

PRINCIPLES OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPLIED TO NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATIONS

by

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of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify the characteristics of successful project management within nonprofit organizations in Alaska. This study includes a wealth of existing literature surrounding both project management as well as nonprofit organizations. This research is intended to add to the existing body of knowledge as well as fill the gap in the existing literature on project management within nonprofit organizations. The use of a qualitative approach to this research allowed the researcher to explore participants' thoughts, beliefs, and feelings surrounding their organizations' methods. The findings, consisting of seven themes present the experiences of four organizations as related to project manager selection and professional development of existing project managers. The findings indicate a strong delineation between the perceived private sector responses with that of the nonprofit organization responses. Additionally, a faith element was strongly introduced into this study as deeply held beliefs impacted the answers of every participant, and thus must not be ignored. This study, in addition to adding to the body of knowledge, offers recommendations to leaders, nonprofit organizations, consultants, volunteers, politicians, and researchers.

*Key words:* project management, program management, leadership, culture, professional development, projects, people management, mission

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## Dedication

To all those giving of their time, talents, and treasures through service to nonprofit organizations. The sacrifices you make, often without acknowledgement, and the tears you shed leave a very tangible and lasting impact in our communities. Thank you for striving to make our communities safer, stronger, and more beautiful.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Project management is a rapidly growing field whose significance to organizations is still being determined. Organizations utilize project management to track costs, timelines, and goals for the organization and have found this to be an effective mechanism for managing their goals. With the abundance of literature available on project management, its benefits, uses, and characteristics, there is limited research specific to nonprofit organizations and how project management is used and might benefit these organizations.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify characteristics of successful project management implementation in nonprofit organizations. The intent was to highlight best practices for these organizations and to determine the benefits of working with successful project managers. The researcher intended to contribute to the existing body of literature with a focus on nonprofit organizations and their selection and training processes for project managers.

Section 1 of this study includes the background of the problem, problem statement, purposes statement, nature of the study, research and sub research questions, a conceptual framework for the study, definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, brief significance of the study, and a review of existing literature on project management as well as nonprofit organizations.

### **Background of the Problem**

Project management is a rapidly growing field of business, and its techniques and the understanding of project success is a critical component for many organizations (Wenu & Tan, 2019). Many studies exist related to the selection project managers, critical success factors or characteristics of project managers, and personal traits found in successful project managers (Derus & Abdul-Aziz, 2016; Keren, Hadad, & Laslo, 2014; Kostalova, Bednarikova, & Patak,

2018). A wealth of research is available surrounding the problem of selecting a project manager for success due to the recurring struggles many organizations experience. Each of these existing studies have added to the general body of knowledge, as the authors identify commonly understood characteristics of successful project managers.

Organizations struggle and fail to utilize the available research when selecting a project manager despite all the research available to these organizations. Similarly, organizations may fail to recognize the value in ensuring project managers receive the training which would make them successful. Existing research fails to address why organizations do not properly apply these principles or seek these characteristics when selecting project managers. Since critical success factors have been identified and include selecting a qualified project manager with key leadership skills, further research is needed to understand why organizations skip this step as they begin projects of any size.

Further, the body of knowledge has not yet focused any significant attention on project management in nonprofit organizations. These organizations inherently function differently than for-profit organizations, and their differences should be considered when researching project managers and what it takes to lead a successful project. The lack of available research in this area presents an opportunity for further research on project management and its function within these unique organizations.

Simply adopting the selection and training practices of for-profit organizations is one potential solution to this business problem in nonprofit organizations. Leading a nonprofit organization in the same manner as a for-profit organization might indeed address some of the failures they currently experience. With this solution, organizations, theoretically, would gain better qualified leaders and should experience successful completion of projects.

**Problem Statement**

The general problem addressed was the failure of organizations to properly select and train project managers for success resulting in project scope creep, expanded budgets, and delayed completion times for businesses. Organizations that engage a project manager who makes ad-hoc decisions surrounding the project, rather than strategic decisions using sound principles, projects begin to experience scope creep, increased budget, and delays (Janssen, Voort, & Veenstra, 2015). Selection of the project manager is considered a critical success factor for projects, yet, organizations often fail to adequately select the person who will be responsible for leading the project (Senam, Rashid, Sarkawi, & Zaini, 2014). Additionally, providing training surrounding project management techniques as well as the organizational mission enables the project manager to gain knowledge and understanding as to what will constitute a successful project because one of the most critical factors in project success is the ability of the project manager to lead the project (Aranyossy, Blaskovics, & Horváth, 2018). The specific problem addressed was the lack of understanding about how projects should be led and what management techniques aid a project manager in successfully completing a project by nonprofit organizations across the state of Alaska.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to add to the body of knowledge by exploring the reasons behind the lack of success of project managers in nonprofit organizations. This problem was explored through an in-depth study of both project manager selection and professional development and its impacts within nonprofit organizations based in Alaska.

## **Nature of the Study**

The researcher elected to conduct a qualitative case study to better understand the importance of selecting and training a qualified project manager for project success. This will allow for a deeper and richer understanding of the problem presented and provide a complete picture of the elements surrounding a problem (Yates & Leggett, 2016). The researcher gained the flexibility needed to learn from organizations within the nonprofit culture, and allowed the participants to share their viewpoints on projects and project management.

**Discussion of method.** In considering research methods and designs, there are three primary methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Researchers select which method is most appropriate depending upon the goals of the study, the business need, and the researcher's preference for analytical or substantive results.

**Quantitative.** The quantitative research method is utilized to test objective theories (Creswell, 2014). A theory is defined, then the hypothesis formed with tests of the hypothesis to support the theory (Barczak, 2015). Quantitative research tends to be scientific in nature as the questions are closed-ended and the researcher seeks hard and factual data. Conducting a quantitative study involved identifying variables, which might change the outcome of the theory and searches for unbiased data related to those variables. Quantitative research is statistical in nature, with a heavy emphasis on the numerical data gained and interpreted.

**Qualitative.** The qualitative research method differs from the quantitative method in that the research often does not begin with a theory, but rather with assumptions and frameworks. According to Stake (2010), it is interpretive, experiential, situational, and personal. Each of these qualities allow for the researcher to direct the study to a certain point of interest and depends upon the intuition of the researcher. These characteristics, researchers utilizing a qualitative

method have a built-in flexibility to the study, allowing it to morph as more details and data are gained through the research process (Barczak, 2015). Due to this need for flexibility, the qualitative design method is alternatively referred to as the flexible design method. This design method is preferred when the researcher is seeking a natural setting for information gathering, little is known about the problem, or only a small sample is available to study. Given the nature of the design method, various sub design methods would be selected depending upon the challenges to the study. Sub design methods, or approaches to qualitative research include narrative, case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography (Kruth, 2015).

**Mixed.** The mixed method is a hybrid research method and incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative study. A researcher might choose to utilize this type of method when there is a need for both exploratory and confirmatory research (Palinkas et al., 2011). For example, qualitative research typically explores concepts, and as mentioned in a previous section typically begins with assumptions or thoughts of a researcher. Quantitative research begins with a theory the researcher seeks to prove. When a researcher needs the flexibility of an exploratory structure, yet already has a theory in mind, the mixed method design is a potential solution. Mixed method designs typically have one predominant design, while the secondary design supports the work to present a more in-depth study. Additionally, mixed method designs may be sequential or simultaneous in nature in that the researcher may first complete either the qualitative or quantitative study followed by the secondary study, or both designs may occur together throughout the research (Morse, 2010).

**Discussion of design.** There are generally considered to be five design types within a qualitative study method including grounded theory study, ethnographic research,

phenomenological research, narrative study, and case study. Value can be found in each research design and the best option for a study depends upon the goals of the study.

***Grounded Theory.*** Grounded theory research is rooted more heavily in analysis and investigation, and will not provide the researcher the flexibility needed to conduct a deep dive into the problem. Additionally, grounded theory requires the researcher analyze a large number of participants to draw upon when creating a theory related to a particular issue.

***Ethnographic.*** An ethnographic study requires a significant amount of time by the researcher to conduct a thorough understanding of an entire culture of organizations as this design intends. While beneficial for certain studies, the researcher is only seeking greater insight into a small community of nonprofits within a single state, rather than organizations across the country or internationally.

***Phenomenological.*** A phenomenological design is best utilized when the researcher seeks to understand the essence of a problem while seeking participants who have all experienced the same results, experience, or outcome (Butina, Campbell, & Miller, 2015). This design is intended to look at a single event and gain perspective of those who lived it. For the purposes of this study, the researcher was looking for a more diverse sampling from nonprofit organizations.

***Narrative.*** While narrative research collects the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2014), the purpose of this design is to tell a story and better understand culture. Narrative researcher seeks to share in detail the stories of participants related to the study, and provides details of the study in a storied fashion. While the researcher found this method intriguing for learning more about these experiences, the purpose was to uncover a deeper

understanding of how a collection of nonprofits select and train project managers, so the focus was not upon an individual participant, but upon organizations and their procedures.

**Case Study.** According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a collective case study enables the researcher to focus on the specific project management problem in detail and in contemporary context. Incorporating multiple case studies allows the researcher to dive deeper into exploring nonprofit organizations and project management and are the preferred method as the researcher has little control over the events, but seeks to better understand how and why these organizations behave the way they behave (Yates & Leggett, 2016).

Using multiple case studies, the researcher intended to collect data through direct interviews with participants, observations, and historical organizational documents of Alaskan nonprofit organizations and their leadership. While case studies limited the researcher to evaluating a limited group of organizations, it allowed the researcher to make the assertions regarding the organizational problem on a local and contemporary scale, providing local nonprofit organizations with real examples of a potential cause of project failure.

**Summary of the nature of the study.** In closing, the researcher will utilize a qualitative case study to provide the insight needed into the business problem. Solid scientific data are not sought, but rather an understanding of what is currently occurring in nonprofit organizations in Alaska, and the best way to gain that insight is to utilize the flexibility of a qualitative study along with the personal insights gained through deeply understanding a series of organizations. These organizations will provide the understanding into what is currently leading to the failure of these organizations to use the existing body of knowledge when attempting to complete a project.

## **Research Questions**

This study will demonstrate the importance of selecting an experienced project manager with familiarity in using project management techniques to lead projects for nonprofit organizations in Alaska. The researcher intended to provide a portrait of the current practices by local nonprofit organizations as well as insight into what project management techniques would be beneficial to solving the crisis of scope creep, expended budgets, and delayed completion times. The following research questions were presented to gain a deeper understanding of ways to improve project success in nonprofit organizations.

**RQ1.** What are the factors by which nonprofit organizations select project managers?

**RQ1a.** How much of an influence on project manager selection is the past project success of the candidate?

**RQ1b.** How much of an influence on selection is the training of the project manager?

**RQ1c.** How much of an influence on selection is the belief in the mission of the organization by the project manager?

**RQ2.** What are the driving factors in professional development in nonprofit organizations?

**RQ2a.** How much of an influence in professional development is leadership development?

**RQ2b.** How much of an influence in professional development is continuing education in current project management principles?

## **Conceptual Framework**

The candidate selection processes and training emphasis of organizations forms the framework through which the researcher answered the formerly presented research questions of this qualitative case study. Organizations must navigate multiple factors when beginning a

project of any size. Assigning the right project manager involves consideration of whether to assign the role of an employee or a contractor, consideration of existing and future training and education the project manager should have, and what the candidate's connection to the mission is. Each of these will be discussed in further detail.

**Employee versus contractor.** Strategically, organizations frequently consider whether it is best to conduct all business activities internally through staff time, or whether certain business activities might be more efficient or less expensive by outsourcing to another business. Outsourcing is the process of gaining a product or service formerly completed internally from an outside company (Dolgui & Proth, 2013). Benefits of such outsourcing include cost savings, time savings, and specialization (Williams, 2004). According to Pyzik and Mar (2012), other benefits include lower costs of training, efficiency gains, and employee flexibility.

Disadvantages of outsourcing may be numerous and include the question of loyalty, a steep learning curve, poor communication, and confusion regarding project scope (Pyzik & Mar, 2012). These challenges can be daunting for organizations seeking to move strategically into the future and must be fully considered. The question of loyalty is a critical factor for most organizations, especially for nonprofit, mission-minded organizations. Organizations might ask whether the contractor supports the mission of the organization and must consider whether this is a deal breaker in working with the contractor, or if working with this individual will allow the organization to achieve the long-term goals identified by the organization.

Outsourcing is rarely an all or none activity. Instead, organizational leaders take into consideration the long and short term goals of the organization and identify the current resources of the organization. If resources are limited in anyway, strategically outsourcing some activities might be an option. Considerations of resource capacity, long terms goals, and need for

specialization all impact the decision of whether to outsource an activity. The concept of outsourcing develops the framework for discussion surrounding the selection of a project manager and addresses research question one of this qualitative case study. An understanding of what type of business relationship a project manager has with the organization is a key component as organizations strategically consider hiring a project manager.

**Training and education.** In recent years, organizations have begun to shift to a project management based system for accomplishing work. With the increasing need to remain competitive, organizations are now considering how to best prepare project managers for success. Researchers consider both education and training to guide project managers. Dulaimi (2005) defined education as a broad process of gaining varied experiences by an individual as contrasted with training which is a specific set of tasks related directly to work behavior. Both are recognized as important factors to the success of the project manager as one focuses on work related attributes, while the other upon professional, person-centered development.

Training includes an emphasis upon tasks related to work activities, but equally important is a focus on development of project manager's personal characteristics through education (Dulaimi, 2005). Marincea and Dascălu (2011) appropriately considered projects as social systems in which the project manager serves as the communication hub. Developing critical skills such as development staff, leadership techniques, motivating others, and understanding employee dynamics is essential for project managers given their critical role in the project (Ceran & Dorman, 1995). These skills often develop through education, and are often considered the soft-skills of business professionals.

The concepts of training and education specifically relate to this qualitative case study as the researcher attempted to answer research question two and its components. Developing a

deeper understanding of both training and education as defined by Dulaimi (2005) will aid organizations both in selecting a project manager, but more importantly in retaining and developing a long-term relationship with the project manager.

**Connection to goal or mission.** Organizations, specifically nonprofit organizations, seek project managers who are not only technically capable of completing a project, but are also loyal to the mission of the organization. It is often not simply about completing the project, but about developing long-term relationships along the way. Webber and Klimoski (2004) referred to the role of project manager as one who manages a group of employees while simultaneously managing client relationships. Organizations seeking to retain talent long-term must strategically hire based upon core competencies as well as values (Lawler, 2007). By selecting individuals who share the values of the organization, businesses are creating an environment in which people want to remain. However, Lawler (2007) also noted organizations must have solid and strategic management systems to retain these talented and value driven individuals.

This concept is perhaps the most critical concept within this study. It impacts both the hiring decisions as well as the development of the project manager in the future. Organizations must balance the desire for a mission-minded individual with that of the strategic needs of the organization. The concept of connection to the mission was evident in the findings of both research questions one and two and has the potential to be the key element within the study given its prevalence in nonprofit organizations.

**Discussion of the concepts.** Successfully completing projects involves many factors. Organizations cannot fail to consider such factors as selecting the appropriate project manager for the project. Considerations might include resource availability and the option to outsource, location of the project, type of project, past experience and education of the candidate, and the

candidate's relationship to the mission of the organization. Training and development of project managers not only leads to greater chance of success in current projects, but builds organizational loyalty within the project manager, and develops this individual for greater project success in the future.

The concepts framing this study each interrelate as organizations consider the best strategy for completing projects. For example, if outsourcing is an option, what is the connection to the mission of the organization? Is that connection with the mission a critical component, or is simply getting the project completed with limited resources most important? The answers to these questions might be different for different organizations facing different circumstances. Through this study, the researcher will attempt to highlight strategic considerations for nonprofit organizations seeking to successfully complete projects. Concepts included in the conceptual framework outline several possible considerations which impact the choices made by organizations and ultimately the success of projects. This framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

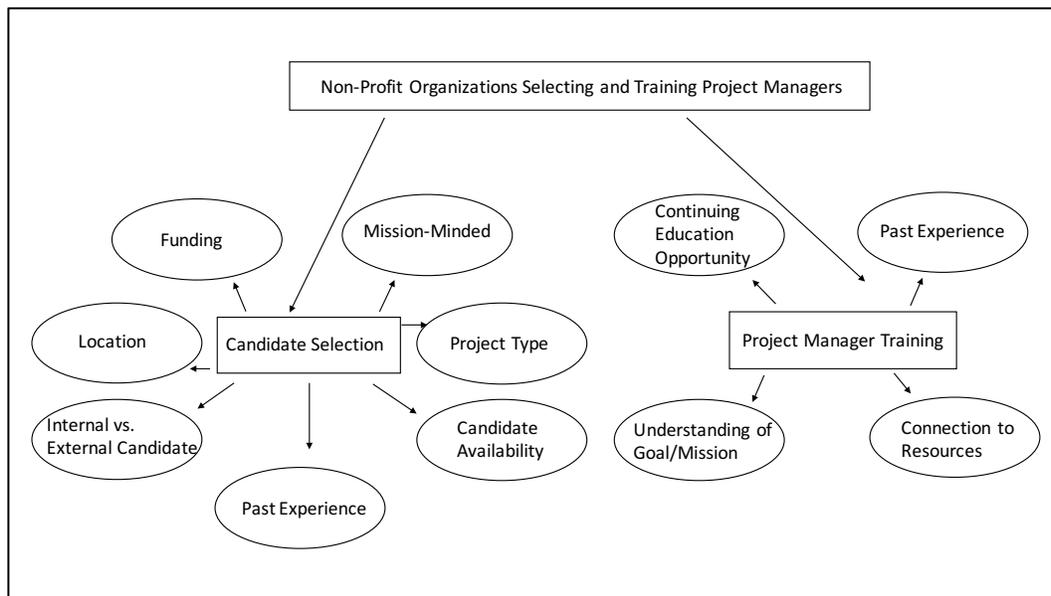


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

**Summary of the conceptual framework.** The concepts portrayed in Figure 1 are intended to outline potential considerations organizations face when determining the best candidate for leading successful projects. Some concepts seem to contradict one another, yet all are intended to help answer the formerly mentioned research questions. Professional education and development, commitment to organizational mission, and outsourcing all impact an organization's ability to achieve its goals, and each are inextricably related. For example, if an organization elects to outsource, the need for providing development opportunities is reduced, yet conceivably the organization gains a highly educated and specialized individual to complete the work. Similarly, if an organization declines outsourcing opportunities it may be make hiring decisions with an emphasis upon commitment to the mission of the organization.

In the context of the study, this framework suggests an equal importance upon hiring and development of project managers as a key to successful project completion. These two concepts individually represent multiple sub-concepts as depicted, yet both share the connection to mission sub concept. This idea may in fact become of greater influence as the research study progresses given its impact upon both selection and education and development.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following set of terms have been defined as they may be unfamiliar to readers.

*Critical success factors.* The key elements which contribute to the success of an event or organization (Zamani & Izhar, 2017).

*Mission statement.* Statement which expresses the reason for the existence of an organization. It captures the purpose and guides the practices (Forehand, 2000).

*Nonprofit organization.* Organizations which are non-governmental and lack a profit motive. Organizations which deliver public services and seek to make a social difference (Erkoc, 2011).

*Outsourcing.* The process of gaining a product or service formerly completed internally from an outside company (Dolgui & Proth, 2013).

*Professional development.* Education is a broad process of gaining varied experiences by an individual while training is a specific set of tasks related directly to work behavior.

*Project.* Temporary undertakings intended to create a product, service, or result by predefining a schedule, cost, and quality (Marinaccio & Trojanowski, 2012).

*Project management.* Process of planning, obtaining, organizing, and controlling resources within time and budgetary constraints to achieve the goals of a project (de Souza, Carneiro, & Bandeira-de-Mello, 2015).

*Scope creep.* Occurs when additional tasks are added to the project after the project scope has been established (Kuprenas & Nasr, 2003).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations**

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations may impact the quality and conclusions of studies and are fully considered. Assumptions are underlying concepts which although critical to the study, may be out of the researcher's control and scope of study. Limitations may be weaknesses in the study while delimitations are intentional boundaries set by the researcher on the study.

**Assumptions.** Assumptions in research are similar to assumptions individuals make daily without thought or consideration as to the impacts upon the outcome. They are often based upon past experience and for the purposes of research, are acknowledged as innate to the study, though

not necessarily proven and validated (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2009). Assumptions help form the foundation of the study, yet are not specifically addressed within the study (Simon, 2011).

The following conditions were assumed true for the purposes of this study. Participants of this case study represented the affiliated organizations, but did not represent an entire industry when responding. It was assumed participants responded openly and honestly as to organizational practices in project manager selection and professional development opportunities for a project manager. It was also assumed participants were familiar with project management activities first hand within their organizations. Lastly, it was assumed participants desired to improve their existing project management processes or contribute to other local nonprofit organizations' success in this area.

