An Investigation of Organizational Goal Setting:
What processes do organizations of varying sizes utilize when setting goals?

by

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Abstract

The existing literature on goal setting theory has focused primarily on goal setting at the employee level. Little consideration has been given to goal setting at the organizational level. In this MSc (Management) thesis, I highlighted the existing literature and where I believe gaps exist. From there, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 individuals at a variety of organizations. These interviews provided information on the processes organizations of varying sizes utilize when setting goals. By analyzing this data, I was able to uncover that there are a variety of processes utilized to set organizational goals. Going forward, I suggest that more emphasis be placed on goal setting in the context of organizational goals. In so doing, scholars can evolve the theory of goal setting beyond its current focus on the individual level.

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Introduction

The topic of goal setting has always been at the forefront of organizational success; whether it is financial targets, production goals, or human resource development goals, to name a few. Organizations utilize goal setting, knowingly or unknowingly, day in and day out. It is what drives their business (Sun, Peng & Pandey, 2014). However, not all decision makers within an organization put the thought and consideration necessary into their goals, thus, creating ambiguous goals and targets that are difficult to attain (Carper, 2015; Young & Smith, 2013). In other words, managers may not always consider how to develop their goals, how they can and should be measured, and how to ensure employees buy-in and understand how their personal goals tie in to the overall organizational goals (Bass, Bruce, Dong, & Yair, 2003).

As I examined the existing literature on the topic of goal setting, I noted that the field, with regards to employee level goals, has been well researched, with almost 50 years of scholarly investigation (Locke, 1968; Locke & Latham, 1984; Locke & Latham, 2013). But I found there was minimal research conducted in the area of organizational goals (Carper, 2015). Furthermore, there was a lack of research conducted on how organizational goals are set and utilized across varying sizes of businesses. Thus, several unanswered questions remained as I examined the literature, such as, what processes do organizations follow when setting organizational goals? Does the size of the business influence the process followed?

As I outline in more detail later in this thesis, this represents the context of my research. More specifically, I research the issue of goal setting processes at the organizational level across firms of differing sizes. I structure my thesis as follows. I first define key terms that are utilized throughout this study. I then conduct a literature review where I focused on the goal setting theory, the theory's origins and evolution, as well as how goals can be utilized in a variety of areas. Next, I describe the results of a semi-structured interview and provide details about how I was able to recruit participants, who was recruited, how I gathered my data (semi-structured interviews), and how I coded and analyzed the data collected. From there, I have provided a detailed data analysis, in which I have used grounded theory to conduct my analysis. Lastly, I discuss how the data I have gathered and analyzed can be useful in furthering the theory of goal setting, and I conclude this by outlining some of the limitations of this thesis and areas for future research.

Definitions

To ensure clarity and consistency throughout the research project, I have defined the following terms: business size (e.g., a small business, medium-size business, large business), semi-structured interviews, coding scheme, goals, and goal setting.

Business Size

The size of businesses is defined solely on the number of employees within the organization. More specifically, consistent with Statistics Canada (2016), when discussing the size of an organization throughout this thesis, a small business is referred to as an organization with less than 100 employees, while a medium-sized business has 101 – 499 employees, and finally a large business has 500+ employees.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In this research project, I gathered data utilizing semi-structured interviews, which are face-to-face or over the phone (where necessary) interviews that are recorded on an audio device (Warren & Karner, 2015). A semi-structured interview is an interview in which the researcher has a list of questions on the topic to be researched, but also has the ability to pose probing questions, where relevant, to obtain more information from participants (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Semi-structured interviews differ slightly from traditional interviews in the sense that they provide the flexibility necessary for the interviewer to pose probing questions to obtain more information on the topic being researched (Warren & Karner, 2015). In addition to simply conducting these interviews, they were also transcribed and coded utilizing a coding scheme developed specifically for this research project.

Coding Scheme

A coding scheme is a tool that researchers utilize to group similar thoughts, themes, content, and information together so that the data can be analyzed and discussed in an effective manner (Cameron, Forbes, Humphris, & Zhou, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Goals

With all of the research within my thesis revolving around goals, organizational goal setting, and employee goal setting, it is important that a standard definition of a goal be outlined. A goal can be described a variety of different ways depending on the context. For example, Etzioni defines a goal as "desired state(s) of affairs which the organization attempts to realize (1964, p. 6)." As such, a simpler definition from Locke and Latham will be used; "The term *goal* is defined by goal setting theory as the object or aim of an action (Locke & Latham, 2013, p. 4)." This definition has been selected as it will be applied to both organizational goals and employee goals in the context of this project.

Goal Setting

Lastly, it is important to understand what goal setting means. It is not just simply setting a goal, and then leaving it to others to accomplish. Goal setting is the process of identifying something that you want or need to be achieved, and then utilizing measurable targets and timeframes to achieve it (Carper, 2015; Locke & Latham, 2002). As Locke and Latham (2002) outlined, there are three key elements of goal setting theory: goal specificity, goal difficulty, and goal commitment (Locke & Latham, 2002). When individuals are encouraged to do their best, and that is the only goal they are given to achieve instead of a specific goal, often times they simply do not perform to their highest standard; goal specificity has been proven to increase performance (Locke, Chah, Harrison, & Lustgarten, 1989). In addition to specific goals, it is important that they also be difficult enough to be challenging to complete, but not so difficult that there is no chance of completion (Locke & Latham, 2002). Lastly, a sense of commitment is critical to goal setting, especially when utilizing specific and difficult goals (Klein, Wesson, Hollenbeck, & Alge, 1999). This is mainly attributed to the fact that goals that are difficult to achieve will require more effort than a simpler goal (Erez & Zidon, 1984).

Literature Review

Throughout my literature review, I outlined the origins of goal setting, mainly by highlighting early work by Latham and Locke (1979). From there, I reviewed how several other researchers have subsequently contributed to the theory. I then outlined the specifics of employee goal setting and describe the dimensions that should make up a goal, to ensure the highest probability of success. Next, I have provided an overview of performance based incentives and how it can be used as a motivator at an individual or team level. From there, I described how the field of goal setting has grown from the employee level to include team and organizational goal setting in more recent years. I then discuss business strategy is the path that organizations, managers, and employees take to attain the goals that are set. And lastly, to conclude my literature review, I have provided a brief overview of the Canadian business environment.

Goal Setting

The terms goals and goal setting are frequently used in scholarship and practice. Arguably, everyone has the ability to set a goal for virtually any desired outcome. For example, coach of a sport's team, goal setting could mean setting a goal to win a championship. If you are the leader of a university, it could mean setting a student enrollment target. For a business owner, it could mean securing a given revenue target. Regardless of the situation, goals always contain two elements, content and intensity (Locke & Latham, 2013). Goal content outlines what result you are seeking to achieve; for example, win a championship. While goal intensity refers to the effort a person or group of people need to put in to achieve this desired state (Locke & Latham, 2013).

With regards to goal setting within organizations, the same general concepts apply. Regardless of the goal, it will have content and intensity. In other words, it will have a specific objective that will be used to measured success, and it will need a certain amount of effort to both set the goal and to achieve the goal.

Goal Setting Theory Origins

As the founders of goal setting theory, Locke and Latham have contributed significantly to the knowledge of this field. Edwin Locke, a psychology professor with the

University of Maryland, is credited with the initial development of goal-setting theory, dating back to its early stages in 1968 when he published *Toward a Theory of Task Motivation and Incentives* (Locke, 1968). Since the 1960s, Professor Locke has continued to conduct research in the area to ensure the theory remains relevant and applicable in workplaces and elsewhere (Locke & Latham, 2002). Gary P. Latham of the University of Toronto has also been a top contributor to the field. Both Locke and Latham have published numerous papers, books, and articles jointly that not only further develop the theory, but also provide a practical understanding of the benefits of goal setting and how it can be utilized to ensure long term organizational success (Locke & Latham 1984; Locke & Latham, 2013).

While Locke and Latham have furthered the field of goal setting within both organizational behavior and psychology, its roots can in fact be traced back to the biological field of research. This is because the theory is based upon the belief that life is a process of goal-oriented actions; or in other words, as Locke and Latham (2013) state, “an organism’s survival is conditional on its fulfilling its needs. This applies to everything from single-celled organisms, to human beings” (p. 318). In other words, in order for the most basic organism or cell to survive in its ecosystem, it must prioritize its basic needs for survival by setting out goals to be achieved. From here, the theory has blossomed in an attempt to explain human (field of psychology) and organizational (field of organizational behaviour) performance (Locke & Latham, 2013).

As outlined by Locke and Latham (2002), goal setting theory, as it relates to organizational behavior theory, is built upon experimental research conducted over a 35-year period. This research produced one of their most well-known articles, *Building a Practically Useful Theory of Goal Setting and Task Motivation* (Locke & Latham, 2002). To publish this article, Locke and Latham (2002) analyzed empirical research over a 35-year period involving over 100 different work tasks and more than 40,000 participants. In addition to their empirical work, they also utilized several key pieces of work from researchers in the field of psychology, including Timothy A. Ryan (1970) and David McClelland (1953), to build the framework upon which goal-setting theory is grounded.

These areas of psychological research were mainly conducted around the causes and effects of motivation (Locke & Latham, 2002). Locke and Latham saw the potential to build upon this research to understand how motivational techniques, and more specifically setting goals, can be leveraged by organizations to encourage positive employee performance.

Employee Goal Setting

As goal setting is considered a theory of motivation (Locke & Latham, 1984), the bulk of the literature has examined goals in the context of employee performance and motivation (Latham & Locke, 1991; Locke & Latham, 1990; Locke & Latham, 2002). The essence of the theory is that people who set, and commit to, specific and difficult goals outperform those that set vague goals (i.e., do your best) or no goals at all (Locke & Latham, 1990). Thus, it is suggested that managers within an organization work with their employees and engage them throughout the process of defining individual goals. In utilizing this participative approach to goal setting, employees feel a sense of value and that they are an important part of the organization while subconsciously compelling them to take ownership of the goals, since they were involved in the development process (Ivancevich, 1976).

While the literature shows that it is key to engage employees to ensure goals and targets are met, there has also been significant research conducted in the area of ensuring employees are properly trained in goal setting. If employees are going to be involved in the process, they must understand how to set a specific, difficult goal that will encourage maximum performance (Latham & Kinne III, 1974). Locke and Latham (2002) highlight this in an experiment where they trained truck drivers on effective goal setting. Subsequent to training, these truck drivers increased the number of logs loaded onto their trucks from approximately 60 percent to 90 percent of the legal allowable weight. By teaching the truck drivers the benefits of goal setting, how to set achievable goals, measure their success, and ensuring they had the tools to complete the goals, the company was able to increase their productivity significantly, resulting in over a quarter of a million dollars saved in only nine months (Locke & Latham, 2002; Fried & Haynes Slowik, 2004).

In addition to aiding with employee performance, existing literature suggests that goal setting also has the ability to facilitate self-regulation within individuals (Locke & Latham, 2002). The goal itself defines acceptable performance. Thus, in theory, an individual will work to achieve a goal and will alter his or her behavior, as necessary, to achieve the desired end result; that is, successful completion of the goal (Latham & Locke, 1991; Klein, 1991). However, self-regulation skills, like any other skills, vary from person to person. For example, while some individuals require little supervision and can adjust their performance as necessary to reach a goal, others may require significant supervision and guidance in order to successfully achieve their goal (Latham & Locke, 1991).

With that said, the existing literature does suggest that self-regulation skills can be developed by all people if they are properly trained (Locke & Latham, 2002; Latham & Frayne, 1989). Additionally, experimental research has revealed a positive relationship between self-regulation and achievement of goals, which in turn has allowed organizations to give their employees the freedom to be self-regulators, within certain parameters (Yearta, Maitlis, & Briner, 1995). To put it simply, while human beings may be natural self-regulators, it does not mean that they are effective self-regulators. These skills must be acquired through experience, training, and effort; it is a skill that must constantly be developed (Latham & Locke, 1991).

Dimensions of Goal Setting

Locke and Latham (2002) assert that goals require certain dimensions to be effective. These dimensions include: goal commitment, goal difficulty, goal specificity, and goal feedback (Locke & Latham, 2002). Research has shown that when a goal embodies these dimensions, its likelihood of being achieved, within the parameters set, is at its highest. Thus organizations, or more specifically, managers, and employees should strive to include them in all goals (Locke & Latham, 2013). I will now expand on each of these elements.

Goal Commitment. In order to gain maximum goal commitment, a manager within an organization should ensure that an employee understands the *importance* of the goal and that the employee has the ability to complete the task with minimal supervision (*self-efficacy*) (Locke & Latham, 2002). If an employee is committed to achieving a goal and is involved in the goal setting process, studies have shown that this employee will be highly motivated to achieve the goal (Latham & Locke, 1979). By including employees in the goal setting process, you are showing them that their thoughts and input are valued, which in turn will allow employees to stay committed to accomplishing the goal (Locke & Latham, 2002). This is because the involved in goal setting provides employees a sense of ownership and pride (Locke & Latham, 1984). Thus, while assigned goals are shown to be effective, there can be additional advantages to having employees anticipatively participate in the setting of goals (Locke & Latham, 2002).

***Importance*.** Throughout the goal setting process, employees should understand the importance of the goal being set. It is not adequate for a manager to simply state that the goal is important; managers need to work with their employees to ensure there is a mutual understanding of how this goal will help achieve a certain target or objective for the organization. In doing this, the employee feels a sense of importance and, thus, they are more likely to be motivated to complete the task (see review in Locke & Latham, 2002).

Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy, or one's confidence in one's abilities to complete a certain task(s) and obtain a specific level of performance (Bandura, 1997), can be leveraged to enhance goal commitment and achievement by employees. When employees have the confidence and they have the skills to complete the required goals, they can self-regulate and adjust their course of action as necessary. Thus, they will improve goal performance (Locke & Latham, 2002). However, it is important for managers to understand that they need to invest in their employees to ensure they are continuously learning and pushing the envelope within their specific industry (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is only beneficial if employees have the motivation and the skills required to be successful (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Goal Difficulty. Additionally, there should be consideration given to the difficulty of the goal. It should be difficult enough to ensure the employee is challenged, but not so difficult that the employee is overwhelmed and feels as if it will be impossible to achieve. In order to ensure successful completion of complex goals, it is important that managers set realistic timelines and ensure adequate resources are supplied (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Goal specificity. By providing a specific target or goal to achieve, managers are able to ensure that there is minimal ambiguity with regards to the desired outcome. In other words, managers should not simply encourage employees to 'do their best.' But instead, should provide specific goals that can be achieved (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Goal Feedback. Lastly, once a goal has been set, with input from the employee, it is critical that managers provide regular feedback throughout the process. This shows the employee that management is committed to ensuring they are successful in attaining any goals. Additionally, if some rework is needed, by having a manager reviewing work and providing constructive feedback, there is a possibility for changes to be made prior to a deadline (Locke & Latham, 2002).

