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The Influence on Employee Engagement of Employee Negative Perceptions of Leader Actions

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Vickki G. Johnson

MS, Central Michigan University, 2000

BS, Fayetteville State University, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

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Abstract

In 2018, only 34% of U.S. workers reported that they were engaged in their jobs, up from

31.5% just 4 years prior. Employee engagement, organizational well-being, and leader

actions are significant to companies and brands in a highly competitive, modern business

environment. The alarmingly low rate of employee engagement resulted from negative

perceptions of leaders. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the

phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees in the public

sector who had negative perceptions of their leaders. The conceptual lens was Herzberg's

theory mapped onto Maslow's hierarchy to address the research question that focused on

the lived experiences of participants. Data were collected from 20 participants who were

full-time federal employees in a medium-sized organization in Washington, DC, through

face-to-face interviews. The data were analyzed by categorization, two levels of coding,

and thematic analysis. The findings showed that the employees worked in a highly

stressful environment where they looked to their leaders for guidance and recognition.

Employees often perceived the leaders were lackluster and impersonal, rarely

acknowledging employee contributions. Employees resorted to intrinsic motivation and

engagement rather than from leadership. Researching other federal agencies may provide

a deeper understanding of workers' critical engagement issues. The results of this study

may help leaders become more aware of the impact of negative workplace experiences on

the well-being and performance of employees, which could lead to addressing and

rewarding employee contributions that ultimately benefit the organization, employees and

the community it serves.

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Dedication

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my husband Darrell and our two daughters Latoya and Lashea for their continued support throughout this academic journey. Their tenacity and stability became the hallmark of my success which fostered an environment for increased patience, as well as an illustration of inspiration and optimism. When I displayed decreased motivation and the desire to relinquish the program, they were there to reinforce the importance of my research and its contribution to society. The same holds true for my beloved mother Bertha, and my dear aunt Eva. Their steadfast belief in the importance of educational achievement contributed to the person I have become today.

Acknowledgments

I must acknowledge those individuals who directly contributed to the success of the study and the completion of my dissertation. With special mention of Dr. Donna K. Brown, Dr. Barbara Turner, and Dr. LaBrina Jones, I am especially proud to have had such outstanding faculty professionals of Walden University to serve as my doctoral chairs and mentors throughout the program. I am also forever grateful to the individuals whose direct participation in my research culminated into applicable principles, objectives, and recommendations for leaders in the federal government to consider and implement. I sincerely thank you all for the enormous support and guidance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Employee engagement is a critical factor in employee efficiency and job satisfaction. Employee engagement can be defined as a person's state of involvement with their work and a desire to do more than just the bare minimum needed to fulfill job duties (Ndaba & Anthony, 2015). It is obviously valuable for an organization to have as many of its employees engaged to as great a degree as possible, but many negative factors affect employee engagement (Adkins, 2015). One of these factors includes working under supervisors and managers who lack the essential skills needed for the job, such as people skills (Rigoni & Nelson, 2015). This applies in the federal sector as well as the private sector. Additionally, employee opportunities have a positive impact on others and to have contact with those whom their work benefits are discrete social job characteristics that trigger two psychological effects in employees: perceived social impact and social worth (Castanheira, 2016). Whereas perceived social impact describes the degree to which employees believe their actions have a positive impact on others, perceived social worth concerns the perception that their actions are valued by others (Grant, 2007). The focus of the study is on employee engagement in the federal sector.

A lack of employee job satisfaction leads to poor performance, burnout, and turnover (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Managers and stakeholders should pay careful attention to hiring the most competent and effective managers, but that does not always happen (Rigoni & Nelson, 2015; van Deursen, Courtois, & van Dijk, 2014). Hiring qualified managers who can promote employee perception of their work having social

impact and worth can result in employee engagement that increases productivity and contribute to transformative organizational change.

This chapter contains the background of the study, an explanation of the study problem, the purpose for the study, and the research questions used. I explain the conceptual framework for the study and nature of the study. I also discuss assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and scope of the study, concluding with a presentation of the significance of the study.

Background of the Study

Employee engagement, organizational well-being, and actions of leadership brand success in the highly competitive, modern business environment. As leadership defines the strategic visions and objectives of an organization, it is crucial that employees are committed and involved to carry out the processes to achieve the visions and objectives (Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, 2011). Employee well-being is the state of individuals' mental, physical, and general health, as well as their experiences of satisfaction at work and outside of work (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Organizational well-being relies on the quality of relationships between employees, supervisors, or the organization as a whole (van De Voorde, Paauwe, & van Veldhoven, 2012).

Company leaders strive to engage employees and increase organizational well-being to build and maintain a competitive edge. The behavior of leadership may produce negative, positive, or ambivalent perceptions in their employees which can shape the lived experiences of employees. Qualitative research can provide a process for exploring this phenomenon. The scholarly contribution of qualitative researcher lies in the

researcher's ability to describe and analyze human experiences, which can create an opportunity for leaders to understand how to increase organizational trust, productivity, and capacity through their actions, (Tims et al., 2011).

The overall effect of employee engagement is high performance (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012). When employees are involved in decision-making, they become motivated, enthusiastic, loyal and committed to the objectives of the organization, thus increasing the performance of the organization (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & Derks, 2016). Organizations that engage their employees often record increased levels of performance and have few issues regarding employee motivation, loyalty, and commitment to the organization. These organizations spend most of their time, energy, and resources improving outcomes and not solving human resource issues, motivating employees, or replacing workers (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012).

There is a paucity of literature on how best to foster employee engagement (Tims et al., 2011; van De Voorde et al., 2012). Henkel (2016), Breevaart et al. (2016), and Popli and Rizvi (2015) found that employee engagement was correlated with transformational leadership. Managers can help organizations to improve operational efficiency through the implementation of various engagement strategies (Ndaba & Anthony, 2015). Identifying appropriate leadership styles that drive engagement through the lived experiences of employees who have negative perceptions of their leaders may help to close existing gaps in the literature regarding the employee disengagement phenomenon.

Problem Statement

Managers continue to be promoted into their jobs by virtue of technical expertise and on their job performance rather than demonstrated people skills (Rigoni & Nelson, 2015). Hiring officials in organizations fail to select the right person 82% of the time (Rigoni & Nelson, 2015). Hiring someone without sufficient skills creates problems with employee engagement, increases organizational overhead, and undermines the capacity to communicate strategically as a result of inadequate knowledge (van Deursen, et al., 2014).

The general problem is less than one-third (34%) of United States workers reported that they were engaged in their jobs in 2016, up from 31% in 2014 (Adkins, 2015; Harter, 2018; Mann & Harter, 2016). When the Office of Personnel Management (2015) Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey was released, it indicated that the employee engagement index score government-wide was 64%. If this problem remains unaddressed, the federal government will continue to operate as less than optimal efficiency, as its employees remain unengaged. Ndaba and Anthony (2015) described an engaged employee as someone who is passionate about the work and does more than expected in meeting the goals of an organization. The specific problem is that employee engagement levels may be reduced when employees have negative perceptions of their leaders (Adkins, 2015; Ndaba & Anthony, 2015).

Employee engagement levels may be reduced when employees have negative perceptions of their leaders was the focus of this study. In the current research, I did not examine ways in which employees' negative perceptions of their leaders could be

improved or the effects of those perceptions mitigated with attendant improvement in employee engagement and thus, employee performance. It was necessary to address an identified gap in the literature that has present relevance to the discipline by exploring the lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees in the public sector who have negative perceptions of their leaders. Recent studies on negative perceptions and ineffective leadership have focused on understanding leadership behaviors that are harmful to employees as well as to organizations (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013). Employee engagement has been shown to affect performance in the working environment of organizations (Shuck & Reio, 2014). On the other hand, employee disengagement can be caused by negative perceptions that lead to a depletion of energy, increased stress, and burnout (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Research Question

In accordance with accepted principles of phenomenological inquiry and the purpose of this study, the following was the research question for the study. Phenomenological studies typically only have one open-ended question about the phenomenon.

RQ: What are the lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders in the government sector?

Conceptual Framework

Formulation of the conceptual framework for this study derived from the seminal works of Burns (1978), Maslow (1943), and Herzberg (1966). The first concept integrates employee perceptions of leaders' actions with the seminal works of Burns (1978) and Burns' theory of transformational leadership. The second and third concepts are based on the motivational seminal works of Maslow (1943) and Herzberg (1966, 1968). Transformational leadership leads to positive change in the followers and enables leaders to improve those over whom they have authority (Burns, 1978).

The early development of the hierarchy of motivation by Maslow (1943) illustrates self-actualization as the highest need for employees (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012). Self-actualization is the achievement of an individuals' potential and the goal of individuals when all other needs have been met (Maslow, 1943). Self-actualizing, like any drive, is unlikely to progress without regard to biological and social costs and benefits (Krems, Kendrick, & Neel, 2017). Krems et al. (2017) examine which functional outcomes (e.g., gaining status, making friends, finding mates, caring for kin) people perceive as central to their individual self-actualization.

Studies suggest that people most frequently link self-actualization to seeking status, and, concordant with life history theory, what people regard as self-actualizing varies in predictable ways across the life span and across individuals (Krems, et al., 2017). This is a state wherein the individuals feel that their goals have been achieved and the purpose of their existence is being fulfilled.

Herzberg (1966) divided motivation into two categories: intrinsic motivation, which refers to the inherent personality characteristics of individuals that make them motivated (or unmotivated) to perform a task, and extrinsic motivation, referring to the characteristics of the environment that affect motivation such as the nature of the work, the work environment, and compensation (Dash, Singh, Anand, & Roy, 2014). Herzberg (1966) also referred to these as hygiene/motivation factors (extrinsic/intrinsic).

The concepts used from the chosen theories to build the conceptual framework were the most appropriate for exploring the phenomenon of disengagement of employees who have negative perceptions of their leaders. In Chapter 2, I discuss how the constructs of transformational leadership, motivation, and self-actualization may contribute to the phenomenon of disengaged of employees who have negative perceptions of their leaders. In addition, I examine the research question by applying the works of Burns (1978) and the motivational seminal works of Maslow (1943) and Herzberg (1966) to the topic.

Nature of the Study

This study was a hermeneutic phenomenological study. The phenomenological approach involves the identification by the researcher of the essence of the phenomenon being studied based on the human experiences described by the research subjects (Moustakas, 1994). My intent in using this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological design was to explore the lived experiences in the workplace of employees who held negative perceptions about their leaders (Laverty, 2003). The phenomenon studied was

employee disengagement by employees who hold negative perceptions of their supervisors.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with human experience as it is lived (Laverty, 2003, p.7). According to Heidegger (1962), consciousness is an arrangement of lived experience. Individuals' background or history comprises what a culture gives them from birth, showing ways of comprehending the world (Laverty, 2003).

Case studies are suitable for understanding individuals' perceptions (Yin, 2009). Narrative research would gather stories of experiences, which might be useful but would not answer the research question as precisely as the interview-based inquiry will. Ethnography would be inappropriate because I did not seek to understand a particular class, group, or culture's experiences. Grounded theory was not needed because the chosen conceptual framework worked well for this study and there was no need to generate new theory.

The research method was a qualitative approach. The qualitative method was chosen over the quantitative method because it is used to answer questions about experience, meaning, and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participant (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). A qualitative researcher typically aims to examine the many nuances and complexities of a particular phenomenon, and therefore qualitative research is employed in studies of complex human situations such as perspectives about a particular issue or the behaviors and values of a specific cultural group (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Qualitative research techniques include small-group discussions for investigating beliefs, attitudes, and concepts of normative behavior,

semistructured interviews to seek views on a focused topic, or with critical informants for background information or an institutional perspective (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

In contrast, quantitative research involves looking at amounts or quantities of one or more variables of interest (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Quantitative research methods are appropriate when (a) factual data are required to answer the research question; (b) when general or probability information is sought on opinions, attitudes, views, beliefs, or preferences; (c) when variables can be isolated and defined; (d) when variables can be linked to form hypotheses before data collection; and (e) when the question or problem is known, clear, and unambiguous (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Based on the purpose of quantitative research, it was not suitable for describing the lived experiences of employees.

The approach I chose was to conduct face-to-face interviews of participants employed at a medium-sized federal organization in Washington, DC. The use of interviews can help to bring understanding to a condition, experience, or event from a personal perspective. Interviews are often combined with analyses of texts and documents (for this study, government reports, media articles, websites or diaries) to learn about distributed or private knowledge (Hammarberg et al., 2016). I ensured these interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded in accordance with accepted qualitative research methods. Interview data were essential in coding patterns and themes as they related to employee engagement and well-being and the motivation strategies implemented by leaders.

The population was employees who held a negative perception of their leaders. Purposive sampling (Olsen et al., 2012) was used for this study as it gave me the discretion to choose a sample based on relevance to the study. This type of sampling typically is of a population that has a particular characteristic that is in alignment with the study's objectives (Shuck & Reio, 2014). In this case, I gathered the sample of 20 participants who had a negative perception of their leaders' actions at a medium-sized federal organization in Washington, DC, using purposive sampling.

I briefed research participants who expressed interest via e-mail to participate in the study, the purpose of the study in more depth, and asked them to sign an informed consent form. Interviews took place in a private location away from the organization and were scheduled at participants' convenience. The interviews took 45-60 minutes.

Definitions

Employee engagement: A distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance (Saks, 2006). Engagement is distinguishable from several related constructs, most notably organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and job involvement (Saks, 2006).

Negative experience: Any experience that results in emotional distress, physical harm, or material loss to individuals; when employees attribute negative events to external factors, for example, perceiving their supervisors as abusive (Zhang & Bednall, 2016).

Negative perceptions: The process by which individuals negatively translate sensory impressions into a coherent and unified view of the world around them (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013).

Organizational climate: The working atmosphere of an organization, as expressed by workplace culture, attitudes of management, and the ways employees are treated and regarded (Kaur, 2013).

Self-actualization: The individual's desire for self-fulfillment, namely, the tendency for them to become actualized in their highest potential. The specific form that self-actualization needs take will vary greatly from person to person. In one individual, it may take the form of the desire to be an ideal mother; in another it may be expressed athletically; and in still another, it may be expressed in painting pictures or in inventions (Maslow, 1943, pp. 382-383).

Transformational leadership: Transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with one another, and they increase levels of motivation and morality. Transformational leadership aims to "raise the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both" (Burns, 1978, p. 20). "Transforming leadership begins on people's terms, driven by their wants and needs, and must culminate in expanding opportunities for happiness" (Burns, 2003, p. 230).

Assumptions

Assumptions are those factors affecting the study that are assumed to be true for the research but cannot be verified. For this study, a primary assumption was that the

answers of the participants to the interview questions were truthful and complete. A

further assumption was that the participants met the study inclusion criteria based on the

information they provided. I did not seek to verify those criteria beyond accepting the

word of the participants.

I assumed that there was a general understanding of what *negative perception* is

in the context of workplace experience. That is a subjective concept and could be

interpreted differently by different individuals. Although it could be assumed that one

who reports having negative experiences might be feeling similar to another who reports

much more significant or frequent negative experiences, it is possible that such

individuals could react much differently. I assumed that all negative workplace

experiences were equal for the study. The study did not involve measuring the magnitude

of such experiences. This potential difficulty was addressed by a brief discussion with

each interviewee before the interview regarding what the definition of a negative

experience shall be for this study (see definitions of terms).

Scope and Delimitations

The specific problem is that employee engagement levels may be reduced when

employees have negative perceptions of their leaders (Adkins, 2015; Ndaba & Anthony,

2015). The specific scope for the study was federal employees in an urban area in

Washington, DC, who hold a negative perception of their leaders. The data gathered for

the study were limited in scope to the lived experiences of employees who hold a

negative perception of their leaders.

From this population, I gathered the sample of 20 participants using purposive sampling or until data saturation occurred. This was in accordance with the study's phenomenological approach, as a small sample allows for rich, thick description and in-depth understanding (Moustakas, 1994).

There were three criteria for participant inclusion. The first criterion was they needed to be currently working as a full-time employee at a medium-sized federal organization in the Washington, DC, area chosen by me. The second criterion for inclusion was they were full-time federal employees who worked at one of two directorates within the organization. The third criterion for inclusion was that the participants had negative perceptions of their employer. This was screened for by asking potential participants during the initial solicitation process if they had such negative perceptions.

Delimitations are those limitations imposed by my choices. I gathered participants from a single urban area. It is possible that soliciting participants from a more scattered geographical base would provide better data, but for convenience in terms of cost and travel time, only the single urban area was used.

Limitations

Limitations are those factors inherent in the study that affect its data results in terms of restricting what can be accomplished. First, the study population was from a single geographical area. It is possible, even likely, that a sample taken from a different area, or several areas at once, would yield different results with the same methods. The sample was small in accordance with phenomenological principles (Moran, 2007), but

that was a limitation in that a small sample was a small number of sources of data, which affected the variety and comprehensiveness of that data.

While I did not anticipate that there would be any characteristics of the population from which the sample was drawn that would skew the results, the possibility existed that such peculiarities were, in fact, inherent in that population. If that was the case, that would severely limit the generalizability or transferability of the results to other populations and settings. Another methodological limitation was the time frame of the study. The examination of the phenomenon was a snapshot in time. The limitation of this approach was that whatever negative experiences a participant reported (as an inclusion criterion), they were likely to have greater emotional impact if they were more severe, more recent, or more frequent. However, the study did not adjust for these factors. A longitudinal study might be valuable in this regard, but I lacked the resources to make that a practical choice.

Significance of the Study

The findings from the study may have a wide impact, as the federal employment sector is large. The understandings created through the study may be applicable to the even larger private sector as well. The study may provide findings that could assist leaders in increasing awareness and improving leadership skills as they relate to employee relations. In the context of scholarly contribution, the study may add value to existing research, as employee perceptions of leader actions can contribute to how people experience meaningfulness when they feel useful and are receiving a return on investments for their performance (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

Management practices that manifest in the workplace may have the potential to either enhance or diminish well-being (Boreham, Povey, & Tomaszewski, 2016). The underlying concept driving the present study's research is that job satisfaction is a critical component of employees' well-being. The concept of the importance of job satisfaction also helps with understanding why employees who lack competent leaders may feel dissatisfied with their jobs even if all other factors are satisfactory. Employee engagement offers workers an opportunity to utilize their abilities and skills towards self-fulfillment. Through engagement, employees can achieve general work satisfaction and self-actualization.

The findings of the study may be relevant to both leaders and followers in business environments. For leaders, employee engagement, well-being, and positive perceptions of leadership from employees have been shown to improve organizational performance and can make the organization more competitive (Bakker, Demerouti, & Lieke, 2012). Engaged employees display higher levels of positivity, motivation, autonomy, productivity and well-being (Bakker et al., 2012). Employee engagement can make organizations more resilient to meet challenges and remain productive. The findings from this research study may be used to help leaders give organizations a competitive edge, improve working environments for employees, and improve their effectiveness, which increases organizational and personal performance (Bakker et al., 2012). As a result, employees can be more satisfied and more productive. Businesses can be more productive and efficient, both of which are socially beneficial.

Significance to Practice

The study is significant because the problem is important to employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders. The study is significant to leaders since it may help them understand employees and their relationships with them. The results of the study may help employees improve their engagement. The results of the study may help the government develop policies, training, and development that will increase employee engagement.

Workplace engagement, productivity, and goal accomplishment are all affected by employee engagement and job satisfaction (van Deursen, et al., 2014). These factors in turn are affected by managers' styles, competence, and methods (Rigoni & Nelson, 2015). In all employment sectors, a major goal is to increase efficiency and productivity. As managers are responsible for such aspects in organizations, any decrease in these elements could be the cause for negative workplace experiences.

The federal sector employs thousands of people and consumes billions of dollars annually. It is important that practices that increase efficiency, employee motivation and satisfaction, and managerial competence be implemented to the greatest extent possible. However, as articulated in the problem statement, most managers are not competent in the jobs for which they were hired (Rigoni & Nelson, 2015). Most employees are not engaged in their jobs (Adkins, 2015). These problems amount to a lack of efficiency that, though hard to measure precisely, in all likelihood costs the federal government millions of dollars annually (Wynen & Op de Beeck, 2014).

The results of this study could help managers, supervisors, and stakeholders to understand the impact of negative workplace experiences on the well-being and performance of employees. Any long-term effects of such experiences would be valuable to understand. For instance, it might be the case that managers underestimate how negative experiences linger in the minds of employees long after the occurrence creating consequent negative emotions and stress for the employees. This study has the potential to advance scientific knowledge in management by exploring disengagement of employees using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The overall benefit could be a greater understanding of what makes employees happier, more efficient, and better satisfied with their jobs, which may increase overall organization success.

Significance to Theory

Initially, it might seem that the study will not contribute much to theory, as its conceptual framework is based on an understanding of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. The concept is well understood in the literature and in practice. In addition, the concept has been added to and modified by subsequent researchers, including Herzberg (1968). However, there is always room for expansion of the concept's scope and understanding, which is illustrated through Koltko-Rivera (2006). A rectified version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes self-transcendence, which is a motivational level that seeks to further a cause beyond the self and to experience a communion beyond the boundaries of the self through peak experience (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

Various perspectives may be gained from the study. The experiences of employees and job satisfaction may be related to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, how well

their needs are fulfilled, and the effect of negative experiences on such fulfillment. Other questions of inquiry include: How significant is a minor nonrecurring event? How significant are minor events that recur (such as an uncomfortable work environment, extrinsic factors such as long commutes, and so forth)? What are the effects of major negative experiences, singular and recurrent?

Hygiene factors shape the work environment of an individual. Derived from Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory of motivation, hygiene factors include relationships with supervisors and coworkers, organizational policies and procedures, supervision, physical work environment, job security, and compensation. Leaders are in a position to positively influence hygiene/motivation factors through their actions. If not, negative perceptions of leader actions may occur. Effective leaders can utilize these theories to develop and implement strategies and concepts to increase employee engagement while improving employee perceptions about the organization. In addition, leaders can utilize the theory to aid in motivating employees by recognizing the distinction between the two categories.

The perspective of a job as fulfilling the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy is relatively recent (Ramakrishnan, Barker, Vervoordt, & Zhang, 2017). It was thought until recently that a job mainly fulfilled the "safety and security" need (i.e., a means to make a living). It now appears that self-actualization is at least as important. An example of this is illustrated when individuals have received unexpected criticism from their boss. In this case, self-actualization can be affected if individuals view criticism from their boss as a negative experience.

It is perspectives such as this that the proposed study could provide, adding to the overall understanding of the phenomenon. Potential for expansion of the conceptual framework within the study is significant in that transformational leaders work to clarify a vision, share it with their employees and sustain it long term. This is expected to result in increased employee public service motivation, that is, orientation towards doing good for others and society (Andersen, Bjørnholt, Bro, & Holm-Petersen, 2016).

Significance to Social Change

The potential for significant social change is a possible improvement in the world of work: how employees feel and function, how employers form and meet their goals, how organizations survive and thrive. The creation of an environment in which employees can feel satisfied and productive has two manifest benefits. Firstly, they have a sense of greater well-being, and secondly, the organizations they work for are more productive (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012; Shuck & Reio, 2014).

The results of the study could carry positive social implications if used by managers and stakeholders to increase their understanding of employees' lived experiences in order to increase their employee's job satisfaction and engagement. As the lack of such engagement is a major issue and impacts productivity, increasing engagement could have a positive social impact. To manage the scope of the research inquiry, a focus on the linkages of alignment and individual performance as it overlaps with employee engagement can also enhance the understanding of organizational factors that affect employee performance (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

It is a social benefit that aspects of individuals' lives can be better understood when it includes workplace experiences. The attitude that work is something that must simply be endured in order to survive is obsolescent. A person's job is part of that person's well-being, identity, and feeling of being part of the world. The findings of the study could add to the understanding of how individuals perceive their jobs.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, a background of the situation was provided, including the effects of a lack of managerial competence in the workforce and a lack of employee engagement. I explained the study problem, which is that negative workplace experiences may affect employee engagement and job satisfaction but that those impacts are not well understood. I discussed the method, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for studying the problem and explained its appropriateness for answering the research question. I also explained the overall significance of the study, which included the study's potential significance to theory, practice, and social change.

The purpose of the study was to explore the phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees who have negative perceptions of their leaders. The research question stated:

RQ: What are the lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders?

I explained the conceptual framework based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, that there are distinctive factors affecting employee job engagement and motivation, and that managers can use extrinsic motivation strategies. I provided an overview of the research

method and hermeneutic phenomenology and defined critical terms. The chapter

continued with a discussion of the study's scope, limitations, and delimitations. As an

example, a general understanding that negative perceptions occur in the context of

workplace experiences was assumed and presented. The limitations of a single

geographical area and use of a small sample were presented. The chapter closed with a

discussion of the study's potential significance to theory, practice, and social change.

