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Strategies to Increase Employees' Morale

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Shannon Coffey

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Strategies to Increase Employees' Morale

by

Shannon G. Coffey

MS, King University, 2014

BS, King University, 2013

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2021

Abstract

Leaders who lack effective strategies to increase employee morale face an organizational decrease in productivity, sustainability, and profitability, increasing absenteeism and turnover and costing businesses millions of dollars. Grounded in Burns's transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies used by successful organizational leaders to increase employee morale to improve productivity and profitability in their organization. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and a review of company documents. Participants comprised five leaders of a company located in Knoxville, Tennessee, who successfully used strategies to increase employee morale resulting in increased productivity and profitability. Three themes emerged through Yin's five-step data analysis process: effective communication, employee engagement, and employee reward. A key recommendation for business leaders is to encourage open communication through emails, face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and yearly performance reviews. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase employees' morale and improve organizations' productivity and profitability, leading to a decrease in unemployment and crime and enabling the organization employees to contribute time, skills, and money to the local community.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my father and mother, Gary and Betty Coffey and my two kids Kaden and Kambria Coffey. I love you, and thank you so much for putting up with my long hours of studying and time away from family. I also dedicate this doctoral study to my heavenly father for helping me to endure sleepless nights and to keep motivated through my academic career to finish what I started.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Low morale in the workplace is the leading cause of an organizational decrease in productivity, sustainability, and profitability (Street & Lacey, 2018). Low morale costs companies in the United States billions in productivity, absenteeism, and employee satisfaction and health (Kocakulah et al., 2016). Low morale within an organization can destroy workplace structures and could have adverse effects on the company (Patterson-Silver Wolf et al., 2013). The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore strategies used by successful organizational leaders to increase employee morale.

Background of the Problem

Employees are the most valuable asset in an organization (Henderson, 2020; Stanko et al., 2014). Employee morale is a major factor for the organization and a contributing factor to consumers' satisfaction. In the United States, employees' low morale is costing the economy \$350 billion in lost productivity each year (Loosemore & Bridgeman, 2017). For productivity to increase in the workplace, a business leader needs to identify ways to improve employee morale that would positively affect productivity (Brun & Cooper, 2009). Business leaders have the responsibility of ensuring employees' satisfaction in the workplace to increase morale (Saridakis et al., 2013).

Employee satisfaction is not easy to monitor because satisfaction is about how an employee feels at work and the psychological forces that act on an individual. An organization can be more efficient if employee satisfaction is high (Korzynski, 2013). The first step in resolving problems related to employee satisfaction is to recognize these problems (Kocakulah et al., 2016). Leaders need to be able to identify employee

satisfaction associated with emotions, staffing, verbal abuse, fairness, and violence (Patterson-Silver Wolf et al., 2013).

Redundant workload, leaders' lack of appreciation, and employees' lack of advancement are significant stressors that contribute to employee job turnover, absenteeism, low job satisfaction, low motivation, and low morale from an unsupportive organization (Jasperse et al., 2013). In an organization, many factors can interrupt production, and a leader needs to know how to influence the employee to support a healthier work environment and reduce stressors that contribute to low morale. Effective leadership has been a contributing factor to the success of many companies. The development of leadership is through learning and applying skills, knowledge, and attitude toward leading employees in the workplace (Walesh, 2012).

Problem Statement

Employees' low morale decreases productivity, increases absenteeism and costs, and changes employees' attitudes toward the workplace (Street & Lacey, 2018). Low morale costs the United States \$350 billion each year (Loosemore & Bridgeman, 2017). The general business problem is that employees' low morale affects the productivity, sustainability, and profitability of their organizations. The specific business problem is that some organizational leaders lack strategies to increase employee morale to improve productivity and profitability in their organizations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies used by successful organizational leaders to increase employee morale to improve productivity in

their organizations. The target population consisted of five managers, at a company in Knoxville, Tennessee, who successfully used strategies to increase employee morale resulting in increased productivity and profitability. The research findings could help increase employees' morale at other companies, which could reduce the turnover rate. The implications for positive social change include the potential to reduce crime in the community by enabling employees to maintain their salaries by reducing employee turnover rates. According to Braun (2019), having a good income can deter people from committing crimes.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a qualitative method to gather and analyze rich data from research participants who used their real-world experiences from within the workplace to answer the interview questions. Using a qualitative method enables researchers to build knowledge and experience from participants' real-world experiences and gain a high degree of perspicacity (Toye et al., 2016). By contrast, researchers use a quantitative method to predict and control phenomena based on statistical analysis to give numerical expressions of the correlation or dissimilarity among variables (Park & Park, 2016). However, because my objective was not to correlate or compare variables, the quantitative method would not have supported the basis for this study. Employing the mixed method requires integrating a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in a single research study (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015; Maxwell, 2019). The mixed method approach was not appropriate for my research because my focus was on exploring rich data from research participants, and not on quantifying them.

I used a single case study for my research to explore strategies managers use to increase employees' morale to improve productivity and profitability in an organization. Researchers use a case study for exploring phenomena within an organization (Raeburn et al., 2015). Before selecting a single case study as the research design for this study, I considered and rejected three alternative qualitative designs: narrative, phenomenological, and ethnographic. In a narrative design, researchers focus on participants' lived and told stories (Jones, 2016). Because narrative design relies on storytelling from the participants to gather data, this design was not acceptable for this study. Phenomenological researchers collect data from research participants based on the meanings of lived experiences (Chang et al., 2016). I rejected a phenomenological design because I wanted to focus my study on the meanings of lived experiences of participants regarding a particular phenomenon. The ethnographic design is a verification process in which the researcher gathers data by actively engaging with people and their culture (Baskerville & Myers, 2015); I rejected the ethnographic design because the scope of my research did not include people and culture.

Research Question

What strategies do organizational leaders use to increase employee morale to improve productivity and profitability?

Interview Questions

1. What are your experiences with developing strategies to boost employee morale?
2. What strategies did you use to increase employee morale to improve

productivity?

3. What strategies did you use to increase employee morale to improve profitability?
4. What were the challenges you faced in maintaining and increasing employee morale?
5. How did you address the challenges you faced in maintaining and increasing employee morale?
6. What other information would you like to share regarding strategies to increase employee morale?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework I used for this study was the transformational leadership theory, developed by Burns (1978) and later extended by Bass (1985). Transformational leaders motivate their subordinates to excel beyond their means and to strive for a higher goal in the organization (Eisenbeib & Boerner, 2013). The transformational leadership theory brings teamwork, motivation, trust, engagement, growth, and development to employees in the organization (Rawat, 2015). The fundamental concept of this theory is for leaders to influence followers' imagination, performance, intellectual stimulation, motivation, and satisfaction in the workplace (Rawat, 2015).

According to Price and Weiss (2013), transformational leadership provides a potential framework for understanding the relationships between managers and supervisors and employees. Therefore, transformational leadership provided a potential

lens for understanding the results of my empirical inquiry. The key constructs of the transformational leadership framework applied to the leadership style provided a basis for understanding effective strategies to increase morale, which could improve productivity and profitability and lead to a reduction in employee turnover.

Operational Definitions

Employee job satisfaction: Employee job satisfaction is a temperamental state that could encourage service quality and customer fulfillment by facilitating employee emotional behavior (Hur et al., 2015).

Employee morale: Employee morale is an emotional state that affects work engagement, motivation, job implication, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Paek et al., 2015).

Heavy workload: Heavy workload is a large amount of work assigned to a particular employee that influences stress, burnout, longer working hours, high turnover, decrease satisfaction, low morale, and organizational failure (Humphries et al., 2014).

High morale: High morale is a work approach affiliated with workplace stability, a clear understanding of work directives, and supportive leaders (Patterson-Silver Wolf et al., 2013).

Job morale: Job morale is how employees perceive their work climate regarding belonging and motivation toward accomplishing workplace goals (Minor et al., 2014).

Leaders' lack of appreciation: Leaders lack appreciation when they do not encourage employees and employees are not receptive to new ideas, promotions, rewards, and recognitions from their leaders (Hogan & Coote, 2014).