While the researcher made these assumptions within the study, these assumptions were addressed with the participants to mitigate the inherent risk within the study. Participants understood their responses were meant to provide greater insight into their organization's practices. Participants had the opportunity to understand the scope of this study to opt in or out depending upon their comfort level. Finally, participants had the opportunity to review all work as related to their organizations prior to the completed study to verify accuracy.

**Limitations.** Limitations represent ideas and factors which are out of the researcher's control and thus represent potential weaknesses to the study (Simon, 2011). As a qualitative case study, this study focused upon a limited number of participants in a very limited market. Only three organizations were directly considered as a part of this study, and all participants were geographically located in Alaska which is notoriously labeled as an outlier culturally from the rest of the United States and certainly from the global community. Secondly, the participating

organizations only represented nonprofit organizations in the human services or religious category and thus did not represent all nonprofit organizations operating in Alaska.

**Delimitations.** Delimitations are completely within the control of the researcher and are intentional boundaries on the project scope set by the researcher (Simon, 2011). These are intended to limit the scope of the study, but are not intended to skew the results of the study. The researcher carefully considered which boundaries were most appropriate for the study.

The group of participants were limited to nonprofit organizations in the human services or religious fields currently providing services to the state of Alaska. Additionally, the selected participants represented small to medium sized nonprofit organizations which typically have more resource constriction than do large nonprofit organizations. The choice to limit to organizations within these fields and of this size was due to the prevalence of these organizations within Alaska. Due to the remote settings around the state, many organizations operate in an isolated manner, yet could benefit from modeling after organizations of similar size, structure, and mission. Larger nonprofit organizations with significant funding were outside the scope of this study as were nonprofit organizations servicing industries such as healthcare, environmental, and arts.

### **Significance of the Study**

Understanding the implications of both selecting the right project manager as well as training a project manager has benefits across industries. However, this study specifically addressed an often-overlooked subset of industry as most are known more for the social benefits than for their business acumen. Nonprofit organizations stand to gain more capacity by learning and implementing the best practices in hiring and training project managers for success. This

study intended to illuminate the existing gaps in literature, integrate biblical principles, and contributed to the greater body of knowledge related to project management.

**Reduction of gaps.** This study attempted to reduce the gap in literature by focusing on project management techniques as implemented by nonprofit organizations. Specifically, the process through which organizations select the project manager and what steps are taken to educate and train that individual for further project and organizational success. The existing body of literature is extensive as it relates to project manager selection and education, yet there exists a significant deficit in research directly related to nonprofit organizations.

**Nonprofit organizations.** This study was important as it links existing literature of project management with that of nonprofit leadership and organization in an attempt to provide direction for nonprofit organizations with project management needs. The design of this study focused directly upon nonprofit organizations' current business practices as it relates to project management to gain a better understanding of what factors direct these organizations and why existing literature has not been widely applied in these organizations. The study offered greater insight into the reasons why this was the case and what nonprofit organizations can do to increase their rate of project success in the future.

**Implications for Biblical integration.** The Creator of the universe created mankind to glorify Himself through serving others (Van Duzer, 2010). The purpose for His children is clear as loving others and walking in wisdom demonstrate the heart of Jesus to the lost and hurting. Project management supports the concepts of stewardship over a given set of resources- whether financial, time, or human capital to achieve a goal. Nonprofit organizations exist to meet the needs of a hurting or spiritually lost people within local communities. The very mission and heart

of these organizations so often glorifies God, yet these very organizations often struggle most with stewardship of the so called “limited” resources at their disposal.

***Stewardship.*** God is the provider of all resources, and miraculously meets the needs of His children, and still there is an expectation that the resources given be managed in a God-glorifying manner as this too points others to Jesus. In the book of Matthew 25 verses 14-30, Jesus tells a story of a traveling master who entrusts his fortune to three of his slaves. Two of the slaves invest his fortune while the third does not. The master blesses the two wise stewards saying “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” Responsibly managing the resources God has provided honors Him and expands the vehicle through which His love is demonstrated to others. Hardy (1990) equated this to being the representatives of God through cultivating the resources He has provided for the benefit of others. In this, God’s purpose for mankind is made evident.

This study attempted to highlight the benefits of successful project management as it relates to the stewardship as well as the mission of nonprofit organizations. It intended to bridge the gap between the existing literature on project management and nonprofit organizations and presented in a manner which spoke to these organizations’ worldview and encouraged stewardship and serving others.

**Relationship to project management.** Project management is one of the fastest developing areas of business, driven in large part by the cultural shift as businesses become project focused as a means of achieving business goals (Dulaimi, 2005). Existing literature continues to emphasize areas such as techniques, leadership styles, project life cycles, and other

related areas. This study intended to add a sub-study focused on a specific type of organization with specific needs which differ from mainstream research.

***Nonprofit organizations.*** Nonprofit organizations, like government organizations, face divergent challenges from private companies, thus the manner in which they tackle projects or hire and develop leaders often differs. Due to competing needs, it appears the consensus in existing literature does not account for nonprofit challenges. This study intended to consider the existing literature as well as the divergent needs of these organizations in an attempt to develop areas of further study which will begin to shift the nonprofit culture toward greater utilization of project management.

**Summary of the significance of the study.** With the prevalence of project based activities in both for profit and nonprofit organizations, it is becoming critical to assess current conditions as well as existing literature to identify ways in which nonprofit organizations might improve project success rates while simultaneously remaining true to their missions and goals. Although nonprofit organizations exist for different purposes than for-profit organizations, they must also seek ways in which they can accomplish the organizational goals in the most efficient and responsible way possible.

The existing body of literature on project management is tremendous, yet fails to adequately address nonprofit organizations and their specific needs. This qualitative case study intended to begin the conversation and provide a framework for moving organizational culture bound by current expectations to one in which project management techniques may be applied for the betterment of the organization. Additionally, many of the organizations considered have a simultaneous mission of serving Christ, thus the Christ based stewardship element will play a critical role in better understanding these organizations.

## A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

As project management becomes more prevalent in business culture and practice, nonprofit organizations and government entities must determine what benefits a project management method might have upon the organization, and how to implement effective project management techniques. Currently, these organizations generally do not often effectively manage projects, and further fail to successfully select and train the leader of the project. While literature is abundant as related to project management, nonprofit organizations, and the selection and training of organizational leaders, few studies have addressed project management and leadership specifically related to nonprofit organizations. A review of the literature begins with an overview of nonprofit organizations and how they function. Following this examination of the unique characteristics of nonprofit organizations, the literature review focused upon project management principles. After this introduction to project management and its benefits, the literature review narrowed down to selecting the right project manager to lead a project. Finally, the literature review focused upon organization's treatment of continuing education opportunities once a project manager was selected. A visual roadmap of the literature review is provided below to aid the reader in understanding how the literature review is structured.



*Figure 2.* Literature Review Structure.

**Nonprofit organizations.** Nonprofit organizations provide a unique niche within the economy and local communities. They contribute to both the local economy as well as the social needs of the community. In fact, it is estimated these organizations contribute roughly 10 percent of the U.S. economy as well as providing significant impact upon the quality of life of communities (Lecy, Ashley, & Santamarina, 2019). These organizations exist to fulfil a unique purpose, and are not limited to any particular industry. They may strategically operate as either a private business or a governmental organization, or perhaps a hybrid of both depending upon the specific mission of the organization. These concepts will be discussed in further detail below.

***Definitions of nonprofit organizations.*** Nonprofit organizations exist to meet a specific and defined mission rather than the goal of maximizing value. These organizations intentionally exist to solve some of the most difficult challenges a community faces in areas such as public health, education, and environmental (Bixler & Springer, 2018). As such, Berlan (2018) contended they exist specifically to support public needs and provide public services as expressed through their organizational mission statement.

The National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities has developed a classification system used by the Internal Revenue Service for the purposes of organizing organizations committed to a mission. This body has designated 10 categories in eight major groups, including: public protection, employment, food, housing, public safety and disaster relief, recreation, youth development, and human services (Norris-Tirrell, 2014). Nonprofit organizations generally fall into one of these categories and the classification is supported by the organization's mission and purpose statement. Organizations may exist as special interest groups such as political organizations or professional associations, they may support vulnerable populations within society, and they may be rooted in religious beliefs (Lecy et al., 2019). Though many

organizations are classified as charitable organizations, for the purposes of this study, only those with the designation of nonprofit organization were considered.

*Mission statements.* It is clear to see nonprofit organizations exist to serve a unique and critical function within communities as they bridge the gap between a private company and a government agency. They are often the front lines of challenging issues within society, and the individuals who volunteer or are employed by such organizations are passionate supporters of the mission of the organization. Since mission statements are a critical element for a nonprofit organization, some added insight into these is appropriate.

According to Forehand (2000), mission statements express the organization's reason for being, conveys identity, and articulates the focus, purpose, and direction. It is meant to be inspiring and provides stability during changing times. Mission statements serve the purpose of establishing purpose, motivating employees, and guiding the organizational strategy (Berlan, 2018) and they provide a powerful strategic tool for organizations seeking to direct an organization of any type (Pandey, Kim, & Pandey, 2017).

While mission statements are common in private companies as well as government agencies and nonprofit organizations, they deserve a second look in concert with nonprofit organizations. Mission statements allow an organization to explain the purpose of the organization as well as provide a framework for leaders in guiding the organization forward. These statements enable nonprofit organizations to strengthen social networks, sustain social capital, and build community (Mendel & Brudney, 2014). While research argues the necessity of these statements to a nonprofit's organizational strategy, few researchers contest the concept of a mission statement as critical to the strategy of the organization (Souder, 2016). Though mission statements may be evaluated and found lacking for several reasons, regardless of how strong a

mission statement, the nonprofit organization exists for the greater social good rather than for the financial profit.

Mission statements serve a secondary function within nonprofit organizations. It is the vehicle through which organizational effectiveness can be measured. Since the mission and goal of nonprofit organizations is never focused upon profit maximization, traditional financial measurements will not adequately measure effectiveness. The mission statement provides the foundation to asking the question “is the organization healthy and achieving a social benefit?” and allows an organization’s leadership the basis for answering that question. It provides the communication method for delivering periodic updates as to the health of the organization if used strategically (Souder, 2016).

*Economic and financial structure.* In addition to operating under these unique mission and purpose statements, nonprofit organizations also may be defined by their unique economic and financial structures. Sanders, Harper, and Richardson (2015) explained the nonprofit organizations’ unique position as an organization which operates in the space between a private entity and as a champion of the common good within a community. In this, they operate as a hybrid between a government and a private corporation.

While many for profit business techniques can be applied within operations of a nonprofit organization, by nature the very mission of the organization differs, and therefore certain elements will differ. Similarly, nonprofit organizations do not function as a government agency existing to take a loss for the public good. These organizations focus upon motivations and incentives which differ from private companies as discussed in the prior section of this review.

Corporate governance standards exist to help explain the relationship between the organization and the balance of power. Typically, a for-profit organization has an owner as well

as stakeholders, and the balance of power is distributed in such a manner as to support the goal which is to maximize the value of the organization (Bradford, Guzmán, Restrepo, & Trujillo, 2018). Unlike a private company, however, nonprofit organizations do not have an owner, but rather operate under the control of a board, or a governing body depending upon the organization. If the nonprofit organization is small, it might be operated by the founder rather than a board, however, that founder is not considered an owner but more a steward of the resources gained.

According to Kamaruddin and Ramli (2018), the governing individuals are often fierce supporters of the services the nonprofit organization provides. They may have little knowledge or skills in operating a business or maintaining the finances of the organization, but they fully support the mission of the organization. Their strengths reside in the skills they possess in providing services and meeting the societal needs. With no ownership, nonprofit organizations may experience significant growing pains and turnover as the leadership and governing individuals change. This may in part be due to weak internal controls which are intended to create reliability, effectiveness of operations, and compliance with laws and regulations (Kamaruddin & Ramli, 2018).

*Donors.* Nonprofit organizations are financially dependent upon various external donors, rather than upon internal capital funding or upon the profits reinvested (Pope, Saigal, & Key, 2015). These potential donors include governments, clients, employees, communities, and boards (Velli & Sirakoulis, 2018). Due to this dependence, many nonprofit organizations are resource deprived and base much of their decisions and strategy upon this limitation (Pope et al., 2015). Interestingly, more and more nonprofit organizations are turning to a model in which they have a secondary arm of the organization which is revenue generating to create another stream of

income to better serve the mission of the organization and reduce dependency upon other sources (Seo, 2016).

*Challenges of nonprofit organizations.* Nonprofit organizations face unique challenges unlike governmental and private organizations. These challenges include managing the necessary human capital including volunteers, organizational resilience, and funding management. While other challenges may impact organizations, these are common to nearly all nonprofit organizations. Other vulnerabilities nonprofit organizations struggle with include drifting from the intended mission as defined in the mission statement, the age and size of the organization, and the networking abilities of the organization. These unique challenges represent vulnerabilities for nonprofit organizations and are often the very reasons these organizations struggle to survive (Zhai, Watson, Gilchrist, & Newby, 2017).

*Donations.* Organizations which are highly dependent upon funding from donations and government grants struggle with the ability to consistently meet the needs of those they serve when funding fluctuates. Highly successful nonprofit organizations have achieved organizational resilience which is the ability to fluctuate with the ever-changing economic conditions in which it operates (Witmer & Mellinger, 2016). West and Ries (2018) likened this to continually assessing risk and developing risk management strategies. These strategies allow the organization to bend and change as funding and human resources fluctuate.

*Human capital.* Nonprofit organizations depend heavily upon human capital to meet the needs of their target beneficiaries. These individuals may be either employees or volunteers, and organizations often have a combination of both. This presents two challenges. The first, is recruiting and retaining qualified employees. Historically, nonprofit organizations struggle with limited resources which translates into lower salaries and reduced benefits (Suh, 2018). The

organization must find individuals who are willing to work for less, yet stay with the organization long term.

The second challenge is in managing volunteers. Many nonprofit organizations depend upon volunteers to achieve the organization's mission, yet keeping these volunteers engaged is challenging. The cost of training new volunteers can be staggering, and matching a volunteer's skill set with an activity is a crucial aspect for retention (Brayko, Houmanfar, & Ghezzi, 2016). Additionally, volunteer reliability is a continual struggle or organizations may not be able to accommodate beneficiaries if volunteers fail to show up as planned (Vantilborgh & Van Puyvelde, 2018).

The third common challenge is perhaps the most difficult and is unique to nonprofit organizations. Funding and fundraising represent some of the greatest challenges faced by these organizations. Financial dependence upon donors or grants can result in unfunded needs, especially in a down economy. Budgeting and strategy activities prove difficult when projected revenue is not realized (West & Ries, 2018). Additionally, with donations and grants comes the expectation of donor expectations, and reporting activities (West & Ries, 2018). While nonprofit organizations are only required to track basic financial information (Jones & Mucha, 2014), certain grants have added requirements. Depending upon the source, this may require a significant amount of staff time to pull together reporting.

The fourth common challenge relates back to the mission statement of the organization. Too often, an organization experiences mission drift which may be due to either internal or external pressure. External factors may include donor requirements, government reporting or standards, or community desires, as well as environmental changes. These pressures may all cause organizations to begin shifting from the intended organizational mission. While this is not

inherently bad, organizations should remain aware of drifting and should continue to clearly articulate and adhere to the mission of the organization (Zhai et al., 2017).

The fifth common challenge faced by organizations is that of the networking opportunities. As previously discussed, these organizations rely on revenue from donors, grants, and government agencies, rather than solely upon revenue produced through the sale of goods and services. Additionally, these organizations exist to provide benefits to the community, whether that be in the health and social services, art appreciation, or environmental concerns. As such, networking is a more critical activity for these organizations than even for profit organizations. According to Zhai et al. (2017), networking and cooperation is the foundation for nonprofit organizational relationships. Networking allows the organizations to share knowledge and best practices with other nonprofit organizations, potentially seek to share resources for the greater community good, and reach new, previously unreached donors (Zhai et al., 2017).

Finally, the sixth challenge for nonprofit organizations is their age and size. Research indicates smaller and newer organizations struggle to survive and fail to thrive at a greater rate – about twenty times more likely - than older established organizations and larger organizations (Zhai et al., 2017). This is perhaps due in part to the five previously mentioned challenges as smaller and newer organizations lack the donor base which older organizations have fought to gain over time. Newer organizations may not have the same extended network to work within, and may have limited access to volunteers simply due to their relatively small footprint within a community.

In conclusion, the term nonprofit organization is a broad concept in which communities seek to assign purpose and structure to an organization. Generally speaking, these organizations are neither government agencies nor private corporations. They cannot be evaluated solely upon

economic terms, but one must also take into consideration the social needs they address. These organizations face unique struggles as they operate with constrained resources and in ever changing environmental conditions. Nonprofit organizations operate within communities to fill the gap between government services and private companies. While they contribute materially to a local economy, their purpose remains in meeting some altruistic need within the community, and this is a significant part of evaluating whether a nonprofit organization is successful.

*Societal impacts.* With all the unique characteristics of nonprofit organizations and the challenges they routinely face to remain solvent, these organizations unequivocally provide real economic and societal benefits within their respective communities. Both the societal and economic benefits were considered in the following sections. While the social benefits may be common to many within a community, the economic impacts are only recently gaining attention.

*Value.* As organizations successfully fulfil their missions, value is created by strengthening social networks, sustaining social capital, building community, and building trusting relationships between government, businesses, and nonprofit organizations in community (Mendel & Brudney, 2014). Several specific benefits can be identified as organizations impact society. These benefits include innovation, public policy, community needs, community involvement, and economic growth.

*Innovation.* The first benefit is that of innovation. Nonprofit organizations have a long history of innovation and organizational culture, largely in part due to the challenges they face daily. These organizations contribute to the development of new business ideas as they seek to creatively meet the needs of their beneficiaries within the budgetary and human capital constraints.

This innovation and creativity ultimately is launched into the private sector and into local communities. Similarly, nonprofit organizations historically have an incredibly strong organizational culture surrounding the organizational mission. This strong culture creates positive benefits for the organization, but also for the local community as individuals connected to the organization remain close knit outside the organization. Lessons learned from nonprofit organizational culture are also being considered and replicated in for profit companies as organizational culture can provide clear benefits to an organization (Langer & LeRoux, 2017).

*Public policy.* The second benefit is upon public policy. Nonprofit organizations have a dramatic impact upon public policy and social change as they navigate local government regulations while attempting to further their mission and serve their beneficiaries (Bixler & Springer, 2018). Since the 1970s, the United States has seen public policy changes directly because of lobbying and advocacy and outreach conducted by nonprofit organizations on behalf of their beneficiaries. Importantly, these include changes in the human services responses within the United States (Norris-Tirrell, 2014).

*Community needs.* The third benefit can be considered the boots on the ground reality within local communities. As identified, nonprofit organizations exist to address complex needs within communities. These include shelters, employment programs, child protection and foster care, mental health programs and more. Many of these programs operated by nonprofits are programs which governments or private agencies cannot or will not oversee, yet through partnership with nonprofits, the needs are met (Norris-Tirrell, 2014).

*Community involvement.* Contrasting the third benefit of meeting community needs, the fourth benefit is building community involvement through volunteerism. Communities and organizations which volunteer are building lasting relationships and sharing skills and

knowledge with one another all benefiting the community while simultaneously benefiting the nonprofit organization. In this, the nonprofit can be considered a vehicle for knowledge sharing and community building. Due to the recent rise in corporate volunteerism, community involvement now lends itself to networking and partnerships which the nonprofit organization formerly struggled to attain (Samuel, Wolf, & Schilling, 2013).

*Economic growth.* Finally, though not nearly as altruistic as the other societal benefits, nonprofit organizations contribute economically to their communities. For example, volunteerism alone contributed an estimated 7.9 billion hours within the United States, translating into nearly \$184 billion to the US economy (Vantilborgh & Van Puyvelde, 2018). Economic impact comes from direct expenditures contributing to the overall economy, as well as through job creation.

In Alaska, the nonprofit sector employs 39,000 people, and nationally, this sector employs just over 10 percent of the workforce (McMillian, Wolf, & Cutting, 2015). Many programs operated by nonprofit organizations focus on employment, education, and general welfare, all of which contribute to beneficiaries gaining long-term employment and thereby adding to the economy themselves. Interestingly, nonprofit organizations increase the employment rate of vulnerable people. These individuals often need additional support, but are capable of contributing to the overall economy through employment, and often find nonprofit organizations are the perfect vehicle for employment (Nicolăescu, Cace, & Cace, 2012).

*Comparison to governmental and private organizations.* As previously shown, nonprofit organizations differ from both governmental agencies and for-profit companies in a variety of ways. Nonprofit organizations fill the gaps between the two types of organizations and are in and of themselves the third layer of agency in a community. They share similarities with the other

two types of agency while still holding distinct characteristics. The comparison between the three types of agency will be discussed further in the next section.

