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## Understanding Successful Strategies Human Service First-Level Managers Utilize when Addressing Workplace Incivility

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Understanding Successful Strategies Human Service First-Level Managers Utilize when  
Addressing Workplace Incivility

by

Mary Elizabeth Barlow

MA, University of Houston – Clear Lake, 2013

BS, University of Houston, 2012

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services

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## Abstract

The social problem of workplace incivility is a well-researched issue that impacts employees, work groups, and organizations across the nation. The purpose of this study was to understand how first-level human service managers describe employee turnover in relation to workplace incivility and what first-level human service managers view as successful strategies they have used to address workplace incivility. The theoretical framework utilized for this study was incivility spiral theory, as described by Andersson and Pearson. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of successful strategies that first-level human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility that aids in reducing turnover. Semistructured interviews were conducted via ZOOM video conferencing with 10 current or previous first-level managers in a human service organization. The themes that emerged, after interviews were transcribed and coded, not only revealed that good employees are being lost as a result of workplace incivility, but that managers used real life experiences, professional development, and the modeling of former managers when addressing workplace incivility. Implications for positive social change include training that will provide managers with an understanding of how to approach, investigate, and address workplace incivility and the creation of or strengthening of policies that aid in dealing with workplace incivility. Such changes could reduce or eliminate the negative consequences of workplace incivility; exhaustion, intentions to terminate employment, and work-related illnesses and stress.

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## Dedication

To my mother for teaching me that education is the key to success and to my husband for supporting me in my endless pursuit of education.

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Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Gregory Hickman and Dr. Tracey Phillips for guiding me throughout this journey and supporting my development as an academic scholar.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Workplace incivility is an increasing concern for employers (Porath et al., 2015; Selden & Sowa, 2015) and has the potential to undermine the social framework of a human service organization's work environment (Warrner et al., 2016). This growing issue can lead to increased rates of voluntary employee turnover, which presents significant challenges to sustainability over time (Selden & Sowa, 2015). With critical humanitarian missions and a prevalence of resource shortages, human service organizations are especially vulnerable to the challenges of recruiting and retaining productive, engaged employees (Renard & Snelgar, 2016; Selden & Sowa, 2015; Shuffler et al., 2018). Researchers have provided guidance and recommendations for strategies and programs employers can utilize to increase an organizations' employee retention while helping uncivil employees improve their behaviors and succeed in their job (Beattie & Griffin, 2014; Lee et al., 2016). These strategies have included employee education programs, cognitive reframing exercises, and assertive communication skills training. However, I have found no studies that have addressed the success of such responsive strategies, especially within the human services field. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the strategies that first-level human service managers have identified as being successful when addressing workplace incivility. In this study, first-level human service managers will be defined as managers who are responsible for managing employees who are providing human services through programs in relation to what the organization offers (Kirchhoff et al., 2013). First-level managers are oftentimes required to possess specific

management skills such as planning, organizing, directing, and controlling day-to-day employees within their program or division (Corin, & Bjork, 2016).

This dissertation will follow a traditional five chapter format. Chapter 1 is the introduction to the study, outlining the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and a brief overview of the methodology. Chapter 2 is the literature review, providing a robust investigation of the research studies that support the viability of this study, discussing the topic from both a historical and recent perspective. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology, highlighting the population and sample, data collection methods, study procedures, the data analysis plan, and ethical assurances. Chapter 4 is the results section, providing a robust overview of the results of the qualitative analysis, and Chapter 5 will conclude the study with a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature, recommendations, limitations, and recommendations for future studies.

### **Background**

Researchers have defined workplace incivility as deviant behaviors that occur in small, reoccurring frequencies with varying intent to do harm; which violates workplace behavioral norms of respect and civility (Fox & Cowan, 2017; Holm, et al., 2015). This form of behavior is a severe form of workplace bullying (Hershcovis et al., 2018), as common themes in defining this form of workplace behavior include repeated and variable frequencies of unethical behavior towards a coworker or supervisor, rude, sarcastic, humiliating, and offensive treatment in the workplace, creating an unpleasant work environment that negatively effects employees' work performance, and/or

intentionally overworking an employee (Perez, 2017; Rockett et al., 2017). Researchers explained that uncivil or negative employees tend to place the majority of the power for change at the top, or in the hands of supervisors and attributes the negative behavior to an employees need for information or resources (Holm et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2016; Petrou et al., 2016).

When incivility in the workplace remains unaddressed, peer effects can occur. Peer effects can be experienced within an organization when negative employees influence the spread of misconduct and the cultivation of a negative environment in the workplace (Reich & Hershcovis, 2015). This in turn can create a group of uncivil employees (Hill, 2019). When uncivil employees see that the potential risk of engaging in negative behavior is low, negative employees tend to perpetuate their behaviors (Jones, 2017; Rockett et al., 2017). When uncivil employee behavior continues, employee turnover rates increase (Schilpzand et al., 2016).

Employee turnover is very expensive for many reasons (Schilpzand et al., 2016). The financial burdens of recruiting, training, providing unemployment benefits, and the potential legal actions from terminated employees are all reasons why organizations take termination seriously and work to develop and implement strategies that reduce turnover and avoid termination (Bevan, 2016; Selden & Sowa, 2015). Fox and Cowan (2017) found that human resource professionals, managers, and organizational practices play a critical role when addressing uncivil employee behavior. Researchers have provided guidance and recommendations for strategies and programs employers can utilize to

increase organizations' employee retention and to aid uncivil employees in improving their behavior and succeeding in their jobs (Beattie & Griffin, 2014; Lee et al., 2016).

Outside of specific strategies that managers can use when addressing workplace incivility, researchers have highlighted how coping responses should be explored in relation as to whether victims should confront or avoid bullying behaviors (Hershcovis et al., 2017; Linvill & Connaughton, 2018; Welbourne et al., 2016). For example, Hershcovis et al., (2018) completed a study that examined both the effects of confrontation and avoidance as a means of coping response when experiencing workplace incivility. The authors found that both confrontation and avoidance were ineffective when preventing workplace incivility, as avoidance promoted an increase of emotional exhaustion and lower levels of psychological forgiveness, while confrontation could increase uncivil and future targeted behaviors. While it is essential for managers to utilize effective coping skills to address workplace incivility, not all can see that it is occurring within their departments (Sliter et al., 2015; Vagharseyyedin, 2015). For example, most leaders feel that their departments are civil, yet only approximately half of their staff feel the same way (Labun, 2019).

Many first steps in addressing workplace incivility include managers being familiar with the policies and procedures for dealing with uncivil behaviors, so it is paramount for managers to review institutional policies that discuss bias, harassment, and retaliation (Hoffman & Chunta, 2015). Other ways that managers can address workplace incivility include setting clear expectations with staff members before any incidents occur, model behaviors that they would like to see in the workplace, and promote open

communication where employees can openly discuss their feelings without retribution (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2017). It is important to note that although researchers have discussed ways in which managers can address workplace incivility, I have found little to no studies that focus on what successful strategies first-level managers in the human services field use when experiencing workplace incivility.

### **Problem Statement**

Employers are increasingly concerned of workplace incivility (Porath et al., 2015; Selden & Sowa, 2015) as it has the potential to undermine the social framework of a human service organizations work environment (Warrner et al., 2016). This growing issue can lead to increased rates of voluntary employee turnover, which can present a significant challenge to sustainability over time (Selden & Sowa, 2015). With critical humanitarian missions and a prevalence of resource shortages, human service organizations are especially vulnerable to the challenges of recruiting and retaining productive, engaged employees (Renard & Snelgar, 2016; Selden & Sowa, 2015; Shuffler et al., 2018).

Fox and Cowan (2017) found that human resources professionals, managers, and organizational practices play a critical role in addressing uncivil employee behavior. Researchers have provided guidance and recommendations for strategies and programs employers can utilize that increase organizations employee retention and to help uncivil employees improve their behavior and succeed in their job (Beattie & Griffin, 2014; Lee et al., 2016). The financial burden of recruiting, training, providing unemployment benefits, and potential legal action from a terminated employee are all reasons why



organizations take employee termination seriously and work to develop and implement strategies to reduce turnover and avoid termination (Doshy & Wang, 2014; Selden & Sowa, 2015).

Although the aforementioned research regarding the existence and consequences of employee incivility in the workplace illuminates important findings, I have found no research that has examined successful strategies human service first level managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility. Given such, further research is warranted that could examine strategies that first-level human service managers have identified as being successful when addressing workplace incivility in an effort to address the documented problem of high employment turnover rates among nonprofit, human service organizations (Selden & Sowa, 2015; Walsh, 2014).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to understand successful strategies that first-level human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility that aids in reducing turnover. Human service professionals assist both individuals and communities in functioning effectively by ensuring that members of society hold basic elements of major domains in order to live comfortably. This study will follow a generic qualitative approach, as the intent of this study is to explore successful strategies that human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility. Additionally, a generic qualitative approach will allow for a deeper understanding of how successful strategies aid in reducing employee turnover. The phenomenon of interest in this study is that of workplace incivility.

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do first-level human service managers describe employee turnover in relation to workplace incivility?

**RQ2:** What do first-level human service managers view as successful strategies they have used to address workplace incivility?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This generic qualitative study will be guided by the theoretical framework of incivility spiral theory to understand the outcomes and solutions of workplace incivility that have been describe as successful strategies used by human service managers. Incivility spiral theory details a pattern of increasing or decreasing unkind acts exhibited by individuals who are unable to change their behaviors and who lack an understanding of their situation (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Defining incivility as “low-intensity, deviant behavior,” Andersson and Pearson (1999) created the incivility spiral theory to aid in determining how workplace incivility is manifested, as well as how organizational managers react to it. I aim to provide a greater understanding of the manifestation of workplace incivility by introducing an incivility spiral, which can be made worse by asymmetric global interactions among employees. Andersson and Pearson further explained that human actors create spirals of incivility because they lack situational awareness and the willingness or ability to alter their behaviors.

In my study, using the theoretical framework of incivility spiral theory will specifically illuminate an explanation of the lifecycle of uncivil behaviors exhibited by

human service employees, as well as guide the data of how instances of workplace incivility are manifested throughout a spiral and asymmetric instances of global interactions amongst employees in human service organizations. For example, because of the dynamics of power and leadership, little acts of incivility, such as microaggressions, oftentimes go unacknowledged by human service managers, influencing these behaviors to spiral into bullying and workplace violence (Atmadja, 2019; Pindek & Spector, 2015). Microaggressions are defined as commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory slights or insults towards an individual or group (Prieto et al., 2016).

The utilization of this theory will allow for the identification of micro-aggression behaviors, which in turn can prevent the spiral of these unacknowledged behaviors into full-blown workplace incivility (Loh & Loi, 2018). Participants in this study may discuss instances of micro-aggressive behaviors, in which this theory could pinpoint, providing specific information to myself regarding the spiral of incivility in their workplaces. Additionally, because there are no explicit laws that focus on workplace incivility, unlike instances of sexual harassment and discrimination, incivility oftentimes goes unreported until the situation becomes out of control (Brooks, 2018). Therefore, this theory will aid me in better understanding practices of how principled leadership is in alignment with the development of zero tolerance policies that address workplace microaggressions and incivility (Harold & Holtz, 2015). Additionally, understanding this theoretical framework has provided me with valuable insight when developing the strengths-based,

semistructured interview questions, as I can learn of the successful strategies human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study will follow a generic qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews as the data collection source. I will utilize 10 to 15 open-ended questions to gather responses from first-level human services managers who have successfully designed and deployed strategies that address workplace incivility. Via the professional network site, LinkedIn, I will use a purposive sampling technique to recruit and select 10 to 15 participants who hold a first-level management role in a human services organization. The final number of participants will be determined by data saturation, which occurs when I experience redundancies and repetitiveness when completing the semi-structured interviews, causing her to cease data collection (Ness, 2015).

A generic qualitative approach is appropriate when the main focus of the research question is to understand an individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences from their world view (Kahlke, 2014; Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). Therefore, I will use a generic qualitative approach in order to gain an understanding of human service managers' experiences and strategies for successfully addressing workplace incivility in a human service organization (Percy et al., 2015). I will additionally use an inductive approach to analyze the data collected in order to identify significant themes that emerge from the perspectives of the study's participants' (Jebb et al., 2017).

## Definitions

*Employee retention:* Employee retention is defined as the efforts that businesses make in order to maintain a working environment that supports current staff to continue working for the company (Al-Emadi et al., 2015).

*Human service organization:* An organization that provides basic human need support services to individuals (Archer, 2017).

*Voluntary employee turnover:* Voluntary employee turnover occurs when employees of a company voluntarily leave their positions, self-terminating their employment (Lee et al., 2017).

*Voluntary separations:* Voluntary separations occur when an employee of an organization accepts a severance package on their own without being selected by management when it comes to layoffs. Voluntary separations are also known as a program where severance packages are extended to employees who may want to step down from their positions (Davis et al., 2015).

*Workplace incivility:* Workplace incivility is defined in this study as low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect (Holm et al., 2015). This form of behavior has also been highlighted as a severe form of workplace bullying (Hershcovis et al., 2018), with common themes including repeated and variable frequencies of unethical behavior towards a coworker or supervisor, rude, sarcastic, humiliating, and offensive treatment in the workplace, creating an unpleasant work environment that negatively effects

employees' work performance, and/or intentionally overworking an employee (Perez, 2017; Rockett et al., 2017).

### **Assumptions**

There are four main assumptions that must be highlighted within this proposed study. The first assumption is that the first-level managers in this study have experienced workplace incivility during their careers. This assumption allows for them to answer the semistructured interview questions in full, providing me with rich data that can answer the research questions. The second assumption is that the participants of this study will answer interview questions openly and honestly. The third assumption is that the participants will have the professional and educational experiences to answer the questions appropriately based upon the study's inclusion criteria. The fourth and final assumption includes that the participants will answer all of the interview questions while sharing their experiences and successful strategies utilized with workplace incivility in their work environments (Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Researchers use delimitations to define the parameters of a study (Sampson, 2017). The objective of this generic qualitative study is to understand successful strategies that first-level human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility to increase employee retention. I will specifically focus on nonprofit, human service organizations, versus that of for-profit human service companies, as I have a specific interest in understanding successful strategies used in nonprofit organizations. The choice to focus only on first-level managers in human service organizations who

have been successful with addressing workplace incivility will delimitate the scope of this study. Managing employees is the responsibility of first-level managers and the analysis of their responses and experiences is expected to be useful for identifying emerging themes related to successful strategies to address workplace incivility.