Low morale: Low morale is a work approach affiliated with workplace verbal abuse, insufficient personnel in the organization, workplace violence, and staff feeling that they have no voice in the organization (Patterson-Silver Wolf et al., 2013).

Mindful leader: A mindful leader is a leader with the ability to observe all process interactions internal and external in the workplace (Furtner et al., 2018).

Mobbing: Mobbing is a form of hostile behavior from a group of employees in the workplace aimed at a single person (Qureshi et al., 2015).

Physical workplace: Physical workplace is the spatial arrangement and indoor environment that has significant impact on employee effectiveness, behavior, and performance outcome in the work area (Kim, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

By acknowledging assumptions, limitations, and delimitations in this study, I provided awareness to the reader and establish boundaries for the research. The accuracy of a research study depends on assumptions and limitations reporting (Lange & Dodds, 2017). In many ways, researchers are limited in conducting scholarly research by these factors due to different conditions and situations that may affect the outcome. Discussing the limitations and delimitations should give a clear indication of the overall trustworthiness to the reader (Elo et al., 2014).

Assumptions

In research, the assumption is the mindset likely to be accurate, based on the researcher reasoning of known facts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Four assumptions guided this research. First, I assumed that leaders participating in this study were willing to

communicate their experiences. As expected, leaders participating in this study were willing to communicate their experiences. Second, I assumed that those leaders would have real-world experience and be able to voice their expertise toward strategies to increase employee morale by providing an honest response. Participants had real-world experiences and voiced their expertise toward strategies to increase employee morale. Third, I assumed that the five leaders in this study were suitable for exploring strategies to increase morale in an organization and that they wanted to take part in this study. Indeed, the five leaders in this study were suitable for exploring strategies to increase morale in an organization and they wanted to take part in this study. Fourth, I assumed the data collected could identify ways to improve employee morale, which positively affected an organization. Through the data collected, I was able to identify strategies to improve employee morale.

Limitations

Limitations reflect the weaknesses of the study (Dahlgaard et al., 2013) that are factors outside of the researcher control (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). The first limitation of this study was that managers must be able to answer the six interview questions (see Appendix), by in-person interview honestly. The second limitation was that the sample size consisted of five managers who participated in the in-person interview. Wilhelmy et al. (2016) explained that generalizability could be limited due to the size of a sample in a qualitative approach. The third limitation was that I was doing a qualitative case study, which was limited to qualitative data compared to other methods.

Delimitations

Delimitations set the boundaries and extent of the study (Bouzon et al., 2014).

There were three delimitations in this study. First, the sample size was small and consisted of only five managers. Second, the scope of the study only includes an organization in Knoxville Tennessee. Third, the primary design was to interview managers to gather data and to focus merely on morale, and I could have gained data through other means.

Significance of the Study

Minor et al. (2014) found that higher morale contributes to higher income growth and productivity in the workplace. This study could be of value to businesses because the findings may include strategies that managers use to increase employee morale to improve productivity and profitability. Van der Vyver et al. (2013) concluded that leaders using caring strategies increase morale, which affects employees' quality of working life and job satisfaction. Business leaders may review their business processes and practices to include such strategies, in their training courses, share such strategies with managers and leaders, or create processes for introducing these strategies in their organization. The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve employees' morale, which may improve organizations' productivity and profitability, leading to a decrease in unemployment and crime and enabling the organization and its employees to contribute time, skills, and money to the local community.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The objective of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies that managers use to increase employee morale to improve productivity and profitability. The

purpose of the literature review was to provide a new assessment of research currently published by prior researchers and to provide readers with a summary of new concepts (Govindan et al., 2015). I conducted a literature review of relevant concepts in the workplace that served as a background to support my research question. My peer-reviewed search began by searching articles, books, and dissertations by entering keywords in the following databases: Walden University Library, Google Scholar, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Expanded Academic ASAP, Academic Search Complete, and ScienceDirect Business. Conducting word searches and phrases through these various databases resulted in hundreds of peer-reviewed scholarly articles, books, and dissertations, enabling me to analyze my research problem further. The literature I reviewed consisted of assessing 379 peer-reviewed sources, 77% of which were published between 2017 and 2021 and 95% of which were peer-reviewed material. I entered the following keywords into these databases: *morale, job satisfaction, employee motivation, individualized consideration, high morale, low morale, increase morale, workplace performance, leadership, transformational leadership theory, team building, turnover, workplace measurement, workplace climate, healthy work environment, leadership style, team player, inspirational motivation, leadership theories, workplace conflict, conflict resolution, ethical leadership, emotional intelligence, leadership, mindfulness, leadership learning, leader emotion, complexity leadership theory, and morale boost.*

I reviewed the professional and academic literature to consider how leaders' initiatives mitigate the adverse effects of low morale and productivity in an organization.

Peer-reviewed scholarly sources were essential to the comprehension of low morale and productivity in the work area to have a more precise depiction of the concepts. I organized the literature review into subsections for the following subjects: (a) transformational leadership theory, (b) other leadership theories, (c) factors and issues affecting workplace performance, (d) job satisfaction, (e) turnover, (f) workplace conflict, (g) ethical leadership theory, (h) team player, (i) emotional intelligence, (j) leadership behavior, (k) absenteeism, (l) epistemic virtues, (m) leadership learning and acting, and (n) compensation.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership is the process in which one individual has the control to influence a group of employees to achieve efficiency, increase productivity, and create solutions in the workplace (Siangchokyoo et al., 2020). Transformational leadership behaviors in the workplace have a significant and continuous impact on individuals (Muchiri et al., 2019). The success of transformational leadership is well documented in prior studies to have an impact on workplace commitment, performance, job satisfaction, morale, and other areas that help facilitate the overall increase in productivity (Yin et al., 2019). The role of every leader is to be able to improve motivation, morale, and productivity within their workplaces. Positive workplace leadership has been documented to influence employee workplace satisfaction, which reduces turnover (Glaso et al., 2018). Transformational leadership theory is the process to improve and transform leaders to become excellent managers in their place of work (Wang et al., 2017). Transformational leaders stimulate motivation, morale, and productivity. Lei et al. (2020)

identified existing research and showed that transformational leadership improves the leader's behavior through individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. All facets of transformational leadership foster a better workplace by giving a meaning for followers, which contributes to oneself and the responses of others. According to Parent and Lovelace (2018), managers with a positive organizational culture can create a work environment where employees could grow and operate at their full potential. According to Robertson and Barling (2017), transformational leadership corresponds with an increase in morale, motivation, and productivity in an organization by targeting employee outcomes. Encouraging transformational leadership behaviors increases subordinates' morale, which improves sustainability in the organization.

In theory, transformational leadership covers a broad range of workplace strategies to increase productivity and morale. Leaders who make efforts to adopt a transformational leadership model use (a) individual consideration, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) idealized influence. Leaders who incorporate these four behaviors in the workplace empower followers to increase productivity and morale (Joo & Jo, 2017). An et al. (2018) suggested that leaders take initial and annual training that explicitly encourages leaders to incorporate transformational leadership theory into managerial behavior, which improves organizations' success. Researchers have proven transformational leadership has positive impacts on team success, including an increase in morale, productivity, job satisfaction, and quality (Alozie, 2020; Yue et al., 2019).

Individual Consideration

Leaders with individual consideration behavior spend time with followers and give opportunities to grow by coaching and mentoring, which can stimulate individual achievement in their followers to help them reach their full potential (Cai et al., 2016). Pasamar et al. (2019) found that encouraging personnel support stimulates learning, coaching, teaching, and mentoring. Leaders with individual consideration behavior, stimulate followers by expressing high-performance expectations, which target the employee rather than the workplace (Dong et al., 2016). Through individual consideration, leaders show respect for employees' development, which in turn increases morale, motivation, and productivity in the workplace. Eberly et al. (2017) found that stimulating and considering employees affect the intention to leave the workplace. Providing empathy, a supportive climate, and training and learning opportunities creates a healthy workplace for the employees, which should signal positive behaviors throughout the workplace (Niessen et al., 2017).