Chapter 2 contains a comprehensive overview of the recent literature on the study

topic along with seminal works, particularly regarding the conceptual framework. I

provide a general discussion of workplace satisfaction, employee engagement, and

managerial competence. The general discussion sets the foundation of the research gap,

which was how employee perceptions of their leaders influence their work engagement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees who have negative perceptions of their leaders. The general problem is that there is a low percentage of workers engaged in their work. The specific problem is that employee engagement levels may be reduced when employees have negative perceptions of their leaders (Adkins, 2015; Ndaba & Anthony, 2015). Managers are often promoted into their jobs based on technical expertise and job performance instead of demonstrated people skills (Rigoni & Nelson, 2015), which may cause poor relationships leading to employees having negative perceptions of their team leaders and managers. The process by which individuals negatively translate sensory impressions into a coherent and unified view of the world around them is known as negative perception (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013). Negative perceptions and an overall lack of engagement may lead to employees not being as productive as they could be.

Employee engagement provides a solution for organizational success, as the overall effect of employee engagement is high performance (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012). The federal government defines employee engagement as the sense of purpose of an employee manifested in the level of dedication, persistence, and effort the individual puts into the work and overall commitment to an agency and its mission (Office of Personnel Management, 2015). Statistics from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (Office of Personnel Management, 2015) indicated the employee engagement index score government-wide was 64%. When employees are involved in decision-making, they can

become motivated, enthusiastic, loyal, and committed to the objective ideals of the

organization, increasing the performance of the organization (Castanheira, 2016). The

findings from the study may contribute to creating awareness for leaders to enable them

to better adjust their day-to-day actions to improve employee relationships and keep

employees engaged.

Literature Search Strategy

To obtain the most recent and relevant literature, I used several search engines

and databases. The databases included Google Scholar, ERIC, and DeepDyve, and the

search terms included: *public sector, transformational leadership, leadership, workplace,*

intrinsic motivation, effectiveness, leadership styles, leadership theories, transactional

leadership, charismatic leadership, authentic leadership, effective leadership, employee

engagement, employee perceptions, extrinsic motivation, organizational well-being,

Maslow's theory, Herzberg, motivation hygiene theory, transformational leadership

theory, Burns, and combinations of these terms. Of the 128 references obtained for this

study, 102 sources (80%) were published between 2013 and 2018, and 26 sources (20%)

were published prior to 2013 which included 10 seminal sources. I included the studies

and research that I believed to be relevant to the purpose and research questions of this

study in this comprehensive literature review. The literature included in this review were

peer reviewed articles, published reviews, and case studies. The majority of the studies

included were quantitative in research design.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study integrated employee perceptions of leader's actions with the seminal works of Burns (1978) and his transformational leadership theory and the seminal works of Maslow (1943) and Herzberg (1966) on motivation. Burns (1978) defined leadership as leaders encouraging followers to undertake certain goals, which represent the motivations, values, wants, needs, aspirations, and expectations of the leaders and followers. Burns (1978) further stated that the leader should appeal to the morals, ethics, and standards of the follower. Burns (1978) insisted that leaders must make employees feel motivated and urge them into action through focusing on shared values and satisfying their expectations and aspirations in order to have the most significant influence on employees.

Transforming leadership eventually ends up being moral, as it increases the human conduct level and ethical aspirations of leaders and followers, which has an effect of transformation for both (Breevaart et al., 2016; Burns, 1978; Carter, Armenakis, Field, & Mossholder, 2013). Using the concept of transformational leadership as a conceptual lens of leadership and motivation to explore the perceptions of leadership of the employees taking part in this study will help to provide insight as to how their leaders might be causing negative perceptions and disengagement. Hoyt, Price, and Poatsy (2013) added that a leader's fundamental focus on goal achievement contributes to group goals being overvalued and increases the moral permissibility of the ways through which these goals are achieved. Leaders at all organizational levels have a significant influence

on change, although few have formal training to lead change successfully (Stilwell, Pasmore, & Shon, 2016).

The early development of the hierarchy of motivation by Maslow (1943) illustrates self-actualization as the highest need for employees (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas, 2012). Self-actualization is the achievement of an individual's potential and the goal when all other needs have been met (Maslow, 1943). However, self-actualizing, like any drive, is unlikely to progress without regard to biological and social costs and benefits (Krems et al., 2017). Kaur (2013) asserted that motivational factors play an important role in increasing job satisfaction and engagement, and promoting self-actualization.

Once individuals meet their basic physical and survival needs, they seek to fulfill psychological, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). This assertion is upheld today in many organizations, which has been further expanded upon by Kaur (2013), Harrigan and Commons (2015), and Fomenky (2015). The rationale behind this concept relies on the suggestion of how managers can help their employees become self-actualized. It includes employees working at their maximum creative potentials, fully engaged (Kaur, 2013), and promoting positive perceptions of leaders. Using Maslow's works as a conceptual lens to explore the engagement (or disengagement) in work of the participants taking part in this study provides a deeper understanding of the factors that motivate and affect them aside from their leaders and explains their negative perceptions of their leaders. Through engagement, employees can

achieve general work satisfaction and strive towards actualization, and leaders are positioned to influence this through their actions (Castanheira, 2016).

Hygiene-motivation theory (Herzberg, 1966) hypothesizes that extrinsic factors such as work environment, leadership, and company policies are linked to dissatisfaction or no dissatisfaction, and intrinsic factors such as the nature of the work, recognition, and achievement relate to satisfaction or no satisfaction (Dash et al., 2014). Management practices that manifest in the workplace may have the potential to either enhance or diminish well-being (Boreham et al., 2016). Effective leaders could use transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), Maslow's motivational works (1943), and Herzberg's motivation-hygiene (1966) theory to develop and implement strategies and concepts to increase employee engagement while improving employee perceptions about the organization.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership theory has been used in several industries, including sports. Price and Weiss (2013) used transformational leadership theory to investigate the relationship of peer and coach leadership to team and individual outcomes among athletes taking part in team sports. The participants included 412 female adolescent soccer players, and they were required to complete measures to assess teammate and coach behaviors regarding transformational leadership, their intrinsic motivation, perceived competence, team cohesion, enjoyment, and collective efficacy (Price & Weiss, 2013). The researchers used structural equation modeling to test their hypotheses (Price & Weiss, 2013).

The results indicated that coach leadership had greater prediction value regarding collective efficacy and individual outcomes in comparison with peer leadership (Price & Weiss, 2013). Peer leadership had a greater association with social cohesion when compared to coach leadership (Price & Weiss, 2013). Furthermore, coach and peer leadership were equally significant for task cohesion (Price & Weiss, 2013). The researchers concluded that transformational leadership theory was viable to understand athlete and coach leadership in the sports domain (Price & Weiss, 2013).

Effelsberg, Solga, and Gurt (2014) also utilized transformational leadership theory to investigate the willingness of followers to take part in selfless pro-organizational behavior. Selfless pro-organizational behavior relates to behavior that benefits the organization, and is unfit for self-serving purposes despite significant personal costs (Effelsberg et al., 2014). The researchers also attempted to demonstrate organizational identification as a mediator for this relation (Effelsberg et al., 2014).

The participants included 321 employees who were required to complete questionnaires that measured transformational leadership, organizational identification, honesty, and humility (Effelsberg et al., 2014). The results indicated that transformational leadership predicted followers' willingness for engaging in selfless pro-organizational behavior, and organizational identification moderated this relation (Effelsberg et al., 2014). The researchers stipulated that encouraging followers to let go of their self-interest for the benefit of the company was a key part of transformational leadership theory, yet a very difficult concept to measure through questionnaires (Effelsberg et al., 2014).

Maslow's Theory

Maslow explains in his hierarchical theory of needs that individuals cannot become sensitized to higher level needs before they have satisfied lower level needs (Rasskazova, Ivanova, & Sheldon, 2016). The conceptual lens used is that until individuals' lower level needs are met, they are not ready to gain from the satisfaction of higher-level needs (Rasskazova et al., 2016). The researchers investigated lower level need satisfaction regarding the perception of security and financial satisfaction, as well as higher level need satisfaction regarding the basic needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Rasskazova et al., 2016). The researchers found that lower and higher-level need satisfaction significantly affected several positive outcomes in terms of work, including organizational commitment, and intrinsic motivation (Rasskazova et al., 2016). The hypothesis of Maslow was confirmed as the satisfaction of higher-level needs showed a greater effect on the outcomes when they were combined with the satisfaction of lower level needs.

Jerome (2013) postulated that it was very difficult to test Maslow's theory empirically regarding causal relationships, as a large amount of research has stated that personal perspective is always influenced by bias and reduces the validity of data. Jerome (2013) also argued that Maslow's theory should not just be accepted as scientific fact because it may be irrelevant in some organizations, other parts of the world, or as a result of the difficult application of the theory. Jerome (2013) stated that Maslow's theory was significant and relevant for current organizations, as well as for all organizations seeking to gain excellence and success. Moving away from the principles

and practical application of this theory will have a negative impact on human resource management, organizational culture, and employee performance (Jerome, 2013). In order to obtain a positive atmosphere in the workplace, organizational excellence, and an overall better working environment, the use of the conceptual framework is important (Jerome, 2013).

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Hygiene factors are extrinsic to the individual, while motivation factors are intrinsic. Both terms refer to reasons why individuals take actions. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction of social commerce have also been investigated. Gao and Lee (2014) examined the dimensionality in respect of satisfaction and dissatisfaction while evaluating the impact of social commerce characteristics. Gao & Lee (2014) utilized Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory as well as the Kano Model, and the participants included 519 social commerce users who conducted an online survey (Gao & Lee, 2014).

The results provided evidence to support that satisfaction and dissatisfaction were distinctly different constructs and nine characteristics of social commerce were derived from factor analysis which supported Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (Gao & Lee, 2014). For example, diversity had a positive influence only on satisfaction, whereas uncertainty only had a positive impact on dissatisfaction (Gao & Lee, 2014). Other factors influenced both or had no significance on satisfaction or dissatisfaction at all. This study and others have shown the effective application of Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory with regards to job satisfaction and will be suitable for the proposed study.

Ul Islam and Ali (2013) attempted to determine the applicability of Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory with regards to university teachers in the private sector. The researchers applied a job satisfaction questionnaire based on motivators and hygiene suggested by Herzberg (Ul Islam & Ali, 2013). The results of Ul Islam & Ali's (2013) study provided evidence to support that most of the teachers conveyed their satisfaction regarding hygiene variables, such as supervision, relationships with their bosses and colleagues, and working conditions.

A majority of the teachers stated that their relationships with colleagues were the most satisfying factor when compared with other hygiene factors (Ul Islam & Ali, 2013). Regarding motivators, most of the teachers also showed their satisfaction with recognition, achievement, the work itself, advancement, and responsibility (Ul Islam & Ali, 2013). A large percentage of the participants indicated that work itself and achievement were the most satisfying when compared with other motivators (Ul Islam & Ali, 2013). Regarding dissatisfaction, teachers reported that policies, their salaries, and opportunities for growth were the most significant sources of dissatisfaction (Ul Islam & Ali, 2013).

The results of UI Islam & Ali's (2013) study provided evidence to support different results than the motivation-hygiene theory on which it was focused with regard to hygiene factors, although it may be as a result of sociocultural differences. Alternatively, this study was in agreement with the theory regarding motivation factors (Ul Islam & Ali, 2013). The researchers suggested that future research should focus on a larger population to account for a variety of population aspects for generalization (Ul

Islam & Ali, 2013). Herzberg (1968) differentiated between hygienic, or environmental/external, and motivational, or mental/internal, reasons for an individual's actions. Ul Islam and Ali (2013) noted that cultural factors and workplace environment functioned as hygiene factors, as they operated independently of the individuals' mindset and goals, while teachers' expectations and personal goals functioned as motivational factors.

The combination of three theories (transformational leadership theory, Maslow's theory, and Herzberg's motivation/hygiene theory) was discussed in the light of previous studies. The works of Burns (1978), Maslow (1943), and Herzberg (1968) connects transformational leadership – an approach that creates change to organizational culture, motivation/hygiene factors – illustrating that work satisfaction may derive from various factors of dissatisfaction, and the hierarchy of needs – where most organizations travels through stages of physiological, safety, and social needs further defining organizational culture. The combination of three theories is proposed to be a viable and well-suited conceptual framework for exploring disengagement through the lived experiences of employees who have negative perceptions of their leaders. Transformational leadership theory, Maslow's theory, and Herzberg's motivation/hygiene theory inform the research question and help to identify research design decisions. The lack of engagement of employees will be explored through Maslow's theory and Herzberg's motivation hygiene theory as a foundation, and employees' perceptions of their leaders will be explored through transformational leadership theory as a foundation. As several variables will be

explored in the study, it was needed to address these theories as a foundation for the

conceptual framework.

Literature Review

This review will deal with three factors that affect employee motivation:

employee engagement, organizational well-being, and leadership. Employee engagement

is the involvement of the employee in the goals and processes of the job, to a greater

extent than that which is needed merely to fulfill the job role (Ndaba & Anthony, 2015).

Organizational well-being is the functionality and smooth operation of the organization

(van De Voorde, et al., 2012). Leadership in the context of this review refers to the

actions and strategies of organizational leaders in the workplace.

Implementing processes which involve employees in crucial objectives of an

organization can be useful as leadership defines the strategic direction (Tims et al., 2011).

Recent studies on negative perceptions and ineffective leadership aimed to gain insight

on harmful leadership behaviors influencing employees and organizations (Mehta &

Maheshwari, 2013). This chapter discusses research conducted on employee engagement

in the public sector, employee perception of leadership, employee engagement and

transformational leadership, and the factors influencing organizational well-being.

Employee Engagement in the Public Sector

Employee engagement could have an effect on the job satisfaction of an

employee, and may even affect productivity. As a result of the possible positive effect of

employee engagement, it has recently been widely studied, and it was found that the

levels of engagement were increasing universally, yet shifting in skill sets across

geographic regions (Srivastava, Ramachandran, & Suresh, 2014). Ndaba & Anthony (2015) described an engaged employee as someone who is passionate about the work and does more than expected in meeting the goals of an organization.

Employee engagement has been shown to systematically influence performance within the working environment of organizations (Shuck & Reio, 2014). Furthermore, employee disengagement could be a result of negative perceptions, which can result in a depletion of energy, increased stress, and burnout (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Xanthopoulou, Bakker, and Fischbach (2013) found that dissonance and emotional demands had a negative impact on work engagement when self-efficacy was low, and that self-efficacy had a positive effect on engagement when dissonance and emotional demands were high. Adkins (2015) posited that less than one-third (31.5%) of U.S. workers were engaged in their jobs in 2014.

There is a need for further research on employee engagement in the public sector. The literature has previously indicated that employee engagement could control public service motivation in a way to result in better staff functioning as well as positive organizational outcomes (Fletcher, Bailey, Alfes, & Madden, 2016). Employee engagement could assist in handling ever more complex challenges related to public service (Fletcher et al., 2016). Fletcher et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review of the available empirical research regarding engagement. The researchers included 59 studies which were conducted within the public sector (Fletcher et al., 2016). The findings from this systematic review were inconclusive and underpinned the need for further research specifically focused on challenges of the public sector (Fletcher et al., 2016).

Generally, previous studies have found that motivational characteristics of jobs like autonomy, social support, leader consideration, voice mechanisms and even psychological resources were the key aspects encouraging engagement for employees within the public sector (Fletcher et al., 2016). Employee engagement was also linked with positive employee health or morale and improved performance behaviors (Fletcher et al., 2016). The researchers recommended that future research should attempt to gain insight into the link between engagement and public service motivation, as well as examining engagement over different services in the public sector (Fletcher et al., 2016).

Employee engagement in the public sector may be a greater challenge than employee engagement in the private sector. Agyemang and Ofei (2013) posited that employee engagement was still a relatively new concept and subject for research, specifically for the African continent. The researchers investigated employees and their work engagement as well as organizational commitment by utilizing a comparative research approach that focused on employees in the public and private sector (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013). The participants were purposively sampled and the sample included 105 employees from three private and three public organizations (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013). The results of the study indicated a positive relation between the engagement of employees and their commitment to their organization (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013). Employees who were employed at private organizations had a greater level of engagement and commitment when compared to employees from public organizations (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013). Employees who were long and short-tenured did not show a significant difference in commitment levels compared to other employees (Agyemang &

Ofei, 2013). This study underpinned the urgency and necessity for employees to be

offered with the necessary resources to conduct their tasks, as it influences employee

engagement and organizational commitment (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013).

The public sector may have an effect on employee engagement, as well as

creativity and learning in the work environment. Eldor and Harpaz (2016) investigated

the indirect link of an employee's creativity and adaptability and learning climate. The

researchers utilized a descriptive quantitative research design applying multilevel

modeling analysis, and the sample included 625 employees working at 12 organizations

in Israel (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016).

The researchers also examined whether the above-mentioned indirect link was

moderated by employee engagement and the sector of employment (i.e., private or

public) (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). The findings indicated that the indirect link among

learning, an employee's creativity and adaptability, and the learning climate was

moderated by employee engagement (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). Additionally, the

researchers found that the moderation through engagement was mediated by the

employee's sector of employment (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016). The researchers concluded

that the link among employee performance behaviors and learning climate was more

complicated than previously stated within the literature (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016).

There is a possible positive effect of learning opportunities within the workplace.

In agreement with Eldor & Harpaz (2016), Jin and McDonald (2016) also found the

moderating effect of learning opportunities. Jin & McDonald (2016) postulated that

supervisor support may be a significant predictor of engagement among employees,

although the available literature cannot provide consistent evidence as of yet. The researchers utilized organizational support theory, social exchange theory, as well as a job characteristics model (Jin & McDonald, 2016). The aim of this study was to examine the moderating function of perceived organizational support regarding the association of employee engagement and supervisor support (Jin & McDonald, 2016). The researchers examined how the above-mentioned moderated association may be further mediated by learning opportunities provided by the organization (Jin & McDonald, 2016).

Participants included 1,251 employees from local and state government agencies, and the findings indicated that supervisor support affected employee engagement directly as well as indirectly through the effect it had on perceived organizational support. In turn, findings also influenced the fluctuation in employee engagement and showed that associating supervisor support and organizational support was mediated through learning opportunities, as such that the positive relation becomes invigorated for individuals who reported that they have opportunities to grow and learn in their workplace (Jin & McDonald, 2016).

Alternatively, higher emotional intelligence might add to the challenge of engagement in employees. De Clercq, Bouckenooghe, Raja, and Matsyborska (2014) utilized research on work engagement, person-organization fit, and emotional intelligence to examine the moderating effect of work engagement on the relation of organizational deviance that includes decreased job satisfaction, lost productivity, decreased performance, lower organizational commitment, and goal congruence, and how the moderating effect may be further mediated by emotional intelligence. This quantitative

correlational study sample included 272 employees from four IT companies, and the results revealed that goal congruence among supervisors and their employees negatively influenced the employees' organizational deviance, even though the influence was not apparent after controlling for work engagement (De Clercq et al., 2014). Furthermore, emotional intelligence moderated the positive link between work engagement and goal congruence, as well as the negative link among organizational deviance and work engagement (De Clercq et al., 2014). These links also became strengthened when combined with greater emotional intelligence (De Clercq et al., 2014). The indirect influence of goal congruence on the organizational deviance of employees through engagement was increased with greater emotional intelligence, which provided evidence of mediated moderation (De Clercq et al., 2014).

Interactional justice, the degree to which people affected by decision and are treated with dignity and respect (Schermerhorn, 2009), may have a positive effect on organizational and job engagement. Ghosh, Rai, and Sinha (2014) explored whether the perceptions of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice were linked with employee engagement and also attempted to ascertain whether these dimensions of justice were possibly inter-related. The study sample included 210 employees working in banks in India's public sector who completed a survey that inquired information on organization and job engagement as well as a scale on procedural, distributive, and interactional justice (Ghosh et al., 2014).

The link among engagement and justice perceptions was analyzed through correlations as well as hierarchical regression analysis (Ghosh et al., 2014). The findings

indicated that procedural, distributive, and interactional justice perceptions were inter-related (Ghosh et al., 2014). Furthermore, interactional and distributive justice took precedence above procedural justice when predicting job engagement, although distributive justice played the most significant role to determine organizational engagement, followed by procedural and then interactional justice (Ghosh et al., 2014). This study provided insight into the underlying processes, such as the inter-relationships of justice perception, by which organizational and job engagement could be improved (Ghosh et al., 2014). The results also highlighted that the application of certain concepts such as relative deprivation within public sector banks could improve the engagement of employees (Ghosh et al., 2014).

Managers and employers may need to focus on their employees' loyalty in order to increase their engagement. Ibrahim and Al Falasi (2014) aimed to examine the associations of employee loyalty or organizational commitment, continuance commitment (CC), affective commitment (AC), and employee engagement. The researchers utilized a self-administered questionnaire to collect data from 50 employees representing three levels of management within the public sector in the United Arab Emirates (UAE; Ibrahim & Al Falasi, 2014). The researchers used correlation coefficient and regression analysis, and the results revealed that there was a significant association between engagement and loyalty (Ibrahim & Al Falasi, 2014). AC was more significant to influence an employee's engagement in comparison with CC (Ibrahim & Al Falasi, 2014). The employees who participated in this study were mostly employed at the same organization, which may have limited the generalizability of the study results (Ibrahim &

Al Falasi, 2014). The results of this study provided evidence to support the significance of employees' loyalty as well as its effect on employee engagement (Ibrahim & Al Falasi, 2014).

Employee engagement has a significant and positive effect on organizational performance in the public sector. Sanneh and Taj (2015) postulated that the relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance had received increased attention from organizational and human resource researchers recently, yet this relationship had not been thoroughly researched in the public sector of underdeveloped countries. The researchers investigated a variety of factors regarding employee engagement, as well as their influence on organizational performance within the public sector in West Africa (Gambia Ports Authority; Sanneh & Taj, 2015). The researchers used a case study design for data gathering, and the participants included 327 employees working at the Gambia Ports Authority, who were all required to complete a survey (Sanneh & Taj, 2015). The sample included employees of different hierarchical levels such as directors, senior managers, and junior staff (Sanneh & Taj, 2015).

The results indicated that a variety of factors significantly affected employee engagement, excluding co-worker and team relation (Sanneh & Taj, 2015). Sanneh & Taj (2015) found that leadership had the most significant impact on employee engagement when compared to other factors. Overall, the researchers found a positive link between organizational performance and employee engagement, and the findings indicated that employees who felt connected and engaged with their organization

attempted to reciprocate by showing more enthusiasm toward their work and the organization, which could result in improved performance (Sanneh & Taj, 2015).

There is a plethora of variables that influence employee engagement in an organization. There is also a wide range of repercussions for high and low employee engagement respectively. Within the public sector, it may be even more difficult to keep employees engaged possibly due to the quality of the work environment, or lack of genuine concern for employees from leaders. Agyemang and Ofei (2013) reported that employees at private organizations had a greater level of engagement and commitment when compared to employees from public organizations. Moreover, Jin and McDonald (2016) found that associating supervisor support and organizational support was mediated through learning opportunities, as such that the positive relation was invigorated for individuals who reported that they had opportunities to grow and learn in their workplace. Alternatively, Eldor and Harpaz (2016) concluded that the link among employee performance behaviors and learning climate was more complicated than previously stated within the literature.

Plester and Hutchison (2016) used an ethnographic approach to examine the relationship between fun and workplace engagement within different industries (e.g., law, finance, information technology, and utility services). In a sample of 59 participants, their findings suggested that some forms of workplace fun offer individual employees a refreshing break which creates positive affect. Conversely, Plester & Hutchison (2016) found that for some people, managed or organic fun created distraction, disharmony or dissonance that could foster disengagement.

Fletcher et al., (2016), Agyemang & Ofei (2013), Eldor & Harpaz (2016), Jin & McDonald (2016), De Clercq et al., (2014), Ibrahim & Al Falasi (2014), Sanneh & Taj (2015), and Plester & Hutchison (2016) examined employee engagement. Fletcher et al., (2016) found that employee engagement was also linked with positive employee health or morale and improved performance behaviors. Agyemang & Ofei (2013) reported that employees at private organizations had a greater level of engagement and commitment when compared to employees from public organizations. Regarding employee engagement in the public sector, Jin & McDonald (2016) found that supervisor support affected employee engagement directly.

Eldor & Harpaz (2016) found that the learning climate was moderated by employee engagement. De Clercq et al. (2014) found that goal congruence among supervisors and their employees negatively affected the employees' organizational deviance. Ghosh et al., (2014) found that interactional and distributive justice took precedence above procedural justice when predicting job engagement.

Ibrahim & Al Falasi (2014) found that there was a significant association between engagement and loyalty. Sanneh & Taj (2015) found that leadership had the most significant impact on employee engagement when compared to other factors. Plester & Hutchison (2016) found that some forms of workplace fun offered individual employees a refreshing break.

