

**CORPORATE STRATEGIC CHANGE IN SMALL BUSINESS:
AN APPLICATION OF ACTION RESEARCH FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNAL MARKETING DURING
STRATEGIC CHANGE**

AN ACTION RESEARCH INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

CORPORATE STRATEGIC CHANGE IN SMALL BUSINESS: AN APPLICATION OF ACTION RESEARCH FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNAL MARKETING DURING STRATEGIC CHANGE

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For this action research study, the researcher studied ProServices, a small business services firm in the United States of America, as they embarked on a strategic change to develop their structure, processes, and internal communication strategy. The author aimed to develop proposals for the ProServices' business owners to evaluate more pluralistic methods for developing and communicating business change using internal marketing and ProServices' employees' participation. This academic inquiry evaluated, within the context of the presented literature, the actions taken by the ProServices' business owners in their approach to reform ProServices and how their strategy was received and affected their employees. Specifically, the researcher studied and analyzed the employees' views regarding the firm's strategic planning, internal communication, and participative management processes during the strategic change to assess why the ProServices' current practices did not adequately communicate the change objectives to reduce employee confusion and business disruption.

The researcher informed the study with the academic methodologies and theories of strategy, internal marketing, participative management, and leadership and how the prior theories combined with existing corporate practices may benefit the design and implementation of strategic change while increasing employee engagement. The researcher adopted an interpretive qualitative research paradigm to assess and develop a better understanding of the change problems that ProServices encountered during change. The researcher's approach to analyzing the collected data was inductive and adapted as the research developed.

For this study, the researcher formed an action research group, explained in sections 1.1 and 3.3, that consisted of five members from the researched organization, three employees, one of the business owners, and the researcher. Working with the action research group, the researcher enacted three action research cycles comparable to the "spiral of the action research cycles" by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, loc. 409). After the first action

research cycle, which the researcher considered the primary change attempt that the ProServices' four business owners tried to execute just before the commencement of this research, the author interviewed the study participants and capture their views vis-à-vis the firm's change and communication methods. Subsequently, with the four business owners' agreement, the researcher implemented two additional action research cycles where he implemented change projects while incorporating in the reorganization strategy collaborative management and leadership and internal marketing concepts. The research findings that the researcher used to develop his proposals to the ProServices' business owners support that involving employees during strategic change through participative management and internal corporate communication with internal marketing to convey information will clear confusion and engage employees during the change. The researcher used the terms action research and action research group throughout this research. The researcher highlighted the limitations of this research and opportunities for future investigation in the final sections of chapter 6.

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1 INTRODUCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

1.1 Aim and Rational of the Study

Changes occurring in an organization could produce confusion that could affect the employees and business operations. Change difficulties are topics of interest for action researchers, which they can use to pursue action research studies relevant to their organizational environment and develop proposals for solutions to issues experienced during the business reformation. Academic action research practitioners focus on advancing the management practice contributing to the scientific realm while enabling their firm to maintain its competitive footprint. Insider action research provides the researcher employee the ability to investigate issues that have either been unnoticed in the business setting or identified as problems while fulfilling their corporate role requirements. Additionally, an insider researcher can utilize existing relationships in their work environment to accomplish their study's objectives and improve organizational effectiveness. Specifically, action research is employed in an action research study because it connects the professional and the academic communities and enables academic practitioners to investigate their corporate setting and develop proposals and solutions about organizational issues and evaluate the results of a past action while contributing to the management and business academia (Hine and Lavery, 2014). An action researcher conducts action research with the assistance of an action research group and collectively focus on assessing and providing solutions to issues that hinder organizational development and may create disruption and employee confusion. An action research group is a group of individuals who collectively and democratically conduct action research to propose solutions to "important social or organizational issues" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, loc. 306). During action research, the members of the action research group participate in a cyclical process of "(1) planning, (2) taking action, (3) evaluating the action, and (4) leading to further planning and so on" to (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, loc. 306).

For this action research study, the researcher elected to pursue a crucial issue for the studied organization, which was experienced during the researcher's tenure as a strategy and internal project manager and created significant concerns for its business owners and the employees. Specifically, the business owners had decided to implement several strategic changes, reform the organizational structure and internal processes, hire a marketing partner and outsource the existing human resources benefits and procedures to reduce corporate costs. In so doing, the business owners, with a small fraction of the senior employees, conducted the planning and execution of the aforesaid strategic changes and were announced

to the staff immediately before implementing the reformation. The latter change process created confusion and disruption amongst the organizational workforce due to the lack of communication between the business owners and personnel and the absence of any contribution and feedback mechanisms to permit the employees to submit their views regarding the change plan. The key management issue was how the ProServices' business owners formulated and implemented the change strategy and the absence of corporate mechanisms to manage internal communications at ProServices. The researcher studied the issue mentioned above at one level by examining the ProServices' business owners' approach to change, i.e., less-democratic, delimited location (at the top) and top-down change implementation, and ensuing from that, at another level, the lack of mechanisms, e.g., employee engagement, communication, feedback.

The researcher undertook this specific action research study to provide the studied organization's members and its business owners with theoretical concepts and proposals to evaluate that support and improve the change action's implementation and communication. Furthermore, his suggestions aimed to assist the corporate members in understanding the strategic change process and identifying more democratic means for planning and articulating change inclusive of all parties within the business context. Additionally, the researcher explored the internal marketing's employment during the strategic business change and *how collaboration with participative leadership and management can create a collaborative communication framework where all interested members can contribute knowledge and innovation during the corporate reform?* Finally, the researcher emphasized his intentions in the presentation and critical analysis of the literature review, which showcased the theoretical viewpoints concerning strategic change and planning, leadership, corporate communication, and internal marketing and how they relate, during change, to communication improvement practices.

This researcher considered this study essential because it addressed strategic change and communication management issues that affected ProServices' employees and its business owners and long-term development. Additionally, it serves as a strategy guide for current and future employees at ProServices or similar professional services firms who wish to contribute to their firm's change and communication processes innovatively. Thus, this research can successfully assist both scholars and practitioners, employees, and business owners in organizations like the studied business, facing internal communication and business transformation management obstacles. The notions mentioned above depict the researcher's

academic and professional aspirations and constitute the basis for his study. Within this study, the researcher identifies himself as the researcher or author.

1.2 Context and Corporate Background

Organizational History

The participating organization is a small business that offers professional technology services in the United States of America and internationally. The researched company maintains its headquarters in New York City and satellite offices in the continental United States and Europe. Its clientele is predominantly from the financial services industry but encompasses companies active in media, marketing, commercial real estate, and legal services. The organization employs over fifty employees in various specialties and professional levels, and throughout the year, contracts full-time over one hundred professionals according to its project load. The firm was established over fifteen years ago by four pioneering and daring executives who decided to pursue innovative ways to provide services related to information technology, the development and implementation of engineering designs, human resources placement services relating to information technology, and data center engineering and buildout. Additionally, the studied business offers advisory assistance to its clients regarding strategic planning and long-term technological capabilities development.

ProServices¹ was in the start-up phase when the terrorist attack struck New York City on September 11, 2001. This horrible incident with devastating implications for both the local and international populations provided the respective company with the unique opportunity of competing for sales contracts concentrated on information technology disaster recovery, new infrastructure builds, and corporate moving and relocation. The award of numerous projects positioned ProServices for growth, and within a few years from inception, it occupied an office on Wall Street and employed over ten individuals and several contractors. The increased profitability and corporate value compelled the ProServices' business owners to enhance its structure and add management tiers and controls for the various corporate processes.

Although the company's efforts were successful, they were based on the firm's existing profitability model and business owner's professional knowledge and not anchored on a strategic plan that would consider future market fluctuations and risk or other

¹ The corporate owners have requested the researcher not to identify the organization and its employees participating in the study. Through the Ethics Approval Form, the author informed the University of Liverpool that he would mask all corporate and personal information to protect and ensure anonymity. The University of Liverpool granted all necessary ethical approvals when they approved the Ethics Approval Form and allowed the researcher to conduct the proposed study. The researcher assigned for this study to the researched organization, the fictional name ProServices.

vulnerabilities that marketplace competition could introduce. Additionally, the business owners did not procure an expert organizational development consultant's services to help design and implement the changes.

While in the growth and development phase, ProServices had to undergo several negative changes, and undo the prior mentioned transformation, due to the 2008 financial crisis in the United States. The business owners decided to downscale internal operational processes by removing formal communication methods and internal marketing practices. The previous actions resulted in the business owners assuming direct communication responsibilities to the entire organization, downscaling its tangible assets and physical locations, and reducing and converting some personnel to consultants.

The downsizing strategies and the changes in the communication practices of ProServices depicted above negatively affected the company's operational capacity and the productivity and morale of the personnel. At ProServices, as per the business owners' views, the changes in its business structure and internal communication practice increased the workload of the existing workforce and negatively affected the staff who no longer received frequent updates from management about their changing organizational setting. Furthermore, the corporate downsizing eliminated all team building and networking events that the ProServices' business owners employed to address the employees' questions and socialize with them informally.

As the United States economy began to recover from the 2008 financial crisis, the ProServices' business owners decided, in 2013, to reintroduce a mixture of changes that they had initially implemented before the 2008 financial crisis, and included process control advancements, management layers, formal sales, and marketing executives, and reformation of existing human resources policies. ProServices was again in a growth phase, with sales revenue increasing, and the ProServices' business owners decided to undertake the changes without developing a formal strategic plan to guide and communicate the change effort or hire a change management consultant.

ProServices' Marketplace

The global business services and information technology industry is continuously growing with customer demand and innovative new products such as artificial intelligence bots, virtualization and cloud services, and datacenter hosting. CompTIA (2018) estimates that global growth will reach 5 trillion dollars, with the United States market accounting for approximately 1.5 trillion dollars. Additionally, they note that the worldwide demand for information technology specialists exceeds industry supply, with small and medium business

requirements leading the charts (CompTIA, 2018). The latter trend positions the New York City market and the United States marketplace as one of the busiest environments for professional services firms that either employ local staff or outsource to markets such as India or Eastern Europe to fulfill their clientele's demands.

In New York City, there are professional services firms that service the specific marketplace's requirements, resulting in constant competition to capture and maintain market share. The differentiating factors among the mixture of businesses are reputation, customer relations, and service, flexibility, and quality of service, ability to augment the operations with new technologies, and the capability to provide human capital to their clients that contribute to their economy of scale (CompTIA, 2018). With the United States job market requiring more information technology talent than it employs and demand for professional services growing, the market will continue to pressure businesses to establish strategic plans and communication practices to guide their corporate changes.

Positioning the Author in Context with the Study

The ProServices' change effort began two years after the researcher's arrival at the firm and approximately two months before the author's thesis phase. The researcher developed the reason for this study several years before joining ProServices and as a member of the Hellenic military, an advisor at the United Nations, and during his employment at Citibank NA. The military and civilian organizations mentioned above had a single common denominator; they lacked effective communication during strategic change and encouraging their employees to submit valuable feedback regarding a proposed strategic change plan. Transitioning as an employee to ProServices, the researcher realized that internal communication and efficiently managing information sharing about strategic change were issues at the respective company. While ProServices was smaller than the organizations prior mentioned, it provided the author with the opportunity to conduct further research.

Learning more regarding his work setting at ProServices, the researcher recognized that the business owners of ProServices desired to develop its management and operational structure and foster a work setting that would become more competitive and attractive to existing and new talent. However, as previously discussed, the business owners did not have a proper change plan but rather a list of changes and tasks they had to do. They maintained a communication approach that employed an information-sharing strategy that would not communicate the details of the design and implementation of the change to the entire organization but only to senior management on a need-to-know basis and assumed that

employees would remain inert to the announcement of crucial changes impacting their professional life and development.

As the researcher started to develop and gather thoughts regarding his thesis project, he focused, as previously stated, on developing a plan for action research aiming to develop and propose to the ProServices' business owners to consider probable and applicable ideas that would highlight various communication and change strategies. The researcher's proposals would provide views on addressing the internal communication issues developed during the execution of the strategic change at ProServices.

The opportunity to propose to the business owners this action research study came when the ProServices' business owners decided to announce their reformation plan and start implementing changes. The business owners' change approach was not well received by the staff, who expressed concerns and questions created by the absence of a strategically planned communication regarding the change plan and the lack of informal discussions with their managers and the researcher. The ProServices' staff conveyed informally to the researcher during social events their confusion, anxiety, and frustration about the perplexing factors on how the company and their business roles would change. Subsequently, the author decided to approach one of the owners and proposed the involvement of ProServices in the study of the organizational issues as part of his doctoral thesis, which was approved. Successively, the researcher decided, as prior-noted, to focus his thesis and explore options for a suggestion to the ProServices' business owners on how to communicate the organizational strategic plan better.

Additionally, the author sought to examine practices for a proposal to the business owners that would permit collaboration amongst the organizational members to influence through communication the design and implementation of strategic change at ProServices. Furthermore, he sought to evaluate how senior corporate leadership can communicate internally with personnel using internal marketing to introduce the reformation and invite feedback. The researcher aimed to benefit with his research both the ProServices' business owners and their employees.

2 PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes literature regarding strategic business change and leadership and the use of internal marketing in corporate communication during the business change, which informed the change strategies during the action research cycles and the proposals that the author suggested to the ProServices' business owners as part of this action research project.

In the literature review chapter, the researcher relates strategic change and internal communication to the research focus, which is to develop proposals for consideration from the business owners on the issues of better communication management during the change. The researcher contemplates the challenges ProServices faced during its change implementation process while considering the appropriateness of the presented theoretical concepts and their applicability in the ProServices' business setting. Furthermore, he thoroughly contemplated the limitations of the selected literature in the context of this study before continuing to the methodology chapter.

2.2 Strategic Business Change

Strategizing for the Future

In this section, the researcher presents research relating to strategic business change and the changes that a company could make to align its practices with its vision and objectives for the future. Andriopoulos and Dawson (2009 cited in Riwo-Abudho, Lily, and Ochieng, 2012) note that strategic leaders guide their institutions during the strategic change to achieve their objectives and react to business challenges that affect the internal organizational framework. Additionally, they stress that during strategic change, essential to the reformation's success is the corporate workforce's participation through the corporate communication processes and the engagement they exhibit to the new proposed business changes. On organizational change, Bolman and Deal (1997, p. 15) contend that each corporate member "has its own image of reality" and that "successful managers" need to "reframe until they understand the situation at hand." This research aims, within the premises of ProServices, to explore and extend Bolman and Deal's (1997, p.15) "image of reality" to one of a pluralistic perspective conceived and successfully communicated with the collaborative relationship and contribution of thoughts of all interested parties in strategy formulation and the change process.

The corporate members employ strategic planning during business reformation to prepare the organizational ground for developing, communicating, and implementing the strategic corporate transformation. Franken, Edwards, and Lambert (2009, p. 49) argue that change through strategic planning "is concerned with: firstly, creating a portfolio of change programs that will deliver the strategy; and secondly, it involves attracting, allocating, and managing all the necessary resources to deliver these change programs." Franken, Edwards, and Lambert's (2009) prior mentioned views are in line with this research's focus because, in developing a business strategic change plan, business executives and change managers formulate a communication approach and method that they will follow during the various phases of change. Whittington (2001, p. 2) offers four generic views to strategy the classical, evolutionary, processual, and systemic. The four approaches described above differentiate "along two dimensions: the outcomes of strategy and the processes by which is it made" (Whittington, 2001, p. 2). Whittington (2001, p. 2) depicts the two dimensions along the intersection of two axes, which answer the fundamental questions of what strategy is and how it is done. The "vertical axis measures the degree to which strategy either produces profit maximizing outcomes or deviates to allow of other possibilities to intrude." The "horizontal

considers processes, reflecting how far strategies are the product of deliberate calculation or whether they emerge by accident, muddle or inertia” (Whittington. 2001, p. 2).

According to Whittington (2001, p. 2), the classical approach relies on the dominant theories that exist in textbooks and underline “rational planning” methods that focus on “profit maximization” and cost-effectiveness and swiftness of change action. Proper planning and rational analysis are what it takes to “master internal and external environments” and “make the difference between long-run success and failure” while simultaneously ignoring knowledge deficiencies produced by its mechanistic approach to management (Whittington, 2001, p. 2-3). The evolutionary approach, like the classical method, adheres to the “profit maximization” business strategy and differentiates it from the classical way because it supports that “strategy in the Classical sense of rational future-oriented planning is often irrelevant” (Whittington, 2001, p. 3). The evolutionary strategists highlight that they cannot plan a swift long-term strategy because the business environment and markets are unpredictable and favor organizations focusing on developing effective strategies for “surviving today” where even imperfect knowledge contributes to strategic planning (Whittington, 2001, p. 4). Systemic and Processual approaches adopt a pluralistic approach to development and support that organizations can achieve “other possible outcomes as well as profit” (Whittington, 2001, p. 2). Processual theorists note that long-term planning is futile and support “strategy as an emergent process of learning and adaptation” (Whittington, 2001, p. 4). Processual strategists underscore that people are too different to unite behind and execute a well-defined strategic plan. The systemic method emphasizes relativism in its approach to strategic planning. Systemics argue that “strategy is inescapably linked to the cultures and powers of the local social systems in which it takes place” (Whittington, 2001, p. 2). Whittington (2001) notes that the systemic strategists relate the objectives of a strategic plan to the social context that the strategy takes place and reflect the social setting in which they will enact it.

Whittington’s (2001) prior noted theorizations relate to selecting a framework to design the change strategy and its processes to execute and best manage the employees’ communication. An organization adopting a specific strategic theory could define the steps and processes that it will employ to accomplish the strategic plan’s objectives and its communication to its workforce. Potentially, none of Whittington’s (2001) theorizations are individually applicable for this study at ProServices because they express distinct paths to strategic planning. Those paths may contradict either with ProServices’ business owners’ views of a top-down approach to a season of a required strategic change or limiting the

inclusion of a pluralistic communication approach and possibly reproduce the existing issues that the firm has experienced during its efforts to change. Acknowledging that market pressures and evolving organizational knowledge about business management and communication during change continuously influences strategic reformation, ProServices' can select, with the help of the researcher, a strategy that incorporates elements from each of Whittington's (2001) approaches and addresses the issues that this research aims to develop proposals.

Concerning the abovementioned views regarding Whittington's (2001) strategy concepts, Appelbaum et al. (2012) note that organizations are required to strategize and change to adapt and address their clients' requirements and the continuously evolving business setting. Additionally, they state that "many organizations, in an attempt to adapt to the constant evolutions of their environment, are adopting cultures of a learning or agile organization." Appelbaum et al.'s (2012) views concerning corporate strategic planning and change may enable a business, such as ProServices, to be ready for transformation by empowering its staff with successful communication to evaluate market demands and communicate their assessments consistently to their managers and ProServices' business owners. Appelbaum et al. (2012) notions are essential for this study because they highlight that external pressures from the marketplace and a continually changing organizational environment will continue to be the focal point of the strategic plan of any growing organization and its staff. Furthermore, the strategies and practices that a firm can use to recognize and communicate the needs and reasons for the change will affect its approach to strategic planning and change and the processes for engaging and interacting with its workforce the various views regarding their company's future professional life.

Aligning an organization, such as ProServices, with market requirements requires adaptation and change in internal corporate structure and processes and overcoming the limitations of its current top-down management and internal communication practice, which created several issues during change. Moreover, it will necessitate maintaining an open communication channel that best manages information flow with all employees and proactively planning while anticipating changes in the market trends and competitors. Reeves and Deimler (2011, p. 137) note that business owners and employees responsible for implementing the organizational strategic plan use strategic change to align their company with the marketplace's demands. Furthermore, they aim to develop a corporate environment where personnel communicating their views can help their firm attain a dominant business market position. While the planning and goals of strategic change may be communicated to

all employees and distributed using communication methods used for corporate reformation initiatives, these are likely to result from business planning that defines the reorganization approach. Corporate strategy and change are related to internal corporate communication and affect corporate longevity as they are critical drivers for organizational performance and development. The latter theories are relevant to this study because the focus of ProServices is to reform its corporate structure while maintaining competitiveness and increasing its market footprint while resolving the communication and employee participation issues that its present traditional top-down change strategy created. However, and although academic research theorists see strategy making both as a more discursive practice and benefiting from different perspectives from within the whole organization, the researcher must consider the degree of their applicability at ProServices because of the limitations of the business owners' management practice. The researcher's contemplation on all the thoughts mentioned above regarding strategic change and internal corporate communication are related and influenced from the traditional and strategic approaches to change, and within the premises of this study, are presented below.

According to Reeves and Deimler (2011, p. 137), the traditional approach to development aims to “build an enduring competitive advantage by achieving dominant scale, occupying an attractive niche, or exploiting certain capabilities and resources.” However, Reeves and Deimler (2011, p. 137) argue that with globalization, technological innovations, and greater transparency between business owners / senior executives and employees, “sustainable competitive advantage no longer arises from positioning or resources” such as in the traditional approach to change. “Instead, it stems from the four organizational capabilities that foster rapid adaptation:

- The ability to read and act on signals of change.
- The ability to experiment rapidly and frequently—not only with products and services but also with business models, processes, and strategies.
- The ability to manage complex and interconnected systems of multiple stakeholders.
- The ability to motivate employees and partners.”

Planning for organizational change and communicating to the employees the four strategic capabilities mentioned above as part of their strategic reformation permits companies, such as ProServices, to introduce their vision for the future and the roadmap to adapt to the changing environment sufficiently. Additionally, it allows businesses, like ProServices, to invite employee feedback about the planned change, the cues and knowledge

they receive from the market, and their customers. Companies should have the scope and processes in place to develop a more flexible and strategic response to change strategy, and as Reeves and Deimler (2011, p. 137) note, organizations must learn how to multitask and learn to become experts in many new things instead of being proficient in one thing. A business practice such as the one Reeves and Deimler (2011) propose above uses strategy to direct change, experiment with processes and the organization's internal setting to design a communication approach to engage all affected by the change and share relevant information about a calculated plan that will address future corporate reformation, which is fundamental for a company's long-term survivability. Such a strategic approach to change will continuously adapt as employees offer their inputs on the strategic change plan and communicate to their organizational leaders their commitment to participate and drive the strategic organizational change.

The traditional approach to change relates to the classical strategic planning method because it connects organizational development to strategic planning and analysis to optimize the firm for long-term growth and profit maximization (Whittington, 2001). The traditional method to change and development in a similar manner as the classical approach to business strategy aims to maximize an organization's competitive advantage by achieving long-term sustainable change through predetermined market goals, increase profitability by focusing on the attainment of a dominant market position through planning, logical analysis and mastering the internal and external environments (Reeves and Deimler, 2011; Whittington, 2001). The aim of the traditional method to change focuses on the market as the realm to dominate. It employs the organizational resources with a top-down management approach to achieve the change goals and does not use information sharing to contemplate the change strategy. The latter resembles ProServices' top-down management change process and minimal use of information sharing that the researcher with this research and its action research cycles aims to study and develop proposals for improvement. In juxtaposition, the strategic approach to organizational change adopts qualities from all four theories to business strategy, the classical, evolutionary, processual, and systemic (Whittington, 2001). Organizations employing the strategic plan to change develop and conduct organizational change by introducing, as noted by Reeves and Deimler (2011), a business practice of learning, communication, and experimentation with new processes and business models, and acknowledging that people influence the design and implementation of change.

The strategic approach to change versus the traditional and classical practice applies to this study because, within an organization such as ProServices, it advances learning and

fosters the ability to motivate and empower employees to act during strategic reformation by communicating to them the reasons for change and the method to accomplish the transformation while inviting their feedback. Appelbaum et al. (2012), Kotter and Schlesinger (2008), and Reeves and Deimler (2011) emphasize a change practice where all interested parties may have an equal opportunity to contribute their views during the planning and execution phases of the strategic change plan. Kotter (2014, p. 35) notes that you need more eyes to gather information effectively and make significant strategic decisions. Kotter's (2014, p. 35) thought process is of significance for this research because he underlines employees' capability to participate and contribute to the corporate strategic change plan's execution and design, which will support their firm's efforts to innovate and stay abreast of the competition. Finally, and in terms of organizational disruption during restructuring, Kotter (2014, p. 35) maintains the view, which underlines that the transformational exercise "must be done with proven processes that do not risk chaos, create destructive conflict, duplicate efforts, or waste money. And it must be done with insiders."

Kotter's (2014) prior stated arguments highlight a change process that uses a well-designed communication framework accessible by all the business staff and, in combination with an employee participation strategy during change, can provide the business leaders, such as the ProServices' business owners, with the necessary information to design and implement the organizational strategic change plan. The academic notions that the researcher has depicted in this section are pertinent to this study and the issues that ProServices is facing because they relate, see traditional approach to change, to its lack of best managing its communication during change and the absence of employee contribution in its strategic planning. Although the ProServices' business owners have focused on evolving the firm according to the market demands, they have not developed an organizational setting that relates to the strategic approach to change, where communication processes permit strategic change planning through experimentation and pluralistic knowledge contribution from its employees. Instead, ProServices' senior leaders have focused solely on profit maximization and employing change to adapt the company to capture market share without considering how change affects employees or how they can influence it. Finally, the researcher should examine what practices from the strategic and collaborative approach to strategy making are available to consider in his proposals to the ProServices' business owners that might help ProServices reduce employee confusion and alienation and proceed with the change.

2.2.1 Strategic Management and Leadership During Change

Business Authoritarianism or Collaboration Best Serves Change

Theories regarding strategic management and leadership are related to business change and the aim of this research. While many of the theorists denote a top-down approach to leadership similarly as in strategic business planning and comparable to the top-down management approach of the ProServices' business owners, a growing number of researchers and writers have a focus on collaboration and a participative management approach during the change. They emphasize how organizational members direct their efforts to collaboratively manage the corporate communication processes and the opportunities available to the business members to participate constructively in the change activities and reflect on their experiences. Vecchio (2006) denotes that during strategic change, business leaders carry the responsibility of managing the overall corporate strategy and communication of it to their business members, expressing the organizational commitment to reforming organizational structures to reflect market requirements and employees' needs. Additionally, Vecchio (2006) argues that successful strategic leaders influence the implementation of the strategic change plan and the design of the corporate vision and guide all organizational members to implement the firm's reformation objectives successfully. Furthermore, DeGrosky (2006, p. 13) contends that strategic managers achieve success by influencing, mentoring, and empowering employees through the sharing of change-related information with an end goal to align their efforts with the strategic business goals and contribute their thoughts regarding the corporate vision.

The researcher highlights the significance of Vecchio's (2006) and DeGrosky's (2006) prior mentioned views for this study, which underlines the efforts of leaders to actively participate in the corporate transformation and communication with the business workforce to guide and educate them regarding change and consecutively receive feedback about the overall change strategy. The latter management method underpins a participative communication process, which the researcher is attempting to explore as an option for ProServices during strategic change. The objectives of such a process would be a) how to develop the entire business ecosystem holistically while maintaining continual commercial operations and b) how to improve the change process by managing better the communication between the organizational workforce and senior leadership.

According to Kotter (2014, p. 36), participative leadership and management exercised by employees during change is the key to "capitalize on unpredictable windows of opportunity that might open and close quickly, and to somehow spot and avoid unpredictable

threats.” Additionally, participative management encourages the creation of organizational synergy between senior executives and employees. The latter may result in the formation of participative practices that lead to the communication and collection of information from the business workforce that an organization, such as ProServices, can use to improve its strategic transformation. Drucker (n.d. cited in Cooperrider, 2012, p. 108) contends that “the task of great leadership is to create an alignment of strengths in ways that make a system’s weaknesses irrelevant.” The author supports the views of Kotter (2014) and Drucker (n.d. cited in Cooperrider, 2012, p. 108) because they highlight that by capitalizing on the strengths derived from participative leadership and management, ProServices may experiment, through the action research cycles and find acceptable practices to attempt to reduce business disruption by improving its anemic internal communication.