Intellectual Stimulation

Leaders with intellectual stimulation behaviors encourage creativity and innovation by challenging organization teams through critical thinking and solving problems, which increases productivity and morale (Allen et al., 2017). Berraies and Abidine (2019) found that when leaders stimulate individual thinking in innovative ways, they inspire motivation that positively influences productivity and morale in the organization. Encouraging intellectual behavior influences employees' thought process, inspires the individual to challenge different methods, and drives employees to find

creative ways in dealing with novel situations, which in turn creates a positive attitude toward their job (Ding et al., 2017). Employees with a positive attitude create the happiest and most productive workplace (Hogreve et al., 2017). Leaders with intellectual stimulation persuade subordinates to be creative, use logic, apply intelligence, and encourage employees to see different perspectives in the way to accomplish any task (Pasha et al., 2017). Leaders who provide quality time, coaching, counseling, mentoring, and opportunities for employee growth would influence productivity and increase the chances of positive change in the workplace (Bouwman et al., 2017). Ali et al. (2019) and Alos-Simo et al. (2016) added that transformational leaders motivate employees to generate and share knowledge, inspire followers' intellects, open communication, influence values, and stimulate the workplace implementation of adaptive culture, which increased motivation and morale in the workplace.

Inspirational Motivation

Leaders with inspirational motivation stimulate followers by acting as a role models (Tsevairidou et al., 2019). Leaders who display enthusiasm and optimism toward subordinates' performance, goals, values, and vision stimulate employees, which increases productivity and morale (Gilbert et al., 2017). Mullen et al. (2017) found that leader behavior contributes significantly to occupational safety in the workplace, and safety stimulates employees' work ethics. Novak et al. (2017) argued that workplace safety starts with a commitment from leaders to ensure employee safety is part of everyday activities. Leaders who develop a safe work environment stimulate employees' engagement, good health positive emotions, and enhancement (Horwitz & Horwitz,

2017). Employee engagement creates a positive social relationship with their coworkers, which in turn creates an increase in organizational productivity and morale (Jha et al., 2019).

Delegach et al. (2017) asserted that leaders motivate their coworkers to gain commitment from their followers, which increases productivity and morale in the workplace. Francis and Keegan (2020) and Merrilees et al. (2017) found that a leader's engagement stimulates employees' motivation, which results in gaining commitment. When employees feel the workplace is beneficial, they have a strong commitment to the organization and their leaders, and achieve workplace sustainability (Abid et al., 2019). Organizational commitment and effective teams in the workplace are crucial for employee attachments and organization success (Wombacher & Felfe, 2017). Erkutlu and Chafra (2019) and Francis and Keegan (2020) found that organizational commitment and employee teams should interact with open communication, which would enhance positive effects on individual performance in the workplace. Researchers have proven that an employee who is effectively committed to the workplace is less likely to leave and is more productive (Tarkang Mary & Ozturen, 2019).

Idealized Influence

Leaders with idealized influence behavior ingrain pride, faith, and respect in their subordinates, which stimulates excitement, importance, awareness, and commitment (Zhu & Bao, 2017). Leaders should influence followers that they are associated with to create a sense of belonging and caring to the organization. Employee commitment is essential in achieving organizational success and the ability for leaders to lead their employees

(Marchalina & Ahmad, 2017). Leaders' values, beliefs, and ethical positions have a significant effect on employees' work performance (Babalola et al., 2018). Leaders' strategies that influence employees would increase commitment, morale, and productivity in the workplace (Bush et al., 2019; Zhu & Bao, 2017). Leaders who share organization vision, encourage positive attitudes, and express concerns that influence positive employee behavior would increase productivity (Jauhari et al., 2017). Leaders who give employees rewards and recognition and the ability to think and solve problems would influence employees to perform beyond expectations (Carbonell & Rodriguez-Escudero, 2016; Crome et al., 2019; Milner & Furnham, 2017). Koo et al. (2019) and Mayes et al. (2017) asserted that giving rewards is a tool to communicate to employees their value contributing to success in the workplace, which would increase productivity and morale, but overtime employees become accustomed to their awards, and the tool would be less useful. When leaders apply a high-quality work relationship with their employees, they see an increase in commitment, morale, and productivity (Ragins et al., 2017).

Other Leadership Theories

Kumar and Khiljee (2016) identified a successful leader from six theories: (a) great man theory, (b) trait theory, (c) behavioral theory, (d) contingency theory, (e) transactional leadership, and (f) transformational leadership. According to Kumar and Khiljee, the leader relationship in each of these six theories is an essential part of research. The modern history of how to lead goes back as far as the 1840s "great man" theory that leaders are naturally born to be leaders, and not made to be leaders (Chatterjee et al., 2017). In the early 20th century, trait theory evolved from the great man theory

(Styron & Styron, 2017). Trait theory is when leaders have inherited observable patterns of behavior such as physical, personality, feelings, and social skills that are unteachable, and the individual is already suitable to be a leader (Kumar & Khiljee, 2016; Morris et al., 2017). Leadership theory changed between the late 1940s and early 1950s to the behavioral theory that states that a leader is not born to be a leader, but taught to become a leader (Kumar & Khiljee, 2016). Kumar and Khiljee asserted that behavioral leaders have traits such as a strong personality, confidence, honesty, respect, engagement, and communicative to lead successfully.

In the 1960s, the contingency theory was developed; much like the trait theory, the leader relied on the sense of human traits that relates to the situation in the workplace to improve productivity (Williams et al., 2017). In the late 1960s, the situational theory was developed to attempt to match a leadership style based on the variables in the workplace (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2017). Transactional leadership theory evolved around the late 1900s based on the transaction between the leader and the followers, and for transactional leadership theory to be effective, the leaders establish a reinforcing environment at which the organizational goals are in sync with rewards (Martinez-Corcoles & Stephanou, 2017; Shafagatova & Van Looy, 2020). Transformational leadership theory was developed in the 1970s as a leadership approach to influencing the need for change and inspiring positive changes in the workplace with their employees to create a stable relationship within the organization, which relates to trust, vision, and passion for inspiring others (Koohang & Hatch, 2017). Leader perception would affect how followers would respond to their leader in the workplace. Because I wanted to view

my findings from the interactional perspective in the workplace, I chose the transformational leadership theory as the conceptual framework for this study. By researching leaders' interaction with followers, I developed strategies to increase morale and productivity in the workplace.

Factors and Issues Affecting Workplace Performance

Workplace performance has positive and negative variables that would influence the outcome of success (Saeidi et al., 2015). Negative variables that would contribute to a decrease in employee morale and productivity would be from bullying, gossip, stress, sexual harassment, workplace wellness, financial, motivation, and leadership. O'Connell and O'Sullivan (2014) asserted that workplace productivity and morale deteriorate when these negative variables originate in the workplace, and Zhou et al. (2017) argued that negative variables could lead to a high turnover rate in the organization. Tiesman et al. (2015) added that negative variables contribute to suicides at an estimated \$45 billion US dollars in workers' loss and medical costs each year. According to Arcy et al. (2014) and Wright (2014), stress is the leading cause of employee absence, low morale, increased turnover, low productivity, increase cost, violence, low self-esteem, depression, substance abuse, and burnout. The positive variables that contribute to an increase in success are open communication, a clear understanding of the company mission, careful hiring, work-life flexibility, competitive pay and benefits, and just having a fun time during work (Eller et al., 2014; Haar et al., 2014; Plester & Hutchison, 2016; Terera & Ngirande, 2014). Leaders could use workplace financial performance as a survey instrument to measure success (Edgeman et al., 2015). Lee and Drever (2014) found that

an employee survey is useful to gauge positive and negative variables in the workplace leading to organizational success.