In addition to these three dimensions, the existing literature has also highlighted the need for specific goals to be assigned (Locke & Latham, 2002). The more specific a goal is, the greater the chance of it being achieved. As a manager, instead of encouraging an employee to do their best, it is shown to be more effective to set specific goals and targets to be met. This way there is no ambiguity on what success means (Latham & Locke, 1979; Locke & Latham, 1984; Locke & Latham, 2002).

Performance-Based Incentives

Incentives, and progress towards incentives, can provide feedback to employees on their goal progress (Lee, Iijima, & Reade, 2011). Managers use performance based incentives, often pay, to ensure alignment between the organization's goals and the employees financial success (Wilson, 2016). According to Beer (1983), such incentives represent one of the most powerful tools in organizational management. It can be used as a tool to motivate employees to work both harder and more efficiently by outlining the direct link between their performance and the financial compensation they are offered (Lee et al., 2011).

Traditionally, performance-related incentives have been associated solely with Western World organizations. However, since the late 20th century, with the slowing of several economies and a variety of financial crises, it has seen growth in other regions, most notably in East Asia (Kang & Yanadori, 2011). The main reason for this adoption was the ability of organizations to pay their employees based on specific goals and targets that were reached; meaning that they were no longer being paid based on their perceived value to the firm. But instead, this value was now measurable and employees were being paid proportionately (Lee et al., 2011).

In addition to facilitating individual, or employee motivation, performance-based incentives can also be used at a group or team level, thus encouraging collective performance as well (Schay & Fisher, 2013). In this context, the better a team, group, division, or even the organization as a whole, does, the more compensation everyone will receive (Durnham & Bartol, 2003). This type of system can take a variety of forms including profit-sharing (once an organization reaches a certain profit target, it is shared amongst employees) and employee stock-ownership plans (employees are given an ownership stake in the organization, so as the organization grows and is successful, so is the employee) (Betcherman, McMullen, Leckie, & Caron, 1994).

Team Goal Setting

Over the past number of years, organizations have undergone a cultural and structural change from hierarchical, top-down to a flatter, more team and group-based structure (Kramer, Thayer, & Salas, 2013). As such, “research on the goal setting theory in the last couple of decades has begun to test the generalizability of goal setting theory to team contexts” (Kramer, et al., 2013, p. 288). Van Mierlo and Kleingeld (2010) found that team goal setting allows for goal setting at multiple levels, which provides an added benefit to organizations as they have more concrete metrics that can be measured. By bringing together a team of individuals, an organization has the ability to set individual goals, but also then set team goals that these individuals will work toward as a group. The individuals' performance will help achieve the larger goal(s) for the team (Kramer et al., 2013).

Thus, a question which arises is whether team goals can be utilized to facilitate the achievement of organizational goals? If we use Latham and Kinne's (1974) study of a logging company's production as context, then the answer is yes. In that study, the logging company set out to increase profit by 25%, meaning that several teams (different crews) had to achieve their goals. Thus, the organizational goal of a 25% profit increase rolled down from the organizational level, to the team level, to the individual employee level – success would have been difficult to achieve if goals were not set at the lower team level (Latham & Kinne, 1974).

There is some evidence to support the assertion that by linking high-level goals (divisional or organizational) to lower level (employee) goals, organizations have a higher probability of achieving success (Kramer, et al., 2013). However, there still is minimal literature on how these goals are set and the processes organizations follow to facilitate such alignment across levels (e.g., organization to team to employee) (Wegge & Haslam, 2005). We know that goals play an important factor in success and organizational performance, but there is limited information on how they are designed and created. Kleingeld, Van Mierlo, and Arends (2011) did highlight that difficult and specific goals to help motivate teams to be successful, similarly to the way that difficult and specific goals motivate an individual to pursue success. But again, they fail to highlight any process that was utilized in setting goals.

Kramer and colleagues (2013) highlighted eight factors that can affect team goal setting: interdependence, goal type, organizational culture, reward systems, team size, leadership, identity, and individual differences. As I now outline, it is critical for organizations, and at a lower level for teams, to ensure these factors are considered when setting goals.

Interdependence. One of the biggest differences between individual goals and team goals is interdependence, that is, the extent to which team members rely on each other to ensure their collective success (Saavedra, Earley, & Van Dyne, 1993). Whereas an individual's goal success is entirely reliant on his/her performance, a team goal is reliant on the performance of the team as a collective unit.

Goal Type. Kramer et al. (2013) specified two types of team goals that can be utilized, namely, cooperative and competitive team goals. On one hand, cooperative goals, which encourage team members to work with each other to achieve a common goal and promote collaboration, have been found to be more effective in team settings (Seijts & Latham, 2000). On the other hand, competitive goals encourage individuals to undermine the goals of a team and focus primarily on individual goals and tasks, instead of the collective goals (Seijts & Latham, 2000).

Organizational Culture. Closely related to goal type is the organizational culture that is promoted; in other words, does the organization promote cooperative or competitive team goals? If teams are encouraged to work together, and cooperative behavior is rewarded, the research suggests that goals will be attained in a fair, ethical, and non-corrupt manner (Kramer et al., 2013).

Reward Systems. Reward systems are often associated with individual goals; for example, if you work at a car dealership, for every car you sell, you would get a certain percentage of the sale. This type of system incentivizes individuals to perform. However, at the team level, reward systems can be designed to reward either the team as a whole or the individual team member (Kramer et al., 2013). For example, when rewards are designed around a team achieving a certain goal and being rewarded as a whole for their performance, the entire team must work together (Pearsall, Christian, & Ellis, 2010). In contrast, if rewards are tied to individual goal performance, employees may be motivated to achieve their individual goals, potentially at the expense of the team's goals (Seijts & Latham, 2000). Alternatively, some researchers suggest that a hybrid between individual and team rewards (rewarding individual and team performance) may be the most effective system to put in place (Kramer et al., 2013). For example, individuals can be rewarded for their individual performance and for the team's performance. If each individual is tasked with selling 10 products to receive a bonus, and if all team members reach this goal, the team as a whole will receive an additional bonus, individuals will be highly motivated to be successful (Latham & Kinne, 1974).

Team Size. As team size increases, individual member's output and effort is reduced (Kramer et al., 2013). The more a team grows, the more its members believe that they do not have the ability to truly affect change. Whereas in smaller teams, individuals are more committed to achieving their group goals because they understand how their performance is helping the collective team (Hollensbe & Guthrie, 2000).

Leadership. Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks (2001) defined a leader as "individuals who are primarily responsible for defining team goals and for developing and structuring the team to accomplish these missions" (p. 452). If we break this definition down, we see that leaders have the ability to define their team goals, and outline to their team how they are to be accomplished. Thus, the leadership style, whether direct, supportive, participative, or achievement oriented, will directly affect the goal setting within a team (Kramer et al., 2013).

Identity. All individuals have an individual identity, and every team has a collective identity. Identity can be referred to as "…the aspect of one's self-concept that is based upon group membership" (Kramer et al., 2013, p. 295; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). What this means is that individuals must be able to identify with the team and the team's goals in order for team performance to reach its maximum potential.

Individual Differences. No two individuals are the same; we all have differences that make us unique. These differences, when brought together in a team environment, can have both a positive and negative effect on the team's goals. Not all individuals are going to have the same level of organizational commitment, or the same level of motivation, or have the same level of value for each individual team members' contribution (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000).

Organizational Goal Setting

As previously stated, literally hundreds of studies have examined goal setting at the individual level over the past 50 years (see Locke & Latham, 2013) and research has more recently examined issues related to team-based goal setting (Kramer et al., 2013). Yet, we have seen minimal research conducted in the area of organizational goal setting. As Young and Smith (2013) have argued: "is surprising given the prominence of macro-level goals in organizational processes including unit coordination, strategy, and resource allocation; and in strategic outcomes including organizational performance and stakeholder satisfaction" (p. 311). Macro-level goals, in the context of this thesis refers to divisional or organizational goals (Young & Smith, 2013).

The current literature on macro-level goals highlights two types of goals; non-operational and operational. The primary objective of non-operational goals is to legitimize the organization and, thus, such goals are often described as abstract, ambiguous goals designed to encourage employees to embrace an organization's culture and values (Vancouver, Milsap, & Peters, 1994). The primary purpose of operational goals is to help the organization measure performance and effectiveness (Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991; Young & Smith, 2013).

Additionally, managers within an organization also utilize proximal and distal goals in their goal setting strategies, while others may utilize just distal goals (Stock & Cervone, 1990). Proximal goals can be defined as short-term, benchmark goals, while a distal goal is a more longer-term, outcome goal (Brown & Warren, 2009). Typically, distal goals are broken down into several proximal goals to provide clarity and feedback throughout the achievement of a long-term objective (Kirschenbaum, Malett, Humphrey, & Tomarken, 1982; Stock & Cervone, 1990).

One issue that organization's need to overcome when setting goals at different levels is the fact that anything that happens within an organization, whether positive or negative, will affect other people within the organization (Locke, 2004). Locke (2004) does state that "Ideally, goals should be integrated across the entire organization, but this is usually impossible" (p. 132). So, again, there is evidence that goal setting occurs at the team or the organizational level, but how are these goals set? What process(es) do they follow?

So, while we know that organizations have goals, targets, and objectives to ensure their success, historically, researchers have paid little attention to the process(es) utilized to set the organizational goals. Instead, the literature has focused primarily on employee goal setting (Carper, 2015). For example, Young and Smith (2013) highlight that "there still remain substantial empirical gaps in our understanding of macro-level goal setting" (p. 323), and Carper (2015) states,

> A number of authors (e.g., Granger, 1964; Gross, 1968, 1969; Hall, 1975; Morasky, 1977) have independently come to the conclusion that organizational goals and goal structures are often taken for granted by both practitioners and academics who make the erroneous assumption that everyone knows what is meant by the term "organizational goals" (p. 50).

On this basis, I noted a paradox in the literature. On one hand, as Barsy (2007) stated, in order to remain effective, innovative, and influential, an organization must set out strategic goals that can be achieved to ensure success. On the other hand, much of the literature that currently exists on the theory does not examine organizational goals and how such goals are developed, measured, and matured over the course of their existence. Unfortunately, as was noted almost 50 years ago by Hill (1969), there is no accepted theory that outlines exactly the process of organizational goal setting and measurement. It is this gap that I hope to fill through my thesis.

Leadership and Visions

In order to understand the types of goals that are being set at an organization, one first must understand what both leadership and visions mean. On one hand, to understand what leadership is, I have used a definition from Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2014), "leadership is a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organizational goals" (p. 57). Visions, on the other hand, can be defined as "providing abstract guidelines and values that may direct the behaviors of an organizational member" (Stam, van Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2010, p. 500). Visions and goals are closely linked, however, goals are specifically created to be fully achieved, while visions are created to provide a vague strategic direction for an organization.

Both of these tools will vary organization to organization, with the vision(s) typically being influenced fully by the leadership. Thus, it is imperative for leaders within an organization to gain the trust of their employees to ensure organizational commitment and work satisfaction (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). In doing this, leaders will be able to take their abstract and broad vision, and work with their teams at various levels within the organization to create more specific goals that can be attained.

Strategy

While the preceding discussions highlighted a variety of goals types and the history of goal setting theory, one piece that has not been discussed is how goals are accomplished. Often strategic plans are the method used to accomplish corporate goals. In fact, a strategic plan can be defined as “a plan or pattern of decision making or actions designed or undertaken to achieve a goal” (Wood, Whelan, Sojo, & Wong, 2013, p. 95). As noted by Whittington and Cailluet (2008), since the early 1990s when research on the topic of strategic planning was at its peak, the number of studies conducted in the area has fallen off significantly. However, strategic planning still remains a critical tool within any organization around the world to this day and is key to their success (Wolf & Floyd, 2017).

With that said, organizations normally use strategies, plans, and goals, as tools to help ensure their success, but again, how are these strategic plans created? What is the process followed when doing so?

Grünig and Kühn (2015) highlight that strategies can be designed at implemented at the corporate, business, or functional levels, and that in order to be effective, strategies need to align with organizational objectives. While Fincher (1972) stated that the success of strategies is directly linked to the accomplishment of organizational objectives. Ultimately, organizational strategies “must be explicitly chosen or developed, internally consistent, and relevant to both the objectives and outcomes of the planning process” (Fincher, 1982, p. 373). They are designed to get from a current point or situation to a desired state (Fincher, 1982).

Steensen (2014) developed a new model for organizational strategy in which he five different types of strategy that can be utilized by organizations. He noted that each strategy has unique benefits and drawbacks to ensuring organizational success and that significant results can be achieved when multiple strategies interact. These five strategy types included: (1) shared strategy, (2) hidden strategy, (3) false strategy, (4) learning strategy, and (5) realized strategy. I now briefly summarize each type.

Shared strategy includes clearly communicated intentions within an organization; typically, this takes the form of collective communication for the entire organization, but it can also be broken down by team or division, where appropriate (Steensen, 2014). In other words, shared strategy can be referred to the communication of an organization’s plans, goals, and policies designed to achieve success (Andrew, 1987).

Hidden strategy is the complete opposite of shared strategy because there is communication with regards to the plans, goals, and policies designed to help the organizational succeed. One argument that has been presented by the existing literature for this strategy is that it gives managers the flexibility to revise their strategy as needed, especially in areas and industries that are highly volatile and require confidentiality (Mintzberg & Waters, 1982; Peters, 1978).

False strategy is exactly as it sounds – it is the communication of a false strategy to an organization’s members; the communication does not outline true intention of the strategy (Steense, 2014). While this strategy was initially utilized in political and warfare arenas, it has grown to be utilized by organizations to deceive competitors into believing something that may not be entirely true (Porter, 1980). These false strategies are often designed to encourage a specific reaction from competitors.

Learning strategy utilizes the knowledge and skills of an organization’s employees to help solve a problem or attain a certain goal (Steensen, 2014). It encourages employees to design a specific path forward that may not have been initially desired. This strategy can become important as organizations continue to grow as it gives employees the ability to foster a culture of learning through the acquisition of knowledge from their peers and their surroundings (Huber, 1991).

"Realized strategy represents the perception that strategy is what actually happens – the changing patterns of organization members' decisions, their activities, their actions and reactions, whether these are caused by intention, by adaptation or by pure coincidence" (Steensen, 2014, p. 272). In other words, realized strategy is always changing and growing.

Based on the existing literature, we know that organizations utilize strategies to achieve their goals, but similar to goal setting, there is a lack of understanding of the process utilized to design these strategies (Mantere, 2013). A further complication of the strategic planning processes is that strategic plans, whether intentionally or unintentionally, often do not get executed as intended (Mintzberg, 1978). As Mantere (2013) stated "…armed with the realization that formal strategy work was at least in part ritual and strategic plans could well be mere fantasies, strategy process researchers examined the unfolding strategy in organizational decisions and actions" (p. 1409). In other words, the evidence suggests that the strategic planning process that is followed by organizations may lack the logic or consideration concerning how to achieve organizational goals.