Therefore, this study is delimited to first-level managers who are currently employed at a nonprofit human service organization, and who are professional members of a LinkedIn human services group located in the United States.

### **Limitations**

Research limitations are potential weaknesses that researchers can experience that could impact the reliability and validity of the study in a negative manner (Greener, 2018). The first limitation that must be addressed includes the possibility of researcher bias. Before starting the study, it is important for me to declare any personal biases that could affect the results of the study (Noble & Smith, 2015). My experience as a first-level human service organization manager could add personal bias to the study. Roulston and Shelton (2015) explained that a researcher could avoid bias by remaining neutral, objective, and impartial during the research process. To overcome this limitation, I will use open-ended, strengths-based interview questions when gathering information from participants, with the questions being created via an interview protocol. An interview protocol is where I will contact a Doctoral student colleague and request that they review the study's purpose statement, the research question, the methodology, and the list of 10 to 15 interview questions to ensure they are in alignment. After receiving feedback from my Doctoral student colleague, I will review the information with my chair and realign

and adjust the interview questions accordingly (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). My Doctoral student colleague who participates in the creation of the interview protocol will also be requested to complete a peer review of the study's findings. During this peer review my Doctoral student colleague will review the findings in conjunction with the interview transcripts to ensure that there is limited bias. Additionally, in order to ensure that bias is not occurring in the data that is being collected, I will also complete member checking. Member checking will occur when I will send a .pdf of the interview transcripts via electronic mail (email) to each participant after the recordings of each interview have been transcribed. During member checking, each participant will review the transcript of their interview to ensure accuracy of the collected data. If the participants identify any inaccuracies of data in the transcripts, I will be able to adjust the information to reflect exactly what the participant said.

A second limitation that I could experience when conducting this study could include transferability. Because this research is understanding first-level human service managers' successful strategies that are used when addressing workplace incivility in the United States, the results of this study will not be generalized to outside of this population. In this study, transferability was accounted for as I was able to describe a strong and narrow description of the phenomenon being explored (Connelly, 2016). When providing a strong and narrow description of the phenomenon, it allows other researchers to collect data that thoroughly details of the participant's experiences and perceptions (Nowell et al., 2017). This ensures that there is a wide range of information



that constructs the problem that is being studied in relation to the participant's experiences and any biases that could occur during the research.

One of the study's criteria could also act as a limitation to this study due to prospective participants self-reporting that they have had experience in dealing with a human resources referral for a problematic employee. There are limited ways to determine whether a prospective participant actually has had this experience, or to what level, as it can be deemed as a subjective experience.

A final limitation that I could experience in this study is that of the qualitative research design. Because generic qualitative studies do not necessarily fall in alignment with specific established methodologies, researchers could experience limitations of rigor when using this qualitative design (Kahlke, 2014). For example, Kahlke (2014) discussed how generic qualitative studies can be seen as a mixology of different qualitative designs, researchers can encounter instances of incongruence through a lack of structure to the research framework. In order to overcome this limitation, it is recommended that researchers ensure that they account for their personal epistemological perspective of their actions as a researcher, as well as the methodology. This can be demonstrated when they are building their interview questions, as it is important for researchers to ensure that their research questions demonstrate cohesion and highlight the research structure in full. Therefore, when addressing this limitation, researchers will ensure that they reflect on their epistemological viewpoints of the role of a researcher, the epistemological perspective of the methodology that they are using, and seek other professionals'

assistance when building the research questions that support the need for the study's framework (Bellamy et al., 2016).

### **Significance**

This study will contribute to the existing body of literature on the topic of workplace dynamics and will illuminate the issue from a unique perspective. When added to the existing body of research, my findings may assist with policy and practice changes within human service agencies. While current research exists addressing this topic in health services (Kerber et al., 2015), hospitality services (Cho et al., 2016), and educational environments (Perez, 2017), I have found little to no research that examined effective strategies used in the field of human services when dealing with workplace incivility.

In addition to affecting the workplace environments of human service organization employees, future researchers could experience positive social change, as they can be exposed to successful strategies that address workplace incivility that lead to higher retention rates throughout their human service organizations. Therefore, the results of this study could strengthen human service organizations as a whole by increasing mission driven service delivery. With over 1.5 million nonprofit organizations in the United States (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2016), improving work environments, client satisfaction, and service delivery could have an overwhelmingly positive effect on the welfare of our society and for social change. This study can lead to social change in human service organizations by aiding in changing cultural norms. Cultural norms can change by agencies adopting strong strategies that are successful in

addressing incivility, which can decrease staff turnover. Additionally, rules of behavior can be redefined that can lead a human service organization to offer a safe climate for all employees when it comes to interacting with managers and coworkers, holding all accountable for their behaviors in the workplace.

### **Summary**

The need to reduce staff turnover in the workplace of today will only continue to increase in demand over time. Research into the problems caused by workplace incivility, from employee turnover to lower productivity and morale, has been thoroughly discussed by researchers. Unfortunately, research into the success of initiatives that aim to reduce or eliminate workplace incivility has been general and sparse. Reflecting this gap, I reviewed literature in this report that defined the overall problem of employee turnover related to workplace incivility and offers some solutions. However, further research is warranted that could examine successful strategies that first-level human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility, in an effort to address the documented problem of high employment turnover rates among nonprofit, human service organizations (Selden & Sowa, 2015; Walsh, 2014).

I introduced the study in this chapter by highlighting the background of the problem, the problem statement, and the purpose of the study. I further discussed the research question, the theoretical framework, and the nature of the study, while concluding with a discussion on the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the research. The next chapter includes a robust overview of the literature, depicting both historical and recent perspectives of incivility of the workplace and strategies used to

address such problematic behavior, highlighting the gap that ensures the viability of this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Employers are increasingly concerned of workplace incivility as it has the potential to undermine the social framework of a human service organizations' work environment (Mikaelian & Stanley, 2016; Sguera et al., 2016). This growing issue can lead to increased rates of voluntary employee turnover, which can present a significant challenge to sustainability over time (Selden & Sowa, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this generic qualitative study is to understand successful strategies human service managers utilize to address workplace incivility. This chapter will provide an overview on the academic research conducted into this topic.

First, a brief discussion of the literature review search process will be explained, followed by an articulation of the overarching theoretical framework that guided this study, which is the incivility spiral theory. An understanding of the historical origins of work and related workplace problems will be introduced in the literature review, followed by an analysis of both historical and recent aspects of workplace incivility, human service organizations, employee turnover, and strategies that focus on dealing with problematic behaviors. Management personnel will also be discussed in this review, while it is important to highlight ways in which they approach and deal with instances of workplace incivility between their employees. The purpose of this literature review is to highlight the gap that ensures the need for this study.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

This researcher's extensive literature review will include a variety of peer-reviewed articles and studies that are focused on the historical problems found in

workplace environments as well as instances of workplace incivility. This literature will focus on the historical background workplace incivility, as well as how managers of human service organizations deal with workplace incivility between their staff, where there appeared to be virtually no research specifically evaluating strategies that they utilize when addressing this problematic behavior. As such, a review of the existing literature was conducted in order to gain a broader understanding of all relevant topics closely related to workplace incivility and successful strategies that are used within human service organizations.

Additional references, such as published government/industry reports and online sources, and professional industry focused websites were identified concerning leadership styles used in healthcare milieus, and the effectiveness that they bring to each area. Key search parameters included the following: incivility spiral theory, origins of work, origins of work and workplace problems, historical elements of workplace incivility, human service organizations, workplace incivility and human service organizations, employee turnover, employee turnover and human service organizations, workplace incivility and human service organizations, employee turnover, employee turnover and human service organizations, employee turnover and workplace incivility, managers and workplace incivility, strategies and workplace incivility, manager strategies and workplace incivility, managers and human service organizations and workplace incivility and successful strategies, incivility spiral theory.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

This research study will be guided by the theoretical framework of Incivility spiral theory to understand the outcomes and solutions of workplace incivility that have been described as successful strategies used by human service managers. This review of academic literature begins with an examination of Incivility spiral theory as the theoretical foundation for this research and includes a discussion about micro-aggressions and leadership.

### **Incivility Spiral Theory**

Andersson and Pearson (1999) explained that human actors create spirals of incivility because they lack situational awareness and the willingness or ability to change their behaviors. The components of Incivility spiral theory have a destructive impact on work environments (Holm et al., 2015; Loi et al., 2015). If left unaddressed, incivility intensifies and the behaviors become more aggressive overtime (Sliter et al., 2015). Incivility spiral theory is defined as a, “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (Andersson and Pearson, 1999, p. 457). Prior researchers (Doshi & Wang, 2014; Kluemper et al., 2019; Loi et al., 2015) broadly cited Andersson and Pearson’s (1999) definition. Other researchers, Hayes et al., (2015), Linton et al. (2015), Mathieu et al. (2016), and Welbourne et al. (2016), applied the theory to researching the personal, physical and safety effects that workplace incivility can have on employees. Andersson and Pearson (2019) developed Incivility spiral theory to aid in determining how workplace incivility is manifested, as well as how organizational managers react to it and aimed to provide a

greater understanding of the manifestation of workplace incivility by introducing an incivility spiral, which can be made worse by asymmetric global interactions among employees.

In my study, using the theoretical framework of incivility spiral theory will illuminate an explanation of the lifecycle of uncivil behaviors exhibited by human service employees, as well as contribute to current literature and knowledge of how instances of workplace incivility are manifested throughout a spiral and asymmetric instances of global interactions amongst employees in human service organizations. Because of the dynamics of power and leadership, little acts of incivility, such as microaggressions, oftentimes go unacknowledged by human service managers, influencing these behaviors to spiral into bullying and workplace violence (Atmadja, 2019; Basford et al., 2014).

### ***Microaggressions***

Microaggressions are defined as commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory slights or insults towards an individual or group (Prieto et al., 2016). Dzurec and Albatineh (2014) and Mizzi (2017) defined microaggressions as systematic, overt, underlying, nonphysical aggression toward individuals or groups. The utilization of this theory will allow for responsible, proactive leadership to be highlighted addressing instances of microaggression, which in turn can prevent the spiral of these unacknowledged behaviors into full-blown workplace incivility (Loh, & Loi, 2018).

Additionally, because there are no explicit laws that focus on workplace incivility, unlike instances of sexual harassment and discrimination, incivility oftentimes goes



unreported until the situation becomes out of control (Burnett, 2019). This theory will aid me in better understanding the practices of how principled leadership is used to address workplace microaggressions and incivility. Additionally, understanding this theoretical framework has provided me with valuable insight when developing the strengths-based, semi-structured interview questions, as I can learn of the successful strategies human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility.

To better understand how the incivility spiral theory has aided researchers in the past, specific results from research should be discussed, especially those that have been guided by the theory. Through research with the Incivility spiral theory, it has been concluded that workplace incivility has been positively linked to instigated workplace incivility, and burnout mediated a relationship between workplace incivility and instigated workplace incivility (Hayes et al., 2015; Laschinger et al., 2016; Loh & Loi, 2018). In essence, burnout can be responsible for employees' uncivil relationships with each other, simply because it can trigger microaggressions, commonly used as coping mechanisms in the workplace (Hayes et al., 2015; Jha & Jha, 2015). Outside of workplace incivility, the Incivility spiral theory also guides the importance of better understanding emotional aftermaths of incivility that occurs outside the workplace (Hayes et al., 2015).

Incivility-driven emotions tend to mediate personal and professional outcomes (Kabat-Farr et al., 2018; Mathieu et al., 2016). Employees can appear to experience reduced empowerment and self-esteem, while also experiencing greater job and work withdrawal, while individuals that companies value the most, can appear to be harmed at

higher levels when it comes to the experience of microaggressions and instances of workplace incivility (Holder & Nadal, 2016; Laschinger et al., 2016). This highlights the importance of using the Incivility spiral theory in this current research, because similar constructs will be studied; however, will be done so under the guise of successful strategies that human service managers use in order to combat uncivil behaviors, which in turn may establish a workplace culture of empowerment and self-esteem while reducing employee turnover.

### ***Leadership***

Leadership is also important when it comes to dealing with uncivil behaviors, in such that passive leadership appears to have a direct effect on behavioral incivility and an indirect effect through experienced incivility (Baronce, 2015; Harold & Holtz, 2015; Jha & Jha, 2015). This was made clear in Harold and Holtz's (2015) study where the authors sought out to examine passive leadership-incivility relationships between employee and supervisor dyads, then sought out to examine these same relationships in a sample of employee-coworker dyads. Being guided by the Incivility spiral theory, Baronce (2015) concluded that both behavioral and experienced workplace incivility was related to that of the level of passive workplace supervision with stronger levels found when leaders follow a passive approach to leading their team members. This information is important for this current study, because gaining broader understandings from human service managers in strong leadership roles can provide an understanding of leaderships successful, direct approaches, rather than passive approaches to uncivil behaviors and the effect those approaches have on employee turnover.

## Literature Review

### Agrarian Society

The United States has seen a major change of work environments over the past two centuries (Landy & Conte, 2016). It is important to understand how the concept and condition of work has changed over time, as America has moved through a variety of work-related stages that include transitioning from an agrarian society to that of the industrial revolution (Griffin, 2017). An agrarian society can be traced back 10,000 years and, in some instances, they can still be found today (Lee & DeVore, 2017). An agrarian society is one which economy depends on producing and maintaining crops and farmland (Bennett, 2017). Also known as an agricultural society, the cultivation of land is the primary source of income (Howell, 2016). Proceeding the hunter and gathering society, agrarian societies were established around 8,000 to 10,000 years ago in the Middle East region, where development was needed from previous societies in order to sustain food levels and deal with the changing climate (Chirot, 2011). Agrarian societies additionally began appearing in Asia by at least 6,800 B.C.E., where rice was cultivated, and later in South America where squash and maize were cultivated (Fuller, 2006). After the development of agrarian societies in the Middle East, Asia, and South America, smaller scales or Agrarian societies developed in India and Southeast Asia, where rice and taro were produced respectively (Fuller, 2006).