Work-related actions play an essential role in the morale and financial success of a company (Bran & Udrea, 2016). For example, Qureshi et al. (2015) indicated that *mobbing*, a form of hostile behavior from a group of employees in the workplace aimed at a single person, could manifest in moral harassment, bullying, workplace violence, rumors, verbal aggression, and humiliation, which lead to a decrease in workplace performance. Hostile behavior causes occupational stress and results in negative employee behavior in the organization. Qureshi et al. found that mobbing is a significant problem that created a decrease in morale and productivity in the workplace.

A physical workplace has a significant impact on the success of an organization (Kim, 2014). Kim (2014) defined the physical workplace as the spatial arrangement and indoor environment that would have a considerable impact on employee effectiveness, behavior, and performance outcome in the work area. Workplace variables such as lighting, temperature, chairs, the design of the workplace, employee-friendly, and supporting technologies have a powerful impact on employee behavior, other than management (Kim, 2014). Kim emphasized that depending on the employee level of discomfort with these variables would increase or decrease employees' motivation, morale, and productivity. The physical workplace is a tool to use as advantage to increase morale, motivation, and productivity. According to Kim, employees or equipment would not guarantee success by themselves but could be integrated together to have a balance that could create success. Designing a physical workplace for the employees could

accelerate the speed of success for an organization.

Lanaj and Hollenbeck (2014) stated team building is essential for organizations' performance, and without efficiently managing, the teams would have a reduction in morale and productivity. Tazzini et al. (2013) defined the team as a group of people with the same goals to achieve success. Asrar-ul-Haq and Kuchinke (2016) claimed that leadership styles could profoundly influence team performance and the absence of different leadership styles would lead to reduced morale in the workplace. Team building starts at the top and requires leaders to have an understanding of the workplace to build a team environment by understanding how to lead a team (Smith, 2017). Team building is a crucial, challenging, complex activity, and is a thinking organism used for increasing workplace performance in an organization (Gaynor, 2015).

Team building is a way of engaging employees to work together to meet the same goals at a place of work. Team building is an essential ingredient in building trust, and increasing motivation and morale (Serrat, 2017). Team building requires leaders having attention to relationship building and leading of each employee (Serrat, 2017). High quality coaching and mentoring would encourage individual competencies in an organization for team building and increasing workplace performance. Team building focuses on improving social relations, resolving interpersonal problems, and clarifying different roles that would affect the team functioning in the workplace (Aga et al., 2016). Team building gives a promising advantage for increasing team processes and plays a significant role in transformational leadership and success.

Transformational leadership is a tool to increase workplace performance by

increasing positive variables to influence the outcome of success from employees.

Transformational leadership is a style used by leaders to encourage individuals of the need for change by inspiring motivation, growth, morale, values, and principles of conduct (Tse & Chiu, 2014). Transformational leadership behavior of leaders contributes to organizational success through the coaching and mentoring process by enhancing the team process, which provides an increase in workplace performance (Aga et al., 2016). The transformational leader typically leads followers to a higher standard of achievement by enabling them to achieve personal growth, and the ability to solve problems in new ways (Effelsberg et al., 2014). To lead followers, leaders need to have the capacity to learn and mentor the followers so that they would also gain leadership skills and accountability in the workplace. Through transformational learning, leaders would develop diversity in multiple roles and responsibilities throughout the organization to teach subordinates (Drago-Severson & Blum-Destefano, 2014). According to Dean (2016), learning is essential for increasing workplace performance because education supports new skills and knowledge to fulfill the responsibility for optimizing human and organizational growth. By using perceptual and objective financial performance measurement, leaders could make decisions that have a positive impact on organizational performance (Saunila et al., 2014). Workplace performance measurement (WPM) is a quantifiable system that organizations use to control organizational behavior to exceed the target performance (Koufteros et al., 2014). According to Spekle and Verbeeten (2014), production-measuring systems affect organizational performance by measurable pre-set performance targets, which would guide operations toward the workplace goals.

Leaders of the workplace using the WPM tool would outperform other organizations that fail to use a WPM tool to increase productivity. The most successful measurement is from productivity, which gives organization performance, followed by profitability outcomes, capital market value, quality, and human resource performance (Zhang et al., 2014). It is also necessary to measure or monitor job satisfaction because employees' attitudes directly relate to the success of the organization by how employees perform their job (Judge et al., 2017).

Job Satisfaction

Hur et al. (2015) defined employee job satisfaction as a temperamental state that could encourage service quality and customer fulfillment by facilitating employee emotional behavior. Job satisfaction is critical to productivity and morale in any workplace. In fact, leader behaviors can have a role in improving job satisfaction and morale. A satisfied employee would positively contribute to the success and growth of the workplace, while the unsatisfied employee would contribute negatively to the workplace (Amarneh & Muthuveloo, 2020; Samson & Babu, 2017). Occupational stress contributes to the employees' burn out, job satisfaction, and physical well-being as well as mental health (Khamisa et al., 2015). To understand the impact on morale in an organization, researchers also have to study the impact on morale and productivity from job satisfaction. Iwu and Holzemer (2014) explained job satisfaction as expressed feelings that can be from emotional rewards, accomplishments, prestige, and positive morale in the organization. Employees reported having an increase in morale from (a) confidence, (b) sense of emotional reward, (c) accomplishments, and (d) prestige in the

workplace. Subordinates also reported that having peer support and a trusting relationship with their leaders build a healthier work environment (Iwu & Holzemer, 2014).

Researchers have shown that the work climate has a significant impact on employee satisfaction in the organization when everyone can work together as a team (Palvalin, 2017).

Minor et al. (2014) defined job morale as how employees perceive their work climate regarding belonging and motivation toward accomplishing workplace goals. Good morale is outstanding for building a healthy work environment, and leaders attend to pay no attention or little thought into increasing morale in the workplace. Minor et al. extended that other researchers advocated that morale is the key to the organizations' well-being and associated with workplace stress. Minor et al. emphasized that there are six aspects of morale among employees in the workplace. The six aspects of morale among employees would include the feelings of attitudes toward leadership, status, appraisal accomplishments and failures, future outlook, belonging to the workplace, and sacrificing in different work situations. Mahmood et al. (2019) and Minor et al. stated that prior studies described employee morale as relations with leaders, attitude toward supervisors, material rewards for meeting goals, relationship with coworkers, and intrinsic job satisfaction. A positive workplace plays a significant role in building a healthier work environment (Geue, 2018). Minor et al. reported that there is a link between having a closer relationship with fellow workers and employee morale, which would result in creating a healthy work climate. Minor et al. indicated that organization leaders play a significant role in increasing morale and building a healthier work

environment. When leaders of the workplace respect their subordinates, worker leader relationships improve, which would increase morale in the workplace, but subordinates would still have to accept and follow directives given by leaders of the organization. Derby-Davis (2014) confirmed that appreciation in the workplace also builds job satisfaction in the organization in which creates a healthier workplace.

Minor et al. (2014) indicated that job morale is the basis to which subordinates feel good about their job in which they have a sense of comfort in affinity and are motivated to accomplish organizational goals. Employees that are satisfied with their job feel a sense of comfort would be motivated to expand to achieve the organizations' directives. Minor et al. confirmed that employee cooperation creates a positive atmosphere and aids in a more productive workplace, which would enhance morale and productivity, and would create a healthier work environment. The employees that are supportive and pleasant to work with would provide quality work, positive atmosphere, and a healthier work environment.