Nonprofit organizations function similarly to government agencies in that they exist to provide for the public good through producing goods or services at conceivably no cost to those who need the benefits. These organizations operate under limited funding and do not distribute profits to any owner group. Government agencies often provide these services at a loss, whereas nonprofit agencies do seek to operate with the funds they have without taking a loss. This is necessary for sustainability of the programs, whereas government agencies receive their funding from difference sources. Recently, governments are finding efficiencies by simply contracting with nonprofits to meet the needs they are statutorily required to address, which indicates the level of efficiency many nonprofits are beginning to achieve (Norris-Tirrell, 2014).

Unlike government agencies, for-profit companies exist to maximize financial value and to distribute profit to owners or stakeholders (Bradford et al., 2018). These organizations may provide social benefits, and indeed are beginning to trend this direction, yet historically, they have existed for the sake of financial gain alone. For-profit companies pay significant attention to their financials and return on investment, and although nonprofit organizations do not have the same level of focus, they are aware of their financial bottom line. Nonprofit organizations do not have an owner, but rather individuals who are charged with stewarding the mission of the organization.

*Professionalization of the nonprofit sector.* Given the challenges faced by nonprofit organizations, and the increasing need for revenue from donors and grants, many nonprofit organizations are seeking ways in which to achieve efficiencies and greater productivity. This movement is known as professionalization in the nonprofit sector, and involves choices such as

implementing various managerial techniques, utilizing a greater number of paid employees instead of volunteers, and entering into strategic alliances with partners or businesses (Sanzo-Perez, Rey-García, & Álvarez-González, 2017).

Dobrai and Farkas (2016) defined professionalization as the implementation of business strategies leading organizations to become market oriented. In other words, professionalization involves organizations executing strategies and tasks with skill and a professional manner which ultimately provides the services at a higher level. The individuals providing services are highly trained and skilled individuals who could do the same work in the private or government sector, but have chosen to use those skills within the nonprofit organization and are compensated for those skills.

Many organizations turning this direction focus upon organizational development which is a process for planning change and innovation within an organization (Dobrai & Farkas, 2016). This is an intentional process through which organizations begin to professionalize certain tasks and standards in such a way as to gain efficiencies and productivity internally. The study of professionalization in nonprofit organizations is in its infancy with research proving to be a mixed bag when it comes to whether professionalization is truly a benefit to organizations serving the public good. While professionalization can aid in areas such as transparency and accountability, organizations may also run the risk of losing sight of the mission. Additionally, while some research suggests professionalization leads to greater grant issuance, other research hints at a reduction in grant making levels due to the administrative expenses (Stewart & Faulk, 2014). Although this topic is outside the bounds of this research study, the concept of professionalization is likely to play a part in the perspectives of the organizations studied and how they strategically determine who is assigned as a project manager.

McMillian et al. (2015) stated the significance of nonprofit organizations succinctly and beautifully as nonprofit organizations “help fill the gap between government services and critical community needs. They...bring activities to the public in ways that aren’t supported by commercial endeavors and... are at the forefront of building communities, creating change, and driving innovation” (p. 35). These organizations are at the heart of every community and not only are the social drivers, but also provide great economic impact to local communities in a niche market that government agencies and for-profit companies simply cannot reach effectively. With a focus upon both functioning similarly to a private entity as well as maintaining the position of champion of the common good, these organizations serve a valuable mission to a community (Sanders et al., 2015).

**Project Management.** With project management becoming the dominant business process in strategic and complex organizational change (Hyatali & Fai Pun, 2016), a brief review into the literature on project management is advisable. Project management can be defined as the planning, organizing, monitoring, and controlling of all aspects of a project coupled with the management and leadership required to reach the successful completion of a project (Lo, Shen, & Chen, 2017). It is a rapidly growing component within organizations of any type as organizations transition to using projects to accomplish both large scale and small scale actions supporting the organizations goals or mission. Understanding projects and project management as well as what leads to successful projects is a critical success factor for organizations seeking to remain sustainable in the future (Wenu & Tan, 2019). The following section is intended to provide deeper insight into the history and definitions of project management and the benefits of successfully managing projects, as well as a discussion surrounding the methodology in selecting projects and managing them as a portfolio to balance an organizations resources. Such a

discussion is critically important for nonprofit organizations which typically are resource dependent and resource strapped.

***Project management defined.*** Project management dates back to the days of the creation of the great pyramids and the Great Wall of China. In the United States, the first organized government use of project management is thought to be the transcontinental railroad (Flom & Wolf, 2016). It was not until 1954 that the term project management was formally created summing up the activities organizations and people have used for generations; and with that formalization, came the emergence of an emerging field of study.

Project management became more widely utilized from the 1960s to mid-1980s, after which various standards and guidelines began to emerge. Organizations such as the Project Management Institute (PMI), the International Project Management Association, and others, released standards such as the widely accepted PMBOK guide through which organizations can discover best practices for implementation (Lo et al., 2017). The purpose of these organizations and guidelines are to help standardize the industry and to share best practices among participants as project management continues to be a growing area of interest amongst organizations. With the development of this area of study, organizations and individuals can now identify the full project and process life cycle which creates a higher level of competence in project managers and project teams (Crayon, Tatiana Patton, & Steigerwald, 2017).

***Definitions.*** A project is a temporary set of activities taken to produce a product or service (Gomes, Oliveira, & Chaves, 2018). Projects typically have four common characteristics: time-bound with start and end date, have a defined budget, clear goal, and anticipated outcome (Ezerarslan & Koç Aytakin, 2018). Projects not only involve activities, budgets, and time, but

also involve a set of individuals including financiers, stakeholders, organizations, teams, and a project leader (Săvescu, 2018).

Consequently, project management is the process of carrying out the project and involves achieving the project goals within the four common constraints of scope, time, cost, and quality while providing direction and updates to the project's key individuals. Săvescu (2018) defined project management as the sum of knowledge applied to budget management, quality management, and the expectations of individuals over a given period of time. Abyad (2018) wrote project management requires the application of knowledge and skills to create and implement a project plan to meet the needs of the stakeholder. More pointedly, Flom and Wolf (2016) stated project management is the very act of "assembling people to systematically achieve a shared goal."

In this viewpoint, project management is not simply about tasks and activities, but more importantly is about bringing people together around those activities. Due to the emphasis upon people when considering project, one can see the importance of a good project manager, or leader. This person would not only have the responsibility for tracking activities, but for leading a team of people and maintaining focus upon the goal of the organization (Keren et al., 2014). This will be a crucial consideration for nonprofit organizations going forward as project management can be successfully utilized even in organizations which might not consider the return on investment (ROI) as the only success factor. Successful project management involves the ability to understand and manage the activities and resources involved in the project to explain what needs to be done, how long that will take and how much the project will cost (Flom & Wolf, 2016). Any one of the previous four constraints can cause major issues with a project and can derail an organization.

*Types of projects.* As organizations begin shifting to incorporating project based activities and goals, it is important to note the various kinds of projects it might encounter as the project leader might vary depending upon the project. For example, projects might be large multinational in nature, or they may be smaller and exist for a shorter duration. They may be based upon the objective of the organization such as cultural or social projects, or they may be managerial projects.

Projects are often thought to produce a tangible outcome, for example, a newly constructed building, or a road system. This is perhaps due to the deep roots of projects in construction. However, the outcome of a project may not only be a tangible product based upon physical work, but also an intangible product produced by physical work, a tangible product using intellectual properties of the organization, or an intangible product based upon intellectual capabilities of the organization (Săvescu, 2018). The distinction between the product of projects is a crucial element as nonprofit organizations begin utilizing projects to complete initiatives, and as they seek to effectively manage their resources and appoint project managers.

*Risk.* A significant amount of research has focused upon organizational risk. Projects of any kind are inherently risky and can either positively or negatively impact an organization. Risk is, very simply, an uncertain event which may have positive or negative consequences (Galli, 2017). Risk management entails the steps an organization takes to mitigate and manage the two areas of risk: that of hazard such as error and mishaps and that of opportunity (Ryu, Lim, & Suh, 2016).

Projects have multiple risk points which should be vetted within the planning phase of the project life cycle. Risk may appear in technical, operational, organizational, financial, and strategic areas of a project, and all must be considered as a part of the project manager's risk

management strategy (de Araujo Lima & Verbano, 2019). Given that project management involves tracking and monitoring activities, time, budget, and resources, risk management is a critical area for an organization to address when it comes to achieving project success. A variety of tools have been developed to assist a project manager in conducting risk analysis, yet project risk management is an area of continued research as project managers continue to struggle with mitigating and managing risk (de Araujo Lima & Verbano, 2019).

*Project manager.* With the evolution of project management over the past several decades, research is shifting from the project and project life cycle to the project manager and his or her capabilities. A project manager's primary goal is to meet the objectives of the project (Afzal, Khan, & Mujtaba, 2018).

Competencies are casually related to the successful achievement of goals (Hanna, Iskandar, Lotfallah, Ibrahim, & Russell, 2018). Afzal et al. (2018) concluded there is a positive correlation between the project manager's characteristics and success of the project. The project manager is quickly being identified as one of the critical success factors of a project because it is the individual's leadership and oversight of the activities and individuals which brings the project to completion. Good project managers make the connection between the project and the goals of the organization and bring that connection to the project team (Keren et al., 2014).

When organizations are selecting a project manager, they should be selecting based upon a set of skills and knowledge necessary for the project. These organizations are looking for the competency, or the ability to complete something successfully and efficiently (Crayon et al., 2017). Competency, emotional intelligence and leadership tactics such as transformational leadership are all elements of a project manager's characteristics which point to project success (Afzal et al., 2018).

Interestingly, not all competencies are equal, and depending upon the project, organization, and project goals, certain competencies should weight heavier than others (Hanna et al., 2018). Emotional intelligence is the ability of an individual to build solid relationship between followers and the leader and covers two core ideas: emotional sensitivity and emotional expressiveness (Pryke, Lunic, & Badi, 2015). Leaders with high emotional intelligence can both perceive and express emotion which aids in relationship building and trust between a project manager and a team. Finally, project managers with a transformational leadership style can lead team members from a self-centered state to one in which all team members are working toward a common goal (Afzal et al., 2018). The ability to evaluate activities, foster trust, and pull a team of individuals together creates a powerful project manager who can lead organization's projects to success. The selection of project managers is a key tenant within this study, and existing research will be discussed in further detail in a future section of the literature review.

*Benefits of project management.* Why do organizations conduct project management activities and what are the benefits to these organizations? Drabikova and Svetlik (2018) stated that these techniques allow businesses to effectively and efficiently link organizational strategy with the results of a project. This enables the organization to communicate the mission of the organization while linking it to real results regardless of the type of organization or industry in which it operates.

Projects may be used to generate innovation or growth within an organization, or they may be used to create a product or service for customers (Turner & Ledwith, 2018). In this, project may be purely for internal and long term strategic benefit, or may be more specifically for the benefit of the customers. Given the fast-paced advancing markets most businesses operate

within, project management allows for businesses to achieve customer satisfaction while enhancing organizational efficiency (Drabikova & Svetlik, 2018).

Project management provides organizations with a framework for strategically approaching risk, improving internal communications and stakeholder buy-in, and developing a product or service in time and on budget (Hubble & Spitulnik, 2016). Perhaps most importantly in literature is the concept of risk management in project management. This management technique allows organizations to more effectively manage or mitigate risk in any possible manner as it applies to the cost, schedule, and technical aspects of activities leading towards the goals (Solomon, 2015).

Nonprofit organizations which implement project management techniques can experience these same benefits. Additionally, nonprofit organizations can utilize project management techniques to ensure projects or potential projects are linked to the organizational mission and meet the needs of the beneficiaries of the organization. Internal processes can be either developed or strengthened through the use of project management, and interestingly, these techniques aid in the recruitment and development of staff or volunteers. Finally, successful use of projects within nonprofit organizations enables these organizations to collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, continuing the goal of strategic networking and community involvement (Batti, 2015).

***Project Selection.*** With the importance of projects and project management defined, the next section of this literature review focuses on project selection and how organizations choose which projects to pursue. Each organization and each industry is unique, and therefore the selection of projects will not always fit into the same criteria. However, all organizations can evaluate a project based upon three concepts: organizational strategy and mission, resource

capacity, and the existing project portfolio. These three areas will be studied in the following section.

Organizational mission and vision. While project management has proven to be a highly beneficial management tool, ensuring the projects and the management of projects is aligned with the organization's strategy remains a point of failure for many organizations (Hyatali & Fai Pun, 2016). When considering whether to pursue a proposed project, organizations should filter this potential project through the mission or strategy of the organization.

The mission provides purpose through which members not only work together to fulfil, but also internalize the purpose (Stephenson, Rothlisberger, & Westover, 2017). The mission of the organization provides benefits including retention and engagement of stakeholders, specifically in the nonprofit sector through the internalization of the organizational mission. As an organization seeks ways to fulfil its mission, projects are a primary mechanism for implementing strategy or achieving organizational mission clearly (Messikomer & Kanabar, 2015). Hyatali and Fai Pun (2016) indicated projects are the primary method for achieving strategic organizational change and are necessary for the organization to maintain a competitive advantage and sustainability. The project selection process should be a direct result of the organization's strategic direction or mission statement (Criscuolo, Dahlander, Grohsjean, & Salter, 2017), and it involves both qualitative and quantitative methods for selecting a project. Due to the dynamic internal and external characteristics of organizational strategy, it is important to consider this strategy when selecting projects (Arifin, Moersidik, Hartono, Latief, & Budi Soesilo, 2015). Project portfolios will be discussed in more detail in a future section; however, this tool is a valuable resource for organizations as they can be the link between the strategy and the project (Arifin et al., 2015).

*Resource capacity.* The second concept in selecting projects is that of resource capacity, or scarcity. Resources may be renewable or non-renewable and include the materials needed to produce a good or service, the human capital to produce the good or service, and the financial resources to complete the project within the allotted timeframe (Campos-Ciro, Dugardin, Yalaoui, & Kelly, 2016).

One of the primary drivers for selecting a project is whether the organization has the necessary resources- financial, human capital, and time- to successfully complete the project (Takami, Sheikh, & Sana, 2018). Some organizations believe the more resources they have the lower the constraints will be, but this is an inaccurate assumption according to Zhang, Song, and Díaz (2017). Instead, organizations must account for the leveling of resources to gain economic efficiencies. Resource over-allocation is a common issue within organizations attempting to balance multiple projects simultaneously, and is therefore a major consideration prior to beginning a new project (Delgoshaei, Rabczuk, Ali, & Ariffin, 2017). Organizations must consider whether they will have the needed resources at the time they are needed prior to beginning the project.

*Project portfolio management.* The final concept to be considered when selecting a project is that of a project portfolio. Project portfolio management is the coordination of multiple projects which require the same resources and meet the same organizational goals. Portfolio management allows organizations to continually evaluate values, priorities, and conflicts for resources between the various projects it may be pursuing in an effort to reduce risk and ensure the greatest chance of success for all projects (Vacík, Špaček, Fotr, & Kracík, 2018).

Organizations with limited funding, or whose dependence is upon the financial support of donors or grants find this concept exceptionally valuable as it allows the organization to select

projects which provide only maximum benefit to the organization (Martínez-Vega et al., 2019). Benefits in this case may or may not be financial, but ultimately will support the mission of the organization as previously considered.

When choosing between a project and its alternatives given a constrained set of resources, decision makers must select the alternative which best supports to goals of the organization, and must consider the inherent risks of all alternatives. Gaining as much information as possible pertaining to alternatives is critical when considering project selection for organizational mix. Some projects may be good and may support the mission, but may not be beneficial at a point in time given the existing commitments of resources the organization has made.

Project portfolio management involves two objectives: first to evaluate and rank the potential project and second to balance the portfolio and ensure the portfolio is contributing to the overall strategy of the organization. Within these objectives, several criteria should be considered for each potential project. These criteria include: the relationship between projection selection and strategic goals, prioritization of proposals, alignment of resource allocation and strategic direction, risk balancing, and justification available to terminate projects (Confido, Wibisono, & Sunitiyoso, 2018). When organizations have carefully considered each of these criteria, it not only helps the organization gain a clearer picture of the potential project, but also helps identify resource constraints and potential risks throughout the project.

*Decision points.* Once considerations are made concerning potential projects, organizations must then make the decision on whether to pursue the project. Nonprofit organizations and government organizations have historically used a rank based system to determine which projects can be funded at the time. While this method can work as far as

assigning limited resources, it may not consider the greatest return for the resources consumed. A plethora of mathematical programming options exist in which organization can quantitatively compute factors such as resources and risk along with return. These provide the organization with the ability to evaluate options with an unbiased lens.

Yet with the availability of these programs, many nonprofit organization stick to the ranking system. Organizations may elect not to use these resources due to lack of knowledge, or because they may see these resources as stripping away the mission or reputation of the organization. Potentially, organizations might choose to utilize a hybrid approach in which some programming assists with the decision while still allowing for human control over the outcome on project selection (Wu & Messer, 2017). While these programming resources are outside the scope of this study, it is important to note there are technological advances which would support organizations in selecting projects quantitatively rather than simply heuristically.

Some researchers suggest organizations operating within resource constraints will gain better quality information about all possible projects as opposed to an organization in which any project can be funded (Boleslavsky & Cotton, 2018). From the nonprofit perspective, this is an interesting theory which may be investigated further. Few nonprofit organizations are not resource constrained; thus, this researcher would indicate these organizations have better information ahead of selecting projects.

In conclusion, project management provides several benefits to organizations seeking for a sustainable future as it allows organizations to achieve organizational growth and goals, identifies and mitigates risks, and strengthens the loyalties of stakeholders through the mission statement. Considerations when selections projects include the link to the organizational mission, resource capacity, and the existing mix of projects. This evaluation provides an opportunity for

organizations to better understand the value provided from a specific project as it relates to either profit maximization or mission furtherance.

Finally, studies show one of the most important critical success factors on a project is the selection of a competent project manager (du Randt, van Waveren, & Chan, 2014). Key characteristics organizations should be seeking in a project manager will be reviewed in the following section of the literature review and include discussion on the potential project manager's technical qualifications as well as his or her personal character traits and personal mission and value fit to that of the organization.

***Candidate Selection.*** Given the importance of the project manager's role in the success of a project, organizations must take care to select the right candidate for the project and for the organization. Candidates are selected based upon their technical qualifications including past experience, their character traits and their fit with the mission and values of the organization. Afshari (2015) referred to the three necessary skills as technical, conceptual, and human. Other research states these as technical, behavioral, and contextual. Technical competencies related to managing the project itself such as time management and project planning skills. Behavioral skills are those leadership, creativity, and commitment characteristics of the project manager. Finally, the contextual competencies relate to the nature of the project itself (Silva de Araújo & Pedron, 2015).

Research is limited in discovering the perfect process for selecting a project manager even with the understanding of these three general areas of importance (Mohammadi, Sadi, Nateghi, Abdullah, & Skitmore, 2014). The first step, however, in identifying candidates is selecting the desired criteria by which to evaluate candidates (Afshari, 2015). Organizations cannot adequately consider proposed project managers without understanding the criteria they

need from the candidate. Traditionally, organizations select project managers through the use of interviews and at the bias of the decision maker rather than upon unbiased facts uncovering the best candidate for the role (Mohammadi et al., 2014). Though mathematical processes also exist to aid organizations in selecting candidates for various positions including that of project manager, these are outside the scope of this study. For the purposes of this study, the qualitative characteristics organizations should consider will be further explored.

*Technical qualifications.* The first consideration when selecting a project manager is his or her technical qualifications. Technical competency is the knowledge and performance competency in Sadeghi, Mousakhani, Yazdani, and Delavari's project manager competency model (2014). It demonstrates the technical skills, knowledge, managerial principle knowledge and the ability to execute and control the various activities within a project. It is with these competencies managers prove their knowledge and skills through performing in the role.

Project managers come from a variety of backgrounds. Some possess project management certifications, while others were simply assigned the lead role on a project and are commonly known as occasional project managers (Hubble & Spitulnik, 2016). While it is possible to have a high level of project management certification and be a poor project manager due to the other necessary components of a good project manager, it is commonly held that those with a high level of certification are more competent than those without certifications (Keren et al., 2014).

It is understood that technical skills and qualifications do impact whether a project manager will be successful. Certifications are available at varying skill levels with the availability of six credentials through the Project Management Institute (Keren et al., 2014). These qualifications, such as a candidate's achieved education and certification along with

general and practical project management skills, help prepare an individual for the type of challenges he or she will encounter leading a project. Organizations may struggle to find this type of experience and training internally depending upon the size of the organization; however, organizations may seek an external candidate or outside contractor to facilitate the work (Kostalova et al., 2018).

In addition to a candidate's advanced training, past project success should be considered as a part of the performance competency (Sadeghi et al., 2014). Organizations should evaluate previous projects in terms of completion time, cost, and goals of the project. These details are beneficial both from the standpoint of the project manager's ability to complete the work, but also may be indicative of his or her leadership capabilities (Keren et al., 2014). As project managers complete projects, they gain valuable experience in handling the unexpected challenges which inevitably occur. This experience can only be gained through practical application of directing projects.

