaires to conduct empirical research on a sample of companies with 50 or more people who had recently initiated a change process. The companies were located in Spain; a random sample of approximately 1,800 companies was chosen out of 12,656 with 86 supplying valid replies.

Pardo-del-Val et al., (2012) found no relationship in general between participative leadership style and change resistance, but some characteristics of the change process were significantly related. For fast changes, participative style showed a positive relationship with resistance. This is not entirely unexpected as a participative style is inherently more inclusive and the process can be lengthy. Participative leadership has a positive relationship with the results of change.
The limitations of the Pardo-del-Val et al. (2012) study include the small sample size and very low response rate as well as a lack of knowledge on the suitability of the participants. The sample size was relatively small with 86 companies for a correlation analysis. Also, it was unknown if the participants understood the approach with the possibility that respondents answered the best they could, especially regarding decision making, despite having an incomplete sense of what the survey articulated.

Kotter (2011) asserts that there are eight reasons for which change efforts fail. Leaders must give a transformation effort the best chance of success and failing to do one or more of the following can thwart a change initiative: (a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) forming a powerful coalition, (c) creating a vision, (d) communicating the vision, (e) empowering others to act on the vision, (f) planning for and creating short-term wins, (g) consolidating improvements and producing more change, and (h) institutionalizing new approaches (pp. 4-5). At the beginning, leaders must push others out of their comfort zone and assemble the right team of managers to support and drive changes. Then, it is necessary that leaders create a strong vision, communicate the vision through multiple channels, and behave in a way that is congruent with the vision.

Washington and Hacker (2005) conducted research examining the relationship between managers’ understanding of a change process and their attitudes toward the change. The authors surmised that effective managers have the cognitive and behavioral capabilities to better understand the change and will be less resistant.

Washington and Hacker (2005) administered surveys to 296 senior-level managers in the Botswana Public Service and collected demographic, leadership, and perception data about implementing a change initiative. The data were analyzed using
ordinary least squares linear regression. The degree to which the respondents understood the change was the independent variable. The resistance to change was measured in three ways: (a) how excited the respondent was about the change, (b) if the respondent thought the change effort would fail, and (c) if the respondent wished the change would never have happened. This indirect method was meant to minimize the possibility of a social desirability effect. The authors controlled for the following set of possible factors: years of work, gender, and occupation.

After Washington and Hacker (2005) analyzed the survey data, the overall results suggested a strong relationship between understanding the change and feelings about the change. Respondents that better understood the change were more excited, less likely to think it would fail, and less likely to wish the change never happened. While the survey did not directly measure the degree that respondents would resist the change, the contention was that those who were not excited about the change, thought the change would fail, and wish the change would never have happened were more likely to resist the change and therefore, a higher probability of the change initiative failing.

**Poor Decision Making**

Making decisions can be simple or complex; however, the level of complexity of the decision making process does not necessarily implicate the complexity of the decision to be made. Making a decision is about making a choice among alternatives. If there is only one option available, then it is referred to as a “Hobson’s Choice” which Goldstein (2001) refers to as a “sole alternative” and the only decision is to take it or leave it (p. 174). Even this type of a decision can potentially create confusion, frustration, and
immobilization. Research suggests that leadership failure can result from poor decision making.

Nutt (2002) conducted research over a 20 year period which concentrated on 400 organizational decisions from the USA, Canada, and Europe which involved “new products, equipment purchases, staffing, pricing, marketing, and locating operations” and found that half of these decisions failed (p. 3). Nutt asserts that the true failure rate is probably higher because a significant number of failed decisions are covered up to avoid the negative publicity. Nutt found the most common failures could be grouped in to three categories: (a) bad decision making practices, (b) premature commitments, and (c) time and money spent on the wrong things.

With regard to educational leaders, Lunenburg (2010) outlines two different decision making models: *The Rational Model* and *The Bounded Rationality Model*. The rational model is about certainty so that the leader has the opportunity to make the optimum choice. In general, the rational model has a series of steps to be followed and is summarized in Figure 1.
The first and most critical step is to correctly identify the problem. According to Lunenburg (2010), the rational method is used when all information is known, perfect, and the situation is ideal to make an optimum decision. This would require resources and time to gather relevant information in the environment and from stakeholders, e.g., employees, customers, suppliers, etc. Next, alternatives are generated that are in alignment with the goals and outcomes the leadership is aiming to achieve. The third step

is evaluating all the alternatives for feasibility, how well each addresses the problem, and impact or consequences on stakeholders and environment. From this, an alternative is chosen, implemented, and evaluated for effectiveness. Depending on the analysis, the cycle may need to be repeated many times. An example for why this may happen is an incorrect definition of the problem that is not realized until the selected alternative is found to be ineffective.

Frequently, the nature of the problem is obscure, there are uncertainties, unknowns, and a lack of resources to conduct a comprehensive evaluation and analysis. The bounded rationality model implies (a) inadequate information, (b) all possible alternatives are unknown, (c) consequences of alternatives are unpredictable, and (d) it is accepted that finding an optimal alternative is unlikely (Lunenburg, 2010; Simon 1972; Simon, 2000).

Lunenburg (2010) lists several cognitive biases and methods of decision making that are versions of the bounded rationality model. These are listed below:

1. Satisficing: Choosing the first alternative that meets the minimum requirements or is considered good enough.
2. Heuristics: A rule of thumb that simplifies complex decisions.
3. Primacy/recency effect: When information discovered early (primacy) or late (recency) influences the decision maker to a greater degree.
4. Bolstering the alternative: When one alternative is preferred over others even before information is gathered and then only information that rationalizes the choice (related to confirmation bias).
5. Intuition: A quick evaluation based on past experience and knowledge.
6. Incrementalizing: Making small changes successively until one alternative is chosen; referred to as *muddling through*.

7. The garbage-can method: Problems, solutions, and resources and figuratively thrown into a garbage can and patterns are explored to find appropriate matches.

These types of decision making methods within the bounded rationality model carry inherent risks that increase the chances of error and failure. Camerer and Lovallo (1999) proclaim that a possible explanation for entrepreneurial leadership failures within entry level businesses is due to bounded rational decisions that led to debilitating mistakes; overconfidence in their ability to succeed while believing most others would fail was a relevant bias amongst the entrepreneurial leaders.

Shore (2008) conducted a two-part study involving systematic biases and project failures. First, systematic biases were identified and defined that could lead to project derailment regarding leaders’ decisions. Second, eight high-level projects that had experienced failure, e.g., Columbia Shuttle, Merck Vioxx, Airbus 380, etc. were analyzed for biased decision making.

The first step in the Shore (2008) methodology was to research current literature concerning decision making. Shore identified the following nine systematic biases: (a) available data that restricts data-collection to a model of convenience, (b) conservatism, which fails to consider new information or negative feedback, (c) escalation of commitment where additional resources are allocated to a project that is unlikely to succeed, (d) groupthink where members of a group under pressure tend to agree and suppress conflicting evidence and viewpoints, (e) illusion of control where decision
makers believe they have more control than they actually do, (f) overconfidence where
the level of confidence expressed is not supported objectively, (g) recency, which means
a disproportionate degree of emphasis is given to the most recent data, (h) selective
perception where several people perceive the same circumstances differently, and (i) sunk
cost where earlier costs are disregarded and should not be considered in future decisions.
Second, a panel of 22 business professionals used a modified Dephi Method to analyze
each of the eight project failures and reach a consensus on which of the systematic biases
could best explain each failure.

Results of the Shore (2008) study revealed that the most common biases
mentioned by the 22 panel members across the eight failed projects were conservatism,
ilusion of control, selective perception, and sunk cost. The implication is that while
projects are assumed to follow a rational process, project success or derailment is highly
influenced by the human decision making process. A limitation of the study was a small
sample size of failed projects for analysis and the results are not considered to be
generalizable.

The literature supports the notion that poor decision making can lead to
derailment and failure. Poor decisions can result from using a bounded rationality model
where relevant data and information are missing, unclear, and vague. Under these
circumstances, leaders can succumb to cognitive biases and heuristics which are subject
to error.

**Resilience**

Drawing upon their work on childhood development, Masten and Coatsworth
(1998) refer to resilience as a “manifested competence in the context of significant
challenges to adaptation or development” (p. 206). Masten (2001) describes resilience as a “class of phenomena” characterized by two judgments (p. 228). The first judgment involves the presence of a threat or tangible risk that could potentially derail development and the second judgment concerns how well the individual adapted (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten, 2001). Masten et al. (1999) contend that studying resilience involves specifying the threat to development, a clear understanding on how successful adaptation will be judged, and characteristics of the individual or environment which may help explain positive outcomes (p. 144). Masten et al. performed a study examining competence of children and adolescents in relation to adversity and resources. Competence was defined as performance in three areas: (a) academic achievement, (b) conduct or behavior, and (c) peer relationships. Intellectual functioning and parenting quality were examined as resources that potentially influenced competence. Hypotheses included linkages between the three domains of competence, adversity as a predictor, and the potential influencing variables: intellectual functioning and parenting quality.

Masten et al. (1999) utilized a longitudinal study of an initial sample of 205 children that were in third to sixth grade. An initial assessment was conducted followed by two more assessments which were administered seven years and 10 years after the first assessment with data obtained from 202 of the original 205 participants. Psychological well-being was measured during the third phase of assessments.

Results of the Masten et al. (1999) study included (a) psychosocial resources such as IQ and parenting quality are related to the development of competence, (b) good resources are less common for children growing up in the context of adversity, (c) competence outcomes are generally good when reasonably good resources are present
even in the context of adversity, and (d) maladaptive adolescents have a history of adversity, low resources, and low competence. In general, this indicates that a higher IQ and good parenting are advantageous for youth that experience chronic adversity. Limitations of the study included the long intervals between assessments, adversity data were retrospective across long intervals, and a relatively small number of influences were measured and accounted for a limited amount of variance.

Bonanno (2004) describes resilience in the context of adults that have been exposed to a highly disruptive event in the following ways: (a) experiencing “transient perturbations in normal functioning;” (b) maintaining “relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning; and (c) exhibiting the “capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions” (pp. 20-21). Bonanno argues that resilience is different from recovery. According to Bonanno, recovery after an event is a trajectory where an individual experiences some level of psychopathology, such as depression or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which lasts at least several months, and then gradually returns to a pre-event level of functioning. Bonanno states that PTSD involves experiencing a traumatic event outside of normal human experience that results in trauma symptoms, anxiety, fear, and grief. Bonanno also stresses that people exhibiting resilience after a disruptive event may not show signs of grief and this lack of grief is not necessarily maladaptive nor does it indicate signs of being emotionally cold, distant, or superficial.

Bonanno (2004) asserts that there are multiple pathways to resilience and there are distinctive dimensions related to the different types of resilience people may experience. Some of these dimensions are (a) hardiness, (b) self-enhancement, and (c)
positive emotion and laughter. Hardiness contains a commitment to “finding meaningful purpose in life,” believing that “one can influence one’s surroundings and the outcome of events,” and believing that change is normal where “one can learn and grow from both positive and negative life experiences” (p. 25). Hardy individuals are more confident, make productive use of their coping skills, seek social support, and tend to appraise situations that are potentially stressful as less threatening and therefore buffered from extreme stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141).