During change, leadership responsibilities and tasks should not be reserved, assigned, and communicated only to senior employees of an organizational position and status. Employees defined by compassion, creativity, and the ability to motivate personnel by adequately conveying and receiving information should also implement the strategic change action plan (Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy, 2006). Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy’s (2006) prior view align with Kotter’s (2014) remarks, emphasizing that leadership is not a one man’s privilege but an opportunity for a leader to share it with their employees. When exercised by the plethora of the organizational workforce, it benefits the change process and enables a business via a pluralistic internal communication setting to identify risks acknowledged by its staff. Furthermore, Whittington (2001, p. 44) argues that employees can develop leadership abilities at every organizational level and exhibit leadership qualities when organizations offer the appropriate opportunities. This research may utilize the notions of Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2006), Kotter (2014), and Whittington (2001) that favor a collaborative approach to practicing leadership and develop proposals for the ProServices’ leaders to consider that may include in their strategic change plan. Such recommendations can improve the firm’s communication processes and enable employees to assume leadership roles during change and the action research cycles.

Providing employees with the ability to lead parts of the change process increases their responsibility and commitment to assist management in achieving the change goals. Dansereau et al. (2013) and Finney and Scherrebeck-Hansen (2010, p. 325) state that participative leadership and management, combined with internal marketing strategies, can establish a business practice that articulates to the corporate workforce the details of the strategic plan vis-à-vis the reorganization. Furthermore, Linski (2014, p. 20) emphasizes that

the use of marketing strategies to introduce change will endorse the inclusiveness of all involved in the process and contribute to their feeling of “self-worth and contribution to the corporation.” The prior mentioned views discussed in this section are relevant to this action research project because the researcher’s objectives encompass analyzing the participative management and leadership paradigm and how their use during a change may improve information sharing during strategic transformation. The latter may positively influence the design, execution, and communication of change at ProServices if its business owners consider the researcher’s proposals closely aligned with their views of a business acceptable change culture. The prior notion is also a limiting factor that the researcher must account for because the ProServices’ business owners maintain the final approval authority concerning strategic change planning using a collaborating framework with the employees.

2.2.2 Leadership Models During Change

Leading from the Top Looking Down or with Participative Pluralism

Of interest, concerning employee collaboration and participation during strategic change, the participative leadership and management approach showcases a juxtaposing perspective to traditional leadership and how it influences internal marketing and corporate communication management during organizational change. As herein defined, Raelin (2003, p. 12-16) notes that participative leadership encourages pluralistic communication, employee contribution, and direct participation in organizational activities, including business change. Pardo-del-Val, Martínez-Fuentes, and Roig-Dobón (2012) contend that participative management leaders share their managerial responsibilities, decision-making ability, and strategic planning contribution with their employees. A business setting, such as ProServices, which encompasses the management and leadership practices, instead of the traditional leadership practice, described above by Raelin (2003) and Pardo-del-Val, Martínez-Fuentes, and Roig-Dobón (2012), enables the employees of all levels to exhibit leadership qualities that underpin their commitment to the internal reorganization and the achievement of all the change objectives. Internal marketing within corporate communication and in the premises of a collaborative communication setting may complement ProServices' business owners' efforts to communicate the change process to the employees and invite personnel to contribute and lead aspects of the company's reformation efforts.

Dansereau et al. (2013) define traditional leadership as a form of leadership through which a leader has a transactional relationship with a follower, which can lead to an essential and intentional connection between the leader as an influencer and the follower as the recipient of a guided and controlled message or action plan. Moreover, Dansereau et al. (2013) argue that a directed and powerful connection between a leader and a follower channels explicit messages, directives, and guidance to achieve specific goals, agreement on newly introduced strategic objectives, and an aspired new vision. Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2006) maintain that traditional leaders will first determine the change strategy and goals and then identify which systems need to change to succeed. Subsequently, traditional leaders continue with change by cascading and communicating the responsibility of change to senior employees rather than inviting high-quality feedback. The latter will assume the obligation to implement the corporate vision and strategic change plan and internally convey it to the staff. The notion of traditional leadership during change relates to the classical thought to strategy and the premise that "strategy formulation should be a controlled conscious process of thought" and that "responsibility for control and consciousness must rest

with the chief executive officer” (Whittington, 2001, p. 15). The view of traditional leadership noted above has been, as per the ProServices’ business owners’ stated views to the researcher, the cornerstone of ProServices’ business strategy since its inception and has since defined the actions adopted by senior management when communicating with their workforce. The theories of traditional leadership and management and influence on the ProServices’ business owners and their corporate communication approach during the change are the foundation that has affected their strategy for managing the change and created the issues that the researcher is studying. Influenced by participative leadership and internal marketing theories, the researcher is centering his efforts on developing suggestions for organizational improvements during strategic change.

In juxtaposition to the views of Dansereau et al. (2013) and Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2006), who highlight the efforts of the traditional leader during change, Raelin (2003, p. 5) debates the notion of participative leadership and how it defies the conventional leadership paradigm that views a leader as “being out in front.” According to Raelin (2003, p. 16), employees exercising participative versus traditional leadership adopt a collaborative leadership paradigm, which influences all the actions pursued during strategic change. Participative leadership can increase communication, contribution, and critical thinking during the planning and implementation phases of the strategic change management process. At ProServices, adopting a participative leadership model may help its business owners to transform their work setting to permit experimentation with new ideas, a pluralistic exchange of information while casting away or suppressing their need to control the environment in which they operate and the flow of change data (Raelin, 2003). With participative versus traditional leadership, senior leaders, such as the ProServices’ business owners, can establish a cohesive, open, and collaborative environment to clearly convey the change message and positively influence support from all organizational members interested and involved in change. Furthermore, employees are more likely to implement a change plan that they have contributed to through participative leadership and management and open communication. Pardo-del-Val, Martínez-Fuentes, and Roig-Dobón (2012) maintain that involving personnel in the change process increases employees’ commitment while reducing resistance to change.

Appreciative inquiry and learning (van der Vaart, 2016; Cooperrider, 2012) during strategic change complement the practice of participative leadership and collaboration and an open communication environment where relevant information, past and new knowledge regarding organizational transformation can be shared and evaluated. Through appreciative inquiry, corporate members can debate themes related to strategy and change, examine

current business practices, and jointly find common ground, leading to a change strategy that all involved parties accept. van der Vaart (2016, p. 6) and Cooperrider (2012), in their work, argue that appreciative inquiry is the intentional choice of taking into consideration what is “working in the work and lives of individuals, groups, and organizations.” Appreciative inquiry is a co-operative process in which organizational members exchange views through their company’s information sharing practices and focus on reaching a mutual understanding (van der Vaart, 2016). Reason (1999, p. 208) notes that co-operative inquiry in a similar way as appreciative inquiry focuses on working with people with “similar concerns and interests” to analyze and understand the world and issues that affect their lives and develop new ways of changing and how to do things better. With appreciative inquiry, in a corporate setting such as ProServices, the business owners and the senior employees would concentrate on evaluating the corporate setting and its processes and select to incorporate in the company’s strategic change plan the components and practices of their environment that are valuable to the organizational workforce and may benefit the change activity. Co-operative research focuses on working with “people rather than on people” and emphasizes that “ordinary people are quite capable of developing their own ideas and can work together in a co-operative inquiry group to see if these ideas make sense of their world and work in practice” (Reason, 1999, p. 208). With collaborative learning and communication, ProServices’ business owners would engage with the employees in a discussion where the focus of power shifts from the “traditional teacher to the dynamic learning community.” Such a process would enable the development of a learning culture in which the individuals would engage in critical reflection and debate to find answers regarding organizational issues that are important to them and reduce the confusion that the restrictive information-sharing structure of ProServices has caused (Charaniya and West Walsh, 2015, p. 48, 50).

The participative management process and appreciative and cooperative inquiry influence the employees to understand the proposed changes by participating in restructuring activities and information sharing processes and critically assessing them. Utilizing the previously mentioned methods can positively affect the ProServices’ workforce’s commitment to the business objectives, the organizational directives for change, and confidence in their working environment and leaders. In their seminal work, Dansereau et al. (2013) note that business members construct an understanding of their transforming organizational reality during strategic change that they either accept or reject based on their information regarding the changing corporate setting and the reformation strategy. When considering Dansereau et al.’s (2013) view as mentioned above, it is worth noting that,

indeed, employees maintain the option to either accept or reject their organization's change strategy. In doing so, they can potentially reject the proposed change strategy and silently resist while continuing their employment. The latter notion, although it relates to the ProServices change issues as more employees are expressing concerns about the firm's change strategy, is not entirely realistic and adds to the limitations of the proposed theories as influencers to the researcher when developing his proposals for the ProServices' business owners to review. Indeed, personnel may reject a company's change strategy, but, at the same time, their organization, for example, the ProServices' business owners, may disregard their view and proceed with implementing the change strategy, which would restrict the employees' options to either pretend they are complying and continue working in confusion or resign from their current role. Fisher (1984) and Hughes, and Ginnett, and Curphy (2006) also contemplate the importance of using strategic planning, participative leadership, and internal communication during change. Through their leadership's commitment to advocate change, the respective authors analyze how companies can create an atmosphere of participative contribution and appreciative inquiry where corporate members can collaborate, contribute ideas, and communicate the details of the strategic change plan.

Finally, the academic researchers' work in this section emphasized that employee alignment with the business' efforts for change and the information communicated regarding the latter are factors that business leaders should consider when contemplating the level of information sharing and personnel participation. Moreover, collaboration, participative contribution, and communication throughout the strategic change process can help convey the corporate objectives, vision, strategy, and benefits of the reform and sponsor and stimulate creative and critical thinking during the strategic change process. The academic notions that the researcher analyzed in this segment of the literature review are part of the inquiry that he undertook to primarily evaluate what academic theories might have applicability to the development of his proposals for the ProServices' business owners, taking into consideration the limitations of their overprotective approach to change management and the communication perplexity that the existing information-sharing practice created. Successively, he focused on developing a framework, which he used to develop critical questions for discussion during the data collection process.

2.3 Conveying Change Through Internal Marketing (IM)

Making Sense of Change Complements Change Success

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the organizational communication system, its processes, and the employees' options to participate in the change process influence and complement their understanding and ability to analyze the mixture of information and provide feedback vis-à-vis the strategic change. Mantere, Schildt and Sillince (2012, p. 173-174) argue that the "managerial communication of new beliefs and meanings to staff" is referred to as sensegiving, while sensemaking is the interpretive activity that employees use to process and analyze all the information received from the sensegiving process. The processes of sensemaking and sensegiving relate to an organization's interpretive and communication model and represent two fundamental steps in delivering the change management process. Employees typically embark on the daily practices of sensegiving and sensemaking to understand their work setting and fulfill their professional roles' requirements. Successively, personnel and management base their actions on transmitting relevant information and the reception and analysis of all the data. As explained above, the sensemaking and sensegiving processes are the contemplation and reflection methods reviewed within the ProServices' organization context. The review focused on determining, based upon the existing limitations highlighted by the employees' confusion and questions about the change, if ProServices' practiced internal communication strategy informed the business workforce vis-à-vis the change action's information. Additionally, if ProServices' had established communication tools that provided the staff with the necessary mechanisms to submit their notions.

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) contend that individuals base their day-to-day processing of information and actions on the cognitive understanding of the developing reality around them. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) note that employees rationalize all received information as part of their effort to understand and accept or reject their organization's strategic change plan, which affects their current work setting. Additionally, Mantere, Schildt, and Sillince (2012) state that during change, leaders employ the practices of sensemaking and sensegiving to develop and convey their message to the organizational workforce, which concurrently employees use to analyze and provide feedback. Traditionally, during the reciprocal process of sensemaking and sensegiving, the flow of information progresses from the senior executives (sensegiving), who make sense (sensemaking) of the changing new situation, to their organizational stakeholders. Following the leader's sensegiving action, the interpretive model of sensegiving / sensemaking

progresses to the stage where employees attempt to make sense of the new vision (sensemaking) and construct a new understanding of their organizational setting (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 443). In the final phase, the employees attempt to provide (sensegiving) senior management with their reaction to the change strategy and eventually influence it (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 443). The prior mentioned notions and the processes of sensemaking and sensegiving are relevant for this research and absent from the communication and interpretive approach that the business owners of ProServices are employing to relate change, its effect, and discuss its effect details with the employees. The development of the action research cycles included suggestions and communication approaches to the ProServices' business owners to contemplate the status of the sensemaking and sensegiving processes within the ProServices change strategy and experiment to discover how it can complement their change plans and influence the ProServices' employees. ProServices is a social structure where its members attempt to understand change and their daily business experiences.

Putting Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) sensemaking and sensegiving work into perspective and relating it to the academic debate about the management of internal communication during change, Kezar (2013) argues that organizations are not static entities but are active systems that adjust and adapt to their business environment. Additionally, she contends that active employees in their organizations continuously recreate mental images of their working environment, trying to make sense of their organizational life and how it is changing (Kezar, 2013). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) state that the constant negotiation of the corporate environment by the employees, in a similar way as Kezar's (2013) notions, reflects their sensemaking process, during which personnel tries to disseminate and assimilate new information that has an impact on their daily routines. The sensegiving process is "concerned with attempting to influence the sensemaking process and meaning construction of others towards a perfect redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). The sensemaking and sensegiving processes occur when senior management transmits the change strategy and its objectives through corporate communication processes, using internal marketing strategies to make the change message appealing, transparent, and accessible to employees. Finney and Scherrebeck-Hansen (2010) define internal marketing as a set of marketing tools and processes used in the internal corporate setting to introduce and support implementing the organizational strategy and messages to the employees.

Leaders, senior and junior personnel, take part in the sensemaking and sensegiving processes as they design, acknowledge, and provide feedback on the various strategic change

elements (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Kezar, 2013). Nevertheless, and as Rouleau (2005, p. 1416) contends, during change, leaders may choose to disregard the organizational workforce's implicit knowledge regarding strategic planning, which can contribute to business disruption and delay the conclusion of the reformation process similarly as with ProServices' change process. Rouleau's (2005) view highlights the argument, which is also applicable, as noted prior, to the issues that ProServices' was experiencing, how employees can embrace organizational reformation if they cannot contribute and influence the future of their professional outlook. Participative contribution and a pluralistic exchange of information, when adopted by senior leaders in the business environment, like the ProServices' business owners, are methods that, when used in combination with internal marketing, may help individuals, such as the employees of ProServices, understand through the processes of sensemaking and sensegiving why and how their environment is changing. Successively, grasping how and why a business setting is changing may lead to employee engagement during the reorganization and reduce the number of employees who silently and in confusion cannot comprehend the change process and continue with their employment.

Within the setting of ProServices, the researcher explored the notions mentioned above during the data collection and analysis phase and as part of the action research cycles to discover how and if the current traditional change management method that its business owners employ may be improved to take into consideration employee feedback. Additionally, and like what Hamilton (2016, p. 626) argues, to highlight in the researcher's proposals to the ProServices' business owners that during change the practices of sensemaking and sensegiving when integrated with the firm's communication approach and in combination with internal marketing may contribute to the organizational efforts to achieve "a viable interpretation of a vision of the future, with the goal of getting stakeholders to embrace the vision as their own."

The sensemaking and sensegiving processes relate to this study and the organizational setting of ProServices because it would help employees reflect, analyze, and provide feedback on the data concerning change and the message that the firm would communicate with internal marketing. Both the sensemaking and sensegiving activities may contribute to the credibility of the ProServices' business owners' corporate communication approach during the business change, which is essential to convey the new vision for change reliably. Kotter's (1996, p. 6) position states that "employees will not make sacrifices, even if they are unhappy with the status quo, unless they believe that useful change is possible. Without credible communication, and a lot of it, the hearts and minds of the troops are never

captured.” In so doing, central to the success of ProServices’ strategic change is the incorporation in the change message of all information pertinent to the transformation, which can enable the employees, through sensemaking and sensegiving, to grasp the essential knowledge of the proposed strategic change and assist them to understand how the change will affect their setting. In the end, the application of the prior-mentioned contemplations is limited to the approval level of the ProServices’ business owners. The question lies in what would be culturally acceptable at ProServices and how flexible the stance is of the business owners in permitting the widening of the information sharing circle.

Essential to the success of the sensemaking and sensegiving processes are using many communication mediums during the reformation, which permits the staff’s choice to contemplate change issues and information critically. Using internal marketing in an organization and a participative and collaborative paradigm in the change process contributes to a communication structure where business members employ the sensemaking and sensegiving processes to elaborate on the elements of strategic change and organizational life. Employing internal marketing and associated strategies can help articulate the change message and its communication to the corporate workforce and all interested parties. The lack of the latter approach to the ProServices’ environment, the absenteeism of information, and two-way communication created confusion and disruption amongst its employees.

Internal marketing (IM), as part of the corporate communication approach during strategic change, allows senior leaders to interact with employees to influence the transformation action’s execution. Rafiq and Ahmed (1993) argue that internal marketing is a strategically planned operation that uses marketing techniques and human resource management practices to execute a firm’s strategic plan and its organizational objectives. According to Barnes, Fox, and Morris (2004), internal marketing adopts the view of the company defining its in-house/internal environment as a marketplace where an internal system of customers represented by the firm’s employees require internal systematic communication and information regarding the company’s vision, objectives, and internal changes. ProServices’ business owners and their authorized senior employees may use marketing strategies in the internal setting to communicate the organizational goals and change strategy to the workforce, which will permit the corporation to “become more proactive in its design process and delivery activities” (Barnes, Fox, and Morris, 2004, p. 594). In this research, the author explored internal marketing as a set of tools and strategies that the business owners may use not only to communicate the ProServices’ change vision but also to consider if they may use the respective communication toolbox “to facilitate

acceptance of organizational change” and reduce confusion by the employees (Finney and Scherrebeck-Hansen, 2010, p. 327).

The abovementioned views of Barnes, Fox, and Morris (2004) and Finney and Scherrebeck-Hansen (2010) highlight the importance of establishing a two-way communication practice, which will foster an internal marketing practice that will positively influence change. Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014, p. 185) contend that employee engagement within an organization and the trust exhibited towards senior leadership increases as executives use internal marketing to convey strategy and change and receive feedback regarding the business reorganization. Additionally, and regarding employee engagement during change, Patah et al. (2009 cited in Kim, Knutson, and Han, 2015, p. 269) state that “when employee voices at work are properly acknowledged and their opinions are respected by the organization, employees are satisfied and they are more likely to be dedicated to the organizational goal.” Patah et al. (2009 cited in Kim, Knutson, and Han, 2015) align with the proposals that the author developed for the ProServices’ managing partners to consider and address the communication issues that the firm is experiencing during change.

Mantere, Schildt, and Sillince (2012, p. 173) contend that change challenges an organization’s communication model and affects its employees’ interpretive ability. Cătălin, Andreea, and Adina (2014, p. 6), when theorizing in support of internal marketing, argue that traditionally, internal communication was executed by passing information and managerial decisions from senior management to the “lower echelons.” They emphasize that “due to the lack of feedback and communication mediation mechanisms between members, internal communication becomes inefficient because it ignores the vertical communication from bottom to top and the horizontal interdepartmental communication” (Cătălin, Andreea and Adina, 2014, p. 6). Cătălin, Andreea, and Adina (2014, p. 6) further retain that “through internal marketing implementation, internal communication has to create efficient feedback mechanisms regardless of hierarchical levels and to communicate important messages to all concerned members.” The literature reviewed above is crucial to the ProServices’ business environment because it highlights the current problematic traditional top-down communication process that its business owners use to convey changes in the firm and have created the employees’ confusion and questions delaying the changes. Furthermore, it argues in favor of internal marketing and an organizational practice where internal marketing is employed to convey and showcase business developments to the workforce and welcome the corporate staff’s views concerning the organizational change process.

Within ProServices, the business change could benefit from establishing a communication rapport between the various employee levels. It will facilitate a dialogue between the business owners and the employees regarding questions and reservations during organizational transformation. Kim, Knutson, and Han (2015, p. 262) note that creating the setting for the employee voice to be heard can improve corporate relations by increasing commitment to the firm and involvement in corporate processes. “As a result, employees’ organizational visions and goals the organization pursues can be shared. Moreover, the encouraged communication among employees can give an employee an increased sense of responsibility” (Varey & Lewis, 1999 cited in Kim, Knutson, and Han, 2015, p. 262). According to Kim, Knutson, and Han (2015), internal marketing provides employees the opportunity to express their voice and discuss issues related to their work and change, resulting in employee satisfaction and reduced confusion that affects the internal organizational environment’s reformation.

ProServices may employ a participative process on information analysis and communication to permit its staff to respond to the internal marketing messages and contribute their ideas regarding a strategic change. The theoretical position of Cătălin, Andreea, and Adina (2014) emphasizes a corporate communication practice that advocates a collaborative change process, contributing to the establishment of an organizational culture of participative change management. Additionally, they highlight that organizational leadership is essential to the success of internal marketing efforts. As Minner (2005, cited in Cătălin, Andreea, and Adina, 2014) notes, leaders support the organizational efforts and have a central role in the organization’s reformation and adaptation. The literature presented in this section is central to this study and ProServices because it explores the role of internal communication and marketing during strategic change. However, would they work with the ProServices’ business owners’ restrictive managerial practice and change management approach? The depicted academic theories and their generalized helpfulness highlight various concepts for contemplation to the ProServices’ business owners that they can use during the action research cycles to explore how to address the issues that ProServices is facing regarding its communication practice and employee feedback during change. Moreover, it can help them answer critical questions about their role in creating the change perplexity occurring at ProServices.

2.3.1 Internal Marketing Strategies and Implementation

Theoretical View of What Could Work at ProServices

Internal marketing, as outlined by Snell and White (2009, p. 196), incorporates tools and strategies designed for external marketing activities, which business leadership may use internally to inspire and inform employees, stimulate performance, collaboration, better dissemination of information, and participation in the planned change strategy. Moreover, on employee involvement and use of internal marketing during change, Grönroos (1981 cited in Foreman and Money, 1995, p. 756) contends that “everyone in the organization has a customer” and Berry (1980 cited in Foreman and Money, 1995, p. 756) that “internal customers must be sold on the service and be happy in their jobs before they can effectively serve the final customer.” According to Grönroos (1981 cited in Foreman and Money, 1995), the internal customers of an organization are the focus of senior management’s efforts to market the internal products of the business, which during corporate transformation at ProServices are the organizational vision, its objectives and the strategic change effort that is required to maintain competitiveness and longevity. During the action research cycles, the researcher and the action research group at ProServices used the aim of internal marketing as described by Grönroos (1981 cited in Foreman and Money) and Berry (1980 cited in Foreman and Money) to explore practices to incorporate in the researcher’s proposals to the firm’s business owners.

Grönroos’ (1981 cited in Foreman and Money, 1995) and Berry’s (1980 cited in Foreman and Money, 1995) approach underline that companies organize employees as groups of internal customers, and therefore, they can utilize the same marketing principles when communicating to them during corporate change. However, as Rafiq and Ahmed (1993) note, when a business markets its products, the customer can accept or reject any advertised products. Positioning Rafiq and Ahmed’s (1993) arguments in the context of ProServices and taking into consideration Grönroos’ (1981 cited in Foreman and Money, 1995) internal customer concept, the researcher highlights in support of Rafiq and Ahmed (1993) position that at ProServices the business owners do not give the employees the option to choose between accepting the change or not. Moreover, the company’s business owners present them with the change strategy ready for execution, which mostly leaves them with the options to accept it, silently or openly reject it, and either continue with their employment in confusion and potentially in angst or terminate it. In this instance, ProServices’ leadership may utilize internal marketing to convey information to the business workforce concerning the reformation, which they can employ to assess the effect that it will have on their

professional position and successively express their views. Grönroos (1981 cited in Foreman and Money, 1995) and Berry's (1980 cited in Foreman and Money, 1995) theories concerning the internal organizational customer concept is a notion that requires further discussion, and particularly the boundaries and limitations that exist in a small business setting such as ProServices during business transformation and how they affect the change process and the external customers of the organization. In support of the researcher's prior mentioned viewpoint, Rafiq and Ahmed (1993, p. 222) highlight that "another problem with the notion of the employee as a customer is the idea of customer sovereignty (that is the idea of the customer is king, the customer is always right and so forth). For if employees were to behave as if they were customers, they would make impossible demands upon the organization and its resources." The thoughts mentioned above set a limitation framework at ProServices, which the business owners employ to reject practices different from their current top-down management approach.

Foreman and Money (1995, p. 760) argue that business leaders, in this study, the ProServices' business owners, may use four internal marketing approaches to address the organizational change needs and target audience according to the organizational setting. Foreman and Money's (1995) theorizations may also provide a framework that the ProServices' leaders may use to regulate the potential "impossible demands" of the employees, as prior mentioned by Rafiq and Ahmed (1993, p. 222), during the discussion about the organizational transformation. The first approach is the "Type I" internal marketing method that "sees one department, group or function as the marketer, and another as the customer(s)" (Foreman and Money, 1995, p. 760-761). In "Type II the organization as a whole, markets to specific groups, functions or departments within itself" (Foreman and Money, 1995, p. 760-761). In "Type III groups, departments or functions marketing" target the entire organization, and they are trying to introduce their services and strengthen their relationship with the rest of the organizational workforce, and in "Type IV," the "organization is the marketer and the market" (Foreman and Money, 1995, p. 760-761).

Foreman and Money's (1995, p. 760-761) "Type IV" internal marketing approach is relevant to this research and ProServices because it encompasses a pluralistic framework for conveying and receiving change information from the entire organization that is currently absent from the firm. The use of the aforesaid internal marketing approach permits the ProServices' business owners, its internal groups, and members with the opportunity to collaboratively develop and execute a marketing strategy for communicating the change initiative. Developing a unified marketing strategy for the entire organization, which

conforms with the business owners' parameters and adapts according to the change demands, may reduce communication clutter and ambiguous messages concerning the business vision and change. Finally, if everyone affected by the strategic change receives all pertinent information regarding corporate reorganization, it may create less organizational disruption and increase the staff's engagement. Rafiq and Ahmed (1993, p. 223) contemplate the appropriateness of an internal marketing program to develop internal customer-oriented behaviors and increase personnel engagement, which will encompass a strategic plan that will embody marketing methods such as market research, interactive marketing, and the techniques and individuals to deliver the change messages. Incorporating an internal marketing plan into the organizational change strategy of ProServices will improve information sharing and provide employees with the ability to offer feedback on the change process.

An essential element to creating an open and inclusive communication environment is the source or conveyor of the change information, who will employ a marketing plan to deliver the details of the proposed business reformation successfully. Rafiq and Ahmed's (1993) views argue that communicating critical changes to employees carries different weight and validity if someone who holds a leadership position and enjoys the respect and acceptance of the internal workforce conveys the changes. Such individuals may be business owners, organizational leaders, and employees who have assumed leading roles during change and are responsible for managing change and shaping the actions taken to establish a communication path between the business owners and the organizational workforce. During periods of strategic change, companies may use external change agents such as consultants in place of internal employees to lead the restructuring efforts and bridge the gap between various organizational layers. Communication between change agents or corporate members and the workforce during change is crucial and adds credibility to the respective individuals, capitalizing upon when advocating the road map of the new organizational vision. Buono and Subbiah (2014, p. 37) note that combining the expertise and insights of an external consultant with the recognition, trust, and established camaraderie that internal employees enjoy with the organizational workforce can be a powerful intervention to overcome change perplexity and increase employee commitment throughout the strategic change.