Turnover

Shi et al. (2017) reported that employee turnover is costing organizations millions of dollars annually in: (a) sales, (b) reassigning, and (c) replacing staff. Turnover is a universal problem; therefore, business leaders are looking for ways to convince employees to remain in the organization (Luo et al., 2017). According to Kim and Fernandez (2017) reducing turnover has been an ongoing goal for many organizations, and Hom et al. (2017) added that employee turnover had brought attention to many scholars because researchers want to find out why employees leave. Javed et al. (2014)

found that employees who do not enjoy their place at work would leave for another job, and preventing turnover is essential to organizational success. Basterretxea and Storey (2018) confirmed that to avoid turnover and to increase job satisfaction employees need to work together as a team. Wombacher and Felfe (2017) added employees that are emotionally attached to other employees within the organization would not have the desire to leave. A flexible work schedule could reduce employee turnover, which would result in higher levels of productivity and morale in an organization (Lexa & Fessell, 2017), and Javed et al. (2014) added that companies prosper when keeping high morale among employees, and satisfied employees are likely to stay with the company. Patterson-Silver Wolf et al. (2013) defined high morale as a work approach affiliated with workplace stability, a clear understanding of work directives, and supportive leaders in the workplace. Leadership style plays an essential role in employee satisfaction in the workplace and turnover. Havold and Havold (2019) asserted that good leadership behaviors contribute to stimulating motivation to increase in the workplace, improving morale in the organization, increasing productivity, and promoting teamwork with fellow employees. Therefore, management should try to identify which leadership style can stimulate motivation, morale, and productivity to increase employee workplace satisfaction. Dhiman et al. (2019) and Stater and Stater (2018) and Zineldin (2017) found that negative leadership behaviors contribute to an unhealthy workplace leading to an increase in turnover, low morale and productivity, and a decrease in motivation.

Workplace Conflict

Almeida et al. (2017); Jimmieson et al. (2017); and Ralph et al. (2017) defined

conflict as an encounter between an individual with a different agreement, opinion, values, and intentions which affect the other in a negative aspect. Conflict in the workplace is inevitable due to different opinions, but how leaders resolve conflict contributed to a negative or positive workplace (Yuksel et al., 2017). Coleman et al. (2014) found that conflict resolution theory is a tool for solving a dispute by the selection of interventions. Therefore, understanding how to manage conflict would prevent destructive behaviors in the workplace. Destructive behaviors create a negative impact on teams, and unresolved conflict can lead to retaliation (Fraher, 2017; Jimmieson et al., 2017). Jimmieson et al. found that interpersonal conflict in the workplace is a social stressor, which leads to the employee being unhealthy, and overtime could strengthen into extreme forms of conflict if not resolved. Two types of interpersonal conflict are task-oriented and relationship-oriented, which pertain to differences in the workplace (Jimmieson et al., 2017). Task-oriented conflict is the contrast to performing the work, and relationship-oriented conflict is a discrepancy from the relationship between the individuals (Jimmieson et al., 2017). Van Niekerk et al. (2017) added that a healthy and effective conflict exists in teams that are functioning effectively and Kalambo and Parikh (2017) informed that healthy conflict could stimulate innovation and productivity whereas an unhealthy conflict causes a loss in trust and productivity.

Understanding and appreciating various opinions that result in conflict were crucial in the resolution. According to Gao et al. (2017), conflict resolution is essential in maintaining a friendship in the workplace, which keeps destructive behaviors from escalating. The conventional approach in the workplace is to access the situation for the

detrimental strife that would be destructive and disruptive, and address the ones causing the conflict and refer the case to an investigation or mediation (Shahzad et al., 2020). Hershcovis et al. (2018) found that by leaders ignoring conflict would result in emotional exhaustion, target-enacted incivility, and lowering the ability to forgive. Confronting the argument would bring out the positive outcome and psychological forgiveness, which result in a healthy workplace (Hershcovis et al., 2018). Communication is crucial to discuss the impact on the workplace with the individuals that are in conflict and agree to a resolution (Overall & McNulty, 2017). Once the individuals start to communicate, the leader can reveal the nature of the conflict and establish a position to resolve. Leaders should list facts, assumptions, beliefs, agreements, opinions, values, and intentions to analyze for a resolution. Leaders should also take a break to think about the decision and convene back to reach an agreement with the individuals. Further analysis is required to agree with the individuals about what needs to be done to come to a conflict resolution (Legault et al., 2017).

A tool to resolve conflict is the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode that gives leaders an understanding of typical behavior in conflict situations based on two dimensions assertiveness and cooperativeness (Brock et al., 2017; Rao, 2017). Rao (2017) extended that the two dimensions of behavior define five different types of conflict-handling modes, competing, accommodating, avoiding, compromising, and collaborating. Competing is the process in which the party is competing aggressively to win using any technique even at others' expense because they want to win no matter the circumstance. Accommodating is when the party sacrifices their needs for the other to be satisfied.

According to Kazansky and Andrassy (2019), avoiding the conflict occurs when a leader postpones the decision on the dispute to obtain more facts about the dispute; in such a case, no side wins the conflict. A compromising conflict is a process where both parties can give up something to resolve the dispute, which satisfies both parties. Collaborating takes longer due to jointly working together to find a solution to the conflict, and once coming to an agreement builds friendships with both parties (Rao, 2017). In resolving conflict leaders need to (a) not look for blame, (b) insist on honesty, (c) have open communication, (d) practice active listening, and (e) build trust (Hood et al., 2015; Meyer et al., 2017).

Creasy and Carnes (2017) found that destructive conflict decreases morale and productivity in the workplace, and therefore there needs to a preventive measure. Kiburz et al. (2017) found that leaders who offer preventive conflict awareness training to employees reduce conflict in the workplace. To create a healthier work environment, Lohr et al. (2017) found that conflict management programs are successful in reducing conflict and improving productivity and morale in an organization. Conflict management programs give the leader the ability to handle employee disputes and learn how to be efficient in managing conflict in an organization. The leader of the workplace would act as a mediator, counselor, and arbitrator during the conflict to resolve the situation and increase productivity (Diebig et al., 2016). Anthony-Mcman et al. (2016), Barreiro and Treglown (2020), and Choi (2019) found that leaders' engagement with employees is essential for positive work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, which decreases conflict and increases productivity. Irving (2019), Woodrow and Guest (2016) added that

leaders with emotional intelligence and open communication could identify the conflict of others and can manage the conflict before it escalates into a more significant problem. Khalili (2017) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to identify emotions and to use the information to make a wise decision. A leader with emotional intelligence can improve organizational behavior (Khalili, 2017). Leaders with emotional intelligence have an understanding of individuals' feelings, emotions, and can create a positive working environment that would increase productivity and morale.

Ethical Leadership Theory

Zoghbi-Manrique-De-Lara and Viera-Armas (2017) found that when ethical leaders discuss rules and values and lead by example regarding ethics, they motivate the employees. Ethical leaders with a positive attitude influence followers' attitudes and behaviors (Walumbwa et al., 2017). Positive implications build commitment, job satisfaction, morale, trust, and task performance, which increase productivity in the workplace (Davis, 2020; Muhammed & Soumyaja, 2019). Walumbwa et al. (2017) found that organizations that promote ethical leadership in the workplace increase employees' ability to deal with conflict situations and decrease misbehavior. Babalola et al. (2019) extended that moral reflectiveness would encourage ethical behavior in leaders to fulfill their leadership roles and responsibilities. An ethical leader would have to behave in a way to actively listen, commit, and discuss unethical behaviors, and become a role model to the employees.

Moral reflective learning is the process in which ethical leaders would learn how to listen actively, commit, discuss unethical behavior, and become a role model to the

employees. Through moral reflective training, leaders would have an understanding of ethical concepts, theories, and rational decision-making to become successful leaders. Through moral reflection learning, a leader would recognize challenges and develop social skills that would shape moral behavior to be successful in the workplace (Hedberg, 2017). Mo and Shi (2015) included that ethical leadership principles are crucial in the workplace for influencing moral attitude and behavior, which places stress on the leader to be a role model for the employees. Ethical principles include respect for others, service to others, justice for others, and honesty toward others (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2017; Li et al., 2015). Developing leadership skills is a continuous process of learning and growing which requires actions from the organization followed by training, mentoring, coaching, and role-playing (Fluckiger et al., 2017).

Team Player

When I think of a team player, I think of a football team. To be a successful team takes all players working together and with one individual not being part of the team, the team could be unsuccessful. The coach is the leader who builds the team to be successful. A team works the same way in the workplace with employees; they all have to work together to be successful, and the leader is the coach. The leader builds morale and productivity in the workplace. Mach and Lvina (2017) found that without a trusting leader, the team would fail. All team members have to trust the leader and not just the majority to have a winning team. Mach and Lvina included two types of trust, (a) in the leader and (b) among team players. The development of a robust team relationship would increase morale and productivity in the workplace.