While these strategies can be utilized by organizations around the world, for the purposes of this project, I am only interested in their application to organizations in Canada. As such, in the following section I have provided a brief overview of the Canadian business environment. This will help provide some context for the methodology I utilized as well as lay the foundation for the data analysis section.

Canadian Business Environment

Two markers of the economic importance of businesses to society are the number of persons they employ and their impact of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In fact, GDP is utilized as a measure of economic macro-economic performance (Cartwright, 2017; Coyle, 2014).

In Canada, small businesses, in terms of number of employees, are the backbone of the economy. For example, in 2015, small businesses with less than 100 employees made up 97.9 percent of the 1.17 million employer businesses across Canada. These small businesses are critical to the success of the Canadian economy, and employ 70.5 percent of the entire private labour force. In comparison, medium and large businesses, in terms of number of employees, only accounted for less than 30 percent of the labour force (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Not only do these small businesses account for the majority of employment, as of 2015, they accounted for approximately one third of Canada's GDP. So, while the number of small businesses across Canada severely outnumbers those of medium and large, when it comes to their respective contributions to the national economy, medium and large business still represent a large portion (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Research Question

As evidenced by the literature reviewed, there is a gap in our understanding of the goal setting processes that organizations utilize. Thus, I seek to understand how small, medium, and large sized organizations set their goals, with a focus on organizational goals. As such, the following research question ground the present thesis: *What processes do organizations of varying sizes utilize when setting goals?* This research question stems from the need to further evolve the theory of goal setting and to expand it from its roots of employee goal setting and task-based motivation to a more macro level, and how organizations as a whole utilize the theory to ensure their continual growth and success.

Methodology

Participant recruitment

Prior to conducting any primary research, I submitted an application to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) and outlined my proposed project, how I planned to recruit participants, how I would utilize collected data, and most importantly, how I would ensure confidentiality of all participants. In the application, I provided a sample recruitment letter, a sample interview guide, and a sample informed consent form. I received confirmation of ICEHR approval on February 7, 2017; this approval provided me with permission to gather primary research, as outlined in my application, for one year. The approval letter can be found in Appendix A.

Initially, there were two different ways in which I planned to recruit individuals/organizations to participate in this research project. First, I contacted the St. John's Board of Trade (BoT). After discussing my research project with a representative of the BoT and how I believed it could provide valuable information to their membership upon completion, they agreed to aid with communicating the research project within their network. The BoT agreed to select several members that they believed would be most inclined to participate, and they sent an email providing some background on the project, the data collection technique to be used (semi-structured interviews) and how the research can benefit the members of the BoT. The recruitment email that they used can be found in Appendix B.

The second technique I used to obtain participants for the research project was focused around 'cold emails' and snowball sampling. I began by reaching out to organizations that fell within the small, medium, and large categories. When doing this, I sent the recruitment email found in Appendix B to a generic email address that I found on the organization's website, or if I had a contact in the organization, I reached out to that contact with the same email. Within this recruitment email, I outlined my research project, what I was asking of each participant, the time commitment, and that my project was approved by ICEHR. As an attachment to this email, I also included an Informed Consent Form, which can be found in Appendix C, for the potential participant to review.

From there, once interviews had been complete, I utilized the snowball sampling technique to obtain other participants. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which current project participants help in recruiting future participants for the project (Gyarmathy, Johnston, Caplinskiene, Caplinskas, & Latkin, 2014). To do this, I simply asked the interviewee if he/she was aware of any other individuals in a management position at an organization with an office in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) that may be willing to participate. I then again utilized the recruitment email in Appendix B and the informed consent form in Appendix C to invite people to voluntary participate in this research study.

In total, I contacted and invited 44 organizations to participate in the research project, of which 26 participated and 18 either did not respond or declined to participate. Once an organization agreed to participate in my research project, the next steps included confirming they had received the Informed Consent Form to review, setting up a time and location for the interview to be conducted and, subsequently, executing the interview. To ensure maximum comfort and minimal distractions, each participant was given the opportunity to select the time and location of the interview and were informed that the interviews would take no longer than 60 minutes to complete. The location for 24 of the interviews was the participant's office, while the remaining two participants were met at a local coffee shop.

Participants

As with any qualitative research project, there are two key components to the data sample that must be achieved, namely, data saturation and ensuring a theoretical sample (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, in order to gather a sample representative of all three business sizes, I attempted to conduct the same number of interviews within each group. This helped to ensure that data saturation was reached within each group – small, medium, and large – and also facilitated an adequate sample across all private sector businesses, for the purposes of this project.

I restricted my sample to include only private sector businesses as I did not want any government institutions, quasi-government institutions, or not-for-profit organizations to be involved in this study. I did so as I wanted to focus solely on organizations that were responsible to their shareholders, and not necessarily have the best interests of the general public or a very specific key stakeholder group as their main priority. In doing this, I was able to ensure that information gathered was from only one type of business (for profit) and was not diluted by a mix of business types (Brown & Hanlon, 2016). Additionally, the information gathered allowed for a meaningful theoretical comparison to be made against the existing literature; especially with regards to how employee goals are set and how success is measured.

The key to ensuring saturation, as stated by Strauss and Corbin (1990), is to continue data collection until no new information is gathered. Therefore, as it relates to the research project, semi-structured interviews must be conducted until no new data gathered. This will be outlined below.

The intention of the recruitment process is to ensure that adequate data is collected. Opinions on the exact number of participants needed for data saturation varies. Tran, Porcher, Tran, and Ravaud (2017) state that saturation is possible with a sample size as small as 25 participants. Whereas, other scholars who have attempted to pinpoint the exact science behind data sampling suggest that as little as 12 interviews can be sufficient to obtain full saturation (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2005). Given these estimates, I conducted 26 interviews in an effort to ensure I had met data saturation. I knew I had reached saturation once I had completed approximately 20 interviews – at that point in the data collection process I was obtaining the same information from interviewees. The breakdown of interviews conducted within certain industries and the size of organization interviewed can be found in the following paragraphs, as well as in Table 1.

In order to gather a broad range of data to better understand how organizations set their organizational goals, I utilized semi-structured interviews as the main data source. The individuals who were interviewed at each organization were all at the management level and were key decision makers within their respective organizations. By interviewing this type of individual, I was able to ensure that the information gathered is in fact the type of strategy and decision-making processes used by the organization when setting their organizational goals.

To ensure adequate data collection and in order to capture the desired sample, a total of 26 interviews were conducted across a variety of industries, including, but not limited to, oil and gas, food services, financial services, and education. To facilitate saturation across small, medium and large organizations, eight, six, and 12 interviews conducted at within each group respectively. In Table 1, I provide a summary of the sample in terms of role, industry, and organization size. This number of interviews provided sufficient information for a meaningful theoretical comparison and data saturation.

Table 1: Participant Information

Participant Number	Position	Industry	Size of Business
1	Owner	Food Service	Small
2	Vice President	Financial	Medium
3	Owner & Vice President	Insurance	Small
4	Owner	Education	Medium
5	Regional Manager	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Large
6	Manager	Financial	Large
7	Partner	Marketing	Medium
8	Owner	Real Estate	Small
9	Manager	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Small
10	Owner	Financial	Small
11	Chief Operating Officer	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Medium
12	Vice President	Financial	Large
13	Manager	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Large
14	Manager	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Large
15	Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer	Technology	Small
16	Owner	Law	Small
17	Vice President	Transportation	Medium
18	Director	Food Service	Medium
19	Manager	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Large
20	Vice President	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Large
21	General Manager	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Large
22	Director	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Large
23	Project Manager	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Large
24	Regional Manager	Financial	Large
25	Owner & President	Oil & Gas, Industrial, Construction	Small
26	Owner & Chief Executive Officer	Food Service	Large

The main criteria used when selecting the type of organization was based on size, in terms of number of employees, as previously explained. By utilizing this guiding principle, the data collected provided a broad range of results and included everything from a small locally owned restaurant to a large multinational oil and gas company, and everything in between. It is worth noting that all organizations that were interviewed had offices in NL, even if they were a national or multinational corporation. Although some of these organizations would be considered 'small' because of their employee count in NL, the number of employees they have worldwide would bump them up in to the 'medium' or 'large' category.

When I first started my research, I had not given this scenario any consideration, however, after a number of interviews with multi-national corporations, it became evident that I had to make a decision on this matter as it had become a recurring theme. If an organization had less than 100 employees at their office here in NL, but had more than that (whether 101-499 or 500+), what type of business would I classify them as? After careful consideration and discussion with my supervisor on the best way forward, I decided that the appropriate course of action was to include this type of business in the category based on all of their employees worldwide, not just in NL. Ultimately, the reason for doing this was because I wanted to understand how organizations set their goals. While I did pose questions on employee and divisional goals, ultimately my research project is aimed at understanding the process of organizational goal setting within varying sizes of organizations.

Interview Process

As this was my first research project that involved gathering primary research, I was the only interviewer throughout the process. This ensured two things: (1) that I would gain valuable experience for any future research I may conduct; and (2) that I would be able to ensure adequate probing – probing is one of the benefits of semi-structured interviews in that it allows you to ask questions that were not initially on the interview guide (McCracken, 1988). In doing this, when an interviewee responded with something of interest, or that perhaps I had not considered, I posed more questions along that line of thought to ensure I gathered enough information to review and examine for trends. Probing questions can also be referred to as prompts to encourage interviewees to continue discussing an interesting thought and provide more clear information.

While creating my interview schedule, which can be found in Appendix D, and going through dry-runs and potential scenarios that would unfold throughout the interviews, I used some of the tools, tips, and guidelines outlined by McCracken (1988). Consistent with the guidance of McCracken (1988), I made a point to ensure I had a hard copy of the interview guide with me for every interview. This allowed me to not only follow along the guide and ensure no questions were being missed, but it also gave me the opportunity to jot down notes and future prompts on the paper to get a deeper level of information from the interviewees (McCracken, 1988).

On average, the interviews were conducted in approximately 29 minutes, with the longest one running 55 minutes and the shortest one being 14 minutes. Before commencing each interview, I walked the interviewee through the purpose of the interview and how the data would be used, stored, and analyzed as well as how it would provide meaningful insight in to the further development of the theory of goal setting. Additionally, each person was asked if they had reviewed the Informed Consent Form, which can be found in Appendix C. If they had already reviewed it, I answered any questions that they might have, and then the interviewee and I both signed and dated the form. If they did not have a chance to review the document prior to our interview, I spent a few minutes walking down through the form, and then again, we both signed and dated the document. Each interviewee was also provided with a copy of the consent form for their records.

Once these housekeeping items were completed, the semi-structured interview began, and the schedule in Appendix D, was used as a guide. The interview schedule was developed with three distinct sections of data in mind: personal information, information about organizational goal setting, and information about employee goal setting. Each interview started with the interviewee being asked to introduce themselves, their background, and their role within their current organization; these demographic type questions were important to not only to increase the comfort level of participants, but also to provide some context of the individual's background and experience (McCracken, 1988). From there, I began to dive into the interviewee's knowledge of their organization's current strategy for setting goals and how they are measured and evaluated. Next, they were posed questions on a more individual-level basis about divisional or team goal setting and individual employee goal setting. This line of questioning was posed to see if there was any correlation between the organizational, divisional and employee goals.

While the interview schedule was largely followed, ultimately it was only used as a guide for conducting the interviews. As stated previously, where appropriate, I veered away from the interview schedule and asked probing questions in order to obtain more information about an interesting response provided by an interviewee. This ensured maximum data collection for the research project.

I also made some slight changes to the interview schedule throughout the data collection process, based on responses I obtained from the previous interviewees, to ensure I was gathering the most relevant data possible (McCraken, 1988; Warren & Kramer, 2015). For example, one question on the original interview guide asked participants to discuss how they utilized goal setting within their personal lives. I was initially hoping to understand if goal setting was an important part of the individual's life, which might show a relationship between their goal setting in their home life and their work life. However, after five interviews, I stopped asking this question because it was not providing any significant information. For the most part, individuals jumped right in to discussing goal setting within their organization, thus the question was dropped from subsequent interviews.

After completion of the interview, I debriefed the interviewee on the research project, how any information provided will be utilized, and answered any questions posed by the interviewee. Interviewees were also told that they could withdraw their information from the research project at any point up until the end of the data collection period – September 30, 2017 – at which point it could no long be withdrawn. Note that no participants withdrew any of their information from the data pool. Lastly, interviewees were informed that upon completion of the research project, their organization would be provided with a copy of the report for their records, which would hopefully provide some benefit to them.

Data

In order to ensure rigorous data collection and analysis throughout the research project, I took written notes of key topics and responses, audio recorded the interviews, and transcribed the recordings. This approach was taken for two reasons. Firstly, it allowed me to easily reference noteworthy topics discussed in the interviews when reviewing the notes, which then provided the opportunity to 'dig in' further to a specific portion(s) of the interviews for more details where necessary. This also meant that I could take notes while the interviewee was in the middle of his/her response, and jot down a potential probing question to obtain more information.

Secondly, by personally transcribing individual interviews, I was able to leverage textual analysis (also referred to as coding) to ensure that common themes and processes among all participants and organizations of the research project were identified and discussed thoroughly (Silverman, 2000). In other words, the transcriptions were able to be coded and became my data source for this research project. In fact, these transcriptions became the backbone of this research project and provided almost all of the data, with the exception of company websites. In cases where the organizations in question had an organizational website, I viewed their websites to get a better understand of their organizational goals and formal strategies. Ultimately this information only supplemented the data collected from interviews.

While note taking throughout the interviews was a negligible draw on resources, the transcription of interviews was a significant draw on resources. As McLellan, MacQueen, and Neidig (2003) stated,

> When a qualitative research design involves the collection of audiotaped in-depth interviews or focus groups, researchers must decide whether their analysis is best supported by transcription or by researchers' notes

> derived from or supplemented by a review of audiotapes. They must also take into account the cost, time, and expertise required to support either decision (p. 65).

As such, careful consideration was given to the data analysis approach to be taken. I ultimately determined that I would transcribe all interviews for two reasons: (1) to gain experience in transcribing for any future research that I may conduct, and more importantly, and (2) the transcriptions are the data source and I wanted to ensure they were done utilizing consistent language by someone familiar with the area of goal setting. Without transcriptions, I would be heavily reliant on notes that were taken throughout the interviews. While these notes would provide some useful information, they would not provide anywhere near the detail provided by the interview transcriptions.

With all primary data for this research project gathered by semi-structured interviews, it was imperative that I used a high-quality audio recording device. This was to ensure that when revisiting the interviews in the future for transcription and general note taking purposes, all words could be fully understood. As Poland (2003) stated, "many challenges associated with transcription quality can be attributed to the poor quality of some tape recordings" (p. 271). Moreover, the potential exists for the transcriber to have a lack of familiarity with the area of researcher, leading to errors. To avoid these problems, I used a high-quality recording device, conducted all interviews, and transcribed all recordings. These decisions were guided by the recommendations of Poland, (2003). While I aimed to have the transcriptions completed within one week of the interview taking place, this unfortunately was not always the case. Ultimately, within two weeks of the interview, the transcription was completed.