*Character traits.* Although a project manager's technical experience is a critical element, it is not the only factor when considering the best candidate for the position. The second consideration when selecting a project manager is the candidate's personal character traits. The project manager's personal character traits are represented in the third section of Sadeghi et al.'s (2014) competency model categorized as behavioral competency (2014). Alvarenga, Branco, do Valle, Soares, and da Silveira e Silva (2018) concluded that a balance is needed between the hard skills learned through education and experience and the soft skills such as leadership, motivation, and vision. One without the other simply will not produce a competent and successful project manager. du Randt et al. (2014) stated that a competent project manager not only demonstrates project management skills, but is also committed to the job. Saadé, Dong, and Wan (2015) stated

this concept as engagement traits. These are the traits a project manager needs to deal with uncertainty and to lead a team of individuals. Some of these so-called engagement traits are inherent to the person, while others are learned through experience.

Project managers are responsible for managing expectations of stakeholders, team members, and others. Studies show project success is influenced by the leadership qualities exhibited by the project manager (Hoxha & McMahan, 2019). Leadership may be defined as the interpersonal influence exercised and directed through the process of communication toward the attainment of a specified goal (Galvin, Gibbs, Sullivan, & Williams, 2014). Put another way, leadership is the “ability to build cohesive, goal oriented teams” (Asree, Cherikh, & Baucum, 2019).

First and foremost, the project leader has vision, honesty and integrity (DuBois, Koch, Hanlon, Nyatuga, & Kerr, 2015). The project manager has the emotional intelligence needed to identify what motivates people to complete their work and achieve their goals. A good project leader excels in communication tactics intended to produce proactive behavior and trust throughout the organization or project team (Afzal et al., 2018). Along with supporting team members’ goals and encouraging open communication, leaders provide empowerment to the project team as they work toward a common goal (Santana Lambert Marzagão & Carvalho, 2016). He or she motivates and inspires the project team, building relationships which lead to a high impact team (DuBois et al., 2015).

Leadership qualities organizations should consider when selecting a project manager include team building, clear role establishment, openness, self-confidence, organization, and the ability to reevaluate the project if necessary. When project managers possess a combination of

these qualities, not only is the likelihood of project success greater, but the project tends to run more smoothly thus further benefiting the organization and its stakeholders (DuBois et al., 2015).

*Values fit.* The third consideration when selecting a project manager is that of the mission and values fit with the organization. The person-organization fit may be defined as the match perceived by individual between their value and those of the organization (Peng, 2018). The person-organization fit tends to be subjective as it is a perceived alignment between the person and the organization, and impacts factors such as motivation and job performance (Mandalaki, Islam, Lagowska, & Tobace, 2019).

Value congruence between an individual and the organization leads to a multitude of positive outcomes for both the individual and the organization. For organizations, knowing the candidate holds the same values can predict job performance, retention, and an overall level of commitment to the organization (Stephenson et al., 2017). Employees who experience a good fit tend to feel more connected to the organization, leading them to continue to stay with the organization, experience positive attitudes and have positive behaviors while performing their job (Peng, 2018). Individuals with high person-organizational fit tend to better identify with the social group within an organization or on a team. This leads to a higher level of group identification and a more positive working group (Wen, Zhu, & Liu, 2016).

As project managers lead teams, ensuring this individual is passionate about the organizational values is critically important as he or she is the link between the organization and the project team. While seemingly altruistic, the person-organization fit consideration is typically the consideration most used in nonprofit organizations. These organizations often cannot offer the same range of salary to a project manager as the private sector. These organization must appeal to the mission and values fit to capture a leader who will oversee projects.

While some organizations may not find the value in this consideration, this is exceptionally important for most nonprofit organizations. If an organization has determined a candidate has the technical skills to do the job, and the leadership skills to motivate and inspire the team, the final hurdle is to determine whether their values match that of the organization. Part of a project leader's role is creating a culture in which people feel inspired toward a common purpose, usually the organization's mission (DuBois et al., 2015). If this is part of being a successful project manager and leading a project to successful completion, then understanding the candidate's values is critical prior to selecting a candidate.

Selecting a project manager is a critical component for project success, and concepts such as technical skills, behavioral skills, and person-organization fit are all important factors when selecting a project manager. These apply whether an organization is hiring for a single project, or hiring a permanent employee who will lead projects. But once a project manager is selected, what is the organization's role in ensuring the project manager continues learning and developing new skills? Should organizations support professional development and training opportunities for a project manager? What are the benefits of providing or at least supporting professional development and training to employees? The final section of this literature review considers these questions.

**Professional Development.** Professional development and training of staff is an important component in any industry as businesses seek to keep and develop the best and the brightest employees in the industry. Given the unique characteristics of nonprofit organizations and the challenges they are faced with, retaining qualified employees or volunteers is a critical element of organizational success (Hanna et al., 2018).

Given the potential shift from volunteerism to professionalization of nonprofit organizations as discussed previously, as well as the need to select qualified individuals to lead projects, training and continuing education cannot be overlooked as a component of nonprofit organizations. The concept of development may be broken into two categories for the sake of discussion: training and continuing education. While often used interchangeably, they meet differing needs. Training seeks to provide hard skills of a job; whereas continuing education assists in developing the individual in areas such as critical thinking, leadership, or motivation. These were considered further in the following sections.

Much of the initial research into project management success factors focused upon the hard skills of managing projects; however, recent research has overwhelmingly acknowledged the importance of the appropriate soft skills in a project manager. Both are necessary; however, research suggests soft skills are a greater influence upon project success (Saadé et al., 2015), and therefore the majority of this literature review will focus upon developing the soft skills of a project manager.

**Training.** Training is the process of showing a person skills or techniques (Wenu & Tan, 2019). Tasks or jobs which can be clearly defined are usually learned through training. With clear objectives directly related to work activities, training objectives may not take as long to achieve as perhaps education objectives might (Dulaimi, 2005).

Training project managers, therefore, involves teaching the processes, techniques, and tools needed by successful project managers (Sukhoo, Barnard, Eloff, Van der Poll, & Motah, 2005). This typically refers to the hard skills or job centered which are most commonly the processes, tools, and techniques applied to projects (Ravindranath, 2016). While organizations should select the candidate possessing these skills, new techniques and technologies develop

frequently, and it is crucial for organizations and project managers to remain up to date on the latest developments.

Additionally, nonprofit organizations may not have the luxury of hiring the most qualified individual for the job, but instead may simply assign the role of project manager to someone who is willing and able. In cases such as these, training will allow this individual the best chance at success as they learn the job centered skills necessary. Training on project management techniques is not only important for the project manager, but for the organizational leaders as well (Kostalova et al., 2018). This allows for senior management or heads of the organization to better understand what will be required to accomplish a desired project.

Skills learned through training include time management, resource management, budgeting, and many more. As technology and techniques change, it is imperative organizations and project managers remain up to date with the latest objectives through continuing to train on these job specific tasks (Dulaimi, 2005). Likely, training opportunities will be outside the organization, either through local training organizations or through organizations such as the Project Management Institute (Kostalova et al., 2018). Training often comes from formal education and degree programs as well as in textbooks (Sukhoo et al., 2005). In any case, training provides the project manager with the hard skills necessary to manage the activities of the project.

***Continuing education.*** Unlike training, continuing education or professional development typically includes development of the soft skills necessary to excel as a project manager. The focus of education is upon developing the individual and the content conceptual in nature rather than task oriented. Education develops the analytical and critical skills of the project manager (Dulaimi, 2005).

Soft skills include communication, teambuilding, creativity, leadership, and conflict management skills and will be discussed in the following sections (Ravindranath, 2016). These traits are not commonly taught in formal education settings, but are instead an area which project managers develop over time and experience. In fact, there is little opportunity to date for these skills to be developed other than from coaching (Thompson, 2019).

Project managers may gain value from coaching relationships to aid in developing these skills as it focuses on developing the personal attributes of the project manager. Coaching systematically and intensively supports the individual in achieving a desired level of performance or personal wellbeing which then ultimately leads to greater effectiveness within an organization. Unlike training which imparts knowledge, coaching meets the project manager where he or she is and focuses on developing the resources to get the individual to the desired results (Wenu & Tan, 2019).

*Conflict management and team building.* Conflict arises when a team begins to disagree over priorities, resource allocation, and quality of work (Ravindranath, 2016). When a group of people work closely together, conflict is bound to be present. Project managers work to ensure their teams are cohesive and continue to work together toward a common goal. Project managers must have the skills necessary to help teams successfully navigate conflict.

*Communication skills.* Projects are a social system, entirely dependent upon the individuals making up the team; therefore, communication skills are a critical element of a project manager. The goal of communication is to understand other and be understood while producing change (Marincea & Dascălu, 2011). Communications skills are the skills in which one has the ability to clearly express ideas in a manner in which the team advances toward the common goal (Ravindranath, 2016). This includes expectations, deadline, and complex data.

Additionally, good communication skills incorporate an open and honest demeanor which creates a trusting environment.

*Creativity.* Part of a successful project manager is his or her ability to think creatively. This soft skill is in part related to conflict management as well as problem solving. Project managers must be able to deliver a product or service on time and on budget while meeting the goals of the organization. When roadblocks appear or conflict arises, the project manager must determine the best way to accomplish the organization's goals and remain on time and on budget. This requires creativity and a complete understanding of the project characteristics as well as the team member dynamics (Ravindranath, 2016).

*Leadership.* Leadership is perhaps one of the most crucial character traits in successful project managers and is the trait most need to continue to develop. This includes the ability to motivate people toward the shared goals, inspiring them to continue toward success (Ravindranath, 2016). There are many different leadership styles in business, and while certain styles may come naturally to a project manager, it is critical to develop an understanding of the team itself and to determine which style will lead to the greatest success for the team.

Depending upon the nature of the project, the organizational culture, and the personality mix of team members and stakeholders, leadership styles should differ, and it is the responsibility of the project manager to determine which style would be most effective. Generally speaking, three leadership styles are commonly assessed, though may be present in hybrid forms. These styles are transactional, transformational, and Laissez Faire (Asree et al., 2019). Leadership skills include decision making and problem solving skills as leaders work to determine the best path toward successful completion of the project as well as team performance while on the project (Ravindranath, 2016).

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, nonprofit organizations are unique organizations which serve a particular mission for the public good. These organizations face unique struggles and receive much of their funding through grants or donor generosity; therefore, they must operate as efficiently as possible to maximize the revenue in support of the mission. Nonprofit organizations provide many benefits to communities in the form of direct services as well as indirect economic benefits and community networking, yet many remain primarily volunteer dependent. With the recent shift to professionalization, however, organizations are beginning to realize the need for greater business-like structure.

Project management is a rapidly exploding field, yet has not been fully adopted by nonprofit organizations. Projects are intended to help organizations meet strategic goals, and are becoming the preferred method of change management. Project managers, then, are one of the key success factors of a project, thus selecting the best person for that job is a critical decision point for an organization. These individuals must not only possess the technical skills to lead a project, but also must possess the leadership qualities needed to lead and motivate others as well as the problem-solving skills to work through unexpected issues during the project.

This is a highly-studied field with a wealth of research for nonprofit organizations to take advantage of. Given the mission driven existence of nonprofit organizations, many do operate projects, yet struggle to achieve success in them. Candidate selection within nonprofit organizations is a field to be explored more deeply in the future as many organizations do not simply select based on the typical education and experience qualifications.

Finally, an emphasis on training and development of project managers cannot be ignored. Continual development of skills and capabilities allow the project manager to continue to add value to an organization as he or she completes projects. Nonprofit organizations typically do not

pay employees at the same rate as a private business might, so encouraging continuing education and development is one way these organizations might encourage retention of employees long-term.

### **Transition and Summary of Section 1**

In conclusion, Section 1, the foundation of the study, included a background of the study along with the purpose and problem statements, the nature and significance of the study, and the proposed research questions. Additionally, a conceptual framework outlines the relationships between the concepts to be studied, important definitions, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were provided outlining the boundaries and direction of the study. Finally, a review of the existing literature for both project management as well as nonprofit organizations has been included to outline existing knowledge as well as highlight existing gaps in knowledge around these topics. This qualitative case study is intended to begin to fill this gap in the literature.

Section 2 of this study builds upon the foundation and insight into current nonprofit organizations' experience with project management is gained. Three organizations will be considered in depth as the researcher learns the selection process of project managers as well as the training opportunities provided to project managers.

## **Section 2: The Project**

Studying nonprofit organizations qualitatively involves selecting a specific group of participant organizations while simultaneously designing the study in such a manner as to collect the data objectively through the process of interviewing these participants. As a case study, few participant organizations were evaluated; and to achieve an appropriate saturation of data for analysis, the researcher anticipated the need to interview multiple individuals within the chosen organizations. This saturation will allow the researcher to fully develop an in-depth analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2014).

Building upon the existing foundation of the study, Section 2 includes a discussion on the role of the researcher and participants, as well as the research and sampling methods utilized in this study. Additionally, data collection and management, analysis, and reliability were identified. With these elements identified, the mechanics of conducting the study were outlined in anticipation of further understanding the study and its purpose.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to add to the body of knowledge by exploring the reasons behind the lack of success of project managers in nonprofit organizations. This problem was explored through an in-depth study of both project manager selection and professional development and its impacts within nonprofit organizations based in Alaska.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research studies, the researcher is responsible for collecting, interpreting, analyzing, and reporting the data related to the study. Creswell (2014) indicated the importance of the researcher as a key component in any qualitative study in that the individual is responsible for collecting the data- the researcher's chosen instruments are self-designed, as opposed to

utilizing instruments built by other researchers. Secondly, the researcher is typically heavily involved in a sustained and intensive research relationship with all participants as he or she attempts to gain a holistic analysis of the case (Creswell, 2014).

The role of the researcher begins with identifying the foundation of the study, the reason the study should be conducted, then continues through to the design of the study. In this study, the researcher determined there was a lack of success at managing projects in the nonprofit setting which should be further investigated and the most effective means to investigate this was through a qualitative study which provided a more holistic perspective of the issue. Once the study was designed, the researcher identified the participants as well as identified a plan for protecting the participants and the data sourced from those individuals and businesses. Finally, the researcher collected, analyzed, and reported the findings. Each of these roles are further described in this section.

**Designing the study.** Once the foundation of the study has been identified, the researcher must design the study. Design includes data collection procedures, analysis, and reporting with a purpose, such as exploring processes, activities or events (Creswell, 2014). Procedures were identified and data analyzed through the use of a multiple or collective case study.

**Collective case study.** Collective case studies are intended to investigate one issue though multiple cases are chosen to illustrate the issue. Nonprofit project management were explored through a collective case study as this design method was most effective when seeking a holistic picture of how these organizations make project management decisions in Alaska. The researcher intends to select three nonprofit organizations through which different perspectives might be identified (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Data collection.** Data collection procedures utilized in case studies often include interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the researcher intended to utilize the first three procedures, excluding the audio-visual due to the relative lack of technology utilized in Alaska nonprofit organizations to begin with. Once data collection techniques were established, the research next identified the desired participants and the standards through which they were selected.

**Identifying and protecting the participants.** The researcher will identify the participants in the study, how access to those participants will be gained, and how those participants will be protected during and after the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Considering the nature of this study, access to several different participant organizations as well as multiple individuals within each organization was required to satisfy the saturation requirements for the collective case study.

The researcher identified eligibility requirements to aid in selecting participants and then evaluated which participants were eligible as well as willing to participate. Ethical considerations were accounted for by the researcher during the design phase. Creswell and Poth (2018) identified three areas in which the researcher must address as common ethical principles: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. Each individual, along with the organizations themselves, had their responses and the data collected protected. Included in the discussion and identification of ethical considerations was that of identifying the biases of the researcher.

As stated previously, qualitative studies require heavy researcher involvement as the person plays a key role in a qualitative study, and therefore biases will be present in some form. During the design phase, biases, values, and personal background will be identified (Creswell, 2014). Each of these can impact the interpretations of the data collected as well as the

relationships to the participants and should be explored prior to conducting the study. For example, background information such as current place of employment, or prior history with potential participant organizations might be disclosed and addressed.

**Collecting and analyzing data.** As previously stated, the researcher was the primary agent in collecting the data for a qualitative study and utilized four techniques to collect data including interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual elements. The goal was to utilize one or preferably a combination of these techniques in order to achieve the saturation needed to fully analyze an issue.

**Saturation.** Saturation occurs when the researcher can no longer collect data because gathering data no longer reveals new properties (Creswell, 2014). Once the data were fully saturated, they must be analyzed and interpreted. Uniquely, for qualitative studies, the researcher is continually analyzing as he or she is collecting data, unlike a quantitative study in which the data are not analyzed until data collection is complete. In other words, one must simultaneously collect, code, analyze, and interpret throughout the study.

Once the researcher is satisfied that saturation has been achieved, a final analysis of the data occurs as the researcher prepares to report the findings of the study (Creswell, 2014). As previously stated, this study utilized a combination of data collection techniques, including interviews, observations, and documents for each of the cases. Presumably, the researcher considered previous cases during the data collection for future cases and continued to collect data between the three cases until saturation occurred.

**Reporting findings.** The final step in the qualitative research process is reporting the findings and interpreting those results. In a collective case study, as in other qualitative designs, the results are presented in a descriptive narrative intended to provide a holistic picture of the

issue studied (Creswell, 2014). The researcher included quotes directly from participants to support the findings as well as other valuable descriptions intended to demonstrate the validity of the interpretation of the researcher.

### **Participants**

Study participants were individuals working in or affiliated with nonprofit organizations within the state of Alaska. These individuals were involved at some level with the project planning or management of projects within their nonprofit organization. The number of employees, size of annual budget, or geographical location within Alaska was not specifically considered when selecting participants, though was identified throughout the course of the study. While individual participants was not limited by age, gender or other protected class statuses, the study required participants to have been with their nonprofit organization in some capacity for a minimum of one year. This limitation was necessary in order to most accurately capture the data needed for analysis. Notably, this requirement did not limit in what capacity the individual served over the course of the year. This was due to the commonality of utilizing volunteers within the nonprofit industry, as well as the presence of board members acting in greater capacity than simply oversight of financials.

Participants and participating organizations were selected using professional and personal contacts around the state of Alaska. As a current employee for the State of Alaska and in a department serving local nonprofit organizations, the researcher had access to a large percentage of nonprofit organizations statewide. Additionally, the researcher is part of a large church family which partners with many faith-based nonprofit organizations statewide. These two relationships provided a wide net from which to select qualified participants for the study. The following

section provides additional detail into the identification process, ethical protections for participants, and a process by which working relationships were established.

**Identification process.** The identification process began by identifying all potential nonprofit organizations through which the researcher already had contact. These included organizations affiliated with the State system as well as through the local church. Next, any organizations which might result in a conflict of interest were removed, specifically as related to the researcher's employer. For example, if significant government funding was provided to an organization through the researcher's department, the researcher chose to refrain from contacting these organizations. Significant funding was defined as greater than 40% of the organization's revenue stream. Once the list of organizations was finalized, potential participant organizations were contacted.

Upon identification of participant organizations, the researcher then needed to identify individual participants. These individuals were associated in some manner with the organization for a minimum of one year, except for independent contractors who might have been contacted to perform project management related activities for the organization. Potential individual participants included staff, directors, board members, volunteers, beneficiaries (as appropriate), contractors, donors, and affiliated community members. In order to achieve saturation, it was likely all of these sections needed to be represented in the study.

**Ethical Protection.** This research project followed all guidance provided by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure participants and their organizations were protected. Identifying information about the organizations and participants remained confidential as the researcher utilized pseudonyms in place of identifying information.

Data collected were scrubbed prior to final release in order to remove identifying information, and the researcher carefully recorded all interviews in such a manner as to limit the identifying information contained therein. Given the small community, extra care was taken in conversations to ensure no one outside the study had access to the participant list. In addition to following the IRB standards and practices, the researcher also advanced the research proposal through the State of Alaska Department of Law, Ethics Supervisor. This ensured the researcher, the State, and the potential participants were protected at every stage of the research and confidentiality was maintained.

**Establishing a working relationship.** To establish the appropriate working relationship, the researcher first contacted the director for each participating organization at which point a detailed explanation as to the purpose of the study as well as the nature and design of the study was provided. This individual had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions prior to the start of the research. The director was asked for individual participant names and contact information, to include the demographics mentioned previously. Then, the researcher contacted these individuals and provided the same explanations ahead of time. During conversation, the researcher evaluated whether the candidates was a good fit for the study, and individuals were given the opportunity to withdrawal or express interest in participating. All participants were provided with a template form to provide participant consent or denial. This form included detail on the protections they were afforded as well as disclosures to the researcher's background and potential conflicts of interest addressed at that time.

Given the researcher's place of employment, establishing a trust based relationship was paramount as these individuals remained in the community upon completion of the study. Not only was the researcher's desire to clearly and completely outline expectations for the sake of the

study itself, but this was also a critical factor in maintaining good working relationships long-term.

