2020

Employee Engagement in the Federal Sector: An Exploration of Communication, Respect, Motivation, and Encouragement

Jody McDaniel
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Jody McDaniel

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Gerald Regier, Committee Chairperson, Public Policy and Administration Faculty
Dr. George Larkin, Committee Member, Public Policy and Administration Faculty
Dr. Victoria Landu-Adams, University Reviewer, Public Policy and Administration
Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

Employee Engagement in the Federal Sector: An Exploration of Communication,

Respect, Motivation, and Encouragement

by

Jody R. McDaniel

MS, Southern Illinois University, 2001

BS, Southern Illinois University, 1999

Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

Walden University

May 2020

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate and deepen the understanding of employee engagement in the multigenerational workforce of a federal agency. Organizational culture in combination with the dispersion of staff across multiple generations presented the opportunity to inform the case study through scientific management theory and the theory of generations as well as concepts regarding organizational change, employee satisfaction, and organizational leadership. Research questions involved investigating factors influencing the reduction in employee satisfaction and engagement, the impact of generational differences, and the role leadership plays in altering employee engagement. Survey questions were developed based on 4 themes identified in the literature to impact employee engagement. One hundred and two staff participated in the survey, and 10 leaders participated in a focus group to inform the research questions. Results were analyzed to identify potential impacts on employee satisfaction. Emergent themes indicated that transparent communication, leadership style, and opportunities for development impacted employee engagement. Investigating employee engagement within a federal organization expands the base of knowledge for federal leaders in terms of working across a multigenerational workforce within the federal sector. The results of this study could be used to improve approaches for communication, leadership interactions, and staff engagement within federal organizations, thus improving the work environment enabling positive social change through continued improvement in public service.

Employee Engagement in the Federal Sector: An Exploration of Communication,

Respect, Motivation, and Encouragement

by

Jody R. McDaniel

MS, Southern Illinois University, 2001

BS, Southern Illinois University, 1999

Professional Administrative Study in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

Walden University

May 2020

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all those who assisted me during my doctoral journey. My Committee Chair, Dr. Jerry Regier, provided consistent, timely, and wise advice throughout the process. On a personal level, this would not have been possible without the support of my husband, my family, and friends. The support at home, and across my support network enabled me to focus my time and effort while this great team held the rest of my world together.

Table of Contents

iii

List of Tables

Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

Introduction

This qualitative study investigates the decline in employee engagement within a federal agency that experienced reorganization. The agency had a history of a distributed workforce that spanned 150 years. The organization was structured with 10 executive leaders and 46 field locations that supported local constituents across the United States. The organization had been structured the same with limited changes for over 20 years. The executive leadership team had historically been filled with career agency employees with 20 to 40 years of federal experience. In 2009, the organization experienced a change in leadership from outside the agency. The following years resulted in a series of operational change initiatives that transformed how and where the organization accomplished its mission.

In 2013, the organization restructured to 12 regional field offices along with headquarters units. The result was a significant loss of institutional knowledge based on the separation of 200 employees who did not wish to accept reassignment to a new location as offered by agency leadership. The reorganization was the end of a multiyear change initiative that was driven by the organization's senior leadership team. Only the staff at headquarters were involved and engaged in reorganization planning. Change initiatives leading up to reorganization were focused on reengineering how the organization completed its business operations. Specifically, the change initiatives centralized processing of data to one unit, introduced remote data collection, implemented enhanced virtual training opportunities, instituted a wide area network

managed from one location, and reengineered key applications within the organization. The overarching goal of all change initiatives was to increase the integrity of the organization and align the vision of the agency with other similar federal organizations.

This professional administrative study involves actions taken by senior leadership following the period of change experienced from 2013 to 2019. The study not only informs actions of leadership within the organization moving forward but applies to other federal organizations experiencing change. Results will allow federal leaders to engage their staff and improve the working environment allowing for positive social change through potential increases in employee retention and continued delivery of public service.

Problem Statement

In terms of employee engagement, the organization was once the highest-rated agency in the cabinet-level department in which it resides based on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), but following reorganization, it fell to the lowest ranking. The problem was that after reorganization and its resulting reduction in employee engagement, the organization had experienced high staff turnover and lower job satisfaction. However, it was unclear what the reasons were for this change in staff motivation and satisfaction. This qualitative case study provides insight into this problem.

Working with an organization which experienced a significant reorganization at the onset of the revised Government Performance and Results Act of 2010 (GPRA), provides a unique opportunity to measure success based on FEVS results and agency performance metrics across time. The GPRA established the need for organizations to

engage their staff and implement measures of success for agency leadership. The shift in the generational makeup of the workforce that resulted from a 20% reduction in force caused by forced reassignments at the time of reorganization allowed for an opportunity to investigate communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement across the workforce.

Investigating communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement within a federal organization expands the base of knowledge in terms of working across a multigenerational workforce within the federal sector. The client organization was a small federal organization with deep roots in public service; the results of this study can inform workforce engagement across many federal service organizations. The broader population of federal sector leaders could improve approaches for communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement within their organizations, thus improving public service through the potential for increased employee retention.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate and deepen the understanding of the reduction of employee engagement in the multigenerational workforce of a federal agency. Generations are defined based on exposure to a given historical event (Pilcher, 1994). Internally, the reorganization was a substantial historical event that divided staff into two generations within the organization, each with its traditional generational differences. Investigating meanings involving themes regarding employee engagement based on organization-specific as well as traditional generations will provide insight into diminished composite scores from the FEVS. It will also provide

additional data so that leadership can prudently apply resources to improve communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement leading to more positive and engaging work experiences.

The study furthers the understanding of communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement through interviews and focus groups selected to be purposeful in defining engagement among the generations present within the workplace. Manheim's theory of generations defined a generation within the context of a group's exposure to similar historical events and experiences. Employees within the organization were divided between those who experienced reorganization and those who did not. Multiple generations (Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial) were present in both the pre and post-reorganization groups. The leadership team's need to further understand the meaning of employee engagement within the organization and across multiple generations best aligns with a qualitative approach allowing for the identification of keywords and themes.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate and deepen the understanding of the reduction of employee engagement in the multigenerational workforce of the client organization. This administrative study assisted in identifying reasons for reduced employee satisfaction in the workplace during the period following substantial organizational change. Lack of depth in current peer-reviewed research regarding organizational change, employee engagement, and the presence of a multigenerational workforce within federal organizations was a gap in knowledge that was addressed by the research. The study will increase leadership understanding of

employee engagement in the federal workplace in terms of communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement, thus leading to improved employee satisfaction in the workplace.

Gap in Organizational Knowledge

In the 5 years following the reorganization, organizational leadership has worked diligently to improve employee engagement by introducing employee training, additional resources, and other opportunities to engage with leadership. The results have been successful, but only marginally based on the annual results of the FEVS. A qualitative inquiry to better understand staff perceptions involving communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement will allow the organization to engage its workforce better.

To better understand employee perceptions and expectations, senior leadership established an employee advisory committee (EAC). The EAC was structured with membership from across organizational lines and was inclusive of diversity in the workplace. The EAC has reviewed annual awards and performance for staff and developed new ideas to promote employee and leadership interactions. Additionally, the agency has focused on promoting diversity and inclusion within the workplace through a series of seminars coordinated by the Civil Rights Office. Activities have been ongoing and were in addition to regular training activities offered to journeyman level staff within the organization.

Guiding Questions for this Study

1. What are the factors that have influenced the reduction in employee satisfaction and engagement?

2. What role do generational differences play in communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement?

3. What role does leadership play in reducing or increasing employee engagement and satisfaction?

Nature of the Administrative Study

The Employee Engagement Index (EEI) is an accurate measure of employee engagement within the federal sector. Questions comprising the EEI were representative of employee engagement from the perspective of resources, supervision, and the ability of leaders to lead. Four main themes were present in the questions: communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement (Byrne et al., 2017).

This study of the organization used a series of staff surveys and a focus group involving senior leadership. This data collection approach will provide clarity to better understand the four themes of employee engagement for individual staff members as well as senior leaders. This exploratory case study was best served with web-based surveys with staff due to the geographic dispersion of staff, personal nature of preferences in the thematic areas of employee engagement.

Staff Surveys

The staff within the organization was geographically distributed in multiple locations and organization units. A cross-sectional sample was identified based on location, position, tenure with the organization, and age of staff to allow for a broad understanding of communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement. The sampled staff members were invited to complete a web based survey with open-ended questions

aimed at identifying what effective communication strategies provide them with critical organizational information and motivation as employees of the organization, clarifying what respect means to them individually, and establishing types of encouragement they require to be successful in their respective position.

Leadership Focus Group

The leadership of the organization was centrally- located, allowing them to be brought together for a focus group. The focus group was semi-structured, using the same questions from the staff survey. The purpose of the focus group was to gain an in-depth understanding of leadership perspectives regarding communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement. The need for an in-depth understanding and a small number of focused questions aligns best with the use of a focus group (O'Sullivan, Rassel, Berner, & Taliaferro, 2017).

<div align="center">

Significance

</div>

In researching to inform the administrative study, limited information was available concerning employee engagement within the public sector, or specifically the federal sector. The findings from this project may inform employee engagement activities within the organization. Positive social change may be attained through an improved work environment resulting in continued public service from federal employees.

This administrative study has furthered leadership's understanding of employee engagement with the client organization. It also furthers the understanding of leaders with regard to how generational differences impact perceptions involving communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement based on leadership actions. The study may lead

to informed leadership actions to encourage improvements in employee engagement

concerning communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement.

Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders of the administrative study were staff and leadership within the

organization. The organization was led by a team of 10 senior executive service

employees who direct the work of more than 800 staff within the continental United

States. The direct impact on the workforce of this organization could be accomplished by

further understanding perceptions of leadership and staff involving communication,

motivation, respect, and encouragement that were realized from leadership actions.

Wider Implications for Public Administration

Completing a qualitative study involving staff within the client organization will

further the understanding of employee engagement within the organization. The results of

the findings will provide organizational leadership with recommended activities based on

this administrative study to improve employee engagement and lead to positive social

change by increasing employee engagement across demographic subgroups within the

federal sector. The results of the administrative study are broadly applicable to similarly

structured public sector organizations

Summary

In Section 1, I documented and introduced a federal agency experiencing

problems in terms of employee engagement. In Section 2, I will present existing scholarly

literature that addresses employee engagement within multigenerational workforces and

communication and collaboration issues as well as unique problems senior leaders must

address.