There are characteristics found in Agrarian societies, including that of them having a higher social organization than that of their previous hunter and gathering societies, as well as the characteristics of the need of having a surplus of food, fewer

technological advances, and a depletion of soil (Marlowe, 2005). Working conditions in Agrarian societies were reflective of that of rural areas in today's world; precarious and hazardous working conditions marked with hazardous experiences, as working conditions typically had no written or verbal contracts, long work hours, and low pay or unstable incomes (Edelman & Wolford, 2017). Agrarian societies typically combine more than one activity in order to make a living (Hall et al., 2017).

Because past Agrarian societies did not have technological advances, the majority of the work had to be completed by hand or with the aid of animals (Stearns, 2018). For example, workers typically had to lift heavy objects and work in dangerous conditions in combination with farm animals, being exposed to harsh climates, chemicals, infectious agents, and organic substances (Stearns, 2018). Because workers in an Agrarian society had limited to no exposure to social protection systems; therefore, instances of workplace incivility were not important in the scheme of things, as workers oftentimes had to concentrate on the physical labor aspect of their job duties, and did not have the time to communicate with other workers unless it was within the scope of the job they were completing (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). Additionally, society morals were different than found in today's world, as women did not experience any protections in the workforce, and oftentimes were not allowed to work in the field alongside men (Borges et al., 1984). In essence, Agrarian societies concentrated on survival more so than positive working experiences, as they had to cope with the cultivation of food in order to make ends meet, while meeting the demands of their wider community (Tisdell & Svizzero, 2017).

## **Industrial Revolution**

The industrial revolution emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, where a shift began occurring that transitioned many Agrarian societies in Europe and the United States to that of industrialized and urban communities (Horn, 2016). Goods that were once manufactured by hand started to be mass produced, providing jobs for individuals to operate machines that aided in this mad production of goods and services (Ashton, 1997). There are two different emerging industrial revolutions in the history of the world, with the first industrial revolution occurring in the 1830s and 1840s, and the second occurred in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, where there were rapid advancement by the introduction of newer materials such as that of steel, electricity needs, and the creation of automobiles (Labor, 1990). Again, workplace conditions throughout the industrial revolution were poor, as workers were mandated to work long hours with the risk of losing their employment if they did not comply (Hartwell, 2017). Many individuals worked 12 hours a day for six days a week, with little time off to spend with their family and loved ones (Mokyr, 2018). Conditions included if they were sick and missed working days, they were oftentimes fired and replaced with other individuals who could continue working on the imposing and required schedule (Hartwell, 2017). Additionally, during the industrial revolution, employers were able to set their employees' pay as low as they wanted with little to no repercussions, as there were a plethora of individuals willing to work (Mokyr, 2018). If one employee complained about worker compensation, they could be fired and replaced with another worker that was willing to complete the job duties as per the pay structure (Mokyr, 2018).

In the late 1880s, workers began to organize unions that would aid in solving their problems of low wages and poor working conditions (Cook et al., 1992). Unions represented employees where they could strike in an attempt to force their employer to increase wages and improve the working conditions of the company (Mommsen & Husung, 2017). Today, unions still represent employees in a variety of industrialized fields, with other government legalization that mandates safe working conditions, proper employee pay, and the protection of equality amongst employees (Sinha et al., 2017).

In recent times, Agrarian societies still exist; however, they are marked by the use of technology that can aid them in the production of crops and the management of farmland (Bennett, 2017). Despite these technological innovations that can be used within their work, many farmers still continue to work long hours in dangerous conditions for low pay (Glover & Kusterer, 2016). In relation to the industrial revolution, many historians report that we are in an actual fourth industrial revolution; however, they do not necessarily see it as an extension of the previous industrial revolutions, as it is more of a new era that promotes digital and computational technologies (Frederick, 2016). Thus, working conditions have changed as more individuals are working in an office environment, working to manage different technologies and services that are offered to the public, which may not have been offered within Agrarian societies and early industrial revolutionary times (Neff, 2017).

### **Elements of Workplace Incivility**

Researchers have defined workplace incivility as deviant behaviors that occur in small, reoccurring frequencies with varying intent to do harm; which violates workplace

behavioral norms of respect and civility (Fox & Cowan, 2017; Holm et al., 2015). This form of behavior is a severe form of workplace bullying (Hershcovis et al., 2018), as common themes in defining this form of workplace behavior include repeated and variable frequencies of unethical behavior towards a coworker or supervisor, rude, sarcastic, humiliating, and offensive treatment in the workplace, creating an unpleasant work environment that negatively effects employees' work performance, and/or intentionally overworking an employee (Perez, 2017; Rockett et al., 2017). Researchers explained that uncivil or negative employees tend to place the majority of the power for change at the top, or in the hands of supervisors and attributes the negative behavior to an employees need for information or resources (Holm et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2016; Petrou et al., 2016).

When incivility in the workplace remains unaddressed, peer effects can occur especially when negative employees influence the spread of misconduct and the cultivation of a negative environment in the workplace, in turn creating a group of uncivil employees (Reich & Hershcovis, 2015). When uncivil employees see that the potential risk of engaging in negative behavior is low, negative employees tend to perpetuate their behaviors (Jones, 2017; Rockett et al., 2017). When uncivil employee behavior continues, employee turnover rates increase (Schilpzand et al., 2016).

Research focusing on workplace incivility has increased dramatically over the past 10 years, as prevalence rates are as high as 75 to 100%, indicating that almost all employees in today's workforce have experienced some level of uncivil behavior while working (Sliter et al., 2015). From the research, workplace incivility can manifest in three

different ways, including that of interpersonal interactions, cyber interactions, and victimless interactions (Harrison, 2015; Katz et al., 2019). Interpersonal interactions include where one employee is uncivil to another employee directly (Paulin & Griffin, 2016). Workplace incivility that occurs in an interpersonal communication is rarely studied (Reich & Hershcovis, 2015). Observers of uncivil behaviors tend to punish instigators, while their reactions to instigators were generally unaffected; therefore, it is essential to understand how, by witnessing uncivil behavior in the workplace, observer reactions towards targets and instigators can be affected (Reich & Hershcovis, 2015). This can be seen when the effect of witnessing workplace incivility can be oftentimes mediated by an observer's negative emotional reaction toward the instigator, which highlights the importance of understanding interpersonal communications when it comes to experiencing uncivil behaviors (Wilkerson & Meyer, 2019).

Workplace communications that are marked by instances of uncivil behaviors can additionally influence an employees' creativity output, leading to severe emotional exhaustion (Hur et al., 2016). In terms of both customers and coworkers, interpersonal communications that are marked with uncivil behavior decrease an employees' level of intrinsic motivation, thus decreasing their level of creativity that they bring to the workplace (Hur et al., 2016). Therefore, there is a negative relationship between workplace incivility and service employees' creativity, marked by levels of emotional exhaustion and intrinsic motivation (Schenck, 2017). This aligns with this current study, as employees who experience severe emotional exhaustion not only negatively influence an employee's creativity output, but also can lead to instances of turnover and poor



retention (Al-Emadi et al., 2015). Anjum et al. (2018) explain, employee retention aids in decreasing expenses and provides a positive impact on a company's morale.

### **Cyber Workplace Incivility**

Workplace incivility can be manifested in the form of cyber communications (Park et al., 2018). With the continuous emergence of technology in today's workplace, there are more instances of workplace incivility in this realm, where managers and leaders must acknowledge and address these behaviors (Demsky et al., 2019). Many studies have also been completed from a historical and recent standpoint that address workplace incivility and cyber communications (Heischman et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2017). Cyber incivility in the workplace is a continuing and prevailing phenomenon, as different emotions can arise from cyber incivility that can motivate affected employees to engage in an approach-focused or avoidance-focused response (Lim et al., 2017). This signifies the importance of focusing on cyber communications, due to the increase of technology that is used in today's workforce, as this can be a method of how individuals in a workplace can promote instances of unhealthy behaviors (Williams, & Loughlin, 2016).

Face-to-face and cyber communication are significantly correlated to each of the work outcomes of job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover intention, indicating that instance of cyber uncivil behavior is just as damaging to that of face-to-face experiences and that a difference exists between the effects of workplace incivility via cyber communications compared to that of face-to-face (interpersonal) communications (Heischman, et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2017). Cyber communications are just as harmful as

interpersonal instance of uncivil behaviors (Heischman, et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2017) and this needs to be better understood since technology continues to increase within the workplace, as well as different organizations using different platforms of technology in order to communicate and conduct business amongst their workforce.

### **Victimless Incivility**

Workplace incivility can be manifested and occur even in victimless interactions (Katz et al., 2019). This occurs where uncivil behavior may not necessarily affect or impact another person, but more so violates norms of ethical behavior and workplace courtesy and respect (Massimino & Turner, 2017). Research has also been completed that has focused on victimless instances of workplace incivility, reporting that although victimless instances of workplace incivility do not directly affect another individual or employee, these forms of workplace uncivil behavior does violate norms of courtesy (Odu & Akhigbe, 2018). There appears to be a strong connection between the exposure of workplace injustice through uncivil behaviors that violate a company's norms of courtesy, as employees' well-being can be severely affected, even though the employees' did not directly experience either interpersonal or cyber communication forms of workplace incivility (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Additional research needs to be completed within this area, especially concentrating on workplace injustice and how managers can respond to instances of victimless workplace incivility in the face of those that abuse or go against the norms or mores of the organization (Odu & Akhigbe, 2018), which this current study is exploring.

## **The Management of Human Service Organizations**

Human service professionals assist both individuals and communities in functioning effectively by ensuring that members of society hold basic elements of major domains in order to live comfortably (Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2017). From a historical perspective, the human service field gained popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, where dramatic changes occurred in helping individuals who were in need (Halpern, 2017). Focusing on populations that struggled with low socioeconomic statuses, unemployment, children in need, the elderly, and the disabled, human service workers began working to coordinate different social and rehabilitation services (Neukrug, 21016). Additionally, during this time period, many individuals who were institutionalized were released to the community, due to passing legislation, requiring care as they transitioned back to their society (Slate, 2016). Around this time, many civil rights movements highlighted the need for social justice and issues of equity; therefore, grass roots campaigns were designed to aid in creating opportunities for new approaches to human services (Rosenthal, 2016). Thus, positions were then created for professional and paraprofessionals to provide services for community members in need (Halpern, 2017).

In 1956, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) provided resources to offer the first educational program that concentrated on human services, training students to appropriately interview, observe, conduct groups, implement treatment plans, and mobilize and utilize community resources in order to work with underserved community members (Higgins, 2017). Today, human service managers develop, guide, and monitor social and community programs aimed at improving the overall quality of life of their

service population (Johnson et al., 2017). To better understand how human service organizations operate, it is essential to engage in a discussion that focuses on the manner in which management operates under the constraints of the organization (Thompson, 2017).

Outside of managing their employees and meeting operational goals and objectives, managers of human service organizations are plagued with ensuring that they are protecting the clients in which they service, as well as ensuring that evidenced-based programs are offered in order to protect instances of social justice and the ability to track the progress of clients that are utilizing their services (Lu, 2015). This presents many challenges in human service organizations, especially for management, as evidenced-based practices appear to be an under-utilized strategy that is used to improve social work practices (Lu, 2015). Nonprofit human service organizations oftentimes experience issues that include capacity limitations, lack of access to research evidence, and instances of funding difficulties (Despard, 2016). This ensures a heavy workload for managers of human service organizations, which can aid in them struggling to oversee other areas of employee management, including that of workplace incivility (Corin & Björk, 2016).

Therefore, researchers have identified specific difficulties that first-level human service managers experience; illuminating severe imbalances in relation to high levels of job demands, lack of job resources, being plagued by work overload, conflicting and unclear goals and tasks, restricted control, and the lack of supervisory and organizational support (Corin & Björk, 2016). This is a major point within this literature review, simply because it provides a robust overview of what human service managers experience when

it comes to employee oversight and management. If managers of human service organizations are restricted in terms of work overload and lack of support, it would be difficult to address employee issues, such as that of workplace incivility (Corin & Björk, 2016). When workplace incivility is experienced within the workplace, it is oftentimes ignored or overlooked by management, making it crucial for employers and organizations to offer specific targeted interventions that can address uncivil workplace behaviors (Chen et al., 2019). Therefore, offering targeted interventions that managers can follow can aid in ensuring that uncivil behavior is appropriately handled, which can lessen the stress; they would be more apt to be supported by the organization and can increase both their stress management and cross-cultural management skills (Chen et al., 2019).

### **Workplace Incivility in Human Service Organizations**

The field of human services allows professionals to deal with individuals in the community that require specialized services to help them complete basic functions within their lives (Higgins, 2017). Therefore, it is important to view workplace incivility amongst human service organizations as there are many stakeholders involved that can be affected by uncivil behaviors (Kabat-Farr et al., 2019). Different stakeholders can include human service organizations, the organizations' managers, the employees and direct-care staff, the clients that are served, and the wider community (Kemeny & Mabry, 2015). Three distinct forms of workplace incivility can be found within organizations, which include: emotional outbursts, fellow coworkers opportunistically and aggressively attempting to advance their personal professional statuses, and the acceleration of the pace of neoliberal reforms of human services offered (Heugten, 2018). This can affect

stakeholders, the services offered to the community, and the organizations' mission statements that employees and managers were operating under (Kemeny & Mabry, 2015).

It is important to understand that more research needs to be completed in this arena, simply because previous research (Itzkovich & Heilbrunn, 2016; Marchiondo et al., 2018; Miner et al., 2018) tends to highlight interpersonal and cyber communication instances of workplace incivility, not being focused on in relation to broader organizational and political dynamics that can sustain workplace incivility. Additionally, workplace incivility and workplace ostracism have significant and negative relationships with turnover intentions (Mahfooz et al., 2017). This highlights an important component in investigating uncivil workplace behaviors, as workplace incivility and workplace ostracism had significant and negative relationships with turnover intentions (Mahfooz et al., 2017). Additionally, burnout can significantly mediate the relationship between turnover intentions and workplace incivility (Hayes et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2015).

From an organizational perspective, it is important for human service organizations to ensure that they are appropriately monitoring employees and responding appropriately to workplace incivility by creating positive interpersonal relationships and communications between their staff members, increasing positive team functioning, promoting equality between workers, and improving supervisory relationships (Shier et al., 2018). Workplace incivility is strongly related to negative work outcomes, such as that as exhaustion, intentions to terminate employment, and work-related illnesses and stress (Jiménez et al., 2015). This is due to coworker incivility being strongly related to

that of supervisor incivility, and supervisor incivility having negative effects when it came to the environment of the workplace and how employees' dealt with stress and recovery (Jimenez et al., 2015). This demonstrates a need for organizations to properly train managers when it comes to dealing with workplace incivility, as managers can also partake in uncivil behaviors in the workforce, creating turmoil and stress for their employees.