Self-enhancement is characterized by high self-esteem and having positive biases in favor of the self. While self-enhancers tend to score high on measures of narcissism and arouse negative impressions in others, they have highly adaptive and adjust well to stressful situations. Another way that resilient people cope well with adversity is by using positive emotions and laughter (which can also be a form of repressive coping which involves the avoidance of unpleasant thoughts, emotions, and memories). By educing positive emotions (e.g., gratitude and interest), potential negative emotions are dampened or prevented and social support is more likely to be invited thereby reducing levels of distress.

Seligman (2012) declares that resilience, for those who suffer from PTSD, is “a return to the previous level of functioning” (p. 157) and “by physical and psychological measures, back where they were before the trauma” (Seligman, 2011, p. 103). Therefore, resilience is an adaptive process in response to a feeling of helplessness that lifts one out of a depressed state. Seligman (2011, 2012) asserts that optimism is the crucial ingredient
for resilience. Goleman (2006) states “Optimism, like hope, means having a strong expectation that, in general, things will turn out all right in life, despite setbacks and frustrations” (p. 88). Optimistic people tend not to give up and view setbacks as temporary and changeable as opposed to pessimistic people who tend to think that the setback is linked to a fixed characteristic within their personality and there is nothing they can do about it (Seligman, 2012). One might propose that optimism would shield a leader from experiencing any type of negative PFE. However, a negative response to the trauma of a failure is normal and one’s optimism has a later effect. Seligman (2012) declares there are three strategies to combat “catastrophic beliefs”: (a) gathering evidence, (b) using optimism, and (c) putting it in perspective (pp. 169-170). From this, optimism is used after leaders understand their reaction to a failure.

Coutu (2015) presents the three following characteristics of resilience: (a) acceptance of reality, (b) the search for meaning, and (c) an ability to improvise (p. 110). Coutu warns the reader that optimism should be tempered, “A common belief about resilience is that it stems from an optimistic nature. That’s true but only as long as such optimism doesn’t distort your sense of reality. In extremely adverse situations, rose-colored thinking can actually spell disaster” (p. 110). Coutu argues that optimism does have its place when attempting to invoke a sense of possibility, but resilient people have a very realistic view of their situation and an almost pessimistic outlook that can prepare them for the worst. Optimism is important while over-optimism can be detrimental; therefore, balance is a necessity.

Bandura (1989) affirms this need for balance in the following: “It is widely believed that misjudgment produces dysfunction. Certainly, gross miscalculation can
create problems. However, optimistic self-appraisals of capability that are not unduly disparate from what is possible can be advantageous, whereas veridical judgments can be self-limiting” (p. 1177). Bandura strongly suggests that a person’s optimism should not produce beliefs that radically differ from reality while also not comfortably fitting within their routine. Rather, optimistic beliefs that are just beyond one’s current capabilities, but still attainable when the right amount of effort is applied are of benefit to the individual.

Post-Failure Experience

What are the immediate effects of failure for leaders that have experienced a significant setback? Are there initial reactions within the affective domain and cognitive domain that must be worked through by each individual? As an example, some leaders may feel depression and anxiety (affective) and blame themselves (cognitive) while others may feel anger (affective) and blame the organization (cognitive). This is referred to as the post-failure experience (PFE). It is important for leaders who have experienced a failure to acknowledge the PFE and work through it.

Seligman (2011, 2012) discusses the immediate effects of a traumatic event with regard to resilience and PTSD. PTSD has been studied extensively on military veterans, sexual abuse survivors, and children with disabilities. In general, PTSD is characterized by the following: (a) experiencing a traumatic event, (b) persistently re-experiencing the event, (c) avoiding stimuli associated with the event, (d) symptoms persisting for more than a month, (e) clinically significant impairment in social or occupational settings, and (f) symptoms not existing before the event (Seligman, 2012, p. 155). While leaders who experience a failure may not have a PFE to the extent of PTSD, it is comparable to some degree. Regarding soldiers who experience PTSD, they “first react with symptoms of
depression and anxiety” (Seligman, 2011, p. 103). Seligman (2011) illustrates the difference between two composite examples of professionals in the workforce who were fired: while their outcomes were different, both had initial reactions of being “sad, listless, indecisive, and anxious about the future” (p. 101). As part of a course for post-traumatic growth in soldiers, Seligman (2012) outlines the first step as understanding one’s response to the trauma itself.

From a corporate entrepreneurship perspective, Shepherd, Covin, and Kuratko (2009) assert that leaders may “feel an attachment to the projects they passionately believe and setbacks are felt as an emotional blow” (p. 591). Leaders can experience a negative emotional reaction such as grief after the failure of a project. Shepherd et al. further state that with regard to entrepreneurial projects, grief can be greater when leaders have (a) made a sustained emotional investment, (b) experienced a sudden, unexpected loss, or (c) felt significantly attached to the project, e.g., taken on as a part of the leader’s identity. A question that arises is whether a negative emotional reaction to failure serves any good purpose.

Shepherd et al. (2009) declare that emotional interference, such as that from a negative reaction, can negatively affect leaders’ attention and information processing which can impede or slow the learning that is desirable following a failure. Organizations may feel the need to lessen or eliminate negative reactions following a setback. Shepherd et al. assert that organizations may normalize failure by way of habituation in attempt to prevent leaders from experiencing a negative emotional response following a setback or failure. Habituation refers to the process where repeated exposure to a stimulus will lessen the negative reaction and can occur with both behavioral and verbal stimuli.
Habituation can be facilitated through social sharing. In other words, leaders that experience failure share their incident with others in the organization and this “allows individuals to reconcile their misgivings by rationalizing that if others are also experiencing it, then it must be acceptable. Individuals are thereby habituated vicariously, allowing others’ experiences to aid in the normalizing process” (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2002, p. 223).

However, Shepherd et al. (2009) argue that while emotional interference can potentially hinder and slow down the essential learning that is expected from a leader following a failure, normalizing the failure potentially “diminishes the learning benefits such emotion can trigger” (p. 592). Experiencing negative emotions following a detrimental outcome can (a) signal the importance of the event, (b) elicit more attention to the core issues and circumstances of the event, and (c) precipitate a search for information regarding the event (Shepherd et al., 2009). Therefore, coping with the failure through emotional regulation can be favorable compared to a process of normalization.

One favorable outcome would be to learn from the failure. Cannon and Edmondson (2001) assert that learning from failure is essential for innovation, adaptation, and success in a changing environment. Cannon and Edmondson proclaim that the process of learning from failure involves three steps: (a) identifying the failure, (b) analysis and discussion, and (c) dealing with conflict. The authors also mention barriers to learning which include how people can be conditioned to avoid failure, protect their self-esteem, and shield themselves from a reduction in self-efficacy.
Self-Regulation

Aristotle suggested that positive human character is portrayed when emotions are expressed in the right way, to the right extent, on the right occasions, and about the right things (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014). This suggests that the appropriateness of both positive and negative emotions are dependent to some degree on contextual factors (e.g., laughter is appropriate after hearing a joke, but not at a funeral and anger is appropriate when an injustice has occurred, but not after receiving a sincere compliment). However, leaders who suffer a failure or setback can experience heightened and prolonged negative emotions such as depression or grief. How leaders manage these negative emotions can affect their ability to learn, adapt, and bounce back.

In the context of social cognitive theory, Bandura (1991) proposes there are three underlying cognitive components to self-regulation: (a) self-observation, (b) a judgmental process, and (c) self-response. However, if people lack the capability to exercise control over their own motivation and behavior, then intention and desire have little effect (Bandura, 1991). If failed leaders are unable to regulate their emotions, then they could become severely depressed. Boss and Sims (2008) assert that after failure, some individuals “endure the momentary sting of embarrassment and grief, and quickly move on, while other languish and allow failure to affect self-esteem and confidence…many individuals move toward recovery, while others find themselves in paralysis or downward spiral” (p. 136).

After experiencing a failure or setback, resilience can be a time of transition where reflection, analysis, reappraisals, new goals are formed, and action occur within the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains that tend to have an optimistic slant. As
an example, according to a retrospective analysis of failed entrepreneurs conducted by Ucbasaran, Shepherd, Lockett, and Lyon (2013), recovery from failure is a process composed of three phases. First, there is an initial period of time where the entrepreneur removes himself psychologically from the failure in order to heal. Second, the entrepreneur takes time to reflect and make sense of the failure. Finally, the entrepreneur takes action to move on from the failure. Therefore, through exercising self-regulation, leaders can summon their motivation and activate the necessary cognitive resources to plan a course of action to overcome the failure.

**Emotion regulation.** Gross and Jazaieri (2014) assert that emotions “arise when an individual attends to a situation and appraises it as being immediately relevant to his or her currently active goals” (p. 388). Typically, emotions are educed when people evaluate a situation as having important challenges or opportunities and will affect people’s experience, behavior, and physiology to some degree (Gross, 1998; Gross & Jazaieri, 2014). Emotions have three salient features: (a) meaning that people have introduced through appraisal of a situation, (b) contain experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, and (c) have both imperative and impressionable qualities (Gross, 2008).

Gross (1998) defines emotion regulation as “the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (p. 275). Emotion regulation begins with either an explicit or implicit goal to influence the generation of emotions and often involves reducing negative emotions (e.g., anger, sadness, etc.) or increasing positive emotions (e.g., love, joy, etc.) (Gross, 1998; Gross & Jazaieri, 2014).
From a process model of emotion regulation, there are five families of emotion regulation strategies that occur along the emotion generation continuum:

1. Situation Selection (SS): Requires some degree of self-awareness and foresight into the features of given situations along with response tendencies. It involves actively engaging situations where predicted emotional responses are desired and avoiding situations where emotions are unwanted.

2. Situation Modification (SM): Necessitates efforts to modify the external environment of a situation (e.g., changing the lighting and music for a romantic interest or leaving an area if someone enters that is disliked). There can be some overlap with situation selection because modifying a situation may effectively create a new situation.

3. Attentional Deployment (AD): Entails modification of internal focus within a given situation to redirect attention by using strategies such as (a) distraction where attention is shifted, e.g. thoughts are invoked that are totally unrelated to a situation or gazing upon a different scene that lessens an emotional impact; or (b) rumination where a focus on thoughts and feelings are sustained to the point of increasing the duration and intensity of emotions, e.g., worrying about possible future threats or negative consequences leads to sadness and depression.

4. Cognitive Change (CC): Refers to changing an appraisal or evaluation of a situation such that the thoughts and meaning of the situation are different which in turn elicits a different emotional response. Reappraisal is a common form of cognitively oriented emotional regulation and tends to lead to decreased levels of
negative emotions, increased levels of positive emotions, and has virtually no impact on memory and no social disruption.

5. Response Modulation (RM): Refers to directly influencing the physiological, behavioral, or experiential aspects of an emotion with such tactics as exercise and drugs. Suppression is a common form of response modulation that decreases expressive behavior while being emotionally aroused and tends to lead to decreased positive but not negative emotion, decreased memory performance, and some degree of social disruption (Gross, 1998; Gross, 2013; Gross & Jazaieri, 2014).