Section 2: Conceptual Approach and Background

Introduction

The client organization was once the highest-rated agency within its cabinet-level department based on the FEVS, but following reorganization in 2013, it fell to the lowest ranking. The problem was that after reorganization and resulting reductions in employee engagement, the organization experienced high staff turnover and lower job satisfaction. It was unclear what the reasons were for this change in staff motivation and satisfaction. This qualitative study will provide insight into this problem while addressing the following research questions through a qualitative survey of current employees and leaders of the organization.

RQ1: What are the factors that influenced the reduction of employee satisfaction and engagement?

RQ2: What role did generational differences play in terms of communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement?

RQ3: What role did leadership play in terms of reducing or increasing employee engagement and satisfaction?

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate and deepen the understanding of the reduction of employee engagement in the multigenerational workforce of the client organization.

Concepts, Models, and Theories

Organizational culture in combination with dispersion of staff across multiple generations presented the opportunity to inform the case study through multiple theories

in public administration as well as concepts involving organizational change, employee

satisfaction, and organizational leadership. The theories identified to inform the

qualitative case study were the scientific management theory and theory of generations.

The following sections outline identified theories and clarify how identified concepts

relate to this study.

Scientific Management Theory

The organization that the qualitative case study focuses on was one with a highly

technical leadership team; each respective leader had held numerous staff positions

throughout their careers varying from 25 to 40 years of service. The scientific

management theory, also known as Taylorism, was born from the observations of

Fredrick Taylor during his time working in the steel mill (Aitken, 1985). Taylor observed

workers "soldiering on" at performance levels below their personal best (Aitken, 1985).

Taylorism was based on four principles. Those principles were: replace rule-of-thumb

work methods with methods based on a scientific study of the tasks, scientifically select,

train, and develop each worker rather than passively leaving them to train themselves,

cooperate with workers to ensure that scientifically-developed methods are being

followed, and divide work nearly equally between managers and workers, so that

managers apply scientific management principles to planning the work and workers

perform their tasks (Shafritz & Hyde, 2017).

Theory of Generations

Since 2012, the workforce within the organization had experienced a shift in

generational makeup. Mannheim (as cited in McMullin, Comeau, & Jovic, 2007, p. 298)

described a generation not only in terms of the period one was born, but also in terms of sociopolitical experiences that group individuals into a given cohort. Traditional generations, like Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials, were are determined solely based on the period in which they were born. A generation is created based on when a cohort was born, in combination with their life experiences. A common myth exists that older generations are more committed, while younger generations are more technologically savvy (McMullin et al., 2007). To better understand the influence of generations within the organization the theory of generations was selected to inform the study.

Theoretical Alignment to the Study

A team of senior executive service employees leads the organization. Eighty percent of the current management team began their federal careers prior to 1985, each starting at the journeyman level and advancing throughout their career within the one organization. Although the work of the organization was not directly aligned with the factory type work traditionally aligned with Taylor's scientific management theory, this theory was closely aligned with the technical nature of the work and organizational dynamics within the agency the study focused on. Fully understanding employee engagement within the organization requires an understanding of the organizational environment in which the staff completes their work. In the context of the client organization, the reorganization was a historical event that shaped a subset, or perspective group, within the generations present in the workforce.

Concepts

This qualitative case required an understanding of concepts involving organizational change, employee satisfaction, and organizational leadership. These concepts will be discussed in the following sections, and their relationship to this study will be clarified.

Organizational change. Do, Oreg, Bartunek, and Lee (2018) investigated the role of the recipient of organizational change using a circumplex model based on the level of engagement. The four quadrants of the circumplex range from passive acceptance to disengagement. The results of the research implicitly indicate that recipients of organizational change were passively assigned to one of the four quadrants. Those passively assigned to a more resistant reaction have a stronger negative response valence regarding the change based on the level of alignment with one's personal goals and overall acceptance of the organizational goals.

Kim (2018) investigated a multinational technology organization in terms of the impact of functional, hierarchal, and geographical diversity on knowledge transfer during organizational change using a social network approach. Kim used a survey of 225 full-time employees and measured knowledge transfer one month after the organizational change.

Lauricella, Ford, Riley, Powers, and Lederle (2017) investigated employee perceptions of organizational change within a state wildlife organization. Lauricella et al. used the organizational change framework as a basis for the research and used an employee survey to measure acceptance to organizational change. The research findings

highlighted that communication was central to the acceptance of change from employees, and was a variable used on the research.

The research informs the potential impact of organizational change on employee satisfaction. The acceptance of organizational change, degree of knowledge transfer, and management of employee perceptions through communication each relate to this study as they were underpinnings of the Employee Engagement Index (Byrne et al., 2017). Specifically, Do et al. (2018) identified the need for goal congruence to mitigate reductions in employee engagement during organizational change. Kim (2018) identified the need for knowledge transfer, and Lauricella et al. (2017) clarified the need for effective communication to sustain employee satisfaction during organizational change

Employee satisfaction. Breevaart and Bakker (2018) investigated the relationship between daily job demands and employee satisfaction. Breevaart et al. used a short survey with educators to explore the impact of transformational leadership on employee satisfaction. Specifically, Breevaart et al. investigated the impact of vision, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration and identified that they had a positive outcome on employee satisfaction. The research will incorporate characteristics of transformational leadership as variables to aid in identifying barriers to engagement within the organization. This research relates directly to the study by identifying potential sources of motivation, such as innovation and independence in accomplishing one's work that was incorporated in the survey instrument.

Organizational leadership. Reina, Rogers, Peterson, Byron, and Hom (2018) investigated the impact of managerial influence style and employee emotional

engagement on the turnover of staff. The two managerial styles of influence studied were pressure and inspiration appeal. The level of engagement was measured in the same instrument. Reina et al. found that pressure as a style of managerial influence leads to higher turnover. Variables for inspirational appeal and pressure were incorporated in the research to identify possible causes for increased turnover. Reina et al. (2018) found that inspirational appeal as a leadership style reduces potential turnover in comparison to pressure. The study will clarify the staff perception of leadership style within the organization.

Relevance to Public Organizations

Extensive literature was available to inform the impact of a multigenerational workforce, organizational change, and leadership styles on employee satisfaction. I identified a gap in the literature in the context of federal agencies. The case study capitalized on the underpinnings of academic research to help identify strategies to increase employee satisfaction within a federal agency that has experienced a reorganization and high turnover in the past five years. The outcome from the administrative study encourages improvements in communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement.

Organization Background and Context

The client organization was a federal agency that has a history of a distributed workforce that spans 150 years. The organization was structured with ten executive leaders and 46 field locations that supported the local constituents across the United States. The organization had been structured the same with limited change for over 20

years. The executive leadership team had historically been filled with career agency

employees with 20-40 years of federal experience. In 2009 the organization experienced

a change in leadership from outside the agency. The following years resulted in a series

of operational change initiatives that transformed how and where the organization

accomplished its mission.

In 2013, the organization restructured to 12 regional field offices along with

headquarters units. The result was a large loss of institutional knowledge based on the

separation of 200 employees who did not wish to accept the reassignment to a new

location as offered by agency leadership. The reorganization was the end of a multi-year

change initiative that was driven by the organization's senior leadership team. Only the

staff at headquarters were involved and engaged in the reorganization planning. The

change initiatives leading up to the reorganization were focused on re-engineering how

the organization completed its business. Specifically, the five initiatives centralized the

processing of data to a national operating center, introduced remote data collection in the

field, implemented enhanced virtual training opportunities, instituted a wide area network

managed from one location, and re-engineered the key applications within the

organization. The overarching goal of all change initiatives was to increase the integrity

of the organization and align the vision of the agency with other similar federal

organizations.

Role of the DPA Researcher

This professional administrative study focused on one federal agency. As a

consultant to this agency, and as a student/researcher, I identified my personal role in the

organization. I was a career employee of the agency and oversaw a staff of 25 people. My

relationship with the organization was a strong motivator to encourage this administrative

study, as I have invested 20 years and worked alongside many leaders and staff.

My long history and position in the organization was a potential source of bias

within this study. Potential bias was mitigated by developing and administering an

objective survey to staff and the leadership focus group. Staff selected for survey

participation was provided a confidentiality pledge to allowing them to respond openly

and provide the most meaningful outcome. All outcomes from the administrative study

were provided without regard to the specific employee providing feedback but instead

were presented alongside the outcomes from other members of the same generational

grouping. The staff surveys and focus group used the survey instrument as written and

captured all feedback for analysis.

Due to my leadership position within the organization, potential bias was

mitigated by removing the staff within their organizational unit from the population of

potential participants. The remainder of staff from across the organization was

representative of the workforce, and their removal from the population reduced inherent

staff concerns over confidentiality of responses and results.

Summary

In Section 2, I documented the literature using the scientific management theory

and Mannheim's theory of generations. While much of the literature presented was not

specific to federal agencies, the material can be adopted and implemented by federal

agency leaders in ways that can help encourage improvements in communication,

motivation, respect, and encouragement. In Section 3, I present the case study research

method and procedures used to collect and analyze study data.

Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

Introduction

Employee satisfaction is challenging to all organizations, and leaders must fully understand challenges present in the workforce to mitigate loss of talent and motivation among their staff. This qualitative study will provide insight into the problem of reduced employee satisfaction in a federal agency while addressing the following research questions through a qualitative survey of current employees and leaders.

RQ1: What are the factors that influenced the reduction of employee satisfaction and engagement?

RQ2: What role did generational differences play in terms of communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement?

RQ3: What role did leadership play in terms of reducing or increasing employee engagement and satisfaction?

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate and deepen the understanding of the reduction of employee engagement in the multigenerational workforce of a federal agency. The EEI identified key themes involving communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement as being integral to employee satisfaction. Additional literature review supported the identified themes and included additional context to inform a survey instrument to engage agency staff and leadership.

Sources of Evidence

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to identify challenges facing the organization regarding employee satisfaction. Four key themes were identified as being

central to employee satisfaction. Those themes were communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement. Evidence generated through survey responses from staff and a focus group with senior leadership was used to clarify factors reducing employee satisfaction in the organization, the role of generational differences, and the role of leadership in terms of changes in the level of employee satisfaction. The collection and analysis of data from staff and leadership within the organization allowed me to identify gaps in employee and leadership perceptions of identified themes as they relate to employee satisfaction. Organizational approval was documented through a service order agreement which outlined the specific deliverables to be provided.