### **Employee Turnover and Human Service Organizations**

Outside of workplace incivility, human service organizations are plagued with high levels of employee turnover, as many workers are exposed to high caseloads, stressful working environment, and long work hours (Willis et al., 2016). It is important to understand employee turnover outside of instances of workplace incivility, as many factors can influence an employee to terminate their employment (Hetschko, 2016). Many studies have been completed that have focused on employee turnover within the human services field, with these studies focusing on the work environment and conditions that human service workers encounter (Cho & Song, 2017; Glisson, 2015; Kim, 2015; McNall et al., 2015; Selden & Sowa, 2015).

Emotional labor increases turnover intention, whereas the construct of trust decreases it (Cho & Song, 2017). This highlights how determinants of turnover intention can affect an organization. Additionally, a workers' autonomy and supervisor support enhance organizational trust amongst employees, as the emotions that are displayed during the duration of the emotional labor is affected by surface acting (Holm et al., 2015). Surface acting, or the faking of emotions is equally important to discuss in relation

to workplace incivility, which occurs when employees did not actually attempt to feel the emotions that they wished to portray purporting the importance of turnover intention behaviors (Cho & Song, 2017). Similarly, the role of an organization's culture and climate is equally important in relation to innovation and employee effectiveness (Glisson, 2015).

Additionally, the efficiency of an organization is an important construct when it comes to employee turnover or their intent to terminate their employment, as the organization will struggle to maintain programs to the community, as they find it more difficult to reach their organizational goals (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Glisson (2015) has purported that it is imperative that human service organizations continue to reach out to better understand employee turnover, as it can be a different experience for each organization. Providing improved supervisor support, manageable caseloads, and the promotion of positive team interactions are just many ways that human service organizations can continue to influence their employees to stay, through increasing employee satisfaction (Griffiths et al., 2019).

Reducing employee turnover is an important goal for human service organizations, simply because money can be saved in the hiring and training process or employees that are replacing outgoing employees, combined with having to work towards team introduction and team building to ensure that programs are continuously run and offered in an appropriate manner to the wider community (Kim, 2015; Miller Jr., 2017; Schilpzand et al., 2016). When bringing aboard a new employee, human service organizations have to understand that there is a period of adjustment that can limit the



achievement towards their organizational goals and the following of their mission statements (Ellis et al., 2017).

It is important to discuss the direct and indirect benefits of employee empowerment in relation to turnover intention, especially in the face of workplace incivility (Kim, 2015). Employee empowerment has a negative effect on turnover intentions and these negative effects are greater when it comes to employees determining whether they will leave the field or transfer to another human service organization (Kim, 2015). Other areas of turnover intention are equally important to discuss in reference to uncivil workplace behaviors. Individuals who were seen as having high positive affectivity, are more likely to experience both work-to-family and family-to-work enrichment, resulting in lower turnover intentions and emotional exhaustion (McNall et al., 2015). It is important to note that although these studies examine turnover intention, Cohen et al. (2016) argued that turnover intention does not necessarily predict actual turnover rates in organizations, as turnover intention and actual turnover rates are calculated using different variables. Therefore, it is important for human service organizations to focus on determining actual turnover rates via demographic information and management practices, versus that of relying on their employees' self-reported feelings of turnover intention (McFadden et al., 2018).

Voluntary turnover in human service organizations can present significant issues at an organizational level, simply because it costs a lot of money, while reducing performance level at both employee and organizational levels (Selden & Sowa, 2015; Schilpzand et al., 2016). When measuring high-performance work practices, it can be

helpful for organizations to align themselves in using variables that include onboarding, leadership development, compensation, and employee relations (Selden & Sowa, 2015). This is because high-performance work practices are associated with lower voluntary turnover, as human service organizations need to invest more time and resources in building their employees up and providing them with education and support to be more successful (Selden & Sowa, 2015).

Other researchers have highlighted how human service organizations and their managers should continue to concentrate on employee turnover, as strategies used to address this can be similar to that of dealing with workplace incivility (Han et al., 2019; Mahfooz et al., 2017; Mathieu, et al., 2016). Managers who have previously identified and utilized person-oriented leadership styles affected turnover intention through increasing job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Similarly, this can be used when dealing with workplace incivility, simply because person-oriented leadership styles are generally flexible in nature and offer stronger communication patterns, relationship building opportunities, and an emphasis on team building (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018).

### **Employee Turnover and Workplace Incivility**

Workplace incivility is an increasing concern for employers (Porath et al., 2015; Selden & Sowa, 2015) and has the potential to undermine the social framework of a human service organization's work environment (Warrner et al., 2016). This growing issue can lead to increased rates of voluntary employee turnover, which presents significant challenges to sustainability over time (Selden & Sowa, 2015). With critical

humanitarian missions and a prevalence of resource shortages, human service organizations are especially vulnerable to the challenges of recruiting and retaining productive, engaged employees (Renard & Snelgar, 2016; Selden & Sowa, 2015; Shuffler et al., 2018). Researchers have provided guidance and recommendations for strategies and programs employers can utilize to increase organizations' employee retention while helping uncivil employees improve their behaviors and succeed in their job (Beattie & Griffin, 2014; Lee et al., 2016). Employee turnover is very expensive for many reasons (Schilpzand et al., 2016); financial burdens of recruiting, training, providing unemployment benefits, and potential legal actions from terminated employees are all reasons why organizations take termination seriously and work to develop and implement strategies that reduce turnover and avoid termination (Bevan, 2016; Selden & Sowa, 2015). Human resource professionals, managers, and organizational practices play a critical role when addressing uncivil employee behavior (Fox & Cowan, 2017). Researchers have provided guidance and recommendations for strategies and programs employers can utilize to increase organizations' employee retention and to aid uncivil employees in improving their behavior and succeeding in their jobs (Beattie & Griffin, 2014; Lee et al., 2016).

Outside of specific strategies that managers can use when addressing workplace incivility, studies have been completed where researchers have highlighted how coping responses should be explored in relation as to whether victims should confront or avoid bullying behaviors (Hershcovis et al., 2017; Linvill & Connaughton, 2018; Welbourne et al., 2016). Both confrontation and avoidance appear to be ineffective when preventing

workplace incivility, as avoidance can promote an increase of emotional exhaustion while lowering levels of psychological forgiveness, and confrontation can increase uncivil and future targeted behaviors (Hershcovis et al., 2018). While it is essential for managers to utilize effective coping skills to address workplace incivility, not all can see that it is occurring within their departments (Vagharseyyedin, 2015; Sliter et al., 2015). For example, most leaders feel that their departments are civil, yet approximately half of their staff feel the same way (Labun, 2019).

Workplace incivility can cause damaging effects throughout an organization (Zhou et al., 2015); therefore, it is essential to better understand how this construct can operate in relation to employee turnover. Workplace incivility can influence employee turnover, making this a critical issue for organizations to address (Sguera et al., 2016). Any relationships that exist between workplace incivility, job burnout, turnover intentions, and job performance is important to examine, as job burnout mediates the relationship between workplace incivility and turnover intention; whereas, workplace incivility can also be negatively associated with job performance (Rahim & Cosby, 2016).

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence, defined by Chen and Wang (2019) as a concept where one has the ability to be aware of, control, and express one's emotion, can also play a role when it comes to discussing workplace incivility and turnover intentions. There appear to be strong relationships between workplace incivility, job satisfaction, and turnover intention, with the moderating effect of emotional intelligence playing a role between

instances of workplace incivility and job satisfaction (Chen et al., 2019). Workplace incivility and turnover attention does not just run through human service organizations but appears to emerge through a variety of industries and disciplines, as mentioned such as restaurants, businesses, and other ventures (Vardi & Weitz, 2016). However, outside of the social work field, workplace incivility and turnover intention has also been examined in the nursing and medical fields (Fida et al., 2018; Laschinger et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2018; McPherson & Buxton, 2019).

Nurses have encountered many instances of workplace incivility, with a strong argument that highlighted how nurses can experience devastating consequences in both their professional and personal lives if workplace incivility remains unaddressed (McPherson & Buxton, 2019). Increased communications, aware managers or supervisors, and education classes are important for nurses to be able to address this issue, even with learning skillsets on how to handle workplace incivility from individuals who work above them, such as senior nurses, doctors, and hospital administrators (Johansen & Cadmus, 2016). As compared to other disciplines, nurses do work longer hours and work within heavy caseloads, which place strains on their employment, leading to potential instances of turnover intention (Martin-Misener et al., 2016). Again, organizations should work at training employees and managers on how to identify workplace incivility among the three areas previously discussed; interpersonal communications, technological communications, and victimless instances of workplace incivility (De Clercq et al., 2018).

### **Strategies for Addressing Workplace Incivility**

There are many steps when it comes to addressing workplace incivility, which can include managers being familiar with the policies and procedures for dealing with uncivil behaviors, so it is paramount for managers to review institutional policies that discuss bias, harassment, and retaliation (Hoffman & Chunta, 2015). Other ways that managers can address workplace incivility include setting clear expectations with staff members before any incidents occur, model behaviors that they would like to see in the workplace, and promote open communication where employees can openly discuss their feelings without retribution (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2017). It is important to note that although researchers have discussed ways in which managers can address workplace incivility, I have found little to no studies that focus on the successful strategies that managers in the human services field use when experiencing these problematic behaviors.

Researchers have provided guidance and recommendations for strategies and programs employers can utilize to increase organizations' employee retention while helping uncivil employees improve their behaviors and succeed in their job (Beattie & Griffin, 2014; Evans, 2017; Ibrahim & Qalawa, 2016; Lee et al., 2016; Shin & Hur, 2019). These strategies have included employee education programs (Evans, 2017), cognitive reframing exercises (Shin & Hur, 2019), and assertive communication skills training (Ibrahim & Qalawa, 2016); yet, little to no studies have been completed by researchers that have addressed how successful such responsive strategies are, especially within the human services field.

Although many studies have been completed that discuss effective strategies that have been used to address uncivil behaviors and workplace incivility (Clark & Gorton, 2019; Fida et al., 2018; Green, 2018), little to no research addresses the human services field and how managers in this field have successfully addressed this important phenomenon. Researchers St. Pierre (2019) and Martinez and Eisenberg (2019) discussed two ways in which workplace incivility can be addressed; directly from the employees that experience uncivil behaviors (St. Pierre, 2019) and those that stem from a managers reaction on how to address this from an organizational perspective (Martinez & Eisenberg, 2019). Within the nursing field, nurses have previously identified many challenges when it came to addressing workplace incivility, which includes communication challenges during the hand-off report and confusion and incomplete patient assessment information, drawing the importance of how workplace incivility can affect other stakeholders as previously discussed (Clark et al., 2017). It was recommended by the authors that nurses complete improved training programs that can aid them in identifying uncivil behaviors, as well as not attempting to solve this problem on their own- instead, reaching out to a supervisor for assistance, as patient safety is being jeopardized during the time of said experience of workplace incivility (Clark et al., 2017).

Confrontation is a strategy that can be used when addressing workplace incivility and has been studied by many researchers including Hershcovis et al. (2018) and St. Pierre (2019). By studying the effects of both confrontation and avoidance to address uncivil behavior, managers can also have a better understanding of how employees can

be affected. Confrontation and avoidance appear ineffective when it comes to addressing uncivil behaviors and workplace incivility, leading to an important understanding of how human service organizations must react and respond (Jung, & Yoon, 2018). This is because avoidance can lead to greater experiences of emotional exhaustion; however, confrontation has promise to elicit positive outcomes, including that of psychological forgiveness (Jung, & Yoon, 2018). Therefore, human service organizations must have set directives for managers on how to appropriately deal with this through their policies and procedures to ensure that it is in alignment with the mission of the organization (Hershcovis et al., 2018).

Other work disciplines create a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to uncivil behavior, as identified by Hoffman and Chunta (2015) in the nursing field. Workplace incivility can be devastating in the nursing field to both staff and patients; therefore, it is essential to create a zero-tolerance policy (Hoffman & Chunta, 2015). Additionally, training programs should be provided to employees so that they are aware of the standards of civil behavior found in organizations; therefore, when addressing or implementing a zero-tolerance policy it can be easily stated that the said employee was trained and understood the impact of uncivil behaviors (Denhardt et al., 2018). With the addition of continuous emerging technologies, it is important to guide staff training sessions towards that of the three components where workplace incivility can be found; through interpersonal communication, technological communication, and victimless instances of uncivil behavior (Schilpzand et al., 2016).



Clark (2019) discussed ways in which workplace incivility could be addressed in the nursing field, by completing research that focused on using cognitive rehearsal, simulation, and evidenced-based scripting. Individuals who completed a training program on how to effectively deal with workplace incivility appeared more confident in addressing issues in order to limit patient and patient safety (Clark, 2019). This is an important study that can be examined throughout different working environments, including that of the human services field, simply because by providing training allows managers to appropriately identify and respond to instance of workplace incivility, while allowing teams to appropriate build healthy communication patterns by stating any issues that they experience that may make them uncomfortable (Hershcovis et al., 2018). Naturally, more research needs to be completed within this area, simply because the results of this study are limited to that of nursing staff.

Other studies have been completed that have addressed how managers should respond to workplace incivility in relation to retention efforts (Fida et al., 2018; Hur et al., 2016; Schenck, 2017). In order to effectively address workplace incivility, it is important for managers to continuously communicate and enforce policies, using one-on-one communication techniques between managers and employees, and addressing any key barriers in the workforce such as issues of resistance to change (Schenck, 2017). These strategies can be effective when reducing turnover or an employee's intention to terminate their employment, as it creates a strong communication pathway with clear support from supervisors, as well as working on issues such as that as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels (Schenck, 2017). Similarly, managers should initiate difficult

yet important conversations that address disruptive behaviors, as well as encouraging employees to build healthy communication and interpersonal skills with both key coworkers and the team as a whole (Kennison & Dzurec, 2017).