The prior mentioned views are vital to this study's aim because they highlight the cause of some of the issues that ProServices is facing during change. The ProServices' business owners, as prior noted, have pursued their past and current change initiative based on their recent experiences and knowledge about organizational change, which did not

include the endorsement or the use of a well-designed communication strategy, inclusive of a marketing plan, or the solicitation of the services of an experienced change consultant. Change agents and business staff can use internal marketing and processes to improve the communication between all employees and establish an open environment in which channeled information regarding strategic change is conveyed, disseminated, and critically assessed. Ferdous (2008, p. 228) highlights that marketing tools such as video conferences, live conferences, email blasts, corporate periodicals, one-on-one meetings, group meetings, workshops, action research groups, and webinars are amongst the most prominent internal marketing tools that companies use to convey information to or from internal departments and employees. Lastly, Snell and White (2009, p. 206-207) argue that it is essential for senior leadership to recognize that during the design and implementation phases of strategic change, no “silver bullet” exists in accurately identifying an appropriate internal marketing strategy that they can use in their communication approach. The researcher considers the latter view crucial in the development of his proposals to the business owners. The researcher aimed to provide a framework of communication strategies to the ProServices’ managing partners that, along with the action research group, can test their applicability in the organizational setting during the action research cycles. Adopting an internal marketing strategy and deciding the level of employee involvement will affect the internal marketing approach’s effect on the internal workforce during the strategic organizational change.

An additional area that requires emphasis during the design of the internal marketing strategy, related to the testing mentioned above of the communication strategies applicability on the ProServices’ environment, is to develop an understanding of the employees’ knowledge vis-à-vis the internal corporate environment. Successively, design the communication of change, limited from the parameters that the business owners have set, to relate how the change will improve their “similar characteristics, needs and wants, or tasks” (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1993, p. 227). Senior leadership, change agents, and marketing professionals can identify behavioral trends, motivation, needs, and expectations during organizational change and design an internal marketing strategy that will encompass the requirements for addressing most of the staff’s questions and the correction of the change message. Rafiq and Ahmed (1993) contend that during change, personnel engagement and the criteria that affect the latter are essential because, as Cătălin, Andreea, and Adina (2014, p. 5) note, it is appropriate to create an internal marketing approach based on employee commitment since it considers their “attitude towards work” and how change is perceived.

In summary, through established communication channels and internal marketing strategies, organizational members and change agents can transmit information about the strategic change, the new vision, and the steps the organization will undertake to succeed in a dynamically changing marketplace. This chapter has presented academic theories highlighting the theoretical concepts that the author and the action research group used during the action research cycles to test their applicability in the ProServices business setting. The conferred literature in this section relates to the focus of this research, which is to develop proposals for consideration by the ProServices' business owners that incorporate a communication approach that will help all the organizational members of ProServices to understand how the change will occur and the way it will affect them while permitting them to submit their views.

2.4 Relating the Literature with the Organizational Context

In this chapter, the researcher presented a variety of theories related to corporate communication and internal marketing, and how during strategic change, and with participative management and collaboration approaches included in his proposals to the ProServices' business owners could create an organizational setting that pluralistically shares the change details to all the affected employees while permitting the submission of their views. The author aimed to depict and analyze a mixture of theoretical ideas relating to this study's scope and produce actionable proposals for consideration by the ProServices' business leaders focusing on how best to manage corporate communication during strategic change. Additionally, the researcher aimed to explore with this study how a more conversational or consultative strategy and change management during organizational change could shape his future consulting practice and benefit other companies that face similar problems as ProServices.

The researcher focused further on the presented literature and developed associations and themes from the analyzed viewpoints and theoretical concepts of the academic authors that inform this research, which he used to frame the context that it was employed to evaluate and categorize the collected data from the interviews that he presents in the findings and discussion chapters. There is ample evidence in the literature review that emphasizes strategic planning as the method to plan a long-term roadmap that will guide the planning and communication of strategic business change to the entire corporate workforce, which will contribute to maintaining an organization's competitive advantage and footprint while effectively managing disruption during the reformation. Franken, Edwards, and Lambert (2009) underscore in their work that strategic planning relates to the development of a range of change programs, inclusive of communication strategies that positively influence a company to achieve its business objectives. The opinions mentioned above are of importance to ProServices and its members because historically, the business owners of the firm have implemented change programs without a long-term strategic plan and without a concrete communication approach that would address day-to-day changes and long-standing corporate reformation, and simultaneously inform the staff about the upcoming change.

Communication of information and employees' ability to contribute to the change process and echo their concerns are factors that can successfully influence the achievement of ProServices' change goals. Using a well-designed internal marketing strategy, which is currently absent at ProServices, conveys the change objectives and may provide the employees with the option to participate during business change and submit their views on

their organization's change strategy. More so, it can help them prepare for the change and reduce their confusion. Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014) support internal marketing during strategic change and highlight in their research that employees who participate in the corporate reformation exhibit higher commitment rates, less absenteeism, and greater involvement in the organizational life with increased productivity. Successively, they note that employers that consistently communicate with their workforce, asking for their "feedback, and taking time to listen to their concerns" maintain a higher degree of staff engagement in their businesses (Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra, 2014, p. 188). Internal marketing during change provides personnel information regarding the strategic action plan, leading to more employee satisfaction.

Internal marketing and the internal customer concept can help ProServices and similar organizations facing comparable issues improve internal communication and increase personnel engagement by addressing people-related concerns directly associated with change. Grönroos (1981 cited in Foreman and Money, 1995, p. 756) states on the internal corporate market topic that in the internal business environment, we should attempt to address the concerns of all interested parties that will successively satisfy the company's external customers. During strategic change, the ProServices' management may use internal marketing to address problems stemming from lack of information and employee contribution in the design of change and ensure that they communicate the corporate message to all employees. Internal communication and marketing are subjects that the author explored during the action research cycles and the data collection and analysis phases to identify and examine the workforce's views vis-à-vis the relation between organizational communication, employee engagement, and strategic change.

Business leaders practicing participative management in conjunction with internal marketing strategies can advance communication between employees, endorse the company's new vision, and prepare for a participative change action (Raelin, 2003). Finney and Scherrebeck-Hansen (2010, p. 329) argue that a successful leader can adapt their approach according to varying change-related circumstances and successively address various asymmetric challenges and organizational conflicts comparable to the ones ProServices is facing due to its lack of effective communication management. Forbes (2013, p. 82) contemplates that a successful strategic leader is a cultural change agent who communicates at all organizational levels and thoroughly understands all interested parties' views.

Business practitioners at ProServices or similar organizations may adopt the academic notions that the author depicted in the literature review by selecting either the traditional or

the participative management paradigm in their organization. The presented researchers have provided the author with a theoretical framework to explore proposals to ProServices' business owners regarding business reformation and communication amongst its employees, advance change, and increase organizational members' engagement. Although most of the presented theoretical ideas offer value in principle, the question remains which would work practically with a ProServices style setting and business owners. To answer these questions, the researcher, and as part of the development of his proposals, during the analysis of all the collected data, investigated the connection between ProServices' business owners' current change management and communication approach and its influence on the employees' perception concerning the proposed change strategy. Furthermore, the researcher sought to discover how the ProServices' business owners and employees may use participative management and internal marketing during the change to convey knowledge, clarify confusion, and understand the change goals.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presents the research methodology he adopted for this study, which encompasses the data collection process, interview instruments, and the data analysis method within the action research approach. Selecting a research methodology helped the researcher identify a roadmap that guided him through the data collection process at ProServices and with all parties involved. Davis, Parker, and Straub (2012, p. 72) argue, “the research methodology should fit the research problem, research aims, and theory base.” The research methodology is dependent on the social phenomenon that the researcher seeks to analyze and the context in which the phenomenon event occurs.

The researcher adopted an interpretive qualitative research method that best fits the analysis and examination of organizational and social issues developed at ProServices during strategic business change by its communication approach. Davis, Parker, and Straub (2012, p. 74) contend that when studying complex organizational issues during business change, we can “achieve more meaningful results with descriptive, qualitative, postpositivist, interpretive methods.” Creswell (2007) notes that a researcher bases his or her choice to utilize the interpretive qualitative research method on the circumstances that determine the study focus and framework in which it will take place. Studying strategic organizational change and the best practices for communicating the information related to it at ProServices required personal interaction with study participants as both the researcher and the participants brought their views, paradigms, and “set of beliefs” to the study, which informed the investigation process and the research project (Creswell, 2007, p. 15).

The researcher wanted to develop proposals for consideration by the firm’s managing partners that would highlight how to manage best the communication between all interested parties that would encompass pluralistic and inclusive methods to convey change information and offer personnel feedback about the change action. The researcher and the action research group, see sections 1.1 and 3.3 for details about the formation of the action research group, considered the position of the researcher who conducted research involving communication and human interaction during the ProServices’ strategic change action research cycles interconnected with the studied organization and its participants. Therefore, as Bhattacharjee (2012) argues, the interpretivism paradigm was appropriate for exploring social and organizational change, as highlighted above, because it denotes that the world, in this study, the ProServices’ setting, is socially constructed and subject to human actions and

interpretation. Additionally, Ponterotto (2005) notes that the relationship between the researcher and the researched organization members is central to the interpretivism paradigm because it allows for discovering meanings that the participants hold regarding the issues that they are facing, and the researcher is exploring. Kant's work (cited in Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129) highlights the primary view of interpretivism thinking "that you cannot partition out an objective reality from the person (research participant) who is experiencing, processing, and labeling the reality." The views that the researcher prior mentioned indicated, in support of interpretivism and in-person interaction with the ProServices' interviewees, that the changing reality at ProServices was influenced and cultivated by its business owners and the employees who further used their reality to develop meanings regarding the organizational and social issues that they are facing during the change.

The action research group agreed with the researcher that in a socially constructed environment such as ProServices, the strategy to engage the studied setting using the qualitative interpretive method was appropriate. The researcher's plan focused on recording data through interviews and informal discussions, analysis of them, and development of theories of what was happening and how it related to the ProServices' strategic change planning and communication structure. Through the interaction with the research participants, the author tried to make sense of the collected data, which further guided him through the analysis process. Finally, as a member of the process, the researcher considered the influence and bias that he was potentially projecting and introducing while collecting and analyzing data and developing assumptions that led to findings related to the study focus.

3.2 Qualitative Research

Depicted in this section are the qualities of qualitative research and the researcher's thoughts about the interpretive qualitative research approach as the appropriate method for utilization in this study and how it compares with the quantitative method. Singh (2015) argues that researchers use qualitative research to analyze and interpret organizational issues and phenomena that emerge in business environments during a strategic organizational change. Qualitative researchers' approach to research and analysis encompasses an interpretive and critical viewpoint process. It aims to collect and code data that refer to the study participants' views and feelings in their business setting and about issues that arise in their organizational environment during strategic change. Ponterotto (2005) argues that qualitative research incorporates a broad range of study procedures designed to target and capture the experiences of research participants while being active in their organizational environment and communicating the information about the change strategy. Furthermore, he contends that researchers present qualitative data in the study by involving all collected information, which they use to build assumptions that they can discuss in the business environment.

Taylor and Bogdan note that qualitative discovery is frequently presented in “everyday language” and often encompasses the study participants’ “own words to describe a psychological event, experience, or phenomenon” (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998 cited in Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128). Qualitative research advocates for active interaction between the researcher, the participants, and the research environment that can integrate viewpoints comparable to what Taylor and Bogdan describe above, encompassing all parties’ opinions involved in the study. Creswell (2007, p. 15) contends that in qualitative studies, investigators include personal feelings and perceptions that he describes as “own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study.” During the ProServices action research, the researcher implemented the principles of the academics’ views mentioned above and focused on collecting, analyzing, and discussing all the pertinent viewpoints about the communication of change-related information and the opportunities of the staff to influence the change design and process.

In contrast to qualitative research, the quantitative approach focuses on the extrapolation and quantification of information from the environment. Ponterotto (2005, p. 128) contends that quantitative research emphasizes the observation and quantification of data and the control of observed variables using large-scale sampling and statistical methods for measuring “group means and variances,” which emphasize the correlation between the

observed phenomenon and the collected data. Denzin and Lincoln (2000b cited in Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128) note, in the same manner as Ponterotto's view (2005), that "quantitative studies stress the measurement and analysis of causal or correlational relationships between variables." Using qualitative and quantitative studies, investigators employ a research approach, which involves collecting data and participants' views for analysis, coding, and interpretation (Ponterotto, 2005). Researchers can apply both research approaches or a combination of them to investigate business and market trends, organizational change design, and implementation strategies in an organizational environment. The advantage of the quantitative approach in the ProServices setting would be the representation in quantitative metrics of the effect of change and its communication approach on performance, information penetration, and staff adaptability. However, a quantitative research methodology in a smaller size firm as ProServices, where interaction between the staff and the business owners is personal and direct, would not account for the employees' personal views and feelings and how they relate and influence the change effort.

Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 103) contends that qualitative research relies mainly on a non-numerical data collection process such as interviews, which permit qualitative researchers to not rely on statistical tools, but rather research instruments such as content analysis to interpret data and construct theories and findings that support or nullify their initial argument. Additionally, Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 103-104) states that researchers frequently code qualitative data as an array of codes for discovering trends emerging from the information, which is then related to existing or developing theories through content rather than statistical analysis. Creswell (2007, p. 16) argues that when academics perform qualitative research, they are "embracing the idea of multiple realities." The concept of multiple realities achieved from employing a qualitative interpretive study within the realm of a business environment such as ProServices relates to the subjective realities that the organizational members develop or adopt regarding strategic change by sharing change data. The latter thought process was essential for this study because it helped the author focus on collecting and analyzing the necessary information that would help him develop proposals for the ProServices' senior management that would delineate more pluralistic and democratic means for communicating in the internal environment.

During the action research group meetings, the members of the action research team, described in sections 1.1 and 3.3, and the author reflected on the presented notions vis-à-vis change, and in what way they can inform the research of alternate viewpoints regarding how organizational members of various levels perceive corporate reformation. Furthermore, they

contemplated how the ProServices' communication approach and processes convey data about change and shape the employees' viewpoints on strategic reformation. The action research group and the researcher maintained that the richness of information provided by the business workforce and their views on ProServices' business change and communication of the latter during their interviews and informal discussions with the author contributed to the development of their perception regarding how the staff understands strategic change at ProServices. The researcher's selection to pursue qualitative research enabled him to understand better the mental constructs developed by employee perceptions and record, as Creswell (2007, p. 20) notes, their subjective viewpoints on the transpiring changes, and how their interpretation of their business reality is affected from the company's communication method. Creswell's (2007) views support Ponterotto (2005) when his study on interpretivism contends that reality forms within the individual's cognitive realm with their experiences instead of only being an external reality that exists independently from the individual. The author employed the latter focal characteristic of interpretivism during the ProServices' qualitative research and explored the interaction between him, the participants, and the study setting, where he aimed to "jointly create (co-construct) findings from their interactive dialogue and interpretation" (Ponterotto, 2005, p.129).

As mentioned before, the action research group unanimously supported the action researcher's decision to pursue qualitative research as he aimed to record complex subjective information about the strategic change (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, in combination with the presentation and negotiation with the study participants of various theories and patterns of meanings, to develop suggestions and concepts for consideration by the ProServices' business owners on improving the communication of information during change and permit the involvement of the workforce. Without personal interaction between the researcher and the study participants, it is unlikely that the researcher would have precisely recorded and identified the complexity of the opinions and working relations at ProServices as personnel depicted them during the strategic change. Creswell (2007), Ponterotto (2005), and Bhattacharjee (2012) contend that the complexity of strategic organizational change requires in-person discussions with the corporate members that will record and demonstrate their views on how change is perceived and understood.

3.2.1 The Interpretive Paradigm

A paradigm is a set of philosophies that offer a roadmap and research guidelines (Creswell, 2007). A research model provides the researcher in this study with a blueprint that helps to navigate through the inquiry according to the research paradigm's principles. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that a paradigm defines the individual's notions about the environment, their position within it, and the various relationships that the individual can conceive from their own societal and business systems. They further contend that a scientific paradigm offers the researcher a "net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 13).

Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. ix) in their book *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis* emphasize that for an investigator to understand the variety of opinions that individuals depict regarding a social or organizational issue, the investigator "must be fully aware of the assumptions upon which his own perspective is based." Moreover, they note that scientists approach their data, findings, and participating research subjects according to their implicit and explicit beliefs about the nature of the social world and how it may be examined and analyzed (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 1). Burrell and Morgan (1979), with their work, according to Jackson and Carter (1993, p. 722), provided a paradigm model that permits researchers to classify "theories of organization according to like characteristics" and "allows organizational theorists, when faced with a variety of competing theories, to impose some kind of order on those theories."

Jackson and Carter's (1993) paper 'Paradigm Wars': A Response to Hugh Willmott and their notion of organizational theory categorization according to similar characteristics or schools of research responds to Hugh Willmott's (1993) paper *Breaking the Paradigm Mentality*. In his paper Hugh Willmott (1993) criticizes Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigm model and the emphasis that Burrell and Morgan (1979) give on the incommensurability between the paradigms. Hugh Willmott (1993, p. 681), in his work, criticizes Burrell and Morgan's (1979) dogma of paradigm mutual exclusivity due to their incommensurability and the "sharp division" that they posit of "the 'subjectivist' and 'objectivist' forms of analysis." Hugh Willmott (1993, p. 682) takes issue with the dualistic nature of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigms model and specifically with the "polarization of 'subjective' versus 'objective' approaches to social science." Hugh Willmott (1993) supports Kuhn's work on scientific development (1962, 1970 cited in Willmott, 1993, p. 684) where he argues that "theory development involves a process of struggle in which all accumulation of anomalies in existing theories stimulates (or supports) the plausibility and

development of alternative theorizing.” Kuhn (1962, 1970 cited in Willmott, 1993, p. 684) argues that there is “continuity as well as incommensurability in the ‘revolutionary’ process of scientific discovery.” Hugh Willmott (1993) further suggests that if Burrell and Morgan (1979) had paid more attention to Kuhn’s work, they would have significantly amended their paradigm mutual exclusivity assumptions. That would permit, as Hugh Willmott (1993) claims in his paper *Paradigm Gridlock: A Reply*, the crossover between paradigms during an organizational study than their mutual exclusivity due to incommensurability and the adoption of dualism and the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism. Jackson and Carter’s (1993, p. 722) response to Hugh Willmott (1993) noted that the paradigms incommensurability guaranteed the development of “a pluralistic concept which allows the potential of divergent opinions to develop without them being automatically proscribed by the orthodoxy, and that the denial of incommensurability denies this plurality.” While the paradigm wars will continue, to develop a model that will proceed to challenge functionalism, the researcher of this study, though he accepts the views of Burrell and Morgan (1979), Hugh Willmott (1993) and Jackson and Carter (1993), proceeded with the following analysis and consideration of the paradigm model and the adoption of the interpretive paradigm. As mentioned in the previous sections, the use of the interpretive paradigm in this study aided the author to understand and analyze the communication issues that ProServices was facing during its strategic change because it permitted, as Bhattacharjee (2012) notes, the individual contribution and assessment of the participants’ views in this study.

Burrell and Morgan (1979) highlight the ontological and epistemological nature of assumptions that a scientist derives during the study of a phenomenon and showcase the “ontological nature – assumptions which concern the very essence of the phenomena under the investigation” and the epistemological nature that refers to “how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge to fellow human beings” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 1). A fundamental ontological question during research is if reality is objective or a product of our “individual cognition” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 1). From an epistemological perspective, the investigator focuses on answering questions relating to the “nature of knowledge itself” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 1). Additionally, the authors note that researchers concentrate their efforts on whether knowledge and reality are quantifiable and able to be presented in a “tangible form” or “softer, more subjective, spiritual or even transcendental kind, based on experience and insight of a uniquely personal nature” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 1-2). Based on Burrell and Morgan’s (1979)

viewpoints, the researcher at ProServices attempted to assess if he can evaluate the company's reality and change-related issues and establish knowledge from an epistemological view that supported knowledge as something that he can achieve and measure from the environment or, instead, as something that he should experience at a personal level to record.

According to Burrell and Morgan's (1979) prior-mentioned two sets of assumptions, the third set of assumptions arises from the position that the investigator supports on the studied setting about its members' relationship to their environment. Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 2) argue regarding the view that a researcher maintains concerning the individual's interconnection with their setting that people's behaviors and expectations are either products of their environment or the result of individuals' influence on their setting and reality. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 2), social science research, is "clearly predicated" on the set of assumptions, the ontological, epistemological and, the position that an investigator has vis-à-vis the connection of individuals to their environment since human life and interaction between individuals is the "subject and object of inquiry." Further emphasized by Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 2) is the notion that in social science, we identify views that underscore that individuals react to their environment in two ways. Either in a "mechanistic" and predetermined way, unable to influence their setting or in a way in which they assume an interactive and "creative role" that enables them to assess a situation and create a new environment that is a product of their "free will." Determining how the ProServices' employees will react and attempt to influence their changing business setting was a priority for the researcher because it influenced his understanding and decision making about recording and analyzing their views through in-person interaction. Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 2) note that many of the assumptions that scientists produce support the notion that human interaction influences the environment and vice versa.

Burrell and Morgan (1979) argue that the three sets of assumptions, ontological / epistemological / human nature, directly impact the type of research that a scientist will pursue. The set of assumptions that a scientist adopts to analyze and understand the social world affects the methodology adopted, the scientific instruments used to record and analyze data, and the format used to present the study's findings (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Burrell and Morgan's (1979, p. 21) work showcases that researchers pursue social theory study in two dimensions of analysis, encompassing several approaches to making assumptions. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 21), theories about "the nature of science can be thought of in terms of what we call the subjective-objective dimension, and assumptions

about the nature of society in terms of a regulation-radical change dimension.” Combining the two aspects and schools of sociology Burrell and Morgan presented four separate sociological paradigms, shown in Figure 3.1.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF RADICAL CHANGE			
SUBJECTIVE	‘Radical humanist’	‘Radical structuralist’	OBJECTIVE
	‘Interpretive’	‘Functionalist’	
THE SOCIOLOGY OF REGULATION			

Figure 3.1 – Four Paradigms for The Analysis of Social Theory (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 22)

The interpretive paradigm that the researcher supports assumes “that the best way to study social order is through the subjective interpretation of participants involved, such as by interviewing different participants and reconciling differences among their responses using their own subjective perspectives” (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 19). Johari (2009) contends that interpretive study allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon studied through a personal research and analysis lens, allowing the investigator to comprehend the studied environment and its relationship with its members. The theory underpinning interpretivism argues that social reality is not “singular or objective” and, from an ontological viewpoint, is constructed by individual experiences and the society in which these experiences are shaped (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 103).

Researchers under the interpretivism paradigm encompass an emerging approach, adapting the study and the relationship between the researcher and participant as the investigation progresses, and new information and assumptions emerge that require analysis and classification (Johari, 2009). The interpretive paradigm in qualitative research highlights the researcher's position in the study as an expert who interprets and represents data and as an individual who immerses him or herself in the study to construct rapport between the organizational members and the corporate setting (Creswell, 2007, p. 248).

Organizational strategic change is a social change and a change in the social reality of a corporate workforce. Involving the members of an organization, such as ProServices, and understanding how change takes shape through their eyes and within the existing corporate communication model provided the researcher and the action research group with valuable information that they used to develop notions based on the collected data of how employees perceive strategic change under the ProServices’ current communication practices. The

analysis and presentation of the collected data illustrated to study participants the degree to which employees accept the current method for designing and communicating strategic change. Walsham (2001) notes that when researching the interpretive paradigm assists the researcher “in filtering participants’ statements and actions through the lens of the researchers own subjectivity,” interpreting them, and then constructing “a ‘story’ about the events that have occurred and some reasons for them” (Walsham, 2001, p. 7 cited in Johari, 2009, p. 26).

For this study, the researcher, as indicated previously in this chapter, used a qualitative method to collect data from participants concerning their views regarding strategic change and internal communication at ProServices. Consecutively, the researcher employed an interpretive methodology to analyze and understand the study participants’ viewpoints, how they compare, and how they connect to the executed change strategy and communication. Within an organization, such as ProServices, different members have divergent views regarding change and communication, and for the researcher to capture all the views, he adopted a hands-on approach to establishing a personal rapport with all participating members. Building personal rapport helped him during the data collection connecting and understanding all the employees’ viewpoints concerning strategic change and the information sharing process. The author’s efforts focused on achieving Vecchio’s (2006) view, which contends that when conducting an interpretive study, it is crucial to construct an accurate picture of the organizational situation and not an account of the summarized views influenced by one’s position. Additionally, the researcher pursued Johari’s (2009, p. 27) notion who argues that the scope behind the interpretivism paradigm is to understand the studied phenomena through the “meanings that people assign to them,” “increase understanding of the phenomenon within cultural and contextual situations” and analyze the “phenomenon of interest” in the environment where it occurs “and from the perspective of the participants.”

Johari’s (2009) view mentioned above regarding the interpretation of the information that employees provide during organizational change and the value that they assign to them connect with the views of Mantere, Schildt, and Sillince (2012) regarding the sensegiving and sensemaking processes in corporate communication, which the researcher analyzed in section 2.3, and their use by the organizational members to convey and analyze information during strategic change. Additionally, Johari’s (2009) opinion on interpretivism interrelates with Gioia and Chittipeddi’s (1991) and Kezar’s (2013) notions. They argue that during sensemaking and sensegiving, employees receive and process data vis-à-vis the business

change that influence their understanding and the development of their feedback regarding the change action.

3.3 Action Research

Action research is a systematic and cyclical process used by a researcher and an action research group as part of an action research process to contemplate, critically assess, and develop theories, solutions, or proposals to address issues that arise in the social and organizational realms. Cassell and Johnson (2006, p. 784) note that action research highlights an “iterative cycle of problem identification, diagnosis, planning, intervention and evaluation of the results of action in order to learn and to plan subsequent interventions.” Cassell and Johnson (2006) and Hine and Lavery (2014) emphasize that action research connects research with action and practical implementation or proposal development for consideration in the business environment. It interrelates theories with problems experienced in the business setting, striving to find useful suggestions for solving them. In combination with the qualitative and interpretive approach, the action research process permitted the researcher of this study and his action research group to critically assess and contemplate information related to this investigation’s scope. This study focuses on addressing the processes of communicating and managing the strategic change at ProServices using internal marketing and how the workforce’s participation during change tackles the communication issues between the various organizational employee layers.

Historically, action research is associated with the work of Kurt Lewin (n.d. cited in Hine and Lavery, 2014), and further analyzed and developed by several academics inclusive of those presented in this section, who support action research as a cyclical, dynamic and participative process comparable to Figure 3.2.