Evidence Generated Through Staff Surveys

Initial evidence for the administrative study was generated through a web-based survey with a sample of employees. I used web-based survey that allowed open-ended responses to a series of questions. Survey participants were informed of the purpose of interviews, confidentiality protection, and key terms prior to the onset of each survey.

Participants. The initial sample of invited participants was 150 people and was determined using maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling is a purposeful method that focuses on identifying a sample broad enough to identify themes through and within diverse groups (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Sixty-eight percent or 102 of the 150 invited participants completed the survey.

The sample for survey participants was randomly identified from across the organization. Respondents were asked to identify their generation based on birth year as

well as if they were on staff prior to the reorganization. The selected sample for survey

participation was evaluated in terms of generations and sex of respondents.

Procedures. Open-ended survey questions were created to inform identified

research questions based on identified theories and concepts discussed in Section 2.

Survey questions were developed and reviewed to ensure they were meaningful in terms

of addressing identified research questions. Survey participants were notified by email of

the opportunity to participate in the research. Each participant was provided an

introductory email that included a brief overview of the study and an anonymous survey

link.

At the onset of each survey, participants were presented with the purpose of the

study and their rights regarding informed consent. Participants were provided with

consent forms that outlined procedures, possible risks, and planned outcomes of the study

and interviews. If participants gave their informed consent to proceed, they had the

opportunity to answer the survey at that time. The average length of time for participants

was less than 10 minutes.

Protections. Identities of the interview participants in the administrative study

were not shared. Characteristics like age, position, or location that might identify

participants also were not shared. Participants' personal information was not used for any

purpose outside of this administrative study. Data collected were kept anonymously, with

only a numeric identifier used for each participant. The key to numeric codes was stored

on a hard copy in a separate locked file cabinet. All electronic recordings and subsequent

coding were stored on a password-protected hard drive with limited access to me only.

No proper name of any participants, the agency, or other stakeholders who may be identified during the data collection process, was used during the data analysis or writing process. Instead, all information was categorized and generalized to ensure anonymity for the protection of all participants. Data will be kept for at least 5 years.

Evidence Generated Through a Focus Group

I conducted a focus group with the senior leadership of the organization. The purpose of the focus group was to establish an understanding of the leadership team's perceptions of communication, respect, motivation, and encouragement. The results of the focus group were compared to the results from the staff survey responses to identify gaps and provide a potential action plan to address the reduction in employee satisfaction within the organization.

Participants. The current leadership team for the organization was brought together to form the focus group. Participants were comprised of the senior executive leadership team for the organization. The current team was comprised of staff with careers in federal service ranging from 8 to 40 years. Most of the group has spent their full career in the organization. Ten participants were invited, and all accepted and participated in the focus group.

Procedures. Open-ended survey questions created for the staff survey were also used for the leadership focus group. Questions were developed and reviewed to ensure they were meaningful in terms of addressing the identified research questions. The focus group was conducted in person and lasted 90 minutes.

At its onset, I informed the participants of the purpose of the focus group. Participants were provided a consent form that outlined procedures, possible risks, and planned outcomes of the qualitative case study as well as focus group feedback. After participants gave their informed consent to proceed, I completed a semi-structured focus group. The focus group was recorded to aid in coding following the conclusion of interviews.

Protections. Identities of the focus group participants in the administrative study were not shared. Characteristics like age, position, or location that might identify participants also were not shared. I did not use participants' personal information for any purpose outside of this administrative study. All electronic recordings and subsequent coding were stored on a password-protected hard drive with limited access to me only. No proper names of any participants, the agency, or other stakeholders who may be identified during the data collection process were used during the data analysis or writing process. Instead, all information was categorized and generalized to ensure anonymity for the protection of all participants. Data will be kept for at least 5 years.

Analysis and Synthesis

Data to inform the administrative study was generated through staff surveys and a focus group with university approval (IRB #02-06-20-0363195). Data collection activities for the focus group were recorded. The recording was transcribed. The first step in the analysis was carefully reviewing the survey responses and transcripts to identify first impressions. Next, I reread and manually coded the research findings to identify pertinent information and patterns based on the identified research questions. The next

step was to load the transcribed information and researcher notes to NVivo. This software

application was used to further code and categorize responses to identify emerging

themes. The coded data were evaluated to identify the interrelationship of relevant data.

The findings from the focus group and staff surveys were assessed independently

throughout the analysis process. The summary of results was used without bias or

interpretation to identify and describe the themes and their connections to one another.

The themes and connections were compared between staff and leadership to identify gaps

for further action. The analysis was concluded with proposed intervention actions and

summary remarks for use by the organization.

Summary

I conducted this administrative study focused on one federal organization that

experienced organizational change and a resulting reduction in employee satisfaction. I

addressed the research questions through surveys with a sample of staff and a focus group

with leadership. The analysis and findings from the qualitative case study informed

potential interventions the organization could implement to improve employee

satisfaction through communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement.

Section 4: Evaluation and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate and deepen understanding related to the reduction of employee engagement in the multigenerational workforce of a federal agency. The agency experienced a significant reorganization that resulted in reduction in staffing and relocation of a large percentage of the workforce. Level of engagement as measured by the FEVS consistently fell in the years following the reorganization. The generational dispersion of staff also changed with the increased attrition rate of those staff born between 1946 and 1964. I developed a survey instrument focused on increasing the understanding of staff and leadership perceptions of four variables identified to influence employee engagement: communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement. A sample comprised of staff within the organization were provided a survey to complete using SurveyMonkey, while senior leaders answered the same questions as part of a focus group.

Sources of Evidence

Data to inform the research questions were collected in two phases: a staff survey and leadership focus group. Both involved a series of 16 open-ended questions that were informed by four variables identified from literature to impact employee engagement. Table 1 presents the variables and associated questions.

Evidence generated through staff surveys. A sample of 150 staff from across the organization was invited to participate in the study. Potential respondents for the staff survey were sent invitation emails which included a brief description of the study. The

invitation included a web link to an online survey hosted on SurveyMonkey that was

comprised of four introductory questions followed by 16 open-ended questions

established to inform identified employee engagement variables. Introductory questions

established participants' consent and generational cohort and identified if participants

were employees of the organization at the time of reorganization. The 16 open-ended

survey questions were used to identify causes for reduced employee engagement (RQ1),

generational and perspective group differences in terms of communication, respect,

motivation, and encouragement (RQ2), and the influence of leadership on employee

engagement and satisfaction (RQ3).

Table 1

Employee Engagement Variables and Corresponding Survey Questions

Variable	Survey question
Communication	1. What are successful organizational communication strategies in regard to your daily work?
	2. What made this strategy successful for you?
	3. What would you recommend to improve communication between coworkers, managers, and leaders?
Motivation	4. Describe one instance where you experienced increased motivation at work.
	5. What caused your increased motivation for this situation?
	6. Describe one instance where you experienced decreased motivation at work.
	7. What caused your decreased motivation for this situation?
Respect	8. Describe one time where you felt the most respected in your current position.

(table continues)

9. What occurred in this instance to make you feel the additional respect?

10. Describe one instance where you felt the least respected in your current position.

11. What occurred to make you feel less respected?

	12. Describe a situation where you felt encouraged by a new opportunity or change at work.
	13. What caused your increased level of encouragement?
Encouragement	14. Please describe what encourages you about your career.
	15. Is there something outside your control that could increase your encouragement about your career?
	16. What could you do to increase your level of encouragement?

As shown in Table 2, 102 participants completed the survey. Of those completing the survey, 21 were Baby Boomers, 47 were Generation X, and 34 were Millennials. Seventy-five respondents completing the study worked for the organization before the reorganization.

Table 2

Survey Respondents and Perspectives by Birth Year

Survey respondents and perspective groups	Respondents			Total
	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial	
Respondents	21	47	34	102
Perspectives				
Prior to reorganization	17	42	16	75
After reorganization	4	5	18	27
Total	21	47	34	102

Evidence generated through a focus group. The next phase of data collection to inform the qualitative case study was a leadership focus group. Potential participants

were emailed invitations, and then the focus group was scheduled. Potential participants

were provided IRB-approved informed consent letters at the onset of the focus group. I

clarified I was leading the focus group as an academic researcher and not based on my

position in the organization. Upon receiving consent from 10 participants, the focus

group was focused on the same 16 open-ended questions provided to participants in the

staff survey (see Table 1). As shown in Table 3, the leadership focus group was

completed with 100% of the invited participants. Forty percent were part of Generation

X, with the remainder Baby Boomers. The focus group session lasted 90 minutes and was

recorded to allow me to listen and guide the participants in the session actively.

Table 3

Focus Group Participants and Perspectives by Birth Year

Focus group participants and perspective groups	Participants			Total
	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial	
Participants	6	4	0	10
Perspectives				
Prior to reorganization	5	4	0	9
After reorganization	1	0	0	1
Total	6	4	0	10

Data Analysis Strategy

Data to inform the qualitative case study was collected in two phases: a staff

survey and leadership focus group. Data from each phase of data collection were

analyzed independently. The following sections outline the data analysis strategy for each

phase independently.

Staff survey. Data for the staff survey were collected using an online survey through SurveyMonkey. This online platform allowed me to monitor data collection throughout the 14-day window. At the close of data collection, the full data set was downloaded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

The first step in evaluating survey responses was to review responses provided by 102 of the 150 invited participants for each of the identified survey questions. Responses were reviewed for spelling errors and the unanswered or blank survey items. These were removed from responses prior to further analysis. Initial coding included any thought respondents expressed on the topics in their words. The dataset was loaded into NVivo 12 to allow me to generate a query of key terms and develop word clouds, and word trees to broaden my understanding of the ideas shared by respondents. NVivo 12 was also used to classify responses by generation. This review identified 96 independent ideas from Baby Boomers, 87 from Generation X, and 91 from Millennials.

Secondary coding of the analysis involved grouping codes and aligning them into categories based on the four variables identified as impactful to employee engagement. I created nodes within NVivo 12 for communication, respect, motivation, and encouragement. I reviewed data across and within perspective groups and generations to establish 33 codes used to evaluate responses. The categories for each variable that was common within perspective groups or generations, and between perspective groups and generations were the themes that I identified from the research.

Focus group. The second form of data collected to inform the qualitative case study was generated through a leadership focus group. The focus group lasted 90 minutes

and included 10 participants, as shown in Table 3. The 16 open-ended focus group

questions focused on four key variables that impact employee engagement:

communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement.