While utilizing semi-structured interviews, and having them transcribed as a data source, is a significant draw on human resources, it was of utmost importance to complete the research in this manner to obtain indirect information. Most notably, the tone of voice used by individuals during the interviews. By recording each interview, it was possible to revisit each interview and listen more carefully to any changes in tone of voice throughout the interview. Some of the causes of this could be attributed to the interviewee showing their disagreement with a statement, or their frustration with current processes. Such cues provide excellent information that can help further define areas for future research (Poland, 2003).

As with all research projects, and consistent my ethics approval, I ensured that all data collected was stored in a secure place (La Pelle, 2004). For example, electronic copies of the audio recordings and transcriptions were stored on a password protected computer throughout the duration of the research project. Additionally, to ensure the security and confidentiality of the individuals and organizations that were interviewed as part in this research project, each interviewee and the organization for whom they work for were given an alias on the electronic file. Moreover, no specific details that could possibly identify a participant have been utilized in this report. All of the results and discussions around the findings were done with great care to ensure privacy and security of those involved.

Data Analysis

Grounded Theory

To analyze all data collected throughout the interview process, I used a grounded theory approach, guided by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) book, 'Basics of Qualitative Research.' I also consulted with Dr. Amy Warren, a professor within the Faculty of Business Administration, who provided me with guidance on utilizing the principles of grounded theory to analyze the data I collected (Warren, 2009).

Grounded theory is, at its most basic form a systematic generation or progression of a theory from data collection and analysis (Engward, 2013). While this theory was first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), for the purposes of my thesis, I have referenced the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990), whose definition is: "A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon" (p.23). Within grounded theory, it is important to note that you do not necessarily have to begin with a theory and prove the theory is correct (or incorrect); rather, you simply begin with an area of research and allow any themes, categories, concepts, and trends to emerge on their own (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In my case, I am beginning with goal setting theory; and will allow themes, categories, concepts, and trends to emerge from my data in an attempt to understand how different sized organizations set their goals.

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) state, “A well-fashioned grounded-theory will meet four central criteria for judging the applicability of theory to a phenomenon: fit, understanding, generality, and control” (p.23). In other words, if the theory is authentic to the reality of the area being studied, and is created from a wide variety of data, then it should fit the area being studied. Next, because it represents reality, and a real topic of study, anyone who was studied or who is involved in the area of study should understand the contributions being made. Additionally, it is important that the theory be sufficiently abstract enough and include adequate variation to allow for application to a number of contexts (e.g, generality) related to the theory. And lastly, “the theory should provide control with regard to action toward the phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23).

In the following section, I have outlined 11 principles of grounded theory that I have utilized while collecting and analyzing data for this project.

Principles of Grounded Theory

Principle 1: Data collection and analysis are interrelated processes. This principle outlines the fact that data collection and analysis are not mutually exclusive activities. Instead, they should be interconnected, and upon completion of an interview (or two or three) the data should be analyzed immediately. As such, I transcribed the interviews within a couple days of completion. I also coded and analyzed interviews within a few weeks of each interview

As an example, while conducting my first interviews, I posed a question near the end of the interviews asking the interviewee to describe what success meant to them. After a few interviews, it became evident that I was receiving a variety of answers from different perspectives: some individuals were providing their own personal thought on what success meant, while others were taking the stance of the organization and outlining what they believed success for the organization meant. As such, I made the decision to pose the question in two ways, (1) what does success mean to you personally? and (2) what does success mean to your organization? In so doing, I ensured that I gained the same set of information from all future interviewees.

Principle 2: Concepts are the basic units of analysis. Principle #2 and principle #3 are considered to be two of the most important pieces of the grounded theory approach because it is the way in which a researcher/theorist can link and compare data throughout the analysis process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Thus, in order to ensure meaningful coding, which would lead to appropriate analysis of the data, it was necessary to ensure that the concepts developed, as the unit of analysis, could be applied to a variety of different situations and responses by interviewees. For example, there ended up being multiple ways in which organizations set their goals (category); top down, bottom up, and a hybrid approach.

Principle 3: Categories must be developed and related. Similar to principle #2, in addition to the concepts that were developed, there were also multiple categories within each concept that was developed and applied to all interviews throughout the coding process. The categories and concepts that were developed throughout the coding process are presented in Table 2. In the results section, I more fully explain these codes and how they were developed through my analysis.

Table 2 – Categories and Concepts for Coding

Category	**Concepts**
What is Goal Setting	a. Setting a strategy/plan b. An accountability tool c. Being organized
Development of Goals	a. Top down b. Bottom up c. Hybrid
Organizational Goals	a. Financial success b. Quality c. Customer satisfaction and retention d. Development
Employee Goals	a. Financial b. Professional development
Measuring Success	a. Financial b. Employee morale and development c. Community involvement
Feedback	a. Recurring meetings

Principle 4: Sampling in grounded theory proceeds on theoretical grounds. Based on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) definition of theoretical sampling, which is 'sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory' (p. 176), I started my research project seeking to gather data from a variety of organizations, both in terms of industry and size. To that end, I made contact with as many individuals as possible, who were in a decision-making position, through both my personal and professional networks, and sought their participation. In total, I was able to conduct interviews with 26 people. Eight were employed in small businesses, six in medium sized organizations, and 12 in large organizations.

Once I had begun conducting interviews, I started sampling in a more meaningful way. For example, once I concluded an interview, especially with a participant employed in a large organization, I asked if they knew of someone else in a similar position who would possibly be interested in participating in my research project. I did this for several reasons. Firstly, I focused on large organizations because they, based on my interviews, utilized a more structured approach when setting organizational goals. I believed the information these organizations were providing had a higher probability of being beneficial to this project. Secondly, I asked interviewees if they knew anyone else that would be interested in this project because once the interview was completed, the interviewee had a better sense of the research purpose and how their responses would be utilized. This gave them the opportunity to ponder who in their network would provide valuable information to my research project.

Principle 5: Analysis makes use of constant comparisons. While I transcribed audio recordings within a few days of the interview, I did not complete formal coding of an interview until several weeks after the transcription had been complete. However, my experience with each interview, especially my notes and my thought process as I transcribed, allowed me to alter my interview guide and my approach to subsequent interviews, thereby, allowing me to gain more valuable information from participants.

Principle 6: Patterns and variations must be accounted for. One of the major patterns I noted throughout the coding of interviews was when interviewees were asked 'what is goal setting'. Specifically, a number of participants responded with something that included the word accountability. While this ultimately did not provide any real feedback in how organizational goals are set, it did provide some insight in to how (and why) managers set targets within their specific team/division.

One major variation that was noted throughout the coding process of the interviews was the nature of organizational goals that were set across the size groups. The larger the organization, the broader their organization goal. While I did not initially expect to see this kind of variation amongst organizational goals before collecting my data, it does make sense that a large, multi-national organization needs to have broad goals with which all divisions and employees can identify. In contrast, a small, locally owned business has the ability to set very narrow and specific targets for their team to achieve.

Principle 7: Process must be built into the theory. The ultimate goal of this research project is to understand the differences in the goal setting processes used by organizations of varying sizes. Hence, at its very basic level, the research project is process oriented; it is attempting to understand a process. Throughout the interviews, I posed questions to understand not only how organizational goals are set, but also how those goals are then trickled down to the next levels; whether that meant regional goals, division goals, team goals, or employee goals. The reason I did this was to see if the goal setting process at different organizational levels (executive, geographic, business unit, to name a few) was similar.

Principle 8: Writing theoretical memos is an integral part of doing grounded theory. To follow this principle, I took hand written notes during all interviews. These notes included key information such as the nature of organizational goals, how the goals are developed, and how success is measured. These hand-written notes allowed for quick reference of key concepts while completing my data analysis.

Principle 9: Relationships among categories should be developed and verified as much as possible during the research process. All categories outlined in Table 2 have been identified as relevant to answering the research question posed in this thesis. To do this, it was important to recognize that there were relationships between these categories. For example, when discussing with interviewees the process taken by the organization to set goals, there was often times a top down approach taken by large organizations. However, once these goals were trickled down to a certain level, say the team level, these team leaders then worked collaboratively with their group to determine the team and employee level goals. So, there was a close relationship throughout the entire coding process between the categories of Organizational Goals and Development of Goals.

Principle 10: A grounded theorist need not work alone. As part of this research project, I held regular check points with my supervisor to discuss progress, any issues I was coming across and potential solutions, and also how to ensure I was creating the best end product possible. In addition to discussions with my supervisor, I also scheduled meetings with other professors in the faculty of business administration at Memorial University to have a general discussion around writing an academic paper of this level and what is expected of a master's student. More specifically, one professor in particular, Dr. Amy Warren, provided me with very useful and valuable insight into qualitative data analysis techniques, and ultimately was the main factor behind my use of grounded theory as a data analysis tool. While I held formal interviews to gather necessary data for this project, I also held informal discussions with friends and family prior to beginning my data collection to understand what they thought of the topic.

Additionally, prior to beginning my research project, I completed course work, as part of my program, in which I utilized every opportunity to research and write on the theory of goal setting. This gave me the ability to grow my knowledge in the area and become familiar with the existing literature. It also allowed me to write some smaller papers on the topic of goal setting. Once I completed this course work and began the process of forming the general outline of my thesis, I leaned heavily on my supervisor, who has extensive knowledge in the field of goal setting theory and provided great support and guidance throughout the pre-data collection, data collection, analysis, and writing phases of this research project.

Principle 11: Broader structural conditions must be analyzed however microscopic the research. My research project focused primarily on answering the research question of how different sized organization set their goals. While the interview guide and process was designed with the intention of answering this question, I realized even before starting the interviews that there were several other factors that would play in to this research project. The two other major factors included employee goals and how organizations measured their success.

One would expect that organizations would develop goals that further their position in the market, and that there would be a close relationship between what they consider 'success' and their goals (Schmidt, 2013). For example, one organization interviewed wanted to double their revenue in five years, that was their highest-level goal. However, they recognized that success to them meant much more than achieving that specific target. In order to reach that goal, they knew they would need to: expand in to other provinces, invest into newer technologies and infrastructure, and ensure they had a top-notch team of motivated employees. Thus, while they had their eye on doubling revenues in five years, they also recognized that success meant much more than achieving that one target.

Results

As outlined in Table 3 below, small, medium, and large organizations all had different processes for developing their organizational goals. While there were some similarities amongst the three sizes, they were not identical.

Table 3 – Summary of Results

Small	Medium	Large
- Mainly use informal processes.	- Utilize both structured and informal processes, depending on the organization.	- Follow the most structured processes for employee and organizational.
- Organizational goals are set by the owner/leader.	- Top-down and hybrid approach to organizational goal-setting.	- Strict top-down approach to organizational goal-setting.
- The strategy used to execute organizational goals is often discussed within specific teams.	- Utilize a hybrid type approach to develop the strategy to achieve goals.	- As goals split into divisional, team, and employee goals, a hybrid/bottom-up approach is encouraged.
- Minimal consideration given to employee goals.	- Employee goals tie directly into divisional and organizational goals.	Employee goals tie directly into divisional and organizational goals.

Category: What is Goal Setting. To gain insight concerning what an individual believed ‘goal setting’ meant, near the beginning of every interview, I posed the following question: “What does goal setting mean to you; whether personally or professionally?”. In doing this, I was able to uncover two of things: (1) what was their personal definition of goal setting, and (2) did the interviewee seem to genuinely believe in goal setting. This question was meant to uncover an individual’s thoughts on the topic, and was not posed with the intention of understand his/her organization’s stance on the topic.

Concept: Setting a strategy/plan. A common concept highlighted throughout the majority of interviews was that goal setting is the strategy or plan that an individual or organization utilizes to get from point A to point B. As interviewee #1 put it “it is just coming up with a strategy to see where you want to be as an organization, or person, down the road at any given time.” In order to do this, it is important that achievable targets (goals) be developed, and that they are tracked and measured frequently to ensure they are met in a timely fashion.

Participant #7, an executive at a marketing firm likened setting a strategy to driving a car while blindfolded. In other words, you know where you currently are, and where you need to go, but the path you need to take is the crucial piece of the equation. This individual highlighted that setting goals and targets is merely the beginning of the goal setting process, and that there needs to be discussion concerning the path needed to achieve these goals. Participant #9, who works in the construction industry, used a similar description:

> I come from a construction background, so to build a house, I need a plan. I start with a plan and then I can move forward. So, to me, the goals that we set as a council is our plan to build our house. If you start to build a house with no plan, by the time you are finished your house might not be what you wanted. So, for me, that’s our blueprint for moving forward, is setting our goals, knowing what we need to do, and focusing on getting to where we need to be.

Throughout all interviews, the concept that goal setting is used as a strategy or a plan, not simply setting targets, was continuously discussed. Thus, goal setting can be used to set short-term, medium-term, or long-term goals, but to stay on track, it is important to outline the path that is believed to be the most efficient way to success. This echoes the literature where scholars discuss proximal (short-term) and distal (medium- and long-term) goals (Brown & Warren, 2009; Kirschenbaum, Tomarken, Ordman, 1982; Stock & Cervone, 1990) as a way to break down larger scale goals, that are often times broad, to ensure an achievable path to goal attainment (Brown & McCracken, 2010).

Concept: An accountability tool. Another concept that became evident throughout the majority of the interviews was the notion of using goals and goal setting as an accountability tool, both at the organizational and employee levels. While it was primarily referenced for the employee level goals, there was some discussion around ensuring the organization is held accountable for achieving the targets it has set out.

The phrase 'what gets measured, gets done' was often used by interviewees when discussing what goal setting meant to them. This same statement that can be found in Locke and Latham's (1990) book and outlines that in order to ensure work is being complete, and that employees are accountable, goal need clear measurement. While this sentiment was particularly germane to large organizations (interviewee #11); it was not as common in smaller local organizations (interviewee #1).

When dealing with a large number of employees across a variety of divisions and geographical regions, it is difficult to measure progress, as such, goal setting is used as an accountability tool. Organizations will highlight that you need to achieve 'X' by a certain date, and people will be held accountable to this target. One individual (Participant #26) put it quite bluntly when he said, "Well, if we have no measuring stick, we have no accountability. So, I mean, the accountability is… I mean, human beings are inherently lazy, and if we don't measure, we don't know where we are." This CEO believes that by using goal setting as an accountability tool, the various teams within his organization are forced to stay on top of the business and continuously improve.

One local start-up in Newfoundland and Labrador has given its employees and teams the freedom to choose how they want to achieve targets, as long as the organizational goals are accomplished and met. The CEO of this organization (interviewee #15) said that:

> And it also lets me know who is getting things done. Because again, I'm not managing day-to-day, so really, we're results orientated, and we have a lot of autonomy and freedom, as long as you accomplish your goals on time and on budget.