The above presents an example of a controversial aspect of the phenomenon under study in that fun workplace environments may also promote employee disengagement and can be further explored. Fletcher et al. (2016) recommended that

future research should attempt to gain insight on the link between engagement and public service motivation, as well as examining engagement over different services in the public sector. There is still much to discover on employee engagement, and further research is needed within the public sector of America, specifically qualitative research, as most of the available research is quantitative.

Employee Perceptions on Leadership

Several factors within the workplace may affect an employee's perception of leadership. Amongst others, hiring someone without sufficient skills creates problems with employee engagement, increases organizational expenses, and undermines the capacity to communicate strategically as a result of inadequate knowledge (van Deursen et al., 2014). Harvey, Harris, Kacmar, Buckless, and Pescosolido (2014) found that political skill promoted ethical employee behaviors, yet it may also assist leaders to conceal deviant intentions. Unethical conduct of leaders is detrimental for a variety of reasons, and it is specifically undesirable for managing subordinates, as it directly affects the ethical conduct of their followers (Bonner, Greenbaum & Mayer, 2016).

Leadership is a determining factor of employee engagement, and different types of leadership such as transformational, charismatic, and authentic are directly associated with the degree of employee engagement (Alfes et al., 2013). The quality of the leader-employee relationship influences employee engagement (Alfes, et al., 2013). Wallace, de Chernatony and Buil (2013) specifically stated that an employee's commitment impacted their brand adoption as well as brand-supporting behavior and that effective leadership encouraged employee commitment. In the modern business environment, it is no longer

sufficient for leaders to just be knowledgeable and qualified; leaders also have to be

adaptable, focused, and resilient to be successful (Clerkin & Ruderman, 2016).

Optimal communication is of high importance, as well as leadership training

programs. Bornman and Puth (2017) postulated that extensive research on

communication from a leader's perspective has been conducted, including how they are

an integral part of organizations, yet the research is lacking regarding the perceptions and

perspectives of employees, as well as communication skills of their leaders. The

researchers aimed to fill the gap in the research by examining the perceptions of

employees on leadership communication. Bornman & Puth (2017) utilized a newly

developed email questionnaire, completed by 317 employees from a variety of

organizations in South Africa. The data were analyzed through statistical software and

reported through a factor analysis and descriptive statistics (Bornman & Puth, 2017).

The results indicated that employees in South Africa perceived that their leaders

did not correctly and efficiently utilize leadership communication (Bornman & Puth,

2017). The results further provided evidence to support that employees perceived that

their leaders did not understand the meaning of being a communicating leader (Bornman

& Puth, 2017). Bornman & Puth (2017) concluded that organizations should consider

implementing training programs for all leaders, which could assist in the development of

leaders who communicate more efficiently, who are aware of their weaknesses, and who

have the tools to improve themselves within their working environment.

In agreement with Bornman & Puth (2017), Bowling, Alarcon, Bragg, and

Hartman (2015) also found that clarity and communication are important aspects in the

workplace, and added that clear set goals and tasks would have a positive effect on employees. Furthermore, Bowling et al. (2015) found that social support positively affected the workload of employees, which might result in positive perceptions of their leaders and increased engagement. Researchers investigating occupational stress have focused on the possible correlation and repercussions of workload during the last 40 years (Bowling et al., 2015). Bowling et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative meta-analysis of 336 articles and research studies regarding workload.

The researchers found that social support such as supervisor support and co-worker support was negatively related to workload (Bowling et al., 2015). The findings further indicated that role ambiguity, trait negative affectivity, role conflict, as well as work-family conflict (work-to-family and family-to-work) were positively related to workload (Bowling et al., 2015). The findings also evidenced that workload was negatively related to several indicators of physical and psychological well-being, as well as effective organizational commitment (Bowling et al., 2015). The workload was found to be positively related to turnover, intention, and absenteeism (Bowling et al., 2015).

Leadership perceptions influence employees' job satisfaction, and possibly their engagement. Černe, Dimovski, Maric, Penger, and Skerlavaj (2014) utilized a multilevel model to investigate cross-level interactions of leader self-perceptions as well as follower perceptions regarding authentic leadership and its effect on job satisfaction. The sample included 24 supervisors and 171 of their followers (Černe et al., 2014).

Hierarchical linear modeling revealed that perceptions of followers on authentic leadership predicted the job satisfaction of employees (Černe et al., 2014). The findings

further indicated that the interaction influence of the leader's self-perceptions and their followers' perceptions regarding authentic leadership predicted job satisfaction, whilst integrating both perspectives on authentic leadership (Černe et al., 2014). Polynomial regression analysis revealed that the similarity among the leaders' self-perceptions and their followers' perceptions on authentic leadership was advantageous and that both of these perceptions need to be at hand at increased levels in order to produce the optimal results for the job satisfaction of followers (Černe et al., 2014).

Leadership has underlying mechanisms that may be related to engagement and should be further investigated. Hansen, Byrne, and Kiersch (2014) aimed to investigate organizational identification as a possible underlying mechanism influencing how the perceptions of interpersonal leadership were linked to employee engagement. The study sample included 451 employees who were employed full-time at an international organization, who completed a survey (Hansen et al., 2014). Organizational identification moderated the relation among engagement and perceived interpersonal leadership (Hansen et al., 2014). Engagement moderated the relation among commitment and perceived interpersonal leadership (Hansen et al., 2014). Engagement also moderated the relation among job tension and identification (Hansen et al., 2014).

The implications included that leaders who encouraged employees to identify with the organization might encourage their engagement (Hansen et al., 2014). The researchers further stated that interpersonal leadership behaviors could be developed, and were positively associated with employees' commitment, identification, and engagement, which were all negatively associated with job tension (Hansen et al., 2014). Interpersonal

leaders were positively linked to employees' engagement, and high engagement was also associated with employee well-being and health (Hansen et al., 2014). Therefore, healthy employees result in a healthy society (Hansen et al., 2014).

Trust and the consistency of supervisors are important for employee engagement. Wang and Hsieh (2013) investigated the influence that authentic leadership exercised on employee engagement via employee trust by utilizing a quantitative research design. The researchers gathered data from a sample of 386 employees who were employed at the highest rated manufacturing and service companies in Taiwan (Wang & Hsieh, 2013). Wang & Hsieh (2013) utilized hierarchical multiple regression analysis in order to test their hypotheses.

Wang & Hsieh (2013) found that supervisors' moral perceptions were positively associated with employee engagement, and the results provided evidence to support that only the consistency of actions and words of supervisors was positively associated with employee trust (Wang & Hsieh, 2013). Employee trust was also positively associated with employee engagement and had a partial moderating impact on the relation between employee engagement and authentic leadership (Wang & Hsieh, 2013).

Shared leadership may have a positive effect on the performance of a team, and researchers and companies should consider it as a solution to increase performance. Hoch and Kozlowski (2014) empirically tested the effect of structural supports, traditional hierarchical leadership, as well as a shared team leadership dynamic on the performance of a team utilizing a sample of 101 simulated teams. The researchers

predicted structural supports, as well as a shared team leadership dynamic to be more significantly linked with team performance (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014).

The results indicated that the degree to which teams were simulated decreased the link significance among team performance and hierarchical leadership, yet increased the significance of the link between team performance and structural supports (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Alternatively, a shared team leadership dynamic was significantly linked with team performance despite the degree of simulation (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). The results of Hoch & Kozlowski's (2014) study provided evidence to support the significant positive effect of shared leadership on a team's performance, and researchers and organizations should consider it as a solution to increase performance.

Certain behaviors could also enhance trust between leader-employee relationships. Trust and other related notions had often been discussed as representatives of the behavior of effective leaders (Gordon, Gilley, Avery, Gilley, & Barber, 2014). Several notions associated with effective leadership were tested in order to determine which of these notions contributed to building trust among leaders and employees from the followers' perspective (Gordon et al., 2014).

The study sample included 409 participants who completed a questionnaire. Regression as well as structural equation modeling were utilized to test the hypotheses (Gordon et al., 2014). Gordon et al., (2014) found that when managers behaved ethically, positively influenced organizational culture, treated employees consistently and fairly, encouraged employee development and growth, and promoted work-life balance, it enhanced employees' perceptions of trust in their leaders. The results of the study

contributed to the literature through the validation of these distinct behaviors which model trust-building with employees (Gordon et al., 2014).

Passive leadership behavior could have psychological effects on perceptions of fairness and trust with employees. Very little research has been conducted on passive leadership in comparison with more active leadership styles, regardless of its continued presence in organizations (Holtz and Hu, 2017). However, Holtz & Hu (2017) aimed to determine the significant effect of passive leadership on perceptions of fairness and trust. The study sample included 192 participants who completed self-report questionnaires. The researchers utilized a three-wave survey methodology to provide temporary separation of the mediator, predictor, and outcome variables (Holtz & Hu, 2017).

The results indicated that cognition-based trust was negatively linked to passive leadership (Holtz & Hu, 2017). Furthermore, passive leadership put forth an indirect negative influence on the perceptions of justice of employees, via cognition-based trust (Holtz & Hu, 2017). Even though this study was specifically focused on employee perceptions, the self-report nature of data collection may have limited the results (Holtz & Hu, 2017). This study underpinned the negative effect of passive leadership on successful supervisor-employee relationships (Holtz & Hu, 2017). Employees distrust supervisors who utilized passive leadership behaviors, and a lack of trust could result in employees perceiving a supervisor as being unfair (Holtz & Hu, 2017).

It is possible that employees with certain personality types may automatically have a high level of work engagement, regardless of the perception of their leaders. Bakker, Demerouti, and Lieke (2012) investigated whether the link between job

performance and work engagement was mediated by the degree to which individuals were expected to work careful, hard, and goal-oriented. After a thorough review of the literature, the researchers predicted that conscientiousness strengthened the link between manager standards of contextual performance, task performance, and active learning and work engagement (Bakker et al., 2012). The sample for this study included 144 employees from a variety of occupations (Bakker et al., 2012). The researchers utilized moderated structural equation modeling and found that work engagement was positively linked to contextual performance, task performance, and active learning, specifically for employees who possessed high conscientiousness (Bakker et al., 2012). Conscientiousness is related to the desire to complete a task on high standards, and employees with this trait are organized and efficient (Bakker et al., 2012).

There may be solutions for the possible negative perceptions of employees in the public sector of their leaders. Jacobsen, Bøllingtoft, and Andersen (2016) stated that the discussion on whether leaders were born or made have been present for decades. It is worth investigating if a leadership training intervention has the potential to result in more active leadership behavior from the leaders, and if it can positively affect their employees' perception of them (Andersen et al., 2016). The researchers conducted a large-scale field experiment, including private and public sector leaders, who were grouped into a control group or one of three training intervention programs (Andersen et al., 2016). The training programs were either aimed at employee-perceived transformational leadership, or employee-perceived transactional leadership, or both (Andersen et al., 2016).

The participants were from different industries, including schools, tax agencies, banks, and day care centers (Andersen et al., 2016). All the participants (leaders and employees) completed surveys at baseline and after the intervening training programs (Andersen et al., 2016). The sample included 4,782 employees from 474 organizations, and the findings indicated that all three of the intervening leadership training programs greatly and positively affected the level of employee-perceived leadership, showing that leaders could be made (Andersen et al., 2016).

Palm, Ullström, Sandahl, and Bergman (2015) contributed to a deeper understanding of leadership improvement over time, as they also found the positive effect of a leadership improvement program. The authors aimed to explore how and if employees within a healthcare organization perceived fluctuation in the leadership behavior of their managers over time, and participants were the employees of managers who completed a developmental leadership program over the course of two years (Palm et al., 2015). The program was provided by Healthcare Provision Stockholm County, which employed the managers and the participants. Interviews were conducted with the employees, and qualitative content analysis was used to determine the results (Palm et al., 2015).

The findings revealed that most of the employees had perceived a change in their managers' leadership over time (Palm et al., 2015). The answers of the participants were mostly consistent, and with only a few exceptions, the changes were perceived as improvements (Palm et al., 2015). As employees perceived changes in the leadership

behaviors of their managers, the results of this study supported the investment in leadership courses or programs (Palm et al., 2015).

This section widely discussed the available research regarding leadership communication and employee perceptions thereof, the effect of trust, different leadership styles and behaviors, as well as possible solutions for improving employee perceptions. Bornman & Puth (2017) and Bowling et al., (2015) examined leadership communication. Bornman & Puth (2017) found that employees perceived their leaders did not correctly use leadership communication. Bowling et al. (2015) also found that clarity and communication are important aspects in the workplace.

Černe et al., (2014), Hansen et al., (2014), Wang & Hsieh (2013), and Hoch & Kozlowski (2014) examined the impact of leadership. Hansen et al. (2014) found that interpersonal leadership behaviors were positively associated with employees' engagement. Černe et al., (2014) found that perceptions of followers on authentic leadership predicted the job satisfaction of employees. Hoch & Kozlowski (2014) found the significant effect of shared leadership on a team's performance. Wang & Hsieh (2013) found that supervisor's moral perceptions were positively associated with employee engagement.

Passive leadership was found to have a negative effect on the trust of employees (Holtz & Hu, 2017). Employee trust was positively associated with employee engagement, and also had a moderating impact on the relation between employee engagement and authentic leadership (Wang & Hsieh, 2013). Gordon et al. (2014) found that when managers behaved ethically, positively influenced organizational culture,

treated employees consistently and fairly, encouraged employee development and growth, and promoted work-life balance, it enhanced employees' perceptions of trust in their leaders. Palm et al., (2015) and Andersen et al., (2016) contributed to a deeper understanding of leadership improvement, as they found the positive effect of a leadership improvement programs greatly and positively influenced the level of employee-perceived leadership. A plethora of research has been conducted on leadership, yet most of the research is of a quantitative nature. The effect of leadership on employees is inevitable, but there is a variety of solutions available to improve the conduct of leaders, and qualitative research will provide a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of leadership and employee engagement.

Employee Engagement and Transformational Leadership

Within the variety of leadership styles, transformational leadership may be the most appropriate style for employee engagement. Managers can foster appropriate leadership styles that have the ability to drive engagement, performance, as well as service-oriented behaviors (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Engagement may also be the tool through which human resource practices influence organizational and individual performance (Truss et al., 2013). Ethical leadership, behavior, and specifically integrity, are recognized to be fundamental for effective leaders (Lewis, 2017). Henkel (2016) found that transformational leadership positively influenced employee engagement, while critiques of the transformational leadership model propose that a transformational leader's focus on the organization may lead to an environment in which the leader devotes excessive time to evaluating performance and protecting hierarchies within the

organization, thus weeding out underperforming employees who fail to contribute to the efficiency of the organization, rather than creating sustainable growth (Allen, Moore, Moser, Neill, Sambamoorthi, & Bell, 2016). Transformational leadership, as opposed to transactional leadership, enhances engagement, also resulting in better job performance, organizational knowledge creation (Carasco-Saul, Kim, & Kim, 2015) and service climate (Kopperud, Martinsen, & Humborstad, 2014). More research is needed on the link between employee engagement and leadership (Carasco-Saul, Kim, & Kim, 2015).

Perceptions of corporate social responsibility and transformational leadership may enable and increase employee engagement. Organizational studies have previously examined transformational leadership as well as employee engagement as significant variables within this field (Besieux, Baillien, Verbeke, & Euwema, 2015). Besieux et al., (2015) posited that further research is required on the relationship between engagement and leadership, through all different hierarchical levels in organizations. The researchers investigated the leadership–engagement relationship more comprehensively and introduced corporate social responsibility perception as a mediator (Besieux et al., 2015). The study sample included 5,313 employees from a European bank, and the hypothesis was supported as corporate social responsibility perception had a mediating effect of the leadership-engagement relationship (Besieux et al., 2015). This study contributed to practice and theory through increasing the literature on the effectiveness of transformational leadership, particularly as an enabler for employee engagement (Besieux et al., 2015). The findings of this study also indicated the contribution of corporate social

responsibility perception and its mediating effect on the relationship between employee engagement and transformational leadership (Besieux et al., 2015).

Transformational leadership has been linked to several positive outcomes. Unfortunately, according to alternatives for leadership theory, certain circumstances may make it difficult, and even impossible for leaders to challenge and inspire their employees (Breevaart et al., 2016). Breevaart et al., (2016) hypothesized that behaviors related to transformational leadership and employee self-leadership strategies contributed to employee engagement as well as job performance. The researchers also suggested that behaviors related to transformational leadership may be more successful in circumstances or environments where employees had a great need for leadership and that self-leadership strategies may be more successful when employees had a lower need for leadership (Breevaart et al., 2016). The participants for this study included 57 distinctive leader-employee dyads who completed a diary survey every week for five consecutive weeks (Breevaart et al., 2016).

The researchers utilized multilevel structural equation modeling, and the findings indicated that when leaders exhibited increased transformational leadership behaviors and employees utilized more self-leadership strategies, employees showed increased work engagement and also received better performance assessments from their leaders (Breevaart et al., 2014). Moreover, the researchers found that behaviors related to transformational leadership were more successful for employees with a higher need for leadership and less successful for employees with a lower need for leadership (Breevaart

et al., 2014). The findings contributed insight on the role of employees within the process of transformational leadership (Breevaart et al., 2014).

In addition, Breevaart et al. (2014) highlighted the significance of everyday leadership for employees' everyday work engagement, and they contributed to the literature by investigating the everyday effect of contingent reward, transformational leadership, as well as active management-by-exception (MBE) on employees' everyday work engagement. The researchers compared the distinct influence of the above-mentioned leadership behaviors and focused on the workplace to determine how these leadership behaviors affected employees' everyday work engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014). The study sample included 61 naval cadets who completed a daily questionnaire while they were traveling on the sea for 34 days, and the researchers utilized multilevel regression analyses (Breevaart et al., 2014).

The findings indicated that cadets showed a higher level of engagement on days their leader exhibited increased transformational leadership behavior and offered contingent rewards (Breevaart et al., 2014). The findings were consistent after controlling for the employees' engagement of the previous day, and active MBE was not associated with employees' work engagement (Breevaart et al., 2014). The researchers concluded that transformational leadership as well as contingent reward, positively contributed to the workplace and environment regarding more support and autonomy, while active MBE leads to a less favorable working environment regarding less autonomy (Breevaart et al., 2014).

The results of Breevaart & Bakker's (2017) study provided evidence to support the significant effect that transformational leadership could have on employee engagement. Breevaart & Bakker (2017) utilized JD-R theory to integrate the challenge-hindrance stressor framework as well as leadership theory to examine the association of everyday transformational leadership behavior and employee engagement. The researchers hypothesized that everyday transformational leadership behavior would sustain the engagement of an employee on days specifically defined by increased challenges and would protect engagement on days specifically defined by increased hindrances (Breevaart & Bakker, 2017).

The participants included 271 teachers, who completed an online questionnaire every day after work for two weeks (Breevaart & Bakker, 2017). The researchers utilized moderated structural equation modeling to conduct the analysis, and the findings indicated that a teacher's daily challenges, such as cognitive demands and workload, had a positive relation with engagement when transformational leadership was increased (Breevaart & Bakker, 2017). Furthermore, the daily hindrances of a teacher such as role conflict had a negative relation with engagement when transformational leadership was decreased (Breevaart & Bakker, 2017). The findings indicated that the role of transformational leadership changes daily, and is also dependent on the sort of job demand (Breevaart & Bakker, 2017).

Organizational justice and transformational leadership may influence the well-being of employees. Perko, Kinnunen, Tolvanen, and Feldt (2016) aimed to examine the distinct benefits of fair and transformational leadership, such as the justice behaviors of

supervisors on exhaustion and engagement of employees, utilizing the Job Demands-Resources model. By defining the distinct benefits, the researchers also took the function of work characteristics into consideration (Perko et al., 2016). The study sample included 333 Finnish municipal employees, of which 87% were women, employed in various occupations (Perko et al., 2016). The employees were required to complete a questionnaire, and the researchers utilized fixed-order regression models to investigate the distinct benefits correlating latent factors (Perko et al., 2016).

The findings revealed that there were no stabilizing influences of transformational leadership over fair leadership regarding work engagement, which means that fair leadership influenced work engagement in a similarly positive manner (Perko et al., 2016). Alternatively, unfair leadership had an incremental fluctuating effect on exhaustion, above low indications of transformational leadership (Perko et al., 2016). The researchers concluded that fair and transformational leadership were interchangeable regarding positive well-being, whilst for health impairment, unfair leadership was more detrimental when compared to a lack of transformational leadership (Perko et al., 2016). Both leadership forms showed a relation with employee well-being, which was partially independent of the employees' work characteristics like autonomy, role clarity, and workload, corroborating the distinct function of leadership (Perko et al., 2016).

Organizations may need to focus equally on the engagement of their employees and their customers. Employees and leadership are important to create higher service orientation. Popli & Rizvi (2015) aimed to explore the relation among employee engagement, leadership, and service orientation, particularly in the private sector in India.

Furthermore, the researchers explored the possibility of engagement and leadership style to indicate service orientation within a specific cross section (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). The researchers utilized a single cross-sectional descriptive design, in combination with purposive sampling to determine the participants for the study (Popli & Rizvi, 2015).

The sample included 106 participants who were managers within the private sector in India, and several instruments were used to collect data, such as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, the Employee Engagement, as well as Service Orientation (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). The results indicated that service orientation was significantly correlated with employee engagement, and employee engagement was a significant indicator of service orientation (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). The other relations which were significantly and moderately correlated were employee engagement and transformational leadership, as well as service orientation and transformational leadership (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). The study highlighted the significant function of employee engagement and leadership regarding higher service orientation within a specific cross section (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). The moderating effect of employee engagement on the relation between service orientation and leadership style should be further researched through path analysis (Popli & Rizvi, 2015).

The preferred communication methods of transformational leaders may also have an effect on employee satisfaction. Men (2014) examined how leadership affected internal public relations through the association of utilizing communication channels, transformational leadership, symmetrical communication, as well as employee satisfaction. The researcher also investigated the success of a variety of internal

communication channels (Men, 2014). Participants included 400 employees who were employed at medium to large sized organizations within the United States, and they were required to complete a web survey (Men, 2014).

The findings indicated that transformational leadership positively affected the internal symmetrical communication of the company, as well as their employees' relational satisfaction (Men, 2014). Moreover, transformational leaders mostly utilized information-rich face-to-face forms of communication with followers (Men, 2014). The leaders' face-to-face communication was positively related to employee satisfaction, and employees also preferred emails for information regarding policies, new decisions, changes, or events from their company, followed by employee meetings, as well as interpersonal communication with their managers (Men, 2014).

Alternatively, relationships may have a greater effect on performance than transformational leadership. Even though transformational leadership was examined regarding higher level change at organizations, the literature is lacking on the effect of transformational leadership on lower levels (Carter et al., 2013). Carter et al., (2013) investigated the relationships between transformational leadership, change frequency, relationship quality, as well as the related change consequences, such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and task performance.

The relationships were observed during continued incremental organizational changes at low hierarchical levels (Carter et al., 2013). The study sample included 251 employees and 78 managers, and the results indicated that the quality of the relationships between the leaders and their followers moderated the effect of transformational

leadership regarding OCB and task performance (Carter et al., 2013). The researchers also discovered that the frequency of change mediated the positive link between relationship quality, OCB, and task performance, as links were stronger for higher change frequency (Carter et al., 2013).

The overall consensus in the literature was that transformational leadership behaviors had a significant positive effect on employee engagement. However, qualitative research on this phenomenon is still lacking. Alternatively, it was also found that the quality of the relationship between leaders and subordinates may be even more significant than transformational leadership behavior. Carter et al. (2013) found that the quality of the relationships between the leaders and their followers moderated the effect of transformational leadership regarding OCB and task performance. The preferred methods of communication of transformational leaders were also investigated. Transformational leaders mostly utilized information-rich face-to-face forms of communication with followers, which had a positive correlation with employee satisfaction (Men, 2014).

Factors Influencing Organizational Well-being

Organizational well-being is the result of every part of an organization functioning in harmony. Organizational well-being is focused on inter-communication or interactions and the quality of relationships between employees, supervisors, or the organization they are a part of (van De Voorde, et al., 2012). The well-being of employees in organizations can be defined as comprehensive aspects and the nature of employee experiences while working (Warr, 1987). Leaders and their organizations

strive to engage employees and increase organizational well-being to build and maintain a competitive edge. Through focusing on increasing employee engagement, a service organization will benefit from the way their employees behave towards customers (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Permarupan, Saufi, Kasim, and Balakrishnan, (2013) posited that there were causal links between employees work passion, commitment, and good organizational climate within organizations.

As a result of the effects of organizational well-being and climate, managers should exert certain behaviors. Mostafa and Gould-Williams (2014) stated that managers should facilitate better congruence between organizations and employees to achieve increased employee behaviors and attitudes. Srivastava, Ramachandran, & Suresh (2014) cautioned that the demographics of the workforce of certain countries had a significant influence on organizational culture, as well as employee engagement. A combined application of leadership style, job design, and human resource management could impact engagement positively (Imperatori, 2017). Furthermore, organizations with highly politicized internal environments create high levels of stress among employees (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017). There have been recommendations for future research on organizational climate specifically focused on elements that promote organizational commitment.