Kisner (2018) researched how to protect staff from instances of workplace incivility and found that taking specific steps can aid in not only effectively addressing uncivil behaviors, but also decreasing the exposure of workplace incivility to staff. The author reported that it is essential to follow specific steps when addressing this phenomenon:

1. Organizations need to immediately implement a zero-tolerance policy for workplace incivility;
2. Uncivil behaviors should be clearly outlined in employee manuals and organizational policy and procedure manuals;
3. Inform all staff that workplace incivility will not be tolerated and what consequences will follow if it is completed;
4. Staff development training programs need to be designed and implemented that focus on uncivil behaviors and workplace incivility;
5. Educational components and staff training programs need to encompass a variety of topics that include improving communication skills, challenging perpetrators, and using silence to promote thinking;
6. Facilities and organization should hold regular team building activities, where staff get to interact with each other in a positive environment;

7. Team building activities should also promote role-playing activities where employees are taught appropriate ways to address workplace incivility and uncivil behaviors with peers, coworkers, and managers (Kisner, 2018).

The author also reported that it is essential that individuals who are reporting workplace incivility should use I statements as a part of assertive communication practices (Kisner, 2018). Mediated conversations can also be helpful, as it allows employees to feel supported and safe while confronting these uncomfortable behaviors (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015).

In relation to other instances of how workplace incivility should be handled, Hutchinson and Jackson (2013) also identified three steps that managers can use when addressing workplace incivility. As a similarity they recommended:

1. Managers should provide individual support, education, and mediation between the perpetrator and the target;
2. Managers should ensure that appropriate disciplinary action is taken against the perpetrator that is in alignment with the organization's mission statement and policy and procedures concerning workplace incivility;
3. Enforcing policies and procedures to deal with workplace bullying;
4. Managers should facilitate social interactions and workplace interventions that support the collective group of building and maintaining a safe and supportive work culture (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2013).

It is also important to address the variety of uncivil behaviors that can occur between the key players of an organization (Walsh et al., 2018). For example, employee to employee instances of incivility are the most common, whereas other instances can occur between client to employee, administrator to employee, and manager to employee (Torres et al., 2017). In terms of addressing these other instances of workplace incivility, it is imperative that organizations set up ways to address uncivil behavior, whereas the perpetrator does not directly address the situation with the victim (Moisuc & Brauer, 2019). For example, if a manager is participating in instances of workplace uncivil behaviors, then there should be a different manager that can take care of the issue for the comfort of the victim (Moisuc & Brauer, 2019). This, alongside with the building of a positive culture can aid in assisting employees through the journey of workplace incivility (Moisuc & Brauer, 2019). Additionally, creating a culture where open and assertive communication is valued also aids in individuals talking and discussing their experiences, and feeling comfortable to assertively discuss their feelings with other individuals in the organization (Dainton & Zelle, 2017).

Employees, managers, and other workers should be taught how to identify disruptive behaviors that are interpersonal, technological and victimless (Novak, 2018). Many times, there are victimless instances of uncivil behavior, and, going unaddressed, they will continue to spiral into more serious offences (Bar-David, 2015). Therefore, teaching employees how to identify all varieties of workplace incivility can aid in stopping these disruptive behaviors company-wide (King, 2019).

Although many strategies have been highlighted in research, Logan et al. (2017) reported that evidenced-based strategies that address workplace incivility are severely lacking. In order to ensure that evidenced-based practices exist, it is important to continue research in the field that can aid in ensuring that strategies used are effective, if not for the safety and comfort of the employees, but also for that of the survival of the organization (Fombelle et al., 2019). It should be noted that the majority of studies that focus on nursing and healthcare organizations do so, because there is a gap in the literature that highlights effective strategies of human service organizations. This current study aims at filling this gap, so it can be determined how effective these strategies could be in relation to the literature that has been discussed in this chapter.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to understand successful strategies that first-level human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility. This chapter provided an overview on the academic research conducted on this topic. First, a brief discussion of the literature review search process was explained, followed by an articulation of the overarching theoretical framework that guided this study, which is the Incivility spiral theory. An understanding of the historical origins of work and related workplace problems were introduced in the literature review, followed by an analysis of both historical and recent aspects of workplace incivility, human service organizations, employee turnover, and strategies that focused on dealing with problematic behaviors. Management personnel were also discussed in this review, while it was important to highlight ways in which they approached and dealt with instances of

workplace incivility between their employees. The purpose of this literature review was to highlight the gap that ensures the need for this study.

The United States has seen a major change of work environments over the past two centuries, therefore, it was important to understand how the concept and condition of work has changed over time, as America has moved through a variety of work-related stages that include transitioning from an agrarian society to that of the industrial revolution (Landy & Conte, 2016). This discussion highlighted how working conditions have changed and how America has entered a third or fourth levels of the industrial revolution that is separate to that of the others; a digital revolution, which can bring upon a higher level of issues in relation to workplace incivility (Griffin, 2017; Labor, 1990). An example of that was highlighted when three constructs of workplace incivility discussed; interpersonal communications (Reich & Hershcovis, 2015), technological communications (De Clercq et al., 2018), and victimless instances of uncivil behavior (Schilpzand et al., 2016), all of which are important to address.

Researchers had defined workplace incivility as deviant behaviors that occurred in small, reoccurring frequencies with varying intent to do harm; which violates workplace behavioral norms of respect and civility (Fox & Cowan, 2017; Holm et al., 2015). This form of behavior is a severe form of workplace bullying (Hershcovis et al., 2018), as common themes in defining this form of workplace behavior included repeated and variable frequencies of unethical behavior towards a coworker or supervisor, rude, sarcastic, humiliating, and offensive treatment in the workplace, creating an unpleasant work environment that negatively effects employees' work performance, and/or

intentionally overworking an employee (Perez, 2017; Rockett et al., 2017). Researchers explained that uncivil or negative employees tended to place the majority of the power for change at the top, or in the hands of supervisors and attributes the negative behavior to an employees need for information or resources (Holm et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2016; Petrou et al., 2016).

It was also important to discuss workplace incivility in relation to that of employee turnover intentions, as human service organizations already deal with increasing turnover due to long-work hours, stressful work environments, and high caseloads (Willis et al., 2016). Therefore, workplace incivility is an increasing concern for employers (Porath et al., 2015; Selden & Sowa, 2015) and has the potential to undermine the social framework of a human service organization's work environment (Warnner et al., 2016). Therefore, it was essential for a strong discussion that focused on how this growing issue can lead to increased rates of voluntary employee turnover, which presents significant challenges to sustainability over time (Selden & Sowa, 2015). With critical humanitarian missions and a prevalence of resource shortages, human service organizations are especially vulnerable to the challenges of recruiting and retaining productive, engaged employees (Renard & Snelgar, 2016; Selden & Sowa, 2015; Shuffler et al., 2018).

There are many first steps that must be discussed when it comes to addressing workplace incivility and can include managers being familiar with the policies and procedures for dealing with uncivil behaviors (Hoffman & Chunta, 2015), so it is paramount for managers to review institutional policies that discuss bias, harassment, and

retaliation (Hoffman & Chunta, 2015). Other ways that managers can address workplace incivility include setting clear expectations with staff members before any incidents occur, model behaviors that they would like to see in the workplace and promote open communication where employees can openly discuss their feelings without retribution (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2017).

Researchers have provided guidance and recommendations for strategies and programs employers can utilize to increase organizations' employee retention while helping uncivil employees improve their behaviors and succeed in their job (Beattie & Griffin, 2014; Lee et al., 2016). However, a gap exists in the literature that examines the success of strategies employers utilize to address workplace incivility. This study will examine the successful strategies used by employers to address workplace incivility. The next chapter in this dissertation is that of Chapter 3 that provides a strong overview on this study's methodology. Within this chapter, I will provide a robust organization of the research's methodology, including a discussion on the appropriateness of the methodology and research design, an overview of the population and sampling procedures, the instruments used to collect data, data collection procedures, data analysis plan, the study's assumptions, and ethical assurances.



### Chapter 3: Research Method

Employers are increasingly concerned about workplace incivility as it has the potential to undermine the social framework of a human service organizations work environment, while also negatively affecting turnover and retention rates. Therefore, the purpose of this generic qualitative study is to understand successful strategies that first-level human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility that aid in reducing turnover. This chapter will provide a thorough overview of this study's methodology, highlighting the research questions and discussing the specific research design and rationale that will be followed. The chapter will then discuss the study's population and sampling procedures, data collection methods, and the study's procedures. The chapter will then conclude with a discussion of the data analysis plan and ethical assurances that will aid in protecting human participants.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study will follow a qualitative methodology in order to explore successful strategies that first-level human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility that aids in reducing turnover. A qualitative methodology is considered a process of naturalistic inquiry that explores an in-depth phenomenon within a natural setting (Glesne, 2016). Offering a variety of data collection methods, researchers can use semi-structured interviews in order to explore participants' perceptions and experiences regarding a topic (Silverman, 2016). Alternatively, a quantitative methodology was considered in order to complete this research. However, this approach was ultimately rejected due to the deductive logic nature of quantitative research, and investigating a

research problem using numerical data, which can be analyzed in a statistical or mathematical fashion (Wrench, 2017). Quantitative research proposes specific hypotheses that will either be supported or rejected due to the results of the statistical analysis (Gilbert & Calhoun, 2019). Therefore, because this current study aims to understand specific strategies that human service managers utilize to address workplace incivility, a quantitative methodology would not be appropriate. Using a qualitative methodology will allow me to explore this phenomenon while allowing participants to answer open-ended questions in their own words and meanings.

This study will follow a generic qualitative approach, which seeks to understand what participants experience as reported by their own personal descriptions (Kahlke, 2018). It is important to note that generic qualitative approaches can draw on the strengths of one or more qualitative research designs, while not claiming full allegiance to a single established methodology. This allows for a researcher to be more flexible in their approach to a phenomenon (Percy et al., 2015).

Other researcher designs were considered but ultimately rejected such as that of grounded theory and ethnography. Grounded theory is a qualitative research design that uses the data that is gathered from participants in order to develop a theory (Morse et al., 2016). Since this current study is being guided by the Incivility spiral theory, grounded theory would not be beneficial and was ultimately rejected. Additionally, ethnography involves the exploration of the network of social gatherings, groupings, customs, and behaviors, mainly through the use of researcher observation (Atkinson, 2016). Because this current study is focusing on the human service managers and successful strategies

that they use, ethnography's goals would not be in alignment with the current unit of analysis, allowing me to reject this research design.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do first-level human service managers describe employee turnover in relation to workplace incivility?

**RQ2:** What successful strategies do first-level human service managers utilize to address workplace incivility?

### **Population and Sample**

I will utilize a purposive sampling method in order to recruit participants for her study. A purposive theoretical sampling method allows me to recruit participants from a group of individuals that are selected based upon my own judgment (Etikan, et al., 2016). Purposive sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling, as I will ensure that participants are recruited based upon specific criteria that aid in answering the posed research questions. A snowball sampling method will additionally be used, where I will ask any current participants to recommend colleagues that may meet the study's procedure (Etikan et al., 2016). I am aiming to recruit 10 to 15 participants who are members of the professional network site, LinkedIn. The final number of participants will be determined by data saturation, which occurs when I experience redundancies and repetitiveness when completing the semi-structured interviews, causing me to cease data collection (Ness, 2015).

In order to participate in this research, prospective participants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

1. Each participant must currently hold a job title as a first-level human service manager.
2. Each participant must currently be employed by a human services organization. In this study, a human services organization is defined as an organization that provides basic human need support services to individuals (Archer, 2017).
3. Each participant must have been working in their position for a period of a minimum of one year.
4. Each participant must have experience with a human resources referral for a problem employee.

I will collect the data using semistructured interviews, where I will ask each of the participants the same 10 to 15 open-ended questions. Ensuring that each participant meets the eligibility criteria will strengthen reliability of the study as they will have the experience and qualifications to answer the interview questions as they see fit.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Semistructured interviews allow the participants to openly discuss the phenomenon being explored as they are able to answer the open-ended questions as they see fit, according to their perceptions and experiences (Kallio et al., 2016). Each interview will be conducted over a one hour Zoom video conferencing call, with me personally video conferencing with each participant at a time that is convenient for them. Only I will have access to each participant's contact phone number, email address, and

other identifiable information. Conducting the semistructured interviews over video conferencing can allow me to obtain a sample that is more geographically diverse and allow for the collection of data pertaining to the participants no verbal communication. Additionally, each of the interviews will be electronically recorded and then transcribed in preparation for data analysis.

When designing the semistructured interview questions, I will follow an interview protocol. I will recruit a doctoral student colleague and request that they review the study's purpose statement, the research question, the methodology, and the list of 10 to 15 interview questions to ensure they are in alignment. After receiving feedback from my colleague, I will review the information with my chair and realign and adjust the interview questions accordingly (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The doctoral student colleague who participates in the creation of the interview protocol will also be requested to complete a peer review of the study's findings. During this peer review, my doctoral student colleague will review the findings in conjunction with the interview transcripts to ensure that there is limited bias. I will also complete member checking. Member checking occurs when the I conduct a follow-up interview after the initial interview has been transcribed. During member checking, I will email a copy of the interview's transcript to each participant and then contact them via telephone where they can review the transcript together (Birt et al., 2016). During member checking, the participants will be able to review the transcript and recommend any changes that they feel may need to be made. Member checking interviews will take approximately 15 minutes.

## **Study Procedures**

Before collecting the data, I will receive approval from both the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). After receiving IRB approval, I will then begin recruiting participants via the social media site, LinkedIn. When contacting potential participants, I will complete a search on LinkedIn to find individuals that may possibly meet the study's criteria. In order to participate in this study, each participant must be currently employed at a human services organization, must hold a job title as a first-level manager, and must have had a referral from their human resources department to work with an identified problem employee. In the recruitment email, I will explain the purpose of her study, along with an outline of the study's problem, and participation criteria (see Appendix C).