This start-up, with 23 employees, has a leadership team that believes in the group they have assembled and do not see the need to micro-manage their day-to-day activities. However, the caveat with this is that, as the CEO stated, goal setting is important because once the targets are set, the organization as a whole – teams and individual employees – are held accountable to ensuring they are met.

Concept: Being organized. Interviewee #1, a restaurant owner, stated that for him, goal setting helps to remain organized. While this interviewee was the only person to directly say goal-setting means organization to him, there were others that echoed similar sentiments, in a more indirect way. For example, interviewee #20 indicated that "goals for me are about defining that success. And then the rest, of course, is how you get it; how you get there." In other words, this individual understands that in order to achieve her desired goals, she needs to remain organized and ensure that there is a path to success that is mapped out. In other words, goals and goal setting help provide organizations, and individuals for that matter, with a sense of direction and how to accomplish a broader, more difficult goal (Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991; Young & Smith, 2013). This would be consistent with the arguments of Locke and Latham (1990) that goals provide individuals with a sense of direction.

Similarly, participant #24, who works in the financial industry said, "I would say goal setting would be setting expectations and commitments for the week, for the present week." So, once again, while not directly using the word organization or direction, this individual is clearly utilizing goal setting as a technique to ensure she, and her team, stay organized every week. Goals are designed and implemented on a variety of timelines and used to drive performance on a weekly level. This is once again evident in the existing literature, especially with regards to performance based pay (Beer, 1983; Wilson, 2016); that is, when an individual, or a team, or a group, is compensated financially for their performance over a certain period of time. This compensation is provided for reaching certain targets, and typically, the better the performance, or the more targets attained, the higher the monetary compensation will be (Durnham & Bartol, 2003; Lee et al., 2011; Schay & Fisher, 2013).

In conclusion, there are a number of factors that affect what goal setting means to an organization. They can include, but are not limited to, the organizations size, the industry, and the leadership philosophy. But ultimately, it became evident that goal setting helped organizations of all sizes set a strategy, hold themselves and their employees accountable, and keep organized. Once an organization understand why they are utilizing goals, it is easier to begin their development.

Category: Development of Goals

How do organizations set goals? Based on the information gathered in my interviews, there are three distinct ways in which this occurs: (1) a top-down approach, in which there is minimal employee engagement and senior management has full control on setting the goals; (2) a bottom-up approach, in which employees are engaged throughout the process and encouraged to share their ideas, but ultimately it is management who uses this information and sets the goals; and (3) a hybrid technique where employees and management work together to set the organizational goals. I will now discuss each method in more detail.

Concept: Top Down. The top down approach was most evident in large organizations with a multi-national presence, especially those that are publically traded. This top down approach can be compared to the concept of 'assigned goals' at the employee level (see review in Locke & Latham, 1990). The existing literature outlines that the more employees participate in the goal setting process, the more they have a sense of ownership of the goal set (Latham & Locke, 1979; Locke & Latham, 2002). Yet, based on the research I have conducted, organizational leaders seem to prefer a top down approach, especially when looking more specifically at the large organizations (500+ employees). Of the 12 large organizations represented in this research project, 11 implemented a top down goal setting approach. When describing how their organizational goals are set, at the highest level, these 11 organizations noted that it was combination of the senior executive designing a strategic plan and working with the board of directors to have it approved. When referencing the goal setting process, interviewee #19 neatly summarized this as: "It's the board that approves it. It is largely the executive that comes up with them (i.e., goals)." Similarly, participant #22, the director of human resources within a utility company, highlighted the fact that their organizational goals are also implemented by their board of directors, and trickled down to specific divisions and teams from there.

It is important to emphasize that the goals identified and set at this level are very broad; they are designed to help the organization to achieve their vision. Interviewee #24 noted that one of her organization's goals is to not only help clients succeed, but also to ensure the communities in which they operate thrive to their fullest potential. While this organizational goal was in essence mandated from the top, it was then left to each specific division, region, and team, to ensure their goals aligned to this goal.

To do this, once again, a top down approach was utilized at the divisional and team level. To continue with this example from interviewee #24, the organization in the financial industry would have their Vice Presidents take the organization's goals and set their strategic plan(s) accordingly. The directors then take these strategic plans and set more specific targets for their teams. Lastly, team leads work with their teams to ensure that the specific targets are achieved. So, ultimately, this organization was one of 11 that utilized this type of approach.

While the majority of large organizations set broad organizational goals, there were some that set specific targets that needed to be achieve, simply because of the industry in which they operate. One oil company executive (interviewee #14), for example, stated that based on one of their goals for the year, they needed to safely put 300,000 of oil per day through their refineries around the world. Given the specificity of this goal, each division, region, and team had a role to play when breaking the organizational goal down further to ensure success. Every division, from the environment, health, and safety group to the operations group, plays a role in ensuring success and sets out their own specific targets with which they will be measured against.

In each of these examples from larger organizational contexts, we see the concept of specific, difficult goals at the employee level. This reflects a core finding of goal setting theory, namely, that assuming goal commitment, specific and difficult goals improve performance over vague or easy goals (Locke and Latham, 1984, 1990, 2002).

In my sample, organizations with a sole owner utilized a very strict top down approach in which the owner (or President or CEO, acting on the owner's behalf) would set the organizations goals, targets and strategic plan, and leave it to the leadership team to ensure it was met. This was something that I did not expect to learn throughout this project, but it was evident in firms and industries from marketing to construction. For example, participant #7 said that,

> So, we tend to be more doers than planners, and I think sometimes that's fabulous because there's a lot less bullshit in the world, but it's also, we struggle sometimes that we're so busy being busy that I think we don't take a moment to step back and look.

He outlines that while his organization has adopted a culture of 'doing', and that it has served them well, sometimes they do not take the time to step back and look at things on an aggregate level and understand what path(s) they are heading down.

Concept: Bottom up. In contrast to the previous top down approach to goal setting, a bottom up approach engages employees in the goal setting process and encourages them to provide their own thoughts, suggestions, and ideas, which goal setting research suggests would ultimately lead to a higher commitment to goal attainment from the very same employees (Latham & Lock, 1979; Lock & Latham, 1984; Locke & Latham, 2002). This bottom up approach seemed more common in with 'smaller scale' goals, or team/employee level goals. In utilizing this approach, employees were provided with informational concerning the organizational goal(s), and then encouraged to develop their individual goals in collaboration with their direct supervisor. In so doing, organizations not only provide autonomy to employees, but as one oil and gas company director (participant #13) suggested, it frees up time within his busy schedule. He went on to provide an example:

> …we spend about $50,000 a year maintaining forklifts. So, they're (employees) telling me this here. I didn't know this. And they say, I think we can cut that by 10% by doing this. And that's what you want. There's your nugget. That's how you know you have a good coach. That's what I look for. Have them come with idea! Because then you've got their behavior changed. You've got them gone out, they take accountability to it, they adhere to procedures and processes, they surfaced a problem that we were spending too much on our forklifts in this case, and its collaborative! They've gone off and talked to their other counter-parts and figured it out!

By allowing his team of employees the freedom to determine how exactly they can aid in ‘cutting costs,’ the director has freed up time in his schedule, given his team a sense of ownership over the goal setting process, ensured they understand the accountability that goes along with it, and allowed them to work together with their counterparts across the organization to ensure success.

Additionally, participant #1, who owns a small local business noted that in the past all organizational goals were set by him. However, in the past 12 months, he has encouraged his team to suggest new organizational goals. As this business is in the food service industry, allowing the front-line employees to suggest new ways of buying and preparing food was a large gamble to take, but he said that it has a been that it has paid off so far. With that said, he also noted, “But you can’t just, you know, you can’t just let them come up with everything. There has to be some order.” So, while he has given some freedom to his staff, he continues to play a large role in the organizational goal setting process.

In another interview, a large multi-national oil and gas company traditionally utilized a top down approach for employee goal setting; however, in late 2016, they implemented a new set of procedures in which employees are given the power to develop their own individual goals. Instead of a manager telling an employee what is expected of him/her, the interviewee (#23) said that, “The change now is it’s essentially turned upside down. It’s got to be driven by the employee. The employee is meant to initiate that meeting, or conversation. Start with making your own goals.” He went on to explain that any successful organization does not hire smart people to tell them what to do, but instead, they hire smart people to tell the organization what to do. Unfortunately, given that the change was only recently implemented, there could not be a legitimate discussion regarding the effectiveness of the change and the extent that it has been successful. However, it was still worth noting that this large multi-national, publically traded company is now encouraging employees to initiate the employee level goal setting process.

With regards to employee goal setting as it relates to performance based pay, there was one large organization (participant #26) that utilized a bottom up approach for this as well. This organization operates within the food services industry and has operations around the globe that rely on a variety of factors to ensure success (e.g., within each region they have to contend with different variables related to product quality, government regulations, and competition to name a few). As such, they have determined, based on trial and error, that the best way to ensure organizational success is to have their senior employees set their own goals and targets, based on what he or she can control and be measured against that. These targets ultimately determine the amount of incentive based pay that can be achieved by individuals across the company.

Concept: Hybrid. Another technique utilized by some organizations with regards to their goal setting was a hybrid approach in which employees and executives worked collaboratively to develop a strategic plan. Instead of it being the leadership team driving the organizational downward, or having the employees set their own specific division/team goals. Thus, in this situation, both groups of individuals work together to determine the best goals and targets to set.

The COO at a medium-sized organization (participant #11) based in Newfoundland and Labrador outlined how he encourages the leadership team to work with their direct reports to encourage development of employee level goals. They go through discussions with one and another, but ultimately, the leadership team helps lead the individual employees to their own conclusion(s) and plan(s). He stated that:

> We go through that whole back and forth, but it's going to be yours. You've got to nail it. At the end of the day, if I tell you what you're going to do, how bought in are you? But if you tell me what you're going to do, and I agree with it, you're all-in.

In utilizing the approach of having the leadership team be mindful of the organizational goals while steering their team of employees to set their own individual goals, this organization believes that they have found the perfect recipe for success. All employee goals tie back in to the organizational goals, and all of these individual goals have been developed by the individual who will be held accountable, thus ensuring total buy in and control over fulfillment.

Additionally, a technology firm headquartered in St. John's utilized a matrix type setup to develop their organizational goals; but ultimately the executive and leadership team have the final say. A matrix organization is an organization that ensures all groups within interact with each other regularly to achieve a specific goal (Wang, Lin, Lin, Chung, & Lee, 2012). Instead of proceeding through a project, or goal, or objective in a linear fashion, all groups are encouraged to collaborate to tackle it together (Wu, 2007). Interviewee #2, who is the CFO at this tech firm, indicated that every week, all employees in the company take part in a meeting in which all teams are given with the opportunity to provide an update on their current state and suggest any change in direction(s) they believe the organization could benefit from. In these meetings, after all teams have presented, employees are then given the opportunity to ask questions, and brainstorm new ideas. She said that,

> …each team presents to the entire business and everyone in the business has the opportunity to challenge and ask questions and give feedback. So, you know, everyone sits through these meetings. The full executive is there, there is nothing… our CEO knows everybody, and he will ask you questions, so it's a business that operates and treats everyone like an adult.

This organization has made it a point to ensure all of their employees feel welcome, like part of the team, and are adding value toward the organization's success and growth.

In interview #4, which was with an organization in the education industry, the CEO of this institution highlighted the fact some post-secondary institutions have come together to form a sort of alliance and work together to ensure they are providing best in class services to their clients. While this is not directly related to organizational goal setting, I did think that this was worth including in this section. This could allow for future research to understand how organizations within an industry work together to ensure growth and success in the long-term.

To conclude, when developing goals, organizations took a varied approach, depending not only on the organization's size, but also on whether they were setting an organizational goal, a divisional/team goal, or an employee goal. The three common concepts that emerged were: (1) a top-down approach, (2) a bottom-up approach, and (3) a hybrid approach.

Category: Organizational Goals

In order to understand the relationship between organizational and employee goals, and how different sized organizations set their targets and strategic plans, throughout the interview I attempted to gather information on the type(s) of organizational goals that were set. From the 26 interviews conducted, I found four major goal types: (1) financial, (2) quality, (3) customer satisfaction and retention, and (4) employee development and retention. Reflecting on the role of goals to provide direction and the long-standing belief that 'what gets measured gets done', through the following analysis, I show how each type of goal was designed to highlight the priorities of the organization in question. I now present these four goal types in more detail.

Concept: Financial Success. An objective for any 'for profit' business is to make money (Brennan, 2012), so this concept was one that I expected to emerge throughout the interviews. All businesses interviewed had at least one organizational goal designed to, at a minimum maintain, or in most cases grow, their profit margins and improve their financial position in the marketplace. This occurred in several ways. For example, an organization operating within the insurance industry (interviewee #3) developed a strategic plan to help them double in size, in terms of revenue, by the year 2020. The owner of the business said that, "Our 2020 vision is we want to double in size, you know, we want to be twice as big as we are now. That's the main thing; in terms of revenue." He went on to discuss how within this bold plan, they have several other targets designed to help achieve this, "There are a couple of strategies within that as well, we want to expand to other Provinces."

Interviewee #6, who works in a n international financial institution, highlighted the fact that his employer has four pillars that define success, one of which was the growth pillar. He said that, "Our growth quadrant, that will be locally, it'll be the goal is to grow and nationally, the goal is to, you know, maintain and grow." Within this growth pillar, he went on to outline that this meant both financially, but also in terms of number of clients working with his institution. They have a team of individuals who are tasked with bringing in new customers every year and ensuring they can contribute to the financial success of the organization on a go forward basis.

In interview #4, the participant stated that continuous growth was key to organizational success. He outlined that since their creation over 20 years ago, they have grown to several campuses across the country, and have partnerships with universities around the world. The way they were able to achieve this was by not accepting that the status quo was good enough, but instead always trying to push forward in to new markets. He outlined that instead of staying in maintenance mode, they would always be forward looking to certain targets to ensure their continuous growth. According to the interviewee, this continuous growth strategy was key to ensuring revenue growth year-over-year. By having more campuses in operation, they were able to increase overall enrollment.

With regards to the food service industry, participant #1 noted that keeping labour costs down was critical to the organization's financial success; "Another major goal was to reduce labour, which as a percentage of our sales. Not necessarily just a blind let's cut labour. But another thing we've done is we've gone from 45% to 33%." The interviewee further noted that this was not something that happened overnight; rather, this was something that involved several iterations and required the implementation of a team willing to work together. He went on to indicate that there is still some significant work to do to lower the cost a few more percentage points, but that with the current team, he is confident that they have found the right mix.