SS, SM, AD, and CC are referred to as antecedent focused because these would occur before the emotion is generated and RM is response focused. However, since emotion regulation can alter the context of the situation that gave rise to the emotion, there is feedback to early stages such that the process can loop (Gross, 2013). SS and SM involve changing or altering the environment in which an emotional response is likely to occur, while AD, CC, and RM are cognitive and behavioral strategies to regulate emotions that have been experienced to some degree. Within the context of failed business leaders who have overcome a setback, regulation and feedback strategies are most likely to occur within the AD, CC, and RM families.

Troy and Mauss (2011) declare that exposure to common major stressful events, such as the unexpected loss of a job, is generally associated with a wide range of negative outcomes. In their examination of relevant research, Troy and Mauss present evidence strongly supporting the role of emotion regulation moderating the relationship between stress and resilience. Specifically, the authors offer a framework for resilience based on
work by Ochsner and Gross (2005) where two groups of cognitive emotional control have been shown to manage emotions: attention control (AC) and cognitive reappraisal (CR).

AC consists of focusing attention toward or away from either internal or external stimuli. Depending on how AC is strategically used, it may lead to negative or positive outcomes. Distraction and rumination are associated with negative outcomes while a modulated response where irrelevant negative information is safely ignored and relevant or changeable information is attended to and coped with appropriately (e.g., active problem solving). CR changes the appraisals and meaning of a stressor and attenuates negative emotions which in turn increases the likelihood of resilience.

**Regulating positive emotions.** Tugade and Fredrickson (2007) argue that positive emotions can lead to better coping skills, resilience, and overall well-being. Tugade and Fredrickson assert that fostering positive emotions is a valuable skill for promoting resilience. The authors contend that with repeated intention and effort to build and strengthen positive emotions through activities such as meditation, relaxation, positive imagery, gratitude, and optimistic thinking that repetitive experiencing of positive emotions can be helpful during times of stress. “In the coping domain, the automatic activation of positive emotion may be particularly useful because stressful situations deplete cognitive resources” (pp. 324-325). While Tugade and Fredrickson suggest that while it is important to allow negative emotions an opportunity to unfold so that adaptive functions can be realized, positive emotions are generally associated with higher resiliency.
Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, and Wallace (2006) conducted multiple studies to examine how resilience and positive emotions affect how negative emotions are experienced during times of stress. In the one study, Ong et al. hypothesized that (a) positive emotions moderate the effects of stress, (b) positive emotions mediate stress recovery, (c) trait resilience would contribute to stress resistance, and (d) positive emotions mediate the effects of trait resistance on stress recovery.

Ong et al. (2006) selected a random sample of 45 participants who were contacted for the study and 27 participants, ages 62-80 who had recently participated in the Notre Dame Family Study of Aging, agreed to take part in the research. As part of this study, participants completed a trait measure of psychological resilience and completed daily entries in diaries related to emotions and stress for 45 days. The four hypotheses were tested using multilevel random coefficient modeling.

For the Ong et al. (2006) study, all hypotheses were supported: (a) higher levels of positive emotion weakened the influence of stress on negative emotions, (b) positive emotion mediates the relationship between stress and negative emotion, (c) trait resilience moderated the relationship between daily stress and negative emotion, and (d) positive emotion mediates the moderating relationship of trait resilience and stress on negative emotions. This evidence suggests that highly resilient people experience positive emotions even when going through stressful events and they draw on those positive emotions to rebound from negative emotions. Limitations of the study included a small sample size, lack of control over confounding variables, and the potential for self-report bias.
Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1994) as “people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave” (p. 71). Regarding expectations, “An outcome expectation is defined as a person’s estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes. An efficacy expectation is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes” (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). Bandura further states that this difference is important because individuals may believe that certain actions can lead to a given outcome, but if they have doubts about their abilities to perform those actions, then they are not influenced to take the necessary steps. Efficacy expectations affect individuals’ choice of activities, coping efforts, and persistence (Bandura, 1977).

Efficacy expectations are based on four sources of information: (a) performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious experience, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977, p. 195). Performance accomplishments can greatly influence individuals’ expectancies because past success positively affects their beliefs to accomplish more while past failures can potentially have a negative effect on expectations. However, “after strong efficacy expectations are developed through repeated successes, the negative impact of occasional failures is likely to be reduced….occasional failures that are later overcome by determined effort can strengthen self-motivated persistence” (Bandura, 1977, p. 195).
When people observe others’ performance levels and related outcomes (e.g., someone overcoming adversity through determination and perseverance), then this observation can generate similar expectations within the observers. Bandura (1977) refers to this as vicarious experience which involves observed behavior that is modeled. Vicarious experience offers valuable information that can contribute to self-belief; however, for the modeled behavior to have a meaningful impact, visibly noticeable characteristics should include effort, perseverance, and clearly observable outcomes.

Verbal persuasion arises through social interaction when people are influenced by the suggestions of others. This type of social interaction helps increase the likelihood of positive outcomes when an environment and the conditions conducive to success are created. This has a positive effect on self-efficacy beliefs: “People are led, through suggestion, into believing they can cope successfully with what has overwhelmed them in the past” (Bandura, 1977, p. 198).

Emotional arousal is often a consequence of experiencing a threatening situation and is another source of information that can affect peoples’ coping self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). As an example, responding to stressful circumstances with fear can debilitating peoples’ performance and lead to elevated states of anxiety. Fear can feed off itself by way of conjuring up fear-provoking thoughts and images of poor performance; however, high coping self-efficacy and emotional regulation strategies can attenuate a fear response, thereby reducing its effects (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1989). It is common for people to judge themselves poorly after a setback, but how they respond to this judgement is of great significance: “The important matter is not that difficulties arouse
self-doubt, which is a natural immediate reaction, but the speed of recovery of perceived self-efficacy from difficulties” (Bandura, 1989, p. 1176).

Spiller (2000) conducted research that focused on the effects of performance feedback on self-efficacy and emotional reactions as well as the effects of emotions on self-efficacy. Two hypotheses of interest were (a) the effects of performance feedback on emotion reaction and (b) the effect of emotions on self-efficacy. For the first hypothesis mentioned, data analysis resulted in a significant positive correlation between degree of dissatisfaction and negative emotion. For the second hypothesis of interest, analysis resulted in a significant negative correlation between negative emotion and post-task self-efficacy. This implies that negative performance feedback, negative emotional reactions, and lower self-efficacy are all related.

Generally, failures lead to a reduction in self-efficacy; however, this is dependent on appraisals, locus of causality, and how the success or failure is attributed (Bandura, 1977). As an example, people may gain competence in performance and fail to accomplish a desired outcome, but if they attribute their failure to external factors rather than internal, then self-efficacy may not be negatively affected (Bandura, 1977). There is a difference between efficacy and outcome expectations. Efficacy refers to a belief in capabilities to perform a desired level of performance and outcome expectations are beliefs about achieving a goal. People may be assured of their capabilities, but not expect their behavior to have the desired effect (Bandura, 1977).

In a related study, Spieker and Hinsz (2004) examined the impact of repeated success and failure on personal goals and self-efficacy. The authors hypothesized that (a) self-efficacy and personal goals will be positively correlated with task performance, (b)
past successes will lead to higher personal goals and past failures will lead to lower personal goals, and (c) past successes will lead to higher ratings of self-efficacy and past failures will lead to lower ratings of self-efficacy.

Spieker and Hinsz (2004) recruited 47 undergraduate students from an undergraduate psychology class to participate in the study. Participants recorded a goal for the number of uses they could find for various objects and they rated their confidence they could achieve certain levels of performance. Participants completed a practice trial followed by two trials where performance was compared to their goals. Performance was deemed a success or failure depending on how it compared to the goal.

Results of the Spieker and Hinsz (2004) study supported the hypothesis that self-efficacy and personal goals were correlated with performance and the hypothesis that repeated successes and failures had significant effects on goals, i.e., repeated successes led to goals that were higher than those that experienced and single success and failure. Successes and failures did not have a significant effect on self-efficacy. This could be because self-efficacy doesn’t measure a people’s beliefs about their ability to achieve a goal, but rather their ability to perform well on a task (Spieker & Hinsz, 2004). Limitations of the study included a lack of random assignment to each condition and possibly not enough trials to induce strong feelings of success or failure.

Social Support

Social support has been recognized as an important protective factor relative to stressful life events (Rutter, 1987; Garmezy, 1991). Regarding how processes or mechanisms can serve as protective factors for people that experience adversity, Rutter (1987) asserts that these protective factors (a) reduce the risk impact, (b) reduce negative
chain reactions, (c) help improve or maintain self-esteem and self-efficacy, and (d) help recognize opportunities. When one or more of these outcomes are attained from social support, it can help leaders that have experienced a setback by reinforcing their coping efforts.

Dumont and Provost (1999) discuss two types of coping strategies: (a) problem focused that focuses on taking action to change the situation and (b) emotional centered where psychological discomfort is avoided without trying to modify the situation. Dumont and Provost proclaim that when problem focused coping strategies are used, social support is more readily accepted and can help to buffer stress. The authors performed a study on 297 adolescents which were classified into three groups based on scores from questionnaires focusing on depressive symptoms and daily hassles. The three groups were (a) well adjusted, (b) resilient, and (c) vulnerable.

Dumont and Provost (1999) utilized a discriminant function analysis to investigate differences on self-esteem, social activities, and coping strategies. The results show that the resilient group used a problem solving coping strategy more than the other two groups. Also, the vulnerable group was more involved with antisocial behaviors and did not use social support as often as the other two groups. The implication is that when people use problem focused coping strategies they are more likely to accept social support which can then help to alleviate anxiety and stress.

Summary

The review of the literature provided the researcher with an understanding of the current state of research for leadership failure, resilience, and bouncing back. The review provided empirical research and substantive information that was applicable and
supportive of the research questions and methodology. Chapter III contains a review of the methods used to address the research question, along with the justification for utilizing a qualitative strategy and semi-structured interviews. The chapter also includes a discussion of the research design, sample population, instrumentation, procedures, data analysis, validity, and ethical issues.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Organizations require leaders to analyze problems, disinter options, and make high impact decisions that carry varying degrees of risk along with potentially negative consequences. Leadership failure is practically inevitable and sometimes leaders suffer a failure that can be damaging to their career. When failure happens to this magnitude, leaders should take time to reflect and understand the cause of the failure, come to terms with their contribution, and accept responsibility for their part. Subsequent self-assessment and an astute self-awareness of their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and actions will inevitably determine whether or not these leaders overcome their setback and return to success. The purpose of this study is to explore the individual experiences of leaders who have suffered and endured a failure. This captures the essence of the central research question: What are the perceptions of business leaders who have overcome a failure or significant setback regarding resilience and rebounding to subsequent success?

Research Design

For this research, a qualitative strategy utilizing an IPA approach is employed. A qualitative methodology was chosen based on the questions of interest, the type of inquiry that the author felt best corresponded to the questions, and the author’s desire to understand the participants’ perspectives regarding the meanings that they have constructed regarding the phenomena of overcoming failure. Marshall and Rossman (2010) state that (a) “qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people,” (b) “focuses on context” and (c) “is emergent and evolving”...
The current research is aligned with the characteristics put forth by Marshall and Rossman.