I will recruit individuals on a first-come first-served basis until I have reached the 10 to 15 participants required for this study. The final number of participants will be determined by data saturation, which will occur when I experience redundancies and repetitiveness when completing the semi-structured interviews, causing me to cease data collection (Ness, 2015). After I have accepted each participant into the study, I will send them a copy of the consent form (see Appendix B), that highlights the study's requirements, level of risk, expectations of the participants, and confidentiality. It is important to note that the level of risk in this study is considered low. Each participant will be required to sign a hard copy of the consent form and return it to me, at which time she will schedule a one-on-one private interview. In order to obtain participant consent, I will email a copy of the consent form to each participant, who will then sign the

document with ink, scan the document, and then return it to me. One-on-one private interviews will be scheduled, when I call individuals to invite them to participate in the study, as well as me being available to answer any questions after potential participants have reviewed the consent form. When meeting with each of the participants for their private semi-structured interview via video conferencing, I will follow the interview guide and ask each participant the same 10 to 15 open-ended questions. Each interview will be conducted via Zoom video conferencing and I will ensure that confidentiality is supported, by asking the participant to locate themselves in a private space, close any open doors, and to use a headphone device, rather than external speakers. I will also electronically record and transcribe each interview, in preparation for data analysis, where the participants will be notified before beginning the interview.

After each interview has been completed and I have finished transcription, I will email a .pdf copy of each participant's transcript to the participant for them to review the transcripts of their interview through member checking. Member checking will occur when each participant reviews their transcript and provides feedback to me informing me of whether the transcripts are reliable and represent the participants' feedback in full. If the participants recommend any changes to their transcripts, I will consult with my chair and make any necessary adjustments.

### **Data Analysis**

Data will be analyzed using NVivo 12.0, a qualitative software program that is used at the majority of research universities. When using NVivo, I will place the transcribed data into the software program where the information will then be coded in

order to explore any emerging themes. I will also use a qualitative codebook during the analysis, which aids in coding the data, highlighting emerging themes, and substantiating each theme in a document with participants' quotations that support each theme.

Because I am following a generic qualitative study, I will follow a general inductive analysis, ensuring that I am guided by the following steps:

1. Prepare raw data files.
2. Become familiar with the text (transcripts).
3. Begin coding by creating different categories.
4. Overlap coding and uncoded text.
5. Continue revising and refining the different categories.
6. Highlight themes that have emerged from the coding procedure (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

### **Ethical Assurances**

It is important for me to provide specific ethical assurances in order to protect the human participants who are partaking in this research. For example, before beginning the study, I will obtain approval from my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Additionally, each participant must review, agree to, and sign the consent form, which highlights the purpose of the study, the study's aims, the level of risk, what is expected of the participants, and how confidentiality will be maintained. Additionally, each consent form will inform the participant that they can remove themselves from the study at any time without any repercussions. This study involves little to no risk, as the participants



are discussing strategies that they have used that successfully deals with workplace incivility.

Confidentiality will also be maintained throughout the study as I will refer to participants in a numerical order (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.), as well as referring to their place of employment in alphabetical order (e.g., Company A, Company B, etc.). Participants will never be referred to in the study using their personal names, especially during data collection and transcription. I will also ensure that all written and electronic documents are stored appropriately. For example, all electronic data will be stored in a password-protected file that only I have access to. Additionally, I will store all physical paper copies in a locked filing cabinet located inside the office of my personal residence. I will also destroy both electronic information and paper documents five years after the study's completion, which is recommended by my university's Institutional Review Board.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to understand successful strategies first-level human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility that aids in reducing turnover. This chapter provided a thorough overview of this study's methodology, highlighting the research questions and discussing the specific research design and rationale that will be followed. The chapter then discussed the study's population and sampling procedures, data collection methods, and the study's procedures. The chapter then concluded with a discussion of the data analysis plan and ethical assurances that will aid in protecting human participants. The next chapter is that of

Chapter 4, which will provide an overview of the study's results after the data analysis has been completed.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand the successful strategies that first-level human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility for the purpose of reducing turnover. The following research questions were developed to guide this study:

**RQ1:** How do first-level human service managers describe employee turnover in relation to workplace incivility?

**RQ2:** What successful strategies do first-level human service managers utilize to address workplace incivility?

In Chapter 4, I outline the qualitative research methodology used and provide an understanding of the data collection method used that examined the research questions. I provide the demographic of each participant and reveal the findings generated by themes that have emerged through analyzing the individual interviews and the personal experiences and viewpoints shared by each participant. Lastly, I will provide an examination of the data that is introduced in the chapter.

### **Setting**

I received approval from Walden University IRB to begin conducting data collection for this research study on May 14, 2020 (IRB Approval # 05-14-20-0651246). Participants for this study were recruited via LinkedIn and Facebook. All participants electronically provided informed consent and agreed to their interview being recorded. Each interview included a one on one, face to face video meeting via Zoom video conferencing software. Each participant was asked 7 demographic questions and 11 semi-

structured interview questions. Interview video and audio was recorded. Each of the interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

All interview video recordings were stored in a secure, password protected Google Drive account. Each interview was transcribed using a downloaded transcription software. Prior to conducting data analysis, each participant was emailed a copy of the transcript from their interview to ensure accuracy and representation. All participants agreed. NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used for coding the transcript data and to aid in theme development. Frequently used phrases and words were identified using word clouds in NVivo. I conducted a second round of data analysis to gain a more in depth understanding of the emergent themes. Lastly, all interview transcripts were reviewed again to ensure accurate coding.

### **Data Collection**

There were a total of 10 participants who completed the interview process. Each video interview was scheduled for 1 hour and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and a conversational interview style was used. Eight participants completed the interview from home and two participants completed the interviews while driving. Several participants verbally expressed their interest in the topic and asked to receive a copy of the completed research study publication. All participants met the following criteria to be included in this study:

1. Each participant currently held a job title as a first-level or higher human service manager.

2. Each participant was currently employed by a human services organization.
3. Each participant had been working in their position for a minimum of one year.
4. Each participant had experience with a human resources referral for a problem employee.

Each participant responded to a post on LinkedIn and Facebook soliciting for participants, who met the previously identified inclusion criteria. Each respondent agreed to participate in a recorded video interview to share their experiences; however, two participants completed the interview via Zoom audio recorded phone call. All participants were sent a link to my schedule of availability for an interview and, upon registering for a date and time, were redirected to the informed consent form where they were provided with the IRB approved consent form and asked to enter their first and last name in the form to consent. All participants completed the consent form and noted no questions or concerns regarding their participation.

### **Credibility**

Roulston and Shelton (2015) explained that qualitative research has the potential for the researcher to inject their personal opinion. Injecting personal opinions into research may lead to a deficit in the data; therefore, the author further explained that a researcher could avoid bias by remaining neutral, objective, and impartial during the research process (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). To reduce the likelihood that this bias could occur, I used member checking where all participants were provided with a copy of the transcript from their interview and asked to review the transcript to ensure their

words were accurately portrayed. All of the participants agreed that the transcript they received was an accurate representation and had no changes to their transcript.

### **Transferability**

In this study, transferability was accounted for as I was able to highlight a strong and narrow description of the phenomenon being explored (Connelly, 2016). Therefore, I was able to illuminate shared themes in experiences of successful strategies that first-level human service managers utilize when addressing workplace incivility, in an effort to address the documented problem of high employment turnover rates among nonprofit, human service organizations (Selden, 2015; Walsh, 2014). The illumination of shared themes and experiences occurred by providing in-depth, first-hand accounts of experiences from participants, which may be replicated by another researcher to attain similar results with the same inclusion criteria.

### **Dependability**

All of the interview questions used in this study were approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board. The questions were relevant to the research study and participants responses were both visual and audio recorded to allow for a dependable and accurate recount of the data to avoid any of my inferred perceptions of their comments and responses. Zoom video conferencing was used to record the video and audio for each interview.

### **Confirmability**

Using NVivo qualitative data analysis software helped me to discover meaningful insights from my qualitative data and helped to support a high-level confirmability. I

initially used Descript, a transcription software, to automate the transcribing process of my interview. I then listened to the interview audio recording while thoroughly reviewing the transcription and made any necessary adjustments to words that were incorrectly transcribed by the software. I completed this process of listening and reviewing the transcript twice for each interview. Using NVivo, I coded each transcript to identify common terms such as *incivility* or *strategy*, I then hand coded all of the transcripts dividing the data into the two main categories of uncivil behaviors and successful strategies. Once I established the two main categories, I coded the transcripts further to discover emerging themes in each of the categories.

### **Demographic Information**

In Table 1, I identify demographic information for the study participants. I interviewed a total of ten participants for my research study. All of the participants needed to meet the inclusion criteria to be included in my research study. Each participant self-identified as working for a nonprofit, human services organization. Several participants currently hold a position that is higher than a first-level manager. However, these participants were able to provide responses based on their time and experiences as a first-level manager. All of the participants reported having had an employee with uncivil behaviors and successfully using a strategy to help them address these behaviors. Additionally, each participant defined their meaning of *uncivil* and *successful*. Participant ranged in age from 32 to 67 years old. Their years of experience as a manager ranged from 7 to 35 years of experience. Participants represented diverse

geographic locations, including Texas, Illinois, Connecticut, Nevada, Massachusetts, Washington, and Florida.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Job Level</u>	<u>Years of Management Experience</u>
P1	M	48	Native American	TX	Chief Executive Officer	16
P2	F	44	White	IL	Shelter Coordinator Advocate Supervisor	11
P3	F	39	White	CT	External Relations Officer	21
P4	F	32	White	CT	Operations Director	8
P5	F	35	White	NV	Office Manager	7
P6	F	43	White	MA	Human Service Counselor	25
P7	F	67	White	CT	Chief Executive Officer	35
P8	M	48	White	WA	Project Manager	21
P9	F	46	Asian	TX	Finance Manager	20
P10	F	38	Black	FL	Operations Manager	15

**Analysis**

This thematic analysis was guided by two research questions that will be discussed below, in addition to highlighting the themes that emerged from the dataset and the codes that substantiated each theme.

**RQ1: How do first-level human service managers describe employee turnover in relation to workplace incivility?**



One theme emerged from the dataset in relation to research question one: defining workplace incivility is broad but understood and good employees are lost due to workplace incivility. Each of the themes will be discussed below and will be demonstrated by participants' quotations that supports each theme.

**Losing good employees due to workplace incivility.** The first theme that emerged from the dataset for the first research question highlighted that the participants perceived that good employees were lost due to workplace incivility. Eight out of the ten participants stated that workplace incivility affected turnover as good employees were typically the first to leave the organization. This was evident when P1 discussed that the victim of workplace incivility typically asks to either be moved to a different department or will resign their position. P1 stated:

It depends on who they're working with. So if they're working with that particular girl, um, generally they'll come to me and ask, to just change shifts. So they'll want to work with someone else. And I oblige, cause I know what it's like. Um, So I think, yeah, it affects, we've had a few people quit because of it (P1).

P2 was able to discuss how employees who are victims of workplace incivility are unable to do their job because they are concerned with workplace conflict. P2 reported:

I've seen people leave because they hate a coworker that they can't get along with someone, which obviously has a negative impact on an organization overall. I have seen people paralyzed in their ability to do the job because they're just worried about their conflict with somebody which has led to a lack of productivity. You know, kind of, kind of the full spectrum there in terms of, of

impact stress and anxiety, which contributes to medical leaves, you know, I've seen it all (P2).

P4 was able to discuss the upper management response to workplace incivility, which they reported can make things worse in regards to the team. P4 stated:

I mean we have management that is not in the fields not doing the work not in the thick of it...So they come in. Like a frigging bat out of hell just trying to tell us how to do our jobs...It makes people feel unappreciated, unworthy, attacked. And when someone feels that way they have no desire to do a good job. So it affects turnover because they're either going to stop giving a crap and not do a good job because they don't feel like it's appreciated anyway. Or they're going to continue to do things the way that they think that they need to be done...And you'll have one of two results...you're going to let them go or they're going to quit (P4).

P5 discussed how low morale and a toxic workplace increases turnover from the good employees:

A hostile work environment impart management is the number one reason why people leave jobs. You will lose good employees because of poor managers. I've seen it a million times. And if you don't have turnover, you're going to have poor morale, big time creating a hostile work environment. Having coachable employees or creating that uncivil work environment is going to every is, will equal either low morale or turning. You're not going to keep good people. So your cost of onboarding people and bringing people in is going to be through the roof and you're not going to have good quality employees (P5).

P8 highlighted how good employees are the first to leave their position, which in turn can affect the entire organization across the board. P8 stated:

Being treated like garbage where you work really takes a toll on you. When nothing happens to the person treating people like garbage it makes the other employees feel unappreciated, attacked and unworthy and when someone feels that way they have no desire to do a good job, so that effects turnover because they don't feel like they're appreciated anyway and they stay, don't do a good job and get fired or they just quit. Work and the quality of work really suffers across the organization (P8).

Finally, P10 discussed how work quality and turnover can be affected:

Well it definitely affects work quality, but people don't just leave good jobs it's important to know your team and have an awareness of what is going on, who people are, and how they are being treated (P10).

**RQ2: What successful strategies do first-level human service managers utilize to address workplace incivility?**

Two themes emerged from the dataset in relation to research question two: Theme two included confronting and documenting uncivil behaviors is a common workplace strategy of first-level and higher managers. Theme three includes using real-life experiences, professional development, and modeling former managers assist first-level managers in dealing with workplace incivility. Each of the themes will be discussed below and will be demonstrated by participants' quotations that supports each theme.

**Confronting and documenting uncivil behaviors.** The third theme that emerged from the dataset for the second research question highlighted that the participants

perceived that confronting and documenting uncivil behaviors are the most successful strategies used when dealing with workplace incivility. All of the participants of the study contributed to this theme. When it came to successful strategies that first-level managers used when dealing with uncivil behaviors in the workplace, all of the participants were able to discuss how they confront and document behaviors. This was evident when P1 stated:

We put them on a work plan, which is basically breaking down what the issue is and what we can do to help them figure it out (P1).

P2 was able to discuss how they call out the behavior and make people accountable for their actions. They reported:

I think the most important thing that I have done or most useful thing I've done as a manager is calling out the behavior and holding people accountable. I think when, when you confront somebody one on one, so I have a. Personal belief that all people are good (P2).

P3 reported that they confront uncivil behaviors by having “to go through the methodical process of writing somebody up and having monthly quarterly and yearly reviews”. P4 was able to discuss confronting and a methodological process as they stated:

I created a spreadsheet for her so that she could track everything that she was doing because she was a very get things done kind of personality. And I had to reel her back in and tell her like I appreciate your ability to be a go getter but you're overlooking. Step C D and E from a to F you know so she would just want

to go straight to it and just get it done. And I would have to reel her back in and say we're not on a time constraint here (P4).