Within the oil and gas industry, several interviewees of publically traded companies indicated the same thing throughout their interviews – delivering shareholder value is critical. At the end of the day, all organizational goals are designed to bring value and success to the organizations shareholders. Participant #23 noted that, "Big picture, the company just wants to grow the business-greed. It's like the saying in the oil and gas industry, safety is #1, but production is king. You know, let's face it, grow the business, deliver shareholder value…" Ultimately, all organizations have to make money, and publically traded, multi-national companies are no different, so there was an element of financial success or growth for all interviewees throughout this research project.

Concept: Quality. Next, the idea of providing a quality service or product was a prevalent concept that emerged throughout the interview process. Delivering a quality product or service allowed the organizations to be known as a top business within their industry. In the food service industry, interviewee #1 noted that he measures how well they are performing with regards to quality based on how many local ingredients he can purchase. The reason for this is, as he puts it, is that he can control what happens to the product before it gets to him; he knows there are no preservatives and that it was not just shipped in a container from a foreign country where food standards could be different.

In the insurance industry, participant #3 noted that offering quality advice to customers was critical to their success. While this relates to customer satisfaction (which will be outlined subsequently), it also means that by having his employee offer quality advice and provide the appropriate services that the client desires, they are ensuring the desired level of service quality. They want people to remember the experience they had when buying insurance through a locally owned company. As he puts it, "Yeah, have a normal conversation, but still giving professional advice." He went on to elaborate and outline that it is important that all customers be given not only quality advice, but that they have the same experience, regardless of who they are speaking with. Thus, for this firm, consistency is also a critical element of quality.

In the education industry, quality was outlined as the #1 organizational goal by and interviewee (participant #4), who, in response to my question of 'What is your organization's number #1 goal?', replied, "Quality. Because it's sustainable." Because this organization is operating in several different areas around the country and world, it is important for them to deliver a quality product. This approach has proven to be successful as the organization has been operating for over 20 years.

Interviewee #22, working within a utility company noted that while the organization is financially driven, it's ultimate goal is to provide a quality product to consumers – the product in this case being the safe and reliable distribution of electricity. Without this quality product, the organization would not be successful financially. Note while I have broken down all of these types of organizational goals in to separate concepts, they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they are often intertwined in that success within one area will often lead to success within another area.

Concept: Customer Satisfaction and Retention. Another concept that repeatedly emerged throughout the interview process was the notion of ensuring customer satisfaction and retention as part of an organizations' goals. In keeping existing customers happy and treating them with exceptional service, not only will that consumer remain loyal, but they will be more willing to recommend the business to another person. As interviewee #1 highlighted, all it takes is one bad experience to ruin a customer's thoughts on a business, or for the business' reputation to be tarnished.

Participant #7, a senior manager with a large marketing firms in the region outlined that customer retention for them means success for not only his organization, but for their clients. They are in the business of helping their clients retain and gain customers through marketing campaigns. He goes on to outline how even when economic times are tough, or the opportunity exists for clients to change marketing firms, because this firm has always operated with a 'client first' attitude, the majority of their clients continue to do business with them:

> So, we've had clients who, there's times where they're ok with this or they're ok with that, but at the end of the day, they recognize that 'hey, these guys have consistently hit numbers for us and have achieved results, we're going to stay with them.' So, at times when clients could renew with a different group, they don't because they're happy with the results. So that's the area for us I think means the most.

By treating each client as their most important client, this organization has risen from a small organization with only a handful of employees, to a leading, national player, employing over 100 employees.

On the other extreme, another organization that provides offshore support to oil and gas companies outlined their desire to 'delight the customer.' Regardless of what was happening, whether positive or negative, they encourage their entire team, from top to bottom, to ensure they always remember to delight their customers. When I pressed him on what was meant by delighting the customer, this individual (interviewee #23) explained

> Delight the customer. It's going above and beyond, right? Don't satisfy the customer, delight the customer. Don't be on time, be early. Don't be on budget, be under budget. You know? So, I think they're getting that connection. And all of that stuff plays in to extending the contract. The best way that we win work, repeat work, is over delivering on our existing work. That job is done, we were early, we were under budget, give us a new job.

In his mind, he believes that by delighting the customer, and going above and beyond their expectations, they will be in a better position to earn repeat work from that customer, which will translate into more revenue.

Concept: Development. One last key concept that became evident when discussing organizational goals was the development of employees and communities alike. The majority of the interviewees, when asked to describe their organization's goals at the highest level, made reference, in some way, to development of employees.

In the financial industry, participant #2 highlighted the fact that one of her organization's core values is "continuous improvement…", going on to say that "…and I think every person feels that they do that as a part of a team." Instead of just having their employees come to the office and work in a normal 9-5 setting, this organization provides their employees with a place to enjoy and look forward to coming to every day. For example, this interviewee outlined that there are absolutely no offices – not even for the leadership team – in the building and every day employees are encouraged to sit next to someone new and learn from them, thereby, fostering an environment of constant learning and growth. In addition to this, she also outlined the fact that individuals are given the opportunity to explore professional development courses and seminars that could be beneficial to their growth within the company.

Several of the interviews from the oil and gas industry discussed this 'development' concept as it related to organizational goal setting. They encourage their employees to attend professional development seminars. Participant #23 said, "For example, for me, I was nominated… globally there's a number of individuals who can participate in leadership, advanced leadership training internally in the company, and it allows you to build your own skillset and network across the global company." In other words, organizations want to see their employees grow professionally and personally. These types of development goals are what encourage employees to stay with an employer for a number of years; the employer is investing in the future of the employee. The employee ultimately takes these new skills and knowledge and uses them to help complete their job in a more effective and efficient manner (Latham & Locke, 1991; Locke & Latham, 2002)

At a local real estate franchise, the owner/operator (participant #8) is required to offer professional development seminars for agents working with him on a weekly basis. He explained that the founder of the franchise can be quoted as saying that they are a training company that is disguised as a real estate company. They have a monthly training schedule that they are required to fill and offer to their agents. And to ensure agents are taking advantage of the offer, this franchise owner has now offered an incentive to attend the professional development sessions. If any 'cold calls' are placed to the office for someone looking to buy/sell a house, the first agents who will be contacted to take on this new client will be those that attend the professional development sessions.

In addition to ensuring employees are encouraged to pursue personal and professional development opportunities, there were also several organizations that outlined strategies and programs designed to help the communities in which they operate develop and prosper. One financial institution (interviewee #24) operates a program that encourages employees to participate in community volunteer initiatives, in return, the organization will make a cash donation to the volunteer organization once their employees have volunteered for a certain number of hours. These volunteer initiatives can be work-related and involve co-workers, or it can simply be an employee volunteering after work or on the weekends. The organization has made the specifics to this goal very broad in an attempt to encourage their employees to give back to the community in a variety of ways.

In the oil and gas industry, specifically here in Newfoundland and Labrador, companies are required to provide support and assistance to community organizations. This support is often done by way of a financial contribution or sponsorship and they can cover a number of initiatives.

In conclusion, based on the constraint I placed on the research project of only interviewing for-profit organizations, the information I gathered with regards to organizational goals was mainly focused on the organizations long-term sustainability. The four main types of organizational goals – financial, quality, customer satisfaction and retention, and employee development and retention – each play a role in the organizations success. An organization must set financial goals to ensure they are profitable. They must ensure they have a quality service or product to keep their clients, which ultimately leads into customer satisfaction and retention. Lastly, they must invest in their employees to ensure they feel like valued members of the organization and can complete their jobs in an efficient and effective manner.

Category: Employee Goals

Given the wealth of literature on the role of goals for employee development and growth, I attempted to gain insight concerning the extent that employee goals were tied to organizational goals in my sample. More specifically, I was expecting to see some variation in both the extent that, and processes by which, different sized organizations follow this process. While all organizations are concerned their financial success, I tried to understand how an individual employee's goals could help either a multi-national, multi-billion-dollar company or even a small locally owned operation. There were two main emerging concepts with regards to employee goals; (1) financial goals and (2) professional development goals.

Concept: Financial. When discussing employee goals, there were some organizations that have pay for performance systems in place where the better an employee performs, based upon established targets, the more money he or she will take home at the end of the year. This was not surprising given the previously discussed literature highlighting the usage of performance based pay systems to reward achievement of goals at the individual or group level (Betcherman et al., 1994; Lee et al., 2011).

This type of system was evident in the food service industry based on the two interviews I conducted with organizations in that industry. One organization (participant #26) harvested and sold products, and their plant managers were compensated based on how much product was passed through their plant in a year. The plant manager and his direct supervisor set out achievable, and stretch targets at the beginning of the year that can be achieved. In this context, stretch targets are referred to as a goal that is extremely difficult to achieve and will require significant attention to ensure success (Sitkin, See, Miller, Lawless, & Carton, 2011)

In another organization within the food service industry (interviewee #1), the owner/operator outlined to employees that the more money the restaurant makes, the more money each individual employee has the potential to make, not just in tips, but in future wages as well, "I tell them, you want to get a raise, make me more money." Additionally, he went on to say:

> Like honestly, I tell my employees this all the time, like if it's very profitable then it means you guys get more out of it too. And I'm dead serious when I say that. You know, like I want them to have a real career out of it.

He wants his employees to make a career out of their jobs; not just to use it as a means to make ends meet.

Additionally, interviewee #3 highlighted the fact that his organization rewards the sales staff based on the number of clients they secure and products they sell. They have developed their performance pay structure to encourage employees to sell multiple types of insurance to one person – if this is accomplished, they will earn more commission off of the sale than if they were to sell both separately. Ultimately, the organization has set out the same structure for all sales staff and has laid out all parameters surrounding the amount of compensation they can earn based on their performance.

For participant #8, who owns a real estate franchise, things operated slightly differently. In that case, each real estate agent earned a certain percentage of a sale, while the real estate franchise also earned a certain percentage. However, once the agent reached a 'capped' level, meaning he or she sold a certain dollar value of real estate in one 12-month span, they then earned 100% commission off of that sale.

> So, what we have, we have cappers. So, if you came to me as a real estate agent, ok, once you hit $67,000 gross commission earned, you're a capper. In other words, there until your next anniversary date, you're at 100% commission

In this case, the real estate franchise is encouraging its agents to sell as many properties as possible. Once they reach a certain point, all sales go in their pocket and the franchise takes no more.

As discussed in the literature review, goal setting provides employees with a sense of purpose and direction, signals priorities and (assuming goal commitment) enhances performance. The evidence highlighted earlier further shows that 'what gets measured gets done' as the act of measurement also signals priorities. Thus, throughout each of these examples in this section, we see reinforcement of the past findings from goal setting research at the employee level.

Concept: Professional Development. Professional development played a significant role in employee goals in this study. The majority of organizations wanted to see their employees succeed and to retain those employees; thus, they need to invest in them. Based on the data gathered, professional development is a large part of businesses of all sizes. Individuals interviewed outlined that their organizations offered everything from seminars for employees, to sending them away on professional development trips, to encouraging volunteering within the community. Individual employees are given the opportunity to suggest areas in which they would like to grow professionally, and then work together with their employer to determine an appropriate course of action.

Within the oil and gas industry, obviously there is regulatory training that employers are required to ensure their employees take part in where necessary. However, based on the interviewees, these types of companies also went above beyond to offer best in class professional development for their employees as well. They have developed their own in-house training modules that employees are encouraged to avail of, which can range from tutorials on utilized Microsoft Office to how to manage conflict in the work environment. This type of training is offered online and free of charge to employees. Additionally, the oil and gas companies also have programs available to support external opportunities for professional development as well. However, as one individual stated, due to the downturn in the price of oil, these types of programs have been cut back significantly, and justification is needed from the employee and their supervisor before going on this type of training. Whereas in the construction industry things seem to be less formal with participant #9 outlining an anonymous survey process that they use to understand what types of training their employees would like to receive the following year. From there, they take these results and offer specific job training based on these results. As a specific example, in 2015 this organization recognized that its employees were eager to be trained in the use of scaffolding. The following year all employees were given this training to enhance their job performance and capabilities.

Category: Measuring Success

A question I was most eager to ask interviewees throughout the project was how they defined success, and how they believed the organization they worked for defined success. This question provided some great insight into how goals (organizational and employee) are measured and what individuals believed constitutes success. Consist with themes previously discussed, one of the main drivers of success was financial success. However, there were two other success markers that became apparent throughout: (1) employee morale and development; and (2) community involvement.

While financial success and employee morale and development were clear measures of success across every single interview, the community involvement piece was only apparent for large businesses, or medium sized businesses who were on the higher-end of the number of employee scale. I believe this trend was evident for two primary reasons. First, by being an active member in their community, organizations have the ability to increase their public image; in other words, the general public will recognize and appreciate that an organization is an active member in their community and provides support where possible to a variety of initiatives. Second, I believe that organizations are active in their communities because it is something that is important to their employees. If employees are engaged within a community, it would only make sense for their employer to also be engaged, where appropriate.

Concept: Financial. Once again, one of the main drivers of any business is financial success. As such, this was the tool of choice when measuring how successful an organization is – the higher profit, the better they are doing. Interviewee #1 said, "Success to me just means increased profitability. I mean that's what any kind of business measures itself unless." Participant #5 said, "The typical publically traded company measures; you know, your shares are going up, you know you're trending upwards, and good value for the investors dollar." Similarly, participant #22 outlined that success was defined by "…hitting the top of range of our rate of return. That's probably the number one. And we have met that for 20 years."

Concept: Employee morale and development. Employee morale and development also played a major role in measuring success. Organizations did not want their employees to simply come to work, punch their hours, go home, and repeat. Employers want their employees to enjoy their work, to love coming in to the office every day, and to look forward to working with their colleagues to reach a common goal. Interviewee #11 put it best

> But I need people to own it. If you don't own it, you're just not going… I don't know if you've ever heard this expression, but it's kind of the idea that I can get your hands and feet engaged, but it's your heart and your mind. And if you get your heart and your mind in to it and you get inspired, that produces results that go way beyond. It comes back to that question of why am I doing this? Why am I working so hard for this company? And if you can make that connection, and get people to

> realize, 'that's why I'm doing this'. That lights them up. And you know, they get a lot of satisfaction.

This leader truly believed that if he could get individual employees to understand how their job and role within the company was critical to its success, that they would feel a sense a pride and motivation that only they could instill in themselves.

Participant #3 had a similar response when asked what success meant to him, "…having an engaged staff and making people want to go to work, are the measurements of success now." While in an interview with the owner of a consulting firm (interviewee #10), he said,

> Then I think #3 would just be taking care of the employees and taking care of everybody that works here, because if they're not happy to come to work every day, this will turn into a pretty shitty place to work period.

Once again, it became quite apparent early in the interview process that success involved employee morale and employee development. Happy employees who enjoy their work and are passionate about their work will prove to be terrific workers.

Concept: Community involvement. Other organizations want their employees to not only be leaders within their company, but also within their communities. As part of the employee level goal setting process, one organization in the financial sector has a section specifically focused on community engagement and volunteering. They encourage employees to volunteer for different organizations within the community and provide financial support once a certain number of volunteer hours have been reached. Another organization highlighted the fact that they want to not only be participants in their community, but want to be "part of the fabric of where we are and where we live."