The focus group was recorded, and I then transcribed the session within seven

days. The results of the focus group were reviewed for accuracy against the recording,

and recordings were referenced throughout analysis for conversational context. Being

open to any perspective, the initial coding included any thought the participants

expressed on the topics in their words. The transcribed data, and field notes from my

observations during the focus group were loaded into NVivo 12 to allow me to generate a

query of key terms, develop word clouds, and word trees to broaden the understanding of

the ideas shared by participants. This review identified 47 independent ideas. The initial

47 independent ideas were grouped into categories aligned with the key variables. I

created nodes in NVivo 12 to allow for further analysis and evaluation to identify

emergent themes.

Participant responses were planned to be evaluated with two perspective groups

based on the status of employment with the organization at the time of the reorganization

and within and across generations to analyze the impact on employee satisfaction and

engagement. Only one participant was not hired by the organization prior to the

reorganization, thus not allowing for comparison at the leadership level across

perspective groups.

Findings and Implications

This section will present the findings from the initial coding and discuss the

themes that emerged in regard to the identified research questions. The initial analysis is

presented based on the categorical groupings based on the four variables for both sources

of evidence generated to inform this study. The subsequent evaluation of emergent

themes is presented by research question and provides insights from the perspective of

staff and leadership as they relate to each theme.

Analysis by Source of Evidence and Category

Staff surveys. Survey responses were evaluated with two perspective groups

based on the status of employment with the organization at the time of the reorganization

and within and across generations to analyze the impact on employee satisfaction and

engagement. Survey questions focused on four key variables identified to impact

employee engagement: communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement. The

following sections were aligned with those variables as they emerged as categories in the

secondary coding of data.

Communication. Table 4 provides a summary of codes that align with

communication. Survey results indicate that the use of multiple communication methods

across the organization were utilized on a regular basis. Email was identified across all

respondents as the main source for daily transactional communication, with 51

respondents referencing it as a mechanism for effective communication. Fifty-four

respondents referenced instant messaging, with Millennials representing 50 percent of

this group. Baby Boomer respondents identified personal interaction as an effective

communication method. Two methods identified by this generation were telephone and

face-to-face, with 18 references.

Table 4

Responses Reported by Codes Aligned with Communication by Generation

Code (Survey Question)	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial	Total
Agency level guidance through written communication (1,2)	4	8	6	18
Communication delivered through centralized system (3)	8	24	13	45
Communication was transparent (3)	2	21	10	33
Group communication with video teleconferencing (1,2)	2	8	2	12
Manager exhibited active listening (1,2)	2	15	18	35
Personal communication from leadership via in person (3)	11	9	11	31
Personal communication via telephone (1,2)	7	12	3	22
Personal feedback delivered regularly to ensure performance and development (3)	5	8	15	28
Task level communication through instant messaging	6	21	27	54
Task level communication via electronic mail (1,2)	12	26	13	51
Task level guidance was provided in a timely, accurate manner. (3)	6	16	21	43
Unit level guidance via in person meetings (1,2)	6	15	18	39

Note. Numbers included in parentheses following identified codes indicate the corresponding question from the survey instrument.

Seventy-six respondents referenced communication challenges. Forty-three

respondents referenced the need for timely and accurate information, and 33 respondents

referenced the need for transparent communication. The communication method for agency-level distribution varied across all generational groups, with 45 respondents referencing a self-directed communication repository as the preferred method. Eighteen respondents referenced written guidance; with 39 respondents referencing unit level guidance is preferred from local meetings.

Respect. Table 5 provides a summary of respondent reported codes that align to respect. Respondents reported 145 instances that impacted respect in the workplace. Eighty-nine respondents reported that they felt an increase in respect from peer-level appreciation, leadership behaviors that they viewed consistent with trust, and autonomy to complete assigned work. Eleven Baby Boomer respondents and 15 Generation X respondents reported increased levels of respect from a peer-level appreciation of their work, while 14 Millennial respondents reported increased motivation from autonomy to complete their assigned work. Survey results indicate that perceived respect is different for Millennial respondents than the other two generations within the workplace. Perspective group analysis identified no reported difference between respondents present at the time of the reorganization compared to those joining the organization afterward.

Fifty-six respondents across perspective groups reported a loss in perceived respect from the lack of opportunity to balance personal and professional responsibility and leadership exhibiting behavior consistent with a lack of trust on the respondent. Thirty-two respondents reported the inability to balance personal and professional responsibilities as a cause for decreased motivation, with the most substantial proportion reported from Millennials at 44 percent of all respondents in this generation. Forty-four

percent of Millennial respondents also reported that they experienced decreased respect

in the workplace when leadership exhibited behaviors consistent with a lack of trust.

Baby Boomer and Generation X respondents also identified the same causes for reduced

respect in the workplace but at a lower proportion of total survey respondents per

generation.

Table 5

Responses Reported by Codes Aligned with Respect by Generation

Code (Survey Question)	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial	Total
Autonomy to balance personal and professional activities (8,9)	3	14	15	32
Autonomy to complete assigned task/work (8,9)	7	12	14	33
Leadership exhibited behavior consistent with lack of trust (10,11)	2	7	15	24
Leadership exhibited behavior consistent with trust (8,9)	3	9	11	23
Peer level appreciation for contribution to work (10,11)	11	15	7	33

Note. Numbers included in parentheses following identified codes indicate the corresponding question from the survey instrument.

Motivation. Table 6 presents a summary of respondent reported codes that align

with motivation. Respondents to the staff survey provided data that supported the

development of 13 codes associated with an impact of motivation in the workplace,

totaling 493 references. Baby Boomers responded to increases in motivation by

developing others, recognition as an expert, and team accomplishments as the highest

impact with 14, 10, and 10 respondents reporting respectively. Millennials respondents

reported perceived personal value, new opportunities, and financial incentives as factors

increasing motivation in the workplace.

Table 6

Responses Reported by Codes Aligned with Motivation by Generation

Code (Survey Question)	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial	Total
Developing other peers (4,5)	14	17	9	40
Disrespect from management in public setting (6,7)	3	12	18	33
Disrespect from peers in public setting (6,7)	2	4	13	19
Fear of reprisal, retaliation, and leadership "favoritism" (6,7)	4	24	15	43
Financial incentives for performance (4,5)	4	21	18	43
Manager recognition for contribution of quality work (4,5)	4	20	11	35
Mission of the agency supports industry (4,5)	8	11	7	26
Mission value validated through external feedback (4,5)	7	10	9	26
New opportunity in the workplace (4,5)	2	19	18	39
Perceived personal value based on skill, knowledge or tenure (4,5)	8	11	21	40
Recognized Expert in my Field (4,5)	10	11	6	27
Successful group level accomplishments (4,5)	10	15	9	34
Unclear focus for priorities across the organization (6,7)	8	19	26	53
Responsibility consistent across grade (6,7)	8	18	14	40

Note: Numbers included in parentheses following identified codes indicate the corresponding question from the survey instrument.

Twenty-one Millennial respondents reported an increase in motivation from a

perceived personal value in the workplace. Generation X respondents reported that

recognition from one's manager for quality work was the leading cause of increased motivation in the workplace, with 20 respondents reporting. The motivators in the workplace varied across the generations but were consistent within the perspective groups. The leading cause for increased motivation in the workplace identified across all respondents was financial incentives, as reported by 43 respondents. The financial incentives identified ranged from small awards to promotions. Additionally, 52 respondents reported motivation from service and feedback from the industry the organization supports.

Decreased motivation in the workplace was reported across all perspective groups and generations. Fifty-three respondents reported the experienced decreased motivation as a result of unclear priorities or vision for the agency. Three respondents wrote that "not everything can be a priority," and four respondents wrote, "staffing has been reduced, but work increased." Forty-two respondents reported disrespect from leadership and peers as a source for decreased motivation.

Respondents also reported reprisal, retaliation, and disparate work at a given performance level as a source of decreased motivation. Forty-three respondents reported reprisal, retaliation, and leadership favoritism as a source of decreased motivation. Twenty-four Generation X, 15 Millennial, and four Baby Boomer respondents comprised this group. Forty respondents identified a reduction in motivation caused by disparate assignments or responsibilities across commonly graded positions. Three respondents said, "it is unfair that staff in remote offices were graded the same a management in the regional site." The positions mentioned by respondents were created during the

reorganization, but all three respondents were part of the perspective group employed by the organization at the time of the reorganization.

    Encouragement. Table 7 presents a summary of respondent reported codes that align to encouragement. The analysis of survey data identified that only two codes were directly related to encouragement. Forty-four survey respondents reported that personal development through training or new assignment increased encouragement. Twenty-six respondents reported external influence without consultation as a cause of decreased encouragement. Nineteen respondents that reported this were employed by the organization at the time of the reorganization, and 17 included the reorganization in their response. Six of the seven Millennial respondents included reduced telework as a decreased source of encouragement and were included in external influence without consultation.

Table 7

Responses Reported by Codes Aligned with Encouragement by Generation

Code (Survey Question)	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial	Total
External influence without consultation (15)	11	8	7	26
Self-development (training or on the job) (12, 14)	5	18	21	44

Note. Numbers included in parentheses following identified codes indicate the corresponding question from the survey instrument.

    Focus Group. Participant responses were planned to be evaluated with two perspective groups based on the status of employment with the organization at the time of the reorganization and within and across generations to analyze the impact on employee

satisfaction and engagement. Only one participant was not hired by the organization prior to the reorganization, thus not allowing for comparison at the leadership level across perspective groups. Focus group questions focused on four key variables that impact employee engagement; communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement. The following sections were aligned with those variables as they emerged as categories in the secondary coding of data.

Communication. Table 8 provides a summary of participant responses related to communication. Focus group participants reported that communication should be delivered in multiple methods to ensure recipients receive the message in a manner that meets their personal needs. Three participants reported the blended method of communication within the organization as a successful communication method. Two participants reported that first-line supervisors should deliver communication, and one participant reported that leadership blogs were an effective communication method.

Focus group participants reported that messages should be delivered in a manner that meets the recipients' needs and that meetings should be focused on relevant information. Three participants reported the need to establish agendas, relay relevant information, and ensure the meeting stays focused on the agenda as a way to improve communication. Five participants reported the need to adhere to active listening principles. Specifically, three participants reported that one should allow others to complete their thought prior to interrupting. Two participants reported that communication could be improved if individuals were genuine in their communication,

and established relationships that were built on understanding the individual both

personally and professionally.