Confronting, coaching, and educating employees is how P5 identified successful strategies. They reported:

So I think what helped that person, um, that gentleman in particular was just coaching him and educating him and helping him understand. So we're fortunate that this person was coachable. Um, if it had been an individual that hadn't been coachable from an HR perspective, like you can't, slanderize your supervisor or anybody that you work with. So we would have had to, you know, set guidelines for him and metrics. And if he wasn't able to, you know, to turn his behavior around, he could have been on grounds for termination, but this person was coachable (P5).

P6 was able to provide an example of how they confront uncivil behaviors as they reported:

I had one female employee who was always talking down about other people. I kind of sat with them and talked through Hey you know this person is saying this and is it true? You know if it's not true. And even if it is how would you feel? You know if this was being said about you and sort of walking through and not coming at them in a in a cruel way or letting them know that Hey I'm here for you. If this is something that you didn't intend or didn't say but at the same time you know this is not behavior that we're going to tolerate because it's just going to get worse you know? (P6)

P7 was able to provide two different methods or successful strategies; the first dealt with providing anonymous feedback when they reported:

Well, one way I've done it in the past is to have employees who I say have issues is to have a 360 done on them. So to actually have people provide anonymous input into how they experience working with that employee and then sitting down with that person and sharing the feedback in a way to try to make them aware of their. Behavior, as seen through the eyes of other people. So that's one way that I've used it (P7).

The second successful strategy that P7 reported was confronting the employee so that they could see their behaviors in action. She continued to state:

I think another way is to just try to have them like see themselves, you know, try to have them see themselves, their behavior, stepping back from their behavior. Cause I think sometimes people who are bullied and treated uncivil, they don't even know they're doing it. so helping them to maybe go through a situation where their behavior was viewed as a symbol and they may not have even been aware of it (P7).

P8 discussed how having a straightforward conversation allowed him to properly and successful deal with uncivil behaviors. They reported:

It just really is a straightforward conversation of making the behaviors known to the person and letting them know that they weren't going unnoticed and that they wouldn't be tolerated. and trying to figure out what we could do together. to fix the issue because she had been a great employee really up until now and we didn't

want to lose her but she was really also hurting the team and that was something that couldn't continue to happen. So I would say the ultimate strategy was just addressing the behavior head-on and not ignoring it (P8).

P9 reported that talking privately to the offender is a successful strategy, albeit in a private setting. P9 stated:

We just took a walk. We got out of the office and had a real conversation. She admitted that she had been saying mean things about the other employee behind her back. I asked her what she was trying to accomplish by doing that and she said that she didn't really know, that she was just upset from being passed over. We walked and talked for about an hour and she acknowledged that her behavior was wrong and that she would stop acting like that (P9).

Finally, P10 reported that although termination can actually be the most successful strategy, it is important to confront, track, and monitor the uncivil behavior before resorting to this method, especially if it is a first offense. P10 reported:

It would definitely be termination. I fought really hard to track conversations and passive aggressive outburst that she would have. And you know, just really every little thing because this lady had never been called out before or no one had ever tracked or documented. These issues with her before so. I took that upon myself (P10).

**Used real life experiences, professional development, and the modeling of former managers.** The fourth theme that emerged from the dataset for the second research question highlighted that the participants perceived that they viewed strategies

as being successful because of lived experiences, professional development, and seeing them be used with former managers. Within this theme, 8 out of the 10 participants contributed. When it came to discussing how first-level managers learned and viewed specific strategies as being successful, many of the participants reported using real life experiences, professional development, and the modeling of former managers. This was evident when P1 reported:

I've tried everything talking, write ups, you know, saying, you know, you get three write ups, we're going to terminate. You I've even threatened to take away, you know, shifts. And nothing really worked because of her mental health. So I had to take a different route. I talked to my boss a lot. My boss used to be a counselor where we work and so like a mental health counselor. And so it helps to talk to her and kind of get her. Um, even though I have many more years of management under my belt, she's got more years of counseling under her belt. So, um, just kind of working together, you know, not thinking you know everything that helps a lot (P1).

P2 was able to discuss learning successful strategies through professional learning. They reported:

A lot of ongoing professional learning, um, some great examples in my life, but also some terrible examples in my life. And I think as we have, as we have evolved as, as a workforce, you know, I think you've got, there's a lot of competing pressures (P2).

P4 stated:



I'm naturally a very organized person. So being able to see like at first like I said at first I didn't it took me a minute to try and figure out what the issues were with just with like actual work stuff. You know if you want me to go into uh the issues that I was having with the lack of communication and lack of I don't want to say lack of respect but just you know That's something different (P4).

Whereas, P5 was able to credit professional development through their Bachelor's degree and learning about different management and leadership styles. P5 reported:

I credit my bachelor's degree. I went to the path college in Massachusetts, where it's a private college it's for adult learners only. I got a killer education. It's all adult women talking about their PR their real life experience. The educators are amazing. Like I have a fantastic education from that. And just learning about management styles and learning styles. So seeing your side of it, like how you're relaying your message on to that person, but also acknowledging that the person receiving the message, maybe doing it, you know, one of 400 different ways, you know, just because it sounds some way, one way to hear it doesn't mean it's being heard the same (P5).

Strong leaders and friends who have previously worked in the field also aided in first-level managers in using successful strategies. This was evident when P6 stated:

I think learning from good leaders over the course of my lifetime. So for example I had a wonderful boss with the red cross who had a purple heart. His name is Glenn Beasley. Wonderful guy And he is somebody who I just greatly respected in interacting with him with him in my younger years (P6).

Additionally, P7 stated:

I spoke about it to some friends who are experts in human resources. So I have a very dear friend who was the senior person that has a very large company for a long time. She's retired. And I thought her advice on how to talk about some of the scenarios with this employee and how I could, you know, do an effective job because you know, it comes down to is it personality or behavior? (P7)

P7 was further able to discuss personal research and training by reporting:

I actually did some reading on it. You know, I've been doing that in leading people a lot of time in my life, but I feel you can always learn. I talked to an attorney because I need to build a case against the behavior so that I can make sure that I'm doing the things I need to do to educate her on what's expected of her, but at the same time to, to make sure that I'm documenting this process (P7).

P8 was able to discuss lived experiences as finding successful strategies. They stated:

I've always been a really direct person and I've always been a big believer in Adult conversations and that adults should have the ability to have serious and uncomfortable adult conversations. ...I would definitely say just life experiences taught me that just ignoring a problem isn't going to make it go away so you have to hit it head on and get all of those emotions an uncomfortable discussions out of the way until you can really start to make any type of meaningful impact. (P8)

Finally, P10 reported completing research in order to find the most effective strategy when dealing with workplace incivility. They reported:

Because I've seen it work and. My ultimate goal was to figure out if this person was going to stay and change their behavior and be a productive team member, which I didn't think was going to happen, but I was willing to give it a try or, you know, make sure that. I was tracking everything that was happening so you know worst case scenario if I needed to protect my job by being able to prove what had transpired, I could absolutely do that. So I just felt like it was important to choose a strategy that gave me the most protection. While also giving the person the chance to change (P10).

### **Summary**

This research study was intended to further an understanding of successful strategies first-level human service managers utilize to address workplace incivility. This was accomplished through a qualitative research approach, which provided an in-depth understanding of each of the ten participants experiences and perceptions. Based on the data collected from the participants in this study, it was learned that these managers relied on lived experiences, professional development opportunities, and the modeling of former managers when choosing the strategy to address workplace incivility. It was also discovered that successful strategies for addressing workplace incivility included confronting and documenting the behaviors. When it came to employee turnover, the participants were able to describe how oftentimes good employees were lost through the process of uncivil behaviors, as they worried about confronting behaviors and a toxic work environment.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss this research study and its relationship to current, existing literature. I will also discuss the limitations of this research study. Implications for stakeholders and recommendations for future research will also be provided and discussed. Lastly, I will discuss possibilities of positive social change for the future.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this research study I explored an in-depth account of first hand experiences and perspectives of first-level human service managers who have successfully addressed workplace incivility. Incivility spiral theory was used as the theoretical framework of this study. The following two research questions were used to guide the direction of this study:

**RQ1.** How do first-level human service managers describe employee turnover in relation to workplace incivility?

**RQ2.** What successful strategies do first-level human service managers utilize to address workplace incivility?

A generic, qualitative study was conducted to gain an understanding of the participants experiences and perspectives addressing workplace incivility. Semistructured interviews, with open-ended questions, were conducted with 10 first-level, nonprofit, human service managers who self-identified as successfully utilizing a strategy to address uncivil behaviors in the workplace, in order to gain a detailed insight into each participants experience.

The findings of this study highlighted three different themes that were in alignment with the research questions: First-level and higher managers reported that they lose good employees due to workplace incivility, confronting and documenting uncivil behaviors was a common workplace strategy of first-level and higher managers, and real-life experiences, professional development, and modeling former managers assisted first-level and higher managers in dealing with workplace incivility. In this chapter, I will

provide a strong discussion of the interpretation of the findings, discussing the themes of the study in relation to previous literature. I will also identify the limitations experienced during the research process, provide recommendations for practice and future research, and discuss the study's implications.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

I used incivility spiral theory as the theoretical framework for interpreting the data collected in this research study. Andersson and Pearson (1999) defined workplace incivility as low-intensity deviant behaviors with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect.

The findings of this research expand upon the current knowledge and available literature and were aligned with the identified research questions that guided this study.

#### **RQ1. How do first-level human service managers describe employee turnover in relation to workplace incivility?**

**Theme 1. Losing good employees due to workplace incivility.** One theme emerged under the first research question, which included first-level and higher managers reporting that they lose good employees due to workplace incivility. This finding is in alignment with previous research that has been completed such as that of Cho and Song (2017) who reported that emotional labor increases turnover intention, whereas the construct of trust decreases it. This is important to note, especially since individuals who are experiencing workplace incivility experience emotional instances with uncivil behaviors, and with individuals whose supervisors or managers may not adequately address these experiences can decrease trust, not only with their relationship with management but also that of the workplace. Additionally, Kim (2015) discussed that

employee empowerment has a negative effect on turnover intentions and these negative effects are greater when it comes to employees determining whether they will leave the field or transfer to another human service organization. In relation to this current study, Kim's (2015) study is important, simply because employees who experience workplace incivility may not feel empowered due to the effects of uncivil behaviors. Therefore, this can influence them to leave the field or transfer to another organization where they may not experience workplace incivility.

Additionally, Reich and Hershcovis (2015) discussed how peer effects can occur when uncivil behaviors are found within the workplace. The authors reported that peer effects can occur especially when negative employees influence the spread of misconduct and the cultivation of a negative environment in the workplace. This in turn can create a group of uncivil employees. When uncivil employees see that the potential risk of engaging in negative behavior is low, negative employees tend to perpetuate their behaviors (Jones, 2017; Rockett et al., 2017). When uncivil employee behavior continues, employee turnover rates increase (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Therefore, this piece of research is important, because by uncivil behaviors occurring in the workplace, other employees who are negative by nature tend to follow suit in regard to uncivil behaviors, thus increasing employee turnover and the loss of strong employees.

Sliter et al. (2015) has also reported that prevalence rates are as high as 75 to 100%, indicating that almost all employees in today's workforce have experienced some level of uncivil behavior while working. These reported amounts of workplace incivility is tremendous, simply because if these behaviors remain unaddressed, businesses can lose

the majority of their workforce. Additionally, Harrison (2015) and Katz et al. (2019) have reported that workplace incivility can manifest in three different ways, including that of interpersonal interactions, cyber interactions, and victimless interactions. Research has dictated that there are limited studies that have focused on workplace incivility in regard to interpersonal communication, which has been defined as face-to-face communication in a workplace setting. Because these instances of communication are oftentimes private, individuals who experience uncivil behaviors during these interactions may not feel comfortable in reporting these behaviors to their supervisors. In these instances, Reich and Hershcovis (2015) have reported that the effect of witnessing workplace incivility can be oftentimes mediated by an observer's negative emotional reaction toward the instigator, which highlights the importance of understanding interpersonal communications when it comes to experiencing uncivil behaviors, where more research needs to be completed. By exploring these instances of workplace incivility, even higher rates of staff turnover and the loss of strong employees can occur.

It is also important to discuss other ways in which research has demonstrated how good employees leave their positions due to workplace incivility. The experience of uncivil behaviors can also influence an employees' creativity output, leading to severe emotional exhaustion (Hur et al., 2016). In terms of both customers and coworkers, interpersonal communications that are marked with uncivil behavior decrease an employees' level of intrinsic motivation, thus decreasing their level of creativity that they bring to the workplace. Therefore, organizations have two main causes of employee turnover due to workplace incivility; the experience of uncivil behaviors and the



experience of burnout amongst good and strong employees due to the loss of motivation and creativity. Anjum et al. (2018) additionally explained that organizations should work towards retaining employees, because employee retention aids in decreasing expenses and provides a positive impact on a company's morale. Therefore, this highlights the important need to support all employees while adopting a zero-tolerance policy throughout the organization.

**RQ2. What successful strategies do first-level human service managers utilize to address workplace incivility?**

Two themes were highlighted under the second research question: Theme two included confronting and documenting uncivil behaviors as being a common workplace strategy of first-level and higher managers. Theme three included using real-life experiences, professional development, and modeling former managers in order to assist first-level managers in dealing with workplace incivility.