Happiness at work has been stated to be significant for engagement and the productivity of employees. Happiness and job satisfaction will be used interchangeably throughout the study. Simmons (2014) stated that there are strong beliefs regarding the happiness of employees, as the happiness of employees has an effect on the customers of

the organization. However, the empirical evidence regarding the long-term performance of organizations categorized as happy or satisfied is almost nonexistent (Simmons, 2014).

Research has shown that links between micro-level variables such as attitudes and emotions, and macro-level variables such as profit and market share were increasingly difficult to investigate (Simmons, 2014). Organizational happiness is vulnerable to the halo effect, which means that the happiness of employees is as likely to stem from organizational performance as being the cause of performance (Simmons, 2014). Further research is needed on this subject, as organizational happiness is significant, yet evidence on the consequences, meaning, as well as causes of happiness in the workplace remain elusive (Simmons, 2014). Should it be suggested that organizations need to focus on improving the happiness of their employees, there has to be evidence to show that happy employees are more productive, or result in profit (Simmons, 2014).

Other researchers also discussed the effect of happy employees. Oades and Dulagil (2017) postulated that organizational theory should move past the happy worker hypothesis to avoid individualistic fallacy. Individualist fallacy, in this case, refers to the phenomenon of mixing organization-level constructs with analysis at an individual level (Oades & Dulagil, 2017). Employee engagement needs to be further researched for clarification and conceptualization (Oades & Dulagil, 2017). Job satisfaction is also one of many important job attitudes (Oades & Dulagil, 2017). Job attitudes are linked with overall life satisfaction measures and are of high significance within organizational psychology, as they can predict behaviors which contribute to organizational culture and productivity (Oades & Dulagil, 2017).

Relational job characteristics may influence work engagement and commitment. Santos, Chambel, and Castanheira (2016) investigated work engagement as a possible moderator for the relationships between the effective commitment of nurses to their organization and their job characteristics. The results of previous research provided evidence to support that work engagement moderated the association between affective organizational commitment and job resources, yet job characteristics that could be job resources, had not been examined in relation to affective organizational commitment and work engagement among nurses (Santos et al., 2016). The researchers utilized a correlational design, as well as an online survey to collect data, and the study sample included 335 hospital nurses who completed the survey over several months in 2013 (Santos et al., 2016). The survey also included translations in Portuguese for the Relational Job Characteristics' Psychological Effects Scale, the Affective Organizational Commitment Scale, as well as the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Santos et al., 2016). The findings indicated that relational job characteristics effectively predicted affective commitment towards the hospital via the nurses' work engagement, and relational job characteristics contributed to the nurses' work engagement thus, contributed towards affective organizational commitment (Santos et al., 2016).

Job strain also influences the proactivity and engagement of employees. Schmitt, Den Hartog, and Belschak (2016) aimed to explore the function of work engagement as a mechanism for effective motivation, and that transformational leadership could be related to proactive behavior through work engagement. The researchers utilized a resource-based approach and hypothesized that employees invested in resources provided by work

engagement and were proactive, only if job strain was low (Schmitt et al., 2016).

Alternatively, high job strain was hypothesized to influence work engagement negatively,

and to be less likely to result in proactive behavior (Schmitt et al., 2016). The researchers

also expected that task-related job performance would be positively associated with work

engagement despite job strain (Schmitt et al., 2016).

The study sample included 148 employee-colleague dyads for data collection

through a multi-source field study (Schmitt et al., 2016). Principal employees completed

self-report surveys on their job strain, work engagement, as well as their perceptions of

their supervisor's transformational leadership behavior (Schmitt et al., 2016). The

participants who were colleagues of the principal staff reported employee proactivity,

such as personal voice behavior and initiative, as well as the core job performance of

principal staff (Schmitt et al., 2016). The findings indicated that transformational

leadership was positively related to work engagement and as a result, to proactivity

regarding voice behavior and personal initiative (Schmitt et al., 2016). Low job strain

was found to be a required precondition for engagement to result in higher proactivity, as

opposed to the association of core job performance and work engagement which was not

influenced by the level of job strain (Schmitt et al., 2016).

Job well-being and organizational climate are associated constructs, and different

climate types may influence well-being at work. Viitala, Tanskanen, and Säntti (2015)

investigated the possible relationships between well-being in the workplace and

organizational climate. The researchers used a quantitative research design and collected

data from 24 daycare centers in the public sector in Finland (Viitala et al., 2015). The

results revealed that various organizational climates were related to different sorts of job well-being. The various organizational climates were also related to cynicism and stress, yet they did not affect work engagement (Viitala et al., 2015). The employees who reported having a specifically weak working climate showed significantly low levels of well-being when compared to employees working at organizations with reported better working climates (Viitala et al., 2015). The climates reported to be the most positive, including descriptions such as friendly, relaxed, encouraging, and supportive of new ideas were more significantly related to well-being when compared to reported negative climates (Viitala et al., 2015).

Furthermore, abusive supervision in the workplace also has negative effects on employees. Jiang, Wang, and Lin (2016) extended the literature by investigating the link between career satisfaction and abusive supervision. The researchers used a social cognitive perspective to investigate if career self-efficacy mediated the link between career satisfaction and abusive supervision (Jiang et al., 2016). The researchers also investigated how proactive personality and organizational tenure moderated the hypothesized mediated relationship (Jiang et al., 2016).

The findings indicated that career self-efficacy mediated the link between career satisfaction and abusive supervision (Jiang et al., 2016). Moreover, proactive personality and organizational tenure attenuated the main influence of abusive supervision, as well as the indirect influence of career self-efficacy (Jiang et al., 2016). At any rate, the findings of these researchers provided fresh insight on career management, abusive supervision, and personality (Jiang et al., 2016).

There is still much research needed on organizational well-being and the influencing factors causing or preventing well-being. There were inconsistent views on the effect of happy employees on the well-being of an organization. Further research is needed on this subject, as organizational happiness is significant, yet evidence on the consequences, as well as causes of happiness in the workplace, remain elusive (Simmons, 2014). Oades & Dulagil (2017) postulated that organizational theory should move past the happy worker hypothesis to avoid individualistic fallacy. Viitala et al. (2015) found that organizational climates that were reported to be the most positive, included descriptions such as friendly, relaxed, encouraging, and supportive of new ideas and were more significantly related to well-being when compared to reported negative climates.

Summary

This comprehensive review of the literature provided a significant amount of information and provided evidence to support the need for further research on variables such as employee engagement in the public sector, how the perceptions of employees of their leaders influence their work engagement, as well as other aspects influencing organizational well-being. There is a plethora of variables that influence employee engagement in an organization, and there is also a wide range of repercussions for high and low employee engagement respectively. The literature revealed that it may be more difficult to keep employees engaged in the public sector when compared to the private sector. Agyemang & Ofei (2013) reported that employees at private organizations had a greater level of engagement and commitment when compared to employees from public organizations.

Regarding employee engagement in the public sector, Jin & McDonald (2016) found that supervisor and organizational support was mediated through learning opportunities, as such that the positive relation was invigorated for individuals who reported that they had opportunities to grow and learn in their workplace. Alternatively, Eldor & Harpaz (2016) concluded that the link among employee performance behaviors and learning climate was more complicated than previously stated within the literature.

This review of the literature also widely discussed leadership, and employees' perception, as well as the effect of trust, different leadership styles and behaviors, and possible solutions for improving employees' perceptions. Employee trust was positively associated with employee engagement, and also had a moderating impact on the relation between employee engagement and authentic leadership (Wang & Hsieh, 2013). Gordon et al. (2014) found that when managers behaved ethically, positively influenced organizational culture, treated employees consistently and fairly, encouraged employee development and growth, and promoted work-life balance, it enhanced employees' perceptions of trust in their leaders.

Palm et al. (2015) and Andersen et al. (2016) contributed to a deeper understanding of leadership improvement, as they found the positive effect of leadership improvement programs greatly and positively influenced the level of employee-perceived leadership. Furthermore, the overall consensus in the literature was that transformational leadership behaviors had a significant positive effect on employee engagement. Alternatively, it was also found that the quality of the relationship between leaders and subordinates may be even more significant than transformational leadership behavior.

Carter et al. (2013) found that the quality of the relationships between the leaders and their followers moderated the effect of transformational leadership regarding task performance. It was also found that transformational leaders mostly utilized information-rich face-to-face forms of communication with followers, which had a positive correlation with employee satisfaction (Men, 2014).

Fletcher et al. (2016) recommended that future research should attempt to gain insight into the link between engagement and public service motivation, as well as examining engagement over different services in the public sector. There is still much to discover on employee engagement, and further research is needed within the public sector of America. A plethora of research has been conducted on leadership, and while its effect on employees is inevitable, there is also a variety of solutions available to improve the conduct of leaders. Furthermore, it was concluded that there is still much research needed on organizational well-being and the influencing factors causing or preventing well-being.

There were inconsistent views on the effect of happy employees on the well-being of an organization. Further research is needed on this subject, as organizational happiness is significant, yet evidence on the consequences, meaning, as well as causes of happiness in the workplace remain elusive (Simmons, 2014). Viitala et al. (2015) found that organizational climates that were reported to be the most positive included descriptions such as friendly, relaxed, encouraging, and supportive of new ideas.

Overall, the review of the literature produced a variety of quantitative studies, yet very little research on employee engagement and transformational leadership has been

conducted using qualitative methodology. On the contrary, the literature review

identified gaps for further research in areas such as transformational leadership and

employee engagement levels, trust, and transparency in the workplace. My current study

may provide a deeper understanding, and fill a gap in the literature on leadership,

employee perceptions, and engagement.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees in the public sector who have negative perceptions of their leaders. Negative employee perceptions of managers may promote disengagement on the part of those employees, and the lived experience of this phenomenon may help to better understand engagement levels in the workplace.

This chapter presents the study's methodology. I restate the research question and explain the strategy for participant solicitation and selection. I discuss the strategy for population and sampling, including inclusion criteria. I also present and explain construction of the interview protocol and discuss data collection procedures, followed by an overview of the data analysis method employed. I addition, I explain measures for data trustworthiness and ethical safeguards.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question for this qualitative phenomenological study was:

RQ: What is the lived experience in the workplace of employees who hold

negative perceptions about their leaders in the government sector?

This research question was qualitative in nature, as it asked specifically *what* is to be understood rather than how much, as would be the case in quantitative inquiry. Critical aspects of quantitative inquiries include the isolation and definition of variables, as well as variable categories that are linked together to frame hypotheses, often before the data are collected, and are then tested upon the data (Brannen, 2016). In contrast, qualitative

researchers begin with defining very broad concepts and as the research progresses may change their definition (Brannen, 2016).

The phenomenological approach was best for the research question of this study because it is an inquiry into the lived experiences of a group of people experiencing the phenomenon of disengagement. It also enabled me to enter into the study with an open mind to clearly see and understand what was investigated (see Maxwell, 2013). The research question was answered via a qualitative phenomenological interview-based approach (see Moustakas, 1994). Such an approach is appropriate when a researcher wants to examine a phenomenon, occurrence, or situation through the lived experiences of those who were affected by and/or experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Other qualitative approaches would not have been as useful. A case study approach would not have worked well for the study because the phenomenon was the focus, not where or to whom it occurred. Additionally, case study research is a comprehensive method that incorporates multiple sources of data (i.e., primary and secondary) to provide detailed accounts of complex research in real-life contexts (Morgan et al., 2016), and questions are more direct.

Narrative research gathers stories of experiences that might have been useful but would not have answered the research question as precisely as the interview-based inquiry did. Ethnography would have been inappropriate because I did not seek to understand a particular class, group, or culture's experiences. Finally, grounded theory was not needed because the concepts used from chosen theories to build the conceptual framework worked well for this study, and there was no need to generate new theory.

The phenomenon explored was disengagement through the lived experiences of employees who had negative perceptions of their leader in the workplace, and how this might negatively affect employee job satisfaction. This was a phenomenon in that it was an occurrence that was happening to a particular group of people. I used the qualitative phenomenological approach in this study. To understand a phenomenon, it is often best to do so by examining the persons who have experienced or are experiencing it (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). Such an examination is best done via face-to-face semistructured interviews (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). I recorded the interviews of persons affected by the phenomenon and subjected the transcriptions to in-depth thematic analysis.

There is a robust tradition in phenomenological inquiry as a research method (Moustakas, 1994). Such an approach employs a small sample size and uses an in-depth examination of each member of the sample, as opposed to quantitative approaches that use large sample sizes and may only find out a few, preselected factors about each participant. The quantitative approach can be useful, and if a researcher uses a well-crafted survey instrument can uncover nuanced data. However, a researcher can be limited to information obtained from survey questions, as opposed to interviews, which are reactive situations of social interaction in which discussions about behavior and perceptions can be influenced by the interview process itself (Nardi, 2018).

The qualitative interview approach provides for the greatest level of understanding precisely because it does not limit beforehand the types of data collected or the themes or concepts explored. The researcher can often be surprised by the results of qualitative phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, I had no

preconceived notions about how negative perceptions do or should affect employees. Such a perspective going in provides the most fertile ground for inquiry and the best potential for new and valuable findings.

The above is not to say that the phenomenon could not be effectively explored by other means. Qualitative phenomenology had the best potential to answer my research question and address the study's purpose. The findings of this study were not definitive and were used to recommend further inquiry into the subject, perhaps by using other research designs.

The review of the literature showed that most inquiries into employee job satisfaction and job engagement have been quantitative in nature and used previously validated survey instruments. The goal of these studies was to establish correlations, for example, if certain workplace conditions affected employee job satisfaction. This could have been a possible approach for my study except for the fact that there is no validated survey instrument to measure employees' negative perceptions of leaders and how those perceptions affect employee disengagement. Furthermore, the study explored the effect of *X* on *Y*, which is a fundamental approach in quantitative research. However, the *X*, disengagement of employees, was measured qualitatively rather than quantitatively, as answers to the research question were tested against additional evidence and possible validity threats (see Maxwell, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary data collection and analysis instrument in a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). As the researcher, I sustained

an empathic neutrality through which I used personal insight while maintaining a

nonjudgmental stance and providing a holistic perspective within explained contexts (see

Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). In this role, the focus was on enhancing

competency methods to successfully conduct scholarly qualitative research. It included a

robust evaluation of the following factors:

1. population/sample size,

2. site selection (type of organization and geographical location),

3. conducting interviews with participants,

4. collecting and analyzing data,

5. addressing and mitigating biases, and

6. presenting findings.

To undertake a study using hermeneutic phenomenology, it is important to apply

the skill of reading texts, such as the text of transcripts and spoken accounts of personal

experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Van Manen (2016) categorized this as isolating

themes that can be viewed as written interpretations of lived experiences. In the

application of hermeneutic phenomenology, the requirement is to examine the text and to

reflect on the content to discover something telling, meaningful, and thematic (Van

Manen, 2016). Philosophical hermeneutics does not assume an absolute position of the

researcher but presents a way of experience, and it entails that there is no higher principle

than sustaining openness in a conversation (Gadamer, 1977). Philosophical hermeneutics

is thus a radical departure from traditional ethics, which tends to deal with the

abstraction, identification, and articulation of values, principles, and rules that frame the

right actions (Gill, 2015). In employing hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology, data are often found by using the techniques of personal interviewing, analyzing written accounts such as documents or diaries, and/or by making observations of subjects in contexts or environments (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Hermeneutics evolves into a methodology by providing the best opportunity to give voice to the experiences of research participants in the study. In isolating phenomenal themes, I rewrote themes while interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon or lived experience (see Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

The hermeneutic approach was best for the research question because meaning is derived by living in the world. The focus was on the phenomenon and what was already known, and I added to what was known with the findings. The hermeneutic approach is known as interpretive, existential, or Heideggerian phenomenology (Laverty, 2003). The hermeneutic approach deals with interpreting the texts of life and emphasizes language (Laverty, 2003).

The transcendental approach would not have been useful. The transcendental approach focuses on the person and the person's perceptions rather than the phenomenon itself, with meaning being derived purely as a mental process within the person in developing particular perceptions. The transcendental approach is known as pure, descriptive, or Husserlian phenomenology (Laverty, 2003). The transcendental approach deals with understanding human experience and focuses on the development of a perspective (Laverty, 2003).

Collins and Cooper (2014) explored the idea of refining the role of the researcher using emotional intelligence as a framework to enhance the connection between humans in qualitative research. The ability to connect with others from the framework of emotional intelligence was helpful in my role. The application of active listening skills during interviews allows for greater understanding of experiences from participants (Collins & Cooper, 2014). Acquiring these skills and subsequently improving them through research practice may contribute to increased competency levels during the qualitative inquiry.

I had no personal or professional relationships with participants, including no supervisory or instructional relationships. However, I possess a significant amount of experience in the respective research field, which may have contributed to confirmation of preconceived biases. I employed alternative strategies such as *epoché* to prevent this from influencing findings during the research process and achieving the ultimate aim of promoting rigor, reliability, and validity in exploring and understanding participants' accounts (Darawsheh, 2014). Epoché allowed me to be bias-free to describe the reality from an objective prospective (see Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). I bracketed my own experience and knowledge associated with the phenomenon to understand the participants' experiences entirely (see Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

There were three criteria for participant inclusion. The first criterion was they needed to be currently working as a full-time employee at a medium-sized federal

organization in Washington, DC. The second criterion for inclusion was they were full-time federal employees who worked at one of two directorates within the organization. The third criterion for inclusion was that the participants had negative perceptions of their employer. This was screened for by asking potential participants if they do have such negative perceptions during the initial solicitation process.

Purposive sampling was used to solicit participants. This strategy is best because I must first determine that the study criteria are met. The sample was selected from a population of approximately 100-120 employees. The first 20 participants who met that criterion and expressed interest in participating in the study were selected. Exclusion criterion omitted participants who work part-time at the organization, those who have positive perceptions of their leaders' actions, and those who are engaged in their workplace. All participants who wish to be in the study were considered if they met the criterion, with the exception of senior management, who were not contacted for participation.

I contacted Directors within the organization and ask for permission to solicit participants via email. The solicitation letter included a request for the director to include a list of employee email addresses. Each directorate has approximately 50-60 employees, and upon obtaining such permission, I emailed a description of the study to each participant, along with an informed consent form. Solicitation continued until the needed sample size of 20 participants (Francis et al. 2010; Moustakas, 1994) was reached. I sent an email to all potential participants outlining the purpose and goal of the study, and what

was required of participants. Participants were asked to provide contact information so that I could schedule interviews.

The sample size of 20, or until data saturation occurs, should be sufficient for an interview-based phenomenological inquiry, as that is the sample size usually needed for data saturation in that type of research (Francis et al., 2010; Moustakas, 1994). It is best to be on the high side of this range to provide rich, thick description. While I aimed for a sample size of 20, I conducted the study as long as a minimum of 15 participants were available. I did not anticipate any difficulty in achieving this sample, as I selected a medium-sized federal organization that employs 100 people or more within its sub-component organizations.

Unless unusual difficulty arose in participant solicitation, I attempted to balance the 20 participants equally between two directorates. This was an effort to provide equal representation from each entity. The premise is that employees' negative experiences may be related to particular characteristics of the organization; therefore, it is best to have 10 participants from each, to ensure data equality.

I obtained permission from management to send emails to all employees of the organization at a level below senior management. I provided management a written explanation of the study's purpose and method and what was expected of participants. No part of the study, including participant solicitation, commenced without such permission being obtained, or IRB approval. Should permission to conduct the study be denied, I contacted another directorate within the organization.

Participants were emailed an informed consent form that provided a detailed explanation of the study, its purpose, and what was required of participants. Ethical and privacy issues were explained. An informed consent form was provided. No participant was included in the study without a signed copy of the form. This can be in the form of a physical signature on a hard copy or an electronic signature on a computer file document.

Length of time in service with the organization and/or under a given supervisor could affect how much information a participant is able to provide. However, I did not adjust for job tenure other than to implement the minimum criterion of having been employed full-time at the organization for at least one year, as turnover percentages may be higher than normal employee attrition.

Likewise, the measure of job satisfaction and job engagement were left to the participants to informally self-report. The measure of job satisfaction is in regard to one's feelings or state of mind regarding the nature of his or her work (Peng, et al., 2016). Job engagement is argued to be the physical, emotional, and cognitive energy that individuals employ on a work assignment (Kahn, 1990). Job engagement can be seen as a motivational concept that characterizes the active employment of personal resources toward the tasks associated with a work role (Christian et al., 2011). There are existing validated quantitative survey instruments to measure these factors, and they have been used in mixed-methods studies. However, I felt that the data collected were more nuanced and provided more depth if it was exclusively qualitative coming from the participants in their own words.

Instrumentation

   Semistructured, face-to-face interviews were the primary data collection method. If face-to-face interviews are not possible, I Skyped with participants as a secondary data collection method. Participants were full-time employees who worked at one of two directorates within a medium-sized federal organization in Washington, DC. In both directorates, employees, regardless of their relative positions in the hierarchy, were treated equally for participation. All data from those employees were treated as having equal importance. Participants employed at the organization for less than a year were not included in the study.

   The interviews were scheduled individually at the convenience of the participants. Interviews took place offsite at a neutral location of mutual choosing for 45-60 minutes. I used open-ended questions from a researcher-constructed interview protocol and asked probing questions when warranted. I audio-recorded the interviews for later transcription and analysis. The interviews were conducted using a researcher-constructed instrument, and a preview of the interview protocol (Appendix A) is given below:

1. Tell me what it is like to work in your organization.

2. From your experience, how do you think the actions of leaders contribute to your perceptions?

3. How do you think your perceptions influence your job performance?

4. What do you think your Directorate could change to increase your organizational commitment?

The interviews took 45-60 minutes, and I devoted approximately 10 minutes to each of these discussions. The remaining time was allotted for further clarification and discussion. The participants were allowed at this time to take the discussion in a new direction if they chose.

As previously stated, the site for each interview was offsite at a mutually agreed location. Should the schedule of a participant not allow that, I made other arrangements, including possibly conducting the interview by telephone. I took notes as well as audio record the interviews. Two recorders were available in case one malfunctions, and these data were used to augment the thematic analysis.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited via an email that was sent via organizational channels. Permission was obtained from supervisors before doing so. The email explained the purpose and objectives of the study, what was required of participants, and how to contact me. No inducements were offered for participation, and potential participants were assured that their anonymity would be protected. Negative consequences did not accrue to participants as a result of their participation. At this time, I scheduled the interviews. I intended to make myself available for interviews at the widest range of times possible. While it is the intent to hold face-to-face meetings, the interviews can be held via telephone if scheduling conflicts prevent a face-to-face interview.

Seniority, position, and tenure were factors for inclusion or exclusion. This was explained in the email sent to potential participants. Senior management personnel was

excluded from this study, defined as vice president, director, comptroller, department

manager, or president; the study focused on employees in nonsupervisory positions.

All interviews were recorded. If the participant did not consent to be recorded, I

took written notes to capture the employee's lived experience and confirm the accuracy

of written comments using the member checking process at the end of the interviews.

The interview phase of the study took four to six weeks. For the single research question,

the data collection process came through interview questions, and I was the sole collector

of the data.

Should the participant selection process result in too few participants, I may add a

third directorate to recruitment efforts. As I intended to send email solicitations to all

potential participants in a given organization, it was assumed that all those who might be

interested in the study had been contacted, and no further recruitment efforts were made

within that directorate. As the federal employment sector is large, there should be no

problem eventually obtaining enough participants though the recruitment process may be

protracted.

Participants were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and

could be withdrawn at any time. This included declining to participate in the interviews,

withdrawing from the interviews in progress, or withdrawing permission for data to be

used in the study. All such requests were honored without reservation.

Participants were debriefed at the end of the interview phase, at which time I

informally compared notes with the participants. Member checking is the process of

taking ideas back to research participants for their confirmation, and/or to gather material

to elaborate established categories; it is accurately interpreting what the participant meant rather than specific words (Charmaz, 2006; Harvey, 2015). It is also known as member validation, described by Richards (2003), as aiming to seek views of participants on accuracy of data gathered, descriptions, or even interpretations, which is further cited in the seminal works of Lincoln & Guba (1985).

I contacted a medium-sized federal organization in Washington, DC as the primary plan for the interviews was to conduct them face-to-face. The solicitation plan allowed for 10 participants from each of two directorates within the organization. While one directorate alone might provide enough participants, I felt it was better to use more than one. The phenomenon as described at any one directorate may be atypical, and selecting two directorates helps to adjust for that possibility.

Any potential participants who expressed interest beyond the initial purposive sample were placed on a list of potential alternate participants. These alternate participants could be contacted for inclusion if:

- one directorate does not supply enough participants,

- a participant withdraws from the study, or

- it becomes impossible to schedule an interview with a participant.