Table 8

Focus Group Codes Aligned with Communication

Code (Survey Question)	Count
Leadership blogs (1)	1
Rely on first-line supervisors to deliver message (3)	3
Communication should come from all levels of management (3)	2
Blended method of communication (1,2)	3
Deliver message to meet recipient need (1,2)	1
Active listening, genuine interest, personal and professional (3)	5
Focused meetings, relevant information (3)	3

Note. Numbers included in parentheses following identified codes indicate the corresponding question from the survey instrument.

  Motivation. Table 9 provides a summary of participant responses related to

motivation. Focus group participants reported personal and professional development

opportunities, defending the mission of the organization, and teamwork as sources for

increased motivation in the workplace. Two participants reported the opportunity to be

involved in personal and professional development opportunities as a source for

increased motivation. One participant clarified that the increased motivation came from

the opportunity to step away from the daily activities of their position to look forward and

discuss new opportunities to transition the organization forward with regard to science

and culture. One participant reported the opportunity to meet with stakeholders and

inform them about the mission of the organization and the value to the industry as a source of motivation. Three participants reported increased motivation by the success of teams from across the organization in accomplishing a new project.

Focus group participants reported that external control of authority, messaging, and resources were a source of decreased motivation. Three participants reported that their perceived lack of authority to message the challenge facing the organization to their staff clearly caused decreased motivation. Four participants reported that the lack of control for resources to make organizational improvements was a source of decreased motivation. Two participants reported that they experienced a decrease in motivation when communication about organizational improvements was not delivered consistently or was unclear.

Table 9

Focus Group Codes Aligned with Motivation

Code (Survey Question)	Count
Personal and professional development opportunities (4,5)	2
Defending the mission of the organization (4,5)	1
Teamwork across the organization (4,5)	3
External control of authority, messaging, resources (6,7)	4
Unclear communication that is not successful (6,7)	2

Note. Numbers included in parentheses following identified codes indicate the corresponding question from the survey instrument.

Respect. Table 10 provides a summary of participant responses related to respect. Focus group participants reported increased levels of respect from within and outside the

organization. Three participants reported increased levels of respect from the outside appreciation for the work of the agency. One participant reported that increased respect was caused by activity in an outside professional organization that recognized their contributions to a field of study. Three focus group participants reported that they felt respected when staff recognized the value in their feedback or engagement in their development. One participant reported that staff recognized their investment in the professional development of a subordinate, and this increased their feeling of being respected as a good leader. Three participants reported that they felt increased respect when staff recognized their technical skill and contribution.

Table 10

Focus Group Codes Aligned with Respect

Code (Survey Question)	Count
Outside appreciation for work of agency (8,9)	3
Employee valued feedback and engagement in their development (8,9)	3
External group dismissed work of organization (10,11)	2
Not being listened to as an equal, lack of rules of engagement in senior team (10,11)	3

Note: Numbers included in parentheses following identified codes indicate the corresponding question from the survey instrument.

Focus group participants reported decreased levels of respect from external groups discounting the credibility and relevance of the products the organization delivers, and from peer-level disrespect within the senior leadership team. Two participants reported feeling a decrease in perceived respect when external groups questioned the validity of the work provided by the organization, and one participant reported a decrease

from staff being dismissed publicly by external organizations. Focus group participants

reported decreased levels of respect caused by the behavior of their counterparts on the

leadership team. Two participants reported that they felt personally and professionally

attacked in a meeting with the team. They stated that the meeting organizer did not

intervene to stop the inappropriate behavior, and thus the two participants reported they

felt the group condoned this type of behavior and it was not appropriate. Three

participants reported that they felt decreased respect when their peers did not hear their

ideas.

   Encouragement. Table 11 provides a summary of participant responses related to

encouragement. Six focus group participants reported perceived value as a technical

leader as a source for increased encouragement. Five participants reported developing

others or creating a personal legacy as a source of encouragement. Three participants

reported that developing others to ensure the future of the organization and establish the

next generation of leaders as a source of encouragement. Two participants reported that

they felt encouraged by the opportunity to develop others to sustain their personal legacy

within the organization beyond the span of their careers. Two participants reported the

opportunity to lead new developments to improve the public service the organization

provides as a source of encouragement.

   Focus group participants reported encouragement from teamwork within the

leadership team and across the organization. Three participants reported that peer support

to get their job done increased their encouragement. Two participants reported that

leading teams from across the organization to develop improvements for the organization

was a source of encouragement. One participant reported encouragement when they could present an idea and then observe staff from across the organization establish the technical detail to actualize the idea.

Table 11

Focus Group Codes Aligned with Encouragement

Code (Survey Question)	Count
New opportunities to improve the work of the organization (12)	4
Valued as a technical leader (12)	6
Developing people, creating a legacy that outlasts time with the organization (12)	5
Peer support to get the job done (12)	3

Note: Numbers included in parentheses following identified codes indicate the corresponding question from the survey instrument.

Generation of Themes

Raw qualitative data was organized by the source of data, identified variables from prior research influencing employee engagement, generations, and perspective groups. After the coding and categorization of data identified in the previous section, I searched for patterns. I asked myself the following questions:

1. What about the reorganization impacted engagement?

2. What differences are present in the perception of effective communication, respect, motivation, and encouragement between generations?

3. What was the cause for the change in the level of respect, motivation, and encouragement?

After reviewing the data within and across categories several themes emerged. The next step in analysis was to review the themes for potential duplication and to collapse similar themes. Additionally, the code analysis was reviewed to assess the prevalence across and within generations and perspective groupings. The process culminated in 19 potential themes evidence generated through staff surveys and six from the focus group. Subsequent reflection allowed similar themes to be combined, and others discarded, as they did not rise to the finding level.

Table 12

Emergent Themes by Research Question

Research Question		Theme	
RQ1:	What were the factors that have influenced the reduction in employee satisfaction and engagement?	(a)	Disparity in accountability and opportunities
		(b)	Disrespect in the workplace
		(c)	External influence
		(d)	Misalignment of resources and workload
		(e)	Unclear goals, vision, and expectations
RQ2:	What role did generational differences play in communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement?	(a)	Autonomy to manage work life balance
		(b)	Communication style
		(c)	Sources of motivation and encouragement
RQ3:	What role did leadership play in reducing or increasing employee engagement and satisfaction?	(a)	Disparity in accountability and opportunities
		(b)	Disrespect in the workplace
		(c)	Misalignment of resources and workload
		(d)	Unclear goals, vision, and expectations

Additionally, the emergent themes from both sources of evidence were duplicative and were consolidated. The prevalence of the emerging themes, as well as the

significance and importance to the employee engagement and satisfaction for the organization, was considered as themes were finalized. The themes were reviewed one final time, with care given to wording, as the intent was that the remaining themes would be the key findings of this qualitative case study. After this review, eight themes emerged as displayed in Table 12.

Results

Through the analysis and synthesis of the evidence generated in this qualitative case study eight themes emerged. The following section presents the evaluation and discussion of the emergent themes regarding the three practiced-focused research questions.

RQ1. RQ1 asked: What were the factors that have influenced the reduction in employee satisfaction and engagement? During the analysis and synthesis of evidence generated to inform this qualitative case study, five themes emerged as sources of decreased employee engagement and satisfaction. Those themes are (a) disparity in accountability and opportunities, (b) disrespect in the workplace, (c) external influence, (d) misalignment of resources and workload, and (e) unclear goals, vision, and expectations.

Disparities in accountability and opportunities. The performance management program within the organization was discussed heavily within the staff survey results as a cause for decreased motivation. The perceived disparity in the employee ratings among similar staff caused decreased motivation. One respondent stated:

Not being evaluated based on my actual productivity was very demoralizing and

frustrating and set the tone for the rest of my career. Fortunately, I take personal

pride in my work, but as a whole, the situation made one ask 'why try to excel'.

Disparities in terms of opportunities for career advancement were also evident

through the analysis of staff survey findings. Staff perceives that advancing their career

while in a field location is limited based on the current organizational culture. One

respondent stated, "HQ management telling me that I have to move in order to be

promoted. This makes me feel less valued as an employee because my family and life

outside of work is not respected." The opportunity to advance or grow ones professional

knowledge without physical relocation was previously afforded to employees through

temporary assignments. One survey respondent stated:

It would be nice if my agency would bring back 4-month TDYs [temporary

assignment with paid travel] to HQ [headquarters]. I can learn a lot in four

months, and I could bring all of that knowledge back to my office to share it with

others. It is impossible for me to move to Washington DC, but a 4-month, or even

6-month, TDY is definitely possible.

In addition to the reduced opportunities to advance one's professional skill and

knowledge, there was evidence from the survey results that staff experienced decreased

satisfaction based on how position selections were made in the organization. Perceptions

of disparate hiring practices emerged as a source for decreased employee satisfaction and

engagement.

Disrespect in the workplace. Survey participants identified that a lack of trust between coworkers and leaders within the organization have reduced employee satisfaction and engagement. A respondent to the staff survey said, "just lack of trust and always having to meet with supervisor. This takes time away from actually doing our job and coming up with better ways of doing our job" as a source for decreased motivation in the workplace. Another respondent said, "the fact I was questioned multiple times if I needed more assistance. Made me feel like I could not be trusted to complete my job" in response to the cause for decreased motivation. Additionally, the respondent said, "being openly criticized in a group setting" was a reason for reduced encouragement. The results of the study indicate that there is a perceived lack of trust between managers, leaders, and staff. A focus group participant said, "The staff don't trust us. They would rather talk to their first-line supervisors, you know you have all seen the FEVS results." The collective group of participants nodded in agreement at the statement acknowledging a lack in staff trust in senior leadership.

Disrespect in the workplace was also evident in the focus group. I observed participants speaking over each other, and not acknowledging the contribution of their counterparts to the discussion. One participant stated, "the most disrespected I have felt in my career occurred in this room. I felt personally attacked and singled out. None of you spoke up to stop this from occurring." The participant exhibited signs of emotion, as it appeared this was unresolved for them. Another participant stated, "I often share thoughts and they are disregarded by the group, yet a month or two later when offered from another person they are received as a new and great idea." Two other participants

validated this comment through subsequent discussion. Based on the analysis and synthesis of evidence, disrespect in the workplace is consistent between staff and leadership.