Category: Feedback

While thus far in my data analysis I have outlined how and why organizations set and measure their goals, in this piece, I highlight the main way in which organizations provide feedback. The role of feedback in this context is to help ensure that employees, teams and whole divisions are staying on-track with their progression towards goal completion.

Concept: Recurring meetings. Ultimately, the primary way all organizations measured their goals and ensured they were on top of things was with recurring meetings. These meetings were held on a variety of frequencies, depending on the goal (whether employee or organizational), and the level at which it was being measured. On one hand, one organization in the financial sector has supervisors meet with employees twice a year to review and discuss employee goal plans. On the other hand, the leadership team at a utility company meets on a quarterly basis to review high-level organizational goals and make strategic decisions.

These of recurring meetings ensured that all employees, right from the front-line to those in management positions, were provided with appropriate feedback on how they were progressing toward achieving their desired goal(s). In line with the existing literature, this is a common practice among organizations for ensuring three things: (1) that team and employee goals are still in line with the organizations goals, (Stock & Cervone, 1990); (2) that employees are aware that management is committed to their success and the organization's success (Lock & Latham, 2002); and (3) that if any rework of the goal(s) is necessary, by having recurring regular meetings, the opportunity exists to do so (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Discussion

Throughout the interview process and data analysis process, it became evident that small, medium, and large size organizations utilize a variety of processes to set their organizational goals. However, that is not to say that there is a clear-cut consensus on how each group sets their organizational goals, but there are certainly trends that emerged throughout the process.

First, large organizations followed the most structured process and had the most clearly defined strategies. Obviously, because of their size, these organizations not only have the financial and human capital required to do this, but often are required to do so – especially when operating in a regulated industry such as oil and gas, financial, or insurance, to name a few. For example, participant #23 (employed in the oil and gas sector) outlined the fact his organization needs to set specific organizational targets around professional development, especially any required training that is required by employees. While interviewees #6, #13, #14, and #24 all outlined that their organizations have created their own custom software to help with goal setting and tracking. Such software provides a 'one stop shop' where employees, managers, and executives can go to view the goals that are set, and how they are being achieved. To expand on how the software is utilized, participant #6 said that within his organization, every year the software is 'updated' with the new corporate goals, and divisional goals (where appropriate), from there, employees and managers are tasked with developing their own individual goals and outlining how they will help achieve the overall corporate goals. Additionally, a number of the large organizations that were interviewed were publicly traded companies, meaning that their shareholders had a right to know what the organization's goals and strategies were. Operating within this type of regulated market, these organizations are required, by law, to report to their shareholders not only specific financial targets, but what their action plan(s) for the short term and long-term will be.

Second, the medium sized organizations utilized either a structured or informal processes when setting organizational goals. Ultimately the driving factor behind which process was used, based on my analysis, was how the individual in the managerial/leadership position viewed goal setting. In other words, if he or she was a firm believer that goal setting was an important practice that needs to be utilized, the organization typically utilized them. While the opposite can be said for organizations that are being led by an individual who may not necessarily see the value in goal setting.

For example, in one case, a locally owned company providing offshore support to oil and gas companies utilizes a formalized approach to their organizational goal setting to ensure success and continue growth. This is because their COO is a passionate believer in goal setting, and has completed a master's thesis in the area as well. This interviewee (participant #11) outlined that he has all of his leadership team sign a 'contract' that outlines what the company expects to achieve each year, and these individuals are held accountable to these goals. From there, they are given the freedom to decide how to best tackle the goals, which often meant by using proximal goals and sitting down with their respective teams to develop team and individual employee goals.

In a separate interview (participant #7), a marketing firm did not utilize any true organizational goal setting, but instead simply relied on the CEO to provide direction on an 'as-needed' basis. This interviewee went on to explain that they have adopted a culture of being 'doers,' and simply getting the job done, without truly knowing what exactly the long-term goal (distal goal) was. He used an example of wanting to land a major client. While the CEO would outline a plan for each team/division, he would not take the time to explain what the objective was or how groups should collaborate with each other; instead, he just told them to go do it. And while to date, this organization has been quite successful utilizing this approach, it was the sense of the interviewee that a change would be needed if they were to continue their growth. It is important to note that both of businesses (participant #11 and #7) are well established, and are each well known in their respective industries for providing quality results and going above and beyond for each and every one of their clients.

Lastly, small organizations once again utilized both structured and informal processes, with the majority of the organizations interviewed falling in the informal process category. On one hand, there was a locally owned insurance company that followed a structured plan that outlined how they were going to achieve long-term success. While on the other hand there was a locally owned consulting company that relied on obtaining contract work before setting out any specific targets and goals to be achieved.

As expected, a variety of concepts emerged within the data collected. Ultimately, I set out to explore how different sized organizations set and measured their organizational goals. With a lack of research in the area of organizational goal setting processes (Carper, 2015; Kramer et al., 2013; Young & Smith, 2013; Vancouver et al., 1994; Vancouver & Schmitt, 1991), I wanted to open the door for future research to provide meaningful insight into the area. Before beginning the collection data, which was done through a series of interviews, I expected that the data collected would show that different sized organizations did indeed utilize different processes to set and measure their goals. However, I did not have any idea what that would look like specifically, beyond that. Ultimately, the data collected highlighted the fact different sized organizations do indeed utilize different processes when setting their organizational goals and that the goals are very closely related to how the organization defines success.

In my opinion, the three most important concepts that emerged throughout the interviews, when discussing the category of development of organizational goals, were the choice to elect a top down approach, a bottom up approach, and a hybrid approach. A top down approach to goal setting, akin to assigned goals in the employee goal setting literature, occurs when employees have little involvement in the goal setting process (Latham & Locke, 1979; Locke & Latham, 2002); rather, the goals are mandated from upper management. A bottom up approach to goal setting, or akin to participative goals in the employee goal setting literature, occurs when employees are actively engaged throughout the goal setting process and their input is taken in to consideration (Latham & Lock, 1979; Lock & Latham, 1984; Locke & Latham, 2002). Finally, a hybrid approach to goal setting is when teams (not necessarily individual employees) are involved in the goal setting process (Wang, Lin, Chung, & Lee, 2012; Wu, 2007).

Within these concepts, as discussed in more detail in the data analysis section, there were several nuances across organizations. For example, large organizations all used a top down approach to setting their organizational goals, however, as those goals were trickled down to lower levels within the company, the way in which they were detailed out could have changed. In one multi-national oil and gas company (interviewee #23), the executive and board of directors sets out the organization's goal and strategy (e.g., at a 30,000-foot level); these goals included keeping safety a top priority, continuing oil and gas exploration, and further developing in-house knowledge and skills, to name a few. However, once those goals were fed down to specific geographic areas, and even further to specific business units within those areas, the leaders of those units and teams were then given the ability to set their own goals and targets, in whatever manner worked best for them.

So, can it really be said that this specific organization utilizes a top down approach to organizational goal setting? Based on the research I have compiled, I would argue that, yes, at an organizational level, they definitely utilize this approach. There is no input from the 'bottom' (employees), it is solely based on what the executive and board of directors deems to be most important to ensure the success of the organization.

In general, this was the concept most prevalent throughout large organizations – their high-level goals are set by the executive and board of directors, and from there, different divisions and teams set their own goals and targets to ensure the company's strategy is being achieved. To set these divisional and team goals, a bottom up or a hybrid approach was often times implemented by the leaders. In one situation, in another oil and gas company, division leaders are given the freedom to set their own strategies to achieve the organizational goals. These leaders often times hold meetings with their employees to understand how they can help achieve this goal, and they work together to develop not only an individual employee goal plan, but also then to tie together a full divisional plan; with input from all team members. As an example, interviewee #5 outlined that their organizational strategy is developed by the executive and the board of directors, but since they operate in an abundance of geographical regions around the globe, it is then up to each individual country leader to set their own specific goals and targets. However, differing from the top-down approach for the broad organizational goals, at the country level, the country leaders come together with their regional directors to refine and develop their strategies, to ensure their success.

So, which approach is more effective? On one hand, we have a strict top-down approach, in which a leader (whether from an organizational, division, team, etc., perspective) directs those underneath him or her as to what they will be doing. On the other hand, we have a top down approach in which the organizational goals are set out by the leaders, but then as they get trickled down to more specific details, it becomes more of a collaborative approach. Based on the interviews conducted, and information gathered, I believe it ultimately depends on what the organizational goals are, and that there is not one correct answer.

If an organization has set out specific financial targets that need to be achieved, I believe a strict down approach may be more effective; that way there is no confusion with regards to what is expected of each group. For example, a restaurant in St. John's, the owner wanted to cut labour costs to a certain percentage of sales. So, in order to do that, there were three things that could happen: (1) he/she could use less staff, and assume they could continue putting out a quality product and continue sales numbers, (2) he/she could try and increase sales and still utilize the same number of staff, or (3) he/she could tell his team that he's trying to reduce labour costs, and outline to them how he believes they can become more efficient and effective in their role(s) to achieve this. By utilizing option (3) in this scenario, the restaurant owner was able to provide his objective to the staff, and work with them to ensure they are as efficient as possible. In other words, this individual is ensuring he has the commitment of his staff by engaging them in the process (Locke & Latham, 2002).

So, that brings me to the next category of concepts that I believe is closely connected to the category of development of goals; and that is measuring success. What does success look like to an organization? Is it strictly financial? Or are there some elements in there about employee growth and development? Organizations exist for a variety of reason, and while all for-profit businesses obviously exist to make money, there are other underlying reasons for their existence. Throughout the interview process, three major concepts emerged within this category: (1) financial, (2) employee morale and development, and (3) community involvement. Similar to research conducted by Vancouver et al. (1994) and Vancouver and Schmitt (1991), these three concepts can be divided into operational (financial & employee development) goals and non-operational (employee morale and community involvement) goals.

Depending on what organizations considered and measured as success, their goals were altered accordingly, so too was the goal setting process. Ultimately, based on interviews I conducted during my research project, I do not believe there is a one size fits all solution to how organizations should set their organizational goals. However, I do believe that the information I have collected shows without a doubt that different sized organizations set their goals in a variety of manners. Additionally, I believe that the industry in which the organization is operating within has a profound effect on the goal setting process as well since different industries will have different measures of success. For example, interviewee #17, who works with a transportation company, outlined that they have a multi-year vision/goal in place to expand their services to multiple province. This strategy has been agreed upon by the executive, and has a clear measure of success, which is, were they successful in expansion. Similarly, participant #20 highlighted her organization's ambition to be one of the best in-class mid-size construction companies (in terms of revenue, not employees). Both these examples highlight a long-term, or distal goal, that has been broken down by the respective organization into shorter-term, or proximal goals. Whether a restaurant wants to decrease costs, or a financial institution wants to increase the numbers of clients they service, or an oil and gas company wants to increase their production capacity, there is no 'one size fits all' definition for success. It will vary by industry, and definitely by organization, regardless of their size.

This then leads in to the third category which I believe plays a major factor in setting organizational goals, and this category is the specific organizational goals. The type of goal(s) an organization's leadership sets can have a profound impact on how the rest of the organization works together to achieve these outcomes (Locke, 2004). This was something that I had really not considered at all when designing my research project, or even while conducting interviews. But instead, it was a relationship that became apparent while coding and analyzing the data.

Essentially, the type of organizational goal set directly affects the way in which it is developed. For example, when an organization (participant #24) is setting a broad organizational goal, such as a financial institution that wants to help communities in which it operates prosper, there are several ways in which this goal can be achieved –

there is no one right answer. So, in this scenario, we have an executive who sets this goal, meaning it comes directly from the top, but the executive has not mandated how this goal is to be achieved in all jurisdictions, because there are too many variables at play. Thus, each jurisdiction has defined their own measure of success, and what this organizational goal means to them. For example, continuing with the scenario above, for every certain number of volunteer hours employees contributed to the community, the organization would donate a certain number of dollars, thus in one jurisdiction, they wanted to help their 'communities prosper' by increasing this cash injection into the community in comparison to the dollar value in 2015. They were successful in reaching their goal in 2016, and have set out to improve upon it again in 2017. So, again, while the high-level, organizational goal is being set at the top in this scenario, ultimately the type of organizational goal will significantly impact execution.

Based on the information collected, I believe the following can begin help to process goal setting theory at the organizational level. First, organizations of varying sizes do indeed utilize different processes when setting their goals. In the present study, large organizations, especially publicly traded organizations, have structures and formal processes in place for setting their organizational, divisional, team, and employee goals. Medium organizations were found to be a mixture of both structured processes and informal processes for setting goals, and small organizations were primarily utilizing informal processes when setting their goals, with minimal consideration given to employee level goals. Second, a top down approach, or assigning goals seems to be the best way for broad organizational goals to be delivered across an organization, regardless of its size. From there, each division and/or team should be given the opportunity to set their own goals to reach the broad organizational goal. With that said, based on the research I have conducted and analyzed, I cannot come to a conclusion on if that next step should be done with a top down, bottom up, or hybrid approach. Finally, I have come to realize that the type of people you are dealing with, and their personal beliefs with regards to goal setting will have a profound impact on the processes utilized at the organizational, the divisional, and the employee levels. On one hand, if you have a leader, or owner, or manager who truly understands and embraces goal setting and utilizes it in an appropriate way, then he or she will utilize a variety of type of goals (proximal, distal, organizational, employee, to name a few), and ensure the development of these goals is done in a suitable manner. On the other hand, if you have a leader, or owner, or manager who does not believe in the goal setting process and the benefits it can bring to the organization and to individual employees, then he or she will be less likely to utilize a variety of goal types and development processes, which could cause confusion, employee dissatisfaction, and lacklustre organizational performance.

Limitations & Future Research

Like all studies, there are limitations to this research. While I do not believe that these limitations have significantly impacted the results of this study, they must be acknowledged nevertheless. In fact, I hope that the identification of these limitations will generate areas for future research by myself and others.

First, when transcribing my recorded interviews, there were two areas that I could have improved upon: (1) the speed of transcription, and more importantly, (2) the coding of data post transcription. When referring to speed of transcription, I specifically mean the time post-interview it took for me to finalize the transcription. The majority of transcriptions were completed within one week of their recording; however, there were some that lingered for a few weeks before I transcribed them. Given that I used a grounded theory approach in this project, I should have transcribed all recordings as soon as possible, and then proceeded to code them, at least in a preliminary fashion, immediately thereafter (Warren & Karner, 2015). Thus, I could have been more prompt in my coding of the transcriptions to allow not only for a deeper analysis, but to have also given me the opportunity to uncover some themes that could have been explored deeper throughout interviews. Ultimately, I do not believe that I missed any key categories, themes, or concepts throughout my interviews; nevertheless, this was an area in which I could have improved upon. I urge future researchers in this area, and using this technique, to more promptly code their data.