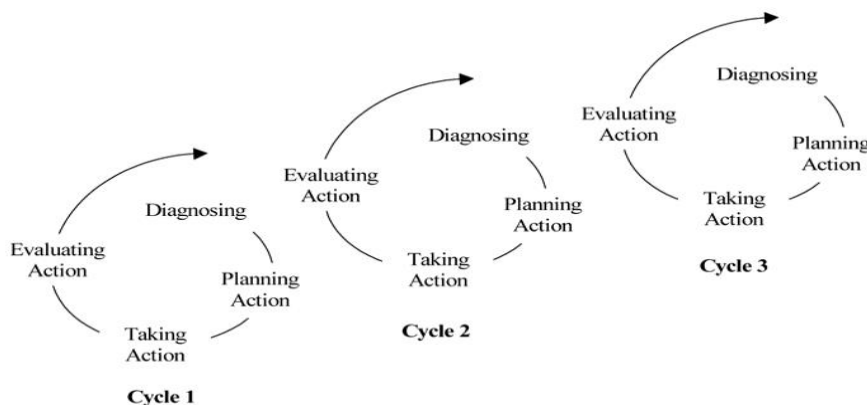


Figure 3.2 – Spiral of the Action Research Cycles (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, loc. 409)

The main characteristic of action research is the collaboration between the participating members that leads to jointly tackling problems through theory and proposal development or experimentation, subsequently discussing their findings and evaluating their actions (Barton, Stephens, and Haslett, 2009). Moreover, the action research process may lead to an approach

like Coghlan and Brannick's action research cycle (Figure 3.3, 2010, loc. 369). Using Coghlan and Brannick's (2010) action research cycle at ProServices, the researcher and the action research team created a strategy for the development of proposals to the managing partners about the corporate issues that their approach generated on how to manage the communication process and participation of employees during change that could help the ProServices' leadership to improve business performance (Hine and Lavery, 2014).

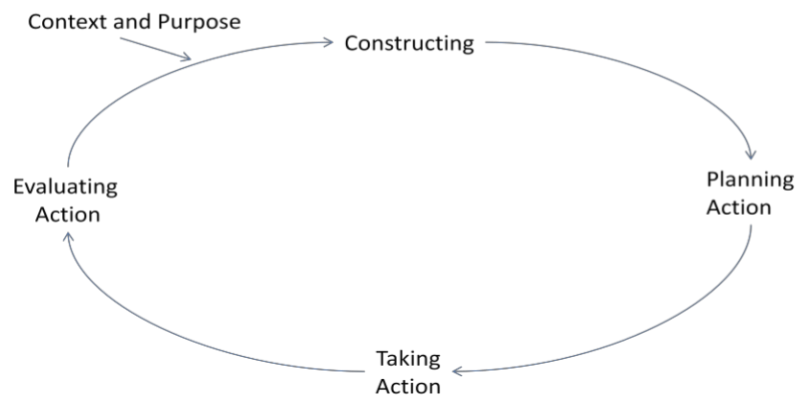


Figure 3.3 – The Action Research Cycle (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, loc. 369)

Hine and Lavery (2014) note that with action research, the researcher and the action research group develop reasonable proposals about a change action, enabling an organization to face business challenges and improve business performance. Successively, the change action team and senior leadership observe, reflect, and revise their change strategy and action plan to bring the benefit required to the organizational environment (Hine and Lavery, 2014; Holgersson and Melin, 2015). Hine and Lavery (2014) and Holgersson and Melin (2015) support Susman and Evered (1978, p. 588 cited in Holgersson and Melin, 2015, p. 5), who highlight five steps for action research, which can be applied during strategic change and include:

1. Diagnosing
2. Action planning
3. Action taking
4. Evaluation
5. Specifying learning

According to Holgersson and Melin (2015), diagnosing suggests how researchers identify the organizational problem. Action planning relates to strategy development and the alternative measures that are available for solving the organizational issue. Action taking refers to the selection of activities for the solution of the problem. Evaluation analyzes the results of the

action taken. Finally, specifying learning entails lessons learned and findings from the selected strategy for action.

Action research is an appropriate approach to study communication problems in the business setting during change because it requires effective communication from all the business members. Efficient communication helps identify their views and disclose the organizational change needs, research requirements and goals, and the suggestions they need to consider for a satisfactory resolution to the organizational issues that the action researcher is studying. At ProServices, the author used action research to develop communication practices during the action research cycles as part of the research and collaborate, as Holgersson and Melin (2015) argue, with the action research group to accurately analyze results and design proposals on the change strategy for the consideration of the ProServices' business owners. Moreover, and according to what Holgersson and Melin (2015) note, the researcher's interest, working method, and values interconnected with the working methods and ethics of the ProServices' employees, which influenced the implementation of the action research project and cooperation between the members of the action research group.

Bhattacharjee (2012) maintains that with action research, the researcher, in coordination with the action research group, may analyze complex social and organizational problems and construct proposals for a change strategy to address the investigated business issues. With the adoption of an interpretive paradigm and an action research approach, the researcher and the action research group at ProServices identified and recorded the mixture of views in the studied organizational environment regarding the reformation process and its information-sharing approach. The action research strategy that the author used in this investigation aligned with the interpretive paradigm and qualitative research methodology. The author collected, analyzed, and classified data that emphasized the participants' experiences while interpreting their views and mental constructs impacted by the strategic change.

3.4 Data Collection

Creswell (2007, p. 118) defines qualitative data collection methods as a “series of interrelated activities” that aim to gather information to “answer emerging research questions.” Qualitative data collection methods are related to approaches that collect information through interviews, observations, and diary methods (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson, 2008). The researcher employed a qualitative data collection method in combination with the action research cycles, which incorporated semi-structured interviews with the ProServices’ business members, to discover participants’ opinions regarding organizational issues that existed and further developed during the reformation of the researched internal business environment due to the absence of effective communication practices. A semi-structured interview process allowed the researcher and the interviewees to establish an open-ended discussion that permitted the respondents to elaborate without restrictions on discussion agenda items and detailed descriptions of the issues researched and problems that arise from the introduction, communication, and implementation of change. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2008, p. 144) argue that “more open, or semi-structured and unstructured interview questions often give a higher degree of confidentiality as the replies of the interviewees tend to be more personal in nature.”

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, the researcher’s data collection effort employed open-ended discussions and informal team meetings to record feedback throughout the action research cycles that the author communicated to the action research group. The employee feedback included information about the communication strategy throughout the action research cycles and change process that conveyed the design of change, the options for staff participation, and the experiences that strategic change produces in the organizational environment. Additionally, the researcher sought to identify how internal communication using internal marketing augment and complement the flow of information about the strategic change to the organizational members through the data collection process. The data collection objectives as mentioned above align with the goals of this study and with its qualitative action research focus because, as Carson et al. (2001, p. 65) note, during qualitative studies, “in-depth understanding is based on researcher immersion in the phenomena to be studied” and collecting data which deliver a comprehensive account of situations in an organization as employees experience them.

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interview Approach

The data collection methods that qualitative research employs are structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews complemented with organizational observation and company documentation review (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson, 2008; Bhattacharjee, 2012). Data collected through these methods are in raw form and require further analysis, coding, and dissemination, which result in depicting the underlying views of the participating organizational members.

The use of a data collection method depends on a study's objectives and the researcher's access to the business setting and organizational workforce. The semi-structured interview method that the author adopted for this research permitted a comprehensive understanding of the interviewees' worldview regarding organizational issues that arose from implementing change and the mediums used to communicate the new strategy and vision. Carson et al. (2001, p. 73) emphasize that independent of the interview format, the purpose of conducting one-on-one interviews is to find out information regarding the interviewees' standpoint on organizational changes or the business environment, their "feelings, memories and interpretations that we cannot observe or discover in other ways."

The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to conduct in-depth discussions with each participant on corporate communication and internal marketing during change and simultaneously establish a setting where the interviewees felt secure and able to express all thoughts relevant to the study's focus. To guarantee an accurate and respectful data collection process, the researcher held the interviews in a neutral setting where participants felt relaxed and away from their office environment. Additionally, before the interview process's commencement, the author conducted test interviews with a limited number of participants, which allowed for clarifying the interview questions and discussion approach.

The work of Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2008, p. 142-150), influenced the researcher's design of this study's semi-structured interview format. They emphasize that the process of collecting data in qualitative research is affected by the following five factors:

i) Degree of structure

The degree of structure is crucial for the success of the interview and the accurate collection of information. The semi-structured degree that the author adopted set first to accommodate an informal and open-ended discussion with the ProServices' employees that served the research objectives. The semi-structured approach permitted the researcher to adapt the interview discussion to address the interviewees' preferences, which helped them feel relaxed. In contrast, if the author had selected a structured interview guide, it would

allow for a firmer questionnaire ensuring that interviewees answer all questions and fulfill all meeting objectives. However, the researcher could have missed exploring other corporate communication and internal marketing viewpoints during change that develop through informal conversation development.

ii) Interviewing skills of the researcher

The researcher and his interviewing skills were critical for successfully collecting and maintaining a friendly discussion atmosphere while keeping the conversation on point. Typically, a well-prepared researcher is successful in planning, facilitating, and managing the interview process. During the interviews, the researcher could differentiate between what was pertinent to the employees' conversation and what was not. Moreover, during the interview process, the researcher managed the questions' sensitivity and appropriately navigated between the internal organizational politics while employing the necessary listening skills to acknowledge and evaluate non-verbal cues that could have jeopardized the data collection process.

iii) Obtaining and maintaining the trust of organizational members

Obtaining and maintaining the trust of organizational members was crucial to the success of the study. The researcher achieved trust because the participants recognized the relevance the research had to their professional setting and how the interview questions addressed the issues and reservations that have arisen from the ineffective communication of information during the execution of the first action research cycle. Additionally, the researcher convinced the organizational members that he would maintain full anonymity throughout the study, and they would have access to the study results to evaluate how the outcomes can improve their day-to-day business lives.

iv) Bias and influence imposed on the interview process

When designing the interview structure and overall interaction between the interviewer and interviewee, we must be cognizant of the amount of bias and influence on the interview process. Although the author proceeded with an informal semi-structured interview approach, he focused during the conversations with the employees to not steer the discussions towards any assumptions and otherwise influence the interviewees to adopt different views from their individual beliefs. Furthermore, the researcher used open-ended questions that provided the opportunity for respondents to elaborate on their points of view concerning communication and internal marketing during the strategic change in an informal manner and with flexibility regarding how much detail they wish to provide.

v) Ethical issues

Factors that influence the recording of relevant and accurate data throughout the study include the confidentiality, anonymity, and security that the interviewer offers to the interviewees. A well-designed study addresses the variety of ethical issues that the research participant might face while contributing to the research. Ethical issues are related to the internal corporate setting and the potential conflicts of interest that organizational members encounter in their business environment. The factors of confidentiality, anonymity, and security are discussed further in the following sections.

The interview instrument [See Appendix A and B for the interview guide] focused on discovering and exploring the participants' views regarding how their organizational setting handled the communication process and employee participation during the strategic change. The researcher discussed specific areas with the respondents to identify how the change impacted their organizational environment and the communication processes and marketing strategies used to communicate various information points during the action research cycles. Furthermore, the researcher explored the methods that senior leadership used to disseminate information regarding business change and vision and their perspective on the level of participation that employees should have during the design and execution of change. To eliminate unanswered questions and gradually focus on the collected data, the researcher used "probes" that "can be useful as an intervention technique to improve, or sharpen-up, the interviewee's response" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008, p. 147).

3.4.2 The Interview Process

To fulfill the research objectives, the author collected data from executives and employees, and therefore, the interview process carefully accommodated participant schedules and remained within the allotted timeframes. The data collection process took place during the action research cycles. After the first action research cycle, the researcher conducted the interviews, which encompassed the ProServices' business owners' initial change implementation strategy announcement to the company's workforce, and over approximately two months. The researcher planned the interview questionnaires and discussion themes, and senior management distributed the research invitations to all employees located at ProServices' headquarters in New York City [See Appendix A and B for the interview guides]. The participants conveyed their replies directly to the researcher. The decision to invite all the employees from the company's New York office to participate in this study was important because each participating member possessed knowledge that benefited this research. The author and action research group determined that keeping the study's participation in domestic-based employees would be most beneficial because most ProServices' employees are in New York City; New York City serves as ProServices' headquarters and the decision-making site for strategy formulation and change planning.

Twenty-nine organizational members made themselves available to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary, and interviewees were free to withdraw without explanation and without incurring any disadvantage. The researcher allocated the interviewees into two groups according to their professional level. The two groups were the business owner and senior employee and the mid-level and junior employee. The researcher, throughout this study, used the terms, employees, staff, workforce, personnel, business owner (BO), senior employee (SE), midlevel employee (ME), and junior employee (JE) to describe the interview participants and the ProServices' organizational workforce. The logic behind the creation of the specific two groups reflects the action research group and author's focus to investigate the views of the workforce regarding strategic change according to their professional level that helped the researcher identify how the participants' viewpoints regarding business reformation and communication of it contrast between the two groups and amongst the members of the same group. The categories of participants illustrated in Table 3.1 represent those who accepted the researcher's invitation to participate in the study and provided insightful data on the following:

- Their experiences with organizational change.
- Their organizational environment during the change process.

- The communication and marketing strategies that they or their firm used for communicating and sharing information about the strategic change.
- The level of their participation during the design and implementation of strategic change.
- Their viewpoints regarding the use of internal marketing throughout the change process.

<u>Position Type</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>
Business Owner & Senior Employee	17
Mid-Level & Junior Employee	12
Total Interviewed	29

Table 3.1 – Interview List

As discussed in the previous section, the interview questionnaires were open-ended to avoid the researcher influencing or driving conversations with interviewees during the meetings. During each interview’s opening phase, the researcher’s focus was to make the interviewee feel comfortable, establish a reliable relationship, and ensure that the terminology and theories used comprehensively allow all questions to be understood and answered. All interviewees were provided with the interview guide, the participant information sheet, and participant consent form to alleviate any interview anxiety and demonstrate the advanced level of knowledge and research undertaken from the researcher to date. The participant consent form informed the members on how the researcher handled all provided data and personal information. The participant information sheet provided the interviewees with information about the study, which helped them decide about their participation. The University of Liverpool committee on research ethics approved all forms.

After the dissemination and review of the documents mentioned above, the researcher started the data collection process. For the collection of data, the researcher employed informal discussions, team meetings, and voluntary semi-structured interviews either in person, via electronic mail, or through videoconference, which permitted him to convey the interview questions and successively follow-up either in person or through a videoconference meeting (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008) [See Appendix A and B for the interview guides]. The semi-structured interview method, which guided each interview, permitted an informal style interview and the interview’s adaptation as the interview progressed. The interviewees provided views that informed the researcher of their perspectives on corporate communication and change preferences. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe,

and Jackson (2008, p. 145) contend that semi-structured interviews are appropriate when it is crucial “to understand the ideas that the respondent uses as a basis for his or her opinions and beliefs about a particular matter or situation.” Finally, the researcher provided the participants with the option to record their interviews, allowing him to transcribe, when authorized, all in-person and videoconference interviews. Participants had the opportunity to opt-out from voice recordings, and all of them did so. When the participants did not authorize a voice recording of their interview, the author took extensive notes. All interviews lasted approximately one hour.

All data collected from the interviews remained confidential and stripped of personal information. The researcher provided all participants with full anonymity. All personal information and data were kept password protected and encrypted on his personal computer, and after five years, he will destroy them. All handwritten notes were converted to electronic files and then destroyed. All emails were converted to PDF files and successively deleted. The researcher used alphabetical or pseudonym combinations instead of company and participant names in all research interviews, research notes, and voice recordings.

In conclusion, the author felt it was vital that he adhered to the rules of good interviewing throughout the interview process, as noted by Carson et al. (2001). Specifically, as Carson et al. (2001, p. 76) argued:

- The researcher used encouragement and short replies to indicate his understanding of the participant’s views.
- He maintained eye contact and a good posture that showed continuous engagement with the interview topic and the conversation.
- Used the “active listening technique of feeding back dialogue in the researcher’s own words to check his or her own understanding and to remind the respondent that what they are saying is very interesting.”
- He asked non-directive questions to engage the participant to elaborate further on their views.
- Used the responder’s exact terminology rather than employing academic terms and permitted the interviewee to decide the order to discuss the study topics if they expressed an interest in elaborating further on specific topics (Carson et al., 2001).
- He avoided asking leading questions. He never introduced his ideas into the interview and never evaluated an answer because it would introduce

researcher bias into the interviewee's responses and influence them towards the investigator's viewpoints (Carson et al., 2001, p. 76).

3.5 Data Analysis and Coding

The researcher's approach to analysing data was inductive and adapted as the investigation developed during the action research cycles, and informational patterns appeared through the interviews and informal discussions and by continuously assessing the collected data (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 113; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson, 2008, p. 175). Patton (1987, p. 150), in the same manner as Bhattacharjee (2012, p. 113) and Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2008, p. 175), refers to inductive analysis as a method "in which the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being decided prior to data collection and analysis."

Carson et al. (2001) and Bhattacharjee (2012) describe three coding methods, open / axial / selective, during a qualitative interpretive study that the researcher used to organize and analyze data. The three coding methods of open, axial, and selective coding are part of the grounded theory method for analyzing qualitative data that Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed and further advanced by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The author used open coding to target information to sort them according to "concepts or key ideas" related to the research phenomenon of interest (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 113). The researcher, as part of the open coding phase, read all data from the action research cycles and developed open codes to highlight and emphasize crucial information relating to strategic change, corporate communication, and internal marketing during change, which further helped him and the action research group to focus the recorded information and discard non-essential data.

Carson et al. (2001) contend that during the axial coding phase, the investigator identifies new data relationships that signify different theoretical patterns that require analysis and interconnection with the research's main topic and initial data codes. During the axial coding stage, the researcher identified data relationships that emphasized how the interviewees perceive strategic change, the communication of change information, and how internal marketing supported the information sharing process and contributed to reducing change ambiguity and confusion.

Lastly, throughout the selective coding phase, the researcher approached the data and established patterns and central themes that encompassed the coded information. The latter approach emphasized how during the interviews and the action research cycles, the participants' viewpoints, informed by the ProServices' communication practices, compared the process of strategic change and understanding of it in relation with the internal communication model ProServices employed in the various action research cycles (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The researcher aimed to "summarize the similarities and differences

between what people are saying” after its action research cycle and focus the range of analysis for the data examination process to move faster (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 115; Carson et al., 2001, p. 83). The researcher will showcase further details and analysis of how he developed the codes during open, axial, and selective coding in section 4.2.

The researcher’s data analysis effort scrutinized existing and newly developed themes and all data remaining for analysis to verify that all possible data analysis and coding had occurred. The data processing continued during the three action research cycles until the author established through the data evaluation that he accounted for all the participating personnel’s beliefs. Data gathering and data analysis were done successively, with data collection leading to data analysis and data analysis informing further data collection to capture all concepts relevant to the research focus (Krathwohl and Smith, 2005, p. 217). During the interviews, the researcher took notes that correlated to the collected data and existing theories, which permitted him to focus the study and develop concepts directly related to corporate communication with the use of internal marketing during strategic change.

During the assessment of all collected data and reflection upon existing academic theories, the author developed a color-coding system that corresponded to the researched themes of strategic change, leadership during the corporate reorganization, and internal communication and marketing. The color-coding process used light red colors for strategy and change, light blue for leadership, and olive green for communication and internal marketing. The aforesaid three-color-coding system facilitated the analysis and comparison of all received information between the various interviews and the designated informational themes. Additionally, it helped the author identify and establish relationships and patterns between the ProServices’ communication processes and the employees’ understanding of change. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 57 cited in Carson et al., 2001, p. 83) contend that “these codes are retrieval and organizing devices that allow the analyst to spot quickly, pull out, then cluster all the segments relating to a particular question, hypothesis, concept, or theme.”

The researcher ceased to analyze the data when all the “sources of information” had “been exhausted,” and additional data led to redundancy and when the data analysis began “to “overextend” beyond the boundaries of the issues and concerns guiding the analysis” (Patton, 1987, p. 154). Specifically, the researcher read the interview transcripts, associated notes and analyzed data several times and terminated the data processing when he was unable to discover new material derived from the collected information regarding strategic change

and internal marketing or evidence that would lead to establishing unique theories, assumptions and relationships between the data, the literature review and the participants' views.

3.5.1 Dealing with Bias

Bias in data collection and analysis arise, as Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2008), and Maxwell (1996) note, from the researcher's influence in the study, the participant sample size, and the design of the interview instrument. The investigator's voluntary or involuntary contribution to the research is biased, and while the researcher accounts for it in the study, bias may influence the validity and reliability of the study (Maxwell, 1996). Additionally, bias can be introduced in the sampling methodology through the "choices made in the design of the study and also through features of the process of collecting data" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson, 2008, p. 213).

Researcher bias may exist during the interview, data collection, and analysis phases. An investigator may introduce bias during the interview process by asking the interviewee leading questions by eliminating open-ended questions, and by driving the discussion with the participant. Furthermore, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2008, p. 213) argue that bias is introduced during the sample design and participant selection period if the researcher purposefully excludes groups of people relevant to the research. Researchers can also introduce bias if they employ a distribution contact list out of date and does not include all the participants' up to date information, and if they use specific language and terminology to exclude people that cannot speak the respective language and do not understand complicated academic and technical definitions. Establishing audit mechanisms and reviews from sources external to the research, such as individuals or groups that will compare the data analysis and findings to a mixture of data sources and views, may reduce bias. The researcher will analyze the variety of audit mechanisms and techniques for reducing bias in the following section.

Opinions on whether bias negatively influences a research project vary depending on the research paradigm that an investigator abides and the research topic. In a qualitative action research study, such as this study, it was challenging for the researcher to differentiate the performed research work from professional and personal experiences because he was part of the research's environment and connected with its participants (Maxwell, 1996). Maxwell (1996, p. 27) argues that bias may exist in academic study, particularly in qualitative research where the researcher is the "instrument of the research." Trying to separate professional from personal life may restrict the researcher from essential experiences that he or she can use to evaluate research and data gaps from the data collection process, findings, and reliability checks. Hillary Putnam (1987, 1990 cited in Maxwell, 1996, p. 29) argues that we cannot hold an entirely objective view, such as a "God's eye view" of a topic of discussion on a

societal and business issue. “Any view is a view from some perspective, and therefore incorporates the stance of the observer” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 29).

Arguing the potential benefit of researcher bias in this study from a philosophical perspective does not resolve the primary issue of evaluating the extent of bias in the research, which, according to the scientific establishment, could impact the validity of the study. The researcher and the action research group supported that when using one’s experiences and views in a research project, it is vital to recognize how the latter introduces bias, and how bias affects the analysis, interview techniques, and conclusions, and subsequently, adjust the study to reflect the opinions of all those involved accurately. In this study, the researcher discussed with the action research group and the interview participant groups the data collection process and the findings that he discovered to record and account for their views regarding bias and accuracy of the interview techniques and findings. All the participating members agreed that bias is inherited naturally from the interviewees’ interpretation of the change information, the effect that it could have on their interview answers, and how the researcher may analyze the collected data. All the interviewees noted it was essential to maintain a personal interaction between the researcher and them because it helped the researcher accurately record their interpretation of how the change affected them, which successively affected the findings’ accuracy. Maxwell (1996, p. 29) notes that the technique of “researcher experience memo” may showcase the interconnection between our past experiences and how they positively or negatively affect our research effort. Using the researcher experience memo technique, we project our thoughts regarding incidents or knowledge acquired in the past that have framed our present stance connected with everyday issues or our research topic.

3.6 Credibility

Throughout this research and during the data collection and analysis phases, the researcher conducted a study that was mindful of the participants and the University of Liverpool's ethics requirements while simultaneously adhering to the interpretive research paradigm. This qualitative study was dependent on the personal interpretation of the studied phenomena and collected data related to the qualitative interpretive paradigm and the benefit that the researcher's personal experience and background brought to the data analysis.

As argued by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) and Johari (2009), the interpretive perspective contends that individuals employ symbols, metaphors, ideas, and theories to make sense of their business and social experiences. The latter viewpoint of Denzin and Lincoln (1994) and Johari (2009) places greater weight on personal views, values, and beliefs, which the researcher articulates over written language rather than behavioral schemes. A qualitative interpretive study becomes more than just a written report that can be subject to a variety of critical scholarly reflection, but a text that is subject to the reader's interpretation and subjective analysis, leading to difficulties when trying to establish credible research. The investigator can improve a study's credibility by developing specific audit trails and tests that allow independent entities to test and validate the results.

A researcher may employ a mixture of methods to help anyone who chooses to test their study results. In addition to conducting all interviews, informal discussions, and employee observations, according to the University of Liverpool's ethical requirements, the researcher used the following methods to establish credibility. The methods that he employed are member checking, audit, and action research workgroup checking. Before the researcher conducting any interviews, he informed all participants about the nature of the research. He provided them with a participant consent form and participant information sheet that allowed them to comprehensively evaluate the study's scope and set their participation level.

The researcher used member checking to ensure the study's accuracy, focusing on the participants' answers in the interview questionnaire to avoid any misrepresentation of the interviewees' accounts vis-à-vis their views on organizational change and internal communication. Guba and Lincoln (1989 cited in Maxwell, 1996, p. 94) note that member check is the process where the researcher is "systematically soliciting feedback about one's data and conclusions from the people you are studying." The researcher conducted member checking by providing all the study participants and the action research group with a report of the interview findings and notes, which permitted the interviewees and the action research

group to submit follow-up question via email or during their informal discussions with the author and clarify any confusion and corroborate the interview data (Merriam, 1998, p. 204).

With auditing, the researcher audited the study for validity and dependability. The researcher accomplished auditing by establishing open communication with the action research group and providing all pertinent information vis-à-vis the research's processes, methods, and results. Additionally, he kept the action research group updated with all the new information and views he recorded during his informal meetings with the interviewees. The latter audit information encompassed interview data such as interview notes, data analysis from the collected data, and information synthesis of examined published theories and relevant literature (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The researcher remained committed to providing all interested parties all study information and facilitating all efforts to audit his research.

Action research “involves a workgroup of people who collaboratively try to work things out together” (Carson et al., 2001, p. 164). Involving the researcher's action research group provided an extra layer of auditing, studying, and validating the collected information and developed assumptions derived from data analysis. Carson et al. (2001, p. 164) state that involving a group rather than just an individual to validate a study seems to be two-fold; “Firstly, if two or more people are involved, biased perceptions of what happened are less likely to occur because the people will have to agree. Secondly, discussions in the group will foster the changes in attitudes that a successful project requires.”

3.7 Final Remarks on Methodology

Researching a social phenomenon such as a change in a business setting may entail individuals' involvement to contribute their views on how change affects their personal and professional lives. Communication of the detailed information requires the researcher and the subjects to maintain a close interaction grounded on the participants' information's trustworthiness and reliability. In this action research study at ProServices, the researcher achieved communication between him and the research participants with a qualitative action research methodology. The qualitative study method provided the investigator with the necessary personal approach that enabled him to conduct an appropriate data collection, interpret the data and deliver findings that supported the development of proposals for the consideration of the ProServices' business owners about the benefits of well-designed use of corporate communication and internal marketing during the business change.

With action research, the researcher established an action research group, and together they focused their efforts on "cycles of observation, interpretation, action and reflection," which allowed for "understanding, construction and testing of explanations, as well as modifications and learning" (Carson et al., 2001, p. 169). Action research also allowed the researcher to classify prior unclassified knowledge and further utilize it to develop proposals for the ProServices' organizational issues or improve prior implemented solutions. Therefore, "there is little doubt that action research has the potential of producing important and useful knowledge of people in context" (Carson et al., 2001, p. 169). The action research group, described in sections 1.1 and 3.3, and the researcher maintained that the pursuance of a qualitative study based on the interpretive paradigm with an action research implementation model captured the viewpoints mentioned above and the "multiple realities" that interrelate with strategic change, leadership paradigm and internal marketing (Creswell, 2007, p. 16).