All those who expressed interest in the study, whether they were ultimately participants or not, were asked if they wish to be informed of the study's results. I emailed electronic copies of the completed study to all who requested it (after the study is approved for publication). The leaders of the organizations were provided an executive summary and the link in ProQuest to the study.

Data Analysis Plan

Heidegger (1962) redefined hermeneutics as a way of studying all human activities. It is the basis for interpretation, with the aim of allowing the text to speak for itself (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009). This approach allows for the lived experience to speak for itself while contextualizing them and providing greater meaning of the phenomenon under review (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009). Through the engagement of text, I brought a horizon of experience forward to understand its meaning (Plauche, Marks, & Hawkins, 2016). Exploration of lived experiences utilizing imagination, the hermeneutic circle, and attention to language (Laverty, 2003) interpreted meaning by unifying the text and its context.

In society today, it can be a challenge to understand something without presuppositions. Johnson (2000) posited that we could not understand anything from a purely objective position. Instead, we always understand from within the context of our disposition and involvement in the world (Johnson, 2000). I constructed reality from the employee experiences of being in the world (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009).

A circle of readings, reflective writing, and interpretations were utilized. I conversed about the experience, and a reflective journal was used to engage a hermeneutic circle (Laverty, 2003). This interpretive process continued to reach understandable meanings of the experience and account for my position and trace my movement (Laverty, 2003; Kafle, 2013). The multiple stages of interpretation and the

interpretive process are significantly important (Laverty, 2003). In addition, it is essential to discuss how interpretations rise from the data (Laverty, 2003).

Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed them into written form from the audio recordings. I sent the transcripts via email to each participant, asking them to confirm that the transcripts were accurate, conclusions about the data were correct, and nothing significant had been left out within five days of receipt. Upon receiving that confirmation, transcript verification continued to ensure that I had captured the meaning of what the participant said, as described under procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. This occurred in the form of follow-up emails to participants and/or scheduled meetings for an estimated time of 15-20 minutes.

The data were analyzed using a six-step thematic coding process as per Braun & Clarke (2006). While these researchers were oriented toward the field of psychology, their suggested analysis methods have been used in a large number of studies. Their six-step method has been particularly popular for qualitative phenomenology. The method involves a series of discrete phases of analysis. These steps are part of the process of thematic coding, which is a kind of shorthand whereby I condensed the interview transcripts (or other similar data) into a series of short phrases, or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six steps of Braun and Clarke's thematic coding process were as follows:

1. Become fully immersed and actively engaged in the data by transcribing the interview data and then reading and re-reading the transcripts and/or listening to the recordings. This is the precursor to the initial coding phase. At this time,

I formulated the initial concepts that were used in the thematic analysis. I took notes while reading or listening to the data. These notes proved valuable when executing the second phase.

2. Assign preliminary codes to the data. These are more specific than themes (to be determined later in the process) and are therefore more numerous. Examples that might be used in the present study could include *frustration, anger, conflict resolution, lack of communication*, and so forth. These codes (e.g., single word or short phrases) were used to generate themes.

3. Sort the codes into themes. Such themes are short phrases that can be used to classify the codes. Examples for the current study could be "my boss does not communicate well," or "I feel frustrated when my supervisor assigns tasks with impossible deadlines." They could also be simple phrases such as "lack of engagement," or "lack of satisfaction." However, it is not possible, nor should it be attempted to determine ahead of time what these themes are or should be.

4. Second phase- thematic coding. I determined whether to refine (alter), combine, separate, or eliminate the themes initially identified. At this point, the goal was to make sure that the data classified within the themes were coherent and supported the thematic classifications. The themes should be distinguished between each other. This was done in two iterations: First, the themes were checked against the coded data extracts, and next, they were

checked against the overall data set. It is useful at this point for me to outline my analysis in a thematic map or chart.

5. Further define the themes and subthemes. This is also known as refining the data analysis. At this point, all themes were clearly defined, and I should have no doubt about which data belongs under which thematic classification. I analyzed the themes and thematic pairings for importance based on such criteria as frequency of mention.

6. Presentation of the results. The results were presented in such a way that readers could easily follow my reasoning process. Such a presentation should, if an interview protocol was used to gather data, include relevant excerpts from the transcripts. These illustrated the major themes that were identified in the analysis. The presentation did not merely list the themes but also supported the analysis in a convincing manner. The writing was compelling and illustrated my thought process. In this study, the presentation of the results will be in Chapter 4.

The coding process was aided by the use of NVivo, an analysis software tool.

The coding process took place independently of any preconceived direction or expectation on my part. However, the thematic analysis was done to answer the research question. In such an analysis, I was careful not to force the interpretation of the data. I must also allow for the data, not answering the research question and the possibility that one or more interviewees did not supply much useful information. This is a feature as

well as a hazard of qualitative inquiry, in that one does not know in advance what the data collected will say, or if it will be useful (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Moustakas, 1994).

In the thematic analysis phase, any theme that has a low frequency of mention was given less weight. Conversely, themes that are mentioned often were given more weight. After the first five steps were completed and before writing the results, I engaged in a second round of coding after putting aside the work for a few days before commencing this second round as a way of maintaining a fresh perspective on the next round (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). As thematic coding is a subjective process, it is best to mitigate that element of subjectivity by repeating the analysis Moustakas, 1994. Reaching the same conclusions about the data upon reiteration served to confirm the analysis, or reaching different conclusions may serve as a reason to study that aspect of the data in greater depth. To use themes to answer the research question, I reviewed the recorded transcript and looked for word repetitions or frequencies of phrases and technical terms. Additionally, I compared and contrasted information that may be the same or different from participants. All information was used during the coding process later in the analysis.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the data depends on several factors. These factors refer to the scholarly rigor with which the research was conducted. Elements of this include checking the data collected and using whatever means are at hand to verify that it was collected accurately. Furthermore, trustworthiness of the data is

enhanced by detailed descriptions of the study. I can take several specific steps to ensure data trustworthiness; these are described below.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the data collected are believable from the point of view of the participant. In other words, are the data, as collected and represented, congruent with what the participant thinks he/she has provided? The only way to assure this in qualitative interview-based research is by asking the participants after data collection. This was done by member checking immediately after each interview. In addition, participants were emailed the transcripts of the interviews and asked to check them for accuracy.

The necessity for member checking lies in the fact that even recorded and verbatim-transcribed conversations can be misinterpreted. Member checking simply verified that I had accurately recorded the data, but it could capture errors that, if left unchanged, could skew the data. The member checking step took a few minutes per interview and should not unduly inconvenience the participants.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the study's findings can be generalized to other populations. In qualitative research, this is assured by making sure that the populations studied are not unusual or atypical insofar as the study problem is concerned. I selected the study sites intending to ensure that the employees at those sites were representative of federal employees in general.

The phenomenon of negative workplace experiences is all but universal. At one time or another, just about every employee is dissatisfied with his/her supervisor. However, in the event a participant answered any interview question that would indicate positive perceptions of their leader, the interview was terminated at that point, and a substitute participant contacted.

Dependability

Dependability is the extent to which the research could be replicated and would obtain similar results with a similar population. A qualitative study cannot be exactly replicated, but I ensured that others could follow in my footsteps with a robust and detailed description of the study from start to finish. This included a detailed explanation of my thematic coding.

Further dependability is assured by a robust and complete description of the study's methods, which is given in this chapter. In addition, in Chapter 4, a detailed discussion of my coding methods and thematic analysis will be given. The idea is that future researchers could replicate the study and, while not imitating the current study's analysis methods, could make their studies similar enough so that their results could be compared with the results of this study.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of the study could be confirmed or corroborated by others. While qualitative research assumes that each researcher brings a unique perspective, confirmability can be enhanced by complete and thorough documentation of the research process. Furthermore, I must ask if biases exist

or if there are existing prejudices in any way; not so much to try to eliminate that bias (which is impossible), but to allow for it in the analysis. In addition, I was particularly vigilant for outliers and anomalies in the data that might suggest flaws in the analysis.

In qualitative thematic analysis, the codes and themes generated had a subjective element to them because every researcher interpreted the transcripts differently. This cannot be avoided. However, it can be allowed if I write the results of the study in such a way that my reasoning during the data analysis process can be followed.

Ethical Procedures

This study was submitted to the Walden University IRB for review and approval before commencing any part of it. The approval number was 08-27-19-0496129. The completion date of NIH refresher training occurred in February/March 2019. Approval has been obtained from leadership of the organization where the study took place to solicit participants. A detailed explanation of the study procedures and ethical safeguards was provided. The participant recruitment emails contained a similar explanation. Potential participants were assured at that time that their participation was strictly voluntary and that no penalty accrued to those who did not wish to participate or who initially decided to participate but then withdrew from the study.

In addition, no incentives were offered to participants. Should a participant withdraw from the study, I solicited replacement participants from within the same directorate if possible. The option remained of including a third directorate in participant solicitation efforts.

The data were anonymous and confidential. It was not possible to identify the participants from the data. Participant privacy and confidentiality were maintained at all times. Participants were referred to in the study only by assigned code numbers.

While I gathered contact information during the solicitation phase, I kept that information private and destroyed it immediately upon conclusion of the interview phase. In addition, if during the interviews, participants inadvertently identified themselves by name, that information was not included in the transcripts. The same was true of any information that could be used to identify the directorate, either directly or inferentially.

Participants were assured of their privacy and that no harm accrued to them as a result of participation on the study. Furthermore, participants were informed of the potential societal benefits of the study. Rewards nor inducements were offered to participants. The informed consent form outlined the purposes and methods of the study. All participants were asked to sign and return the form (via email).

No participant was interviewed without a signed copy of the form. The data were kept in a locked file cabinet (physical data) and a password-protected computer (electronic data) to which only I shall have access. Five years from the completion of the study, all physical data were destroyed, and all electronic data were erased.

I had no personal or professional relationships with the agency directorates or the participants to be studied. There should be no issues of power relationships or asymmetry of authority, as participants were assured that participation in the study had nothing to do with their job obligations or functions. Participants were assured that if they felt reluctant to talk about their jobs, they were allowed to withdraw from the study.

The phone interview was offered as an alternative option to mitigate participant reluctance and to prevent participants from being seen.

There is one ethical issue that is peculiar to this type of setting. The participants were asked about their negative perceptions of their leaders. This is a potentially sensitive topic and one that they may not feel entirely comfortable discussing. In a way, the solicitation process served as a screening mechanism, as it was made clear that I asked participants to talk about such perceptions. Presumably, anyone who feels uncomfortable discussing such matters would not respond to the solicitation in the first place.

There is also the issue of perceived fear that potential participants may be harmed. They may be reluctant to be open as complaints could be heard by that person or the person who made them could be identified. To minimize any potential risk, I endeavored at all times to carefully protect the identities of the participants. Beyond the initial contact information, I did not maintain any personal data on the participants. All participants were assigned a code number and were referred to individually by that number only. We did not meet in or near their organization at any time.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology for the proposed study, which was a hermeneutic phenomenological study using a researcher-constructed interview protocol. The population was full-time federal employees who work at two directorates (100+ employees) in the Washington, DC area. Sampling was purposive, to reach the contemplated sample size of 20. I used face-to-face interviews based on a

researcher-constructed protocol to ensure consistency from participant to participant.

The data were transcribed by me for thematic analysis to answer the research question.

Thematic analysis involves the search for and identification of common threads that

extend across an entire interview or set of interviews (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000) based

on the participants' lived experiences. Trustworthiness and ethical procedures were

explained to include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The following chapter presents the results of the study. My analysis, procedures,

and findings will be presented. The research question will be discussed and answered.

Results will be presented in tabular form where appropriate, to illustrate the thematic

coding process.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees in the public sector who have negative perceptions of their leaders. Phenomenological studies are most suitable for examining the lived experiences in the workplace of employees. Through a qualitative study with a hermeneutic phenomenological research design, I explored the phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees in the public sector who have negative perceptions of their leaders. The research question for the study was as follows:

RQ: What are the lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders in the government sector?

In this chapter, I provide a short description of both the setting and the participants' demographics. Information regarding how data were collected follows. I then describe the data analysis process, after which I discuss evidence of trustworthiness. I discuss the results in detail, which were the themes resulting from the 20 individual in-depth interviews with federal employees. To close this chapter, I provide a summary of the findings.

Research Setting

Interviews were held in discreet, neutral locations, off-site in private meeting rooms, restaurants, or coffee shops of the participant's choosing to avoid potential embarrassment, fear, damage to professional reputation, and/or harm. When it was not possible to conduct a face-to-face interview, video teleconferencing occurred via Skype

at the convenience of the participant, but only for the audio portion. The audios were recorded, and transcriptions and notes were indicated by the pseudonyms given to each participant. No personal names were used on the data collected. I have the master list stored in a secured location in my home office, and I have taken the necessary provisions to minimize the risks. Voluntary participation as noted in the solicitation/consent letter was e-mailed to all employees. Identity and identifiable information (e.g., assignment of pseudonyms) were protected.

Demographics

There were three criteria for participant inclusion. The first criterion was they needed to be currently working as a full-time employee at a medium-sized federal organization in Washington, DC. The second criterion was they were full-time federal employees who worked at one of two directorates within the organization. The third criterion included only those participants who had negative perceptions of their employer. Participants with negative perceptions were identified through their understanding of the purpose of the study as indicated on consent forms. There were 13 females and seven males.

Table 1

Demographics

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	7	35%
Female	13	65%

Data Collection

To achieve the goal of 20 participants, the head of the organization agreed to provide me with a list of all employee e-mail addresses. I sent an e-mail to employees in two directorates informing them of the nature of the research study. Returned consent forms indicated participant interest. The participants met the criteria as described in the solicitation/consent form and had negative perceptions of their leaders. In deciding which participants to use as consent forms came in, I reconfirmed the above-stated criteria in a subsequent e-mail and removed participants if informed they were not interested.

A subsequent e-mail was sent to schedule face-to-face interviews. The solicitation/consent form informed participants that participation in the study was voluntary. In addition, the solicitation/consent form discussed minimal risks. There were 14 face-to-face and six telephonic interviews. The face-to-face interviews occurred off-site at a neutral location of the participant's choosing. To accurately capture the lived experiences of participants, an individual semistructured interview protocol (Appendix

A) was used to guide the interviews. During the interviews, I asked questions, listened to, and recorded answers from participants in a semistructured format. The duration of each interview was 1 hour, and it was audio recorded. Transcript verification of the interviews showed the data was interpreted accurately.

I ensured that all mailers had only one participant and not a group mailer. As I received confirmation from employees who chose to participate in the study, I protected their identity by assigning pseudonyms. I used pseudonyms throughout the entirety of the study. This method ensured that data collection was confidential. Leaders of the organization could not deduce the identity of participants from information provided during the research study, as I was the only one to have the secured list. I withheld site and demographic information to further protect the identity of participants. Data will be kept for 5 years. After 5 years, computer history will be deleted from the entire hard drive by selecting "erase" on my disk utility application.

There were some variations in the data collection. These variations included those participants who did not want their interview recorded. In these cases, I took notes and verified the accuracy of my notes through follow up e-mails with participants once the interview was completed. There were no uncommon conditions when the data was collected.

Data Analysis

I used a six-step thematic coding process to analyze the data (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). While Braun and Clarke (2006) were oriented toward the field of psychology, their suggested analysis methods have been used in a large number of studies. Their six-

step method has been particularly popular for qualitative phenomenology. The method involves a series of discrete phases of analysis. These steps are part of the process of thematic coding, whereby I condensed the interview transcripts (or other similar data) into a series of short phrases, or themes (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six steps that were followed were (a) familiarization with the data, (b) generating initial codes within the data, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report.

Firstly, I developed the initial concepts that were utilized in the thematic analysis. I carefully read the interview transcripts to get familiar with the data. I uploaded the transcripts in NVivo 12, a qualitative software which helps with coding and generating themes. Using NVivo 12 and a predetermined deductive coding list, I applied codes separately to each transcript. Information that did not fit any of the predetermined codes received a new code.

Secondly, during the coding process I looked for recurring topics between the different transcripts. Once codes were applied to all transcripts, I sorted the codes under possible themes. Next, I carefully reviewed these themes, and I linked codes under the same theme to each other. Once the codes and themes made sense, themes were further refined and named. As I defined the themes, I analyzed the themes and thematic pairings for importance. The thematic label was established from 26 invariant constituents: (1) leaders do not trust or appreciate employees, (2) I work in a high-stressed environment, (3) I enjoy my job, (4) I became disenchanted, (5) I have a good relationship with my chain of leaders, (6) there are two reporting structures, (7) I work in a group or team

environment, (8) low employee engagement, (9) employees do not trust leadership, (10) it depends, (11) employees can sense whether the boss is really engaged, (12) employees carry themselves in a professional manner, (13) high employee engagement, (14) negative impact, (15) no impact, (16) communication, (17) I expect a leader to be truthful, (18) fairness, (19) clear objectives, (20) Leader actions contribute significantly, (21) treat everybody fairly, (22) communication, (23) there should be a change in leadership, (24) come out of their offices, (25) promotion, and (26) training (Appendix B).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), credibility refers to the extent to which the data collected are believable from the point of view of the participant. The only way to assure this in qualitative interview-based research is by asking the participants after data collection (Yin, 2019). This was done by means of transcript verification. I e-mailed the transcripts to each interviewee and asked that they be checked for accuracy (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The same was done with interview notes.

Member checking is the process of taking ideas back to research participants for their confirmation and/or to gather material to elaborate on established categories; the purpose is accurately interpreting what the participant meant rather than what specific words were (Harvey, 2015). It is also known as member validation; the aim is to seek views of participants on accuracy of data gathered, descriptions, or even interpretations (Paley, 2016). The necessity for member checking lies in the fact that even recorded and

verbatim-transcribed conversations can be misinterpreted. The process of member checking limited misinterpretation and maximized the credibility of the data and the results. I performed member checking by providing interpretations of participants' discussion or conclusions and asking if they agreed with what was provided.

Transferability

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2016), transferability is the extent to which the study's findings can be generalized to other populations. In qualitative research, this is assured by making sure that the populations studied are not unusual or atypical insofar as the study problem is concerned. Transferability was achieved through thick descriptions of real-life settings and understandings of participant experiences (see Ospina, Esteve, & Lee, 2018). Thick description and variation in participant selection were also used to assure transferability (Paley, 2016).

Dependability

According to Paley (2016), dependability is the extent to which the research could be replicated and obtain similar results with a similar population. The idea is that future researchers could replicate the study and while not imitating the current study's analysis methods, could make their own studies similar enough so that their results could be compared with the results of this study (Vaishnavi & Kuechler, 2015). Although a qualitative study can never be exactly replicated, dependability was maximized by describing the exact analysis process, which was thematic analysis, in detail so that future researchers would be able to follow the researcher's process (Harvey, 2015). This exact process was described earlier in this chapter. Dependability of the study was also assured

by a robust and complete description of the study's methods, which was provided in Chapter 3.

Confirmability

According to Paley (2016), confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of the study could be confirmed or corroborated by others. While qualitative research assumes that each researcher brings a unique perspective, confirmability can be enhanced by complete and thorough documentation of the research process (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Furthermore, I made sure to be aware of my own biases and existing prejudices, not so much to try to eliminate that bias (which is impossible), but to allow for it in the analysis.

In qualitative thematic analysis, the codes and themes generated had a subjective element to them because every researcher will likely interpret the transcripts in a different way. This could not be avoided. However, confirmability was maximized by writing the results of the study in such a way that my reasoning during the data analysis process could be followed.

<div align="center">

Study Results

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RQ: What are the lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders in the government sector?

The thematic analysis of 20 individual in-depth interviews resulted in a number of themes and subthemes that were attained in correspondence with the seminal works of Burns (1978), Maslow (1943), and Herzberg (1966). The primary theme was: The lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their

leaders in the government sector. The invariant constituents (i.e., meaning units that do not overlap) are presented and give clear indication of how themes are related to the conceptual framework. The thematic label was established from 26 invariant constituents: (1) Leaders do not trust or appreciate employees, (2) I work in a high-stressed environment, (3) I enjoy my job, (4) I became disenchanted, (5) I have a good relationship with my chain of leaders, (6) two reporting structures, and (7) I work in a group or team environment, (8) Low employee engagement, (9) Employees do not trust leadership, (10) It depends, (11) Employees can sense whether the boss is really engaged, (12) Employees carry themselves in a professional manner, and (13) high employee engagement, (14) negative impact, (15) no impact, (16) communication, (17) I expect a leader to be truthful, (18) fairness, and (19) clear objectives, (20) Leader actions contribute significantly, (21) Treat everybody fairly, (22) communication, (23) there should be a change in leadership, (24) come out of their offices, (25) promotion, and (26) training.

Thematic Category 1 (Leaders do not trust or appreciate employees) showed one of the most important characteristics. Participant #BF01L said that leadership treated their employees as expendable by disregarding any expertise they brought to the workplace. The participant said,

> The leaders have a reputation of playing favorites and bypassing capable, talented employees for their favorites, or for people who fit their idea of the corporate mindset. It seems like current management is determined to deprive employees of what used to be a great place to learn and grow. You cannot tell them that. If you

did, they would disregard you. I think there are better places to work where the employees are not being treated with such coldness. Since the latest managers have come in, they have done everything they can to strip away benefits for new employees, and they are getting away with it. Participant #EJ31E agreed with participant #BF01L. The participant said, "What I do not like is how my boss treats me and how he takes away my responsibility. My boss usurps my authority on numerous occasions."

Participant #KY02N agreed with participant #EJ31E and participant #BF01L. The participant said that she wanted to retire because her supervisor did not care about people. Her supervisor made it hard for her to come to work every day. Her supervisor made her do other things which prevented her from responding to customers timely. The participant said,

> If a customer has a question about something, my supervisor would send them to the Help Desk when it is something that could be resolved quickly. In my opinion, that is unnecessary and only prolongs solving the problem for the customer. That is what I mean by not caring for others. There are other examples such as lack of resources and access to specific files. My supervisor password-protects files preventing me from answering employee questions until he returns. He has total control of everything.

Thematic category 2 shows the negative characteristics shown by six participants. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 2 is as follows: I work in a high-stressed environment. Participant #7122D said, "I have to have high energy,

working in a high-stressed environment. If you fail to meet objectives, there is a lot of questions of why, and what is your plan to meet them later." Participant #CR29A agreed with participant #7122D. The participant said, "I think it is stressful because people are constantly thinking about how things will be perceived by leadership."

Participant #MI04A agreed with participant #7122D and participant #CR29A. The participant said that everyone was tense, and that the leadership did not recognize employees. The participant said,

> Sometimes it can be exhausting. Walking into work, you have to be careful because EEO staff are all around. Many EEO complaints have been filed, but some have not been justified. Supervisors do not want to solve issues. Nothing is getting done.

Thematic category 3 shows the positive characteristics shown by three participants. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 3 is as follows: I enjoy my job. The participant #OA091 enjoyed working at her organization. The participant said, "People are highly experienced in their field. Everyone knows each other." The participant further stated that there was a lot of workplace flexibility, she felt no pressure to be at work at a particular time, and could rearrange her schedule to get things done outside of work. The participant enjoyed the flexibility, and it made her work harder. The participant appreciated that work option.

Participant #WO18A agreed with participant #OA091. The participant also enjoyed her job. The participant said, "My organization allows for freedom and

autonomy; very structured environment; expectations are the same for everyone, and because of that, I enjoy my job."

Thematic category 4 shows the negative characteristics shown by one participant. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 4 is as follows: I became disenchanted. Participant #DC17N said, "When I started in the organization, it was a good thing; after five years, it changed; I started seeing leadership differently." In this example, the participant said it was a White female who hired her, and she promoted open communication, a shared vision, and goals. Over time, the leader encouraged the participant to rewrite her position explaining why it should be upgraded. The participant carried out the task explaining how the duties and responsibilities warranted promotion.

However, a White male ultimately got the participant's job. The participant felt blindsided because she thought that she was going to get the job. When the participant asked why he got the promotion, the participant was told his position was upgraded for various reasons. Unfortunately, leadership avoided giving her a straight and honest answer as to why she did not get the job. The participant stated such actions from leadership were not fair, and in her opinion, this was part of a larger strategy.

Thematic category 5 shows the positive characteristics shown by one participant. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 5 is as follows: I have a good relationship with my chain of leaders. Participant #BD27E said, "I have built trust, I can contribute to things, and I am empowered."

Thematic category 6 shows the negative characteristics shown by one participant. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 6 is as follows: Two

reporting structures. The participant #NS03A said, "It is good and bad. My experience is unique because I have two reporting structures." The participant further said that challenges existed because she had two lines of supervisors, and they did not communicate with each other. Two sets of rules needed to be followed, and it was challenging. Each supervisor had two sets of policies, and sometimes they conflicted with each other. The participant had to decide which set of rules to follow. The participant said, "I decide which set of rules are least disruptive, and most convenient to get the work done and accomplished."