A phenomenological approach was chosen because the author “seeks to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience” (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 19). The intent is for leaders who have experienced failure and overcome it to describe in rich detail how they felt, what they thought, and what they ultimately did to bounce back. Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, and Sixsmith (2013) assert, “Phenomenology as a philosophy is seen as a way of returning to and exploring the reality of life and living….It is a way of describing phenomena as they appear to the person experiencing the phenomena” (p. 18). The leaders’ own account of their experiences is of particular interest in this study.

**Role of the Researcher**

Tuohy et al. (2013) inform readers that there are two types of phenomenological research: descriptive and interpretive (p. 17). They state that interpretive phenomenology differs from descriptive phenomenology as a qualitative inquiry in that the latter attempts to describe phenomena in its purest form and general terms. The authors maintain that for this to occur, researchers must undergo the bracketing process: being aware of their biases and setting aside assumptions, prejudices, preconceptions, and presuppositions about the phenomenon under study as much as possible. In contrast, an interpretative approach tends to embrace researchers as part of the research and integrate their interpretations into the study based on their knowledge, previous understanding, and view of the world: “Rather than setting this aside, we need to bring it to the fore to be
recognised as influences and biases; through this acknowledgment, we can be open to other people’s meanings” (Tuohy et al., 2013, pp. 18-19).

The work by Tuohy et al. (2013) clearly suggests that the researcher’s viewpoint is integral to the interpretation and analysis of the subjects’ experience. Accordingly, the background of the researcher and his relationship to the topic are important considerations vis-à-vis the validity of the analyses and interpretations made.

In this study, the researcher has had personal experiences that could influence the interview process and interpretation. First, the researcher is a small business owner and is somewhat familiar with setbacks and failures associated with opening and building a business. Second, the researcher’s scholarly background and preparation has had a significant impact on his worldview and philosophy on how failure and success are defined.

Taking these into account, the researcher acknowledges and is aware of potential biases derived from these personal experiences that could have an influence on the interview questioning, coding, and analysis. According to Creswell (2009), “With these concerns in mind, inquirers explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status, that may shape their interpretations formed during a study” (p. 177).

Emic and Etic Perspectives

An emic analysis is one that attempts to describe a phenomenon from a participant’s perspective. It is the experience as portrayed through the lens of someone who belongs. An etic perspective is one of an objective outsider looking in with an effort to understand and describe the phenomenon. An individual can have both emic and etic
viewpoints that may toggle depending on their experience. Danquah and Miller (2007) state that “emic or etic can shift from one context to the next. Most individuals participate in multiple settings that can have quite differing interpretations as to insider or outsider” (p. 72). For a given phenomenon, there are multiple emic perspectives that can differ based on gender, race, religious upbringing, environment, and a variety of other factors and just as importantly, etic analyses can vary to the same degree. The preferred etic interpretation is one that follows and implements scientific rigor (Danquah & Miller, 2007, p. 72).

**Population and Sample**

The population of this study is business leaders from the United States who have experienced a failure or significant setback and then rebounded to a position of equal or higher status. The type of business may be small (less than 50 employees), medium (greater than or equal to 50 and less than 500 employees), or large (greater than or equal to 500 employees). The business leader may be an owner or one of the following: (a) Chief Executive Officer (CEO), (b) Chief Operations Officer (COO), (c) Chief Financial Officer (CFO), (d) President, (e) Vice President, (f) Director, or (g) Project Manager.

Sampling was be purposive, beginning with one of convenience and subsequently taking advantage of snowball and opportunistic leads (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). With reference to sampling approaches, Creswell (2009) asserts that “although such plans are subject to change, given the realities of field research, at the proposal stage, the wise researcher has thought through some of the complexities of the setting has made some initial judgments about how to deploy his time” (p. 107). This researcher developed an
initial plan of sampling, but remained flexible throughout the process. The final sample size was 10.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were introduced in Chapter I and are presented in this section for convenience of the reader. These questions guided the development of the questionnaire and interview schedule which are mapped to the research questions (Appendix A).

1. How do leaders perceive the determining factors of their failure?
2. What are the feelings and thoughts of leaders who have experienced failure?
3. How does resilience manifest as an adaptation or coping mechanism in leaders who have experienced a failure?
4. What is the process of bouncing back from a failure to achieve success again?
5. What do leaders learn about themselves during the process of failing and bouncing back?

The intent of these research questions was to understand the perceptions of business leaders who have failed and bounced back. The purpose was to gain a deep understanding of the cognitive, affective, and agentic strategies that each subject experienced. Evidence embedded in the literature suggests that leaders will have (a) framed the failure as a cause-and-effect construct, (b) at least some understanding of their feelings and thoughts after experiencing the failure, (c) a realization of when they felt empowered to overcome the failure, and (d) the ability to identify the actions taken when they bounced back from their setback. Thus, the research questions were designed to draw out responses that help
delineate the proposed phases that leaders experience whereas the current literature tends to amalgamate these potential distinct phases into a single phenomenon.

**Instrument Development**

Marshall and Rossman (2010) declare that for a qualitative study, there are four primary means of gathering information: (a) participating in the setting, (b) direct observation, (c) in-depth interviews, and (d) analyzing documents (p. 137). For this study, interviews were employed as the primary data collection method along with a background questionnaire (Appendix B), which was used to gather demographic data on participants who will be asked to complete this questionnaire before the interview.

The background questionnaire and the interview schedule (Appendix C) were developed under the guidance of the researcher’s dissertation seminar professor and dissertation committee chair. This study utilized an IPA methodology employing semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. When constructing questions, Smith and Osborn (2007) recommend framing the questions in such a way “to get as close to possible to what your respondent thinks about the topic, without being led too much by your questions” (p. 61). The interview schedule was developed with the ideas put forth by Smith and Osborn that the interview for an IPA should (a) be guided and not dictated by the interview schedule, (b) establish rapport with the respondent, (c) not be overly concerned with the order of the questions, (d) be free to probe interesting areas that arise, and (e) follow the respondent’s interests (p. 58). Criteria for developing the questions came from literature reviews, personal insights, and the research questions developed for the study with the intent of guiding the respondent and eliciting personal viewpoints.
Pilot Study

Pilot studies can help “find ways to eliminate barriers such as resistance to tape recorders and mistrust of the researcher’s agenda” (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 96). The pilot study affords the opportunity to work through problems such as ensuring the questions are worded properly and the data collection methods are adequate before actual participants are interviewed. Three subjects who possess similar characteristics as the population were chosen for the pilot study. A letter describing the study was sent to the pilot subjects (Appendix D). After completing the survey and interview, the subjects were asked to provide feedback on the two research instruments.

Following the completion of the Background Questionnaire and the Interview Schedule, pilot participants gave valuable feedback regarding the process and the instruments by completing the Pilot Member Review of Interview Schedule (Appendix E). In addition to the completion of the instruments, the researcher reviewed the process and examined the subjects during the process. Following the pilot interviews, the researcher reviewed the audio recordings for clarity. No alterations to the Background Questionnaire and the Interview Schedule were required.

Procedures

An invitation letter (Appendix F) was sent via electronic mail to the individuals identified in the population as potential participants for this study. Participants who agreed to be in the study were asked to return a form with contact information so that the researcher could set up an interview date and time.

Each participant in the study was required to sign a consent form (Appendix G) at the time of the interview. This informed consent made each individual aware of what
would occur during the study, information to be collected, and how the information would be used. Individuals were informed that at any time they could withdraw from the study without any penalties.

A semi-structured interview was chosen for this study. Marshall and Rossman (2010) provide advice for a guided interview by stating “the researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant’s views but otherwise respects the way the participant frames and structures the responses” (p. 144). Additionally, Marshall and Rossman state that “The participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it (the emic perspective), not as the researcher views it (the etic perspective)” (p. 144). Smith and Osborn (2007) provide the following tips for interviewing: (a) do not rush, (b) use minimal probes to explore a topic more in-depth, (c) ask one question at a time, and (d) monitor the effect of the interview on the participant (p. 64).

For this study, the interview data was recorded using a digital audio recording device. At the end of each interview, the researcher spent several minutes noting issues or instances that occurred during the interview. These included (but were not limited to) reactions of the participants, unusual responses, or questions about the context. These post-interview notes were important clues when trying to interpret data from the coding. Once the interviews were completed, transcription were completed utilizing computer software, consistent with the summary of work on the transcription process.

**Data Analysis**

Marshall and Rossman (2010) explain that a typical analysis of qualitative data follows certain steps or falls into phases. Marshall and Rossman contend that in general,
the analysis falls into the following phases: (a) organizing the data, (b) immersion in the data, (c) generating categories and themes, (d) coding, (e) interpretation, (f) searching for alternative understandings, and (g) writing the report. Creswell (2009) offers the following hierarchical approach while also advising that the process is interactive: (a) organizing and preparing the data, (b) reading through the data, (c) doing detailed analysis with coding, (d) generating categories or themes, (e) putting the description and themes into a narrative, and (f) interpreting the data.

The transcriptions were read a number of times to attain a deep understanding. Data analysis consisted of organizing the data, identifying themes, and tabulating their frequencies. As topics are realized within the data, they were be coded. The analysis process entailed open coding where conceptual categories are created followed by axial coding where the codes are grouped by common points of intersection (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 215).

For IPA, Smith and Osborn (2007) recommend reading through the data a first time while making notes, then reading a second time to generate themes. This is followed by connecting the themes, continuing the analysis with the other cases, and then the write-up where the meanings are drawn from the participants’ experience. These steps followed the prior open and axial coding, with emphasis here on both emic and etic insights.

**Trustworthiness and Validity**

Marshall and Rossman (2010) state that trustworthiness refers to the “goodness” and validity the “soundness” of qualitative research (p. 39). Marshall and Rossman further state that reliability, validity, objectivity, and generalizability were borrowed from
quantitative approaches and historically used as criteria to measure the soundness of a qualitative study (p. 39). In that context, citing Lincoln and Guba, the authors put forth alternative constructs to capture concerns of trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (p. 40).

Creswell (2009) advises the researcher to incorporate one or more of the following eight primary strategies actively to ensure validity: (a) triangulation, (b) member checking, (c) use of rich, thick descriptions for the findings, (d) clarification of the researcher’s bias, (e) presenting discrepant information that runs counter to the themes, (f) spending prolonged time in the setting, (g) peer debriefing, and (h) use an external auditor.

First, the data collection method was limited to personal interviews, so there was a limit to the richness in the description of the findings, but the responses include in-depth depictions of the participants’ experience. Second, the researcher clarified personal experiences and possible biases in a previous section of this chapter. Third, information that tended to disagree with the themes put forth were explicitly stated. Finally, a review of the process and interpretation was be conducted by the researcher’s dissertation chair, who served as an external auditor.