During the data collection process, the author did not encounter any significant obstacles. Twenty-nine professionals answered the call to participate and accepted his invitation to attend. Twenty-one denied the request due to increased workload and prior personal obligations. Fifty organizational members did not reply to the invite for study. The risk posed to this study's participants was minimal as this is a social science study and did not involve any physical intervention. Participating subjects were all healthy, well-informed individuals, participation was voluntary, and the author immediately gave all participants full anonymity. As mentioned throughout this chapter, all interviews, interview notes, and voice recordings, when permitted, were stripped of any personal information, and alphabetical or pseudonym combinations were used instead of participant names. As per the business

owners' request, the researched organization's name, member information, and participation list remained confidential. All data were kept password protected and encrypted on the researcher's personal computer for five years after which, he will delete them. If the researcher disposes of his personal computer, he will erase all information following the United States of Defence (DOD) 5220-22 M standard for securely erasing magnetic media.

4 THE ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 The Analysis Process

The researcher relied on various data collection methods, as presented in section 3.4, such as semi-structured interviews and informal discussions. After the first action research cycle, he collected primary data by conducting semi-structured interviews with employees from ProServices and its business owners. The author assigned the interview participants to two groups according to their seniority and appointed them in either the business owner and senior employee or the mid-level and junior employee interview groups. The interview groups were explained in chapter 3 and highlighted in Table 3.1. The interviews' focus was to investigate the interviewees' ideas regarding the change process at ProServices and the type of communication approach that the company's business owners employed during the corporate transformation process. Specifically, the author's objective was to enable the participants to identify their preferences vis-à-vis how to contribute to the strategic change and how corporate communication and internal marketing strategies could benefit from sharing change information throughout the ProServices' strategic business reformation. The researcher collected further information during the subsequent two action research cycles (presented in chapter 3) through informal discussions with the employees. Table 4.1 shows the data analysis process and how it interrelates with the data collection phase.

Data Analysis Process		
Data Classification		
1 st AR Cycle	2 nd & 3 rd AR Cycles	Entire Set of Data
Information was collected from the interviews and informal conversations. The data was presented in the action research group for initial consideration, and then the researcher categorized them according to the thematic groups of strategy and change, leadership, communication, and internal marketing.	Data were further collected from subsequent rounds of informal discussions and discussed in action research roundtable contemplations. All new information was integrated and classified similarly to the data from the interview process.	All information was compared to develop patterns, relationships, and central themes that highlighted the interviewees' notions vis-à-vis the process of strategic change and its communication with internal marketing. The researcher terminated the data analysis after numerous data assessments revealed no new evidence or informational patterns that could showcase new theoretical assumptions.

Table 4.1 – Data Analysis Process

The researcher analyzed all the collected data using an inductive approach, following the methodology described by Bhattacharjee (2012), Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson

(2008), and Patton (1987), which permitted the researcher to develop thoughts and informational patterns through the interviews and informal discussions and classify them in thematic groups related to the focus of the research. The researcher categorized the data and emerging concepts according to the thematic groups of strategy and change, leadership, and corporate communication, and internal marketing as he presented and analyzed them in the literature review while adding, during open coding, open codes that highlighted the initial ideas from the interviewees that he developed from the collected data. Additionally, under each of the open codes, and during axial coding, the researcher established axial codes that focused on identifying relationships between the open codes that he supported with the views of the participants regarding the strategic change and the positive effect of a two-way communication process with the use of internal marketing in the design and implementation of organizational reformation.

Finally, during selective coding, the researcher identified the selective codes that relate to both the open and axial codes, highlight their relationship, and describe the overall view of the study's participants about the communication process that ProServices employed during change and how they understand the information sharing process with the use of internal marketing. Simultaneously with the coding process, the author revisited each interview several times to reconfirm the participants' findings and shared views and compare them with the data collected from the second and third action research cycles. As showcased in Table 4.1, the researcher concluded the data analysis when reexamining the entire set of information, the same ideological patterns emerged repetitively, and he discovered no new evidence. The author recorded further details and analysis of how he developed the thematic groups' codes in section 4.2. In section 4.2, he demonstrates how he established the various code categories during the analysis of the information related to communication and internal marketing. Table 4.2 exhibits the coding process and the codes that the researcher developed.

Coding Process					
	Open Coding (first)	Open Coding (second)	Axial Coding	Selective Coding (first)	Selective Coding (second)
Strategy & Change	Strategic planning and effective communication are crucial factors in change. Conveying the strategic plan with information sharing to the staff. Inviting employee involvement in developing the change strategy with corporate communication.	Strategic planning and corporate communication are central to business continuity.	Creating and communicating a strategic plan for long-term controlled organizational development.	Creating a communication process that permits the development and execution of the strategic change plan.	The use of corporate communication with internal marketing positively influences the implementation of the change plan.
Leadership	Centering information sharing to senior leaders. Employees desire communication about the change to provide feedback and participate.	Ineffective communication restricts employee participation in leading and planning opportunities for the change initiative.	A relationship between job level and business ownership supports a participative or a traditional leadership approach and access to information about the change.	Communication of information affects the participation in leadership roles and tasks during change.	The use of corporate communication with internal marketing positively influences the implementation of the change plan.

	Open Coding (first)	Open Coding (second)	Axial Coding	Selective Coding (first)	Selective Coding (second)
Communication & Internal Marketing	Inefficient corporate communication processes during change. Employees request information to make sense of the change. Use of internal marketing to convey change information and invite employee feedback.	Establishing a communication process to share the change objectives.	Use of internal communication with internal marketing to convey and control information and clarify the change process and its objectives.	Connecting information sharing with change success.	The use of corporate communication with internal marketing positively influences the implementation of the change plan.

Table 4.2 – Coding Process

4.2 Illustrative Example of the Coding Process

In this section, the researcher demonstrates the interview transcripts' analysis by developing open, axial, and selective coding. The researcher used the information gathered relating to communication and internal marketing to exhibit the data and code development process and analysis. The remaining two thematic groups of strategy and change and leadership used the same process to analyze data and develop codes.

Open Coding

During open coding, the researcher read through the data from the interviews and informal discussions several times and started developing a sense of the interviewees' views and how they felt about the ProServices' communication practices. The various information that the interviewees submitted formed meanings that emerged from the data and were supported by examples of the participants' remarks. The interview participants from both the business owner and senior employee and mid-level and junior employee groups expressed views about corporate communication and internal marketing during change that highlighted the importance of communicating during the business change.

As noted in the following section 4.3.3 of this chapter, the researcher recorded juxtaposing views regarding the level of internal communication during change amongst the seventeen members of the business owner and senior employee group and specifically between the four business owners and three of the senior employees and the remaining ten senior employees. One of the business owners stated: "sharing information about the changes may cause employee reactions that could delay change." Simultaneously, a senior employee, the director of marketing, noted: "that communicating our intentions with some detail could help the employees the next change steps." The ProServices' four business owners and the three senior employees' opinions were also different from the twelve members of the mid-level and junior employee group. The latter group highlighted that they favor a communication approach from the business owners and senior employees that informs them of the impending business changes. The manager for computing services, a mid-level manager, said: "receiving information describing the change process can help me prepare my team for the change."

The researcher proceeding with open coding developed primary and secondary open codes from the interviewees' notions and the transcribed data. Specifically, the researcher used the collected data and developed an open coding table for each thematic group of strategy and change, leadership, communication, and internal marketing. Table 4.3 exhibits the primary and secondary open codes during open coding for communication and internal

marketing. The researcher used Table 4.3 as an example to showcase the code development process, which he then combined with the axial and selective codes to create Table 4.4 that is part of Table 4.2 in section 4.1. Additionally, the researcher demonstrates in Table 4.3 the evidence that emerged from the interviewees' views about their approach to corporate communication and internal marketing, which supported the open codes relating to communication and internal marketing. As prior noted in chapter 3, the researcher used the terms, employees, staff, workforce, personnel, business owner (BO), senior employee (SE), midlevel employee (ME), and junior employee (JE) to describe the interview participants and the ProServices' organizational workforce.

An example of the researcher's analysis process for open coding for communication and internal marketing was a thought progression relating to the open code of *inefficient corporate communication processes during change*. The researcher identified the interview participants' views noted in Table 4.3 regarding the ProServices' internal communication during a change in the past and the changes announced during the first action research cycle. In addition to the views noted in Table 4.3, one of the four business owners stated: "we do not want to reveal too much change information to avoid discussions with the employees," while another business owner noted: "we control the content, context, and rate of change because ProServices is our firm." In contrast, a junior employee, a systems analyst, argued: "there is just too much confusion about what will change and how everything will it look like after the change." The researcher's developed opinion trends from the employees and the business owners highlighted the opinion trend, which supported that senior leadership controlled and restricted the sharing of change information to the organizational workforce to monitor change and maintain an uninterrupted process to avoid confusion that failed. The interviewees' opinions highlighted the requirement that ProServices needed to create a communication system to regularly convey the change information to reduce the change's perplexity. Based on the data and process mentioned above, the researcher developed the open code (first) *inefficient corporate communication processes during change* and the open code (second) *establishing a communication process to share the change objectives* that he further supported with the interviewees' views presented in the following Table 4.3. The researcher maintained the same process for developing the entire set of open codes on communication and internal marketing.

Open Coding (first)	Open Coding (second)	Supporting Data from Participants' Interviews Vis-à-vis Communication and Internal Marketing at ProServices
Inefficient corporate communication processes during change.	Establishing a communication process to share the change objectives.	<p>JE: “The managing partners did not often share the change information or provided us with limited information.”</p> <p>ME: “We had questions about the announced changes, but the owners only provided us with partial updates according to change progression.”</p> <p>JE: “We wanted to maintain the change process uninterrupted, but we were confused and had answered questions.”</p> <p>BO: “We decided that we would not provide change-related information until we implement it to proceed with change faster.”</p>
Employees request information to make sense of the change.		<p>ME: “We wanted to understand how the change will alter our day-to-day work routine.”</p> <p>ME: “We wanted to make sense of how the change will affect our long-term business life.”</p> <p>JE: “I am feeling isolated from the change process.”</p>
Use of internal marketing to convey change information and invite employee feedback.		<p>SE: “Receiving change information helps me prepare and adapt.”</p> <p>ME: “I will have fewer concerns if I can contribute my change views.”</p> <p>BO: “We will use internal marketing to clarify change objectives if it does not inhibit the progress of change.”</p>

Table 4.3 – Open Coding for Communication & Internal Marketing

Axial Coding

The researcher, as part of the axial coding process, focused on identifying axial codes that showcase the relationship between the open codes and the collected data vis-à-vis the ProServices' internal communication practice and internal marketing and its development during strategic change. The following Table 4.4, which is part of Table 4.2 that is in section 4.1, showcases axial and selective codes that connect with the open codes and emphasize that internal marketing is a tool that can structure and complement the dissemination of change information, help employees understand the change requirements, and provide them the option to request and submit information about the change.

An example from the researcher's axial coding process is the axial code, depicted in Table 4.4, of the *use of internal communication with internal marketing to convey and control information and clarify the change process and its objectives*. To develop the respective axial code, the researcher developed first the open codes that he previously mentioned above in the section open coding. He then proceeded to establish connections between them in an effort aimed to recognize relationships between the open codes that highlighted the need for a structured approach to communicating change information with the use of internal marketing before and during the implementation of change, and how the sharing of change information can help the employees at ProServices better prepare their adaptation to their changing business setting. The researcher supported the prior mentioned process with further data from the interviews such as the opinion of a senior employee, the chief operating officer, who contended: "we need to be clear as to how will we change but also careful not to engage in endless conversations with the staff," and the opinion of mid-level manager, the network design manager, who argued: "if we have information about the change direction and what aspects of our work life will change we will try to adapt faster." The researcher continued with the same process until he developed under all the thematic groups all the axial codes that highlight the relationships between the open codes. His axial codes emphasized how the research participants' views interrelate and form opinion trends supporting the notion that with a developed corporate communication process that ProServices augments with internal marketing, ProServices can manage better the sharing of information about its strategic change.

Selective Coding

During selective coding exhibited in Table 4.4, the researcher's objective was to identify selective codes that include all the data and open and axial codes from the analysis of information from the interviews and informal meetings and discussions. During this process,

he revisited the interview transcripts and notes and selectively coded any information associated with the selected codes. An example of the selective coding process was the selective code (first) *connecting information sharing with change success*. The respective code represented the entire set of codes, data, and interviewees' views, which the researcher noted in the previous sections under the thematic group of communication and internal marketing. It highlighted that ProServices could develop an information-sharing strategy to employ to clarify the change process.

Furthermore, it could use the same strategy to alleviate employees' concerns and anxieties and facilitate implementing the strategic change plan. The selective code (first) mentioned above relates to the selective code (second), *the use of corporate communication with internal marketing positively influences the implementation of the change plan*. With the latter selective code (second), the researcher underlined that if ProServices adopted a communication strategy that encompassed a pluralistic information sharing process of the change information using internal marketing, it would increase the employees' participation during change, reduce ambiguity and potentially ease the implementation of its change strategy. The proposed communication strategic plan would control and minimize interruptions in the change process.

	Open Coding (first)	Open Coding (second)	Axial Coding	Selective Coding (first)	Selective Coding (second)
Communication & Internal Marketing	Inefficient corporate communication processes during change. Employees request information to make sense of the change. Use of internal marketing to convey change information and invite employee feedback.	Establishing a communication process to share the change objectives.	Use of internal communication with internal marketing to convey and control information and clarify the change process and its objectives.	Connecting information sharing with change success.	The use of corporate communication with internal marketing positively influences the implementation of the change plan.

Table 4.4 – Axial and Selective Coding for Communication & Internal Marketing

4.3 Findings the Opening Presentation

The findings examined in this section connect with the academic theories presented in the literature review section and the author further reflects on them in the discussion chapter. This section presents the findings according to the theoretical concepts that he examined in the literature review chapter. Furthermore, he categorizes and focuses the data's presentation under the notions he developed from the data analysis. The researcher further classified the findings according to the participants' professional level and interview group. Excerpts from the interview process and the informal discussions with the research participants are in quotation marks and used to support the findings. For ease of reference, the researcher decided to replicate Table 3.1 from the methodology chapter and highlight the two employee participant groups and the number of employees who agreed to participate in this study. Additionally, at the end of the findings' discussion in each of the following sections, the researcher summarized the interviewees' prevailing views in tables that highlighted their approach vis-à-vis the strategic change, communication, internal marketing, and leadership and participative management. When necessary and based on the views of the participants, the researcher divided the business owner and senior employee group into two subgroups that express the differentiating opinions of the four business owners and three of their most senior employees and the beliefs of the remaining ten senior employees of the same interview group.

<u>Position Type</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>
Business Owner & Senior Employee	17
Mid-Level & Junior Employee	12
Total Interviewed	29

Table 3.1 – Interview List

4.3.1 Strategy for Change

Strategizing and Communicating Change: The Executive View

The researcher asked the business owner and senior employee group members, which consisted of the four business owners and ten senior employees, to share their views regarding strategic change planning and how the ProServices' communication strategy furthered the collaboration and employee participation and impacted planning and implementing change. The responses between the members of the business owner and senior employee group were similar. They seemed to share similar views regarding their commitment to develop their firm and implement a change management strategy that a business owner, who also led business development activities, noted: "will achieve our business goals while operating without disruption." Additionally, they highlighted that a well-thought-out strategic change plan would positively affect the organizational setting and combined, as the vice-president of operations, a senior employee stated: "with appropriate internal communication it will also provide details regarding the change to the employees." As the author noted in the literature review, Franken, Edwards, and Lambert (2009) underline that the focus during strategic change is to create a change plan, which with internal communication, can relate the change projects and objectives that will lead to a possible business reformation.

The interviewees' views on strategic change planning and implementation emphasized that planning for change is a strategic process that is essential for maintaining an organizational competitive advantage in a continuously changing market environment. A senior employee, the director of networking, underlined that: "change is constant, and our company should be alert and ready to adapt according to what we observe in our market and clients." Appelbaum et al. (2012) state that corporations should continuously adapt to market changes to maintain their competitive advantage. The business owners' views during the interviews are in line with Appelbaum et al. (2012), and in an informal conversation with the researcher, they underlined that: "we want ProServices to stay current with the developing needs of our market and maintain its relevancy in the U.S. market."

Although the interviewed members of the business owner and senior employee group expressed comparable thoughts, as noted in the previous two paragraphs, concerning the need for the long-term capability of the corporation to strategize and change, their views varied regarding the level of employee communication of the strategic change plan that would also define their involvement during change. The four business owners and three of the senior employees of the business owner and senior employee group highlighted that they prefer, as

one of the business owners stated: “to maintain radio silence and control the change process because the more you communicate and involve the staff the more delays we will have.” The consensus amongst the four business owners and the three of the business owner and senior employee group’s senior employees was that although strategic planning is essential for corporate success, there are ample examples from their experiences where employees’ involvement delayed the planning and implementation of change. A senior employee, the director for technical infrastructure, who has been with ProServices for over ten years, stated in his interview: “We were changing the company’s benefits provider, and a week before the change, we asked the staff to look at the new provider’s website. To our surprise, we delayed the benefits provider change for over two months due to conflicts that the employees had with the coverage of their current health treatments.” A business owner, who mainly led the strategic planning efforts of ProServices, gave another example to the researcher during a chat over coffee of how he felt the change was compromised. He highlighted that: “when we decided to change the vacation policy of ProServices from twenty working days, plus five sick days and three personal days to thirty days paid time off (PTO), we informed the employees two weeks in advance. The result was that many of the employees called out sick or planned vacation under the old policy that created confusion when trying to calculate how many days had left under the new PTO policy. We ended up delaying the switch to the PTO policy for a month until all employees were back.”

The views that the researcher described above highlights how the ProServices existing top-down communication during change without providing all the necessary information to the employees to educate themselves about the changes and prepare accordingly can lead to confusion, personal conflicts, and feelings that the business owners were reducing their benefits when their benefits regarding the new PTO policy were improving. In contrast, two-way communication during the change, such as the information-sharing strategy with internal marketing that the researcher was exploring, highlights that communication during the change could have helped the ProServices’ business owners explain the new benefits and clarify any confusion while facilitating the implementation of the new changes.

The four business owners and the three senior employees’ views expressed above relate to a certain degree with the views expressed in this study that favor the corporate reformation’s execution with regulated processes and a concrete strategic plan with set objectives and communication practices. The ProServices’ business owners highlighted their extensive support on involving and communicating to only senior personnel the details of the change strategy and then, as the director of the technology infrastructure noted: “convey the

change strategy for feedback to the mid-level and junior staff as soon as an actionable plan is ready for execution.” They differ from the rest of the interviewees’ opinions, who reiterated that the change planning should include all parties affected by the business change and ensure communication efficiency of all change-related efforts in the internal setting. Furthermore, the data that the researcher collected during the interview process and action research cycles, and showcased in the previous sections of this chapter, contradict further the views of the four business owners and the three senior employees regarding the benefit of employee participation earlier in the change process. The researcher argues based on the data that during change, the organizational workforce should be involved and provide input that will empower the business leaders to make strategic importance choices. Nevertheless, the four business owners and the three senior employees did underscore during the action research cycles the significance of establishing a structured process that will clearly define the communication method that will convey information between the management and the organizational workforce during change. Moreover, one of the business owners argued that: “our focus is to maintain the change process uninterrupted by providing structured communication to the employees through their managers.”

When assessing and analyzing the views of the remaining ten members of the business owner and senior employee group, the researcher noted that they expressed reservations regarding employee involvement in the early stages of the strategic change planning with one of the interviewees, the director of marketing noting: “that extensive employee involvement in the early stages of change planning may create change delays.” However, in juxtaposition to the views of the four business owners and the three senior employees, the remaining members of the business owner and senior employee group held the overall view that by involving the business workforce to some degree after they formulate a preliminary change plan and before they finalized it, would encourage employee engagement during the business transformation. The view noted above was showcased in section 4.2 and Table 4.3, where the open codes and supporting data emphasized that involving employees in the change process reduces uncertainty and provides them with a feeling of belongingness. The author further supports the latter opinion with the view of a senior employee, the senior manager for technology relocation, that: “by involving employees during the change, it will help clarify the change objectives and how it will affect their daily business life.” The remaining ten members of the business owner and senior employee group with their views argued that during change, all business members at ProServices would be able to develop an understanding of how their company implements

change and how it would affect their daily routines and development. Subsequently, based on the information available to them, they could express their questions and the confusion that the change process might have created because of the potential lack of information as it happened during and after the first action research cycle where the employees expressed their confusion that resulted from the announced change and the lack of internal communication.

Although there are conflicting views amongst the business owner and senior employee group members, as prior noted in this section, regarding the level of employee participation during change, the final decision-makers of ProServices' change strategy are its business owners. While they are open, as one of them argued: "to the views of their senior staff and some degree to the feedback of their employees, in the end, they will design the change according to their view of what they need to change with the less amount of business disruption." In doing so, ProServices' business owners support an ongoing strategic planning process that, as one of them stated: "they will manage it with a small number of senior employees who will act as the caretakers of their vision." Their position suggests a top-down and culture driven perspective of change management that defines the role of the senior managers during the change and could also limit the discussion about the development of the change strategy.

The business owners of ProServices regarded strategic change and the function and level of communicating information about it, as the business owner and head of all technology services stated: "exclusively reserved for them and senior business members." Kotter (2014), in contrast to the views of ProServices' business owners, notes that employee involvement during change complements the reformation process as it positively affects the organization's ability to recognize and analyze alternative views of the business reality. When the researcher discussed Kotter's (2014) notion with the business owners, they agreed on its potential benefit. However, they supported a change planning and implementation change strategy that, as one of them argued, "helps control the change process, reduces business disruption and helps employees maintain their productivity," which intentionally excluded the possibility that employee contribution during the change would benefit the faster adaptation of ProServices' business setting to reflect the required changes.

The Benefit of Employees Views During the Change

During the action research cycles and the data collection process, the researcher asked the mid-level and junior employee group participants to express their views regarding strategic planning and their interest in participating in the change process to define the future roadmap for ProServices and their professional development. All interviewees expressed their interest in learning more about their corporation's strategic plans concerning change and business vision while conveying how the communication strategy of ProServices during the first action research cycle had left them with much confusion and wondering what will happen during the change. The interviewees of the mid-level and junior employee group noted their belief that although they consider change as inevitable and a normal process during the life-cycle of ProServices, it can still create perplexity with one mid-level employee, the manager for managed computing services stating: "that if we are not prepared for the changes relating to the company's business operations and subsequently to how we are fulfilling the requirements of our business roles, then the change could disrupt the office environment due to the lack of sharing information and details about the change." Furthermore, most of the members of the mid-level and junior employee group argued, in a similar notion as a junior employee and recent graduate, working as a business development analyst, stated: "that strategic change is the responsibility of all of us." The views of the participants of the mid-level and junior employee group underlined their support on the idea that reshaping a business should be an action and a working opportunity that, as one of the mid-level managers and network designer contended, "all employees should pursue because changing and adapting the firm would benefit ProServices and their personal and professional development."

The twelve mid-level and junior employee group members maintained in their interviews and informal discussions with the researcher that strategic planning is essential for ProServices to remain competitive and develop their workforce and as one mid-level employee stated, "that during the process of strategic planning and change we can contribute something valuable that will complement the change process." Another interviewee, a business development associate, highlighted that: "if we are involved and familiarized with what will happen during the change process, then I would feel more confident about my place and my role in the company and have a sense of achievement and contribution to the development of ProServices."

Proceeding with the data collection, the researcher discussed with the interviewees the challenges they experienced during change. The participants of the mid-level and junior

employee group emphasized that during past change activities, they had experienced uncertainty due to lack of information about the change effort that led, as one mid-level manager mentioned: “to too many questions and insufficient time to prepare and professionally adapt to their transformed working environment.” Ten out of the twelve interviewees of the mid-level and junior employee group noted that not being informed of how the change will affect them created more vagueness regarding the future of their business role and professional development.

The remaining two interviewees were indifferent regarding their role in the strategic change process. They noted similarly, as one of them stated that “change will take place according to the wishes and instructions of the business owners and independent of their inputs because this is how they have been doing business at ProServices since they were employed.” The participants of the mid-level and junior employee group contended, contradicting the views and aim of the business owners to reduce business disruption and change delays, that the absence of systematic internal communication about change and the lack of opportunities to participate in the reformation process by sharing their feedback about the changes affects their focus during their workday. A junior employee participant noted: “that not being able to address their confusion, they tend to spend time discussing everything that is changing, and it is unknown to them than actually completing their daily business tasks.”

The researcher continued discussing the impact of ProServices’ staff participation on strategic change through its established communication channels and processes. The mid-level and junior employee group’s interview participants stated the conforming view that including them in all the discussions related to the change initiative would be as one mid-level employee responsible for technical low voltage infrastructure noted: “counterproductive and could delay the change process.” Nonetheless, the participants of the mid-level and junior employee group underlined, following their prior expressed positions, the benefit of a systematic and regulated communication practice during change that would permit them through structured information sharing processes to contribute knowledge about the change, which could then the ProServices’ business owners incorporate into the strategic change plan. In support of their position about internal communication during the change mentioned above, one of the interviewees, a tier two technical support analyst, argued: “that providing feedback throughout the change permits me to speak my mind and potentially positively influence the change process and successively business performance.”

Summary of Findings on Strategy and Change

Research Categories	Business Owner & Senior Employee Group	Mid-Level & Junior Employee Group
<p>Strategy & Change</p>	<p>There is firm support from the business owners and senior management about strategic planning. The prevailing view is that business strategy and change and an established corporate communication system with structured processes to share change information are essential for corporate development and long-term business viability.</p>	<p>There is substantial support from the organizational workforce about strategic development. The employees' view is that strategy and planning for the company's future are central to maintaining a competitive footprint. There was strong support for the change activities of ProServices and how a communication process could help clarify them to the employees and improve the change process.</p>

Table 4.5 – Summary of High-Level Findings from the Data Analysis Process

4.3.2 Leadership and Change

Leading Change from the Business Owners' and Senior Employees' Eyes

The researcher and the action research group members viewed leadership and change as interdependent pieces of the strategic business reformation process during which leaders maintain the obligation to drive the change effort and align all corporate resources towards accomplishing all the change objectives that will fulfill the business vision. The seventeen members of the business owner and senior employee group supported the notion that strategic leadership and participative contribution during change is crucial for a successful corporate transformation. The director of marketing noted that: “if we receive feedback from the employees as they participate in the change projects, then we can modify the change effort as it occurs and alter the strategic plan for future changes.” The ProServices’ business owners adopted during the action research group meetings and informal discussions with the author a similar top-down approach about leadership during the change as in the previous sections of this chapter. A business owner and head of technology infrastructure design stated: “that developing ProServices, its change plan and who participates in it is their responsibility as they are the ones who bare the financial and operational cost of a failed change action.”

The business owner and senior employee group’s views differentiated vis-à-vis the employees’ participation during change and change projects’ communication. The four business owners and three of the senior employees maintained their lasting position that by delegating decision-making and assigning leadership roles predominately between ProServices’ directors and managers will increase, as one of the business owners, the head for client relations, noted, “their sense of responsibility, commitment, and accountability to the firm’s change strategy and business owners.” The latter view of the ProServices’ business owner aligned with the opinion of a senior employee, the director of network design, from the business owner and senior employee group who argued that “when senior employees and business owners support and share the responsibilities of the planning and execution of change then the company can execute and communicate the change strategy to the employees like the product of the entire senior management.” The entire group of participants from the business owner and senior employee group supported the view of a business owner and acting chief executive officer that highlighted: “that participation and critical contribution from the senior management team helps build an environment of collegiality where we are engaged in organizational development to meet market demands and retain the ProServices’ competitive advantage.”