Second, I gave very little consideration to the gender of the individuals I was interviewing. As was noted when I presented by preliminary findings in a Brown bag session, this is an area for future investigation. For example, research suggests that women are less likely to make decisions for a group of individuals; whereas, men have no issue making these kind of decisions (Ertac & Gurdal, 2012). Additionally, the existing literature also shows that women take less risks than men (Charness & Gneezy, 2012). While ultimately, I do not believe this affected any of the information I obtained, it became apparent after I had concluded my data collection that I had interviewed seven women and 19 men. It would have been interesting to interview a male and a female representative from the same organization and analyze how they may view the goal setting practices of their employer, either similarly or differently.

Third, similar to the second point, I interviewed organizations across a variety of industries, which can all be found in Table 1. For the purposes of my research project, I believe this proved to be beneficial as it provided a wide-array of information and context from organizations, not only of varying sizes, but also from varying industries. While I did not consider why there may be differences among the goal setting practices of organizations in different industries, this would be an intriguing topic for future discussion.

Fourth, another potential area for more specific future research could be in the area of privately held versus publicly traded companies and how their goal setting practices differ. In my research project, I did not give any consideration to what group the organizations I interviewed fell within. However, looking back on the data, of the 26 interviews I conducted, only seven were publicly traded companies, with the remaining 19 being privately held companies. All of the publicly traded organizations had specific goal setting practices in place, at the employee, team (or division), and organization level. While the remaining 19 organizations were a mixture of formal and informal processes.

Fifth, for this research project, I utilized the number of employees within an organization to determine whether it was a small, medium, and large business. This allowed me to easily analyze the data collected with regards to business size. However, there are other measures for business size that could have been utilize; one of which would be revenue. While I made a conscious decision not to use revenue as my determining factor for business size, mainly because such a number would be difficult to obtain from privately held businesses, I believe this would be a unique way to compare the data in future projects.

Sixth, if given the opportunity to complete research again, I would continue with the same general research question, but my sample would include multiple decision makers within an organization. These individuals would come from multiple 'levels,' as well, especially in large organizations. That is, instead of interviewing multiple mid-level managers at one company, I would like to interview an executive member (or owner), a mid-level manager, and a front-line employee. Instead of interviewing just one person, and having only their perspective on the organization's goal setting process, I believe interviewing multiple people within the one organization would provide an even deeper sample and data pool for future research. This type of approach, referred to as triangulation, is utilized to gather data from multiple sources throughout the collection process (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, Neville, 2014; Koster, Baars, Delnoij, 2016).

Seventh, in the literature review, I outlined five different strategies that organizations utilize to achieve the goals they set out. However, I did not discuss these strategies within the data analysis section as it did not pertain specifically to my research question. While the purpose of this thesis was to understand how organizations set their goals, these strategies should be investigated in future research that examines how organizations ensure goals are achieved.

Eighth, future research with regards to organizational setting could also be combined with the existing work on self-determination theory. Self-determination theory suggests that while all individuals can be motivated, they experience this motivation to varying degrees. In addition, individuals are often motivated by different things (Howard, Gagné, Morin, Van den Broeck, 2016). Thus, in the context of organizational goal setting, a future step would be to understand how employees, teams and even divisions are motivated to achieve certain goals. What is driving them to succeed?

Lastly, an examiner suggested that descriptors such as gender and whether the organization was publically traded or privately held should be included in Table 1. The table was carefully designed to exclude information that could enable readers to potentially identify any interviewees. This was important as all of the organizations interviewed had a physical office in the province, and the province' business community is relatively small. While future studies may wish to include such information, this information was not reported in table to minimize threats to anonymity. This was also consistent with my ethics approval.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that this MSc (Management) thesis makes important contributions to goal setting theory and practice. Through 26 interviews, I have provided valuable insight in to how organizations of varying sizes set their organizational goals. It is evident that there are several factors at play; (1) organization size will have an effect on goal setting, (2) what the company defines as success will also have an effect on goal setting, and (3) the specific organizational goals themselves will affect how they are developed (the more specific they are, typically the more people are involved) (Locke & Latham, 2002). Throughout this process, I have found that medium and large organization utilize a more formal process and have implemented a top down approach for the most part, with goals being set by the executive and/or board of directors and then trickling down from there. However, there were also some instances where organizations set a very broad goal, and gave the freedom to the specific group, or division, or team, to ensure execution. With regards to small organizations, they also tended to follow a top down approach, but their goals were more specific and rigid in nature and there was not much room for maneuvering. However, there was no real process followed to develop the goal(s), it was the owner or decision maker making all of the decisions.

The only situation in which a true bottom up or hybrid approach to goal setting was utilized in the organizations interviewed was when divisions, or teams, or individuals were setting their goals. All organizations utilized a top down approach, to some extent, when setting their highest level organizational goals.

Ultimately, this research project has attempted to answer the following research question: What processes do organizations of varying sizes utilize when setting goals? And while I believe I have answered it, there is still much to be discovered. I have indeed uncovered how different sized organizations set and measure goals; however, future research now needs to examine if there could be a formal process that is standardized across all organizations to streamline the goal setting process. The present study has highlighted that there are certain processes that organizations follow (e.g. top down approach), but the next step for the research would be understand more deeply how and why this approach has been adopted. From there, as mentioned previously, perhaps a specific process for organizational goal setting can be derived.

Similar to the works of Barsy (2007), Carper (2015), Locke (2004), and Young and Smith (2013), to name a few, I believe that there is still significant need for research to be conducted in the area of organizational goal setting. More specifically, the processes organizations utilize for goal setting. The theory of goal setting as it relates to motivation and employee goals is well researched (Locke & Latham, 2002; Locke & Latham, 1990). However, little has been done in the way of discovering similarities and common themes among organizations for the processes and procedures they utilize for setting organizational goals. While this research project has attempted to uncover some trends, ultimately, I only sampled organizations within St. John’s and surrounding area. While a number of these organizations were large multi-national corporations, I believe there is a need to discuss the goal setting process with multiple people within each organization. Not just from within the same office, but in the case of large organizations with multiple offices in multiple geographic areas, getting the perspective of a variety of locations would prove to be very beneficial to the future development of the theory.

Finally, my contribution to the theory of goal setting centers on the examination of the goal setting process used at the organizational level. In so doing, I have attempted to bridge the micro (employee) and macro (organizational) levels. At the micro-level, the bulk of goal setting research has focused on individual goals and individual performance (Locke & Latham, 1990; Locke & Latham, 2002). It has rarely examined the dynamics of organizational setting and the specific processes utilized (Barsy, 2007; Carper, 2015; Young & Smith, 2013). In short, there has been a dearth of research of the goal setting process at the organizational level. With regards to the field of organizational studies, there has been extensive research around planning, which has embedded in it, goals (Fincher, 1972; Fincher 1982; Grünig & Kühn, 2015; Wolf & Floyd, 2017; Wood, Whelan, Sojo, & Wong, 2013). But again, there has been very little discussion about the goal setting process itself. Rather, goals have been taken as a just is (Mantere, 2013; Mintzberg, 1978). Given these gaps, this thesis represents a novel perspective of better understanding the goal setting dynamics at an organizational level.

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Appendix A: ICEHR Approval Letter

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864-2561 icehr@mun.ca
www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr

ICEHR Number:	**20171400-BA**
Approval Period:	February 7, 2017 – February 28, 2018
Funding Source:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Tom Cooper Faculty of Business Administration
Title of Project:	*Goal Setting: The Approach Taken by Different Sized Organizations*

February 7, 2017

Mr. Shane Skinner
Faculty of Business Administration
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Mr. Skinner:

Thank you for your submission to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) seeking ethical clearance for your research project. The Committee appreciates the care and diligence with which you prepared your application. The recruitment letter needs to state that the study is not connected with the Board of Trade, that participation is not a condition of membership, nor will participation be reported to anyone. It also needs to state the time required for the interview, that the participant can choose the location, and that you wish to interview two managers in 30 organizations. As well, the reporting results section of the consent form needs to state that findings will be published in your masters thesis and will be publically available at the QEII library. Also, the second last bullet item in the signature section needs to indicate the withdrawal end date of April 2017; rather than "at any time."

The project is consistent with the guidelines of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2). *Full ethics clearance* is granted for one year from the date of this letter. ICEHR approval applies to the ethical acceptability of the research, as per Article 6.3 of the *TCPS2* (2014). Researchers are responsible for adherence to any other relevant University policies and/or funded or non-funded agreements that may be associated with the project.

If you need to make changes during the project, which may raise ethical concerns, please submit an amendment request with a description of these changes for the Committee's consideration. In addition, the *TCPS2* requires that you submit an annual update to ICEHR before February 28, 2018. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance, and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer involves contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you are required to provide the annual update with a final brief summary, and your file will be closed. Annual updates and amendment requests can be submitted from your Memorial University Researcher Portal account by clicking the *Applications: Post-Review* link on your Portal homepage. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Russell J. Adams, Ph.D.
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research
Professor of Psychology and Pediatrics
Faculties of Science and Medicine

RA/th

copy: Supervisor – Dr. Tom Cooper, Faculty of Business Administration

Associate Dean, Research, Faculty of Business Administration

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Hello,

My name is Shane Skinner and I am a Graduate Student in the Faculty of Business Administration at Memorial University of Newfoundland. As part of my studies, I will be completing a research project entitled "Goal Setting: The Approach Taken by Different Sized Organizations". This project will examine how different size organizations, based on number of employees, utilize goal setting to ensure employee motivation, and thus their organization's success.

If you are willing to participate in this study, the next step is for us to discuss setting up an interview. As part of this interview, you will be asked to answer a series of questions about how your organization set goals, manages goals, and uses goals to steer your organization in a specific direction.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. Participants may withdraw from the research, without any penalty, until the end of the data collection period (September 2017), after which point data can no longer be removed from the study.

There are several measures that will be taken to protect your confidentiality, as well as that of the organization for with whom you are employed. Participants' names will not be attached to interview recordings or transcripts. A separate password protected file will link participants' names to a code number, which will be used in all data analysis. Additionally, all interview data will be password protected.

This study will not only enhance understanding of the way in which organizations of various sizes utilize goal setting, but it will also identify some areas for future research within the spectrum of goal setting, thus allowing organizations to better themselves from new best practices that will potentially be uncovered.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at: sns477@mun.ca or by telephone: 1-709-691-1761.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Thank you for your assistance.
Sincerely,

Shane Skinner

Graduate Student
Faculty of Business Administration
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, NL, Canada, A1B 3X5
Phone: 709-691-1761
Email: sns477@mun.ca

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form
Title: Goal Setting: The Approach Taken by Different Sized Organizations

Researchers: Principal Investigator: Shane Skinner, Faculty of Business Administration, Memorial University, e-mail: sns477@mun.ca or phone: (709) 691-1761

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled "Goal Setting: The Approach Taken by Different Sized Organizations". This project will examine how different size organizations, based on number of employees, utilize goal setting to ensure employee motivation, and thus their organization's success. I have attached the consent form to this email to provide you with more information. You are asked to participate in a research interview, which will take approximately 1 hour.

In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact me if you have any questions about the study or for more information not included here before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Purpose of study:
This project is attempting to understand how organizations of various sizes utilize goal setting. In-depth research will be conducted to analyze any difference in how goals are set, managed, and measured.

What you will do in this study:
As a participant in this research, you will be asked a series of interview questions about how your organization utilizes goal setting to ensure its long term success.

Length of time:
The interview will last approximately 1 hour.

Withdrawal from the study:
You may withdraw from the study prior to September 2017 without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the project, your interview recordings, transcripts and related data will be removed from the project.

Possible benefits:
Research respondents will not receive any direct benefits from their participation in the research. The project will identify any major differences between different sized organizations and their use of goal setting, while also identifying areas for future research, thus enhancing the theory of goal setting.

Possible risks:
The interview questions do not deal with sensitive topics. However, you may skip any questions you do not want to answer. You may also stop the interview at any time, without any penalty.

Confidentiality and Storage of Data:
Interview materials (including digital audio recordings of the interviews and typed interview transcripts) will be kept on a password-protected computer. Your name will not appear on the audio file or interview transcript. A separate password protected file will link participant names with identification numbers. Only Dr. Tom Cooper, an associate professor at Memorial University, and Shane Skinner, a graduate student, will have access to this file. Only this identification number will appear on interview transcripts or in data analysis files. Research data will be retained for a minimum of five years, in accordance with Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.

A legal "duty to disclose" details of criminal actions may override participants' confidentiality. Participants' confidentiality will be breached only if legally obligated to do so.

Recording of Data:
Interview data will be collected using a digital audio recorder.

Reporting of Results:
Every reasonable effort will be made to assure your anonymity in the reporting of research results. Quotations from interview transcripts may be used as data in conference papers, journal articles, books or research reports. Your name will not be attached to these quotations. Pseudonyms will be used for all quotations. Furthermore, quotations will be edited to remove details that could be used to identify participants.

Sharing of Results with Participants:
After the data collection and analysis are completed, the results will be given to the participants, in the form of the final written report.

Questions:
You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: Shane Skinner, e-mail: sns477@mun.ca or phone: (709) 691-1761.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:
Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that any data collected from you up to the point of your withdrawal will be destroyed.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Your signature:
I have read and understood what this study is about and appreciate the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation prior to September 2017.

☐ I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview/focus group

☐ I agree to the use of quotations, with the understanding that my name will not be identified in any publications resulting from this study.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

______________________________ ______________________________

Signature of participant Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

_____________________________ _____________________________

Signature of Researcher or Research Assistant Date

Appendix D: Sample Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Participant Reference #:	
Date interview conducted:	**Time:**
Interview conducted by:	
Participants' Informed Consent signed:	

Interview questions

1. Please introduce yourself and provide a brief summary of your background.
    a. Name
    b. Education
    c. How long you've worked with INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME
2. Please describe your role with INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME.
3. How long have you been with the company?
    a. What roles have you held during your employment?
    b. How long have you been in your present role?
4. How many people are employed within your organization?
5. What does goal setting mean to you?
6. Do you use goal setting in your personal life?
7. Are you aware of your organization's corporate goals?
    a. How were they defined and developed?
    b. How are they measured?
    c. Are employees engaged throughout the process?
8. Are mid level managers encouraged to utilize goal setting with their teams?
    a. Do these goals align with the corporate goals?
    b. How are goals developed and measured?
    c. Are employees engaged the develop goals?
9. Why are goals utilized within your organization?
10. What type of term do your organizational goals typically follow (monthly, annual, etc.)?
    a. Or do you follow multiple types?
11. Is there a record of goals being set and how they were reached?
    a. Is something that is built upon every year? Or do you start fresh every year?
12. How are goals prioritized within your organization?
13. Were you provided with any training on setting goals for your division/group/area?
    a. If yes, who administered? How long ago?
14. How does INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME measure success?
    a. Does success change year over year?