Thematic category 7 shows the positive characteristics shown by one participant. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 7 is as follows: I work in a group or team environment. The participant said, "We depend on each other to accomplish our jobs."

The responses by eight participants focused on negative opinions. Eight participants thought that employee engagement was low. The most significant themes show that employee engagement is low.

Thematic Category 8 (low employee engagement) shows one of the most important characteristics. Participant #BD27E said that employee engagement was low, which was why she left that Directorate. There was no room for growth or expansion of her experience. Participant #TS07M agreed with participant #BD27E. The participant said, "Very little engagement. Employees do just enough to get by." The participant thought that employees were there to get a paycheck. Favoritism of certain employees created discontent with other employees resulting in EEO complaints.

Participant #WH24E agreed with participant #TS07M and participant #BD27E. In the beginning, the participant was happy to spend his time doing work that he found personally meaningful, challenging, and impactful in an organization where he felt connected. However, his leadership structure changed, and he had to report to a demeaning and condescending boss.

The participant said that his boss questioned every detail of his work. No matter how much success the participant demonstrated or effort he exerted, it was never good enough, which resulted in a significant decrease in his engagement level within the organization. The participant limited his engagement with leaders to a minimum, but he continued to engage internally with his colleagues. The participant said that his actions spread amongst his co-workers.

Thematic category 9 shows the negative characteristics shown by four participants. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 2 is as follows: Employees don't trust leadership. Participant #DC17N said, "We would have staff meetings with leadership, but communication did not seem to provide what we needed. We hear information from others in a round table format." Managers did not share what was going on. It always felt like managers did not trust lower-level employees with information because of fear of information getting out. The participant said,

> I understand some things need to be kept close-hold, but I still feel as if I am not a part of the organization. I guess I am somewhat engaged. I discussed my level of engagement with others. As time goes on, I have grown more and more distrustful of management.

The participant said that while working from home, the employee made a work error detected by his leadership, and they wanted the participant to take a disciplinary action on him, which bothered her. The participant said that she did not take the action because the employee was fighting for his life. The participant thought that the employee was not treated fairly, and it was not consistent with what management spoke (e.g., caring for family, family first, etc.). In another example, the participant believed that there was disparate treatment between White and Black employees (e.g., training opportunities for some and not for others). Restructure of the organization was done (e.g., a lot of favoritism, all White leaders, no diversity), which made the participant feel more distrustful of leadership and disengaged.

Participant #DE14S agreed with participant #DC17N. The participant thought that employees were against management because of the lack of trust. The participant said,

> If you get in trouble for something, employees are on the defense because there is no trust in management. It spreads to your peers. You cannot make a mistake. They create an environment where others treat you differently. One negative circumstance disregards everything that is positive.

Thematic category 10 shows the negative characteristics shown by three participants. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 3 is as follows: It depends. The participant #LA10R said,

> It varies depending on what department you are in. It depends on how long you have been there. On the programmatic side, people are very engaged. The

operational side is not engaged, and employees have low moral like me. I cannot

question leadership or challenge them. There are generational differences, too.

The younger generation (those in their 20s and 30s) need to be engaged to

empower them. This group is more open-minded and can adapt to multiple

changes. Otherwise, they get bored, and hop into different jobs. Employees in

their 40s and 50s are there more for support. Those in their 60s do not even care.

Their engagement is low to zero.

Participant #NS03A agreed with participant #DE14S and participant #DC17N.

The participant said,

It depends on the day. Some days are better than others. Some days people are

disengaged, and do not care. It depends on how communication is going with

leadership. If you have a project, you need resources, personnel, and software. If

you do not have them, you cannot complete the project. Leadership does not

provide any assistance, but they want the work done. That is what causes me to

disengage from the work.

The participant thought that leadership did not help to complete the objective. In

addition, the participant felt that leadership was not supportive. The participant said that

leadership did not do all they could to accomplish the objective.

Thematic category 11 shows the negative characteristics shown by one

participant. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 4 is as follows:

Employees can sense whether the boss is really engaged. Participant #7122D said, "The

boss who is not engaged comes up with work that does not have anything to do with the true cause."

Thematic category 12 shows the positive characteristics shown by one participant. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 5 is as follows: Employees carry themselves in a professional manner. The participant #BD27E said, "We do what it takes to get the job done. There is no animosity between employees. We try to accomplish our mission."

Thematic category 13 shows the positive characteristics shown by one participant. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 6 is as follows: High employee engagement. The participant #NS03A said, "Most people are very engaged in the workplace because they enjoy what they do. Since people like their jobs, engagement is high. Overall, everyone seems to be engaged."

The third thematic label (i.e., My perceptions influence my job performance) was established from two invariant constituents: (a) Negative impact and (b) no impact. The responses by 16 participants focused on negative opinions, and they believed their perceptions negatively affected their job performance. The most significant themes show that the participants' perceptions negatively affect their job performance.

Thematic Category 14 (negative impact) shows one of the most essential characteristics. Participant #BF01L said, "Because of how I feel, my attitude has impacted my job performance." The participant said that he did less than excellent performance because leaders did not appreciate his value to the organization.

The participant's reactions to others, including colleagues and some customers, had changed. The participant thought that he was short with supervisors because of how he viewed them. The participant showed supervisors respect, but that was only because of the position they were in. Participant #JK15I agreed with participant # BF01L. The participant said, "While I strive for excellence in my job performance, my perceptions have taken a toll on my performance." The participant said that it was challenging to work for someone who undermined her actions. The participant felt like she had to work harder to prove why her position on issues was better than another. The participant worked extremely hard, but her efforts were not appreciated. The participant said,

> Someone who leadership likes, favors more, or believes they are the experts in an area they know nothing about mainly contributes to my negative perceptions of leader actions. I am often confused because I do not understand how decisions are made. It seems as if the direction of the organization is convoluted because there is no consistency in what leadership will do. It depends on what is important to them on any given day. Policies and procedures are ignored when it is not convenient for leadership, or the outcome appears to be unfavorable.

Participant #KY02N agreed with participant #JK15I and participant # BF01L. The participant said that his perceptions of his supervisor continued to influence his job performance. The participant did not feel like he could give his all to the organization. His supervisor never talked to him about professional development. The participant said,

> When I broach the subject, he would tell me to go on-line. I have to maintain up-to-date information and accuracy in my field of expertise. This cannot be done all

on-line. He does not support growth and development outside of the office, nor

have we discussed promotion opportunities. I have worked for the same

supervisor for 10 years, and these types of topics have not been discussed.

Participant #WD19A agreed with participants #KY02N, #JK15I, and # BF01L.

The participant said that her perceptions of her supervisor continued to influence her job

performance. She did not want to go to work. The participant said, "I would rather

experience fun activities; I come to work to make a difference." The participant thought

that supervisors did not engage or respect her. The participant said, "There is an open-

door policy, but you do not feel comfortable using it." The participant experienced

boredom over and over. The participant said,

When people treat you a certain way, that affects how you go about your job.

You just do what you are supposed to do and nothing beyond. Why should I stay

late? I just do the bare minimum, but I know I could do more. Leaders make

multiple people do similar tasks. I feel they do not trust me to do the task. This

causes confusion among other colleagues and it is frustrating. It questions

whether you favor another employee, so I disengage because two people do not

need to perform the same job or task. Colleagues look at each other negatively

which leadership has caused, and leadership does not care.

Thematic category 15 shows the positive characteristics shown by four

participants. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 2 is as follows:

No impact. Participant #NS03A said,

I have separated my negative perceptions of leaders so that it does not affect my

job performance. If I write a technical report, I do not let my negative perceptions

impact the quality and content of the report. I have learned from leadership what

not to do which has contributed to my negative perceptions.

Participant #TX20E agreed with participant #NS03A. The participant said, "My

perceptions may be bad, but I am going to do my job."

Eight participants thought that their leader should communicate with them. The most

significant themes show that a leader should communicate with his or her employees.

Thematic Category 16 (communication) shows one of the most vital

characteristics. Participant #BD27E said, "Someone who listens, encourages employees

to contribute, and one who is innovative. A leader understands my value, takes me

seriously, and is willing to have a real discussion about my ideas."

Participant #NS03A agreed with participant #BD27E. The participant said,

"Effective communicator. Everyone should be on the same page." The participant was

in a team-based work environment, and communication was key. When leadership did

not communicate with the team leads, people did not know what was going on. The

participant said that there was a duplication of efforts with assigned tasks as a result of a

breakdown in communication.

Thematic category 17 shows the negative characteristics shown by six

participants. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 2 is as follows:

I expect a leader to be truthful. Participant #JK15l said, "I expect a leader to be honest

and transparent. Fair and able to exercise equitability across the board for all

employees." Participant #WH24E agreed with participant #JK15l. The participant said, "I expect a leader to be ethical and honest."

Thematic category 18 shows the negative characteristics shown by three participants. The invariant constituent which is vital to thematic category 3 is as follows: Fairness. Participant #LWO18A said, "Basic expectations should be the same for every employee. Expectations should not be lowered because of a known personal relationship between an employee and leadership." The participant thought that dress code must be adhered to. A certain employee did not follow the dress code because of the personal relationship. She did not follow established rules, which illustrated unfairness and favoritism.

Participant #EJ31E agreed with participant #LWO18A. The participant said, "To be fair to all people, not withstanding race, gender, color, or religion." The participant thought that a leader should take a non-biased/unbiased approach to developing employees.

Thematic category 19 shows the negative characteristics shown by two participants. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 4 is as follows: Clear objectives. Participant #7122D said, "A leader should be someone who sets clear objectives. A leader should define how those objectives will be measured. A leader should review objectives at set intervals."

The fifth thematic label (i.e., Actions of leaders contribute to my perceptions) was established from one invariant constituent as follows: (a) Leader actions contribute significantly. The responses by 20 participants focused on negative opinions. They

thought that leader actions contributed significantly. The most significant themes show

that leader actions contribute significantly.

Thematic Category 20 (Leader actions contribute significantly) shows one of the

most significant characteristics. Participant #BD27E said that the actions of the leader

got people confused. The participant thought that the leader was disconnected from the

staff. The participant thought that there was no acknowledgment. The participant felt

terrible because she received no direction on how to do the work. Her perceptions were

terrible of her leader, which was very dysfunctional. The participant said that it was

called into question why she was there. The participant left that environment to escape a

bad situation. The participant did not feel that what she did mattered because there was

no feedback. Participant #BF01L agreed with participant #BD27E and said, "I think the

actions of leaders contribute to everyone's perceptions. If leaders mistreat people, show

favoritism to some and not for all, or treat people with disrespect, your perceptions will

be negative."

Participant #JK15I agreed with participant #BD27E. The participant said that

actions such as unfair employee practices (favoritism, and the absence of transparency)

continued to contribute to her negative perceptions. The participant thought that other

things (e.g., the lack of trust and the absence of integrity) contributed to her perceptions.

The participant said that the willingness to communicate honestly also contributed to her

perceptions.

Participant #KY02N agreed with participant #JK15I and participant #BD27E, and

said, "Everything a leader does contributes to employee perceptions. I think leaders

should consider the impact of their actions before taking them; this is especially true if the action has a negative connotation." The participant continued to see and hear negativity in her workplace from top leadership down to her supervisor. Her supervisor was negative because the head of the organization was negative. The participant said that these actions did not promote a pleasant work environment. Participant #NS03A agreed with participant #KY02N, participant #JK15I, and participant #BD27E. The participant said, "The actions of leaders have not been great, which contributes to my negative perceptions. Favoritism; leaders are doing things for some, but not for others. Leaders are hypocritical. Leaders do not lead by example." The participant thought that leaders had expectations of the staff to complete assignments on time, but they did not promote such standards.

The responses by eight participants focused on negative opinions. Eight participants thought that their leader should treat everybody fairly. The most significant themes show that their leader should treat everybody fairly.

Thematic Category 21 (treat everybody fairly) shows one of the most important characteristics. Participant #DC17N said, "The people who benefit from leadership's positive decisions should not be for White males only. It should be more than White males who receive key information, face time with senior leaders, and key assignments." Participant #OA09I agreed with participant #DC17N, and said,

> Everyone needs to be held to the same standard when it comes to fulfilling the job responsibility. Those that are entry-level are strictly held accountable. Still, those that are in positions that impact the organization greater, they are not expected to

be held accountable, completing assignments, and being reprimanded. You

should not be rewarded if you are not doing your total job. Supervisors should be

held to the same standard because they have more responsibilities. Accountability

influences everything from the top down. Exercising fairness in what they expect

from people; If employees see that, their commitment is the same. What

increases my organizational commitment is seeing everyone held to the same

standard.

Participant #TX20E agreed with participant #OA09I and participant #DC17N.

The participant said, "No favoritism." The participant thought that a leader should treat

staff members equally across the board. The participant said, "They should not force

staff members out of the door because they favor someone else. Employees see what is

going on."

Thematic category 22 shows the negative characteristics shown by five

participants. The invariant constituent that is central to thematic category 2 is as follows:

communication. Participant #7122D said that a higher level of communication could

increase positive perceptions and a higher level of engagement. Participant #BD27E

agreed with participant #7122D. The participant said, "Leaders have to talk to us and take

the time to get to know their people. They need to improve communication to leverage

direction and strategy for the organization."

Thematic category 23 shows the negative characteristics shown by three

participants. The invariant constituent which is vital to thematic category 3 is as follows:

A change in leadership. Participant #LWO18A said,

Unfortunately, the only way to make change is to change at the top level. To get

me to feel comfortable and stay in my current organization, there would need to

be a change in leadership. Top-level of management is filled with political

appointees. They need to change the Directors (Political appointees, Principle

Deputy Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, and Directors). The

PDASs determine and approve everything, and there is no willingness to be open

to other ideas.

Thematic category 24 shows the negative characteristics shown by one participant. The

invariant constituent that is essential to thematic category 4 is as follows: Come out of

their offices. Participant #7122D said that her Directorate should establish a bridge line

or conference calls to come up with solutions collectively. The participant said, "Just

being seen makes a difference. Employees want to see what management is doing;

manage by walking around the floor."

Thematic category 25 shows the negative characteristics shown by one

participant. The invariant constituent that is essential to thematic category 4 is as

follows: Promotion. Participant #MI04A said that her supervisor did not reward her for

her work. This was why she had negative perceptions of her leader.

Thematic category 26 shows the negative characteristics shown by one

participant. The invariant constituent that is vital to thematic category 4 is as follows:

Training. Participant #WD19A said that the Directorate should make supervisors take

mandatory supervisory training.

It is important to note that the majority of participants found the employee-employer relationship most important. 19 participants (95%) emphasized the importance of a good and healthy employee-employer relationship. Participant BD27E explained in this regard that "I've built trust" and that because of this, "In my current position, I have a good relationship with my chain of leaders." However, this participant reported that this positive relationship had not always been present because he used to have a leader who "was disconnected with the staff." The participant elucidated: "There was no connection with employees and leadership; this resulted in the loss of critical human resources in the organization." In this regard, according to the participant, one of the most important characteristics of a good leader includes "someone who listens." The participant explained that "leaders have to talk to us and take the time to get to know their people."

Ten others (50%) similarly raised the importance of one-on-one communication. Participant DC17N for example, stated that he would want to have a leader "who values employees and communicates with the employees." Similarly, Participant WO18A highlighted the need to "increase communication with employees." With reference to the previous statements, Participant PV08H explained that the main problem was that "the mindset of leaders is different; engagement with employees happens only when they want you to do something." This participant explained that "it seems they're not used to working with or interacting with employees" and that "leaders should be engaging with all employees versus working only with other leaders." The participant emphasized the importance of leaders "understanding the importance of two-way communication" so that an "us against them syndrome" could be avoided. According to the participant – this

could be achieved by encouraging an "open dialogue" and a "one team concept or mentality."

Participant MI04A similarly found that "the environment has to promote a team effort." Participant BF01L agreed and said that this was something he missed in his workplace. He explained that "this place is highly political with too many levels and layers" which has negatively impacted the employee-employer relationship. He added that "I'm short with supervisors because of how I view them," and that he only respects them "because of the position they're in."

In alignment with the above, Participant CR29A added that "we should have a level of respect for everyone. It should be, 'Hey, come on in, my door is open'." The participant explained that this is currently not the case and that "we go into meetings tense, and come out of meetings tense." Similarly, Participant KY02N noted:

> For me, most of my co-workers talk to each other. . . We laugh together, but when our supervisor is around, we stop talking. We don't engage with him unless he asks for something or tells us to do something. The workplace is pretty tense when he is around.

This participant further opinionated that "engagement is more than supervisors giving orders to employees" and said that "giving orders is very impersonal and it does not show the 'human' side of individuals."

WD19A further added: "Certain leadership have respect for employees; if they feel they can benefit from you, they'll engage; if you work for certain leaders, they'll speak to you or engage." However, this participant said that not all leaders are like this

and explained that sometimes "leadership is not approachable." The participant further stated:

> From my experience, when some leaders get to a certain level, others are beneath them. . . . This creates a lack of communication, engagement and interaction with employees. . . . Some leaders have a 'what you can do for me' mentality.

As a result, the participant explained, "You don't feel comfortable speaking to leaders about your career, aspirations, or the next level" because "they're not engaging in that way." The participant said that this attitude results in lack of communication and that although "there's an open-door policy, you don't feel comfortable using it." To overcome this, Participant WD19A recommended leaders to "conduct weekly or bi-weekly meetings."

Participant WH24E confirmed the above and similarly said that "there is a large degree of verbal disrespect towards employees from senior leadership" and that there is a need for leaders "who value their employees." This participant elucidated:

> In the beginning, I was happy to spend my time doing work that I found personally meaningful, challenging, and impactful in an organization where I felt connected. Then, my leadership structure changed, and I had to report to a demeaning and condescending boss. . . . I have witnessed first-hand how leaders insult other employees. These actions continue to create negative perceptions of my leaders. That is not the way to treat employees.

Four participants (20%) also noted that physical absence of leaders could negatively impact employee engagement. DE14S, for example, believed that "just being

seen makes a difference" and that to be seen "leaders need to come out of their offices

because employees want to see what management is doing." MI04A similarly noted that

"A lot of supervisors are not on site, and they only see the finished product." He

expounded that "my supervisor doesn't come to the office unless something goes wrong"

and that because of their physical absence, "leaders are not interacting with the people

that actually do the work." The participant explained that this gives the impression that

they don't care about their employees: "To come to work every day knowing that your

leader doesn't care about you, and only what the "numbers" look like is not good." In

alignment, Participant TS07M similarly noted that in his work environment "supervisors

are rarely in the office," negatively impacting the employee-employer relationship. This

participant found that employers who are physically present and "engage and

communicate and get to know all their employees" are strongly appreciated.

Participant CR29A explained that what he misses from his leaders is for them "to

show us that we can trust them," because "I expect them to fight for us." The participant

also explained that "I expect leaders to deal with employees individually." He illustrated:

"My manager has never asked me, "how can I help you, or what do you need? (…) How

does my supervisor know if I have stretch goals? He doesn't." Participant RC06K agreed

with the above and similarly stated the significance of a leader "who is open-minded and

can create a concept that fits specific individuals; one that sees that one size doesn't fit all

because you cannot supervise people the same way because people are different."

Like Participant CR29A, Participant JK15E too raised the issue of lack of trust:

"While I strive for excellence in my job performance, my perceptions have taken a toll on

my performance. For example, it's challenging to work for someone who undermines your actions, or you simply don't trust." He said that in order to avoid this lack of trust it was crucial to "build trust among employees and through other coalitions" by "truly working together with employees for the common good."

With reference to teamwork, Participant EJ31E shared a rather extreme story to illustrate the hostile attitude of some leaders:

My boss created an environment where people were split between me and my boss. Some people would not do what they were supposed to do under my guidance. . . . Some employees would report everything that I would do. . . . This attitude of "I'm the boss" is unacceptable; it's not necessary. I do not expect a leader to portray themselves in a threatening manner. . . . I expect a leader to care for employees.

Participant 7122D opinionated that leaders should be empathetic because "most people come to work to do their best." The participant explained that "empathy means you understand me" and that this is important because "If you're looking for me to benefit the organization, actions of leaders should also reflect that; this way, I have the ability to do good work." However, this participant also highlighted that although leaders should have "a noticeable level of empathy, they should also be able to leverage that to achieve more in the organization."

LA10R made an addition in this regard and preferred a leader to be "someone who starts at the very bottom of the pyramid because that leader knows what entry and

junior employees face." This again implied the necessity of respect from employers towards their staff.

The responses by seven participants focused on negative opinions. Seven participants thought that leaders did not trust or appreciate employees. The most significant themes show that leaders do not trust or appreciate employees.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees in the public sector who have negative perceptions of their leaders. Recent studies on negative perceptions and ineffective leadership have focused on understanding leadership behaviors which are harmful to employees as well as for organizations (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013). Employee engagement has been shown to affect performance within the working environment of organizations (Shuck & Reio, 2014). On the other hand, employee disengagement can be caused by negative perceptions which lead to a depletion of energy, increased stress, and burnout (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

The participants of this study were 20 federal employees working in the public sector. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with each of these participants and data were analyzed thematically. Any conditions that affected participants did not have an impact on interpretation of the results. The common theme was as follows: The lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders in the government sector.

In Chapter 5, a more detailed evaluation of the findings as well as a comparison of the findings of this study with existing literature will be provided. Furthermore, Chapter 5 will also discuss the limitations, recommendations, and implications that were linked to this study, and will be closed with a few concluding paragraphs.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees in the public sector. A phenomenological study was most appropriate for examining the lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders in the government sector.

The research question for the study was as follows:

RQ: What are the lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders in the government sector?

The common theme was as follows: The lived experiences in the workplace of employees in the government sector who hold negative perceptions about their leaders.

The previous chapter reported on the results from the thematic analysis of 20 in-depth interviews with federal employees. I provided direct participant quotes to illustrate and support claims. In this chapter, the results presented in Chapter 4 are interpreted and compared to existing literature. Further, I discuss the limitations of the study as well as the recommendations and implications before closing the dissertation with a conclusion that recaptures the aim of the study, the findings, and the value of this study.

Interpretation of Findings

The analysis resulted in one primary theme that corresponded with the seminal works of Burns (1978), Maslow (1943), and Herzberg (1966). The primary theme was: The lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders in the government sector. Participants emphasized the importance of

employers who are connected with their staff, listen to their employees, and take the time to get to know them on an individual level. One-on-one communication was deemed important by many; however, it seemed that in many of the participants' work environment a positive employee-employer relationship was absent.

Participants indeed said that leaders do not interact with their employees as much as their employees desired. Rigoni and Nelson (2015) have attributed this to the fact that managers are often promoted into their jobs based on technical expertise and job performance instead of demonstrated people skills. According to these scholars, this may cause poor relationships leading to employees having negative perceptions of their team leaders and managers.

According to participants, leaders have a different mindset and feel "*superior*" over their employees. Participants claimed that some of their leaders would only speak with their employees if they needed something from them and so the communication was more one-sided. Participants found this disrespectful and stated that this lack of respect negatively affected their engagement because it made them feel unvalued and mistreated. Participants also emphasized the importance of two-way communication so that an "us against them syndrome" could be avoided. This would imply that environments in which positive employee-employer relationships are absent. Participants indeed found that in such environments they would not be encouraged to go to their leaders with their problems and speak with them when they would experience obstacles.

An interesting addition was that this lack of communication and alienation between employees and employers was further stimulated by the physical absence of the

employer. Some participants said that their bosses would either be in their offices all day or would literally not be present at work. This would result in the leaders only seeing the end product of work and not seeing the efforts that their employees put in reaching the objectives. Furthermore, participants also said that being physically absent gives the impression that leaders do not care about their employees and only care about the end product; not how they got there and/or how the leader could contribute.

An important concept that was mentioned more than once was *trust*. Participants said in this regard that leaders must show their employees that they can trust them and can count on them. Leaders were expected to defend and fight for their employees and be there for them, both for emotional assistance as well as professional assistance. Wang and Hsieh (2013) have similarly demonstrated the positive association between employee trust and employee engagement.

Communication with clarity of objectives, expectations, progress, and important information to help employees get a better understanding of what they need to do and how to effectively do their jobs was needed. Participants said in this regard that when leaders do not clearly communicate the objectives, expectations, and visions, this often leads to confusion and inefficiency. This is so because leaders were seen as driving efficiency and effectiveness in the organization. This agrees with Bowling, Alarcon, Bragg, and Hartman (2015) who found that clarity and communication are important qualities in the workplace; clearly setting goals and explaining tasks has a positive effect on employees.

Many participants shared their frustration with regard to leaders who do not successfully communicate the objectives and expectations, and as a consequence of this, employees often end up doing tasks that are meaningless or could have been done differently if they would have understood the end goal. When everyone is not on the same page, misunderstandings can indeed lead to inefficiency.