### **Research Method and Design**

Considering the purpose of this study, along with the research questions answered, the following section provides a discussion and justification for why a qualitative method, collective case study was the most appropriate method and design for this study. The combination of available research and the nature of focus on nonprofit organizations lends this study to one in which exploration is an ideal description for the outcome.

**Discussion of method.** There are three primary design methods most often selected during research projects: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method. A quantitative method is best used when testing objective theories in which the hypothesis is formed (Barczak, 2015). The qualitative method is used when the researcher is seeking an experiential, situational, and personal outcome (Stake, 2010). Finally, a mixed method is a hybrid design method in which elements of both qualitative and quantitative techniques are present. It is best used when both exploratory and confirmatory research is called for (Palinkas et al., 2011).

For this study, the researcher chose a qualitative method and believed this to be the most appropriate method as it provided a more holistic picture of the issue studied. It was expected to provide a natural experience for the participants in which information could be gained both organically and through inquisitiveness, rather than from scientific data collection. It was anticipated that many organizations and individual participants did not have formal project management protocols or experience, thus scientifically studying these organizations would improperly skew results. Rather, the qualitative method allowed the researcher the flexibility needed to collect and analyze data and revisit cases or interview participants multiple times

depending upon additional data gained. This flexibility ultimately allowed for adequate saturation of the issue.

**Discussion of design.** In further developing a qualitative study, there are five commonly referenced designs researchers must consider when building any study. These designs are grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and case study. Each design may have sub designs the researcher may choose to utilize and each provides a valuable perspective to a study.

**Collective case study.** This study was a collective case study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the case study allows the researcher to focus on a single issue, yet compare data from across several cases in order to better explore the issue. The benefit of this design is it allows the researcher to better understand all components of project management in nonprofit organizations. These components come from a variety of individuals and structures within and surrounding an organization. In every sense, it provides the hyper-local data sought after by both the researcher, but also the local nonprofit community.

While other designs might be utilized, the collective case study is the most appropriate for this study as it aids the researcher in identifying particularities of an issue within multiple organizations (Creswell, 2014). Similarities in data results were expected, and while the researcher did not likely generalize these results across all nonprofits, or even all nonprofits in Alaska, the particularities identified could be used in conversations with local Alaska nonprofits seeking to manage projects for success.

**Summary of research method and design.** Qualitative research, and particularly the collective case study design, is conducive to gaining deeper insight into a problem or issue for which the researcher may not be aware of all factors impacting the issue. In the case of nonprofit

organizations and project management, the researcher may glean some information indicating a problem, but may not have identified specifically the causes of the problem. Selecting a method and design which allows for complete flexibility with the study and allows for qualitative data and interpretation will produce a holistic result intended to be beneficial to nonprofit organizations as well as to the overall body of researcher related to project management. Selecting multiple case studies provides the added depth as the researcher begins to piece together impacts on project success from one organization to another, adding validity to the study. For these reasons, the qualitative research methodology and collective case study design were the most likely and reasonable choices to address the purpose of this study.

### **Population and Sampling**

The initial population investigated in this collective case study included individuals affiliated with three nonprofit organizations in Alaska which routinely participated in projects. Individuals had to be affiliated with these organizations to be considered a participant, but the relationship to the organization could differ and could have included employees, directors, donors, clients, independent contractors, volunteers, or board members. More detail about the population and the sampling method will be outlined in the following paragraphs.

**Population.** The intended audience for this research included local nonprofit organizations. Generally, these organizations struggle to achieve goals, raise funding, and meet the needs of the community. As such, it was important to the researcher to better understand project management practices within these nonprofit organizations. To gain further insight into this problem, three organizations were selected as part of a collective case study.

All organizations were based in Anchorage or the Matanuska Susitna Valley. The researcher intended to limit the nonprofit participant pool to this area given the time of year the

research occurred. Communities off the road system in Alaska become virtually inaccessible during the winter months, and as such, research could have been delayed due to inclement weather. Instead, participating organizations were located on the road system, but participating organizations had to serve both rural and urban communities.

Urban and rural organizations face different challenges, and it was critical to the study to have both demographics represented given the unique characteristics of life in Alaska. Organizations may be religious and may receive government funding. Organizations were in the human services, meaning only organizations which directly served people within the state were evaluated. For the purposes of this study, nonprofit organizations focused on the arts, sciences, or nature were not considered though the researcher recognized they each play a vital role in communities. These were excluded because they were typically located in urban communities, and did not impact rural areas the researcher hoped to study. Finally, participating organizations were small, medium, or large organizations with budgets ranging for a few hundred thousand dollars, to multi-million dollars. In fact, the researcher intentionally sought to bring that diversity into the study.

Once participating organizations were identified, individuals affiliated with these organizations were considered. Only individuals directly affiliated with one of the three participating nonprofit organizations were considered. Of these, their relationship to the organization were as employees, directors, board members, independent contractors, volunteers, donors, or even clients. Only participants who had been affiliated with the organization for at least one year were considered as part of this study- except for independent contractors, donors, volunteers, and clients. Employees, directors, and board members had to have a minimum of one year with the organization given their unique position in directing projects on behalf of the

organization. Alternatively, independent contractors, donors, and clients may have provided further insight into project management from a client perspective. This outside perspective could have been critical in identifying weaknesses in the organization's project management activities. Finally, all individuals had to be at least 18 years of age to participate for liability reasons. It was understood that many teens volunteered their time with nonprofit organizations; however, these individuals were excluded from the study.

Given the identified eligibility criteria, the population chosen shared several key characteristics necessary for this study. Each represented local nonprofit organizations serving both rural and urban populations. Each organization, regardless of size, conducted project management activities in some form to further their organization's mission. Lastly, each individual participant was familiar with their organizations' projects and the goals of those projects. These key characteristics were necessary for the researcher to fully explore the problem.

**Sampling.** Purposeful sampling was used to identify and select participating organizations as well as individuals in this study. Unlike quantitative studies in which random samples may be chosen, this qualitative collective case study was dependent upon the researcher identifying local nonprofit organizations willing to participate in the study to further the body of knowledge of project management within the local nonprofit community. Organizations were purposely selected based upon their ability to provide the best insight about the problem being studied. Additionally, the critical case sampling method will be utilized as it will allow for generalization and maximum application of information to other cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although the intended participant organizations may meet differing needs within Alaska, it was believed that these organizations were able to learn and grow from one another's insight, and it

was the intent of the researcher to pursue key thought patterns or actions related to project management through each case.

**Sample size.** Determining the appropriate sample size in a collective case study is a critical element. Too few participants and the results of the study may be irrationally skewed. However, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested case studies are labor intensive for the researcher, and selecting too many participants may dramatically lengthen the research period unnecessarily. It was for this reason, the researcher focused upon key characteristics to pursue with participants, and once data saturation occurred, no more participants were sampled. It was expected data saturation was achieved through sampling between 25 and 35 participants within three organizations. This aided the researcher in avoiding scope creep within the study and remain on target with exploring the stated problem.

### **Data Collection**

The goal of a collective case study is to better explore a phenomenon through a deep understanding of that phenomenon within a series of cases. One of the key tenants of a case study is the researcher provides an in-depth study of a case or set of cases. Instead of a wide pool of participants, the researcher focused on a limited number, but gained a deeper understanding of the problem as a result of intently studying a few cases. The following paragraphs provide insight into the instruments, data collection techniques, and organizations techniques needed for this study.

**Instruments.** The primary instrument utilized in this study was interviews, though the researcher intended to utilize observations as a secondary source of data. Interviews were conducted while being recorded to allow the researcher to refer to during the analysis phase. During the live interview, the researcher listened to the participant responses as well as observed

for non-verbal cues. These instruments were discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

***Interviews and audio recordings.*** The interview process was recorded with each participant to allow the researcher to review and transcribe each recording after the meeting. This allowed the researcher to capture any additional data that might have been overlooked during the live interview. Each interview was an in-depth conversation with the participant and due to the nature of the study, questions were open-ended and the researcher asked follow-up questions as needed to ensure data saturation was achieved within each case.

***Interview guide.*** Although the researcher intended to allow for open-ended, follow-up questions, each participant was asked the same initial questions. For a complete version of the interview guide, refer to Appendix A. The initial questions asked ensured the participant was qualified to participate in the study, while the remaining questions made up the study. Each question in the guide applied to a research question to ensure the problem was addressed. It should be noted that while these questions aided the flow of the conversation, it was anticipated that subsequent follow-up questions not included in the script were necessary to fully capture the necessary data.

***Note taking.*** While the interview was the primary instrument utilized in this study, note taking played an important role as well as the researcher documenting both verbal and non-verbal interactions during the interview. Additionally, the researcher took personal notes as related to specific projects the participants may have noted. Observations included an evaluation of the business process, the available resources, the timeline, and the outcome. Finally, notes about follow-up questions for each case were necessary as the researcher sought to gain a full understanding of the problem.

**Data collection techniques.** Case studies typically allow for a variety of different data collection techniques, but the two most common are the interview and direct observation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Both techniques allow the researcher to seek and identify the current procedures, processes, and levels of success within the participant organizations. Although other techniques are effective for case studies, this study utilized interviews and direct observations as the primary means for securing information. Once both participating organizations and individual participants were identified and determined to be qualified, interviews were scheduled. Participants worked with the researcher to determine the location and timeframe for their interview to ensure participants were both in a comfortable space for sharing as well as free from distractions. All interviews were audio recorded with the transcription that followed within 24 hours. The researcher followed the interview guide in Appendix A, though likely asked follow-up questions as needed within an interview. Once all interviews were completed, the researcher allowed participants to review transcriptions of their interviews for accuracy and clarity. Any clarifications made were considered as part of the data analysis phase.

To fully explore each research question across each organization, participants within each organization were categorized prior to the beginning of interviews. Categorization included position within organization, longevity, and exposure to projects at the organization. Interviews were then scheduled with each participant according to their categorization. For example, the first week of interviews was with participants who were at the Executive Director and Board Member level within an organization. From there, the interviews moved throughout the organization and ended with clients and independent contractors. This categorization allowed the researcher to focus upon the same type of data across each organization simultaneously and ensure all possible data gleaned from each level prior to moving to the next level.

Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher then dedicated time to direct observation within the organizations. The researcher noted direct observation within interviews as related to the individual and their words and nonverbal cues, but direct observation of the organization occurred upon completion of interviews. All direct observations were recorded in a journal that was coded prior to data analysis. Following the interview phase, the researcher gained information on whether the concepts shared during the interviews were followed in routine practice within the organizations. Other data collected during this phase might also include data on the organizational culture, resource availability, or active projects.

**Data organization techniques.** The researcher collected both notes as well as audio recordings as the research progresses. The data were maintained and organized in such a manner as to both protect the participants as well as be readily available to the researcher for recall when necessary. As mentioned in the prior section, interviews were scheduled according to the category the participant fit into. Each level had a slightly different viewpoint and had different insight into the problem being studied, and this allowed the researcher to organization the data by group as well as by organization. This allowed for adequate cross evaluation as needed throughout the study as the researcher began coding data for analysis. An Excel spreadsheet was utilized for coding and tracking details related to the problem to allow the researcher to more easily identify whether information was complete or if more was needed. This spreadsheet was collocated on the drive with the data collected.

**Security.** Data were secured on an external drive dedicated to this study. The data were kept in a safe and secure location within the researcher's home and inaccessible to others. Audio recordings were kept only until the researcher had them transcribed and coded. At this point, the

recordings were destroyed. Transcriptions and notes from both the interview and observations were uploaded to the drive within 24 hours of collection for security purposes.

**Summary of data collection.** Two types of data collection techniques were utilized within this study: the interview and direct observation by the researcher. These two methods were selected for this case study as they enabled the researcher to compare responses from each participating organization to determine similarities and differences between organizations, while still allowing for open-ended and follow-up questions to continue mining for information. Direct observation enabled the researcher to analyze nonverbal information identified during an interview as well as by evaluating the organization while on site. Interviews were recorded to aid the researcher in the collection of data and were transcribed upon completion of the interview. Any details missed by the researcher during the interview were identified in the recording. The data were coded and tracked on an Excel spreadsheet to enable the researcher to more quickly identify trends or anomalies within the data across each organization and across subsections of each organization. Finally, once an interview or site visit was complete, the data were uploaded to a separate drive for security, and the recordings were destroyed once transcribed. Data stored here remained secured and will be destroyed based upon the recommendations of the IRB.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis represents the culmination of the data collected and involves the coding and organizing of themes as well as interpretation of those themes collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is at this point the researcher again inserts his or her perceptions into the project as the data results are analyzed and an interpretation of the data are stated. In qualitative research projects such as this study, it is important to note some level of data analysis will occur during the data

collection phase as the researcher seeks to fill in missing data as necessary through interviews and observation (Creswell, 2014).

Data collected and transcribed were coded as the researcher went through the collection phase, thus allowing the researcher to see what themes were appearing and where more information was needed. Interpretation of the data was not completed until all data were collected. Ethical considerations were acknowledged at this phase to protect the identities of the participants and organizations during the analysis phase. During the initial analysis, identities of those interviewed remained known to the researcher; however, prior to release of any analysis, all participant names were masked for their protection.

Analysis of a case study may occur in a variety of means depending upon the number of cases studied. In this study, the researcher used a cross-case synthesis to identify similarities and differences among the cases, and formed naturalistic generalizations based upon all the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed organizations to learn from and apply lessons from the cases studied based upon the generalizations formed from the similarities and differences among cases.

**Coding process.** As previously stated, the researcher coded data throughout the data collection process, and reviewed all data upon completion of the collection process to ensure all ideas were appropriately coded. Recoding may have been necessary prior to the onset of the analysis phase. Coding, by definition, is the process of organizing data into chunks of thought using a word or idea to tag each bracket of data (Creswell, 2014). This process allowed the researcher to sort all the data collected into themes or issues as related to the study. While software exists to aid the researcher in this process, for this study, coding was conducted with the assistance of Microsoft Excel, Word, and Atlas.ti for tracking. Atlas.ti was utilized from the

point of transcription through coding and identification of themes. The researcher intended to build an informal coding handbook for which she referred to as this process unfolded. This handbook allowed for a clear understanding of what coding existed and if additional coding was needed, which could be easily added.

**Interpretation.** Once all the data were appropriately coded and the researcher was satisfied with the chosen themes, the next step in the analysis process was to begin sorting the data into those groups. When themes were identified and patterns began to emerge, the researcher began to pull together a description of both the themes themselves, but also the trends within that data. It was at this point where the cross-case synthesis began. The researcher utilized a narrative format to report on the findings for this study as she began to make an interpretation based upon the data analysis. Lessons learned, questions for further research, and suggestions for organizational change were considered in the final narrative.

**Summary of data analysis.** The data analysis phase of this study required the researcher to accurately identify themes and code the data collected accordingly. Coding involved the creation of a code handbook for the researcher to easily utilize to ensure all data were tagged with the necessary concepts or ideas. Once the data were coded, data were then sorted by these codes for use during the analysis and interpretation process. For this study, the researcher utilized a cross case synthesis as well as naturalistic generalizations with the intended outcome being recommendations of change or lessons learned which can be implemented in the local nonprofit industry. A narrative began to form surrounding the findings as the researcher interpreted the themes as well as the similarities and differences. Interpretation included recommendations or areas for further study.

## **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are paramount to a successful research study as they indicate a researcher's findings are accurate and the processes used throughout the study were consistently applied (Creswell, 2014). A researcher may confirm validity, or accuracy of the findings through one or more strategies commonly used. These strategies will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs. Similarly, researchers must detail out procedures and steps taken throughout a study if reliability is to be achieved. These procedures enable other researchers to follow the same steps to determine a similar outcome. This section will provide an in-depth analysis of both reliability and validity as they apply to the current case study.

**Reliability.** At each phase of the researcher project, reliability should be considered, and steps taken to ensure the project is repeatable. In qualitative studies, reliability simply means consistency or stability of the process (Creswell, 2014). Researchers should ensure transcriptions are accurate when translated, code definitions are clearly noted, and cross checking of codes is conducted by an outside coder. If transcriptions are inaccurate the entire basis of the study is in jeopardy due to the importance of these interview transcriptions to a case study. Ensuring these interviews are accurately captured is vital to the continuation of a study.

Similarly, appropriate coding is vital to ensuring others could replicate the researcher's study. For this to occur, the researcher should determine which codes to utilize for the study, and should fully define them. For a collective case study, these codes should be the same throughout each case. The steps the researcher takes should be identical throughout each case and the same coding process utilized throughout.

In this study, the researcher intended to ensure transcripts were accurate when transcribed by providing a copy to the participant for review and approval. It was at this point in which the

participant made any correction or clarifications in the study. Each participant was asked to review this data prior to the transcription being coded by the researcher.

The Interview Guide in Appendix A addressed reliability as it outlined not only the questions which were asked of each participant, but also the process for ensuring accuracy in transcriptions. The Interview Guide was intended to create consistency within the interview process, as the researcher followed this guide for every interview as well as the pursuant process for ensuring accuracy of the transcript prior to coding. Once transcripts and field notes were collected, the researcher considered the data case by case, coding concepts, key words, and other useful data.

A code book was developed with definitions and notes. This code book was utilized and refined throughout the course of the study and a final check was conducted to ensure coding remained stable throughout each transcript and each case study. The researcher will ensure coding is consistent throughout each case, and may elect to utilize another individual who can cross check the defined codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Validity.** Where reliability in a qualitative study refers to the stability of a process across research, validity refers to the accuracy of the findings through those procedures (Creswell, 2014). There are a variety of strategies a researcher may choose to utilize to ensure validity of a study. Creswell (2014) identified eight common strategies, while these strategies are further broken into the researcher's lens, the participant's lens, and the reader's lens by Creswell and Poth (2018). Additionally, face and content validity should both be considered. Face validity typically refers to whether the results are sensible, relevant, and real whereas content validity refers to the comprehensiveness of the components being measured (Connell et al., 2018). These two types of validity can be implemented through the interview questions, and seen in the

Interview Guide in Appendix A. For this study, face validity questions listed were questions 1-4, 6, and 9-10, while the remaining questions were considered content validity questions related to the research questions proposed.

**Triangulation.** For this study, the formerly mentioned lenses were considered during the collection process. Triangulation is the process by which the researcher examines multiple sources to build themes or perspectives and is considered a strategy from the researcher's lens (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When themes begin to form using these different sources of data, this process adds to the validity of the study. It is the researcher who begins to collectively evaluate the data with the intention of forming themes. Similarly, it is important for the researcher to clarify any biases she may have as related to the study (Creswell, 2014). This clarification will ensure an honest narrative adding to the validity of the study.

For this study, biases, along with all field notes were noted in a journal and considered as a part of the data collected during the interview process. Field notes were coded just as the interview transcripts were, with the researcher carefully ensuring coding was consistent throughout. Participant feedback was another validity strategy the researcher utilized for the study. Participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy as indicated in Appendix A. This process occurred after the interview itself, and the researcher completed these transcripts soon after the interview itself to ensure the data collected were fresh in the mind of both the researcher and the participant.

**Saturation.** In addition to this feedback, the researcher spent a prolonged time in field study to ensure she achieved saturation of data and could convey every detail about the case. Saturation occurs when no new information is shared or gained through the interviews and field observation times. For the purposes of validity, saturation is critical as the researcher will be able

to identify both themes and divergent ideas intimately due to the time spent with the participants and participating organizations. This level of detail will add validity to the study.

Finally, rich description and peer review strategies added validity to this study. Rich descriptions enable the readers to be transported or transferred to the setting. These descriptions provide for the interconnected details which transfer between each case, allowing the reader to determine whether the themes and conclusions can truly be transferred to another case outside of those studied. A peer reviewer may be utilized to ask the researcher questions about the study, ensuring the study, the data, and the themes and conclusions are understood by individuals other than the researchers (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Summary of reliability and validity.** Given the importance of ensuring both validity and reliability of the study, the researcher employed several strategies to ensure the results of the study could be trusted and repeated. The researcher intended to ensure the transcriptions of interviews and field notes were accurate through a process including transcription within 24 hours of data collection, and participant review of their transcriptions. The researcher intended to spend a significant amount of time observing in addition to interviewing participants, and this time helped the researcher achieve saturation and began identifying themes or divergent concepts while still in the collection phase.

Similarly, the researcher relied on creating a codebook that was utilized as these themes or concepts were identified in the data. This codebook was thoroughly defined and additional notes to ensure consistency were added as needed. Biases were identified and acknowledged as they appeared throughout the collection, coding, and analysis of the study. Triangulation was a critical strategy as the researcher began pulling together themes found in multiple sources to create conclusions, and rich descriptions aided the reader in understanding the cases and

transferring themes to other circumstances. Finally, the entire process and report was reviewed under peer review with the intent of aiding the researcher in solidifying the study prior to release.