In a workplace, individuals who cause negativity are non-team players, and those who are team players want to succeed and have a positive outlook. Krumm et al. (2016) found that there are two types of team players, virtual and traditional. According to Do and Nuth (2019) and Schulze and Krumm (2017) and Vega-Zamora et al. (2019), a virtual team consists of individuals, regardless of their location, collaborating through communication and information technology to accomplish a common goal. Virtual team would interact by completing a common goal that the leader establishes. The interaction between high instrumental employees drives motivation, which increases productivity and morale in the workplace (John et al., 2019; Schulze & Krumm, 2017). Challenges from having virtual teams would include distance, communication, collaborating, establishing norms, and seeing the player face-to-face. Benefield et al. (2016) found that traditional workgroups working within proximity and having interactions with each other would be more productive. Benefield et al. extended that virtual teams are becoming more common due to online software that improves team face-to-face interaction and these interactions increases productivity and morale worldwide. According to Schulze and Krumm, virtual team players need to be motivated to learn new skills and to handle the challenges from technology use, increase in workload, cultural differences, and geographic location.

According to Lacerenza et al. (2018), leaders who are unavailable to be with their teams due to workloads would influence non-team building in the organization. Leaders must be available to foster team improvement, provide tools necessary for individuals to solve their problems, which would build team motivation (Lacerenza et al., 2018).

Employees must come first, and leaders need to be available when called upon by their team. If employees do not have support or guidance from their leader, they would not know what to do to meet their goals in the workplace, and motivation would decrease in the workplace (Janes, 2018). Trust within teams increases morale, and conflict decreases morale in organizations. Leaders need to be involved with teams and to dedicate themselves to improving trust to build workplace relations. Hughes et al. (2018) found that workplace relations build morale, which increases performance in individuals and teams. Ozyilmaz et al. (2018) concluded in their study that when employee trust is high within an organization, job satisfaction increases, and when trust is low organization turnover increases, and employee performance decreases. It is a fact that employee trust in the workplace is required to increase morale. Leaders need to have emotional intelligence, so they can be aware of the team needs and have an open-door policy to stay in touch. Lee and Chelladurai (2017) found that leaders' emotions in the workplace have a significant impact on the attitudes and behaviors of employees.

Emotional intelligence

Leadership development plays a crucial role in increasing morale within an organization. To have an effective leadership program, human resource managers need to understand personality traits, which contribute to the understanding of emotional intelligence in the workplace (Miao et al., 2018). Miao et al. (2018) found that leaders can influence employees by being trained in emotional intelligence and can increase morale in the workplace which leads to an increase in job performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions. An engaged leader who

assesses the emotions and the psychological states of their subordinates can influence employees' motivation, morale, and performance in the workplace (Hidayah Ibrahim et al., 2019; Prati & Karriker, 2018). According to Lumpkin and Achen (2018), an emotionally intelligent leader has self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill to help followers break old workplace habits. Inceoglu et al. (2018) found that leadership behavior influences employees' well-being in the workplace furthermore increases job satisfaction, work engagement, morale, and decreases stress and burnout.

A perfect leader is the one who can handle their temper in any situation, has employee trust, is a good team listener, has an open-door policy, has the ability to inspire, and can make educated decisions (Martin, 2018). Leaders with emotional intelligence have self-awareness and understand how their emotions can affect the people around them. Leaders who can control their emotions and actions can control employees' morale in the workplace (Langner et al., 2018). Leaders who discipline their emotions and contain them would be able to control the team morale.

Leadership Behavior

Organizations leaders employ many techniques to increase morale and overall productivity within the organization. One technique is leaders being mindful of their subordinates' behaviors by paying attention to the present situation in the workplace and reacting based on their emotions. According to Lange et al. (2018), being mindful has many benefits, including employee well-being and performance in the workplace. The other important aspect of increasing employee well-being and performance in a

workplace is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is a useful practice for inspiring vision, fostering morale, and encouraging teamwork throughout the organization to perform above expectations (Lange et al., 2018). According to Lange et al., mindful leaders are leaders who are more effective and have revealed positive outcomes from subordinates in the workplace. Being aware of thoughts, emotions, actions, and being attentive in the work area enables the leader to respond to the needs of the employees, which promotes empathic (Lange et al., 2018). According to Lippincott (2018), a mindful leader manages team emotions within the organization to influence behaviors and to improve workplace performance. Organization leaders have a special gift to regulate employees' behavior to improve morale within the workplace. Yao and Huang (2018) found that leadership behavior is a process in leading personnel with certain methods and actions to achieve goals set by the workplace. Mindful leaders can encourage personnel to be confident, reinforce professional behavior, influence job satisfaction, increase morale, and guide the team to achieve workplace objectives (Yao & Huang, 2018). The demanding leader who is not mindful and treats employees with high-pressure orders would lose loyalty, interaction, and not achieve workplace goals. Yao and Huang found that leadership is a two-way interaction between subordinates and leaders. An organization should provide training for leaders to be mindful of promoting a high level of success of the employees. An organization can have a very competitive climate to be successful, providing that the mindfulness training is available to employees. According to Kersemaekers et al. (2018), mindfulness training improves morale, well-being, and production output. A high level of success would benefit from organization

leaders being mindful of actions that increase the success of their employees. A trained mindful leader who interacts with subordinates would reap the rewards from this leadership technique. According to Schuh et al. (2019), mindfulness leaders can effectively harness a high level of employee morale in any workplace.

Leaders become mindful by organizations investing in developing individuals to recognize the emotions of subordinates and to make changes accordingly to improve morale within the workplace. Mindfulness training, if offered, would improve health, morale, performance, productivity, and team climate. According to Pinck and Sonnentag (2017), leaders and subordinates mindfulness contributes to an increase in morale, well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction. Training leaders to pay attention to the current situation and developing a mindful attitude leads to better leader-employee relations (Reb et al., 2018). Reb et al. (2018) found that leader stress would pass to employees, which in turn influences employee negative behavior. If the employee stresses the leader, in turn, the leader would stress the employee. The employee needs to be mindful of the current situation and develop a mindful attitude of their actions. Leaders and subordinates that can control their emotion are less likely to have a negative attitude in the workplace. According to Reb, negative attitudes in the workplace contribute to an unproductive working relationship among coworkers, in turn, decrease morale, well-being, and job satisfaction. Training would open the employee or leader to observe, reflect, and respond in a manner to increase morale in the workplace. The mindless employees are the ones who do not pay attention or have any awareness of the consequences of current reactions. A mindful employee makes sense of events and actions that would have a positive impact

on the organization (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2018). Stress affects morale in the organization (Vaclavik et al., 2018). Mindfulness interventions reduce stress, which improves morale, empathy, well-being, productivity and less emotional exhaustion (Vaclavik et al., 2018).

Vaclavik et al. (2018) found that a four-week training program in mindfulness intervention is more effective than an eight-week program. After the four-week training session, employees had a feeling of being not exhausted and had a higher level of control and satisfaction in the work area (Vaclavik et al., 2018). The class training included specific questions that pertain to stress in the workplace and mindfulness intervention. According to Vaclavik et al., the training provides mindfulness interventions that have an impact on a stressful environment and in turn, increases morale. Rose et al. (2017) found that mindfulness-based stress reduction training enables employees to develop automatic acceptance into mindfulness interventions. Students learn how to use mindfulness to respond to emotions in the workplace from others' insight into unpleasant experiences in the workplace. Rose et al. identified that mindfulness-based stress reduction could improve psychological health, coping with work, mindfulness, which would facilitate positive change in the workplace. According to Molek-Winiarska and Zolnierczyk-Zreda (2018), mindfulness-based stress reduction training is an effective intervention to improve morale, well-being, employee health, and productivity in the workplace. Mindful learners become metacognitive about thinking before acting. Duan and Ho, (2018) added that applying mindful learning techniques would enhance a wide range of interventions that would facilitate employees' well-being in the workplace. Jin et al. (2018) found

mindful leaders learn from the past workplace crisis and find ways to prepare by being mindful of patterns, changes, norms, and trends that would contribute to a workplace dilemma. Jin et al. added that leaders who are mindful of past event or experiences would be confident in the ability to lead, which would promote morale in the workplace due to having a mindset to resolving current situations.