The seventeen members of the business owner and senior employee group varied their views, as the author presented throughout this chapter, about non-senior personnel's involvement in the formulation of the strategic change plan. Notably, seven senior employees of the business owner and senior employee group, amongst them the ProServices' four business owners, in a similar way as in the previous sections, highlighted their skepticism regarding the use of a collaborative leadership model during the change management process with the use of internal marketing to share change information when it involved the participation of the employees. The business owners, during their interviews and informal discussions, communicated their support to the author about the traditional leadership and management model and stressed the importance, as one of the business owners and responsible for all client relations argued: "of maintaining control of their company's strategic planning and vision and communication of them to ensure that the changes will happen without delays." The business owners' views favored the position that senior employees should manage the decision-making, planning, and oversight of the organization's strategy to operate efficiently. The seven prior mentioned members of the business owner and senior employee group accommodated the idea of receiving input from employees through anonymous feedback instruments or informal conversations, but only after, as a senior network designer stated: "a strategic change plan was in place and ready to be announced."

The notions of the business owners and the three senior employees who supported the view that for strategic change to be successful at ProServices, the business owners are required to maintain tight control of the decision-making process contradicts the evidence that the author collected during the action research cycles, and presented in the previous sections of this chapter. Based on his data, the researcher highlighted that employees wanted to participate or lead projects and contribute valuable feedback to the business owners to help ProServices change. Additionally, the confusion and eventually termination of the failed initial change action that the ProServices' leaders started just prior and continued during the first action research cycle negate the ProServices' business owners' approach about change and underscores the importance of sharing leadership change responsibilities, which the business owners could assign amongst the ProServices' staff.

In contrast to the four business owners and the three senior employees, the remaining ten members of the same business owner and senior employee group maintained a different employee involvement position. The researcher encapsulated their views in the opinion of a senior employee, a low voltage infrastructure administrator who noted: "that although senior leaders should manage the planning and decision-making of change, involving employees is

likely to impact the change process positively.” The respective interviewees appeared to be open to staff participation, the delegation of responsibilities with a planned communication approach, and input contribution as the strategic change progresses from its initial phase to its next phases. The views of the remaining ten senior employees from the seventeen members of the business owner and senior employee group vis-à-vis participative contribution through the mechanisms of internal corporate communication and the use of internal marketing during change supported a change strategy with a focus on accomplishing a synergy between the ProServices’ employees who would use their cooperation to diminish any change strategy problems during the corporate reformation.

The ProServices’ four business owners highlighted their support for traditional management methods, which support a transactional relationship and communication structure from the leader to the follower that they can use to convey a well-planned and controlled organizational change plan (Dansereau et al., 2013). The four business owners and three senior employees, all members of the business owner and senior employee group, supported one of the business owners, and responsible for internal client management, who argued in a conversation with the author: “that for change success they would need to control the flow of information and predominately direct it to upper management. Successively, they will then regulate the information sharing process with the rest of the organization and potentially invite the participation of the employees.” The business owners’ call for a tightly managed transformation process aims, as one of the owners, the acting chief executive officer, emphasized: “to regulate the involvement of the staff during the design and execution of business change and reduce delays.” Their views come as no surprise to the researcher because while the ProServices’ senior leaders were aware of the initial failure of their change action, they still seemed in limbo to catholically adopt suggestions incorporated in the researcher’s proposals that, in theory, would benefit their proposed change.

All business owner and senior employee interview group members supported the ProServices business owners’ views about the participation of senior employees and managers in the change process that the researcher summarized in the words of the head of business development and business owner. He emphasized: “that their involvement could help alleviate the concerns of the organizational workforce regarding change by communicating information that they have authorized to the employees about the change process.” The prior mentioned viewpoints of the members of the business owner and senior employee group focused on a communication strategy that would primarily introduce, with the approval of the ProServices’ business owners, to all affected by change various details of

the respective process and provided to them, if senior management requested it, the ability to submit their feedback, and volunteer for various change activities. The latter overall shift on the flexibility of the business owners to consider proposals for adopting a pluralistic communication approach and workforce participation during change that the researcher noticed after the first change cycle and as he was evaluating and reporting to the business owners the results of the second action research cycle, aligned with the findings that the researcher discovered after the action research cycles reported in the previous sections of this chapter. The data highlighted that the employees could successfully assume change responsibilities and participate in related change projects that furthered their ability to act strategically and develop a sense of accountability for their actions and their firm's advancement. The business owners' flexibility to accept some employee involvement using senior management to share information with the employees followed their exhibited stance on rigorously regulating the change.

When the author asked the interview participants of the business owner and senior employee group how they plan to deal with employee concerns about change, their answers varied according to their business role. The business owners and three senior participating members emphasized an approach related to the power relationship they maintained with the staff. They underlined the expectation, as a senior employee, a field quality controller for infrastructure design, argued: "that once they announced the change, they expected all personnel to agree with the reformation strategy or to explore other professional opportunities." Their approach to managing employees' reservations showcased a rather extreme management practice and certainly not an approach that would coincide with their prior mentioned position to consider an information exchange activity to alleviate the change confusion. Furthermore, their views continued highlighting change planning as a privileged function reserved only for senior management, which employees should accept to maintain their employment.

The remaining ten members of the seventeen members of the business owner and senior employee group adopted a more flexible stance and maintained that through discussion, sharing of information, and contribution of ideas, employee objections could be alleviated. The ten interviewees' views above align with their stance, reported in earlier sections in this chapter, favoring a two-way communication with the employees and a participative management model during the change process. Additionally, their notions underpin Kotter (2014, p. 36), who notes that "most people won't want to help if you appeal only to logic, with numbers and business cases. You must also appeal to how people feel."

The researcher encapsulated the opinions of the remaining ten members of the business owner and senior employee group in the position of a senior employee the director of marketing who stated: “that it is important to keep employees involved and informed about change because sharing knowledge regarding the implemented change will complement instead of hinder the process.”

Leadership While Changing – The Discussion with Mid-Level and Junior Colleagues

The researcher discussed with the mid-level and junior employee group of interviewees the topic of assuming leadership roles during the business change and with information available to them jointly managing with the ProServices’ business owners and senior employees the change projects and overall progression. Many of the members of the mid-level and junior employee group voiced their preference in support of assuming greater responsibilities during change that would permit them, according to a mid-level manager, the manager for managed services: “to lead and participate in change projects and voice the concerns and questions of their colleagues.” The prevailing thought that the researcher derived from the interviewees’ views, such as the one mentioned prior, and similar opinions like Andy’s, a junior business development analyst, who stated: “I want to feel that I belong in this group and I can share my thoughts, worries and ask questions” or Mikes’ who argued: “I felt relieved when I realized what was going on and what will change that I could leave work and not think about it,” was that when the employees participated in the change process and assumed responsibility during strategic change it positively influenced their sense of responsibility, corporate ownership, and establish accountability during the strategic reformation while voicing their thoughts. The interviewees’ positions agreed with their prior statements, depicted in earlier sections, about consistent internal communication to understand what is changing and how they can influence the change action while alleviating their confusion.

The researcher progressed the discussion with the mid-level and junior employee group members on participative leadership and management during change using internal communication. He contemplated with them on their views, such as the opinion of a junior employee, a field infrastructure technician, who noted: “that participating in change and exchanging information and questions about it defined better my future role and progression at ProServices and helped me build my operational and managerial skills.” Additionally, in a chat with the author, a mid-level manager in client service, Cynthia, maintained: “that being able to exercise leadership tasks and stay involved in the company’s management processes permitted me to stay engaged with the company, communicate my ideas and created a setting

where I could develop professionally.” The interviewees’ views favored a professional environment that the researcher’s proposals to the ProServices’ business owners could help create, that highlighted as one junior employee, responsible for human resources, opined: “a place where we feel like valuable members who can provide information for the development of ProServices.”

The mid-level and junior employee group employees that the author interviewed exhibited an understanding of the participative management practice. The researcher defined it as how a leader supports employee participation in the business activities while sharing with them through internal communication, managerial responsibilities, and decision-making abilities. The mid-level and junior employee group members highlighted, in the words of a junior employee, George, that: “although they prefer to be part of the conversation regarding the design and implementation of the strategic change, they understand that this might not be feasible.” A mid-level manager noted: “that at ProServices the business owners are actively involved with running every aspect of the business and tend to centralize all aspects of the business decision making, which resulted in a controlled environment that insulates and limits the management and leadership processes from all non-senior personnel.” The members of the mid-level and junior employee group underpinned their views about participation during the ProServices’ change on their experiences supported by the business owners’ approach to change management and overall business management, which adhered to the traditional management model that maintains its basis on establishing a transactional relationship and transmission of information between the leader and the follower. In this transactional relationship, like the ProServices’ first action research cycle, the business owners delivered explicit messages and directives to the employees on achieving their specific business and change goals.

The researcher, as an employee of ProServices, shared the position of the members of the mid-level and junior employee group, stated above, as he as well reinforced his view from his accumulated experience observing the ProServices’ working environment and from the projects that he participated in as an employee where the company’s business owners always wore the skipper’s hat micromanaging every step of the project. An example that the researcher experienced was selecting an external marketing firm to help ProServices establish marketing functions. During the third action research cycle, the researcher was assigned the project and developed the research requirements to create a hybrid marketing department that would use the researcher and an external consultant. He finalized the marketing firms that he would interview before presenting to the business owners the short-listed candidates. The

business owners decided, without the researcher being aware of, to bring a local firm on board that the researcher did not study or had the opportunity to verify the compatibility with the ProServices' goals. The business owners awarded the contract to the respective firm based on their evaluation of the cost and not the overall value that the marketing firm could create for the company. The researcher's prior mentioned experience also speaks to and reinforces that the ProServices' business owners, although at the third action research cycle, still had not embraced the value of collaboration, the delegation of responsibility, the benefit of two-way communication that the data of the study highlighted.

During the discussion about participative management and leadership, the members of the mid-level and junior employee group, based on their experiences as prior described, favored a participation approach that as a mid-level manager noted: "adopt a cascading approach where senior employees and team managers are assigned leadership duties and objectives during change and successively communicate and appoint various responsibilities to the members of their groups." According to an interviewee, an administrative professional, of the mid-level and junior employee group during the action researcher cycles: "her participation through her manager permitted for systematic communication and feedback on the change plan, which kept a degree of involvement during the various phases of the change and helped her develop leadership abilities and managerial experience by participating in change-related projects."

All the views that the research participants of the mid-level and junior employee group proposed vis-à-vis employee participation and development during change underlined their desire for a participative approach during the change that would employ better communication and opportunities for them to provide feedback. Keeping their expectations grounded, they noted, as evidenced in the previous paragraphs, that a less restricted approach to managing and administering strategic change at ProServices using an improved communication strategy would permit them to convey their questions and proposals to the business owners via their managers. The author believes that the interviewees' position described above resulted from the bias they held of their current business environment where everything is tightly assessed and controlled by the business owners or the disbelief that the ProServices' current practice could change.

The entire set of the mid-level and junior employee group participants emphasized their overall ambition that with participative leadership and pluralistic communication, they can reduce employee concerns since personnel would play an integral role in designing and implementing the organizational transformation. The interviewees summarized their notions

in the view of a junior employee, Alex, who stated: “that when senior leadership enables her to assume leadership roles within her department or as part of the change management team, it increases her motivation, satisfaction and develops a working environment where the workforce can grow as leaders and feel part of the ProServices team.” A business framework by which all interested parties can exchange ideas regarding their company’s improvement can create rapport with the organizational workforce and support the strategic change.

Summary of Findings on Leadership

Research Categories	Business Owner & Senior Employee Group	Mid-Level & Junior Employee Group
<p style="text-align: center;">Leadership</p>	<p>There is strong support from the business owners and senior employees for the participative leadership paradigm involving senior management. Their views emphasized that delegating responsibility and communicating change information amongst senior employees would increase accountability and commitment to achieving the change objectives.</p>	<p>There is powerful support from the members of the mid-level and junior employee group regarding participative leadership. The group universally supported the option of employees assuming leadership responsibilities and managing change projects to develop their leadership qualities and professional knowledge. Moreover, they highlighted that if they were included in the various aspects of planning and implementing strategic change through an inclusive information sharing process, it would positively affect their sense of responsibility, accountability, and inclusiveness during the corporate reformation. The group was realistic vis-à-vis their participation expectations during the reorganization and stated that it might not be feasible for the company to include them from the outset of change.</p>
	<p>There is no explicit support on participative leadership from the four business owners and three senior employees when involving non-senior employees' participation. Their viewpoints supported the traditional management practice and argued that senior leaders must maintain control of the change process for the company to operate without disruption. The four business owners and the three senior employees accommodated the notion of employee contribution to the change activities after their managers introduced the strategic change plan.</p>	
	<p>There is some support to the participative management approach from the remaining ten senior employees of the business owner and senior employee group. Their approach underlined that by including the staff in the change, the process would likely have a positive influence and possibly reduce business disruption since it would communicate change information and provide them with the ability to submit their feedback regarding the transformation program.</p>	

Table 4.6 – Summary of High-Level Findings from the Data Analysis Process

4.3.3 Communication with Internal Marketing for Change

Factoring Communication in Change – Proliferate or Restrict Information

Communicating and internally marketing the strategic change plan was a fundamental discussion point during the interviews because it was a crucial part of this study's focus. It also affected the understanding that the workforce created regarding the strategic reformation. Communication is a significant change process at ProServices because all employees maintained the desire to attain information concerning the proposed corporate reorganization and how it would affect them. Internal communication was a primary challenge at ProServices during the change and action research cycles, and the focus of the researcher was how best to manage communications at a time of strategic change. During the ProServices' change and action research cycles, the communication of data would define how the company approached its information sharing processes and efforts to clarify the change's objectives to its employees.

Seven interviewees from the business owner and senior employee group, amongst them the four business owners, favored the approach of one of the business owners who underlined an information-sharing process that as he put it would: "regulated the distribution of change information according to the progression of change and the professional level of the employees." Additionally, he emphasized: "that they can achieve effective employee management during change and reduce the disruption of their business operations if they control the flow of information to the entire corporation." ProServices' business owners' views on internal communication aligned with their positions supporting traditional management and strategic planning as noted in the previous sections of this chapter, and highlighted a communication process in which they favor the development and communication of their change message and strategy to the staff after the completion of the change action plan. ProServices' business owners' opinions about information sharing described their on-going approach to change, expressed throughout this study, and although it was likely the main culprit for the change issues at ProServices, it was still a process that they were willing to control tightly.

The four business owners and three interviewees from the business owner and senior employee group noted that while communicating change in advance could help the design of the strategic plan and assist the organizational workforce in preparing for business reformation, it could also, as a business owner, the acting chief executive officer stated: "produce the opposite effect and delay the change." He further underscored that: "until the start of this study, we did not negotiate our change design and did not have any discussions

with non-senior employees about our change plans.” A senior employee and senior manager for administration provided an alternative view that supported progressive dissemination of change information and argued: “that a controlled process that would progressively disseminate change information to the employees might maintain minimal business disruption.” In contrast to the prior mentioned business owner’s view, the senior manager’s latter view factored in the ProServices’ strategic design structured and systematic corporate communication about the change. Such a communication practice would minimize the risk, as in the first action research cycle, of demoralizing and confusing the employees once the ProServices’ business owners revealed the entire change program and did not consider their views.

The remaining ten interviewees of the business owner and senior employee group supported the administrative manager’s prior opinion. Furthermore, they added, as the director of marketing posited: “that a progressive information sharing process using anonymous feedback would lessen staff concerns and maintain the business owners’ control of the information sharing process.” However, they stressed similarly to the words of the director of business development, who noted that: “the business owners must be available and should maintain an open mind when discussing employee feedback.” The ten senior employees of the business owner and senior employee group supported a thought process during the ProServices’ change that recognized that employees using the sensemaking and sensegiving processes would receive change information from senior leadership, evaluate it, and respond with a constructive contribution. The latter communication process focused on employees interpreting the change strategy and understanding their firm’s future, which was something that it was missing from the previous change activities at ProServices and the first action research cycle.

The business owner and senior employee group acknowledged that using internal marketing during the strategic change and the second and third action research cycles helped them relate change information and receive feedback from the employees that helped them prepare to answer their questions. All members of the business owner and senior employee group emphasized the significance of internal marketing during change and stated, as the director of marketing noted: “the importance of using internal marketing to evaluate current business practices and the need for change while also addressing the staffs’ concerns about the changes.” The researcher incorporated email campaigns, informal discussions, and town hall meetings during the action research cycles and provided the option to anonymously convey the employees’ feedback about the change. The interviewees of the business owner

and senior employee group viewed internal marketing as a set of tools that they can use to interact with the employees, clarify confusion, and as the director of business development emphasized: “influence the personnel’s commitment and engagement and increase their confidence in senior management.”

Although all business owners and senior employee research participants supported internal marketing employment during change, they differentiated their views, vis-à-vis the degree of information sharing. The four business owners and three senior employees favored, as one of the business owners argued, “a controlled sharing of change information to the employees with the use of internal communication,” which relates to their prior views in this chapter regarding employee participation during strategic change planning and execution of the change strategy. The remaining ten members of the business owner and senior employee group maintained the view summarized in the words of a senior employee: “that an internal communication strategy implemented using internal marketing would clarify the change objectives and invite the employees to contribute their thoughts.” All executives remained open to using internal marketing if it did not inhibit the reformation with redundant processes and information. The business owners and senior employees’ views showcased the validity of the open, axial, and selective codes that the author developed during the processing and analysis of data, depicted in sections 4.1 and 4.2. Their opinions verified that ProServices’ business owners preferred restricting information and controlling who has access to the change data, an approach that led to the ProServices’ employees expressing confusion about the change process during the first action research cycle. The business owner and senior employee group members, with their views, validated the selective code (second), *the use of corporate communication with internal marketing positively influences the implementation of the change plan*. Most of the business owner and senior employee group members favored using an internal communication practice that with internal marketing would permit them to share change information and promote the change action to the entire organization.

Employees Want to be Heard

All the interviewees from the mid-level and junior employee group expressed dissatisfaction during the first action research cycle with the lack of information concerning future changes and how, as a junior employee, a desktop engineer stated: “it could potentially impact his position in the organization and his personal life.” All the interviewees emphasized, in the same manner as the senior employees of the business owner and senior employee group, that, as a mid-level employee, a business development strategist argued: “I prefer to stay informed of all changes that affect my professional capacity and prepare for the

new organizational setting that might potentially affect my life outside work.” Moreover, a mid-level employee highlighted: “that although he did not require in-depth information regarding the firm’s inner structures and financials, he would prefer to receive communication that informed him of the approaching changes and how he could contribute to the change.” The main argument that the specific interview group highlighted in their replies is in the words of a junior employee: “that communication regarding change supports my preparation and adaptation prior, during, and after the change is complete.”

The interviewees emphasized that concerns attributed to the lack of communication regarding the organizational change agenda during the first action research cycle were significant during the implementation phase. Moreover, they were a factor that contributed to personnel confusion, skepticism, and alienation from the ProServices environment. The researcher encapsulated the beliefs of the mid-level and junior employee group members that are prior expressed in the words of Tim, a mid-level manager for client coordination. He contended that: “by not including us, the employees, at some point on the thought process of what they wanted to change and if it would affect us, I felt a lack of commitment like what I am doing here, and it contributed to a couple of strong chats with my manager.”

When asked about internal marketing, the interviewees noted similarly to the view of a business development analyst: “that the business owners except for random emails to announce that the changes are in effect or about to execute them I did not experience any concrete approach to inform me about the change goals.” Continuing the conversation regarding internal marketing, many participants elaborated on specific approaches they were aware of, and the business owners could have potential use to convey the strategic change. According to the interviewees, as one mid-level manager for managed services contended: “a well-designed message to inform staff about change and address questions from them would have helped the employees understand the change process and answer any questions.” Other marketing instruments that the interviewees mentioned included email campaigns, anonymous surveys, team deliberations, and formal and informal discussions that would focus on the aspects of change directly affecting the workforce.

Summary of Findings on Communication & Internal Marketing

Research Categories	Business Owner & Senior Employee Group	Mid-Level & Junior Employee Group
<p>Corporate Communication & Internal Marketing During Strategic Change</p>	<p>There is no substantial support from the four business owners and three senior interviewees regarding communicating the change initiative to the employees from the beginning of the change. They highlighted that by controlling the flow of information to the employees, they could control the degree of business disruption. The four business owners and three senior employees supported internal marketing during change but emphasized that they would use it to convey change details to senior employees and preliminary information to ProServices' non-senior workforce.</p>	<p>There is firm support from all the mid-level and junior employees. All the mid-level and junior employee group members expressed dissatisfaction with the current corporate communication practices, which senior management employed to convey corporate news. Moreover, their opinions focused on the ProServices' existing information process regarding the change action during the first action research cycle and its impact on their professional and personal lives. The interviewees argued that communicating the details of change using internal marketing supports the employees' preparation while simultaneously permitting them to adapt to the changing business setting.</p>
	<p>There is strong support from the remaining ten senior employees of the business owner and senior employee group to progressively communicate the change plan using internal marketing and permit the employees to submit their feedback concerning the strategic change initiative anonymously. They maintained that the communication strategy mentioned above would reduce change confusion and help employees interpret change information.</p>	

Table 4.7 – Summary of High-Level Findings from the Data Analysis Process

5 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Strategic Planning and Change

Communicating for Future Change

Strategic planning is a process that interrelates with corporate communication and business operations and contributes to the planning and sharing of an organizational vision that influences the organizational change plan to the employees. In the analysis of the findings and specifically in section 4.3.1, the researcher identified through the views and the data collected from the ProServices workforce and its business owners their commitment to strategize for the future of the company and design a strategic change plan that will keep ProServices current with the business trends of its marketplace. Planning and communicating the change to the employees at ProServices were central to the company's change issues and its business leaders during their initial efforts to execute the change plan. Communicating and sharing the change information or lack thereof were actions that affected the organizational life and the employees at ProServices, which the researcher identified to the business leaders during the first action research cycle and highlighted that conveying the change details can help the staff prepare and adapt for the execution of change. In chapter 4 and section 4.3.1, the participants of the two interview groups of the business owners and senior employee, and mid-level and junior employee highlighted with the words of a mid-level manager: “that a well-thought-out strategic change plan in combination with a practical communication approach with the use of internal marketing practices would benefit the development of ProServices. Additionally, it would provide adequate details to the staff regarding the change, which would help alleviate their anxieties and resolve the ambiguity.”

The views of the interviewees as the researcher presented them in section 4.3.1 are aligned with the views of Franken, Edwards, and Lambert (2009), when they note that designing and implementing a successful corporate reformation requires the development of change programs inclusive of all related internal communication that would successfully plan for the execution of all the reformation actions, and finally the acceptance of change by the organizational workforce. Additionally, most of the participants' notions emphasized Reeves and Deimler's (2011) study when they argued that employees' participation during the strategic change would reinforce the implementation of a company's strategic plan, which would lead to achieving the organizational vision and successfully attaining all related strategic objectives. In their entirety, the participants' views underpin the open code (first)

strategic planning and effective communication are crucial factors in change, and the open code strategic planning and corporate communication are central to business continuity.

Although in section 4.3.1, the participating members backed with their views the process of strategic planning and communication of the change process, the business owner and senior employee group participants underlined that was essential as a business owner expressed: “to focus on maintaining operations with minimal business disruption during the business transformation and avoid interrupting the implementation of strategic change.” The findings exhibited in section 4.3.1 under Strategizing and Communicating Change highlighted the predominantly view amongst the business owners of ProServices that the key to change success was to control the process of strategic planning to senior management. Their position varied compared to the opinions of the members of their interview group and the rest of the employees who elected to participate in the study. Furthermore, it exhibited the business owners’ resistance and constant contradiction to the presented academic theory and beliefs of the ProServices’ staff that supported a pluralistic change strategy with a well-designed communication. Such a strategic change method would enable the submission of alternative views of all affected by the corporate reform. The four business owners and three of the senior employees from the business owner and senior employee group underlined, as one of the owners noted: “that the business vision and the strategic development and longevity of the firm was their responsibility and argued in favor of the traditional approach to planning and implementing strategic change.” According to the same business owner: “the ProServices’ senior members would primarily conceive and convey to the staff the execution of the change in order to develop a lasting competitive business advantage.” The remaining ten participants from the business owner and senior employee group supported that change should be initiated and developed by senior management. However, in support of the theoretical concepts that the researcher presented, they contended that the organizational workforce’s contribution would provide the organizational leaders with complementary views regarding the change needs and help drive the reformation process.

In juxtaposition to ProServices’ senior leadership, as mentioned above, the members from the mid-level and junior employee group highlighted their preference towards the participative approach to corporate development and reorganization. They argued that their input concerning change would positively influence the way ProServices would change through corporate communication. Along with their interest to stay involved in the ProServices’ strategic plan, the members of the mid-level and junior employee group highlighted that the development of internal communication with the incorporation of internal

marketing tools was essential for their professional adaptation during the reformation and the development of their strategic and leadership skills. Their viewpoints support the open code *inviting employee involvement in developing the change strategy with corporate communication*. The beliefs of the participants of the mid-level and junior employee group align with Reeves and Deimler (2011) views when they note that an organization is required to develop strategic planning abilities throughout its workforce that will permit its members to multitask and react proactively during the change to adapt their business routines and performance.

Furthermore, they argue that firms that provide a setting where employees can critically contemplate and influence the corporate strategic change plan could react more rapidly to market changes that stimulate corporate reformation and adaptation signals. The interviewees' views and business owners' notions support the axial code *creating and communicating a strategic plan for long-term controlled organizational development*. The above-mentioned axial code combines the entire set of interviewees' positions while highlighting the ProServices' senior leaders' concerns.

The similarities and differences in the opinions of the members of the two research participants groups of business owners and senior employee and mid-level and junior employee about strategic change and planning that the author analyzed in section 4.3.1 underpinned the selective code (first), under the thematic group of strategy and change, of *creating a communication process that permits the development and execution of the strategic change plan*. The respective selective code encompassed the interview data about ProServices' strategic change planning process and underlines the differentiating approaches and thought processes that the business owners, the senior executives, and the rest of the ProServices' staff employed during change and the action research cycles. The researcher showcased with the prior mentioned selective code (first) that although he identified commonalities on the participants' views about the importance of strategic planning and communication of the latter to the ProServices' workforce, the viewpoints of the latter about participation and detailed information sharing during strategic change planning and the benefits that it brings varied significantly.

Bolman and Deal's (1997, p. 15) concept of the employee "own image of reality" could explain the internal difference of opinions amongst the ProServices' employees and business owners about strategic planning during change. According to Bolman and Deal (1997), all the organizational members develop a specific understanding of their reality during a change to analyze and comprehend the transformation and potentially influence it by

contributing their thoughts in the strategic planning and implementation phases of change. The views of Bolman and Deal (1997), as mentioned above, relate to the selective code (first) of creating a communication process that permits the development and execution of the strategic change plan. The researcher views Bolman and Deal's (1977) notions as relevant and supportive of the specific selective code (first) because they showcase how even if employees and business owners support different notions regarding staff participation and communication of information during change, they could devise a change strategy that would permit the ProServices setting to remain competitive, current, and innovative. The author's thought approach reinforced Kotter's (2014) notion that businesses should conduct change with insiders, such as the ProServices' staff, who can contribute new and innovative ideas regarding the change process and maintain a good relationship with all involved in the change process. Furthermore, and in support of Kotter's (2014) view, Pardo-del-Val, Martínez-Fuentes, and Roig-Dobón (2012) argued that when an organization employs a participative communication and management change model, it could handle better employee relations during change, increase their accountability, contribution, and commitment to strategic change.