Two important concepts that were mentioned frequently were honesty and transparency. In this regard, participants said that leaders should be honest about what they want and should be transparent about any information that would be considered important for employees to successfully and efficiently do their jobs. However, as mentioned before, participants said that their leaders often failed at effectively communicating objectives and expectations. In line with this, Bornman and Puth (2017) found similar results in a study conducted with South African employees. According to their findings, employees perceived that their leaders did not understand the meaning of being a communicating leader. Based on this result, they concluded that organizations should consider implementing training programs for all leaders, which could assist in the development of leaders who communicate more efficiently, who are aware of their weaknesses, and who have the tools to improve themselves within their working environment. Similar suggestions may be applicable to this study.

Participants indicated leaders are expected to take responsibility both in terms of team failure as well as resolving issues and implementing change when necessary. In this respect, participants said that leaders must hold themselves and others accountable for their mistakes and should never blame others. Participants explained that accountability

was often not present and that their leaders often did not follow the rules themselves. However, due to their position they were able to get away with it, unlike their employees who could not. This resulted in feelings of unfairness and could potentially negatively impact on employee engagement.

It was suggested that leaders who provide constructive feedback help to avoid employee disengagement. In this respect, many participants said that their employers' constructive feedback and motivational and encouraging words positively impacted their engagement. Conversely, lack of feedback and motivational talks gave the impression that their employers did not care and hence negatively impacted on participants' engagement. Participants indeed expected to receive from their employers regular and valuable feedback so that they could improve themselves and learn from their mistakes. However, some said they did not receive any feedback because their employers were either "too busy" or did not really care about personal feedback as long as the end product would be successful.

An employer who is engaged in the work and with his employees can influence employees' engagement. In this respect, participants said that it was important for employees to see their employers being genuinely interested in the company and their employees. More specifically, participants desired having employers who were invested in the company's growth but also the employee's personal development and the team's growth in general. Participants said that engaged employers seek for solutions and continuous improvements and are innovative. They have the knowledge and skills to lead a team and drive effectiveness.

Participants' employee engagement and satisfaction was a direct result of feeling involved in the decision-making process and in the organization as a whole. In this regard, many participants felt that they were not valued and included in the organizational decisions. They felt that their ideas were not considered and that their leaders viewed them as unknowledgeable and redundant. This was seen as disrespectful, especially considering that participants said they were experts in their field and have valuable insights to bring to the table. However, according to participants, this is not how their leaders saw them and as a result their ideas would be ignored.

Only after the decision made by the leader would have proven ineffective and unsuccessful would leaders ask for the input of their employees. Participants said that many leaders will always follow their own ideas and disregard others' input or only take others' input in account if their own strategy would not have worked.

In addition, participants said that they missed "freedom of speech" as they felt they could not communicate negative or constructive feedback to their superiors. This made them feel powerless and discouraged, which they said negatively impacted their engagement. Conversely, they said that being included in the decision-making process would contribute to their engagement. In this respect, similar results were obtained by Viitala et al., 2015).

Actions of leaders contribute to employee perceptions and the need for recognition and acknowledgement from their superiors/leaders. These participants said that they receive insufficient acknowledgement from their leaders for their efforts, which was a shared frustration and negatively played on their engagement and job satisfaction.

Participants indeed found that they would sometimes invest a lot of time and effort in something and their superior would take it for granted. They would not receive any recognition for their efforts and as a result no rewards. This was said to negatively play on their employee engagement. In alignment with previous studies, Dash et al. (2014) and Ul Islam and Ali (2013) similarly pointed out the importance of recognition in employee satisfaction and engagement. Interestingly, participants raised the presence of favoritism and said that some employees would get recognition more easily because of personal relationships with leaders. This was found to be unfair.

Statements relating to growth opportunities as a way to stimulate employee engagement was also discussed. In this regard, participants found it important to have growth and development opportunities and stated that a lack of such would negatively impact their engagement. Some participants had worked at their company for many years and had not been able to get a promotion, which frustrated them. In alignment with this finding, Ul Islam and Ali (2013) found that the absence of opportunities for growth is one of the most significant sources of dissatisfaction. Even more frustrating was that some said that getting a promotion is not about what you do, but rather about who you know. Indeed, participants said that employers and leaders often play favoritism and promote those employees they have a personal relationship with. Such individuals do not always deserve to be promoted and thus participant regarded this as unfair treatment. Because of promotions, financial rewards, and company benefits not being given high priority, some said to be less engaged than they used to be. Thus, the lack of growth and development opportunities was believed to have a serious negative impact on participants' engagement

in their company. The opposite was also true and corresponded with findings from Gordon et al. (2014).

Participants said to value working in an environment where flexible work hours were an option and where a healthy work-life balance is promoted. Moreover, one participant said that having such a flexibility made him a more engaged employee. In accordance this this finding, Gordon et al. (2014) found that when managers behaved ethically and promoted work-life balance, it enhanced employees' perceptions of trust in their leaders.

Limitations of the Study

The current study entailed a number of limitations. The first limitation referred to sampling, with 20 individuals interviewed and volunteer sampling used as a recruitment method. As a result, only federal employees who were invited via email were eligible. As a result, selected participants' representativeness of the general population was outside the researcher's control (Paley, 2016). In addition, the focus in this study was on employees in the public sector who have negative perceptions of their leaders; as such, other populations of employees were not eligible, which may also limit the study.

This study sample only included participants with negative perceptions, and the perceptions of participants who have positive views of their leaders were not reflected. Another limitation was the possibility for researcher bias. Unlike quantitative studies that entail the use of hard and unambiguous data, qualitative findings are prone to interpretation. It should therefore be taken into account that if another researcher had carried out the current study, different themes may have emerged, resulting in a different

presentation of the results. However, principles of dependability and confirmability may limit this.

The findings of this study are not generalizable to the population of all federal employees. This was predominantly due to its qualitative approach. The main disadvantage of qualitative studies is that their findings do not directly extend to wider populations with the same degree of certainty that quantitative analyses would have (Yin, 2019). This is because the findings of qualitative research did not undergo testing to determine if they were statistically significant or due to chance (Yin, 2019). Indeed, because of the focus on federal employees in the Washington DC district, it is impossible to generalize the findings of this study to other regions and countries. Although a more diverse and larger sample may help achieve greater insight regarding the phenomenon of disengagement, a large sample size was not feasible in this study.

A fourth limitation pertains to theoretical issues. Collection and interpretation of the current study's results were in line with the seminal works of Burns (1978), Maslow (1943), and Herzberg (1966); other results may have appeared if another conceptual framework had guided the study. This suggestion falls under the recommendations for future research in the next section.

A fifth limitation is that all data collected in the study pertained only to subjective experiences shared by participating federal employees (Paley, 2016). The subjective views of mental health practitioners may differ based on their particular experiences. Accordingly, using a sample of other federal employees with the same roles may have produced other results.

Recommendations

In relation to this study, a number of recommendations for future research emerged. A first recommendation pertains to addressing sampling issues. The current study only incorporated federal employees from two directorates in a medium-sized organization in the Washington, DC area. As a result, perceptions of federal employees working in other states and countries are left unexplored. To gain more knowledge on the subject and the particular negative perceptions that these employees had of their leaders, one recommendation is that future researchers carry out similar studies in other geographical contexts. Such studies may also be interesting for the sake of identifying intra- and international differences in negative perceptions. Additionally, it may also be useful to increase the sample size and include other populations, such as federal employees with positive perceptions of their leaders, and leaders themselves. Their perceptions may further contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon.

A second recommendation is to make this study quantifiable, referring to the use of quantitative methods such as surveys. Quantitative methods may make it possible to extend results to wider populations; in addition, quantitative researchers could test the results for statistical significance, which is not possible in qualitative studies. Qualitative findings are indeed subject to interpretation; therefore, it is possible that if a different researcher replicated the current study, different themes may emerge, resulting in a different presentation of the results. By quantifying this study, more objective results may be possible.

A final recommendation is to adjust the interview protocol and focus more on particular areas, for example the employee-employer relationship or lack of clear communication. Both these factors seemed to play a crucial role and it may be useful to further explore these. Study results also indicated that practitioners are dissatisfied with the organizational structures in their companies, as well as their financial income. Some participants indeed shortly mentioned the high demand in their work environment. As such complaints were not the focus of this study, I did not delve into these topics; therefore, it may be useful for future researchers to pay more attention to such ideas. As a result, it is advisable to replicate the study with a focus on these aspects to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the negative perceptions of federal employees.

Implications

Positive Social Change

The findings from the study may have a wide and positive social impact, as the federal employment sector is large. The understandings created through the study may be applicable to the even larger private sector as well. The study may provide findings that could assist leaders in increasing awareness and improving leadership skills as they relate to employee relations. In the context of scholarly contribution, the study may add value to existing research, as employee perceptions of leader actions can contribute to how people experience meaningfulness when they feel useful and are receiving a return on investments on self-performance (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

The findings of the study may be relevant to both leaders and followers in business environments. For leaders, employee engagement, well-being, and positive

perceptions of leadership from employees have been shown to improve organizational performance and can make the organization more competitive (Bakker, Demerouti, & Lieke, 2012). Engaged employees display higher levels of positivity, motivation, autonomy, productivity and well-being (Bakker et al., 2012). Employee engagement can make organizations more resilient to meet challenges and remain productive. The findings from this research study may be used to help leaders give organizations a competitive edge, improve working environments for employees, and improve their effectiveness, which increases organizational and personal performance (Bakker et al., 2012). As a result, employees can be more satisfied and more productive. Businesses can be more productive and efficient, both of which are socially beneficial.

The study is significant since the problem is important to employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders. The study is significant to leaders since it may help them understand employees and their relationships with them. The results of the study may help employees improve their engagement. The results of the study may help the government develop policies, training, and development that will increase employee engagement. The results of the study indeed carry positive social implications used by managers and stakeholders to increase their understanding of employees' lived experiences, in order to increase their employee's job satisfaction and engagement. As the lack of such engagement is a major issue and impacts productivity, increasing engagement could have a positive social impact. The results of this study can help managers, supervisors, and stakeholders to understand the impact of negative workplace experiences on the well-being and performance of employees.

Theoretical Implications

The present study is guided by Burns's (1978) theory of transformational leadership and the motivational seminal works of Maslow (1943), Herzberg (1966), and Herzberg (1968). Transformational leadership creates positive change in the followers (Burns, 1978). According to Maslow (1943), self-actualization is the accomplishment of a person's capacity. Burns's (1978) theory of transformational leadership and the motivational seminal works of Maslow (1943), Herzberg (1966), and Herzberg (1968) are most appropriate for examining the lived experiences in the workplace of employees.

The participants thought that the actions of leaders contributed to their perceptions. Most participants believed that their perceptions affected their job performance. The results imply that Burns's (1978) theory of transformational leadership and the motivational seminal works of Maslow (1943), Herzberg (1966), and Herzberg (1968) tie into the study.

Methodological Implications

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to explore the lived experiences in the workplace of employees in the government sector. The phenomenon to be considered was employee disengagement. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach is most appropriate for exploring the lived experience to speak for itself (Yin, 2019).

The research method was a qualitative approach. The qualitative method is most appropriate for examining questions about experience (Hammarberg et al., 2016). In the

study, many nuances of a particular phenomenon were examined by using a qualitative

research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

Credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability were enhanced

(Leedy & Ormrod, 2016; Vaishnavi & Kuechler, 2015). Credibility was assured by using

member checking after each interview. Transferability was assured by ensuring that the

populations studied were usual. My thematic coding was explained in detail to assure

dependability. The research process was thoroughly documented to assure

confirmability.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to

explore the phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees in

the public sector who have negative perceptions of their leaders. Recent studies on

negative perceptions and ineffective leadership have focused on understanding leadership

behaviors which are harmful to employees as well as for organizations (Mehta &

Maheshwari, 2013). Employee engagement has been shown to affect performance within

the working environment of organizations (Shuck & Reio, 2014). On the other hand,

employee disengagement can be caused by negative perceptions which lead to a depletion

of energy, increased stress, and burnout (Saks & Gruman, 2014).

The general problem is less than one-third (34% of US workers reported that they

were engaged in their jobs in 2018 (Adkins, 2015; Mann & Harter, 2016). The specific

problem is that employee engagement levels may be reduced when employees have

negative perceptions of their leaders (Adkins, 2015; Ndaba & Anthony, 2015). If this

problem remains unaddressed, the federal government will continue to operate as less than optimal efficiency, as its employees remain unengaged.

Through a qualitative study with a hermeneutic phenomenological research design, I explored the phenomenon of disengagement through the lived experiences of employees in the public sector who have negative perceptions of their leaders. The specific research question of this study was:

RQ: What are the lived experiences in the workplace of employees who hold negative perceptions about their leaders in the government sector?

The participants of this study were 20 federal employees working in the public sector. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with each of these participants and data were analyzed thematically. The analysis resulted in several themes and subthemes that were attained in correspondence with the seminal works of Burns (1978), Maslow (1943), and Herzberg (1966).

The results of this study imply that federal employees take many factors into account when forming their positive or negative perceptions of their leaders. Employee engagement, communication, and expectations of a leader were deemed most important. However, constructive feedback, recognition, employee value, and growth opportunities were also crucial components. Insights from employees in the government sector can help policymakers as well as leaders improve perceptions of federal employees. Similar studies are needed to further assess the negative perceptions of federal employees of their leaders.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Tell me what it is like to work in your organization.

2. How would you describe employee engagement in the workplace?

3. How do you think your perceptions influence your job performance?

4. What are your expectations of a leader?

5. From your experience, how do you think the actions of leaders contribute to your perceptions?

6. What do you think your Directorate could change to increase your organizational commitment?

Appendix B: Invariant Constituents and Excerpts from the Transcripts

Invariant constituents	Excerpts from the transcripts
Leaders do not listen, trust, or appreciate employees.	<Internals\\Interview with BF01L> - Leadership treats their employees as expendable, like dirt basically, by disregarding any expertise they bring to the workplace. The leaders have a reputation of playing favorites and bypassing capable, talented employees for their favorites, or for people who fit their idea of the "corporate mindset." It seems like current management is determined to deprive employees of what used to be a great place to learn and grow. You can't tell them that and if you did, they would disregard you. I think there are better places to work where the employees aren't being treated with such coldness. Since the latest managers have come in, they have done everything they can to strip away benefits for new employees, and they are getting away with it. Ex: Same pay, more work responsibilities. <Internals\\Interview with EJ31E> What I don't like is how my boss treats me and how he takes away my responsibility. My boss usurps my authority on numerous occasions. I believe there's discrimination of race and gender in the work place. <Internals\\Interview with JK15I> Fairness is not executed across the board. Ex: Only the people that work close to senior leadership get significant salary increases and monetary awards in less than a year. Employees who are favored over others also receive these benefits. <Internals\\Interview with KY02N> I'll just tell you, I'm going to retire because of my supervisor; he doesn't care about people. He makes it hard for me to come to work every day. I like my job because it allows me to interact with people and take care of their needs. The problem is that my supervisor disrupts that by making me do other things which prevent me from responding to customers timely. Ex: If a customer has a question about something, my supervisor would send them to the Help Desk when it's something that can be resolved quickly. In my opinion, that is unnecessary and only prolongs solving the problem for the customer. That is what I mean by not caring for others. There are other examples such as lack of resources and access to specific files. My supervisor will password-protect files preventing me from answering employee questions until he returns. He has total control of everything. <Internals\\Interview with PV08H> Leaders do not listen, trust, or appreciate employees; it seems they're not used to working with or interacting with employees <Internals\\Interview with TX20E> Superiors tell you how to do your job, and they do not listen to my opinions or recommendations. We go around in circles until we're back to what was originally suggested. Then, they ask for my opinion. I really like the organization, but the upper echelon (leadership) is in disarray. <Internals\\Interview with WD19A> You can learn a lot about our organization, and there's opportunities to learn in universities to get training. Often times, you may not know of these training opportunities; instead you learn of them from your peers. I learn from my colleagues instead of supervisors which demonstrates a lack of communication from leaders.

I work in a high-stressed environment.	<Internals\\Interview with 7122D> I have to have high energy, working in a high-stressed environment; if you fail to meet objectives, there's a lot of questions of why and what's your plan to meet them later <Internals\\Interview with CR29A> Very stressful; I think it's stressful because people are constantly thinking about how things will be perceived by leadership. <Internals\\Interview with MI04A> Sometimes it can be exhausting. Ex: Walking into work, you have to be careful because EEO staff are all around; Many EEO complaints have been filed, but some have not been justified. Supervisors do not want to solve issues. No notes are taken; It's a "he said, she said" environment. Nothing is getting done It appears that no one is held accountable Opportunities to get promoted do not exist; it's who you know; you're not getting a well-rounded leader. Federal employees are not doing ok in this organization. Supervisors are not held accountable for their actions and neither are the rest of the employees Everyone is tense; the leadership does not recognize employees, only those who are in similar areas as they are. <Internals\\Interview with RC06K> Very stressful <Internals\\Interview with TS07M> - Stressful, low engagement, small organization; it should have been an ideal and fun organization Assignments/projects are given at the last minute; little time available to complete projects Supervisor rarely in the office; degrading as speaking to employees; unrealistic expectations Little to no accountability <Internals\\Interview with WH24E> - With that said, there is confusion and intense pressure to get short-term results from leaders. There is a lot of talk about values, but not enough action. There is a large degree of verbal disrespect towards employees from senior leadership too.
I enjoy my job.	<Internals\\Interview with LA10R> It's fun and it's like family. Everyone is very friendly; every time I enter the doors, I feel like I'm at home. <Internals\\Interview with OA09I> I enjoy working at my organization. People are highly experienced in their field Highly engaged, and everyone knows each other A large part of collaboration; a good, healthy working environment There is a lot of workplace flexibility I feel no pressure to be at work at a particular time; I can rearrange my schedule to get things done outside of work; I can make up time; I enjoy the flexibility and it makes you work harder because of the workplace flexibility I appreciate that work option <Internals\\Interview with WO18A> My organization allows for freedom, autonomy; very structured environment; expectations are the same for everyone, and because of that, I enjoy my job;
I became disenchanted.	<Internals\\Interview with DC17N> When I started in the organization, it was a good thing; after 5 years, it changed and I became disenchanted; I started seeing them (leadership) differently Change in management; A white female hired me who presented open communication, a shared vision, goals, etc. Before she left, she wanted to upgrade my position; she encouraged me to rewrite my position explaining why it should be upgraded. I rewrote my position description and explained how the duties she wanted me to perform would be included.

	I didn't know there was someone else leadership brought in to replace my previous supervisor
	As such, a white male ended up getting my job; I felt blindsided; I thought that I was going to get the job.
	I asked why he got upgraded and I didn't. I was told his position was upgraded for various reasons, and I was getting the song and dance (leadership avoided giving me a straight and honest answer as to why I didn't get the job)
	Leadership never gave me a good answer; it wasn't fair, a bigger plan was going on.
	The organization already had plans that I wasn't a part of; it was done underhanded.
	The organization did allow three of us to act in a role at the next higher level.
	I received cash awards (to appease me), but when the position was advertised, leadership hired someone from the outside; As a result, I was placed under a white male who was in the position I originally applied for.
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I have a good relationship with my chain of leaders.	<Internals\\Interview with BD27E> In my current position, I have a good relationship with my chain of leaders; I've built trust, I can contribute to things, and I'm empowered.
Two reporting structures	<Internals\\Interview with NS03A> It's good and bad. My experience is unique because I have two reporting structures.
	Challenges exist because I have two lines of supervisors, and they do not communicate with each other.
	Two sets of rules need to be followed and it's so challenging.
	Each supervisor has two sets of policies, and sometimes they conflict with each other.
	You have to then decide which set of rules to follow.
	I decide then which set of rules are least disruptive, most convenient to get the work done and accomplished.
I work in a group or team environment.	<Internals\\Interview with DE14S> If you make a mistake, there will be repercussions; someone will have to take the blame; it becomes an issue when no one takes responsibility.
	I work in a group/team environment, and we depend on each other to accomplish our jobs.
Low employee engagement	<Internals\\Interview with BD27E> Employee engagement was low, which is why I left that Directorate.
	There was no room for growth or expansion of my experience.
	I worked in the organization for 6 years, but last year, there was a change in leadership.
	Leadership's focus was just on meeting deadlines, nothing else.
	<Internals\\Interview with BF01L>
	Most people in the organization don't feel like they can engage or talk to management because of how they feel they're viewed – beneath leadership.

	<Internals\\Interview with CR29A> Engagement is pretty low because the precursors have not been addressed (team building, etc.)
	<Internals\\Interview with RC06K> Everybody is overwhelmed, rushed, and mainly putting out fires.
	Once you finish one thing, you're moving to another without absorbing what you've learned; cannot ask questions, take notes, etc., because there's no time.
	<Internals\\Interview with TS07M> Very little engagement; employees do just enough to get by;
	Employees are there to get a paycheck
	Some people are retired in place
	Favoritism of certain employees; created discontent with other employees resulting in EEO complaints, etc.
	<Internals\\Interview with WD19A> You don't feel comfortable speaking to leaders about your career, aspirations, or the next level. They're not engaging in that way.
	Leadership is not approachable.
	Supervisors are out of touch with what's really happening in the agency.
	<Internals\\Interview with WH24E> In the beginning, I was happy to spend my time doing work that I found personally meaningful, challenging, and impactful in an organization where I felt connected. Then, my leadership structure changed, and I had to report to a demeaning and condescending boss.
	She questioned every detail of my work, and no matter how much success I demonstrated or effort I exerted, it was never good enough. This resulted in a significant decrease in my engagement level within the organization. I limited my engagement with leaders to a minimum, but I continued to engage internally with my colleagues. My actions also spread amongst my co-workers.
	<Internals\\Interview with WO18A> I was very effected; I'm not an employee who would not give my all. But when you work in an environment where you feel unappreciated, and you know it's because of a personal relationship between an employee and the leader, it's frustrating.
Employees don't trust leadership	<Internals\\Interview with DC17N> Employees don't trust leadership
	We would have staff meetings with leadership, but communication didn't seem to provide what we needed
	We hear information from others in a round table format
	Managers do not share what is going on, or what is hot; it always felt like they didn't trust lower level employees with information; fear of information getting out.
	I understand some things need to be kept close-hold, but I still feel as if I'm not a part of the organization.
	I guess I am somewhat engaged, and I discussed my level of engagement with others.
	As goes on, I have grown more and more distrustful of management.
	Ex: An employee had a bout with Cancer. He used to leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), people also donated their leave to him, etc., and he survived.
	Later, the cancer came back, but he couldn't come in to work; he completed assignments from home
	Later, senior leadership became more concerned with whether the employee could accrue his advanced sick leave or reimburse the organization.
	Unfortunately, he wanted to work towards his retirement. Then, while working from home, he made a work error detected by his leadership, and they wanted me to take a disciplinary action on him.
	That bothered me, and I didn't take the action because he was fighting for his life.
	He was not treated fairly, and it wasn't consistent with what management spoke – caring for family, etc., family first.
	In another example, I believe there is disparate treatment between white and black employees; training opportunities for some and not for others
	Restructure of the organization was done; a lot of favoritism; all white leaders, no diversity.
	This made me feel more distrustful of leadership and not engaged.
	<Internals\\Interview with DE14S> Employees are against management because of the lack of trust.