### **Transition and Summary of Section 2**

This section concludes Section 2, the Project, which identifies the procedures by which the research will be conducted. Procedures for identifying the role of the researcher and participant qualifications, selecting the research methods and design, data collection, data organization, data analysis, and reliability and validity have all been defined as the researcher prepares to transition into Section 3, Application of Professional Practice and Implications for Change. For this study, local nonprofit organizations will be identified, and participants selected from those organizations. Participants' information will be protected as governed by the IRB and the information gathered through interviews and direct observation transcribed and coded for further analysis. The researcher will ensure data reliability through consistency in data collection as well as in coding procedures, and validity through both face and content questions during the interview phase. In Section 3, the researcher will report on the research completed with a discussion of the findings, applications for professional practice, recommendations for action, further study, reflections, and final conclusions.

### **Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change**

Section 3 revisits the importance of the study and provides a brief summary of how the study was accomplished. Next, the findings of the study are presented, followed by applications to professional practice, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study. Finally, reflections of the researcher and a summary of the study are provided in closing.

#### **Overview of the Study**

This qualitative case study was conducted to add to the body of knowledge surrounding project management in nonprofit organizations. As a qualitative case study, it is interpretive, experiential, situational, and personal (Stake, 2010). Multiple case studies were studied, and the comparisons drawn as part of the analysis of data. The researcher specifically chose to consider two specific aspects of project management in nonprofit organizations. The first, as identified in Research Question 1, is identifying how project managers are selected in these organizations, and the second, found in Research Question 2, is identifying training or professional development once a project manager is chosen. Through the process of investigative interviews, the case study format allowed the researcher flexibility to dive into conversation with participants of the organizations studied, and follow their thoughts (Yates & Leggett, 2016). This provided a personal insight into the organizations one might not otherwise have gained without the flexibility to listen to participants' stories. The following section provides a brief description of each participating organization to aid the reader in understanding the backgrounds of participating organizations. Data on individual participants will remain confidential.

**Demographic information.** This study included three participating nonprofit organizations serving Alaskans. Each of these organizations was identified through the connections of the researcher, and each was excited to be a part of the study. Uniquely, all

organizations exist to show the love of Christ while meeting the needs of Alaska's children. Each organization has a different focus and manner in which this mission is achieved, yet all have a single goal in mind: reaching Alaska with the love of God. Interestingly, because 100% of organizations researched are faith-based, an additional thread can be seen throughout the data as a result.

Each of the organizations has been in existence for over 10 years and remain established and valued members of the Alaska community. Similarly, all organizations have more than one location across the state and have the capacity to serve both urban and rural children and their families in some capacity. Their missions are met despite limited staffing and volunteers, and what staff is available focuses on covering a large geographic area of the state.

Thirty (30) individual participants were interviewed. Individuals were all over the age of 18 and have been associated with their respective organizations for at least one year. All were engaging participants and expressed a desire for the researcher to better understand how their organizations operate. The following sections present a more detailed description of the participating organizations while intentionally keeping specific indicators vague to protect the identities of the organizations.

**Organization A.** In 2009, 10 families came together and began meeting the needs of local families. In 2012, the Lord put a clear purpose in front of the founders: focus on children in foster care. This organization has been tirelessly focusing on this calling since. Their mission purposes to serve these children through the love of Christ. The organization consists of nine active board members, 15 staff members, and an army of volunteers located statewide.

**Organization B.** In 1992, this organization drew two similar ministries under one umbrella, with a single focus. That purpose is connecting youth to Christ through the outdoors.

Individually the two organizations had been in operation from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, however, leaders in the 1990s saw the benefit to coming together working toward the same mission. As it operates today, the organization consists of seven board members, and approximately 25 full time staff members. Additionally, during the peak months, volunteers can number in the hundreds.

**Organization C.** In 2009, this organization officially launched after four years of intense prayer and planning. The founders firmly felt called to facilitate freedom from the bondage of addiction and is passionate about restoring adults and children through the love of Christ. This organization is led by nine active board members and operates with approximately 20 staff members. Given the sensitive and traumatic nature of this organization, volunteers are limited to administrative or fundraising activities.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The researcher will begin setting the stage for the findings by providing a brief explanation of triangulation and saturation of the study, followed by a narrative about each of the organizations studied in an effort to provide the reader contextual insight prior to revealing the findings. It is imperative to understand the organizations as a whole prior to dissecting the results into themes crossing organizational lines. Comparisons will be drawn now, and data supporting those will be presented in future sections.

**Saturation.** When the researcher can no longer collect data because gathering data no longer reveals new properties saturation has been achieved (Creswell, 2014). In this project, the researcher was working with small nonprofit organizations, meaning the pool of participants was limited to begin with. The researcher interviewed a total of 30 participants across the organizations, and in some cases, interviewed nearly all persons affiliated with the organization.

The final interviews conducted netted no new or additional information, and as a result, the researcher is confident saturation has been achieved when considering small to medium nonprofit organizations in Alaska.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation is the process by which the researcher examines multiple sources to build themes or perspectives and is considered a strategy from the researcher's lens (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher begins to gather themes across each organization in future sections of this project. When themes begin to appear across organizations, this adds validity to the study. For this project, the researcher identified five similar themes seen mirrored in each organization, with two additional themes common between two organizations and the exact opposite replicated in the third organization. These themes will be discussed in further detail shortly.

**Organization A.** Although this organizations' responses contribute to the available and willing theme, the leaders selected display a fervent passion for the mission, a drive to impact others, and a servant leadership spirit. This organization, as with others, displayed the tread, or theme of acknowledging God's provision when choosing a project manager. Because they select a leader from within their ranks, these individuals have already proven themselves to be passionate about the mission, and they have some background which lends them toward success in a given project.

Training is rarely considered when selecting a project manager. However, this organization is learning-based as a culture. From board members through the ranks to volunteers, each displays a passion for growth and a desire to do things better. While the organization operates on very limited financial resources, that is not considered a challenge for them, but rather a catalyst for innovative thinking. Instead of simply saying, we do not have the money for

training, they look to their community resources to either apply for grants, or perhaps find a resource who would offer the needed training for free. Either way, a lack of funding does not stop this organization from seeing the importance of continually learning and developing. The leaders, project managers, often take leadership courses, connecting with others to encourage them along the way. A strong desire to learn is evident as each participant excitedly shared their hopes and dreams for continued growth, and how they planned to achieve those areas of growth. This organization struggles in the areas of processes, people (indeed, all three organizations do) and surrendering control of the outcome of the project or program. As a result, communication courses, team building activities, and self-care training are a primary focus, especially for a project manager. The organization has put no effort into pursuing project management trainings; however, understanding how to lead people is a priority for them.

**Organization B.** Organization B is a self-described unique organization. It is a nonprofit that functions as a ministry. When selecting a project leader, this organization fully embraces who is willing and available. One participant stated project managers were selected by the “see a need, fill a need” method. The primary criteria this organization considers when selecting this individual is whether they have a relationship with God. The leadership acknowledges this can cause several challenges when seeking to complete a project, as often the individual leading has no other qualifications or training to complete a project. The organization also subscribes to Theme 2 in that God provides who they need for each project. Reviewing the data gained from these conversations proves difficult as on one hand the organization believes God provides the right person, but on the other, they struggle with project success because they do not have a capable person. Similarly, this organization has a mission, yet it did not appear to permeate through the decisions made as an organization based upon participant’s responses. All

participants clearly identified their perception of a good leader and these responses were in line with the other organizations.

Training and continuing professional development is not a cultural element within this organization. Over the past 10 years, very little training has been encouraged and employees failed to see great value in training during the interviews. In fact, one participant said he was sick of learning, and would just like to do his job instead of being asked to learn something new. Although each participant was able to communicate organizational challenges, when asked how they might overcome and learn from those, few could provide an answer beyond wanting to do more Bible studies. Their challenges included financial limitations, geographical distances, lack of consistency in leadership, and a muddy mission and vision.

**Organization C.** This organization's leadership is focused on strategy and highly focused on education and training. When selecting a project manager, passion for the mission is primary, and the organization believes in God's provision. However, contrasted with the other organizations, this organization considers past history and training when selecting a project manager. They focus on who is willing to lead a project, but they encourage their staff to bring their passions and ideas to the organization to pursue. Therefore, if one has a passion for a particular project, and that project is in line with the mission of the organization, the board will prayerfully consider it. Often these ideas are in line with that particular staff member's passion as well as skill set, so naturally, those considerations are given. Participants each clearly articulated what makes a good leader and expressed a desire and a heart to become a good leader. These individuals work in a high burnout industry which necessitates a deep passion for the mission. Without that passion, an individual would not be able to face the trauma faced daily.

This organization operates in a fast paced, high intensity environment, and project managers and leaders continually seek to learn better ways of doing things. They ensure their staff do not operate in isolation, but encourage team building and training. They encourage employees to seek personal development opportunities as well as professional as a means to keep the employees fresh and excited. Employees are given an annual training stipend which can be used on any training the employee is seeking. No strings attached. In fact, this has become a major recruiting tool for the organization as people in the industry know the value placed on training before they ever set foot on campus.

The executive director of this organization has taken many courses on project management courses and is a strategic thinker. While few other staff members have pursued in his footsteps, most of the other project managers are in a medical setting and rely on his knowledge of seeing ways to make things run smoother. This organization faces challenges in the areas of people (as do all three organizations), demonstrating the heart of Jesus in the face of trauma, and high burnout of staff. To that end, corporate training is less about process and more about self-care, though culturally, any one of the staff would be encouraged to learn more about managing projects if that was their desire.

**Research question 1: Project manager selection.** What are the factors by which nonprofit organizations select project managers? According to existing research, the selection of a project manager is paramount to the success of a project outcome. Considerations in project manager selection include technical, conceptual, and human skills (Afshari, 2015). From 30 transcripts, 392 statements were related to RQ1. Of those statements, further breaking RQ1 down into the three sub research questions, participants were asked about the importance of past success upon project manager selection, the training of a project manager, and the strong belief

in the mission by a project manager. As the research results are presented below, the researcher will indicate several themes discovered crossing organization lines.

Participants across each organization were asked how project managers were chosen as an open-ended question prior to being asked specifically about the three sub research questions. As an open-ended question, respondents typically answered with characteristics such as selection is based upon who is available and who is willing. Examples of these responses have been provided in Table 1.

Table 1

*Selected Examples of Significant Statements for RQ1*

Statement	Meaning
...who was inclined, interested, and who was available, who had the flexibility of hours and could take that on.	Availability and willingness
God just brought the right people.	Availability
Okay, who has God brought that's really gifted in that and who can really take that on. Who can be handed over to?	Availability
...passion, skills, talents, time.	Willingness (passion) and availability (time)
Skills necessary but also alignment with the purpose and the mission.	Willingness (alignment with purpose)
It's who's available that has a skill set that is remotely close to what we need.	Availability
Just identifying someone who has that passion and who really aligns with the mission and core values, pretty much everything else can be taught.	Willingness
I hate to use the term "see a need fill a need" but that's with a lot of the staff that we have coming in.	Availability
It was basically evaluating who was here and what they could do.	Availability

Statement	Meaning
We'd like to think that God provides the people we need for the position, but that's not 100% true. We work with what we get. God does provide people, but they're not always qualified for the job they're given, but necessity and because they're here is a big part of it.	Availability
It's a body. We put it in hole and try and get it to fit that hole as best we can and continue on.	Availability

**Theme 1: Availability and Willingness.** Without prompt, respondents clearly expressed project manager selection as being a result of who is available and who is willing. One participant put it succinctly when he said, “It’s a body. We put it in a hole and try and get it to fit as best we can.” Whether the person identified as the project manager was a staff member, board member, or volunteer, really did not matter, so long as they were available and willing to take on a project for the organization.

**Theme 2: God’s provision.** As mentioned previously, each organization studied is faith-based. As a result, another thread could be seen in participant’s responses. Although clearly the responses were related to availability and willingness, many indicated the provision of these individuals was a direct result of God intervening and actively working within the organization. One respondent said, “God had been prompting” her to fill a role, while another in the same organization indicated “God brought the right people.” Throughout the interviews, God was a prevalent part of the conversation, primarily related to project manager selection, but this theme also made an appearance when discussing training as well.

*RQ1a.* How much of an influence on project manager selection is the past project success of the candidate? When specifically asked about past project success and whether that plays a part in selecting a project manager, data indicates this is not a critical element in selecting project managers in nonprofit organizations. While past success has the potential to indicate future

success of a project manager, it was not the primary driver when these organizations seek someone to lead a project. Respondents generally believe that a person's ability to learn from either past success or failure is important, that was not necessarily a driving factor when selecting someone initially. It is important to note, none of the organizations studied hire project managers for a single project. When new projects are identified, each of the organizations look inside the existing staff and volunteer base for someone to lead. As a result, many of the elected "project managers" do have known past successes or failures prior to being selected. One leader within the organizations studied put it this way, "I don't hire anyone not already doing the job." And another participant indicated her organization intentionally seeks to develop leaders and project managers from within with indicates the past history of the individual is known, whether or not participants believe it to be a leading factor. This area would be a good area for further study as discussed in later sections.

*RQ1b.* How much of an influence on selection is the training of the project manager? Continuing the conversation surrounding project manager selection, participants were asked about the importance of training when considering selecting a project manager. Interestingly, most responses had more to do with the individual's character qualities than it did with any kind of educational or even on the job training. Typical responses mirrored the ones provided in Table 2.

Table 2

*Selected Examples of Significant Statements for RQ1b*

Statement
One of the things that we say is you cannot train passion. Just identifying someone who has that passion and who really aligns with the mission and core values, pretty much everything else can be taught. Skill can be taught, but those kind of core beliefs are really hard to get past because they can be so ingrained in just one's fiber of their being. You can go to any training that you can imagine and you can read any book that you want, but if you don't have the capacity to understand and sit across from somebody and look into their eyes and give them human connection and understanding, then really what do you have? You have to have a passion for what you're doing and for who you're trying to reach. It is less about skill and more about does the person have the ability to see the person.

Evident in conversations with the board level or executive level participants was this desire for finding people with passion over those with skills and training. Each of the organizations aligned with the belief that the training could come after a project manager was selected.

*RQ1c.* How much of an influence on selection is the belief in the mission of the organization by the project manager? Overwhelmingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, across all three organizations, the strongest response for project manager selection was the connection to the mission. Nearly every participant came quickly to the conclusion that passion for the cause (mission) was a critical determinant of whether to select an individual to lead a project. Without that passion and connection to the mission, individuals were simply not considered. One leader classified this passion as a part of the staff and volunteers' "DNA... it's (the mission) something that you're part of, and you're really passionate about." Other responses are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

*Selected Examples of Significant Statements for RQ1c*

Statement
their passion for the mission
to have a passion for doing something so you just step up and make it happen
The world would never hire him, but he's passionate about it, and God's using him
You have to have a passion for what we're doing, but to be a leader of something else, you have to be very practical.
Just identifying someone who has that passion and who really aligns with the mission and core values, pretty much everything else can be taught
You have to have a passion for what you're doing and for who you're trying to reach

**Theme 3: Passion for Mission.** Throughout the responses passion for the mission was evident, particularly in two organizations. As one leader spoke of her organization and that passion being a part of every employee and volunteers' DNA, this was evident in the number of times the word "passion" was used. This thread of passion can also be found in the third organization; however, this organization appears to have additional factors influencing why people are a part of the organization.

**Theme 4: A good leader.** Each participant provided a detailed explanation of what makes a good leader. The researcher was curious to see if what was said about a good leader translated into the type of leader which was selected to lead projects. Common themes developed across all three organizations as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Selected Examples of Themes for a Good Leader*

Concept	Number of responses
Desire for success of others	20
Clear Vision	18
Approachability	9
Passion/ Drive/ Growth Minded	17
Relationship Based	8
Confidence	5
Relationship with God	12

All three organizations identified what traits make a good leader, and they were all very similar. Despite knowing these qualities, they selected leaders or project managers based on only loosely one of these traits: support of the mission (passion). Yet statements made about who a good leader is in accomplishing projects indicate simply selecting a project manager on willingness and availability may not truly be enough. Table 5 is a cross-section of the statements made regarding leader qualities.

Table 5

*Selected Examples of Significant Statements Regarding a Good Leader*

Statement
They need to have a desire to make people successful
Having a clear vision
Approachability
A good leader is one that never rests with excitement to see the organizations continually bloom with each new season.
I think that a good leader has a really good blend of confidence and humility.
It all comes down to relationships.
God makes a good leader.
I think it doesn't matter how, they start to say passion, but it doesn't matter how passionate I am about something unless I have the ability to connect with people and infuse them with that passion.
I think a good leader is somebody who effectively communicates a vision of where they want to see the organization go and then how we can actually get there.

Research Question 2: Continuing Education for Project Managers. What are the driving factors in professional development in nonprofit organizations? The focus of education is on developing the individual and the content conceptual in nature rather than task oriented. Education develops the analytical and critical skills of the project manager (Dulaimi, 2005). It provides an avenue for an individual to learn soft skills including communication, teambuilding, creativity, leadership, and conflict management skills (Ravindranath, 2016). During the interviews the researcher used the term “training” but explained the meaning for education. This

was done because most individuals simply equate the two and the focus of this research was not so much on technical skills, but rather these soft skills.

From 30 transcripts, 645 statements were related to RQ2. Of those statements, further breaking RQ2 down into the two sub research questions, participants were asked about professional development in leadership development as well as continuing education in project management principles. Participants were asked questions related to organizational culture, training opportunities provided, what makes a good leader, and what challenges the organization routinely faces. All questions were open-ended to allow flexibility in the research.

Out of the three organizations studied, organizations A and C place an emphasis on professional development culturally. This is evidenced by the ability of participants to recall what training plans or training opportunities their organization has pursued recently. Training generally fell into the category of professional development as determined by their particular industries as seen in the responses in Table 6. Participants with these organizations spoke of a cultural acceptance and thirst for continued education. Those participants in leadership positions similarly spoke of a desire to grow and develop personally. Organization B has not historically placed any emphasis on training for any staff members; however, the current director has begun slowly changing the culture to one in which training and development is a priority and is encouraged. This is not to say there has been no training, but only a few participants for this organization could speak of any training offered.

Table 6

*Selected Examples of Significant Statements for RQ2*

Statement
<p>Cultural awareness training or trauma-related training or OCS training.            If there's a way to get people to network, they're going to learn so much more from their peers than just sitting in a classroom.            Sexual abuse prevention, TBRI or Trust-Based Relational Intervention.            The training we do with them is for fundraising because for us it's critical that they stay there.            We provide risk management training.            For this amazing training now that I'm certified in and that's going just be really good, not just for our moms and our kiddos but it'll be really good for them when they're presenting court cases that they have this added knowledge.            They are always offering classes and things like that to give us the tools to help the kids as best as we can.</p>

*RQ2a.* How much of an influence in professional development is leadership development? Aside from generally practical training as dictated by industry and mentioned previously, organizations A and C also indicated a propensity toward developing staff- primarily in higher ranking positions, but when funding is available all staff are encouraged- in leadership qualities. This is evidenced in their responses shown in Table 7.

Table 7

*Selected Examples of Significant Statements for RQ2a*

Statement
<p>I have taken some incredible courses that have really developed me as a leader.            I'm in a leadership program right now through {redacted}.            Right now, we're reading People Fuel by Townsend.            Triple Impact Leadership program that I'm in right now is something we've been watching for a while.            I would like every staff member that we have on year-round staff to have Bible training.            I ended up getting my six Sigma black belt through Villanova, went through the graduate school of business at Stanford with through leadership program there. Took a Triple Impact Leadership program with Gwen Kennedy. Went through the catalyst for nonprofit program through Context International.</p>

While none of the organizations offer professional development in the realm of project management specifically (which is a finding of this research itself), one participant summed it up eloquently when he said, “my impression of project management is that it's actually people management.” And it is from this perspective the researcher considered the availability of training to those specifically in leadership roles. In all organizations, those in “higher ranking” roles were given opportunity to pursue leadership development training courses more geared to running organizations or leading projects or programs. Conversely, line staff and volunteers in organizations A and C were provided training opportunities as related to their specific positions and the need. Each of these organizations places a heavy emphasis on learning and developing of the staff and volunteers. In fact, one organization strategically budgets certain dollar amounts for every employee to seek professional development opportunities annually because growth is so important to the organization.

***Theme 5: Organizational Challenges.*** In order to best understand the type of training needed by a project manager or leader, one must understand what the organizations struggle with when it comes to managing projects. While each participant blithely acknowledged that finances were the greatest challenge, every one of them turned it a bit deeper than simply finances. Instead, commonly listed challenges were things such as processes, volunteer and staff management (people), innovation and creativity, time, poor choice of project leader, self-care, control over the outcome, and continually demonstrating the love of Christ to all people. Certainly, lack of funding is nearly always a component of project failure. However, the other components these organizations struggle with most is people. This finding is in line with existing literature surrounding volunteer management (Brayko et al., 2016; Vantilborgh & Van Puyvelde,

2018) which speaks to the challenges of accomplishing projects with the aid of those not under direct supervision.