In summary, the researcher incorporated four of the validity strategies recommended by Creswell (2009) which included using rich, thick descriptions of the participants’ experience; clarifying possible biases; being forthright with information that disagrees with proposed themes; and using an external auditor check. These strategies strengthen the credibility, trustworthiness, and validity of the analysis.
Ethical Issues

For this study, all standards were met for ethical research including federal rules regarding the study of human subjects and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) submission, review, and approval. Additionally, the research participants had a right to anonymity and confidentiality to the extent of which the research methodology can afford. Regarding anonymity, Whiting (2008) states that “true anonymity exists only if the participant's identity cannot be linked to the data, even by the researcher” (p. 39). For this study, absolute anonymity was not guaranteed since face-to-face interviews were conducted. However, a stringent effort was made to “collect, analyze, and report the data without compromising the identities of their respondents. The ultimate goal is complete confidentiality for every research participant” (Kaiser, 2009, p. 1634). All data were managed and controlled in accordance with recommendations by Kaiser (2009) and Whiting (2008). Each participant was given a consent form in writing and verbally informed prior to data collection regarding all rights to confidentiality and anonymity along the use of pseudonyms.

Summary

This chapter identified the methodological issues and concerns for this study. The purpose of this study was to explore the individual experiences of leaders who have undergone a significant setback or failure and uncover the individual cognitive, affective, and agentic aspects of resilience and bouncing back.

The research design is a qualitative IPA that allowed for inquiry into the detailed experience of the business leaders who have failed and bounced back. Background and demographic information on the participants were collected via questionnaires. The
Interview Schedule was the primary source of information which focused on the emic perspective of the participants using a semi-structured interview format. As the researcher’s role is integral to this study, he takes responsibility for the interpretation of the data and is cognizant of his own background and biases.

The population for this study was business leaders from the south-central region of Kentucky. The sample was purposive, initially based on convenience, and then other participants were identified by opportunistic sampling. The final sample size was 10 based on the availability of individuals meeting the criteria for this research.

The research questions were designed with the intention of eliciting the perceptions of business leaders who have experienced a failure and subsequently bounced back and gaining a deep understanding of the process followed by each subject. The questions were developed from a survey of related literature. The background questionnaire and interview schedule were generated to collect the desired data pursuant to answering the research questions. A pilot study was conducted to work through potential issues with the questions and data collection.

Subjects for this study were invited to be a part of this research and those that took part signed a consent form outlining their rights regarding anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. A semi-structured interview was employed as the primary data collection method.

Data analysis consisted of organizing, immersion, generating themes, coding, and interpretation based first on open and axial coding (Creswell, 2009) and then further subjecting these themes to the lens of interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The interviews were recorded by a digital voice recorder. Computer
software was used for transcription and to aid in the analysis of the recorded data. Strategies will be implemented to ensure trustworthiness, validation, and managing ethical concerns such as anonymity and confidentiality.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

For organizations to move forward, leaders are required to be driven and make minimal mistakes that have a significant negative impact on the organization. Leaders may try to be fully aware of the external and internal events that could lead to their ultimate demise such as termination or loss of a business, but not all risks are known. Leaders will experience setbacks and failures that can significantly affect their status and livelihood. How leaders respond to failures can determine how well they eventually recover. The purpose of this study was to investigate the individual experiences of leaders that have succumbed to a setback or failure and their reactions across the affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains. This leads to the central research question: What are the perceptions of business leaders who have overcome a failure or significant setback through the manifestation of resilience and subsequently rebounded?

Procedures

The purposeful sampling techniques described in Chapter III were utilized, which were convenience, snowball, and opportunistic. The research began by contacting academic and professional connections requesting recommendations of individuals who met the desired characteristics and could participate. Also, the WKU doctoral office sent an email on behalf of the researcher to current students and alumni. Additionally, messages were submitted on social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) in an attempt to recruit participants. Based on these sampling techniques, 10 participants were located who met the desired criteria.
Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used as the primary data collection method. Of the 10 interviewees, five were conducted face-to-face and five were by phone. Before each interview was conducted, the researcher explained the purpose of the project and reviewed the contents of the informed consent document. Regarding confidentiality and anonymity, participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identity. Each participant signed an informed consent document and a Letter to Study Participants (Appendix F) was provided. The participant then completed the Background Questionnaire and the interview process began. Table 2 provides a detailed description of the sample profile.

With the permission of each interviewee, the researcher audiotaped the interviews. The total length of all the interviews was six hours and 35 seconds and ranged from 26 mins to 48 mins. After transcription, the 10 interviews provided 102 pages of raw transcripts.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section of the chapter focuses on the in-depth analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the interviews. The researcher used a theoretical framework developed by King and Rothstein (2010) that refers to resilience as a process over time that follows how leaders respond to a failure or setback, how they deal with the traumatic event, and the activity that leads to growth and recovery. King and Rothstein developed their model within the following three domains: (a) affective or emotional, (b) cognitive or thought processes, and (c) behavioral or actions taken. In general, leaders may experience characteristic changes in how they feel, what they think, and the actions they
Table 2

*Profile for Participant Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Years in Leadership Role</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Type Of Business</th>
<th>No Of Employees</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>Owner</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>Director</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>College Degree</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>Manufacturing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>Black</td>
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<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Advanced Degree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
<td>Sports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>Advanced Degree</td>
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<td>Owner</td>
<td>In-Person</td>
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<td>Alice</td>
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<td>59</td>
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<td>Some College</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
take which will ultimately lead to positive outcomes of resiliency. Additionally, a detailed review of existing literature and previous research in the areas of business leadership, failure, and resilience was conducted.

As suggested by Saldana (2015), blocks of text were numbered as reference, a two-inch margin was created on the right side of the raw transcripts, and a text box inserted. The open coding process consisted of reading through the transcribed interviews, highlighting relevant interviewee comments, and labeling concepts and categories in the text box. The interviews were read again to ensure all relevant text was highlighted and properly coded. This process was used for all transcriptions. Then, the codes were transferred to a spreadsheet and organized by interview, page number, and block number. Lastly, the open codes were chunked for each research question, themes were identified from the open codes, and then organized by the axial codes.

The process allowed the researcher to identify themes and patterns that were present in the data and specifically, how these leaders experienced and perceived their failure and process of bouncing back. Qualitative research utilizing semi-structured interviews that use open-ended questions allow the individual experiences and phenomena to be captured from each interviewee’s perspective (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

This section has been organized by first addressing the research questions that guided this study and providing the themes that emerged from the open and axial coding process. Additionally, summaries of the participants’ responses to interview questions and other supporting analyses are provided. The research questions that guided the development of the questionnaire and interview schedule are listed below:
1. How do leaders perceive the determining factors of their failure?

2. What are the feelings and thoughts of leaders who have experienced failure?

3. How does resilience manifest as an adaptation or coping mechanism in leaders who have experienced a failure?

4. What is the process of bouncing back from a failure to achieve success again?

5. What do leaders learn about themselves during the process of failing and bouncing back?

The respondents were open to sharing their experiences. Nearly all interviewees followed the same pattern with how they experienced the setback or failure, coped, manifested resilience, bounced back, and learned from their experience. A summary of these steps is shown in figure 2 (which aligns with the research questions):

![Figure 2. Steps business leaders follow from experiencing a setback or failure and bouncing back.](image)

**Research Question 1**

RQ 1: How do leaders perceive the determining factors of their failure?

For this question, the researcher probed the circumstances and causes of the leaders’ setback or failure. Nine respondents listed external causes and three listed internal causes (two listed both).

When asked about the causes and determining factors regarding their failure or setback, three themes surfaced: (a) external causes, (b) internal causes, and (c) secondary events (see Table 3). Nine of the 10 participants cited external causes as the main
contributors. Three of the nine, who were business owners, explicitly stated the great recession of 2008 and 2009 (external event) was the driving force behind their setback or failure. Sam stated “The economic collapse of they say in 2009…, it was a chain of events that created eventually the closure of my store last year.”

Table 3

*Relationship between Research Question 1, Open Codes, and Axial Codes/Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Axial Codes/Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>External Event</td>
<td>External Causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduction In Force</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance Related</td>
<td>Internal Causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overconfidence Bias</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Optimism Bias</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Event</td>
<td>Secondary Event</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three participants listed internal causes as the reason for their failure. Rob stated overconfidence bias ultimately lead to him losing his job, “I was probably overconfident in what I was actually researching out. This is something where I've felt really cocky for lack of better word.”

James who was terminated from his leadership position listed both the external cause of a change that was out of his control and the internal cause of performance related issues. He stated, “Well, just a lack of performance for a year and a half or so. Through some transition…We went through a growth change and adding some lines. We changed some materials on the lines and didn't come out of that very well.”

James stated changes dictated from upper management and his performance were the causes. Whether or not he implied that the changes caused the performance issues is
unknown. However, there are examples in the literature where change can cause negative emotional reactions or rigidity and are characteristic of leadership identified with failure (Burke, 2006; Chaffee & Arthur, 2002).

Sam attributed the primary cause of closing his business to the economic recession, but also admitted his optimism bias. An optimism bias can be born of a long successful run and potentially serve as a latent internal factor that when combined with an enabling condition, leads to an error or series of errors that eventually produce a failure (Tinsley et al., 2011).

Four respondents gave a secondary event as a contributing factor and these were: (a) divorce (listed twice), (b) death of family member, and (c) spouse had cancer. Only those who had attributed their setback or failure to an external event responded with a secondary event.

The expectation was for more internal causes (cognitive biases, emotional intelligence, ethical issues, etc.) to be expressed, but this was not the case. However, this could be due to a cognitive bias referred to as an attribution error where people will ascribe their faults or mistakes to the situation, environment, or some other external factor (Eberlin & Tatum, 2005; Edmondson, 2011).

An unexpected finding was that secondary events were mentioned during four interviewees’ responses, but was not specifically probed so it is unknown if others also experienced anything like this. It is possible that the secondary event was given to further reinforce the attribution to an external set of events. It is also unknown how much weight regarding their emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and resilience in general can be attributed to their business related setback or their personal issues.
Research Question 2

RQ 2: What are the feelings and thoughts of leaders who have experienced failure?

This question probed the feelings and thoughts of leaders who have experienced a setback or failure. All interviewees gave examples of negative emotions or thoughts following their event (see Table 4). It is common when experiencing setbacks and failures for people to have negative emotions and thoughts such as anger, sadness, grief, disappointment, low self-esteem, depression, shame, low self-confidence, or self-doubt. (Bandura, 1989; King & Rothstein, 2010).

Table 4

Relationship between Research Question 2, Open Codes, and Axial Codes/Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Axial Codes/Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Negative Emotional Response to Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thought a Failure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hurt Self-Image</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letting People Down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overthinking Decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Doubt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suppression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maladaptive Regulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These leaders shared many emotions and thoughts of how their setback or failure impacted them negatively. Themes for this research question are (a) negative emotional response to failure, (b) negative thoughts in response to failure, and (c) maladaptive regulation. Nine out of 10 of the leaders who participated in this study experienced either a negative emotional response or a negative thought in response to their setback or failure. Eight out of 10 respondents gave at least one type of negative emotional response and seven gave at least one negative thought. Six of these eight stated both negative emotions and thoughts. John declared that he experienced five negative emotions and three negative thoughts in response to his setback,

It is not only fear, it is what have I done? How do I get into shape? And it's that. It's the almost like helplessness like you're drowning, like this is not a quick fix. There is no magic bullet you can do and solve the problem. It's going to be a long term thing but the feelings I think I had isolated myself as well… It's a very hard thing to say ‘I'm not successful, I have failed miserably’… I was overthinking every decision.