The employees that are not mindful attend to operate without cognition, empathy, and behaviors, and mindful employees have a focus on moment-to-moment experiences (Lawrie et al., 2018). According to Antonacopoulou and Bento, (2018), a mindful leader who recognizes the past work experiences and is engaged mindfully with lived experiences can learn to lead in ways to make a difference in the workplace. Leaders being mindful of the past and present are being mindful of learning for leadership development. Antonacopoulou and Bento expressed that leaders need to be able to deal with change, complexity, context, and connectedness in the workplace to be good leaders. Leaders who have the willingness to learn would continue to grow to their full leadership potential. Leadership skills are essential in the workplace for directing teams, individuals, and corporations towards a better outcome for tomorrow. According to Gobble (2018), mindless leaders are always on autopilot, distracted, and cannot focus and be aware of their surroundings. Marques (2017) found meditation achieves mindfulness; mindless actions result in adverse effects in the workplace. According to Marques, having mindful thinking is from having mental focus. Leaders who have mental focus would listen, think, then react with constructive words to improve morale in the workplace, and according to Coe (2017), negative words are hurtful to an individual. According to Marques, leaders

take things for granted until they learn from their experiences and become mindful.

Marques found that meditation techniques sharpen the mind that would enable employees to be mindful in the workplace. Leaders should increase morale by being mindful in the workplace by first listening, thinking, and responding in a way to have a positive effect (Marques, 2017).

Buchanan et al. (2018) concluded that sexual and racial harassment contributes to negative psychological well-being inside and outside of the workplace. According to Buchanan et al., half of the adult women encountered sexual harassment in the workplace, and this would have an adverse effect on the organizations' well-being. Leaders who are mindful of the situation and share mindfulness techniques with their employees would increase well-being and morale in the workplace (Gervais & Eagan, 2017). Sexual harassment in the workplace can happen to men or women, is a violation of human rights, and causes job tension and work-to-family conflict (Dean, 2018). Positive social change from employees being mindful may improve employee morale and well-being in the workplace. Other workplace benefits from the employee being mindful would include less absenteeism and an increase in productivity and profitability.

Absenteeism

According to Martin and Matiaske (2017), stress-causing events such as hostile behavior would proliferate absenteeism, and stressful working conditions increase the likelihood to escalate harmful behavior in the workplace. Leaders who are already mindful of employee stress-causing behaviors can teach employees to be cognizant of others, and the working relationship would prevail (Martin & Matiaske, 2017).

Martin and Matiaske found that the best way for employees to avoid stress is to stay away from work. According to Martin and Matiaske, high levels of stress can trigger latent aggressive feelings, which in turn, increase the employee's desire to do evil toward coworkers. Martin and Matiaske added stress triggers could be from workplace heat, noise, workloads, and poor working conditions in the facility. These decisions to do evil would create an atmosphere of stress and tension that would decrease employees' morale and well-being as well as organizational profitability.

Martin and Matiaske (2017) found that workplace stress could have emotional and physical consequences that never end for an employee. According to M.B. Nielsen et al. (2017), dramatic stress influences the probability of anxiety, sadness, and other types of mental health problems. Stress takes on many forms of behavior, and an interactive situation could develop between employees to develop conflict in the workplace. The leader who is mindful of the situation takes control and gives emotional relief from the conflict that could result in employee interaction (Martin & Matiaske, 2017). High stress in the workplace contributes to the probability of harmful behavior in the workplace. According to Martin and Matiaske, social stressors increase absence in the workplace and directly affect employee morale and well-being. Workplace stressors is a contributor to a decrease in productivity, profitability, morale, and the well-being of employees' (Shuck et al., 2017).

Workplace absenteeism leads to low employee morale and well-being, and socially harmful behavior in the work environment affects performance (Martin & Matiaske, 2017). To decrease stress in the work environment, a leader should be mindful

of socially harmful behavior and remove the cause of hostile behavior (Martin & Matiaske, 2017). Mindful interventions are an effective way to reduce stress and increase morale and well-being in the workplace. Workplace stress is a common occurrence in males and females and could have a negative impact on the organization. The cost of workplace stress continues to increase due to individuals experiencing bullying, sexual harassment, and limited promotional opportunities and jobs which contribute to a variety of mental disorders. Older individuals with psychological and physical disorders from stress contribute more to absenteeism, which would negatively affect their morale, productivity, and employee satisfaction in the workplace.

Gilstrap and Bernier (2017) found that individuals cope with stress while working in a stressful environment. These individuals cope with workplace stress by prioritizing, seeking help from other coworkers, keeping perspective, and being active. According to Gilstrap and Bernier, 60% of adult workers claim that their jobs have a considerably stressful environment, and organizations continue to lose an estimated \$200 to \$300 billion from stress-causing illnesses. Employees using coping strategies can fight back from the adverse effects of stress and return to the state of not being stressed (Gilstrap & Bernier, 2017). Gilstrap and Bernier added that by identifying problems, planning, and altering stressors by taking breaks physically and mentally disengaging from work, an individual could cope with stress, which would positively affect employee morale, social well-being, satisfaction, and productivity in the workplace.

Gilstrap and Bernier (2017) concluded that individuals should manage their workplace stress and have programs in place to cope with stress in the workplace.

Organizations are providing employees with outlets, programs, and professional help to mentally, physically, and emotionally cope with stress in the work environment (Gilstrap & Bernier, 2017). Kersh (2018) found coping with stress to be beneficial to personal health and without coping would have psychological impacts. Taking on more than one job in the workplace can lead to job stress, strain, and typical burnout in the workplace if the individual does not act quickly on coping with stress (Kersh, 2018). Employees experience burnout from ongoing or repetitive stress and not coping with the issues (Mansour & Tremblay, 2018). According to Olsen et al. (2018), organizations that offer flexible work schedules for their employees contribute to employees' well-being and less stress. Well-being and less stress correlate to the employees' having less burnout and turnover in the workplace.

Work-family conflict continues to increase due to an increase in single parents, and both husband and wife are working (Kuo et al., 2018). Kuo et al. (2018) found that fathers are now more involved in raising their children since wives are also working that puts more stress on husbands and wives and increases work-family conflict. Mansour and Tremblay (2018) found that family conflict contributes to an increase in job stress, burnout, and intentions to leave the workplace. Intention to leave a job is a reaction from an employee being burnt-out from not being able to cope with stress in the workplace (Chiang & Liu, 2017). According to Wang and Peng (2017), family and work conflict, contribute to job dissatisfaction, depression, and burnout and have negative effects on employee well-being. Family conflict adds to the stress in the workplace and increases harmful outcomes; organizations need to have the social responsibility to fulfill employee

professional and family roles (Mansour & Tremblay, 2018).

Kangas et al. (2017) found that unethical workplace leads to employees feeling exhausted and burnt-out, which contributes to their absence. Kangas et al. concluded that a workplace with a strong ethical culture has less absence and creates a better ground to increase employee morale, well-being, and productivity. An ethical culture in the workplace comes from having a leader with a strong ethical background (Walumbwa et al., 2017). According to Hewlin et al. (2017), a leader has to have the integrity to lead the workplace or organization. According to Moutousi and May (2018), an unethical leader would have an unethical workplace, which would increase turnover. Unethical behavior in the workplace can decrease productivity, satisfaction, and employee morale (Moutousi & May, 2018). According to Thiel et al. (2018), ethical leaders in the workplace can create a high-quality relationship with their employees by setting expectations for appropriate conduct for the subordinates. Subordinates then react from feeling an obligation to the desired behaviors. Thiel et al. found an ethical leader to be very beneficial to the workplace to increase morale and productivity. Ethical leaders are moral persons who influence employees' ethical behavior in the workplace (Thiel et al., 2018).