Based on the researcher's analysis of the data on strategic planning during the change, the notions highlighted from the study's participants, although contradicting they still emphasized information that showcased the issues that this study tried to address. Additionally, they underlined how the entire set of data helped the researcher to focus his views and efforts to develop proposals for senior management on how the development of a strategic change plan inclusive of a communications structure would prioritize ProServices development while providing the option for the employees to submit their views and reduce operational disruption in the business setting.

The author guided his efforts to develop guidance for consideration to the ProServices' managing partners that, based on their approach to managing the strategic planning process, was not easy to accept and plausibly led to struggle whether to maintain control or include the organizational members in the change process. However, as Reeves and Deimler (2011, p. 137) note, business leaders and employees are responsible together for executing the organizational strategic plan and achieving its objectives. The researcher argues in the same tone as much of the analyzed research that integrating personnel with internal communication in the development and execution of the change strategy could positively influence the motivation and commitment of the ProServices' staff. Such a change strategy is transferable and would benefit similar businesses to ProServices to engage their employees

and facilitate changes because of the interoperability of the proposed strategies and benefits of integrating communication approaches in their practice.

5.1.2 Leadership During Strategic Change

Developing Leaders while Leading Change

At ProServices, during the change and the action research cycles, leadership and assuming leadership roles on the change projects were a function that the researcher discussed with the participating members while framing it within its communication practices and strategic planning design. During his discussions with the staff, the author collected the information that undertaking leadership roles during change promoted their sense of responsibility and engaged them in developing as professionals and leaders and contributing to the organizational change plan while maintaining a level of accountability. The researcher related their views on leadership duty to Vecchio's (2006) argument that leaders who operate in all organizational life levels maintain their duty to underline and communicate the organization's commitment to the employees to reform its corporate structure successfully. Furthermore, Vecchio (2006) argues that within a leader's primary objective is to engage through corporate communication the staff and provide them with a framework where they can assess and provide input to the strategic change plan while contemplating with and delegating to them leadership responsibilities in the mixture of change projects. DeGrosky (2006) believes that strategic leaders undertake a successful change action by cooperating with personnel and developing an effective communication plan that will successfully convey the change objectives and bring the corporate reformation in line with market demands.

The data that the researcher derived from the views of the participants from both interview research groups supported that participative leadership and contribution to the strategic development of the change plan through internal communication has, as one of the senior employees noted: "a positive impact to the design and implementation of change." He further posited: "that it increases the employees' sense of responsibility and accountability and provides a working setting where they can develop as part of the ProServices' corporate family." The data set that the researcher collected, analyzed, and presented from the two interview groups' members in section 4.3.2 underscore the prior said notions of Vecchio (2006) and DeGrosky (2006). The respective authors also highlighted that leaders and employees seek to understand the business structure they operate and attempt to impact and contribute to the strategic change plan to develop as leaders and evolve their company's competitive footprint. The inclusion of the information depicted above supported the focus of this study because they not only expressed the frustration of the ProServices' staff that led to the company's change issues but also provided the framework in combination with the

academic literature to develop a set of proposals for further contemplation with the ProServices' managing partners.

The information that the researcher derived from the data collection process and the evidence that he developed from the analysis process combined the views of the ProServices' business owners that emphasized their support to traditional management and communication and that of the employees who supported a participative leadership and management approach that would permit for information sharing during the change process. Furthermore, they supported the open codes (first) of *centering information sharing to senior leaders*, and *employees desire communication about the change to provide feedback and participate*. The aforesaid open codes further based their validity on the change issues that the author observed during the action research cycles. The fruitless efforts of the ProServices' senior leaders to design and implement a change, their need to maintain the reins and restrict access to the change effort, and on the other hand, the efforts of the employees to understand and influence the reformation effort resulted in conflict and confusion at ProServices.

The ProServices' staff and its managing partners could benefit from the work of Drucker (n.d. cited in Cooperrider, 2012, p. 108), who argues, the objective of great leaders during change is to orchestrate a strategic plan, which will be supported by all interested parties and create a synergy of "strengths" that will highlight all change "weaknesses as irrelevant." The author argued in support of the open code (second) of *ineffective communication restricts employee participation in leading and planning opportunities for the change initiative*, that the "synergy of "strengths"" that Drucker (n.d. cited in Cooperrider, 2012, p. 108) emphasized in his work or better lack thereof created a turbulent change process accentuated from an ineffective internal communication structure at ProServices. The researcher viewed Drucker's prior mentioned theorizations as a valuable contribution to developing his proposals to the ProServices' business owners that would include a note on the added benefits from cooperating with their employees during the formulation and execution of the change plan. The author used Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2006) ideas, who argue that professionals who demonstrate creativity, responsibility, knowledge, commitment, trustworthiness, and can communicate with the organizational workforce should be able to assume leadership roles and lead the corporate efforts to achieve the organizational change to strengthen the development and validity of his proposals to the ProServices' senior leaders.

Of course, although the researcher's efforts to develop out of the box proposals for critical assessment were valiant and underlined Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy's (2006) study

and the emphasis that they portray in it on the ability of employees to assume leadership responsibilities, this was not a practice that the members of ProServices universally accepted. The four business owners and three of the senior executives maintained, as prior noted, during their interviews that leadership responsibilities should be delegated and assumed only by senior personnel. The latter approach would increase their corporate commitment and accountability, which would lead, as one senior employee noted: “to develop further a set of collective participation where the formulation of the strategic plan will be the product of all senior management.” The ProServices’ senior leaders’ position further underpinned the development of the axial code of *a relationship between job level and business ownership supports a participative or a traditional leadership approach and access to information about the change*. The specific axial code connected with the previously mentioned open codes and aligned with the views of Dansereau et al. ’s (2013) and their definition of traditional leadership, where senior leadership, at ProServices the business owners and executives, maintain rapport with the employees who subsequently are the recipients of their predetermined message regarding the corporate strategic plan and change approach.

The remaining ten interviewees of the business owner and senior employee group maintained the position, highlighted in the words of a senior director, “that while the primary responsibility for the strategic change falls under the auspices of the business owners and senior employees, embracing the involvement of the organizational workforce would likely have a positive effect on the outcome of the business transformation.” Moreover, they supported the view of a senior employee: “that if the ProServices’ employees are well-informed vis-à-vis the improvements that the reorganization will bring to the corporation, then it would help reduce the ambiguity and questions regarding ProServices’ change strategy.” Kotter (2014) argues that if people are not aware of why their setting is changing, how the future will look, and how it will affect their lives, then most likely, insecurity and fear will replace excitement and high-performance efforts to achieve the change vision. The viewpoints that the remaining ten participants from the business owner and senior employee group submitted during the interviews connect with the codes mentioned above because the data derived from their inputs highlighted their understanding of the disconnect that the ProServices’ employees experienced from the strategic change process. Moreover, it underscored their approach to change management, which included the ProServices’ employees in the change process, making them aware of the change strategy and contributing to it.

A shared view amongst the business owner and senior employee group members is that employee engagement is essential for a company to outperform its competitors and innovate at a rate that will outmatch the market changing dynamics and demands. The fundamental differentiating view amongst the participants of the business owner and senior employee group, as prior noted, was the emphasis and support that the four business owners and three of the senior employees gave to the traditional management of change versus the remaining ten senior members who highlighted a more flexible attitude towards handling change and staff's participation to the change projects. The words of one of the business owners encapsulated the juxtaposing opinions of the members of the business owner and senior employee group who noted about the implementation of change: "that staff should maintain a view that is in line with management's directives or else they will be managed out of the firm." The remaining ten participating interviewees chose to address employee inquiries, reservations, and confusion by favoring the option of creating an internal working setting that supported information sharing, communication pluralism, and constructive feedback on the proposed strategic change plan. Pardo-del-Val, Martínez-Fuentes, and Roig-Dobón (2012) argue that if we engage staff during change and request their input on the corporate changes, it will increase their commitment to the company's strategic plan and lessen their anxiety and potential resistance.

The mid-level and junior employee group members noted they are eager to learn more regarding the future of their firm. They emphasized explicitly, as one mid-level manager stated: "that if given the option to assume leadership roles during change and complete tasks related to the business reformation, it would complement the development of their leadership skills and abilities, and their feelings of positive contribution to the change process." Their views underpin the work of Bass (1990, cited in Whittington, 2001, p. 44), who contends that any member of the corporate workforce could develop leadership skills and manage internal corporate development processes if an organizational training framework with appropriate communication is in place that will educate and empower personnel to assume responsibilities and contribute ideas to the business change process. Additionally, the mid-level and junior employee group participants with their views supported the open code (first) *employees desire communication about the change to provide feedback and participate*. They aspired to stay current with the change initiative and develop as leaders who can lead change actions and contribute information to the strategic change plan, and in doing so, help their organization recognize knowledge that otherwise might not have been captured during the transformation. Their thoughts support Kotter (2014) arguments regarding participative

leadership, who notes that when all interested parties jointly exercise leadership, a corporation can develop various understandings of the competitive landscape and fine-tune its change strategy as the marketplace evolves.

The plurality of the members of the mid-level and junior employee participant pool expressed the view highlighted in the words of a junior employee: “that the senior management’s approach to change created a setting in which we felt alienated from senior management and the reformation effort.” Moreover, they summarized their views encapsulated in the notions of a mid-level manager who argued: “that they felt ignored by the four business owners and confused regarding the change plan due to the lack of available information.” Their feedback on how senior leadership approaches change related to the open code (first) of *centering information sharing to senior leaders* and the primary code (second) of *ineffective communication restricts employee participation in leading and planning opportunities for the change initiative*. The processes of sensegiving and sensemaking that employees undertake to make sense of their changing environment interconnected with the interviewees’ prior mentioned views and further emphasized the negative effect that the ProServices’ communication structure had on the business reformation. Kotter (2014) contends that leaders should consider their views and create an organizational setting of inclusion to elicit support and participation from the staff during change. Additionally, Raelin (2003) underlines that involving the business workforce leads to improved employee contribution levels during strategic change.

The data analysis, which occurred as described in sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, supported the open, axial codes depicted in this section. Moreover, they underpinned Raelin (2003) and Pardo-del-Val, Martínez-Fuentes, and Roig-Dobón (2012). They argued that enabling employees affected by the change to act in a leader’s capacity and influence the transformation plan through an established and effective communication system will positively impact their commitment to the organizational vision and complement their efforts to contribute ideas that will benefit the corporate strategic change plan. Furthermore, the data derived from the interviews underlined the selective codes (first) of *communication of information affects the participation in leadership roles and tasks during change*, and (second) that *the use of corporate communication with internal marketing positively influences the implementation of the change plan*. The aforesaid selective codes’ relation with the data resulted from an alignment of the study’s participants’ views towards either the traditional or the participative management approach, which further underscored the existing communication practices that the ProServices’ business owners endorsed and negatively

affected the change. Additionally, the particular selective codes expressed and emphasized the ProServices' staff stated notions that highlighted their need for pluralistic and comprehensive sharing of change information and providing feedback.

The principal contradiction that influenced the researcher's efforts when developing proposals for consideration to the ProServices' business owners was between the study's participants' views and centered on the four business owners' notions supported by three of the most senior employees and the remaining interview participant group. The business owners maintained their support for the existing communication and strategic planning framework, which focused on them solely developing, leading, and implementing change at ProServices. The remaining interviewees emphasized a progressive approach to participative management during change that developed from flexible and structured participation during the reformation reinforced with internal marketing to complement the information sharing process.

5.2 Communication and Internal Marketing

Managing the Communication of Change

The organizational communication process is related to the sensemaking and sensegiving processes and the entire set of open coding codes that the researcher developed during open coding of the data about the thematic group of communication and internal marketing described in table 4.2 in section 4.1. The author supported the open codes (first) and open code (second) noted in table 4.2 in section 4.1 from the views of the members of the two interview groups noted in section 4.3.3. They communicated in their interviews that the details of change would help employees analyze and understand their changing work setting and how it will affect their professional lives. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) argue that when the employees are informed about the change, they can process the evolving business reality, and evaluate the effect of the change on them and their business setting and submit feedback related to the change action.

The researcher developed the position from the data analysis that highlighted a notion from the participating employees in this study that emphasized, as he exhibited from their views in section 4.3.3, their interest in finding out information regarding the proposed change and their disappointment from the ProServices' corporate communication practice during the formulation and execution of its strategic change plan. Moreover, they underlined the importance of sharing information and how essential a well-defined communication strategy is to the transformation phase's success and alleviation of confusion. The primary differentiation points between the interviewing members and specifically amongst the business owners and senior employees and the mid-level and junior employee groups was their stance on how they approached information sharing and the requirements and limits they imposed when communicating their vision on future change steps to the employees.

The ProServices' business owners with three of their senior employees maintained in their interviews that while they underscored in principle the significance of internal communication, they preferred that change information should be primarily conveyed to senior employees and not to the entire workforce until the change is undergoing and subsequently communicate the change details to the employees through their managers. Their views contributed to creating the open code (first) *inefficient corporate communication processes during change*. The business owners' communication strategy resulted in the restriction of information sharing about the ProServices' change that fueled the sentiments of confusion and alienation of the workforce, which further underpinned the formation of the open code (second) of *establishing a communication process to share the change objectives*

that expressed the staffs' need for inclusion during the reformation. The business owners' thought process and communication approach contradict Barnes, Fox, and Morris' (2004) theory regarding internal marketing, which states that internal marketing aims to communicate the vision and intention of change for the firm to respond proactively to market demands and its staff to familiarize with the proposed corporate setting and professional requirements.

The remaining ten participants of the business owner and senior employee group favored an approach that communicated change information to the employees in different phases during the change action. Their view endorsed personnel's inclusion during the various phases of the strategic change plan's design and execution. It supported that senior management could convey all appropriate change information with internal marketing in different periods and receive employee feedback. The opinions, as mentioned earlier of the remaining ten participants of the business owner and senior employee group, supported Mantere, Schildt, and Sillince's (2012) thoughts regarding organizational communication during strategic change. The researchers mentioned above view the change details' communication to the staff as practices that management can use to express its strategic business plan and receive feedback regarding the emerging change action.

The thoughts of the remaining ten members of the business owner and senior employee group, which support employee incorporation on the discussion concerning change, relate to the open code (first) of *use of internal marketing to convey change information and invite employee feedback* and open code (second) *establishing a communication process to share the change objectives*. The specific opinions supported using an internal communication practice, as the prior mentioned open codes highlight, that will create a communication bridge between ProServices' business owners and its employees and further a working relationship between them that will provide the opportunities to share change information and invite feedback while reducing their concerns and confusion. Additionally, the views of the remaining ten members of the business owner and senior employee group underscored most of the literature review that the researcher presented in this study regarding internal marketing, and specifically Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014) and Patah et al. (2009 cited in Kim, Knutson, and Han, 2015). Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014, p. 185) asserted that employee engagement and the confidence they display in their leadership rise as business leaders use internal marketing to deliver strategic change information and receive feedback from all interested parties. Patah et al. (2009 cited in Kim, Knutson, and Han, 2015, p. 269) maintained that when staff is part of corporate management and have the ability and

the means to contribute their views to the business strategy, then “employees are satisfied and they are more likely to be dedicated to the organizational goal.” ProServices’ organizational goals are to achieve all the goals in its strategic change plan.

The mid-level and junior employee group interviewees noted the absence of a set communication strategy and tools that ProServices could use to inform its members regarding the status of their current work setting and the changes featured as part of ProServices’ strategic reformation plan. The participating members of the mid-level and junior employee group and all the senior members of ProServices’ management emphasized their desire to stay abreast of all corporate developments and in tune with the strategic development and new business vision. As noted in section 4.3.3 and initially presented in section 4.2, their opinions underlined a communication strategy that is supported by internal marketing and focuses on conveying the intricacies of ProServices’ proposed changes to all the personnel. Conveying change information will also indicate, as a mid-level manager noted, “the important role that ProServices’ employees maintain during change and will help us understand how our daily business routines will change and its effect on the development of the company.”

The interviewees’ views support the axial code of *use of internal communication with internal marketing to convey and control information and clarify the change process and its objectives*. The aforesaid axial code embodies the variety of opinions that the ProServices’ members expressed during the interviews that highlighted the ProServices’ business owners’ desire to control the change process and flow of information, and the request of the rest of the participants to receive internal communication during change. Varey and Lewis (1999 cited in Kim, Knutson, and Han, 2015) note that sharing information with employees during change could empower their sense of responsibility and significance and help them understand why change is necessary and how it will transpire.

The primary goal of strategic change should be accomplishing the business objectives while maintaining increased commitment and employee satisfaction. The prior mentioned goal, while it resonated in principle with many of the ProServices’ interviewees, their juxtaposing views highlighted that the development of the change strategy from its business owners was a controversial process where the aim of the process focused on satisfying the requirements of the ProServices’ business owners. At the same time, the employees struggled with confusion and desired their inclusion in the change process. The selective codes *connecting information sharing with change success* (first) and *the use of corporate communication with internal marketing influences positively the implementation of the*

change plan (second) encompass the prior noted views and satisfy the requirements for regulating information sharing while clarifying the change process and its objectives to the entire organization. Cătălin, Andreea, and Adina (2014, p. 6) contend that it is feasible with internal marketing to construct the necessary mechanisms that will allow the communication of change messages and feedback from the employees who are interested in contributing to the strategic change plan while enabling senior leadership to make the appropriate decisions and proceed with the change.

5.3 Concluding Thoughts on the Discussion of the Findings

Based on the interview groups' views, the researcher created various thematic groups and opinion trends that led to open, axial, and selective codes. The researcher presented an example of developing open, axial, and selective codes in section 4.2.

During the data collection process, the participants' views differentiated between the members of the business owner and senior employee group with the four business owners and three of the senior employees creating one sub-interviewee cluster and the remaining ten senior employees another one. The mid-level and junior employee group members expressed opposing views from the four business owners and the three senior employees of the business owner and senior employee group. However, they maintained similar notions as the remaining ten senior employees of the business owner and senior employee group regarding strategic change and how internal marketing can be a factor that will benefit the design, implementation, and completion of a strategic change effort.

The business owner and senior employee group's participants exhibited agreement to some extent in their positions regarding strategic change and internal marketing, but also dissimilarities in the proposed approach and flexibility regarding employee participation and communication. As highlighted throughout the findings and discussion chapters, ten of the seventeen interviewees from the business owner and senior employee group supported a participative approach to managing change and a flexible communication strategy that would permit employees to receive change information and submit their feedback. The ProServices' business owners emphasized corporate ownership and defined change as their responsibility and the design and implementation of the business transformation as an executive privilege. Their viewpoints were aligned with the theories regarding traditional leadership and specifically with Dansereau et al.'s (2013) views. Dansereau et al. (2013) define traditional leadership as a leadership type where the leader establishes a controlled relationship with a follower and successively attempts to transmit a predetermined message that will influence and guide the subordinate through the established change action plan. The researcher challenged the position of the business owners with the arguments of Pardo-del-Val, Martínez-Fuentes, and Roig-Dobón (2012), who stated that participative leadership permits the entire organizational workforce to stay involved during change, which subsequently increases their capacity to contribute knowledge, to act strategically and maintain accountability for their actions. Raelin (2003, p. 5) reinforces participative leadership's reasoning and highlights that increased employee collaboration and involvement can enhance critical thinking and commitment during change.

Communication and internal marketing, as prior noted, were another point of contradiction between the interviewees and of great interest to this study since it highlights its aim and focus. The findings underlined the different communicational lenses that the members of ProServices adopt to convey change information and vision. The business owners and the three senior employees of the business owner and senior employee group viewed communication and marketing efforts throughout strategic change as a selective process that should target only senior employees who will carefully disseminate information to their subordinates. On the opposite side of the communication spectrum, the remaining ten participants of the business owner and senior employee group and the entire mid-level and junior employee group approached data sharing as the necessary step to ensure that all the organizational members received information during the strategic change.

The replies of the mid-level and junior employees during the interview process showcased that it is important for them to communicate with senior leadership during change and receive by them information that explicates the change strategy and required change steps. The perspectives of the respective group, in juxtaposition to the four business owners, support the views of Barnes, Fox, and Morris (2004) and Finney and Scherrebeck-Hansen (2010), who highlight that developing a two-way communication through internal marketing will further the change efforts and reduce staff's concerns. In addition to Barnes, Fox, and Morris (2004) and Finney and Scherrebeck-Hansen (2010), Mantere, Schildt, and Sillince (2012, p. 173) argue that change challenges an organization's communication system and if not prepared effectively it will affect the company's communication ability to convey to its personnel the details regarding the corporate reformation, which can lead to debilitating the change action.

All the information that was collected and analyzed helped the researcher to acknowledge and understand that although different opinions and approaches exist regarding the planning and communication of strategic change, he can develop proposals for the development of a change strategy for consideration from the ProServices' business owners that can take into consideration their requirements and the views of all interested parties during change. Companies like ProServices can employ the same process, based on the results of this study, and develop strategic approaches to change that can selectively utilize some or all the researcher's proposals, and customize their change and communication practice based upon their size, business owners' demands, and internal personnel structure.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Appelbaum et al. (2012) contend that for businesses to remain relevant, they must acknowledge that reforming their internal environment to address challenges presented by competition and the marketplace is necessary, challenging, and inevitable, and a fundamental point in a company's strategic planning effort. An essential element of a company's change strategy is the planning, communication, and execution of the strategic change plan to address employee questions, concerns and clarify confusion while providing opportunities for the employees to participate in the change action. This action research study focused on examining internal marketing and communication and their application during the strategic change to communicate the objectives of change to employees and address questions and concerns developed during its implementation at ProServices. The researcher aimed to develop proposals for recommendation to ProServices' business owners and evaluation by them that would delineate options that, if adopted, would complement ProServices' strategic change plan and permit the participation of the members of the researched organization during the strategic change. Additionally, the researcher's effort was to create a study that businesses could utilize and apply its findings to their business environment after appropriate customizations.

During the analysis phase of the findings, the difference of opinions that the author identified between the members of the business owner and senior employee group and the mid-level and junior employee group highlighted the divide and the similarities amid the viewpoints of the members of the interview groups vis-à-vis their approach to strategic change and communication of it. Additionally, the different standpoints that the four business owners of ProServices had with most interviewees supported an opinion divide that emphasized a conflict of opinions about the level of employee participation and shared decision-making during change. The high-level findings from section 4.3, presented in chapter 4, primarily underlined the following perspectives that the researcher used to develop his proposals to the ProServices' business owners:

- The ProServices' business owners' preference to control change with restrictions on information sharing and employee contribution.
- The ProServices' business owners' resistance to include the organizational workforce during the change strategy development.
- The position of most interviewees of the business owner and senior employee group that favored a) the inclusion of the employees, to a certain degree,

during the development and execution of strategic change, and b) the development of a communication process that would include internal marketing to introduce change to the employees and permit them to provide feedback on the reformation process.

- The mid-level and junior employee group interviewees highlighted the ProServices' ill-designed communication processes, which restricted disseminating information regarding the design and execution of the change.
- ProServices' current communication practice created confusion about the employees' role and engagement during the corporate reorganization.
- The employees are willing to learn about ProServices' transformation, provide their input, actively manage and lead projects related to the restructuring, and develop their leadership skills.
- The employees' desire to be heard, acknowledged, and feel like part of the ProServices team.

6.1 Connecting Findings and Action Research

The researcher discussed the findings presented in chapter 4 during the action research meetings to develop a set of proposals for the ProServices' business owners for an action plan to address the concerns of the participants and those impacted by the change, improve the communication during the design and implementation of the strategic change to achieve its objectives successfully. Moreover, the scope behind the formation of the action research group, analyzed in sections 1.1 and 3.3, underpinned the work of Kurt Lewin (n.d. cited in Hine and Lavery, 2014), who presented the methodology of action research as a cyclical and participative process, which, within the context of this research, aims:

- i. To diagnose the issue at hand, which in the studied firm is the reservations that have been expressed by most of the organizational workforce regarding its change planning and communication approach.
- ii. To plan and act to address the variety of concerns that were depicted in the interviews' findings by developing proposals for evaluation by the ProServices' business owners, and
- iii. To evaluate the results of all actions taken and take any corrective action on the researcher's proposals.

The researcher accomplished each of the action research steps that he prior described as part of Kurt Lewin's action research methodology during the action research meetings and while conducting informal discussions with the ProServices' employees. All the participants and the action research group members decided that the author should integrate the results of the action research cycles in the design of his proposals for recommendation to the ProServices' business owners. Specifically, as part of the action research cycles, the action research group members discussed the results of the data collection process and their interrelation with the execution of the company's strategic change plan and communication of it. During the action research group deliberations, it became evident from the research findings that employees desired communication about the changes and wanted to be involved during change and be part of the ProServices' team. Additionally, they maintained an unenthusiastic view regarding the firm's change and communication processes. The business owner and senior employee group members also had a juxtaposing perception and approach regarding the potential involvement of the ProServices' employees in the formation and execution of strategic change. During the meetings and through the presentation of the collected evidence from the interview process, the researcher decided to incorporate in his proposals to the business owners the employees' option of participation during the change

through the ProServices' communication processes and by assuming active roles during the business restructuring effort. The researcher and the members of the action research group highlighted to the four business owners that employee participation through information sharing could positively influence the implementation of the organizational reformation, as it will engage the staff and provide them with the opportunity to be part of the corporate reorganization while reducing change confusion. The suggestions of the action research group are in line with the findings of this study that the researcher depicted in chapter 4 and the notions of Pardo-del-Val, Martínez-Fuentes, and Roig-Dobón (2012), who maintain that when the organizational workforce participates in the strategic change process, it permits them to provide input and influence change while alleviating their concerns of the upcoming change.

Considering the presented data from the information analysis and the proposals that the researcher developed for their review, the business owners of ProServices decided to review the company's change and communication strategy and the misalignment that the researcher and the action research group identified between their actions to adapt and transform the organization and how the employees perceived the change strategy. ProServices' business owners considered that the company's change and communication practice produced undesirable feedback, confusion, and organizational disruption in the first action research cycle, as identified from the interview findings. Subsequently, as noted in chapters 3 and 4, they decided to execute, as per the researcher's study plan, two more action cycles, which employed extensive communication of change information and materials using internal marketing and partial or complete involvement of the workforce during change. The second action research cycle encompassed the managers communicating the change information to the employees and their partial involvement in change projects. The third action research cycle included directly sharing the change information to the entire ProServices' workforce and the employees' direct involvement in the change projects. During the action research cycles, the researcher developed a communication approach that included internal marketing that allowed the employees to receive information regarding the reorganization and provide feedback. As presented in the relevant literature review section, internal marketing included an email campaign, informal discussions, company town hall meetings that delineated the change's focus, the reasoning behind the corporate change, and how the proposed changes would affect the personnel. ProServices' communication approach focused on identifying the employees' views regarding its redesigned communication and strategic planning approach.

The researcher used the revised change strategies that he experimented with vis-à-vis employee participation and communication to develop the proposals he eventually submitted for review to the ProServices' business owners. The researcher's proposals were in line with the employees' views during their interviews and following the first action research cycle, noted in chapters 4 and 5, and with the opinions' of Dansereau et al. (2013) and Kotter (2014). Dansereau et al. (2013) and Kotter (2014) argue in favor of staff inclusion throughout the business reform, which can lead to the development of their understanding regarding how the change will affect them and, consequently, in what way they need to adapt their efforts and emotions for the transformation to be successful. Furthermore, the researcher employed internal marketing practices that align with Finney and Scherrebeck-Hansen's (2010) notions that internal marketing, when used, will communicate and support the implementation of the strategic change plan while permitting bottom-up feedback during the corporate restructuring. The author will elaborate on the derived conclusions and recommendations for furthering strategic change execution in the next section.