Mark articulated his emotion succinctly, “I was mad” as well as what he was thinking, “I questioned my abilities.” Mary was also terse in her description of how she was feeling, “I was angry.” Two respondents gave maladaptive regulation responses: Dave suppressed his anger and depression and Alice was in denial regarding her situation. Dave’s self-image was damaged, but he wanted to appear strong and stated, “I kept it all inside.” With all interviewees, it was clear in their voices or faces that the event troubled them in some way.
Two participants did not list a negative emotional response and both had a very positive outlook on the experience and life in general. However, Tim stated he was worried about letting others down. Alice also did not respond with a negative emotional response, but as previously stated, she was in a state of denial following her event.

As expected, all interviewees gave examples of negative emotions or thoughts following their event. This implies that it is not detrimental to experience these negative emotions and thoughts, and appears to be normal. This lends support to Seligman (2012) who states that negative responses to the trauma of a failure are normal. However, two participants did not mention a negative emotion, but one explicitly listed denial. These two could be correlated, but inferences can’t be drawn with one result.

**Research Question 3**

RQ 3: How does resilience manifest as an adaptation or coping mechanism in leaders who have experienced a failure?

King and Rothstein (2010) present a model for resilience involving protective factors and attributes within the affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains. As a means of addressing the question on how resilience manifests as an adaptation or coping mechanism, the researcher explored the transition from a negative reaction to one of a more positive state.

All participants used multiple adaptation or coping mechanisms to achieve a state of resilience. These themes are (a) external support, (b) cognitive regulation, and (c) behavior regulation (see Table 5).
Table 5  

*Relationship between Research Question 3, Open Codes, and Axial Codes/Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Axial Codes/Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>External Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Reappraisal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Behavior Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social support was listed the most with eight out of 10 interviewees discussing how someone, whether a family member, coworker, or mentor helped them in some way. Rob gave a good explanation of how social support turned him around:

Finally, you realize that there was a light at that end. I don’t know, I think that there was probably a couple of moments, we're just talking with small groups of people and people said, “Well, wait a minute. You know how to do this.” There's something you can't do that actually turned a light on to me that said, “Well yes, I can.” This didn't completely-- I've missed it this one time. It doesn't mean that I can't do it at all. It doesn't mean that I can't do this. I just need to take different steps to do this.

Mary was purposeful with getting the right people around her to help, “I surrounded myself with really supportive people.” Sam’s partner helped motivate him to change his state of mind, “Steve made me realize, he said, ‘You have built such a clientele, everybody in this town respects you, everybody looks up at you. You need to utilize those connections that you've made.’”
Social support and interpersonal relationships have been identified in the literature as improving adaptive competence by providing emotional support, feedback, and guidance (Bonanno, 2004; Garmezy, 1991; King & Rothstein, 2010; Rutter, 1987).

Cognitive and behavioral regulation were also salient themes for this question. Five respondents presented how their thoughts about the event changed in such a way that they applied a different meaning to the situation. This form of regulation is called cognitive reappraisal and can lead to a reduction in negative emotions and an increase in positive emotions (Gross, 1998; Gross, 2013; Gross & Jazaieri, 2014; Ochsner & Gross, 2005).

Five out of 10 participants asserted that their spirituality was an important factor in turning them around. Tim expressed how social support and his spirituality affected him, “I think any time you go through adversity, you try to lean on something. For me, it was my faith and my family. Those are wonderful coping mechanisms.” Alice testified that “I'm very grateful many angels showed up at that point in my life.”

Eight out of 10 interviewees used some form of behavior regulation to get in a resilient state. Changed behaviors included goal setting, problem solving, and planning. These changes in behavior involve volition or will and an agentic approach to change people’s condition to one of a more positive state (Bandura, 2001; King & Rothstein, 2010; Kuhl, 1994; Zhu, 2004). All eight utilized goal setting as a strategy. Rob stated with confidence it helps him take action, “Yes, definitely goal setting…. What that does for me is that it doesn't give me the space to be lazy.”

Gary also used planning along with goal setting to his advantage with making positive behavioral changes, “the takeaway is really a solid written tactical plan marching
towards that strategy and our goals have put in place.”

Others stated that optimism and hope had replaced previously held negative emotions and thoughts. Seligman (2012) stressed that optimism is a critical component of resilience. Goleman (2006) proclaimed that optimism, like hope, is a feeling that everything will turn out satisfactory despite setbacks.

The basic model presented is that resilience manifests after the post-failure experience and this manifestation results from coping and adaptive mechanisms. As previously noted, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141). From this, it is not unexpected for leaders that have overcome a negative event to have undergone some type of coping. An interesting result was how much spirituality came into play for the interviewees and how all of them also mentioned social support.

The coping mechanisms used by the participants mentioned tend to support declarations by Bonanno (2004) that there are multiple pathways to resilience. Bonanno presents different dimensions that can lead to resilience and are as follows: (a) hardiness, (b) self-enhancement, and (c) positive emotion and laughter. Hardiness is about finding meaning, believing in the notion of influencing the environment, and making positive changes. Self-enhancement is characterized by high self-esteem. Positive emotions and laughter can dampen negative emotions and social support is more likely to be invited. These are all supported by the research findings.
Research Question 4

RQ 4: What is the process of bouncing back from a failure or setback to achieve success again?

For this question, the researcher explored the interviewees perception of how they bounced back that included motivation, potential barriers, and strategies that aided them. At this stage, the responses were overwhelmingly positive and action-oriented. All participants answered affirmatively that they have bounced back from their setback or failure and expanded on how they did it.

All interviewees affirmed at this point in the process that they had started having positive thoughts about the future and performed positive behaviors. The themes that surfaced from this set are (a) positive affect, (b) positive thoughts, (c) barriers, and (d) positive behaviors (see Table 6).

Table 6

Relationship between Research Question 4, Open Codes, and Axial Codes/Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Axial Codes/Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sense of Value</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Determined</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive Outlook</td>
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<td>Conviction</td>
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<td>Self-Confidence</td>
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<td>Self-Efficacy Beliefs</td>
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<td>Perseverance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guilt</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retribution</td>
<td>Barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lacked College Degree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Improvement</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focused on Helping Others</td>
<td>Positive Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Took Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Made Positive Changes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two responded with how they began to have positive feelings about their abilities. Mark discussed his determination and how it helped him by making a very positive affirmation, “I'm inherently relentless.”

Seven of the participants discussed their positive outlook and thoughts in their own unique ways. Tim stated, “I tried to focus on the positives. Although you get a lot of things going through your head…I knew I had a lot left and it would just be somewhere else pursuing another goal for another organization. That's part of life.” James discussed his positive outlook and how his self-confidence has increased, “Piece by piece. I got my mojo back…got my confidence back.” Two interviewees gave responses of positive affect, which were a feeling of determination and sense of value.

Five participants touched on how past experiences have shaped their current beliefs. Mary communicated how challenges in her past have affected her self-efficacy beliefs, “I'd had other losses and other challenges that were smaller. But I believe that all those small ones before, are what created the resilience.”

Nine responded with positive behaviors such as taking action (e.g., seeking new opportunity), focusing on helping others (e.g., volunteering), self-improvement (e.g., attaining a new degree), and making positive changes (e.g., opening different type of business). Sam, in discussing positive changes when he had to close down his retail store and now owns a bakery, stated “It's like, you just decide it's time to do something else.” Sam also told a story during his time in limbo when he focused on helping someone in need,

There was an old World War II vet…I took care of him. His wife had died. He had financed my original store. He had no children, an old Greek man, very loyal
people, extremely. Anyway, his wife passed away and he got no health and was
going to have to go to a nursing home. I stayed with him. I threw myself into
something else. It was beneficial to someone else. Maybe there was a little bit-- I
feel good about myself, doing something for somebody in that end.

Tim spoke about his experience focusing on others, “I think people have always
been able to count on me, especially the toughest of times, to try to see things through, to
be there for them. So from my perspective, I had to continue to do that. I couldn't do
anything other than be resilient.” While no question specifically asked about the amount
of time it took from experiencing the setback to bouncing back, some interviewees shared
this and it was generally a number weeks to a number of months, but less than one year.

When queried about barriers that participants confronted while bouncing back,
three interviewees responded: guilt due to being more focused on his own needs, desire
for retribution after being fired, and lacking a college degree that stymied efforts looking
for a new opportunity. It seemed that most of the participants were more focused on the
positive aspects at this stage of the process and possibly could not think of barriers that
got in their way.

During this time of bouncing back from their setback, respondents displayed
positive feelings, thoughts, and actions. Of course, there is an expectation for those that
have overcome their negative situation to reflect and describe themselves as having
determination, positive, and self-confident. A noted observation is that five interviewees
spoke about helping others and they also had a positive outlook (seven total had
responses coded as a positive outlook). It is possible that the act of helping others caused
the positive outlook which then lead to positive action to help themselves.
Research Question 5

RQ 5: What do leaders learn about themselves during the process of failing and bouncing back?

This question focused on what leaders learned about themselves during the process of failing and bouncing back. Leaders who participated in the study learned many characteristics about themselves after experiencing their setback or failure and bouncing back. The common themes were (a) gained wisdom, (b) increased coping efficacy, and (c) higher emotional intelligence (see Table 7).

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Open Codes</th>
<th>Axial Codes/Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Detect Warning Signs of Failure</td>
<td>Gained Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluate Risk More</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gain Clarity of Situation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overcome Fear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better Prepared</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Adaptable</td>
<td>Increased Coping Efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can Overcome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resourceful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Humble</td>
<td>Higher Emotional Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allow Employees to Make Mistakes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More Compassionate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked what they specifically learned about their setback, the theme reflected a gain in wisdom. Six participants gave responses such as being better prepared, looking for warning signs of a potential setback, and better at evaluating risk. The wisdom expressed appeared to be different and unique for each leader. James was better at detecting the warning signs of failure,
You learn what not to do, as well as what to do. I think it really helps you see things coming and avoid some of those things from happening again, see, cause you can recognize some of those situations and you feel like you've got enough experience in having gone through them before, that you're not going to let it happen again.

The literature suggests that learning from failures is imperative for growth and can be easier when thoughts and emotions are regulated. Negative feelings (e.g., grief, anger, etc.) and thoughts (self-doubt, overthinking, etc.) can be detrimental to gaining the valuable wisdom inherent in the process (Cannon & Edmondson, 2001; King & Rothstein, 2010; Shepherd et al., 2009).

Alice now asks pertinent questions that help her evaluate risk, “What is the current situation? What is it that we are trying to deviate from? Obviously, the current situation…needs to be improved or it needs to be changed...What is it that I'm trying to arrive at?” John described an analogy of taking a boat out in the water as to how he is now better prepared after experiencing his setback,

I think I'll be much more prepared. What I know is, I have things in place and the things I'm doing, I would see this beforehand. It was like [before], I was taking that boat out in the water without looking at the forecast, and bad deal getting in that hurricane. At least now, I'm going to look at the daily forecast before I ever take that boat out for sure.