External influence. The client organization that was evaluated through the qualitative case study is a federal organization and is subject to external influence at the organizational level. Additionally, staff within the organization is subject to external influence within their local office from agency leadership. The regionalization of field offices was viewed as an uncontrollable external influence that many viewed as a cause of reduced encouragement in the workplace. One survey respondent stated:

When the regionalization plan was announced … and good friends either quit, retired, or were forced/decided to move, that was a very depressing time because not only did we lose good people, but the workload increased exponentially on the remaining stats. I was working until 10 or 11 at night during quarterlies.

The results of the survey identified the regionalization as a source for reduced employee engagement and satisfaction, but this was not only referenced by those employees on staff at the time of the reorganization. The reorganization was also referenced by staff that has joined the organization since it occurred. The reorganization was not referenced in the leadership focus group, but the impact of external influence was discussed.

The leadership focus group participants and survey respondents both referenced a change in the organization's remote work policy as a source of decreased employee satisfaction. A survey respondent stated that after the reorganization, the other external

influence that lowered satisfaction was "when the telework policy was changed for confounding reasons. This was one of the most successful policies in all of government, and it was gone in 90 days. Encouragement decreased, and I immediately began to look for another job." Another respondent stated, "this change was a crushing blow to morale of employees and caused adverse reaction to family situations and overall quality of life. Caused employees to feel undervalued and thus decreased motivation." Leadership focus group participants referenced telework as an example of external influence, but one participant stated, "telework was a privilege and something we didn't always have." This statement was echoed by others in the focus group and highlighted a difference in work life balance preferences between the leadership team and staff.

Misalignment of resources and workload. Disparity in the work performed by an employee receiving similar compensation emerged as a theme for decreased engagement based on the evidence generated for this study. The results from the staff survey drew attention to the decrease in employee engagement and satisfaction that occurred as a result of this disparity being amplified by the reorganization. Many respondents mentioned the disparity, and one provided context to the challenges facing the organization after the reorganization. The respondent stated:

> There is a disparity since regionalization. Many of us are doing, in our case, six times the work at the same pay while others who used to have salaries that reflected their supervisory responsibilities now not only get the big bucks for not supervising anyone AND they get per diem to just go around and glad hand

people. No measurable results required. We have so much more to do and are on

the front lines, so to speak, of the face of the organization.

The disparity in workload and alignment of resources was a source of decreased

employee satisfaction. Staff survey findings identified that staff draw motivation from

being able to develop the next generation of leaders in the organization, but do not have

the time given resource constraints to engage in this activity. Survey respondents stated,

"just get it done", "no time to be innovative", and "moving the widgets" as challenges to

being encouraged in the workplace.

Unclear goals, vision, and expectations. In addition to performance and similar

responsibility across like positions, the study identified the need for a clear, consistent

vision and goals from the leadership team of the organization. One respondent to the staff

survey stated:

I feel our Senior Executives are not providing unified goals and vision. Politics,

turf battles and lack of understanding of our business processes, IT state, and

customer needs are resulting in poor decisions that are not in the best interest of

the organization.

The leadership focus group also discussed providing a clear, consistent message

about the organization's vision and goals for the future. A participant of the focus group

identified that the leadership team had recently completed a new strategic plan and

widely distributed it to the staff. Another participant stated, "yes the plan has been

shared, but when I was on a field visit no one in the local office was aware of it." The

body language of the remaining focus group participants appeared as they were

uncomfortable with this dialogue. The group then discussed that communicating with staff has become more challenging and they "are looking for ways to make the vision more relatable to staff."

RQ2. RQ2 asked: What role did generational differences play in communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement? During the analysis and synthesis of evidence generated to inform this qualitative case study, three themes emerged as sources of generational differences regarding communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement. Those themes are (a) autonomy to manage work life balance, (b) communication style, and (c) sources of motivation and encouragement.

Autonomy to manage work life balance. The analysis and synthesis of evidence generated for this study was focused on four variables that were impactful on employee engagement. The respondents to the staff survey were categorized by generation to assess the potential differences across generations with regard to the identified variables. Staff that reported being part of Generation X and Millennial reported increased satisfaction when they have the autonomy to manage their work life balance independently. One respondent stated, "Having telework and flexible work life balance motivates me to work. Work life balance is valued by my generation." Another respondent stated, "HQ management telling me that I have to move in order to be promoted. This makes me feel less valued as an employee because my family and life outside of work is not respected." The presence of a preference for work life balance was not present in the Baby Boomer respondents, or in the leadership focus group findings.

Communication style. Three survey questions were focused on understanding communication within the organization. Numerous methods of communication were identified in the initial coding. The initial codes were grouped into two categories, transactional and organizational. Generational differences were present in the communication styles preferred for transactional communication. Baby Boomer respondents reported that they value face-to-face personal communication on a regular basis, and experience increased satisfaction from dialogue with others on work projects. One respondent stated, "I find it encouraging when a team meets and works through a problem together." Millennial respondents preferred to work through daily work challenges with the use of instant messaging, email, and written documentation. One respondent stated, "properly done the emails contain all the details needed to do my job." Focus group participants also displayed different preferences with regard to communication style. One Generation X participant stated, "meetings should be organized, and only relevant information shared with the group." The sentiment I drew from this statement, was that long dialogue without clear purpose was not meaningful to this participant. Generation X survey respondents shared similar views related to meaningful communication. One respondent stated that, "The meetings have set agendas and get straight to the point. I will read brief e-mails. Long ones will be left until later, and, I will probably never get around to reading them."

Sources of motivation and encouragement. Survey questions four and five asked for an instance where one experienced increased motivation and the cause for the motivation. Baby boomer respondents reported experiencing increased motivation from

the mission of the organization, training new staff, and representing the organization in the public. The commitment to the mission of the organization was a strong motivator for this generation. One respondent stated:

> After returning from the government shutdown in 2019, employees were well rested and anxious to get back to work. Timelines were delayed so there was extra motivation to get the work done quickly and accurately. I was motivated to show I could get my work back on timeline, efficiently and accurately.

During the focus group, Baby Boomer participants stated increased motivation from "defending the work to outside groups," and "staff recognizing the value of their feedback." The sources of motivation were different in magnitude but similar in the source as those within the same generation in the staff survey.

Millennial survey respondents identified increased motivation from opportunities to balance work and life. One respondent stated, "having telework and flexible work life balance motivates me to work." The motivation derived from the opportunity to utilize work life programs, like telework, were present across generations but only Millennial respondents drew motivation the autonomy to balance the work life continuum.

Encouragement was derived differently across generations. Baby Boomer respondents drew encouragement from developing others and representing the organization externally. One respondent stated, "it is encouraging when I can share my knowledge with others." This statement represents the generational sentiment seen across survey respondents and focus group participants. One focus group participant stated, "I am encouraged to be in a position to share my knowledge with my staff and have a long-

term impact on the organization." The study participants in the Baby Boomer generation are nearing the end of their career and based on study results draw encouragement from developing the next generation in the workplace.

Generation X respondents drew encouragement from improving processes and modernizing the systems in the organization. Respondents stated they were encouraged by "using iPads for data collection," "modernizing the information technology platform," and "the opportunity to develop a new project." Unlike their counterparts in other generations, Generation X drew encouragement from opportunities to improve the daily work of the organization and the adoption of technology. Generation X focus group participants also drew encouragement from improving the organization, although the magnitude of the improvements was broader. One participant stated, "I was encouraged when I had the opportunity to work with the department to transition IT services from the agency to a consolidated platform." This comment was met with skepticism from the remaining participants as three of those in the Baby Boomer generation identified this activity as negative and a loss of control for the organization.

Millennial survey respondents were encouraged by recognition for success in the workplace, monetary awards, and new jobs. One respondent stated, "I felt encouraged when I was tasked with a new assignment, it made me feel like my supervisor trusted me and valued my ability to complete it." Another respondent stated, "a new opportunity is encouraging, and a little extra money doesn't hurt either." Overall this generation is in an earlier stage of their career and life, the synthesis of results from this qualitative case

study identified they draw their encouragement from external validation more than other generations in the workplace.

RQ3. RQ3 asked: What role did leadership play in reducing or increasing employee engagement and satisfaction? During the analysis and synthesis of evidence generated to inform this qualitative case study, four themes emerged as sources of change in employee engagement and satisfaction attributed to leadership. Those themes were (a) disparity in accountability and opportunities, (b) disrespect in the workplace, (c) misalignment of resources and workload, and (d) unclear goals, vision, and expectations.

Disparity in accountability and opportunities. During the synthesis and analysis of results from the staff survey the disparity in accountability and opportunities emerged as a theme that reduced overall employee satisfaction and engagement in the workplace. In further review of the survey data, employees identified leadership as a catalyst for this theme. Survey respondents identified that leadership, including first-line supervisors to executives, had an impact. One respondent stated:

> Whenever I attempt innovation at work, it is usually denied. Management says they wish to work smarter, increase response rates, etc. However, when we wish to do something to address this, such as mailing a survey twice, we are told we cannot because somewhere in the organization it was decided this was the calendar and there is no room in it for additional days. We used to routinely mail twice in longer surveys. We have forgotten how to do that.

The lack of clarity in the reasoning behind rejecting a recommend improvement at the local level decreases employee engagement. Based on the previous respondent quote,

local management requests innovation, but then uses leadership decisions outside their control as a cause to reject a new idea or improvement. Staff survey respondents and focus group participants identified increased motivation from being respected for their institutional knowledge yet based on the location in the organizational structure the value of the knowledge could be discounted. One survey respondent stated:

> Whenever I am not recognized for my work. In my area, this happens a lot (not just to me) and it's a horrible way to support a group. I was also especially unmotivated when I wrote a ten-page paper for my yearly review to support my stance of getting a higher rating and then told that I wouldn't get the higher rating because of ONE action item. That action item had been addressed in the paper as well.

The respondent experienced a decreased level of motivation from their misunderstanding of their performance in regard to their rating. Rating officials have the responsibility to engage with their staff to deliver a meaningful evaluation of the work. The tone in the quote above indicates the employee felt the supervisor did not read their 10-page document based on the indication that the one action item in question had been addressed in the provided documentation. An additional respondent, who identified as "a part of leadership" stated:

> In several instances, I am undercut by upper management. I have been told my role is part of leadership, but then I seem to never be included in project decision plans. This does not motivate me to step up and make decisions.

