## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and better understand how followers perceive the influence of the executive nonprofit leaders they follow. The results of this study may increase understanding of the leader-follower relationship in the nonprofit sector and contribute to the information gap relating to nonprofit leader-follower relationships as they relate to organizational outcomes. Specifically, I investigated followers’ perceptions of the leadership traits, skills, and characteristics that best influence their behaviors to affect positive organizational development and change (Church & Warner, 2017). The dearth of studies exploring the nonprofit leader-follower relationship led me to employ the narrative inquiry method in the quest to answer the primary research question: How and in what ways do nonprofit followers perceive the influence of their executive nonprofit leaders?

Thus, this inquiry gave voice to six followers of nonprofit executive leaders relating to their experience and perceptions of being led with the intention of informing researchers and those in leadership positions about how followers understand leader influence in a way that might positively affect the formation of leader-follower relationships. Leader-follower relationships have a strong impact upon organizational development and transformation. However, followers’ perspective of their leaders has not been thoroughly investigated (Gilstrap & Morris, 2015). Based on the reviewed literature, nonprofit organizations particularly fail to sufficiently focus on creating healthy leader-follower relationships, affecting their performance adversely (Punait & Bucinschi, 2018). Although Panait and Bucinschi provided insights on emotionally intelligent leaders and their follower relationships, there is no specific evidence which differentiates between for-profit and nonprofit approaches to leadership development.

Knowing that nonprofits primarily focus on the mission and rarely on the financial margins and gains, one could assume that budget restraints limit the time and resources the organization may invest in leaders’ skill development, particularly in creating an understanding of the value of soft leadership skills. Leaders’ actions impact the organizational outcomes and diversity of objectives achieved by the organizations they lead (Takos et al., 2018). Thus, lack of investment in cultivating and developing key areas of leadership influence may negatively impact organizational growth. These challenges motived me to locate approaches that could improve leader-follower relationships from within the narratives of followers working in the nonprofit sector.

When it comes to the topic of influential leadership, most studies have focused on the leaders’ perceptions of followers. Researchers examining for-profit organizations, for instance, exclusively focused on leaders’ perspectives (Gilstrap & Morris, 2015). Studies focusing specifically on the relationship between nonprofit leaders and followers from the followers’ standpoint are sparse. Furthermore, most extant relationship studies only focused on how leaders can influence followers; by-and-large, scholars have failed to review how followers feel about leaders (Gilstrap & Morris, 2015). Thus, I proposed that exploration of the means and ways that nonprofit followers perceive their executive nonprofit leaders to influence their group success might be an important contribution to the literature.

## Problem Statement and Significance of Study

The problem investigated in this study was how nonprofit followers perceive their leaders’ influence on moving their organizational mission forward based on measurable outcomes rooted in the leader-follower relationship (Givens, 2008). Evidence supporting how followers understand the influence of nonprofit executive leaders is needed to add to existing