Mary proclaimed that she had lost her fear of failure due to an awareness of her resilience, “I learned to not be afraid of the future about it happening again. I learned that I did have resilience.”
Nine interviewees described their increased coping efficacy as a result of bouncing back from their setback. Responses centered around being aware of their resourcefulness (e.g., focused on strengths, determination), adaptability, and ability to overcome their setback (e.g., relentless). This increase in coping self-efficacy is in alignment with the assertion by Shepherd et al. (2009) that social support and emotional regulation help to provide the conditions necessary for an increase in these beliefs. The authors define coping self-efficacy as “the beliefs in one’s capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to recover from major setbacks” (p. 593).

When asked about his ability to bounce back, Dave stated very explicitly that “I can adapt and overcome.” Mark described his ability to overcome and resourcefulness as “I just learned to have more confidence in myself… and to really focus in on [my] strengths…it has improved my decision making skill.” Rob asserts his confidence in his ability to overcome obstacles, “It doesn’t even slow me down at any point…I can’t imagine that there’s anything that’s actually going to make me decide that whatever obstacle comes up that I’m not going to figure out how to overcome it.”

Six interviewees explained how their leadership has changed as a result of their experience. Dave illustrated his humbleness and newly found participative style, “I'm very humble, I'm not better than anybody… everybody's got an opinion and everybody's opinion and thought is calculated before we make a whole decision.” Based on the valuable lessons Rob has attained from his experience, he encourages his team to make mistakes, “I've learned to let these guys go out and make some of their own failures.” Alice explains her compassion in the following way, “I think it gives me more capacity to
[have] more empathy, to be more understanding and to be more kind, to be more gentle. I think most importantly, to be more free as a leader.” Five responded in a way that implies higher emotional intelligence (EI). As a result of their experience, these leaders were more humble, compassionate, and participative in their leadership approach.

There appears to have been a shift in some characteristics toward a more transformational style of leadership (Bass 1998; Burns, 1978) especially with regard to emotional intelligence (EI). While the literature research did not reveal a connection between failure, resilience, bouncing back, and EI, higher EI can be conducive to better employee engagement and teamwork (Goleman, 2006; Goleman, 2015) and the feedback from the interviewees implies this linkage may exist.

Chapter Summary

A total of 10 business leaders from a purposeful sample completed two instruments: the Background Questionnaire and the Interview Schedule. The participants shared their insights and perceptions from their experiences with a setback or failure, resilience, and bouncing back. The responses of this group of business leaders provided a rich, thick description of the researcher’s findings regarding the six research questions:

1. How do leaders perceive the determining factors of their failure?
2. What are the feelings and thoughts of leaders who have experienced failure?
3. How does resilience manifest as an adaptation or coping mechanism in leaders who have experienced a failure?
4. What is the process of bouncing back from a failure to achieve success again?
5. What do leaders learn about themselves during the process of failing and bouncing back?
In summary, the purpose of this qualitative study was defined, along with the methodological approach. The researcher identified 16 themes derived from the semi-structured interviews. The themes are summarized with each code numbered and example open codes in Figure 3. The data analysis included open coding within each transcribed interview, transferring the codes onto a spreadsheet, organizing, and creating themes from the related codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience Setback or Failure</th>
<th>Post Failure Experience</th>
<th>Manifestation of Resilience</th>
<th>Bouncing Back</th>
<th>Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 1: Internal Causes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 4: Negative Emotional Response</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 7: External Support</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 10: Positive Affect</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 14: Gained Wisdom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Related</td>
<td>Depression, Anger, Sadness, etc.</td>
<td>Social Support, Spirituality</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Detect Warning Signs of Failure, Better at Evaluating Risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overconfidence Bias</td>
<td><strong>Theme 5: Negative Thoughts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 8: Cognitive Regulation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 11: Positive Thoughts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 15: Increased Coping</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 2: External Causes</strong></td>
<td>Self-Doubt, Overthinking</td>
<td>Cognitive Reappraisal, Optimism</td>
<td>Positive Outlook, Self-Confidence</td>
<td><strong>Theme 16: Leadership Changed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Event (e.g., Economy)</td>
<td><strong>Theme 6: Maladaptive Regulation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 9: Behavior Regulation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 12: Barriers</strong></td>
<td><strong>More Humble, Participative</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in Force</td>
<td>Denial, Suppression</td>
<td>Goal Setting, Problem Solving, Planning</td>
<td><strong>Theme 13: Positive Behaviors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 3: Secondary Events</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Theme 14: Gained Wisdom</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., Divorce, Family Member Ill)</td>
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</table>

**Figure 3.** Summary of themes organized by process step of the individual experiences.

Overall, the participants openly shared their thoughts and feelings to the questions in the Interview Schedule. At times there were emotions and thoughtful pauses, some stated the interview process was therapeutic. Many of their thoughts and feelings mirror the findings with the literature research. Some may represent new thoughts or ideas. Chapter V contains a summary of the findings and discussion, as well as recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The capacity for strategically achieving performance objectives that are in alignment with an organization’s vision and mission is a vital skill for leaders. But how do leaders know how they are performing? Locke and Latham (2006) identified feedback as a key moderator for goal setting. Just like any employee in an organization, leaders need performance feedback to help them make necessary adjustments to their strategic plans and behavior modifications when needed. However, there are times when the feedback is in the form of a significant setback or failure and potentially too late for simple course corrections. At this point, negative consequences have been realized and how leaders react is crucial in their ability to bounce back.

The strategy for this qualitative research study was grounded in the literature on business leadership, failure, and resilience. These components are brought together using the theoretical framework of King and Rothstein (2010) and their process model of resilience in terms of the affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains. How leaders react and the self-regulatory factors in each domain indicate changes in feelings, thoughts, and actions that can lead to positive outcomes of resiliency. This leads to the central research question of this study: What are the perceptions of business leaders who have overcome a failure or significant setback regarding resilience and bouncing back to success? The empirical research questions were designed to investigate the overall research question identified above. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do leaders perceive the determining factors of their failure?

2. What are the feelings and thoughts of leaders who have experienced failure?
3. How does resilience manifest as an adaptation or coping mechanism in leaders who have experienced a failure?

4. What is the process of bouncing back from a failure to achieve success again?

5. What do leaders learn about themselves during the process of failing and bouncing back?

A purposeful sample of 10 participants was selected utilizing convenience, snowball, and opportunistic sampling techniques. The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. An IPA methodology was employed for this study with an idiographic mode of inquiry where individual perceptions and insights were captured to make sense of the phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2007). In the remainder of the chapter, the researcher discusses implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

**Implications**

This present study provides support for previous research related to leadership failure and resilience. The business leaders who participated in this study were able to articulate their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors within the context of their personal experiences with failure, resilience, and bouncing back. The codes and themes interpreted from the responses of the interviewees inferred characteristics that emphasize (a) how leaders perceive their setback and the surrounding circumstances, (b) experiencing negative emotions and thoughts following the setback or failure, (c) coping and adaptive mechanisms involving social support and emotional regulation that appears to allow resilience to manifest (d) bouncing back by taking positive action, and (e) learning from the experience in ways that could help with future events that pose risks of failure.
The findings from this study led the researcher to draw a number of conclusions regarding the research questions. First, how respondents viewed and ascribed the cause or causes of their setbacks did not have an effect on their ability to overcome the setback. In other words, some interviewees gave external factors as the cause of their failure while others presented internal causes, but all followed somewhat similar paths along their journey to overcome their failures. Therefore, following a negative event, it may not be important to focus on the causes, at least right away, but instead concentrate on the how the individual has been impacted.

Second, it was encouraging to hear the leaders open up and express how they felt following their negative event. The researcher expected that even though these leaders showed resilience in their ability to bounce back, they still experienced negative feelings and thoughts after their failure, but wasn’t sure of how they would respond because there can be an expectation to appear strong and in control at all times. From this, it appears that whether or not someone can cope, express resilience, and bounce back cannot be predicted solely based on their initial reactions.

Third, the coping and adaptive mechanisms that were expressed by the respondents varied, but social support was the characteristic most often mentioned. In most cases, social support appeared to have initiated the internal shift from a negative viewpoint to one comprised of optimism, determination, goal setting, planning, and overall positive outlook. Could these leaders have arrived to a more resilient state on their own? Maybe so, but because these leaders specifically mentioned social support, it demonstrated the importance it had for them. The implication is that leaders should receive this support as quickly as possible. But, will a leader know to seek social support
following a setback? Maybe not, but organizations should be aware of the importance of social support and it would benefit leaders to know that coaching and counseling could be a beneficial way to help get them back on track. This social support may also be an important factor for regulating their emotions and changing the meaning of the event to one of a more positive outlook, i.e., instead of being sad or angry because of the event, being happy the event happened because now something more interesting can be pursued.

Fourth, for the leaders interviewed, bouncing back was about a translating positive thoughts and feelings into affirming beliefs and actions. These actions included helping others or volunteering in some way, self-improvement activities such as working on a new degree, and making positive changes such as opening a new business. Therefore, if someone has suffered a setback, whether or not action has been taken by the individual may be an indicator of where they are in the process of bouncing back. Also, it may be important to recognize the right time to encourage behaviors that are action oriented. If we attempt to inspire someone to take action before they are ready, will it have an undesirable effect? This question can’t be answered based on this research, but the study suggests that positive behaviors naturally follow positive feelings and thoughts.

Last, the interviewees expressed what they learned from their experience and in general, they were more focused on being better prepared and risk management. This suggests that regardless of the individual perceptions of the cause or causes of their setback, they are taking it upon themselves to avert a future setback by watching for the indicators that alert them to an impending negative event and managing the risks associated with them. Additionally, leadership styles appeared to have changed such that these leaders exhibit more compassion toward their employees and encourage
participation. From this, it appears that these leaders see their employees as important to their organization’s success as well as their own.

**Limitations**

Beyond the relatively small sample size, there are additional limitations of the study. First, the researcher assumes all participants answered the interview questions honestly. Second, the participants had to rely on memory to recall specific feelings, thoughts, and actions along the timeline of events that they experienced. Third, the researcher was a former business owner and has experienced setbacks and failures, which could present potential bias. Last, the findings of the study are subject to the interpretation of the researcher.

**Future Research**

Based on the results of this study, the researcher has suggestions for future research opportunities. First, this study focused only on business leaders that experienced a setback or failure and then bounced back. These leaders shared their own unique experiences and perceptions that were extremely valuable. However, by interviewing leaders from different industries and various levels, additional themes and insights may be realized to provide a broader view of this phenomenon.

Second, the development and use of different interview questions could reveal more and deeper aspects of this phenomenon. This could improve the quality and richness of the data. As an example, asking questions about the time between the various stages or phases could be insightful and could show a linkage between how they felt following their negative event and subsequent actions.

Third, locating a sample that has just recently experienced a failure or setback and
agrees to share their experiences in real time would be of interest. This would potentially require a larger sample size because some participants may end their participation. It will also be impossible to know if they will bounce back or not, but the real time data would be more accurate than relying on memory.