The lack of opportunity to be heard and engaged in decisions resulted in decreased motivation for this respondent. Leadership chose not to engage in this instance, although they had empowered the employee as a part of the team. The disparity between the words and actions of the leader referenced by the respondent decreased employee engagement.

Disrespect in the workplace. Disrespect in the workplace emerged as theme within the evidence generated by the staff survey and focus group. Staff survey respondents identified disrespect in the workplace from peers and supervisors. One participant stated, "I experienced decreased respect when a coworker diminished my work in a staff meeting and this was worse because my supervisor allowed it to happen." In this example the disrespect from the peer was discouraging, but the respondent felt a further decrease because the supervisor allowed the interaction to occur without clarifying this is not an acceptable practice in the workplace. Two leadership focus group participants described a similar experience. One participant stated, "that was the most disrespected I have felt in my career. The other participant took the opportunity to engage with the peer and build rapport. The participant stated, "The experience that occurred in this room 18 months ago was the least respected I have felt in my career. The fact that my leadership was present and did nothing to resolve the attack made it more hurtful." The respondent continued to clarify that it turned into an opportunity to engage and build a stronger relationship with one of their peers. The participant stated, "The first one on one meeting with the person was challenging an uncomfortable, we took the next year to build an understanding of our relationship and this is now one of my closest confidants."

The focus group participant used the negative experience to build engagement and satisfaction in their work environment.

Evidence also supported that staff feel disrespected when leaders interject themselves into lower level decisions. The client organization is led with career executives that were promoted for their technical skill, and still draw respect from being valued as technical experts. Staff survey respondents felt that leadership intervention below their place in the organization was disrespectful. One respondent stated they felt the least respected when they experienced "meddling from a manager two steps up."

Misalignment of resources and workload. Leadership within the client organization is charged with establishing the vision and direction for the organization. Evidence from the staff survey identified an emergent them that there is misalignment or resources and workload within the organization. Leadership often visits remote office locations, and visits with staff in those locations. A participant in the focus group stated, "I am encouraged by my visits to field offices and the innovation present in the new staff." The emergent theme from the staff survey identified a disconnect between the intent of the referenced visit and the result. One respondent stated:

> Leaders need to explain their vision and keep staff in the know. There isn't an interactive dialogue with staff. When leaders come to RFO [Regional Field Office] and we talk about what is going, they are surprised about the issues we are dealing with. The leaders should be looking out for their staff and help us facilitate the work we do. We are just drowning in work that is always due on a short notice with not enough resources.

Consistent with the quote above, another staff person stated, "leaders need more communication with staff and most importantly listen and take action. Tired of the political speak. They say they hear but little ever gets done so what is the point in saying anything." This sentiment was correlated during the focus group. As the group ended the discussion about communication, one participant stated "oh, and active listening. We don't want to see the results come out and show we don't listen to our staff." The tone and delivery of the comment was jovial, and laughter occurred from four other participants and was documented in the observation notes.

Unclear goals, vision, and expectations. Through the analysis and synthesis of staff survey results, the theme of unclear goals, vision, and expectations emerged with regard to leadership impact on employee engagement and satisfaction. Survey respondents identified a desire to hear more directly from senior leaders with an opportunity to dialogue openly about different perspectives. One respondent stated they hoped for improved communication through "employee engagement with detailed logic behind agency decision making with an openness to diverse staff perspectives." Another stated, "more informal emails from upper management with information about current happenings. Also, informal meetings with Directors and employees to get a sense of what's going on in their world at work." The respondent survey responses identify a disconnect between the leadership of the organization and the staff. In addition to the general disconnect, there is also a sense that this communication is more strained with staff in remote locations outside of headquarters (HQ). When asked about how to improve organizational communication, one respondent stated "…more SES [agency

leadership] communication toward employees outside of HQ. Aside from attending training schools and workshops, employees do not get much direct communication from the SES team aside from the 'SES Communication Corner'." Conversely, one respondent stated, "frequently communicating agency information gives the appearance of transparency within my building. It creates a greater sense of trust among management and staff." The level of transparency between leadership and staff appears to vary based on location from the evidence generated from the staff survey.

One respondent stated "the good old rumor mill" as the most effective communication strategy within the organization. This sentiment was supported by an additional respondent that stated:

From leaders to employees- there is a big disconnect when it comes to sharing information that may impact individual sections or perhaps the whole agency. We the employees are so used to finding things out from somebody else other than the leaders. Between managers and employees - Often time leaders relate the information to managers however at times managers fail to convey the message to subordinates.

The evidence generated through the focus group with leadership supported the communication challenges present in the organization. One participant stated, "we already send emails, do occasional all hands meetings, post comments on the intranet site, and have an open-door policy. What else can we do?" Based on evidence from the survey responses, the organization does readily use email, intranet postings, and personal communication to relay organizational level communication. The disconnect that

emerged between the leadership focus group participants and staff survey respondents is

that the staff want to be involved in two-way communication to help establish the vision

and direction of the organization. This cannot occur through the current one-way

communication from leadership to staff.

Recommendations

The results of the qualitative case study identified eight emergent themes that

impacted employee engagement and satisfaction in the client organization. The following

recommendations are presented as mitigating steps to resolve the decrease in employee

engagement and satisfaction. Those recommendations are adopting transparent

communication, increased development opportunities for staff, and transitioning to an

authentic leadership culture. The following sections will clarify the recommendation and

relate it back to study results and the opportunity to increase employee engagement.

Adopting Transparent Communication

The acceptance of organizational change, degree of knowledge transfer, and

management of employee perceptions through communication each related to this study

as they were underpinnings of the EEI. Do et al. (2018) identified the need for goal

congruence to mitigate reductions in employee engagement during organizational change.

As described in the previous section, communication within the organization can be

viewed in two general categories, transactional and organizational. Respondents within

the Generation X and Millennial groups identified the use of email and instant messaging

as the key communication mechanisms to accomplish daily work items. Evidence

generated identified a Millennial staff desire streamlined communication and reduced

numbers of official memos, while the Baby Boomer participants found them essential to

daily work. The organization uses a centralized data repository for cataloging the

messages but relies on the employee to search out the information. The organization

should relieve the burden on staff and reimagine how they communicate with employees

in regard to running a given program. Applications like Microsoft Teams allow for

collaboration across multiple worksites and could increase the productivity of staff by

targeting the messaging to the intended audience while keeping local leadership included

for awareness. As noted in previous research (e.g., Lauricella et al., 2017) and validated

by the evidence generated through this study, effective communication is impactful on

employee engagement. Going forward the organization should develop an internal

communication plan that is consistent with modern technology and the needs of the staff.

Broader organizational communications should be transparent and timely.

Transparent organizational communication generates trust and credibility (Rawlins,

2009). Respondents identified the preference to receive this information from local

management on a regular basis, less regularly from agency leadership with opportunity

for back-and-forth dialogue. Effective communication has been shown to sustain

employee engagement during organizational change (Lauricella et al., 2017). The

executive leadership and senior leaders in the organization meet monthly and should

investigate the best platform to present this information in a timely manner to encourage

staff participation in innovative solutions to organizational challenges. The qualitative

case study findings identified the lack of information degrades employee satisfaction and

results in a culture of mistrust, and research has indicated that transparent communication

can be a mitigating factor to decreased employee engagement (Men & Stacks, 2014).

Increased Development Opportunities for Staff

Taylor's scientific management theory was a theoretical basis for this qualitiative

case study based on the tenure and technical ability of the leadership team. The principles

of Taylor's scientific management theory were Replace rule-of-thumb work methods

with methods based on a scientific study of the tasks, Scientifically select, train, and

develop each worker rather than passively leaving them to train themselves, cooperate

with the workers to ensure that the scientifically developed methods are being followed,

divide work nearly equally between managers and workers, so that the managers apply

scientific management principles to planning the work, and the workers perform the tasks

(Shafritz & Hyde, 2017). Staff and leadership within the organization have a high level of

respect, motivation, and encouragement created by their dedication to the mission.

Leadership should invest in this opportunity by engaging staff of all levels to investigate

new opportunities to move the organization forward in support of the mission. Staff and

leadership reported increased levels of encouragement from being consulted for technical

knowledge. The disparity in the amount of technical knowledge is present across the

organization based on the evidence generated through this qualitative study.

Leadership should capitalize on the depth of technical knowledge of staff across

the organization and identify team members, technical experts, and project champions

based on the ability of the person to make the best impact and not on the current location

or position. Baby Boomer respondents indicated increased engagement through

developing others, while Generation X respondents identified process, and system improvement and Millennial respondents identified opportunities for advancement. The differences that emerged through this qualitative study support the theory of generations, as each generational group is at a different place in their career thus drawing encouragement from disparate activities. The broader engagement of staff in agency level teams and transparency could potentially reduce staff perceptions that opportunities are limited outside of headquarters.

Authentic Leadership

Reina et al. (2018) said that inspirational appeal as a leadership style reduces potential turnover in comparison to pressure. The evidence generated through this qualitative study identified a disconnect between the leadership and staff based on the emergent themes. Transitioning to a leadership model based on transparency and authentic leadership principles could reduce the disparity between the intent of leadership and the perceived result from staff. I recommend the organization adopt a culture centered based on authentic leadership theory.

Authentic leadership theory is based on self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and an internalized moral perspective (Stober, Putter, & Garrison, 2013). The words and actions of peers and leaders impact the organization. Focus group participants and survey respondents reported decreased levels of respect, motivation, and encouragement based on interactions with peers, leaders, and external groups. Staff and leadership development should be reimagined to include the key concepts of authentic leadership.

Self-awareness. Wei, Li, Zhang, and Liu (2018) referred to self-awareness as the "understanding one's strengths and weaknesses and the multifaceted nature of the self" (p. 764). The results from the leadership focus group indicated a need to be aware of one's actions as they relate to the impact on peers and staff. Increasing self-awareness within the organization, and across teams will allow individuals to be cognizant of how they may be perceived. Additionally, evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses across the leadership team could allow for focused succession planning to identify skill gaps requiring staff development.

Balanced processing. Balanced processing requires a leader to gather facts about a situation and analyze them objectively before determining a decision that is best for an organization (Wei et al., 2018). The adoption of balanced processing across leadership could reduce the perception that staff recommendations were not considered and allow for a more broadly accepted recommendation for organizational excellence. Practicing balanced processing could require that leadership allow staff autonomy to innovate new solutions to existing problems and trust them to test the validity of the new solution. Balanced processing, therefore, could increase autonomy and trust in the organization potentially increasing employee engagement.