**Theme 2: Confronting and documenting uncivil behaviors.** The second theme that emerged from the data is that of confronting and documenting uncivil behaviors were the most common ways of dealing with workplace incivility. This finding is not necessarily in alignment with previous research that has been completed, as evidenced by Herscovis et al. (2018) who reported that confronting uncivil behaviors is not necessarily effective because confrontation can increase uncivil and future targeted behaviors. However, documenting instances of uncivil behavior is crucial, as evidenced by research completed by Johansen and Cadmus (2016) who reported the importance of managers having communications, awareness, and education in order to address and document the issue at hand. Hoffman and Chunta (2015) reported that there are many

steps when it comes to addressing workplace incivility, which can include managers being familiar with the policies and procedures for dealing with uncivil behaviors. Therefore, it is paramount for managers to review institutional policies that discuss bias, harassment, and retaliation. Other ways that managers can address workplace incivility include setting clear expectations with staff members before any incidents occur, model behaviors that they would like to see in the workplace, and promote open communication where employees can openly discuss their feelings without retribution (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2017). Researchers have provided guidance and recommendations for strategies and programs employers can utilize to increase organizations' employee retention while helping uncivil employees improve their behaviors and succeed in their job (Beattie & Griffin, 2014; Evans, 2017, Ibrahim & Qalawa, 2016, Lee et al., 2016, Shin & Hur, 2019). These strategies have included employee education programs (Evans, 2017), cognitive reframing exercises (Shin & Hur, 2019), and assertive communication skills training (Ibrahim & Qalawa, 2016); yet, little to no studies have been completed by researchers that have addressed how successful such responsive strategies are, especially within the human services field. Other ways of dealing with workplace incivility have been documented including the need for managers to utilize effective coping skills. Labun (2019) reported that most leaders feel that their departments are civil, yet approximately half of their staff feel the same way. This is an enormous implication for human services organizations, as it demonstrates the need to properly and appropriately address workplace incivility. Chen and Wang (2019) discussed how emotional intelligence can aid in addressing workplace incivility, simply because this construct aids

employees to have the ability to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions. This is important, simply because it can allow managers and employees to have constructive and honest conversations about turnover intentions. By increasing a department's level of emotional intelligence, it can be the first step in addressing workplace incivility; however, other strategies are needed that focus specifically on addressing perpetrators' behaviors. It should also be noted that the research that focuses on strategies to address workplace incivility is dearth, as I have also found little to no studies that focus on specific successful strategies that managers in the human services field use when experiencing these problematic behaviors. This gap in the literature aided in providing the need for this study.

**Theme 3: Using real-life experiences, professional development, and modeling former managers to assist in dealing with workplace incivility.** The third theme that emerged from the dataset included that first-level and higher managers used real-life experiences, professional development, and modelling former managers in order to assist in dealing with workplace incivility and uncivil behaviors. Similarly, to the second theme, there is little to not studies that have focused on successful strategies that managers use when dealing with workplace incivility; however, some research has focused on the need for professional development. Researchers St. Pierre (2019) and Martinez and Eisenberg (2019) discussed two ways in which workplace incivility can be addressed; directly from the employees that experience uncivil behaviors (St. Pierre, 2019) and those that stem from a managers reaction on how to address this from an organizational perspective (Martinez & Eisenberg, 2019). This is an important connection

to the previous literature, simply because it seems that the managers react to workplace incivility based upon their own experiences of how to handle it. For example, participants in this study discussed how they modeled former managers on how to deal with this toxic workplace phenomenon. Therefore, the research is strong, that first-level or higher managers use their own experiences when dealing with uncivil behaviors. Additionally, Evans (2017) highlighted the importance of employee education, including managers so that they can respond appropriately to instances of workplace incivility. This appeared to be completed in this current study as some of the managers reported that they utilize resources and tactics learnt throughout professional development workshops. Kisner (2018) reported the need to provide employees and managers with staff development training programs that focus on uncivil behaviors and workplace incivility as well as educational components that encompass a variety of topics to improve communication skills, challenging perpetrators, and using silence to promote thinking.

Additionally, training programs should be provided to employees so that they are aware of the standards of civil behavior found in organizations; therefore, when addressing or implementing a zero-tolerance policy in a human services organization it can be easily stated that the said employee was trained and understood the impact of uncivil behaviors (Denhardt et al., 2018). With the addition of continuous emerging technologies, it is important to guide staff training sessions towards three components where workplace incivility can be found; interpersonal communication, technological communication, and victimless instances of uncivil behavior (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Real-life experiences and the modeling of former managers did not appear to be covered

within the literature; however, these concepts that were highlighted by the participants still have to do with the importance of staff training and education.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are some limitations that were experienced within this study that need to be discussed. The first limitation included that of the participants themselves. Because this study focused on human service first-level or higher managers, the results of the study may not be generalizable to a population outside of these parameters. For example, the results may not be generalizable to other organizations outside of the human service field due to experiences that may have been specific to social services. Additionally, because this study was completed in the United States, the results may not be generalizable to areas outside of this geographical area. Therefore, future studies are recommended for other geographical areas and populations that are of interest to study.

A second limitation to this study was that of the criteria that was used to recruit the participants. One of the study's criteria acted as a limitation to this study due to prospective participants self-reporting that they had had experience in dealing with a human resources referral for a problematic employee. There were limited ways to determine whether a prospective participant actually had had this experience, or to what level, as it was deemed as a subjective experience. Therefore, because it was unknown of the level of training that the participants had in dealing with a problematic employee, it could not be determined if they were dealing with an employee who engaged in specific uncivil behaviors.

A third limitation to this research was researcher bias. Because I completed a qualitative study, researcher bias could have occurred. However, I did attempt to limit the instance of researcher bias by following an interview protocol and ensuring that I asked each of the participants the same open-ended questions during the semistructured interviews. Additionally, in order to address researcher bias I had a doctoral student colleague to complete a peer review of the study's findings. During this peer review my doctoral student colleague reviewed the findings in conjunction with the interview transcripts to ensure that there was limited bias. Additionally, in order to ensure that bias was not occurring in the data that was being collected, I also completed member checking. Member checking occurred when I sent a .PDF of the interview transcripts via electronic mail (email) to each participant after the recordings of each interview had been transcribed. During member checking, each participant reviewed the transcript of their interview to ensure accuracy of the collected data. None of the participants requested any changes to the transcripts and reported that the transcripts reported exactly what they said.

### **Recommendations**

There are some recommendations that need to be made, both for the practice and for future studies. In regards to recommendations for practice, it is recommended that human service organizations develop strong professional development training programs for first-level and higher managers to complete in order for them to strongly understand workplace incivility, uncivil behaviors, and ways to address workplace incivility quickly and efficiently. Additionally, all employees within the organization should also be trained

on workplace incivility and how to identify uncivil behaviors. Training could also include a combined audience of both management and employees, simply because this in itself could create a culture of the importance of understanding workplace incivility and how it can be addressed from both sides of the aisle. Additionally, a combined training program could allow both managements and employees to commit to a zero-tolerance culture throughout the organization that highlights the seriousness of uncivil behaviors and workplace incivility. Training should also be provided to management and employees that focus on topics outside of workplace incivility. This could include trainings on emotional intelligence, assertive communication skills, and other psychological constructs that can in keeping both employees and management motivated and creative within their positions. This is because employee turnover not only occurs because of the instances of workplace incivility or experiences of uncivil behaviors, but also due to the processes or lack thereof of dealing with a toxic work environment. Therefore, training programs can focus on employee retention and how management and employees can work together to build a strong, honest, and safe environment for all.

Another recommendation for practice is to ensure of stronger supportive measures for employees that are experiencing workplace incivility. For example, because the results of this study highlighted that managers are losing employees due to workplace incivility, it is important to ensure that employees are appropriately supported during their experiences. This falls in alignment with the need for strong training programs that not only educate first level and higher managers of social service organizations on workplace incivility, but also effective strategies that can be used to assist with the

process of dealing with uncivil behaviors that are found in the workplace. For example, employees need to know that confidentiality and privacy will be maintained whenever possible, yet will be provided with the tools on how to handle the situation from both a physical and emotional standpoint. By following specific strategies to deal with workplace incivility, letting employees know these processes are important, as it demonstrates what they can expect from their employer and how the issue is being taken seriously.

There are also some recommendations for future research, which includes continuing research on this same topic. For example, it would behoove future researchers to continue with this research in other organizational settings to better understand effective strategies that they utilize when dealing with workplace incivility. It is important to note that some of the strategies that first-level and higher managers reported in this current study were not in alignment with current research, such as that of confronting the offender. Future research needs to be focused on these areas of hodgepodge results in order to better understand how confrontation is used and in what ways this strategy is effective for dealing with uncivil behaviors. Another recommendation for future studies could include that of research that is more longitudinal in nature. For example, studies that are completed over a longer period of time could focus on specific workplace uncivil behaviors and how strategies that are used to deal with workplace incivility are effective over time. Finally, completing future research that focuses on how training programs can be effective in dealing with workplace incivility is important. Because previous research has indicated the need to explore issues of



emotional intelligence and assertive communication skills can focus on how training programs can contribute to a healthier workplace environment. This is important because it has been determined that training on workplace incivility does not necessarily have to focus on the constructs of uncivil behaviors.

### **Implications**

There are several implications that need to be discussed with this study. The first implication is that policy changes need to be made within social services organizations in regard to workplace incivility as per the first theme that emerged from the data. The first theme highlighted how many of the participants in this study reported losing good employees due to uncivil behaviors. This can indicate that there is a lack strong training or policies that aid in dealing with workplace incivility as well as a lack of understanding of how to approach, handle and deal with this toxic workplace phenomenon. As discussed, there are three important components of why addressing workplace incivility is important for employee turnover and retention. Firstly, peer affects can be experienced when workplace incivility is occurring; that is, other negative employees who have not demonstrated uncivil behaviors typically feel the need to begin displaying instances of workplace incivility. This in turn, appears to create a chain reaction, which increases the toxicity levels of the department or organization, thus providing an increase of employee turnover.

Secondly, Sliter et al. (2015) had also reported that prevalence rates are as high as 75 to 100%, indicating that almost all employees in today's workforce have experienced some level of uncivil behavior while working. These numbers appear to be astronomical,

which can indicate that if not addressed appropriately and properly, workplace incivility could severely damage an organization by experiencing even higher numbers of turnover than what are currently reported. These numbers support the findings of this study by highlighting how good employees can definitely be lost due to uncivil behaviors in the workplace.

Thirdly, it is important to protect employee retention through understanding the different ways in which workplace incivility can manifest. Harrison (2015) and Katz et al. (2019) have reported that workplace incivility can manifest in three different ways, including that of interpersonal interactions, cyber interactions, and victimless interactions. Because previous research has indicated that interpersonal communications have not been studied when it comes to workplace incivility, this is an important area that promotes many different implications. For example, because interpersonal communications are defined as face-to-face communications and can be completed in a private setting, workplace incivility may not be addressed, skewing the numbers of instances of uncivil behaviors in the workforce. If both staff and management are not appropriately trained on identifying and responding to workplace incivility, then it can be difficult for employees to report instances of uncivil behaviors to their employees; thus, increasing employee turnover to the bullying effects within the toxic workplace. It can be difficult for first-level or higher managers to know that uncivil behaviors are occurring in private face-to-face interpersonal communications, thus the importance of providing training to all members of the organization.

This is also supported in the second theme that highlighted that first-level and higher managers tend to view successful strategies as documenting and confronting uncivil behaviors, while also using real-life experiences, professional development, and the modeling of former managers to deal with workplace incivility. Previous researchers have suggested other strategies that have deemed successful that were not highlighted within the results of this study, such as that of Abdollahzadeh et al. (2017) who discussed the importance of setting clear expectations with staff members before any incidents occur, model behaviors that they would like to see in the workplace, and promote open communication where employees can openly discuss their feelings without retribution. Additionally, Shin and Hur (2019) reported that organizations can ensure that they can teach their employees cognitive reframing exercises in order to deal with uncivil behaviors, and Ibrahim and Qalawa (2016) reported the importance of promoting assertive communication skills training.

The first-level manager participants in this study work in positions where these strategies could be applied, but as I learned through collecting and analyzing the data, none of the participants had received training on any of these recommended strategies; however, all of the participants utilized components of these strategies in their approach to successfully address the uncivil employees behaviors, which they derived through lived experience, consulting with colleagues, and in one instance, Google. This can indicate that first-level managers in this study were oftentimes left to their own devices in their organizations in order to find effective ways to deal with workplace incivility. Therefore, it is important that social service organizations work to ensure that they do

have policies, procedures, training, and support for all staff in order to deal with workplace incivility. This can additionally decrease employee turnover.

Another area that has implications to this current study is the teaching of emotional intelligence. Because there were limited studies that have focused on specific strategies of dealing with workplace incivility, other research has been completed that has focused on the strengthening and understanding of emotional intelligence. Chen and Wang (2019) discussed how emotional intelligence could aid in addressing workplace incivility, simply because this construct aids employees in having the ability to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions. This is important, simply because it can allow managers and employees to have constructive and honest conversations about turnover intentions. Yet, at the same time, these conversations, combined with training on how to identify instances of workplace incivility, can also create a culture in the organization where displaying emotional intelligence to a supervisor can be beneficial. A culture that allows for honest expressions about feelings regarding workplace incivility will aid in decreasing not only turnover intentions, but also that of instances of workplace incivility and toxic, uncivil behaviors.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to understand successful strategies that first-level human service managers utilized when addressing workplace incivility that aids in reducing turnover. The results of this study highlighted three themes that emerged from the data: First-level and higher managers reported that they lose good employees due to workplace incivility, confronting and documenting uncivil behaviors

was a common workplace strategy of first-level and higher managers, and real-life experiences, professional development, and modeling former managers assisted first-level and higher managers in dealing with workplace incivility.

The findings of this research expand upon the current knowledge and available literature. As discussed in Chapter 2, there were many recommendations for strategies to use when addressing workplace incivility: employee education programs (Evans, 2017), cognitive reframing exercises (Shin & Hur, 2019), and assertive communication skills training (Ibrahim & Qalawa, 2016). The first-level manager participants in this study worked in positions where these strategies could be applied, but as I learned through collecting and analyzing the data, none of the participants had received training on any of these recommended strategies; however, all of the participants utilized components of these strategies in their approach to successfully address the uncivil employees behaviors. Therefore, it was recommended that organizations review their current policies and procedures in order to provide training and support to all employees when confronting and dealing with workplace incivility.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### **Demographic Questions**

1. Gender:
2. Age
3. Race/Ethnicity
4. Job Level:
5. Years of experience as a Manager:
6. Number of employees you currently manage:

### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. Tell me how you define workplace incivility?
2. Describe the uncivil behaviors that your employee engaged in.
3. Tell me about a time when you successfully used a strategy to help an uncivil employee overcome their behaviors?
4. How did you develop the strategy you used?
5. Why did you choose that strategy?
6. Why do you view that strategy as successful?
7. Describe strategies that you feel are not successful when dealing with uncivil employee behaviors.
8. How have you seen workplace incivility impact employee turnover?
9. In what ways do you feel supported or unsupported by your organization when dealing with uncivil employee behaviors?

10. Describe ways you feel your organization can better support you when dealing with employee behaviors.
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about this experience that you have not had the opportunity to share?