Fourth, interviewing leaders who experienced a setback or failure, but did not bounce back is recommended. Themes from this data set could be compared and contrasted to those who have bounced back.

Fifth, a different research design is recommended. Utilizing surveys as part of a quantitative design would enable statistical analysis and provide further insight. Also, a mixed methods approach where a survey was developed from the qualitative data could prove valuable in predicting how leaders would respond to failure based on the survey questions and scales. The survey could be developed from the results and insights gained from this qualitative study.

Sixth, research studying the possible effects of mediator or moderator variables would be of value. As an example, probing deeper into the social support, spirituality, helping others, and possibly coaching is recommended.

Seventh, a replication of the current study is recommended by recruiting entrepreneurial leaders and high level managers. A replication could provide or dispute evidence of the inferences drawn from this research and add more to the body of knowledge on this subject.

Conclusion

This qualitative study provided valuable insights into the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of leaders who have experienced a setback or failure and subsequently
bounced back. The participants shared their reactions, emotions, and deeply held convictions from a personal perspective and as a leader. The responses gave the researcher a glimpse into their personas in that given moment, but the data was rich and full of meaning for each individual.

This research was conducted to explore the characteristics of leaders that have experienced resilience after a failure. 10 leaders participated in this study. Each completed a background questionnaire and answered questions according to the interview schedule. By audio recording their responses to the open-ended questions, the participants revealed their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors regarding their setback and return to a successful state.

The results of this study suggest a process is followed after a setback has been realized that involves negative feelings and thoughts immediately following the event, a period of coping and adapting, a transition to a resilient state, and behavioral changes that lead to bouncing back. This study implies that (a) ascribed causes are not predictive of later resiliency and bouncing back, (b) it is normal and acceptable to experience negative thoughts and feelings following a setback, (c) coping and adaptive mechanisms such as social support were important factors for allowing resiliency to manifest, (d) taking positive action that helps the leader improve or helps others in some way was important in building momentum toward returning to success, and (e) the leaders reported more wisdom and more participative leadership styles.
REFERENCES


King, G. A., & Rothstein, M. G. (2010). Resilience and leadership: The self-management of failure. In M. G. Rothstein & R. J. Burke (Eds.), *Self-management and*


Research questions are shown in bold. BQ is short for Background Questionnaire; IS represents Interview Schedule.

**Research Question 1**

How do leaders perceive the determining factors of their failure?

IS1  Could you give me a description of the failure or setback that you experienced?

IS2  What were the cause or causes and contributing factors of the outcome that you experienced?

**Research Question 2**

What are the feelings and thoughts of leaders who have experienced failure?

IS3  Immediately following this event, how did you feel and what were your thoughts?

**Research Question 3**

How does resilience manifest as an adaptation or coping mechanism in leaders who have experienced a failure?

IS4  Did your thoughts and feelings change after a period of time following what occurred and if so, could you explain in depth how your thoughts and feelings changed?

IS5  As you dealt with this outcome what were your coping mechanisms?
Research Question 4

What is the process of bouncing back from a failure or setback to achieve success again?

IS6   Do you feel that you’ve bounced back and are now successful again and if so, what motivated you to take action?

IS7   What barriers did you encounter?

IS8   What strategies did you use/develop that helped you bounce back?

Research Question 5

What do leaders learn about themselves during the process of failing and bouncing back?

IS9   From this experience, what did you learn about:

   a. The setback that you experienced?
   b. Your ability to bounce back?
   c. How this affected you?

IS10  Has your approach to leadership changed and if so, how?
APPENDIX B
Background Questionnaire

To assist with the study, this is a short questionnaire to gather demographic data prior to the interview.

Please answer each question by placing an X in the box or filling in the appropriate information on the line.

1. Gender: □ Female □ Male

2. Age: __________

3. Ethnicity: □ Caucasian □ Hispanic or Latino □ Black or African American □ Native American or American Indian □ Asian or Pacific Islander □ Other (list) ________

4. Highest level of education: □ Less than high school □ High School Diploma □ Some college □ College Degree □ Professional or advanced degree

5. Estimated years in a leadership role: __________

6. Title: __________________________

7. Type of business: __________________________
8. Size of business: ________________

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE!
APPENDIX C

Interview Schedule

Directions: I am going to ask you a number of open-ended questions. Please give me your honest opinion regarding each question.

IS1 Could you give me a description of the failure or setback that you experienced?

IS2 What were the cause or causes and contributing factors of the outcome that you experienced?

IS3 Immediately following this event, how did you feel and what were your thoughts?

IS4 Did your thoughts and feelings change after a period of time following what occurred and if so, could you explain in depth how your thoughts and feelings changed?

IS5 As you dealt with this outcome what were your coping mechanisms?

IS6 Do you feel that you’ve bounced back and are now successful again and if so, what motivated you to take action?

IS7 What barriers did you encounter?

IS8 What strategies did you use/develop that helped you bounce back?

IS9 From this experience, what did you learn about:

   a. The setback that you experienced?
   b. Your ability to bounce back?
   c. How this affected you?
IS10  Has your approach to leadership changed and if so, how?
Dear Pilot Study Member:

I am a student in the Doctoral Program at Western Kentucky University. I am completing a research project under the direction of Dr. Randy Capps, Gordon Ford College of Business at Western Kentucky University.

The qualitative research project is titled “Overcoming Failure: Characteristics of Leaders Who Have Successfully Recovered from a Significant Setback.” This study is focused on how business leaders bounce back from a failure.

The purposeful sample will come from business leaders who have experienced a failure or significant setback and have bounced back to a level of success equal to or greater than prior to the failure or setback.

The participants will be asked questions via a semi-structured interview. I would like feedback into the questions on the interview which is attached as the interview schedule, mapped to the research questions. I would like for you to review the set of questions and provide feedback on the forms included.

I believe this research is of importance to understanding the process of experiencing failure, resilience, and bouncing back. Your feedback will help me improve the clarity and concision of the questions, ensuring the most information from the subjects. The following definitions of key terms are included to reduce any potential misunderstanding, confusion, or ambiguity within the context of this study:

- A failure or setback is an event that leaders may experience when an expected outcome is not achieved which leads to a reduction or elimination of position or responsibility.
- Resilience is a characteristic that enables leaders to withstand and overcome a failure or setback.
- Bouncing back is an outcome of behavioral changes to achieve a similar or better level of success than what was held before the failure or setback.

Thank you for your time. Please contact me by phone (270-799-2503) or email (richard.hunt220@topper.wku.edu) if you are unclear what the task is or if you are unable to participate. Your anticipated cooperation is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Richard Hunt
APPENDIX E

Pilot Member Review of Interview Schedule

Please respond to the following questions regarding concerns affecting the interview schedule. Comments may be written directly on the instrument. If additional space is needed, please attach a separate sheet of paper and specify to which item your comments refer.

Please note that the research questions were developed from the literature and theoretical perspective included in Chapter II. If you would like to examine this section, please contact me and I will provide you with a copy.

Thank you again for your time.

The Interview Schedule Mapped to Research Questions (Appendix A) is attached for your convenience.

1. Introduction:
   Is the introductory statement of purpose clear?

2. Format:
   Is the format clear?
   Easy to follow?
   Are the questions clear and understandable?

3. Topics:
   Is the wording appropriate for business leaders?
   Do the questions make sense in terms of content?

4. Directions?
   Are the directions clear and understandable to the interviewee?

5. Feasibility?
   Is the instrument practical?
   Is the instrument too long?

6. Do you have any general comments or suggestions on the overall format and presentation of the interview schedule?
7. Do you have any final thoughts about the constructs? Any particular suggestions?

Thank you for your time and effort!
Dear Study Participant:

I am a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program at Western Kentucky University. I am completing a research project under the direction of Dr. Randy Capps, Gordon Ford College of Business at Western Kentucky University.

You are being invited to participate in a qualitative research project entitled “Overcoming Failure: Characteristics of Leaders Who Have Successfully Recovered from a Significant Setback.” This study is focused on how business leaders bounce back from a failure.

Two instruments will be used to gather information. Prior to participation, you will be required to complete a consent form. Then, before the interview, you will be asked to complete a short background questionnaire. A semi-structured format with open-ended questions will be used for the interview. The approximately one hour recorded session will be conducted by your method of choice: face-to-face, videoconference, or telephone, at a mutually agreed upon time.

Be assured that there are no physical, psychological, financial, or legal risks to you or any participant associated with this study. The benefits gained from your participation will provide information about how business leaders experience failure, resilience, and bounce back to success. The following definitions of key terms are included to reduce any potential misunderstanding, confusion, or ambiguity within the context of this study:

- A failure or setback is an event that leaders may experience when an expected outcome is not achieved which leads to a reduction or elimination of position or responsibility.
- Resilience is a characteristic that enables leaders to withstand and overcome a failure or setback.
- Bouncing back is an outcome of behavioral changes to achieve a similar or better level of success than what was held before the failure or setback.

Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed; however, data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. All information collected may be reviewed by Dr. Capps and/or others associated with the research study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question that may make you feel uncomfortable.

If you have any questions, please contact myself or Dr. Capps. You may contact the Human Studies Committee offices at Western Kentucky University to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in confidence, with a member of the respective committee. These are independent committees composed of faculty and staff of Western Kentucky University. The committees have reviewed this study.

Sincerely,

Richard Hunt
Cell: (270) 799-2503 Email: richard.hunt220@topper.wku.edu
Dr. Capps: (270) 745-4160
WKU Human Studies Committee office: (270) 745-6733
APPENDIX G

Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: Overcoming Failure - Characteristics of Leaders Who Have Successfully Recovered From a Significant Setback

Investigator: Richard Hunt, WKU Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Telephone: 270-789-2503 Email: Richard.hunt220@topper.wku.edu

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project**: This study investigates leadership failure, its causes, immediate effects, the process of resilience, and the act of returning to success. The purpose of this study is to explore the individual experiences of leaders that have suffered and bounced back from a leadership failure.

2. **Explanation of Procedures**: This research design is qualitative, employing interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology utilizing semi-structured interviews. Background and demographic information will be collected via questionnaire. The Interview Schedule contains open-ended questions and will be used as a guide since this is a semi-structured interview format. The participant may be interviewed face-to-face, videoconference, or telephone. The interview session is designed to not exceed one hour per participant.

3. **Discomfort and Risks**: No known physical, psychological, financial or legal discomforts or foreseeable risks have been identified for this research.

4. **Benefits**: Results from this study could help gain a better understanding of the linkage between leadership failure, the immediate effects, the process of resilience, and the act of returning to success. It could positively affect leaders who suffer similar setbacks through coaching or influence leadership training focusing on the characteristics of resilience.

5. **Confidentiality**: For this study, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed since face-to-face interviews are being conducted. However, data will be held in confidence to the fullest extent permitted by law. Pseudonyms will be used in all published or presented materials related to this research study.

WKU IRB# 17-191
Approval - 11/30/2016
End Date - 6/30/2017
Expedited
Original - 11/30/2016
6. Refusal/Withdrawal: Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Signature of Participant  Date

Witness  Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the research. (Initial here) 

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129

WKU IRB# 17-191
Approval - 11/30/2016
End Date - 6/30/2017
Expedited
Original - 11/30/2016

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