Internalized moral perspective. Internalized moral perspective, or authentic behavior is reliant on a person relying on their own values and moral standards rather than accommodating external pressure (Wei et al., 2018). Focus group participants and survey respondents identified external influence as a factor reducing employee engagement. Authentic behavior among leaders that is based on their own moral

character, rather than the societal pressure from leadership will require the organization to accept the value of independent thought and style. Adopting authentic behavior across the organizational leadership team could reduce the perception of retaliation, reprisal, and personal favoritism as a barrier to improved employee engagement.

Relational transparency. Wei et al. (2018) referred to relational transparency as an active process of "self-disclosure, including showing one's authentic self, true thoughts, and feelings to followers and developing mutual intimacy and trust" (p. 764). Focus group participants and survey respondents reported increased engagement through the development of personal relationships. Focus group participants reported establishing relationships to further their legacy in the organization, while survey respondents reported developing relationships for the betterment of the organization. Relational transparency from leadership that increases trust across the organization could lead to improved employee engagement.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

A strength of this qualitative case study was its contribution to the literature on employee engagement and satisfaction in the federal sector. However, this study was a single case study with a small sampling of participants not sufficient for generalization throughout the federal sector. While there were a small number of participants involved in this study, the material contained in it may be useful to other federal organizations. The qualitative nature of the study was subjective and not supported by quantitative data. This study may be used as the basis for future research into employee engagement and satisfaction in the federal sector.

In Section 4, I present the study findings and investigated eight emergent themes to inform the three research questions about employee engagement Also, I recommend strategies for addressing challenges with communication, respect, motivation, and encouragement in support of employee engagement and satisfaction. In Section 5, I explain how the results of the study will be disseminated to the federal organization under study.

Section 5: Dissemination Plan

Section 4 outlined the data collection, data analysis, results, and recommendations for the study. In this section, I will detail the dissemination plan, potential audience, and a summary. I will disseminate the result of the study through a four-page summary to senior leadership of the agency. The summary will include emergent themes generated through the qualitative case study that were the foundation for recommendations focused on improving employee engagement within the organization. After senior leadership has reviewed the findings, I will schedule a 30-minute session to discuss the study, results, and recommendations. The audience for the study includes federal organizations that are experiencing decreased employee engagement or communication challenges within multigenerational workforces. The study could be shared in training sessions, leadership conferences, academic settings, or research.

Summary

I conducted the qualitative case study at an established federal organization with a history of strong employee engagement that diminished after an organizational change. The reorganization did have a negative impact on employee engagement, as detailed in Section 4. Other items impacting employee engagement included communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement. Recommendations in Section 4 offer a path forward to the transition to transparent organizational communication and an authentic leadership model. Jiang and Men (2017) identified that through open, honest, and timely communication and partnership between leadership and organizational staff an organization can improve employee engagement.

Senior leaders and staff both identified a strong dedication to the mission of the organization. The support of the mission and dedication of leadership and staff to that mission are a strength of the organization. Moving forward, the potential for improved communication, motivation, respect, and encouragement in combination with the dedication of both staff and leadership to the mission of the organization provides a clear path to improved employee engagement across the organization.

References

Aitken, H. G. J. (1985). *Scientific management in action: Taylorism at Watertown Arsenal, 1908-1915*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Breevaart, K., & Bakker, A. B. (2018). Daily job demands and employee work engagement: The role of daily transformational leadership behavior. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 23*(3), 338–349. doi:10.1037/ocp0000082

Byrne, Z. S., Hayes, T. L., & Holcombe, K. J. (2017). Employee engagement using the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. *Public Personnel Management, 46*(4), 368–390. doi:10.1177/0091026017717242

Do, B., Oreg, S., Bartunek, J. M., & Lee, G. (2018). An affect-based model of recipients' responses to organizational change events. *Academy of Management Review, 43*(1), 65–86. doi:10.5465/amr.2014.0335

Jiang, H., & Men, R. L. (2017). Creating an engaged workforce: The impact of authentic leadership, transparent organizational communication, and work-life enrichment. *Communication Research*, *44*(2), 225–243. doi:10.1177/0093650215613137

Kim, H. (2018). Differential impacts of functional, geographical, and hierarchical diversity on knowledge sharing in the midst of organizational change. *Management Communication Quarterly, 32*(1), 5–30. doi:10.1177/0893318917728340

Lauricella, T. K., Ford, J. K., Riley, S. J., Powers, C. L., & Lederle, P. (2017). Employee perceptions regarding an organizational change initiative in a state wildlife

agency. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife, 22*(5), 422–437.

doi:10.1080/10871209.2017.1342013

McMullin, J. A., Comeau, T. D., & Jovic, E. (2007). Generational affinities and

discourses of difference: a case study of highly skilled information technology

workers. *British Journal of Sociology, 58*(2), 297–316. doi:10.1111/j.1468-

4446.2007.00152.x

Men, L. R., & Stacks, D. W. (2014). The effects of authentic leadership on strategic

internal communication and employee-organization relationships. *Journal of

Public Relations Research, 26*, 301-324. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2014.908720

O'Sullivan, E., Rassel, G., Berner, M., & Taliaferro, J. (2017) *Research methods for

public administrators* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

Pilcher, J. (1994). Mannheim's sociology of generations: An undervalued legacy. *British

Journal of Sociology, 45*(3), 481–494.

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual,

theoretical, and methodological.* Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Rawlins, B. (2009). Give the emperor a mirror: Toward developing a stakeholder

measurement of organizational transparency. *Journal of Public Relations

Research*, *21*, 71-99.

Reina, C. S., Rogers, K. M., Peterson, S. J., Byron, K., & Hom, P. W. (2018). Quitting

the boss? The role of manager influence tactics and employee emotional

engagement in voluntary turnover. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational

Studies, 25*(1), 5–18. doi:10.1177/1548051817709007

Shafritz, J. M., & Hyde, A. C. (Eds.). (2017). *Classics of public administration* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

Stober, D. R., Putter, S., & Garrison, L. (2013). Connecting the dots: Coaching leaders to turn values into meaningful work. In B. J. Dik, Z. S. Byrne, & M. F. Steger (Eds.), *Purpose and meaning in the workplace.* (pp. 217–233). doi:10.1037/14183-011

Wei, F., Li, Y., Zhang, Y., & Liu, S. (2018). The interactive effect of authentic leadership and leader competency on followers' job performance: The mediating role of work engagement. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *153*(3), 763-773. doi:10.1007 /s10551-016-3379-0

Appendix A: Service Order Agreement

This Project Proposal has been drafted by Jody R. McDaniel for the [masked agency name] and is dated December 4, 2019.

Scope of Work

Work Phase	Estimated Time Required
Staff surveys (Up to 150 at 10 minutes each)	40 hours
Senior Leaders Focus Group (Up to two hours)	4 hours
Data Analysis (Transcription and thematic coding)	40 hours
Report Preparation (Results and proposed actions)	40 hours
Outcomes/Deliverables: Final Report and Briefing	2 hours
Additional Services Provided if Requested: Not applicable	
Total	126 hours

Services Summary	Estimated Length of Engagement
Staff surveys and a leadership focus group to investigate the generational differences in perceptions of communication, respect, motivation and motivation across generations within the workforce to inform potential improvements in employee engagement. Results will be provided in a report and executive briefing for agency leadership.	4 weeks

Terms of confidentiality and compliance:

In all reports (including drafts shared with peers and faculty members), the student is required to maintain confidentiality by removing names and key pieces of information that might disclose an Institution's / individual's identity or inappropriately divulge proprietary details. If the Institution itself wishes to publicize the findings of this project, that is the Institution's judgment call.

The student will publish the case study in ProQuest as a doctoral capstone (with site and participant identifiers withheld). The case study will be based upon interviews with non-vulnerable adults on the topic of the Institution's business operations, review of public records, and review of internal records/documents related to the Institution's operations that the Institution deems appropriate for sharing with the student. The doctoral student will not use these data for any purpose other than the project outlined in this agreement.

Interview recordings and full transcripts will be shared with any interviewee (upon request), and the doctoral student will provide opportunities for clarifying previous statements. Transcripts with identifiers redacted may be shared with the doctoral student's university faculty, peer advisors, and site leadership (upon request).

The doctoral student is responsible for understanding and complying with all of the Institution's policies and regulatory requirements.

Ethical Conduct in this Consulting Relationship

The Code of Conduct in the Walden University 2016-2017 Student Handbook and the ethical requirements for IRB compliance.

Also, students are required to uphold professional principles in fulfilling their roles as consultants and coaches to client organizations. Beyond the confidentiality requirements outlined above, three principles are key to ensuring ethical conduct in consulting relationships.

Principle 1: Protect the integrity of Walden University
- Not representing conflicting or competing interests or positioning themselves such that their interest may be in conflict or may be perceived to be in conflict with the purposes and values of Walden University
- Not intentionally communicating false or misleading information that may compromise the integrity of Walden University and of the consulting capstone experience

Principle 2: Exhibit professional conduct at all times
- Respecting the climate, culture, values, and regulatory requirements of client organizations and client workforce members

Principle 3: Protect the promise of confidentiality
- Not using or adapting client organization's data and information after the capstone experience, unless the information has been publically shared by the client
- Not conducting telephone conferences with the client organization in public places where information may be overheard

This Project Proposal has been submitted by Jody R. McDaniel, Walden University:

_____
SIGNATURE & Date

This Project Proposal has been approved by {NAME WITHELD}, Administrator

_____
SIGNATURE & Date

Appendix B: Survey Questions

1. What are successful organizational communication strategies in regards to your daily

   work for the organization?

   1.1. What made this strategy successful for you?

2. What would you recommend to improve communication between coworkers,

   managers, and leaders of the organization?

3. Describe one instance where you experienced increased motivation at work.

   3.1. What caused your increased motivation for this situation?

4. Describe one instance where you experienced decreased motivation at work.

   4.1. What caused your decreased motivation for this situation?

5. Describe one time where you felt the most respected in your current position.

   5.1. What occurred in this instance to make you feel the additional respect?

6. Describe one instance where you felt the least respected in your current position.

   6.1. What occurred to make you feel less respected?

7. Describe a situation where you felt encouraged by a new opportunity or change at

   work.

   7.1. What caused your increased level of encouragement?

8. Please describe what encourages you about your career.

   8.1. Is there something outside your control that could increase your encouragement

       about your career?

   8.2. What could you do to increase your level of encouragement?