	Ex: If you get in trouble for something, no trust in management therefore employees are on the defense; it spreads to your peers.
	You cannot make a mistake.
	Creates an environment where others treat you differently
	One negative circumstance disregards everything that is positive.
	<u>\<Internals\\Interview with EJ31E\></u> Guarded, conscious, higher level of positive alertness
	I feel everything I do is scrutinized
	Overly conscious on how you treat your own employees
	Scrutinizing to find fault; leaders do not respect me as an employee
	2-pronged effect: Pressure from the top and from your co-workers
	Pressure from the leader is the control of my livelihood; Quid pro quo effect
	Given directives to do things against the law, but I didn't do it; I was penalized for that through my evaluation though.
	Attacked my personality – too strong; No problem with deliverables, rather my gender and as a person of color
	My leader had a problem with me addressing decisions that were wrong
	Issues with policies; could not strategically forward the organization
	No professional development initiatives for employees; we needed certifications
	It's a toxic environment
	<u>\<Internals\\Interview with KY02N\></u> We laugh together, but when our supervisor is around, we stop talking. We don't engage him unless he asks for something or tells us to do something.
	The workplace is pretty tense when he (my supervisor) is around. I think engagement is more than supervisors giving orders to employees. To me, giving orders is very impersonal and it does not show the "human" side of individuals. We could be in the office all day, and he would not say anything to me unless he needed something.
It depends.	<u>\<Internals\\Interview with LA10R\></u> It varies depending on what department you're in
	It depends on how long you've been there
	People are into their work.
	On the programmatic side, people are very engaged; The operational side is not engaged, and employees have low moral like me.
	I cannot question leadership or challenge them.
	There are generational differences too; Ex: The younger generation (those in their 20s and 30s) need to be engaged to empower them. This group is more open-minded and can adapt to multiple changes. Otherwise, they get bored, and hop into different jobs.
	Employees in their 40s and 50s are there more for support; Those in their 60s, don't even care. Their engagement is low to zero.
	<u>\<Internals\\Interview with NS03A\></u> It depends on the day. Some days are better than others. Some days people are disengaged, and don't care.
	It depends on how communication is going with leadership
	Ex: If you have a project, you need resources, personnel, software, etc. If you don't have that, you can't complete the project. Leadership doesn't provide any assistance yet; they want the work done anyway. That's what causes me to disengage from the work.
	Leadership does not help to complete the objective. They're not supportive, nor do all they can to accomplish the objective.
	It leaves doubt.
	<u>\<Internals\\Interview with OA09I\></u> Employees are engaged because they really enjoy the work, they do
	People are focused on the specifics of their job
	While people are excited, people are disengaged because their leaders are not giving them structure

	Ex: Administrative support – supervisors drop the ball and it makes the employees feel as if they don't know what's going on. Ex: Measuring performance – supervisors are required to complete performance reviews and they do not do it.
	Supervisors may tell the employee verbally how they're doing, but they don't want to do the administrative part of it.
	Supervisors are not taking the time to handle the administrative stuff; they don't feel it's necessary or important. Supervisors would rather take care of the programmatic stuff instead of their administrative responsibilities.
Employees can sense whether the boss is really engaged.	<Internals\\Interview with 7122D> Employees can sense whether the boss is really engaged. The boss who is not engaged comes up with work that doesn't have anything to do with the true cause – "busy work"
Employees carry themselves in a professional manner	<Internals\\Interview with MI04A> People are getting done what needs to be done <Internals\\Interview with PV08H> We all get along; employees carry themselves in a professional manner We do what it takes to get the job done No animosity between employees; we try to accomplish our mission
High employee engagement.	<Internals\\Interview with JK15I> Most people are very engaged in the workplace because they enjoy what they do. Since people like their jobs, engagement is high. There are others who enjoy their jobs, but they do just enough to get by. This is because they view their leaders with negative perceptions. Overall, everyone seems to be engaged.
Negative impact	<Internals\\Interview with BD27E> While I continued to work hard, it was never enough; Ex: I was managing multiple staffing actions, managing people, providing status reports, etc. The main focus for leadership was getting the core work done; no priorities were defined, I was steady getting dinged on other tasks, and the expected workload was a problem. I took work home on weekends, but that still wasn't enough; leadership did not care for employees. We had a staffing capacity issue; there were not enough people to get all the work done. Technology couldn't do everything, nor was that taken into consideration. There was no connection with employees and leadership; this resulted in the loss of critical human resources in the organization. <Internals\\Interview with BF01L> Because of how I feel, my attitude has impacted my job performance. I do less than excellent performance because they (leaders) do not appreciate my value to the organization. My reactions to others including colleagues and some customers have changed. I'm short with supervisors because of how I view them. I show supervisors respect, but that's only because of the position they're in. <Internals\\Interview with CR29A> My job performance will always be high because I'm an over-achiever. However, because of some personal things and the lack of support from my leaders, my will to want to go to work is lacking. Is this the day that I should come in? What's on my calendar? These are the questions that I ask myself. <Internals\\Interview with DC17N> My attitude changed and I didn't want to push that on my employees I noticed my employees were sharing their negative experiences I would encourage them to put in for training. Ex: I had a stellar employee, and I wanted to promote her. I had to rewrite her position, but I wanted to rewrite it as a career ladder (showing career growth each year), GS-7/9/11/12. Then I was told I could only advertise the position as a GS-7/9. It was a hassle to do this and leadership continued to put obstacles in the way. Eventually, I did get her promoted to a supervisory level, but it took me three years to make that happen; I believe it was because of her race. Management continued to say they just couldn't do anything for this employee. She had the potential to do great things for the organization; I knew she was a "diamond in the ruff." Leadership however, found a way to promote the white male; a way could have been made to promote the black female too. I continue to perceive unfairness throughout the organization.

<Internals\\Interview with EJ31E> Things are very bad, and it was common knowledge that this tension existed between me and my boss.

My boss created an environment where people were split between me and my boss

A mutiny; Some people would not do what they were supposed to do under my guidance

Grossly divided

I always had to posture myself in doing the right thing

Ex: Hiring actions – all eyes were on me to ensure everything was legally vetted, etc., to ensure no favoritism was going on

Rendering evaluations and promotion was the same because of this toxic environment and the leader

Some employees would report everything that I would do

They could not fire me though, because I did my job

I was angry because of how this experience evolved; mistreatment

It made me stronger, created thick skin, and I did the right thing at all times

I had to constantly watch out for favoritism and this toxic culture

<Internals\\Interview with JK15I>

While I strive for excellence in my job performance, my perceptions have taken a toll on my performance. For example, it's challenging to work for someone who undermines your actions, or you simply don't trust. I feel like I have to work harder to prove why my position on issues is better than another.

I work extremely hard, but my efforts are not appreciated.

Someone who leadership likes, favors more, or believes they are the experts in an area they know nothing about mainly contributes to my negative perceptions of leader actions.

I am often confused because I don't understand how decisions are made.

It seems as if the direction of the organization is convoluted, because there's no consistency in what leadership will do. It depends on what's important to them on any given day.

Policies and procedures are ignored when it's not convenient for leadership, or the outcome appears to be unfavorable.

<Internals\\Interview with KY02N> My perceptions of my supervisor continue to influence my job performance.

I don't feel like I can give my all to the organization. Ex: My supervisor never talked to me about professional development. When I broach the subject, he would tell me to "go on-line."

I have to maintain up-to-date information and accuracy in my field of expertise. This cannot be done all on-line.

He doesn't support growth and development outside of the office, nor have we discussed promotion opportunities. I've worked for the same supervisor for 10 years, and these types of topics have not been discussed.

<Internals\\Interview with LA10R> A lot. Since leadership doesn't care about my recommendations, I do not feel valued.

I see myself as not part of something.

I expect a leader to help me with a problem. Ex: If I have a heavy box that I cannot move, I expect the leader to help me pull the big box. It's the same if I have a problem. I expect the leader to help me resolve the problem, not be absent or unwilling to help. My perceptions are really influenced in a negative way because of things like that.

<Internals\\Interview with MI04A> - My supervisor doesn't come to the office unless something goes wrong.

I get no feedback as to what can be done to get recognition for the team; no response other than "the numbers look good, or I have no issues."

There's no feedback with context.

If I ask you what I can do better, I expect viable feedback.

If I have met expectations, I want to know how I can improve. The response is, "well no one is perfect."

<Internals\\Interview with OA09I> Supervisors that are higher up on the pay scale feel they can get away with not doing this in the organization (they pick and choose what they want to do); or conveniently not have time to do the work.

Those in lower positions cannot get away that

It's discouraging to others that are doing their job

For those that try to skate by, others may see this as ok. It sets the precedence as if this behavior is ok.

The work that supervisors are doing is so important that they don't have time to do employee performance appraisals.

Not helping the team grow professionally

It adds more work to my job because I have to chase people to obtain the work product.

It gets tricky to handle those situations, because you don't know; Am I to stop my work when it's the supervisor's responsibility?

<Internals\\Interview with PV08H> My job performance is affected because while I do what I can to take care of people, I do just enough to get through the day. Ex: When people see me, I offer options towards resolution of their concerns. However, I won't stay beyond my 8-hour day.

<Internals\\Interview with RC06K> I have difficulty with my current job because there's no time to absorb what I have learned.

I do not feel I'm doing a good job because I haven't been properly trained;

No manuals, formats, etc.

My supervisor often states, "just do your job, and make use with what you have."

<Internals\\Interview with TS07M> I dread going to work

I still gave 100 percent, but I am looking for another job

It felt unorganized; stressful

The work environment lowers my ability to produce what I would normally provide

I spend more time on unnecessary or trivial things being dealt with

Affects my ability to produce at higher levels; I've resorted to using personal time to get stuff done more so than any other job

<Internals\\Interview with WD19A> A great deal because I don't want to go to work.

I'd rather experience fun activities; I come to work to make a difference.

Supervisors don't engage or respect you. Ex: There's an open-door policy, but you don't feel comfortable using it.

I experience boredom over and over.

When people treat you a certain way, that affects how you go about your job; you just do what you're supposed to do and nothing beyond.

Why should I stay later? I just do the bare minimum, but I know I could do more.

Leaders make multiple people do similar tasks; I feel they don't trust me to do the task. This causes confusion among other colleagues and it's frustrating.

It questions whether you favor another employee, so I disengage because two people do not need to perform the same job or task.

Colleagues look at each other negatively which leadership has caused, and leadership doesn't care.

<Internals\\Interview with WH24E> When there is poor communication throughout the Directorate, my performance is impacted. As I mentioned previously, people get confused and they do not know what to do in many situations. It's because there is a lack of communication hence, no desire to do my job to the best of my ability; only enough to get by daily.

My perceptions influence my performance because I work closely with employees who never have anything positive to say about senior leadership in our organization. Prior to working for my current boss, I hadn't noticed any of these issues and was fairly engaged in my work; however, as I started thinking more about the

	perspectives of other employees, I began to wonder if they were right. I found myself quickly spiraling into a disengaged state, and I no longer felt the same enthusiasm for my work. <Internals\\Interview with 7122D> In my job performance, I lost my creativity
	The amount of time spent engaging with my team is minimized
	It stifled my creativity as well as driving down the moral within my area of responsibility
	I moved into more of a negative work environment that caused others to become disengaged as well
	I witnessed reduced engagement which led to higher turnover
No impact	<Internals\\Interview with DE14S> In my profession, I will always get the job done.
	<Internals\\Interview with NS03A> I care about my career and the mark I leave.
	I will always ensure that my work is up to par.
	I have separated my negative perceptions of leaders so that it doesn't affect my job performance.
	Ex: If I write a technical report, I don't let my negative perceptions impact the quality and content of the report.
	I've learned from leadership what not to do which has contributed to my negative perceptions.
	I see how their actions affect other people - cannot trust leadership, it decreases morale, you cannot believe what leadership says, etc.
	<Internals\\Interview with TX20E> -I'm going to do my job regardless.
	My perceptions may be bad, but I'm going to still do my job.
	<Internals\\Interview with WO18A> My co-workers never knew my perceptions were negative of leaders, and I brought some of my frustration home. When I was doing my job, my customers still got the most out of me in spite of it all.
Communication	<Internals\\Interview with BD27E> Good two-way communication
	Someone who listens, encourages employees to contribute, and one who is innovative
	Understands my value, takes me seriously, and is willing to have a real discussion about my ideas
	<Internals\\Interview with DC17N> Communicates with the employees
	<Internals\\Interview with KY02N> A leader should be willing to have conversations with their employees about career and growth progression.
	<Internals\\Interview with LA10R> Great communication skills especially when making tough decisions or delivering bad news
	One who tries to explain things, gives advice to employees rather than telling employees what to do.
	<Internals\\Interview with NS03A> Effective communicator
	Everyone should be on the same page
	Ex: I'm in a team-based work environment and communication is key; When leadership doesn't communicate to the team leads, people do not know what's going on.
	There is a duplication of efforts with assigned tasks as a result of a breakdown in communication.
	<Internals\\Interview with RC06K> Holds you accountable, communicates
	<Internals\\Interview with TX20E> Provide feedback; give a good critique of your job performance, good or bad
	<Internals\\Interview with WD19A> Someone who can communicate their expectations
	One who is fair and honest Gives positive/negative feedback
I expect a leader to be truthful	<Internals\\Interview with CR29A> I expect a leader to be accountable to their people; to have our back; to show us that we can trust them
	I expect them to fight for us
	I expect leaders to deal with employees individually
	Be a leader, and not afraid

	I want them to be ok with not saying the right thing all the time
	I want them to be ok with me as an employee, providing them feedback
	My manager has never asked me, "how can I help you, or what do you need?"
	During one-on-ones, my leader says, "ok, this is your meeting, what do you want to talk about?" I want to make sure we're on the same page to avoid surprises. He would agree, state that I'm on track, but I think the conversations need to be separate. We should not transition into day-to-day operations. I need to know if I'm 30, 40, or 50% there. My supervisor should drive that conversation, not me.
	How does my supervisor know if I have stretch goals? He doesn't.
	<Internals\\Interview with DE14S> Transparent, honest, straight shooter
	One who leads by example; a communicator
	Commits to showing you the ropes; ensures you are able to do your job.
	<Internals\\Interview with JK15I> I expect a leader to be honest and transparent.
	Fair and able to exercise equitability across the board for all employees.
	<Internals\\Interview with PV08H> I expect a leader to be truthful.
	<Internals\\Interview with TS07M> Transparency to me means having trust, open and frank on what needs to be done
	<Internals\\Interview with WH24E> I expect a leader to be ethical and honest.
Fairness	<Internals\\Interview with BF01L> Treat employees fair and right.
	<Internals\\Interview with EJ31E>
	To be fair to all people, not withstanding race, gender, color, religion
	I expect a leader to develop his or her subordinates/employees
	Use opportunities to development employees to be the best they can be; Ex: Customer service
	Take a non-biased/unbiased approach to developing employees
	Properly/positively appropriating his/her authority; treat people the way you want to be treated
	No yelling, and do not abuse the authority given
	This attitude of I'm the boss is unacceptable; it's not necessary.
	I do not expect a leader to portray themselves in a threatening manner
	I expect a leader to care for employees
	Uphold the policies of the organization
	I expect a leader to be competent in their jobs – knowing your core skills, lead strategically that moves the organization forward
	I expect a leader to empower and encourage me
	<Internals\\Interview with OA09I> To be fair to the people you're supervising, and to emulate what you expect your team to do; if they're working hard, you should be too
	<Internals\\Interview with WO18A>
	Basic expectations should be the same for every employee
	Expectations should not be lowered because of a known personal relationship between an employee and leadership. Ex: Dress code must be adhered to; a certain employee did not follow the dress code because of the personal relationship; she didn't follow the established rules which illustrated unfairness and favoritism.
Clear objectives	<Internals\\Interview with 7122D> Someone who sets clear objectives
	Defines how those objectives will be measured
	One who reviews objectives at set intervals

	<u><Internals\\Interview with MI04A></u> Give me specific objectives, i.e., I need to have 5 reports completed If I've done something wrong, inform me before the final appraisal is completed so I can improve in that area.
Leader actions contribute significantly.	<u><Internals\\Interview with 7122D></u> Leader actions contribute significantly <u><Internals\\Interview with BD27E></u> The actions of the leader got people confused. The leader was disconnected with the staff; no acknowledgement. I felt terrible because I received no direction on how to do the work; my perceptions were terrible of my leader. It was very dysfunctional. Leaders set the tone, drive efficiency and effectiveness in the organization. It was called into question why I was there. I left that environment to escape a bad situation. I didn't feel that what I did mattered; no feedback, no communication. <u><Internals\\Interview with BF01L></u> I think the actions of leaders contribute to everyone's perceptions. If leaders mistreat people, show favoritism to some and not for all, or treat people with disrespect, your perceptions will be negative. I can only comment from my experience, and my above statement is what I continue to see in my organization. My leaders can do a lot better when it comes to training and professional growth for employees. <u><Internals\\Interview with CR29A></u> Heavily. No action is an action. An employee will feel positive or negative about it. If you don't fall, you have to stand for something. Most managers are not leaders. If you're in this role, do your job and be fair. <u><Internals\\Interview with DE14S></u> All good qualities of a leader make for a culture where people want to work for you Culture building <u><Internals\\Interview with EJ31E></u> There's a consistent set of actions that go against what I believe a leader should be Pervasive – it affects the culture and the entire organization There's no effort or intent to change for the better, it frames my perceptions as negative It's not changing because the leader does what he/she believes; hence his actions are what they are <u><Internals\\Interview with JK15I></u> The actions of my leaders have similar affects as what was asked previously. I would reiterate actions such as unfair employee practices (favoritism, and the absence of transparency) continue to contribute to my negative perceptions. Other things such as the lack of trust and the absence of integrity within their actions contribute to my perceptions. The willingness to communicate honestly also contributes. <u><Internals\\Interview with KY02N></u> Everything a leader does contributes to employee perceptions. I think leaders should consider the impact of their actions before taking them; this is especially true if the action has a negative connotation. I continue to see and hear negativity in my workplace from top leadership down to my supervisor. I guess my supervisor is negative because the head of the organization is negative. These actions do not promote a good work environment. <u><Internals\\Interview with LA10R></u> First impression sets up the stage; Ex: If a leader cannot make a decision, yelling at employees, etc., in the first 90 days, that affects my perceptions of that leader. <u><Internals\\Interview with MI04A></u> I think it contributes a great deal. To come to work every day knowing that your leader doesn't care about you, and only what the "numbers" look like is not good. I should be paid overtime, since my supervisor still expects the work to be done.

Staffing capacity is not appropriate to complete the work. For example, an intern has to be trained, but once trained, they leave. We need permanent positions filled.

Organization is reorganizing and undergoing restructure.

<Internals\\Interview with NS03A> The actions of leaders have not been great which contributes to my negative perceptions.

Favoritism; leaders are doing things for some, but not for others.

Hypocritical

Leaders do not lead by example

Ex: Leaders have expectations of the staff to complete assignments on time, but the leaders do not follow the same standard.

<Internals\\Interview with OA09I>

If you see more than one supervisor exhibiting the same negative behavior, it influences me because while I want to do a good job, I'm not going to give 100 percent.

You reserve a little bit because at the end of the day, I don't feel like I'm being supported because I have to take on more work duties and responsibilities.

After a while, I feel like I should look for other opportunities because I don't feel valued.

No longer engaged because you have a foot out the door.

The organization has high turnover because supervisors do not recognize their own behavior; they only handle certain parts of their jobs.

<Internals\\Interview with PV08H> Ex: We had a hurricane last year. There was no process to inform people of what was going on.

The office was closed, but people were told to report to work.

This was unacceptable because it violated the organization's closure policy. Roads were flooded, trees fell in many areas, etc.

I went to work to inform people to go home in an effort to follow closure procedures. People were confused thanks to leadership.

This type of leadership placed many others at risk regarding safety and severe weather events.

This mindset is all throughout the organization, so the actions I witnessed from leaders did not make me feel confident in their judgment.

<Internals\\Interview with RC06K> Some leaders aren't really leaders; Ex: On an interview, you're judged on how you look, not by your experience. That's how I felt when I interviewed for a couple of positions and did not get selected.

They get upset with employees because they're not learning the task the way they think you should;

Lack of trust in the leaders and their sorry attitude.

I come to my job open-minded, but the leaders do not treat me fairly.

Supervisors aren't in the role because they're the best; it's because of who they know.

Supervisors need to understand where the gaps are in different employees, and work to close those gaps.

<Internals\\Interview with TS07M> To me, perceptions are reality; to me, if they're not doing something, that helps to form my perceptions

Even if leaders sent an email, the reality from the past shows they're talking the talk and not walking the talk

Example: Transparency at all levels; meetings held but the information was not to go out to employees, or you're not allowed to tell employees about what is changing;

Instead, "water cooler" conversations go on

Leadership finally communicates to all employees, but it's very vague or broad; the result is a mess

A lot of questions are asked because of poor communication and how information was rolled out; had it been communicated step by step; employees would not have been confused

	If employees saw a change, but it was not properly communicated
	<Internals\\Interview with TX20E> Leadership's actions dictate how I perceive my job.
	If the leader is unprofessional or not for the staff, that's not a good perception for me.
	Leaders display favoritism to certain staff members, and they get all the perks.
	<Internals\\Interview with WH24E> From my experience, I have witnessed first-hand how leaders insult other employees. These actions continue to create negative perceptions of my leaders.
	That is not the way to treat employees. Leadership is supposed to inspire and encourage us to do better. Instead, they use language that describes some people as "old and sleepy."
	This is unprofessional behavior, and it sustains my negative perceptions of my leaders.
	<Internals\\Interview with WO18A> In the workplace, expectations should be the same for all employees
	Ex: If everyone is required to show up 15 minutes prior to the start of work, everyone should report to work 15 minutes prior.
	If this doesn't happen, it instills lack of confidence in the leader; makes you feel uneasy about your place, your value, and your ability to operate with confidence. You question the leader.
Treat everybody fairly	<Internals\\Interview with BF01L> Stop mistreating employees because they are our best assets; Be fair and transparent.
	<Internals\\Interview with DC17N> Treat everybody fairly
	The people who benefit from leadership's positive decisions should not be for white males only; It should be more than white males who receive key information, face time with senior leaders, key assignments, etc.
	<Internals\\Interview with EJ31E> My leader's boss needs to get engaged, bring parties together to see what the issues are in an effort to help both of us.
	The leader's boss needs to implement organizational training to help people understand each other's differences, prejudices, stereotypes, etc.
	It's not an issue of not doing your job or their competency level; it's because they look different given, they have their own biases; leadership is not open to anything else
	Bring in an outside expert team of people in to give an objective and neutral fair analysis of what's going on with me, employees, race and gender issues, sexuality, etc., to see what's really going on in the existing culture.
	This could determine if it's leadership styles, culture, etc. Whatever the outcome, the head of the organization has to drive the initiative.
	After the training or third party has made their assessment, put together an action plan.
	Distribute surveys to see what the fundamental issue is thereafter; make it a part of the organization's strategic plan.
	Must be treated with the same level of importance as money/profit; all inclusive
	Use activities to strengthen the organization through team-building exercises.
	An action plan can reveal the core problems within an activity for leadership to pair individuals, reshape policies, and put right with right.
	<Internals\\Interview with JK15I> Promote transparency and fairness across the organization
	<Internals\\Interview with NS03A> Hold people accountable.
	Leaders have to be honest, open, and share information.
	Leaders need to stop exercising favoritism.
	Be fair across the board.
	<Internals\\Interview with OA09I> Everyone needs to be held to the same standard when it comes to fulfilling the job responsibility.

	Those that are entry level are strictly held accountable, but those that are in positions that impact the organization greater, they're not expected to be held accountable, completing assignments, and being reprimanded. You should not be rewarded if you're not doing your total job. Because you're higher, this should be more of a requirement. Supervisors should be held to the same standard because they have more responsibilities. Accountability influences everything from the top down Exercising fairness in what they expect from people; If employees see that, their commitment is the same. What increases my organizational commitment is seeing everyone held to the same standard. <Internals\\Interview with TX20E> No favoritism Treat staff members equally across the board Not force staff members out of the door because they favor someone else; employees see what's going on. <Internals\\Interview with WO18A> Consistency, employee valuation Even though I was able to do my job well, I was still frustrated. Leaders can help to change that.
Communication	<Internals\\Interview with 7122D> A higher level of communication can increase positive perceptions and a higher-level engagement <Internals\\Interview with BD27E> Leaders have to talk to us, and take the time to get to know their people. Improve communication to leverage direction and strategy for the organization. <Internals\\Interview with PV08H> Keep talking to members of the organization Encourage open dialog <Internals\\Interview with TS07M> Consistent and ongoing communication <Internals\\Interview with WH24E> My Directorate should host an offsite for all leaders. Topics of discussion should include good communication techniques, the art of corruption and how it can lead to high turnover, ethics, integrity, and honesty.
There should be a change in leadership	<Internals\\Interview with CR29A> Unfortunately, the only way to make change is to change at the top level. To get me to feel comfortable and stay in my current organization, there would need to be a change in leadership. The top level of management is filled with political appointees. Change the Directors; (Political appointees, Principle Deputy Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, and Directors); The PDAS is the single point of failure. He determines/approves everything, and there's no will to be open to other ideas. <Internals\\Interview with KY02N> Move my supervisor to a different Directorate. I would be able to show my highest potential. <Internals\\Interview with LA10R> If the workforce already has a negative perception of the leader, bad experiences, etc., changing the leader is the only option.
Come out of their offices	<Internals\\Interview with DE14S> - Establish a bridge line or conference calls to collectively come up with solutions. Just being seen makes a difference. Leaders need to come out of their offices. Employees want to see what management is doing; manage by walking around the floor.
Promotion	<Internals\\Interview with MI04A> Possible promotion that is commensurate to the work I'm doing Additional human resources I love my job, but I don't plan on staying in my organization We have new leadership and maybe it will get better I've given the new leadership a window of what I do, and they are surprised at the amount of work that I do with the limited capacity I know who gets the awards, and their supervisors are rewarding them for their work. However, my supervisor doesn't do that. This is why I have negative perceptions of my leader.

Training	<Internals\\Interview with RC06K> Training on how to do your job
	Working for the government is critical, and if I had the proper training, I could perform my job better.
	<Internals\\Interview with WD19A> The Directorate should make supervisors take mandatory supervisory training.