*RQ2b.* How much of an influence in professional development is continuing education in current project management principles? None of the individuals interviewed had any experience in professional development related to project management techniques specifically. All organizations studied are in the human services sector which typically involves social workers, counselors, therapists, spiritual leaders, and then the support staff needed to operate the organizations. It is not unexpected to have had a 0% finding related to project management training in these organizations, yet was a pretty clear finding for this study. This will be discussed further in the analysis of the findings.

***Theme 6: The desire to learn and grow.*** The researcher asked every participant what they might want to learn if given the opportunity. This was intended to indicate whether there is a propensity toward professional development within the organization and also to determine whether as an organization, they are growth based. While all participants paused before answering, individuals in organizations A and C knew exactly where they needed additional training or development, and how they might achieve that. Many respondents also volunteered that they were pursuing those opportunities with their supervisor's encouragement. Again, organization B has not historically had a culture in which training was pursued. While participants did answer the question, they had no plan for which to achieve training nor were they enthusiastic about the opportunity to learn. This concept will be discussed more in the analysis of the findings. For perspective, Table 8 compiles a short list of the more commonly identified areas in which participants wish to learn and develop more.

Table 8

*Selected Examples of Significant Statements for Growth*

Statement
I would want to learn about jobs that other people are doing that inform their decision-making in terms of how we interact.
I really do need to do more computer learning.
Learning better how to just communicate because we are all, as so many people are, in different places at different times.
I would like to get more just training on how to continue to be an effective leader and run a growing nonprofit without losing yourself in it.
I've been looking for a coach, like who's farther down in this nonprofit world than I am that I could just meet with once a month and just pick their brain.
How to supervise staff but also just how to get systems in place and be efficient and organized in the work that I do.
Bible classes which would help me more with the interaction with the work teams when I do have them here.
We need domestic violence training.
Mental health, I would like addiction, I think that they need addiction training.

**Theme 7: A culture of learning.** Two of the three organizations interviewed expressed a desire to continue to grow and learn as an organization and as individuals. While every organization recognized the very limited financial resources at their disposal, these organizations expressed the belief that learning is critical to the continued success of their organizations and the development of their teams. One organization's leader referred to General Shinseki's quote, "If you don't like change, you're going to like irrelevance even less." For him, this is a driving force behind his continued encouragement to staff who desire to learn and grow. Another organization operates on an extremely tight budget, yet has found creative ways in which to encourage learning of staff. They dedicate time to seeking grants for education and tap into their donor resources to find people who might be willing and capable of offering training at no cost. The third organization now has a director who appears to value training. However, this has not yet reached the ranks of the staff members which in itself is a culture not focused on learning.

## Analysis of the Findings

Further analysis of the organizations is presented in light of the conceptual framework as well as the existing literature. The organizations are compared and contrasted as the discussion unfolds surrounding the strengths and challenges each organization faces. As the reader will begin to see, a thread of organizational culture begins to emerge in subsequent sections and will be discussed separately in future sections.

**RQ1: Project Manager Selection.** These three organizations bring so much knowledge to this study primarily in the area of project manager selection. It came as no surprise that mission-mindedness was a primary driving factor when organizations make a selection. As identified in the conceptual framework, mission-mindedness was one of the expected factors, as was funding, location, internal candidate, past experience, project type, and availability. Each of these concepts were present in discussions with the participants; however, mission-mindedness and availability were the greatest responses. These concepts are further broken down on Figure 3.

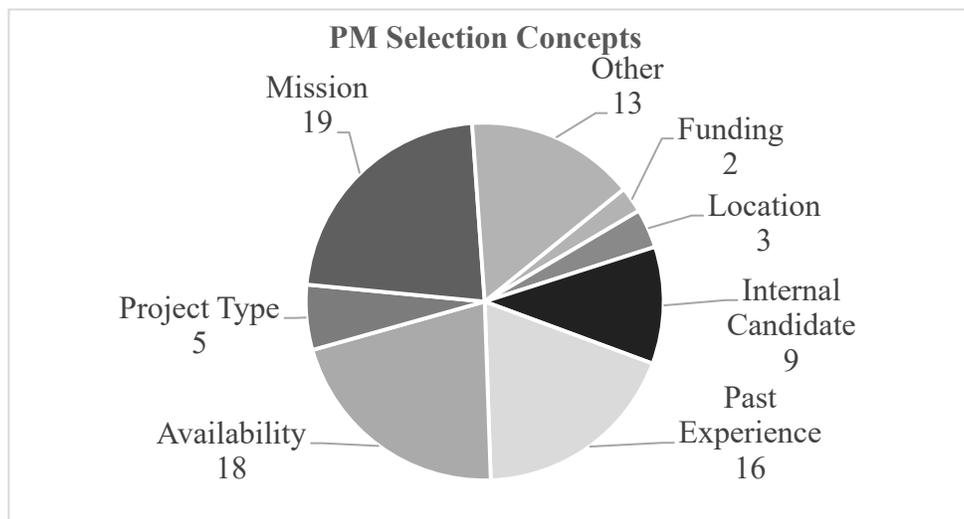


Figure 3. PM Selection Concepts.

*Comparison.* Of the responses provided, interesting patterns between the organizations began to emerge. For example, Organizations A and C, in addition to focusing heavily on mission-mindedness and availability, also focused on past experience. Organization B focused on funding, location and other factors not initially considered in the conceptual concept. This organization also focused upon what they did not have whereas organizations A and C both focused upon what they do have, as well as in developing the people they have.

For example, while funding and location could conceivably and rationally be a major roadblock for all organizations, only organization B highlighted these areas. The others gave mention, but also explained how those could be overcome. Here, organization B is truly focusing on limitations whereas organizations A and C have a growth minded mentality when it comes to overcoming the challenges of funding and geographic location. All organizations operate out of both urban and remote locations; therefore, it would have been expected they would share equally the challenges in working in remote Alaska, and that was just not the case. It appears organization B focused on limitations, while organizations A and C focused on valuing their staff and volunteer base by developing them and allowing them to creatively think about ways in which to achieve the missions while grappling with funding and location challenges.

Another more striking example might be seen in an organization B board member's explanation of how a project manager was selected. He said of one of his project managers, "He wouldn't be the best. The world would never hire him, but he's passionate about it...the irony is when you have faith-based missionaries, sometimes you take what you can get." The director of this same organization when discussing another project manager said, "he had a degree but not a lot of experience" and noted this individual was no longer with the organization. A line staff member said their selection process was simple: "We draw straws." Although she noted she was

kidding, one might wonder just how far from the truth that is when the heads of the organization simply pull whoever is available, whether they have the skill set or even the aptitude for the project. Another staff member noted that while they would like to think God brings the people they need for a project, that is not necessarily true, and they must work with what they get.

Compare this messaging to that of organization C in which one participant said, “We believe strongly in promoting from within, so part of my goal is training someone for my succession.” While that person might not be ready yet, his or her supervisor is already pouring into that person knowing they are capable with a little guidance. The same thread can be found as an individual in organization A stated, “Who has God brought that’s really gifted in that area, who can take that on?” For them, it is not simply who is available, although it is a part of it. They look for who has the aptitude for accomplishing the project using their unique set of gifts.

**RQ2: Professional Development of Project Managers.** Similarly, these organizations each have a unique outlook when it comes to training and professional development. The researcher first considered whether the participant responses indicated training was available or not. These results are indicated in Figure 4.

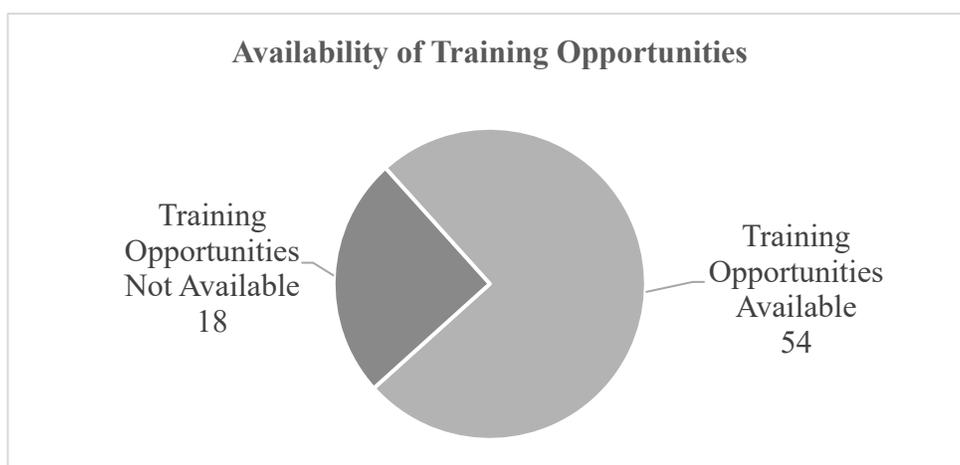


Figure 4. Availability of Training Opportunities.

While none of the organizations specifically focuses any training upon project management techniques or development in project management, the executive director of organization C does have a black belt in 6-sigma and uses his training daily in the workplace.

Each organization operates projects (and programs which run like projects but do not necessarily have a specific end), yet no time is devoted to learning how to improve processes for these initiatives. What was striking while interviewing these participants is many of them were visibly surprised when asked about further development in these types of project development techniques. As a researcher, this was notable, because it means that while many responded to the question about their greatest struggles with things such as processes and people, none had considered those struggles might be mitigated through training in this area. Generally, this is in line with expectations, yet presents the opportunity for further development of the staff.

**Comparison.** In lieu of having material data regarding project management specific training, the researcher asked a follow up series of questions to every participant about what training was available to them, if any. The data from this line of questioning did reflect the conceptual framework and is further broken down in Figure 5.

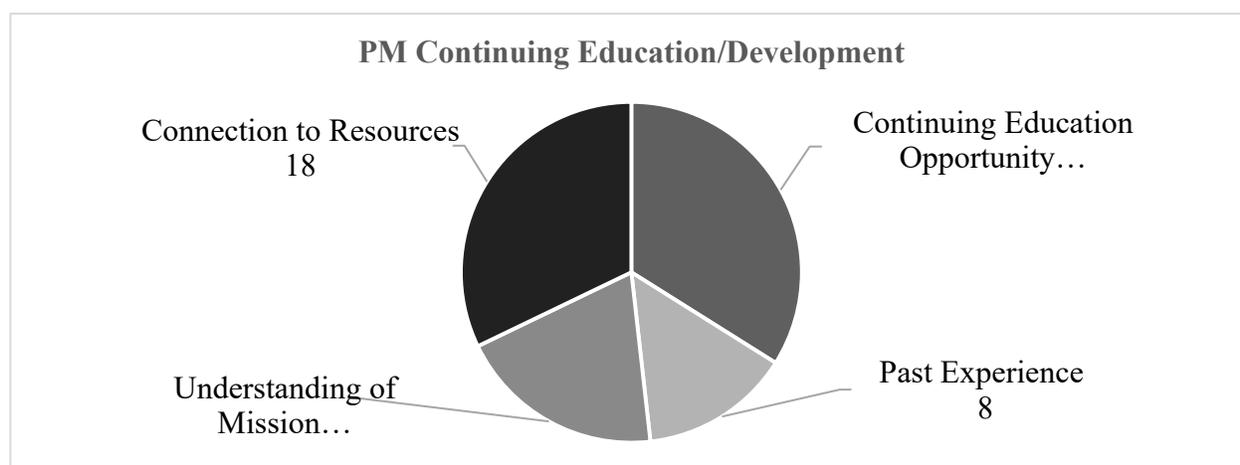


Figure 5. Continuing Education Compared to Conceptual Framework.

One participant in organization A said, “I think nonprofits in general or maybe just small nonprofits don’t put enough emphasis on [training].” And this may be a generally true statement, however, organizations A and C, both place a heavy emphasis on training, though the opportunity for training is carried out much differently between the two. It was not surprising to find the data indicates training provided is the continuing education surrounding the development of specific job classes within nonprofit organizations (think CEUs for licensure), however, it was notable to find such a great emphasis upon connection to resources. Although expected as part of the conceptual framework, it is surprising to find just how thirsty these organizations are to network and connect with others. Organizations A and C both are driven by finding others who have done what they do better and connecting into those resources. This not only develops the staff within the organizations but creates a network of services through which more Alaskans can be served, thus furthering this mission.

Considering the thirst for training, organization A is very aware of the funding constraints and ensuring what money is available is used for the best purpose. However, training is vital for the continued growth of the organization, and they have identified creative ways in which to provide training to employees and volunteers through the use of local and national grants as well as simply networking within the community to identify individuals who have the knowledge they need and who would be willing to donate time and materials to provide the training.

Alternatively, organization C believes training is an integral part of their business model and budgets an allotment per employee per year towards training and professional development opportunities. This encourages employees to confidently seek out further development knowing they will be able to pursue their own growth. While supervisors may encourage staff to

participate in certain trainings, each staff member also has leeway to identify their own training path.

Compare these two organizations with that of organization B, and one would see a different perspective. This organization historically has placed no emphasis upon development which is evident in the responses of nearly all employees. The only consistent training provided is related to fundraising to ensure all staff are capable of helping the organization raise the necessary funds. It is also expected that all staff have Bible training or have a desire to pursue Bible training. There is a culture of qualifying responses with, “we haven’t done training in the past.” It should be noted the newer director is working towards shifting this practice, however, this has not yet been embraced by employees, and it is an interesting note that what training has been offered seems to benefit the organization more than the employee, thus makes one question whether it was truly beneficial. This idea would be an area of further study.

Another area of further study is the impact of culture upon whether employees desire and pursue training. Organizations A and C have cultures which place high regard on training and professional and personal growth. Employees are encouraged to follow their dreams and pursue growth opportunities. Although funding may be limited, employees are encouraged to think creatively to overcome the roadblocks to pursue the training opportunities they need. Every member interviewed knew this culture and embraced it. Compare this with the culture in organization B. The leader of organization B informed the researcher that training was offered to employees, and that, “they have that opportunity in their staff handbook, and it is documented.” Yet, no staff member appeared to either be aware of this, or perhaps they simply did not value this themselves. Either way, many reasons for not pursuing education were given, and when

pushed to consider what training they might want, many said “Bible training.” Others simply were tired of training, and indicated they did not want to learn.

To summarize the impacts of training upon a culture of an organization, the researcher will end with a quote provided by the leader of organization C. “Learners will inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully prepared to deal with the world which no longer exists.” For these organizations to continue to be impactful within the state, their staff and volunteers must continually be learning and growing, or they will simply no longer be effective in achieving their missions.

**Summary of the Analysis.** In summary, none of the organizations studied specifically pursue training for project managers in the areas of project management development. While these results are not unexpected, they clearly highlight an area of potential focus for these organizations which stated organizational challenges such as processes and people management. It was heartening to see the majority of organizations value training and professional development generally and are learning based organizations. The culture of learning is present, and thus, one day, these organizations might choose to pursue project management training for their project managers.

Considering the results around project manager selection, the evidence points strongly toward selection being based upon availability, yet several organizations preface that with looking for who is available with the experience needed, or some experience needed as the case may be. Selecting a project manager based upon their connection to the mission was also prevalent as expected given existing literature (Aranyossy et al., 2018; Lawler, 2007). A unique factor not anticipated early in the research is that of the faith element. The strong dependence

upon God bringing the right person was evident in all organizations, and while outside the scope of this project, is worth validating.

It is also notable that organizational culture impacts both selecting and developing a project manager in the nonprofit sector. This was also not a major component of the scope of this project, yet this supports the existing body of literature as well. Organizations A and C both have cultures of growth, drive, and passion, and this is evident in their selection of a project manager as well as in development of their employees. Contrast this with organization B which does not have the same drive or passion, and thus does not emphasize the same values as the others.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

After reading through all the data presented, the question remains, why is this relevant to business practice today? And why does that matter from a biblical framework? These two questions will be explored, and answers postulated in the proceeding sections, but first, a review on what it means to be a nonprofit organization is needed.

Nonprofit organizations exist to meet a targeted mission rather than the goal of maximizing value. They may be special interest groups such as political organizations or professional associations, they may support vulnerable populations within society, or they may be rooted in religious beliefs (Lecy et al., 2019). Nonprofit organizations undeniably provide real economic and societal benefits within their respective communities. As discussed in Section 1, these organizations provide benefits such as value, innovation, public policy, meet community needs, garner community involvement, and generate economic growth both locally and nationally. Statistics indicate 10% of the national workforce is employed by nonprofit organizations. While it is easy to blithely assume a nonprofit organization is not “real” business

that is a false assumption. Many nonprofit organizations run with the “big dogs” of private sector and are often a driving force with the government sector as well.

**Relevant business practice.** With that understanding, it begs the question, why is this research project relevant to improving business practices today? This data supports the concept that nonprofit organizations are choosing their project managers based upon factors inconsistent with project manager, or leader, success. Factors such as funding, geographic location, availability, or other lesser known factors may all impact the decision of who to place in charge of a project; however, these should not be the leading factors. Past experience and connection to the mission are both critical success factors to be considered by organizations going forward. As the data implies, nonprofit organizations in Alaska select with the mission in mind, and existing evidence indicates that is a key component when used *alongside* some sort of experience or gifting.

Similarly, the data from this research shows strong indication that organizations are not consistently placing an emphasis on professional development in the areas of leadership or project management techniques for their project managers. Some organizations currently enjoy a culture which encourages training and professional development of employees, but only one organization studied currently uses that as an organizational strategy point. On the other end of the spectrum, one organization has not placed much if any value on continuing education, and finds itself struggling to remain relevant.

So, what then is the lesson to be learned in professional practice? It is not too late to change the organizational strategy. Existing literature, in addition to this study, indicate selecting a project manager who both has a level of experience needed as well as a devotion to the mission is a critical component of long-term success as an organization. Similarly, once a project

manager has been selected, it is not too late to begin to encourage professional development and training for that individual. Creating a culture in an organization of continuous improvement while remaining dedicated to the mission presents a powerful opportunity of leverage for a nonprofit organization.

**Project Management as a Field of Study.** So how does this research impact field of study in project management? Data gained through this project supports the existing research indicating the importance of project manager selection and continuous professional development as a means to develop the bench of project managers within an organization. This is applicable to nonprofit organizations, government organizations, and private sector organizations equally; thus, the research simply adds to the already existing body of knowledge. However, it also makes positive inroads into the field of project management as it relates to nonprofit organizations. Very little data currently exists in this area, yet nonprofit organizations continue to gain footholds in every community in the nation and considering the economic and societal impacts they have, this will continue to become a popular field of study. As of this time of this writing little new research in this area has become available within the last 12 months, yet given the importance of these organizations during an unprecedented pandemic, it is expected to become a broader field of study within the next several years. The work done through this study is intended to lay the groundwork for this additional research in the future.

**Biblical Framework.** Finally, no discussion on these nonprofit organizations would be complete without acknowledging the biblical framework through which the author lives, works, and writes. While it was not intentional that all organizations studied were faith-based, this provided ample opportunity to view this study through a biblical worldview lens. In fact, this lens is so interwoven through the results, it would be difficult to separate it out from the results,

nor would it be wise. In all the strengths and in all the challenges faced by the three organizations studied, each answer boiled down to “God provides” at its most basic level. It was so prevalent, it was one of the seven themes highlighted in the findings, and without it, the researcher and the reader miss the most important of stories. With that theme is another: what is the purpose of man? To glorify God. Each organization exists and is passionate about loving others through Christ’s love. It is all about bringing glory to the Creator just as Van Duzer (2010) writes when he says the purpose for children of God is clear as loving others and walking in wisdom demonstrate the heart of Jesus to the lost and hurting. So, whether one is affiliated with a nonprofit organization, a government organization, or a private sector organization, the example these three organizations provide when it comes to trusting God’s provision and loving others as He loves us is a powerful testimony as to what mankind’s purpose is. Project management techniques as studied are simply one way in which people may choose to bring glory to God, and if that is the gifting an individual has been given, then the responsibility has also been given. Hardy (1990) equated this to being the representatives of God through cultivating the resources He has provided for the benefit of others, and ultimately for His glory.

### **Recommendations for Action**

What follows next is a series of recommendations drawn for the conclusions of this study. The researcher has chosen to address five of them, though the reader may see more within the data results. While all five recommendations may apply to all nonprofit organizations, the final recommendation is included specifically for faith-based nonprofit organizations as something that cannot be overlooked.

**Recommendation 1: Mission Clarity.** Existing literature supports the concept of the necessity to have a clear mission statement. These statements allow not only those affiliated with

the organization to communicate their story but also provide a framework for leaders to strategically guide the organization (Mendel & Brudney, 2014). It is the blueprint for organizations as they determine a need for a project, determine who will lead that project, and what kind of training to provide to employees and volunteers. Second to having a clear mission statement is communicating that statement well. Keeping it on a shelf and checking it off the to-do list is not an effective use of this powerful tool. Leaders, whether they be project managers or not, need to be keeping this mission statement at the forefront of their minds and their tongues. Everything an organization pursues starts with the mission, its purpose for existence. Without that, a project and indeed a project manager is bound to fail.