6.2 Research Summary

6.2.1 Conclusions

During this study, the business owners, the action research group, and the author deliberated various academic theories and views collected from the research participants regarding the change, planning, and internal communication during the strategic reformation. The number of viewpoints that the researcher obtained from interviews, informal discussions, and deliberations of the action research group showcased an opinion divide between the members of the business owner and senior employee group. The researcher also identified juxtaposing views between the four business owners and the interview group members of the mid-level and junior employees. Various opinions highlighted different thoughts regarding strategic planning, internal communication, and employee engagement during change. Moreover, the expressed views of the business owners, senior employees, and mid-level and junior personnel highlighted the arguments developed by Kezar (2013), who underscored that during business reformation through the information sharing processes, all affected individuals create and recreate mental images of the reality to make sense of their role in the changing environment and how the transformation will affect them. All participants in this study acknowledged and interpreted their firm's change action in varying ways depending on their involvement and communication they received. Their ability to influence and play an active role during the reformation was primarily affected by the role and participation level that the business owners envisioned for them that influenced the information disseminated to the workforce before and during the reorganization implementation.

After the first action research cycle, which included the initial period during which senior management presented and attempted to implement their change strategy, it became evident that the business owners and the organizational members had different requirements, needs, and expectations during the change action. After presenting the interview findings, it became apparent to all participants that one of the benefits of this study showcased that the ProServices' business owners should consider developing a better change strategy for the business transformation to progress with less business disruption and more participant satisfaction. The three action research cycles that took place as showcased in the methodology chapter produced findings analyzed in chapter 4 and discussed in chapter 5 that support that the ProServices' change strategy, design, and implementation would improve with the communication of the change information and the involvement of its employees. With the exclusion of the four business partners and the three senior employees who aligned

their views with them, all the research participants underscored the importance of communicating change information and permitting employee participation during strategic change as a strategy to reduce employee confusion, increase their engagement and develop them as leaders and professionals.

After the second and third action research cycles, the study participants' submitted feedback underlined to the ProServices' business owners that communicating change information and involving the employees in the change process permitted them to submit their ideas and responses regarding the proposed reform. Additionally, it allowed them to participate in the execution of change-related projects, which positively influenced their engagement and sense of understanding during the implementation of the proposed reorganization and developed their leadership and management qualities. The communication approach that the researcher used in the second and third action research cycles included internal marketing strategies such as team meetings, town hall conferences, an email campaign, and processes that managers and non-managers employees could use to submit employee feedback directly or indirectly. The views of the employees presented above and, in the findings, agree with the analysis of Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014), who underscored that employee engagement during change increases with the use of internal marketing practices to convey to the workforce the strategy and the objectives relating to the corporate reorganization.

An additional viewpoint that was highlighted through employee feedback and emphasized in the analysis and discussion of the findings in sections 4.3.2 and 5.1.2 related to how extensive internal communication permitted participative management on change projects and leadership development throughout the reformation period. Participants reported to the researcher that leading or participating in change-related efforts provided them with the framework to learn and master new tasks and procedures such as project management planning, task planning, participative management of change processes, which led to developing them as leaders. The mid-level and junior employee group members noted that leading or contributing to efforts concerning the business transformation helped them realize that the success of their firm's strategic change interrelates with their professional development since the organizational goals and vision align with their objectives. These employee views are in line with Kotter's (1996) position when he emphasizes that employees will not make sacrifices and commit to the corporate strategic plan unless we convince them that change will be useful and beneficial for the long-term development of the company. Furthermore, the employees' expressed notions underline Whittington's (2001) argument that

people can develop into competent leaders and advance their managerial and leadership skills if they enjoy trust from their senior management and provide them with the necessary information and tools to lead and participate in activities that will showcase their strategic planning and execution qualities.

The feedback that the interviewees, excluding the four business owners and three senior employees, submitted to the researcher and subsequently conveyed to ProServices' business owners after the second and third action research cycles highlighted the validity of the opinions that the remaining ten senior employees of the business owner and senior employee group emphasized. Specifically, the remaining participants of the business owner and senior employee group noted that the communication of the change information augmented with the use of internal marketing strategies assists senior management to convey to the personnel the change details in an inclusive manner, allowing staff to contribute their views on the strategic plan and provide feedback on the projects previously implemented or about those to be executed. The views mentioned above are consistent with the findings of Pardo-del-Val, Martínez-Fuentes, and Roig-Dobón (2012), who argue that information sharing benefits personnel involvement, which increases their engagement to change while reducing confusion.

While the academic theories and evidence presented in this study underlined the importance of effective communication and employee contribution during strategic change, the business owners maintained similarly as in their initial interviews that change is a process that primarily senior management handles with minimum involvement of the employees. Business owners noted that although they recognized the validity of all the presented information based on their collective and subjective professional experiences, the involvement of only senior organizational members in the planning and execution of change has a positive influence on the implementation period of the reformation and in turn results in less disruption. The ProServices' business owners acknowledged to the researcher that because of this study, they now have a better understanding of internal marketing and communication strategies, which they will use to communicate change once it is ready for execution. The ProServices' business owners' persistence in maintaining their initial approach about employee participation and internal communication during change contradicted the views of Dansereau et al. (2013), who argue that by including the workforce during the planning of strategic change, they develop their understanding of how the change will affect them and prepare accordingly for the new corporate setting, which positively affects the execution of the transformation. The four business owners of ProServices, by

resisting the practicality and beneficial influence that the findings could have on the strategic change, run the risk of further alienating their employees, and delaying the change process.

The conclusions that the researcher derived from this research, which he included in his proposals to the ProServices' business owners and supported with the study's findings and participants' views, underscored the beneficial impact that a pluralistic and inclusive communication with the use of internal marketing to convey strategic change would have on ProServices and organizations facing similar issues, and its employees. A participative change management approach that employs internal marketing in its communication strategy provides the employees of ProServices with the option, if the ProServices' business owners approve such an option, to influence the change plan, submit alternative views regarding the reorganization and provide their feedback relating to the change projects. Hamilton (2016) argues that a business entity, in this study ProServices, that employs a practice of collaboration during corporate transformation aims to create a business setting where its members, based on the change information available to them, can prepare, adapt and develop their professional qualities according to their changing work setting and embrace the company's vision as their own.

6.2.2 Recommendations

The information from the data collection process and the material developed from the analysis of all the evidence support, as noted in section 6.2.1, that a participative change management approach in combination with the use of internal marketing to convey and clarify the change details are business strategies that can help develop a setting where affected employees can contribute to the strategic change. However, an opinion divide still exists between the four business owners and three of the senior employees, and the rest of the organizational members even after the ProServices' business owners acknowledging the positive influence that participative contribution and internal marketing has on change. The four business owners and three senior employees maintained that business change is a duty primarily carried out by senior members. The remaining ten senior employees from the business owner and senior employee group argued that engaging the employees during change will support the company's strategic change plan by communicating to them using internal marketing the change details and encompassing their feedback in the change plan. ProServices' mid-level and junior employees emphasized that their contribution to the firm's reformation will clarify any confusion regarding the change, reduce disruption and improve the design and implementation of the change effort by providing innovative alternative views of how they can perform their duties more efficiently. The beliefs of the mid-level and junior employees underscored that by actively participating in the discussion via the ProServices' internal communication processes about the strategic change it provided them with an environment where they can voice their opinions and questions, their value and importance acknowledged by senior management and their leadership and management skills, and knowledge developed.

The previously noted viewpoints align with Patah et al. (2009 cited in Kim, Knutson, and Han, 2015), who state that employees should voice their views regarding the business change, and when considered by senior leadership, it will contribute to the creation of a work setting and a strategic change plan where the business owners and employees' goals converge. However, the matter at hand was how the author could develop his proposals to the ProServices' business owners and simultaneously address the resistance that stemmed from their reservations to employ internal marketing to convey change to the entire organization and invite employee feedback during the action research cycles and communicate to them the views of the plurality of their employees and the benefits of such a strategy. The researcher's recommendations to the business owners of ProServices to consider are the actionable knowledge of this research. The researchers' proposals included the design of an internal

communication strategy, with the approaches that he described in the previous sections, that included the combination of some level of direct or indirect employee involvement during the action research cycles and the change projects, and the sharing of the change information in phases via the ProServices' employee managers or openly with direct employee communication. The author tested his proposals during the action research cycles with positive results from the employees' views during informal discussions. The researcher's proposals benefitted the planning and implementation of the strategic change and addressed the ProServices' business owners' feelings about employee participation during change. Specifically, the proposals for the different communication approaches and employee participation and feedback maintained a balanced relationship between the beliefs of the business owners regarding employee participation and the dissemination of information and the needs of the organizational workforce to reduce their confusion, voice their opinions, develop as professionals, prepare for the changing work setting and feel like valued members of the ProServices' family.

The researcher positioned his proposals for alternative strategies to plan, advance, and communicate the strategic change to support both the ProServices' business owners' and the employees' views. As prior noted, his proposals focused on designing and executing a well-rounded communication approach using internal marketing where the ProServices' business owners would share their primary thoughts supporting the proposed change with the employees and welcome their feedback. Additionally, the researcher aimed to offer the ProServices' employees the opportunity to participate in the change and business owners with the tools and strategies they can employ to create a companywide accepted strategic change plan. The researcher's proposals presented above aligned with the notions of Cătălin, Andreea, and Adina (2014). They supported that corporate communication could create useful feedback tools with internal marketing, which will help the entire organization convey important change messages to all its members. Additionally, the researcher's proposals highlighted the work of Kim, Knutson, and Han (2015), who argued in favor of the positive influence of internal marketing in the development of an innovative change plan through the exchange of knowledge and the submission of constructive criticism, which in the case of ProServices would be between the business owners and their employees.

While no silver bullet can accommodate the requests of the ProServices' business owners and their employees, the researcher maintains and highlighted through his proposals that for a change activity to be successful, the business owners should meticulously plan and communicate to all affected individuals all the components related to the change design and

execution. The researcher suggested that ProServices' business owners examine the evidence presented to them during the action research meetings and proposals. Furthermore, evaluate them based upon the research findings that the author derived from their failed attempts to reorganize their firm in the past and the successful change action research cycles that he implemented during this study. Additionally, consider, based on the researcher's data, why their employees were not enthusiastic from their initial change approach and successively assess their positive and passionate feedback after the action research cycles and revised change strategies that the researcher implemented. The researcher suggested that the ProServices' business owners proceed, based on the study's proposals, and improve their strategic change plan and communication approach to meet all parties' needs impacted by the corporate reform.

This research aimed to create proposals for the ProServices' business owners to consider and potentially incorporate in their business management practice. The researcher, as stated throughout this study, did not have authorization from the ProServices' business owners to implement permanent changes on the company's change practice and focused on researching and testing with action research cycles change and communication strategies that showcased to the ProServices' business owners the views of their employees and the benefits of internal communication with internal marketing. Furthermore, because ProServices is considered a small and midsize business, it has many similarities and faces similar issues as other companies in the United States of America and specifically in the New York City business setting. Therefore, researchers, business owners, and senior leaders of other organizations can access the results of this research in the form of proposals and employ them to address similar issues in their companies.

6.3 Study Limitations and Future Study Prospects

Though this research achieved its research objectives as expressed in the introduction and literature review, the subsequent limitations are acknowledged by the researcher:

- i. This study was conducted at ProServices and included employees from its New York headquarters and no other offices. The researcher did not include other businesses from the same or comparable industries and geographical locations. The limitations mentioned above potentially restrict the applicability of the findings across different than ProServices operational settings and business markets.
- ii. The data collection process was based heavily on interviews and informal discussions with participants in a single geographic area. The number of participants was limited to the employees that agreed to participate in this study. All participants shared a common nationality and cultural heritage with similar working principles, which limited the identification of viewpoints related to strategic change and internal marketing based on their cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- iii. Due to time constraints and the numerous literature sources that the researcher could utilize for this study, the author decided to focus the investigation on specific academic theories. Specifically, the literature review and subsequent data collection process did not include information and scientific work about marketing segmentation based on ethnic, gender, national, and educational backgrounds. Furthermore, the researcher did not research how formal education impacts strategic planning and the individual's cognitive ability to comprehend the variety of academic concepts presented in this research.
- iv. Although the researcher interviewed the company's owners during the data collection process, only one participated in most action research group meetings. The latter restricted the researcher's ability to observe the dynamics and critical reflection skills of ProServices' top leadership while interacting with their employees in round table discussions.

The previously noted limitations provide the author or another researcher with an opportunity to conduct a study that will encompass the observations mentioned above and other relevant literature concepts and extend the knowledge regarding the strategic change, internal marketing, and participative management. Expressly, future research can incorporate and explore the following concepts:

- i. Conduct in-depth analysis to evaluate the impact of formal business training and education on employees' perception vis-à-vis change management and adopting a participative versus a traditional leadership paradigm.
- ii. Identify how varying change scenarios affect the implementation of strategic change and business disruption.
- iii. Develop an inclusive research study that will encompass personnel from all company locations, both domestic and international.
- iv. Evaluate how different cultural, ethnic, and gender backgrounds impact the organizational workforce's design, execution, and acceptance of the business change.
- v. Analyze and identify the business change's employee participation requirements based on their business level, role, and department.
- vi. Explore the provisions for developing an organizational setting where the corporate workforce can explore leadership concepts while developing their leadership competencies through change-related projects.
- vii. Execute a change management related study that will compare the strategic change in comparable organizations across similar and varying geographical locations.

There are several options related to the research of change management, and with the inclusion of internal marketing, a researcher can pursue a mixture of topics focusing on improving the study of both management and marketing.

6.4 Researcher's Reflection on the Action Research Practice

Action Research Knowledge

As noted in the introduction chapter, this study aimed to contribute to theory and practice by establishing findings that add to management practice knowledge while developing proposals for business issues during a strategic change for the ProServices' business owners to evaluate and consider for incorporation in their business management practice. Troubleshooting business problems and developing proposals that may help resolve such business issues is a fundamental objective of action research since the aim of an academic-practitioner is to improve his or her organizational setting by providing answers for crucial corporate concerns through research, planning, experimentation, evaluation, and optimization of the action research effort. Cassell and Johnson (2006, p. 784) note that action research emphasizes a cyclical process that aims to identify and diagnose a corporate issue by strategically planning and executing an intervention for its resolution and subsequently evaluating the results of the action taken to study and assess how future actions will produce the aspired results.

Using action research, the researcher created actionable information directly related to the organizational issues experienced by ProServices during its strategic change. The author employed the findings to emphasize the association between the employees' and the business owners' views and how the respective groups perceived business change. Moreover, by repeating three action research cycles, the researcher showcased that employing varying approaches to strategic change planning, management, and communication can have a contrasting impact on how employees understand and evaluate change.

As noted in chapters 4 and 5, the views of the business owners and three of their senior employees were juxtaposed with the rest of the research participants concerning strategic change, internal communication, and employee involvement during the design and implementation of change. During the second and third action research cycles, the researcher's feedback through informal discussions and group meetings from the study members noted their desire to stay involved during the strategic change and voice their views. After the action research cycles, the interviewees' views and feedback supported the change and communication strategies using internal marketing, which the researcher proposed to the ProServices' business owners. The ProServices' business owners acknowledged that the findings from the action research cycles supported the researcher's proposals that suggested adopting a participative change management practice and communicating it using internal marketing to convey the change information. However, and although the action research

evidence and produced knowledge supported the participated management model and the use of internal marketing during change, the business owners resisted the universal acceptance of the researcher's action research' findings delivered through his proposals to them. They maintained their support for a controlled change action process where senior management designs and leads the reformation effort and communicates change information when appropriate, potentially using internal marketing practices. The researcher notes that the consideration from the ProServices' business owners to incorporate internal marketing on their business management and change practice, and their commitment to reassessing the inclusion of mechanisms for including the employees and communicating to them the change objectives, highlights a favorable change on the ProServices' environment that is a direct result of this research.

The research evidence and the researcher's proposals in the previous section are the results of the action research process he executed with the action research group and employed three action research cycles. The action research process permitted the researcher to develop and present actionable business knowledge in the form of proposals to the ProServices' business owners that are not only actionable and useful to the business community but also to the academic realm by contributing knowledge in the areas of business management, corporate change, and internal corporate communication (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). The findings and the research proposals showcased a positive relationship between strategically planning for change and using pluralistic communication with internal marketing to share information and implement it. A change strategy that includes the use of internal marketing to communicate change data can positively impact the execution of the organizational change by conveying crucial information vis-à-vis the restructuring to the employees, which can clarify the confusion that they might be experiencing about change and permit them to provide their feedback regarding the company's strategic goals.

Reflecting on Role Dualism

The researcher's thesis project with the University of Liverpool doctoral program started during his tenure at ProServices. ProServices employed the researcher as a strategy executive focused on corporate development, communication, and internal corporate projects to revive and reform the company's business practices. Throughout that time, the researcher formed his views regarding the firm's processes, relations with its employees, and methods to communicate information concerning the organization's future and professional development to its staff. The researcher's tenure at ProServices had certain advantages since he had ample access to its structure, management, employees, and internal documents. His access to the

mixture of the pre-existing information helped to understand the objectives of prior change initiatives, how the ProServices' business owners designed and implemented them, and the corporate workforce's overall reaction and expectations.

The acquired pre-research knowledge created challenges surrounding the study that the author aimed to pursue. Predominantly, it was enticing for the researcher to proceed and recognize the experienced corporate issues with a pre-established comprehension about the reasoning surrounding the exhibition of the problems during the strategic change. An approach such as those described above would lack any external validation of the established viewpoints. It would contribute to the formation of biased assumptions based on the action researcher's pre-existing knowledge and not on the analysis of the collected data founded on the literature review and his selected research methodology. The temptation to proceed without critical contemplation was high, and he confronted it by establishing auditing and reflection mechanisms identified in the methodology chapter.

In addition to the challenges mentioned above, the researcher found himself questioning his position as an employee of the firm, whose primary responsibility was to work with senior management and the business owners, and as an internal researcher who pursued an unbiased action research study regarding the organizational issues that he examined during the ProServices' strategic change efforts. An example of the researcher's struggle was exhibited during the interview data collection when he identified employees' views reporting issues with their participation level during the change and information required to comprehend how ProServices would change. As a researcher, he realized that he was part of the issue because as part of mid-level management, his business role required him to work closely with the business owners about strategic planning and change who successively preferred to involve only senior employees when designing the long-term organizational plan. Wearing the research practitioner's and business executive's hats positioned the researcher in a perplexing position where his obligations to the ProServices' business owners and academic research were conflicted. He had to choose between defending the business owners' positions and proceeding with an unbiased study. In the end, and as noted in the methodology chapter, the researcher established all the necessary protocols that furthered a transparent and impartial inquiry that aimed to develop proposals to further the ProServices' business change.

6.5 Final Reflections on the Lived Experience of a Scholar Practitioner

The Researcher's View of ProServices

The researcher pursued this study with the confidence that ProServices provided him with a comprehensive knowledge of its operations and the dynamics surrounding the relationship between senior leadership and its members. Nevertheless, and as the investigation evolved, he realized that while he had acquired significant knowledge during his tenure, his collaboration with the action research team and the organizational members presented him with the opportunity to acquire additional information and assess current processes using various alternatives viewpoints. Using his relationship with the ProServices' employees, the researcher acquired a new understanding that verified some of the assumptions he developed as an employee and his interaction with senior management. Through the participants' views, it was evident to the researcher that the business owners maintained a firm position regarding the firm's management and employee involvement during change and in administering the day-to-day business operations. The researcher recognized that his assumptions regarding the lack of commitment by senior management to acknowledge the absence of innovation, the level of business disruption, and commit to a participative change approach during which collaborative management and communication and sharing of change information are welcome were well-founded.

The notions mentioned above provided the researcher with a different understanding of the management of the ProServices' organizational operations during change and how he needed to adapt his approach and pursue a study that would produce flexible outcomes. His newly acquired view showcased a framework where all the innovation and strategic planning for the firm's development interrelated with the business owners' directives and a fraction of senior management. The latter knowledge led the researcher to develop and provide results consisting of options for the ProServices' business owners to consider instead of a rigid result that would potentially alienate them because it would not consider their intense feelings of ownership and duty to lead from the front instead of from within a team.

Reflecting on the new perspective and the collected information, the researcher realized that the business owners considered that only senior employees were eligible for granting them access to the company's management structure and strategic planning and change management processes. The four business owners favored a management model that provided them and a limited number of senior employees with total control over all corporate operations, a practice which they maintained since the company's inception. Contemplating further on the perceptions described above, the author compared the senior leaders' efforts to

develop their firm to the glassmaking process. A glassmaker blows molten glass into a bubble to create a design and a finished product. During glassmaking, the glassmith has complete control over the glass product's design, and according to his or her plan, they will blow the glass molten and form and reshape it until they finalize the object. Once the glass solidifies, the opportunity to influence the design and manipulate its structure is limited. Hence, if the glassmaker wants to redesign the creation, it will require them to heat the glass product until it reaches the appropriate temperature and becomes moldable.

Like the glassblower's process mentioned above, the ProServices' business owners structured and developed ProServices based on their strategic intent, which was formulated over two decades ago and relied on its then structure and the existing marketplace. Since then, the firm grew from infancy to a developed entity, and the market's demands evolved. It currently employs an overachieving group of employees, and the clientele base is growing. The organization's structure, management processes, strategic planning, and change mechanisms have moderately changed over the years but still operate according to start-up mental images of the business owners. The business owners employ a management paradigm that influences the organizational change activities and restricts employees' engagement during the reorganizational process. To change the firm's management style and strategic change planning process, ProServices must become moldable again, requiring senior leaders to maintain a position that permits critical reflection and contemplation with the entire organization. The previously mentioned practice applies to many similar firms to ProServices in the United States and New York City. The author's reflections, as mentioned above, provided the researcher with an additional impetus to adopt flexible tactics when discussing his action research strategies with senior management and produce academically sound results in the form of proposals that businesses can employ and adapt to their needs to become moldable again and strategically change. His proposals aimed to convey that all participating members should maintain flexibility and openness to innovating ideas and controlling personal egos and protectionist views to avoid the pitfalls of past practices during change.

The Researcher's Perception of Self

During the final action research meetings, the group members decided to offer their final views on how we grew as professionals throughout this investigation. The comments that the members offered about the researcher encompassed views such as "reserved on the outset of the study, not challenging enough the views of the business owners, puzzled at the beginning of the research vis-à-vis his dual role, knowledgeable regarding the firm's

processes, supportive towards the business members, and eager to empower the participants to reflect critically.” The researcher welcomed all the critical feedback that constituted another step in the cyclical action research process during which he evaluated, planned, acted, and reevaluated his research practice and critical reflection abilities to advance as a scholar and professional.

From a personal standpoint, the researcher felt that he evolved personally and professionally from the experiences and knowledge that he acquired that provided him with alternative lenses to contemplate, analyze and develop proposals to issues that affect his personal and professional lives. Flexibility and adaptability, and working the issues for solutions were crucial practices in the researcher’s efforts to produce this study. He used the latter practices to diplomatically contemplate his proposals with the ProServices’ business owners and influence their adoption. Additionally, the researcher realized that his previous military background as a naval officer influenced his working ethics and his investigative action process, which he used to analyze and continuously reevaluate the research data until he discovered meaningful connections that identified notions that could benefit the development of the studied organization and the management practice. Another association between the author’s military career and his role as an action research researcher was his association and engagement with the examined firm and its workforce. As with all action research projects, the scholar-practitioners role is to be an active member of the investigation and alongside the corporate staff to create and assess all the produced information (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). The latter process relates to the practices that the researcher employed in the military environment as an officer where, together with his military team, he attempted to develop proposals and find solutions to problems and work towards resolving them. Additionally, as the study evolved, the researcher discovered that in a comparable manner as in his previous tenure in the military, the members of the military and corporate environments experienced similar difficulties when trying to relinquish past practices and embrace alternative concepts that might benefit more the study and the development of their business.

As researchers and business members, we can derive multiple assumptions regarding the methods that we can adopt to reduce business disruption and enable our firm to be more competitive and resilient to its marketplace demands. To achieve success, we should strive to assess our organizational structure collaboratively, and through established processes, we should employ action research to discover the most optimal plan for strategic business change to occur.

The Researcher's thoughts on Insider Action Research

Insider research is a study approach where the researcher must assume both the employee and the researcher's personas. This research method aims to achieve value for the business setting and the academic environment and exposes the research practitioner to certain risks and benefits. The following takeaways offer an advice-giving roadmap regarding strategies that the researcher followed during the study of ProServices.

- i. Accept that there may be consequences associated with the researcher's actions or efforts to identify and diagnose essential business issues that senior management might not want to address during a business study. Be prepared to address any complications and establish a strategy that will permit the research to continue or fall back to an alternative approach or plan. Fortunately for the researcher, although senior management had reservations concerning some of his proposals, the situation did not escalate to the point that he had to pursue alternative academic and professional actions.
- ii. Insider action research could benefit the investigator's professional development and establish him or her as an expert in their field. The researcher focused his study at ProServices to produce proposals that would help resolve the change issues it faced, and without any desire to advance his professional career by compromising his academic and business ethics.
- iii. As with any study, a researcher needs to obtain senior leadership authorization to conduct an internal study. A researcher must establish alliances with crucial corporate figures who will support them to achieve the study's objectives.
- iv. Verify that the selected organization is ready, and the business environment will accept internal research as the medium to identify and resolve fundamental business issues. Confirm that all internal departments are aware and committed to the corporate action research efforts.

In conclusion, the author recommends that action research practitioners maintain a strategic plan vis-à-vis his or her study to account for all the requirements and challenges that might arise in the internal setting and support or hinder the insider research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Business Owner & Senior Employee Interview Guide

1. How do you feel about change in your organization and the challenges that you have and may potentially face?
2. How do you feel about traditional leadership versus participative leadership during change?
3. Tell me about your views on the processes and strategies that you have employed or are still employing to market and communicate changes to all interested parties.
4. Tell me about how you analyze and assess the impact of change.
5. Could you talk about how the change initiative was managed?
6. What are your thoughts regarding employee participation during change?
7. How do you feel about involving your organization's internal departments in the change process?
8. Tell me more about your views on the potential positive or negative influences that such a joint effort could have on change and employee performance.
9. What are your thoughts regarding the application of marketing strategies in the internal organization during change?
10. How do you feel about resistance during change?
11. What are your views on how to overcome resistance to change?
12. How do you influence corporate members to drive changes forward?
13. How do you feel about participative management and leadership as a motivating factor for your team?

Appendix B: Mid-Level & Junior Employee Interview Guide

1. Could you talk about how you feel about change in your organization?
2. Tell me about the challenges you have and may potentially face.
3. How was change communicated or marketed in your business setting and department?
How do you feel about it?
4. What information did senior management offer about the organization's performance, vision and change objectives?
5. How do you feel about the information sharing policies and practices of your company?
6. How was the change initiative managed? Did you ask or were you asked to contribute your thoughts during the design and implementation phases of the change strategy?
How do you feel about being asked or not asked to participate?
7. What are your thoughts on employee participation during change?
8. Was your organizational department involved in the change process? Can you tell me more about that involvement / lack of involvement?
9. How do you feel about the use of marketing tools, such as print materials, email campaigns, research studies, surveys, weekly or monthly conference calls, town hall meetings, and performing marketing research regarding the change initiative before and during change?
10. How do you feel about your organization's culture of communication and your role and involvement in your organization's change initiative?
11. What are your thoughts on human resources and marketing departments working together during change? What are your views on the positive and negative influences that such a joint effort could have on the change effort?