Implementing this recommendation is easier said than done in many ways. It is simple to say an organizations leader must determine what the mission statement is and write it up. But the researcher acknowledges much work, thought, and prayer goes into determining the mission statement. But the steps to take are necessary for the health of the organization and her people. Gather the board and leaders and skip to recommendation five for more guidance.

Similarly, once a mission statement is clearly defined, leaders must communicate that mission on a regular basis. It must become something the leader and therefore the employees and volunteers begin to adopt as their own. As one participant put it, the mission becomes a part of the DNA of all individuals connected to the organization. First step is to begin sharing with the team, and sharing why it is important. Ed Sabol describes this phenomenon, “Tell me a fact, and I’ll learn. Tell me a truth, and I’ll believe. But tell me a story, and it will live in my heart forever.” For leaders, telling the story is crucial.

**Recommendation 2: Project Goals.** When asked what the definition of success was in a project, most participants responded hesitantly, yet came to the same conclusion. Each of them

responded with success is when the project reunifies families, rescues children, frees addicts, and saves souls. The answers varied depending upon which organization, but interestingly, those responses pointed directly back to the organization's mission statement, its purpose for existence. Ultimately, participants were saying, a project is successful if it meets its intended goal. While one might argue there are other factors, for the purpose of these recommendations, the researcher believes it is important for every team member to understand the "why" behind a project. They need to understand what the goal is for the project. This means, first, the leader or the project manager must first identify those goals. But secondly and most importantly, those goals must be communicated and shared with others.

Implementation steps include first understanding the mission of the organization, then clarifying why the project is necessary. Once clear, the project manager or leader must clearly define and communicate the goals for the project. This will give the team a basis for tracking whether the project is successful and will allow for mid-course adjustments if necessary.

**Recommendation 3: Take Action and Communicate.** It may seem as if the directive to take action and to communicate are commonly known principles. Yet, as this research discovered, it is not as common as one might think. One participant noted their organization has lots of chiefs but no Indians. In other words, the staff were all doing their own thing in the absence of a strong leader providing the direction. A leader is in place, yet the leader is not taking action. The first step is to communicate with team members. Communicate the mission, the story, and the genuine respect for each team member. Leadership is about being in relationship with people; yet a leader must both take action and communicate in order to be in relationship with others.

The first step to implementing this is to begin to get to know each member of the team- whether staff or volunteer. Understand what makes them who they are and learn about their hopes, dreams, and talents. Not only for organizational gain, but out of respect and concern for the individual. Build a relationship on trust and respect, then begin to see their dreams and talents as answers to the organizational needs, or consider encouraging additional development opportunities as in recommendation 4. The first step is seeing the individual.

**Recommendation 4: People Development.** As evidenced through research question 2, training and professional development are intended to grow not only individuals, but also organizations. Although both financial and human resources may be limited in an organization, understanding the criticality of training and development of staff and volunteers is a key component of long-term success. Instead of living in the space of resource limitation, this is a perfect opportunity for an organization to creatively think outside of the box when it comes to encouraging staff to pursue additional training, development, or even their dreams. This development will pay in dividends with a loyal, engaged staff who has the expertise needed to keep the organization on course for years to come.

As a leader, implementing a training program is daunting for any organization, especially if one does not exist. Similarly, changing the culture from passive to active learning will require time, patience, and consistency. One participant interviewed said it best when he said, “Consistency, consistency, consistency, is key” to winning the trust and developing people. Start by leading by example, personally attending training, then sharing lessons learned as a result. Encourage others to pursue something which supports their dreams- whether or not it directly supports the organization. If finances prevent any paid opportunities to begin with, begin looking

to the community or donor base. Who can deliver the needed training for free or who can provide a grant so an employee can attend?

**Recommendation 5: The Power of Prayer.** The final recommendation comes from the stories of the individuals interviewed. The dependence on God and the relationship with God so many the participants displayed is a powerful testimony of the goodness of God and His active participation in the lives of mankind. Prayer is communication with God; it is an acknowledgement of the relationship one shares with Him. As a people called by God, how can one lead an organization or lead a project without calling upon Him for direction, guidance, provision, relationships with others, and accomplishment of His purpose? It cannot be done. It may seem crazy to point out the importance of prayer, yet the very acknowledgement of it points out the needs of mankind for One who is in control. Let it always be said that the faith-based organization – and truly the faith-based leader of any organization- first sought the Lord in prayer.

Stuck on how to begin praying? The first step is to acknowledge mankind's need for a Savior. Begin praying for wisdom, direction, protection. Begin praying for individual team members and their families. The content is up to the person as prayer is an extension of the relationship between God and the person. Ask God what He would like to share. And praise Him for the work He has already done.

### **Impacts**

This study is intended to impact four distinct people groups. Each group serves an entirely different purpose, yet each may benefit from the work presented through this project.

**Researchers.** The first group which can learn from this study is that of researchers. Because this is intended to begin the conversation surrounding project management in nonprofit

organizations, the researcher knows other researchers will follow and will build upon the lessons learned. The results of this study will be available to this group of individuals through publishing and will be available as a resource for these future researchers.

**Nonprofit organizations.** The second group this study is intended to impact is that of nonprofit organizations. While the study focused on small and medium sized organizations in Alaska, the truths contained in the data are beneficial for any organization. Organizations struggling to find their way, struggling with financial and human resource limitations, volunteer management, or simply too much work to complete on time are all able to learn from the recommendations presented previously. This information will be available as a published journal, thus searchable through trade journals. Additionally, copies will be provided to the participating organizations and others within Alaska who are excitedly waiting for the results.

**Alaska Organizations.** Alaska businesses face unique challenges, whether they are nonprofit, for-profit, or government agencies. Isolation can be extreme, as can other geographical challenges. Resources of all kinds are already in limited supply. The dark months produce natural depression in workers, leaders, and children. Yet, Alaska is a fiercely driven state. People are determined to carve out a life worth living. The recommendations provided previously apply equally to businesses across Alaska, and provide reminders as to the importance of relationships. Relationships with others and relationship with God. The lines of communication between others and with God are critical to overcoming the challenges faced by all Alaska industry. Alaska is a big state, but a tight network of people. These recommendations will be available in published journals and will likely be made available through word of mouth around the state. As one organization learns, they will share with another in their network. It is what Alaskans do: people helping people.

**Followers of Christ.** This project and the results contained therein are for the follower of Jesus working in the secular world. It is important to remember where all the knowledge of project management techniques and tools came from. God is the Author and Creator above all. He is the giver of knowledge. Thus, as followers of Jesus, using this knowledge in isolation from Him is not living the life He intended. The gifts given and the lessons learned must be taken as provided by Him. All the knowledge contained in this document; it means little without a relationship with Jesus. This story, the stories of each participant impacts the follower of Jesus. The researcher contends the results of this study will be in the hands of His children as the study is disseminated to the participating organizations, their connections, and others who the Lord will lead to read.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

In terms of research, the limitations of this study abound. This study only considered three organizations in the State of Alaska. While the results supported existing research, much work remains to be studied. The researcher has identified four areas in which this particular study would benefit from further research. There may be other areas as well.

**Hiring Internally.** As identified in the findings, one organization effectively hires from within when selecting a project manager. Although not stated in those terms, the leader and the culture believe strongly in hiring someone who is already doing the job. This works well as this organization has almost no turnover. What turnover exists is due to relocation from Alaska, rather than individuals leaving the organization. Clearly this concept works for this organization, but further research should be conducted to determine if other factors are at play with this decision, and whether there are any times hiring outside would be a good business practice.

**Forced Professional Development.** As discussed in the findings, one organization does not currently have a culture of encouraging training. However, what training is encouraged does not seem to excite the staff. An area of future study might be whether trainings such as the unwanted trainings provided are really beneficial in any measurable way. Do employees really learn and develop when they are resistant to the training or professional development opportunities in the first place?

**Organizational Culture and Training.** The third area of further study identified is that of the impact of organizational culture on the employee's desire to pursue training or professional development opportunities. Is it the culture which drives whether employees seek these opportunities, or is it the employee's desire for these opportunities which drives the culture?

**Wider Nonprofit Organization Net.** The final point which demands further study is the need to test the theories and lessons learned in this study through the study of nonprofit organizations with a secular bent, outside of the human services industries, and in geographically diverse areas. Undoubtedly, nonprofit organizations without the faith-based beliefs would approach the research questions differently in many respects. Similarly, perhaps organizations with missions supporting movements such as the arts, or animal rights, or environmental protections would approach the questions differently. Geographic differences certainly impact how nonprofit organizations interact with the donor and beneficiary base, yet further research could illuminate whether Alaska faces these issues outside the expected parameters, or if, truly, despite the unique challenges in an isolated state, people handle those challenges in a similar manner as those living elsewhere.

## Reflections

The following section presents an inside look into the researcher's thoughts upon completion of this project. Considerations include thoughts on the research process, potential biases, effects of the researcher upon participants, changes in the thinking, and a biblical perspective. Through these reflections, it is the hope of the researcher to impart a few final lessons to those journeying behind.

**Research process.** In reflecting back on the research process, the researcher experienced great growth and developed a passion for the study along the way. The growth came in the form of writing style and skill. Passion came in the form of interviewing the community.

The research process is extremely difficult for most, if not all, doctoral students. The level of detail, length of research, and then time to implement is intensely demanding, never mind having a personal life and maintaining a career. One of the greatest struggles for the researcher throughout the course has been the ability to accurately communicate concepts or ideas in an intellectual and intelligible manner. The journey from the first assignment all the way through the final assignment felt as if it would never end; yet when reviewing all the research which went into the project, it is clear the goal of learning how to effectively communicate thoughts and ideas has been achieved.

Unlike many doctoral students, the researcher did not have any great desire to pursue any one line of research, which meant starting the dissertation process without passion created many painful moments. In fact, it was not until the interview phase began that the researcher began to be passionate about the study. Although the interview phase was by far the most difficult, made even more difficult by a pandemic, it was the most rewarding. Meeting community members who were completely sold-out in both their faith and for the mission of their organizations was a

humbling experience. These individuals literally endure daily trauma because they love God and want to love people well. Aside from the academic lessons learned through the research process, the researcher was reminded what it looks like to live life with abandon and complete dependence upon God's provision.

**Potential biases.** The researcher sought to refrain from allowing personal biases into this study. On the one hand, it was easy to begin with as the researcher had no great interest in the subject. When one does not have an attachment, it is easy to remain outside the data. Once the interviews began, it became very difficult not to interact with the participants during the interview itself. The researcher sought to remain unbiased by simply following the interview script, and not sharing positive or negative feedback. One tactic which seemed to meet both the need for consistency of interviews as well as the researcher's need to build relationships was to maintain distance during the interview itself, but as soon as the recording was stopped, the real relationships began. While most interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes, the researcher often spent closer to an hour and a half with participants on the day of their interview. These participants are now lifelong friends, yet the research data collected remains unbiased as a result of simply keeping the interview professional.

**Effects of the researcher.** As stated above, the data itself indicates the researcher did not have a bias on the data collected from the participants. However, the researcher impacted not only those participating in the study, but indeed, the entire organization. Although the researcher is sworn to confidentiality and does not speak of the perspectives of individual participants, the participants are not held to that same standard. The result? Each organization is buzzing with team members communicating and comparing responses. The questions peaked office conversations surrounding what it means to be a leader, what kind of training opportunities they

should pursue, what hope and dreams are tied to those trainings, a thankfulness for the cultures they have the privilege of working within, and most importantly a recognition that God is in control and that He has provided them immeasurable blessings. All this information was already within each organization, but it took an outsider- who also happens to have a biblical worldview- to draw that information out into a medium to discuss as a team.

A second point to note is one organization's staff was very tentative about being interviewed by the researcher due to a deep seeded distrust of leadership. Because leadership was the mechanism for the researcher to gain access to these participants, it took a great deal of patience, and then trust building for them to agree to be interviewed. The result? Some of the most beautiful conversations (interviews) were had as these brothers and sisters in Christ learned they could trust someone to value their thoughts and opinions. The researcher prays this softening continues and is humbled to have witnessed such a major milestone in these staff members.

**Global Pandemic.** The researcher would be remiss not to acknowledge the impact an unprecedented global pandemic had upon this research. Timing is everything, and the national shutdown and stay at home orders were implemented during the data collection phase of this research. Blessedly, most of the interviews with these three organizations were completed by the time Alaska's governor shut down the state; however, the researcher had intended to study as many as five nonprofit organizations. There were two organizations which had agreed to participate, however, as the pandemic swept across the state, it became clear for both these organizations as well as the researcher, that pursuing with them at this time was not study practical. Could the results of this study been materially different by adding these two

organizations to the study? Perhaps, however, the researcher remains confident in the results given the saturation and triangulation of the three organizations studied.

**Changes in thinking.** As a project manager previously working in the private sector many years, and recently working for a state government agency, the researcher had a pretty good idea about what it takes to successfully lead a project. Understanding the importance of having a good project manager cannot be stated enough, nor can the need for constant growth and development. Continually learning not only develops the individual but benefit an organization and a team. The researcher also believes the mission of the organization- the goals of the project must be embraced by the project manager on some level. This research supports that belief. The researcher has led plenty of projects in which she was not completely sold on the purpose, but worked hard and sacrificed, ultimately leading the team through to a successful end.

However, what the researcher was not prepared for was the level of focus put on the project manager selection of support for the mission. The researcher certainly expected that this impacts leader selection and ultimately project success on some level, but these organizations were wholly committed to that being the priority. The mission become part of the DNA of people. That level of belief was a shocking thing to witness for the researcher. Although the researcher still believes there are key project manager qualities organizations should seek, the order in which the researcher would place those has changed- with mission being at the top. On a personal note, it makes the researcher wonder what she could have achieved as a project manager on those projects if she had fully supported the mission.

**Biblical principles.** Perhaps this is the most important concept to spend time reflecting upon. This study could certainly have been undertaken through a secular viewpoint. Project management and nonprofit organizations are not special to the biblical faith by any means. And

the data likely would be very similar in many ways. However, this study was not undertaken from a secular worldview, and the organizations studied were not secular organizations. The researcher did not know ahead of time which organizations would ultimately be participating, and all signs point to God clearly working in the life of the researcher and in those of the leaders of the selected organizations. He clearly had a purpose in the researcher working with these three organizations in this season. Lessons are still being learned, but the foundation for the researcher's work-life has been shifted, with the foundation of Jesus replacing what had been. Seeing, as an outsider, what it means to love your coworkers and to love your community; experiencing that love and being adopted into these organizations, one cannot go back to life without that intensity and passion for others. One cannot help but be changed because these individuals are pursuing relationship with God so hard, they are like a wildfire. The researcher remains wholly changed by God and praises Him for His work in her life. She never knew seeking an academic degree could so radically change her perspective on what loving God and loving others could look like. If nothing else is learned through this study, the researcher prays each reader is given the opportunity to clearly see what God's plan is for his or her life.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

In conclusion, the current study added to the existing body of knowledge surrounding both project management and nonprofit organization. This qualitative case study followed three organizations in Alaska, and their current practices of hiring project managers as well as their emphasis on professional development. The study sought to understand how these organizations currently undertake their selection and training of these leaders, while also seeking to identify recommendations for future success within nonprofit organizations.

Through this study, the researcher determined nonprofit organizations overwhelmingly select project managers based upon two concepts: availability and support of the mission. While not necessarily surprising, the degree to which support of the mission was noted was enlightening. Similarly, the importance of passion for the mission was evident throughout the study, for without a firm belief in the mission, why would people continue to face the traumas they face each day? Two out of three organizations studied place a heavy emphasis upon learning and have a growth-based culture in which employees are encouraged to pursue professional development. The benefit of this? Employees who are better equipped to take on a project when the need arises, and employees who are that much more passionate about the mission. The third organization ultimately led to the same conclusion as to the importance of training; however, this was accomplished because they do not have training-based culture. They struggle to find leaders to step out and take on projects when the need arises, and because of that, they select whoever is available, and that person struggles to see the need for the project, let alone how they can accomplish the project. The need for training and development is great- not only for the short term, but truly for the long-term success of the organization.

Though research on project management is plentiful, research on how nonprofit organizations might implement these tools is rather limited, and it was the goal of the researcher to close this gap in the research. It is the researcher's hope that nonprofit organizations, which so clearly impact every community, would begin to experience powerful leaps in achieving their missions.

In closing, the researcher wishes to leave the reader with a single quote. It is a quote by Ed Sabol which impresses upon both the researcher and the reader to identify the facts and truths

found through this research, but then to look past those to find the story. Find the implications out of the facts provided and allow God to write your story.

“Tell me a fact, and I’ll learn. Tell me a truth, and I’ll believe. But tell me a story, and it will live in my heart forever.” - Ed Sabol

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

Thank you for meeting with me today. As a reminder, I am Katie Vachris, a doctoral student at Liberty University. The purpose of this study is to identify how project management techniques are utilized in nonprofit organizations across Alaska. The intent is to add to the body of knowledge to provide useful business techniques to help further your organization's mission. At this time, please review and sign this Informed Consent.

Participation is voluntary, and you may refrain from answering any question if you are uncomfortable. Our interview will be recorded for the purpose of helping me ensure I did not miss anything you share, and will be transcribed upon completion of the interview. The data collected will through this interview and through any observations made while I am in your organization will be kept secure. Once the recording of our interview is transcribed, I will destroy the audio file. The data I collect will be scrubbed of any information which might identify you or the organization.

Do you have any questions about the informed consent form or the study? If not, we'll begin.

1. First, tell me what your experience is with projects in this organization? How are you involved, and what process does the organization have for determining whether to pursue a project? [RQ1]
2. What type of projects does your organization routinely engage in? [RQ1]
3. Why are these projects deemed necessary? [RQ1]
4. Can you tell me what the mission of the organization is? [RQ1]
  - a. How is this important to you and why do you devote your time to this organization?

5. When your organization determines a project is necessary, how is a project manager, or leader, selected? [RQ1]
  - a. What does a typical assignment conversation sound like?
  - b. Is the project manager assigned or do they volunteer for that role?
  - c. Do you think past project success is an indicator of future project success for the person in the role of project manager?
    - i. What do you think predicates the success of this individual?
  - d. What qualifications should a person who is the project manager possess in your opinion?
    - i. Are these qualifications currently considered when projects begin in your organization?
  - e. When you are preparing to select a project manager in charge of a new project, what considerations do you account for?
    - i. Do you consider resource availability, time, mission oriented, legal issues when selecting a project manager?
    - ii. What other considerations might you account for?
  - f. Is the role of project manager typically assigned to an employee, a volunteer, or an independent contractor and why?
6. What projects is the organization currently pursuing? [RQ1]
  - a. Are these projects related to the mission?
  - b. Who is leading each of these projects?
  - c. Does the organization have adequate funding for the project and where does the funding come from?

- d. Are the projects on time and on budget?
7. What do you believe is the definition of a successful project? [RQ1]
    - a. What do you believe are the contributing factors to reaching that successful outcome?
    - b. Is the leader or project manager a driving force behind the success?
    - c. What makes the leader successful?
  8. What training do you think a project manager should have? [RQ1]
  9. Tell me a little about your organization's culture. What motivates employees and volunteers? [RQ2]
  10. Does your organization offer training opportunities to its employees? [RQ2]
    - i. What kind of training opportunities are typically offered?
    - ii. Do employees seek outside training opportunities and are those requests encouraged?
  11. If individuals are filling the role as project manager, or leader, what training do they typically have in project management techniques? [RQ2]
    - a. Do employees have any formal training in project management?
    - b. Given your unique set of projects and your mission, do you believe professional development in project management techniques would be beneficial to your organization?
  12. When you consider your organization, tell me what makes a good leader. [RQ2]
    - a. Are there certain skills or character qualities you think make a good leader? If so, what are those?

- b. Do you think anyone can learn those skills or qualities? Or are they innate to only some people?
    - i. If these can be learned, how do you think someone could learn those skills?
13. When you hear the term “professional development” what is your immediate reaction?  
[RQ2]
- a. What does this term mean to you?
  - b. Does your organization participate or encourage professional development?
  - c. If you were given the opportunity to continue to learn new skills and develop personal character traits, what would you want to learn?
14. Within your organization, what would you say is the greatest weakness when it comes to managing projects? And Why? [RQ2]
- a. How do you think that weakness could be mitigated for your organization? Or can it?
15. If you were the project manager, or leader, how would you overcome the challenges your organization faces as it relates to projects? [RQ2]

Thank you for your time and willingness to share your thoughts on your organization with me today. Is there anything else you would want me to know about your organization, the business process you follow with regards to projects, or the project managers who lead these projects?

Now that I have had a chance to talk with you, I will be transcribing our conversation this evening and destroying the audio version. I will send you a copy to review for accuracy, and at that time, you may provide any additional information which you feel may clear up any

point in our conversation. I will continue my interviews with other stakeholders within your organization, and will finish my field study in the coming weeks. It is possible I might have additional questions for you during this time. May I contact you again if the need arises?

If you think of anything else I should know about your organization as related to your management of projects, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Do you have any questions, comments, or final thoughts before we conclude our meeting? Thank you again for your time and your contribution to our community.