Epistemic Virtues

According to Javed et al. (2018), ethical leaders can have a positive influence on subordinates' behavior in the workplace. An ethical leader has a moral identity and leads by example, by doing the right thing base on the organizational policies. According to Engelbrecht et al. (2017), an ethical leader leads with openness to input from employees, making fair decisions based on company policies, and is an overall role model for the

organization. Javed et al. added that organizations that have ethical leaders could increase employees' morale, creativity, cooperation, information sharing, and openness within the workplace. Ethical leaders have epistemic virtues that can process ethical situations based on being open-minded and having knowledge. Javed et al. found that being open-minded, able to think carefully, creative, and capable of making wise decisions are the supporting structure for having epistemic virtues. Open-minded leaders attend to listen carefully to what others have to say, think carefully, and entertain the thought. Open-minded employees are interested in new ideas, views, knowledge of others, taking a risk, and creativity (Javed et al., 2018). Failure makes ethical leaders stronger, and openness to employees' builds trust and creativity. The openness to experiences is the moderating effect, which increases the relationship between an employee and the leader. Employees not having confidence in the leader would be reluctant to come forward with new ideas and would not communicate with the leader (Javed et al., 2018). Employees, who do not correspond to the leader would decrease the morale and growth in the organization. If trust exists with the employees, subordinates would be willing to communicate their new ideas without fear of repercussions (Javed et al., 2018). According to Walsh et al. (2018), ethical leadership behaviors foster how employees react at work. Leaders who mistreat employees do not receive any new ideas and would be a target for losing the respect of others (Walsh et al., 2018). Walsh et al. found empirical evidence that workplace incivility would harm morale, job satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and productivity in the workplace. Coworkers and even other leaders could encourage criticism of leaders, which would lead to employees being guarded and distant with leaders. A general rule is

to keep criticism to oneself, especially if the criticism offends the other individual. According to Chen and Ayoun (2019), unacceptable criticism has adverse effects on employees, and receiving negative criticism would be retaliation in the workplace. An ethical leader tends to influence followers' outcomes through ethical decisions by being mindful of knowing how to respond to unethical and ethical behaviors in the workplace (Walsh et al., 2018).

According to Walsh et al. (2018), all organizations have workplace norms that foster respect for leader behavior and curb unethical behavior in the workplace. Workplace norms guide appropriate conduct by having mutual respect, listening first before answering, being prepared for daily meetings and continuing to strive for improving, and achieving organizational goals as a team (Walsh et al., 2018). According to Hershcovis et al. (2017), respectful treatment sends a message to employees that everyone is part of the workplace team. An unethical employee sends a message to the employees that they do not belong. Hershcovis et al. found that incivility in the workplace is comparable to the effect of an abusive leader and bullying, which has an adverse impact on employee morale and productivity. Leaders who mistreat their employee have a more significant impact than coworkers abusing each other in the workplace (Hershcovis et al., 2017). According to Walsh et al., an ethical leader listens to employees, makes fair decisions, discusses ethics and values with employees, and reduces incivility. Organizations should seek to reduce employee mistreatment by leaders acquiring ethical leadership behavior, which would increase morale and productivity in the workplace. The leaders could obtain from training how respectful norms are

developed and how certain activities disrupt respectful norms from forming in the workplace. Leaders could obtain from training how certain norms could disrupt morale in the workplace. According to Marchiondo et al. (2018), learning facets are essential to increasing employees' performance, productivity, improvement, and morale.

Leadership Learning and Acting

The leadership training would give opportunities for leaders to learn the skills necessary to manage employees in a way to build trust, motivation, and morale. The training should consist of students learning the skills to influence others, communicate, make decisions, think, understand others, and can apply this knowledge to increase morale in the workplace. According to Peck (2018), organizations have identified work ethics, problem solving, communication, teamwork, and leadership as very important for employers to build success in the workplace. Engaging leaders in a leadership program would give leaders competence in managing a workforce. An effective leadership program would inspire employees and encourage innovation, which would affect organization teams and performance outcomes (Karam et al., 2018). Sousa and Rocha (2019) found that game-based learning is crucial in building the leadership skills necessary to increase productivity and morale in the workplace. Games-based learning is a design based on virtual world experiences that leaders may encounter while playing the game. The game allows leaders to fail and develop the skills necessary to become effective leaders. By failing in the game, nothing is lost versus failing in the real-world environment could have repercussions. According to Karam et al. (2018), leaders having effective behavior in the workplace are connective to positive employee outcomes.

Therefore, the leader-employee behavior is one of the essential parts to control the organization outcomes in productivity. According to Sousa and Rocha (2019), an effective leader's behavior provides skills, motivation, support, and feedback so employees can be successful in the workplace. An effective leader gives positive feedback for reinforcing behavior and defines the new employee behavior to increase performance in the organization (Sousa & Rocha, 2019). Positive interaction between the leader and the employee would have a crucial impact on the workforce.

Winton et al. (2018) found that the complexity leadership theory applied to leadership programs would provide the framework for strengthening leaders' understanding the competence in the workplace. Complexity leadership theory encourages leaders to learn and adapt to employees' behaviors (Winton et al., 2018). Leadership behavior is of great importance to drive high levels of success in the workplace. According to Horvat and Filipovic (2017), complexity leadership theory would improve workplace performance by leaders being able to make specific outcomes possible. These outcomes would be from leaders behaving in a way to increase subordinates' productivity and morale. According to Moin (2018), the perception of leaders' actions would have a positive or negative influence on subordinates. Positive perception increases commitment, morale, productivity, trust, and negative perception would do the opposite. Emotions drive success and are part of the leadership role to influence followers to increase morale and productivity. According to Moin, the understanding of the implication of emotion would be a great benefit for an organization to obtain for leaders to promote emotional efforts that would be helpful for increasing

morale and productivity of subordinates. The leaders' positive or negative feelings towards the employees would increase or decrease workplace morale. The three ways of expressing emotions are surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotions with the purpose of controlling subordinates' behaviors (Moin, 2018). The first thing is to understand the emotions of the followers, and from understanding the followers' emotion, the leader would know how to behave in a way to promote positive emotional behavior in followers.

Deep acting is the process in which the leader watches the subordinate emotions with the objective of changing emotional response (Moin, 2018). According to Lavy and Eshet (2018), a leader using a deep acting process would change followers' behavior to improve morale, moods, motivation, and productivity. Surface acting is the leader modifying their emotions to the point to disguise their actual emotions by tone of their voice, facial expression, and motion (Moin, 2018). According to Moin (2018), surface acting is more unfavorable with the employees' outcomes. The third emotion, genuine emotion is when leaders combine surface and deep acting and could be beneficial in influencing followers' behaviors (Moin, 2018). These emotional strategies are beneficial for influencing subordinates' productivity and morale in the workplace. Leaders who are fair and can influence subordinate behavior would benefit positively. Karam et al. (2018) found that effective leaders have the ability to influence positive employee outcomes. For one to be a leader, it is an everyday learning experience in the workplace, and it all depends on the individual being proactive in learning.

Karam et al. (2018) found that social exchange relationship theory is the ability

for the leader to have a high degree of interactions and task interdependence with the employees. Karam et al. added that the managerial role theory identifies leaders' decision-making as the number one requirement to being an active leader in the workplace. Karam et al. added that relational leader theory requires a leader to be supporting, recognizing, developing, and empowering the employees. The relational leader can listen, seek input, and have an interaction with individuals or groups that would be beneficial to the company. The change in relationship theory, leaders, have the vision to encourage change, creativity, and to seek alternative solutions in the workplace to complete the offset facing the organization (Karam et al., 2018). In the relationship theory, leaders who practice change could stimulate and encourage employees to take a risk in the workplace. Change could have an impact on organizations if the leader behaves in a way to have a positive effect on the employees.

Compensation

Employees work hard for their employer to get compensation for accomplishing set goals, and compensation affects employee behavior in the organization. According to Lazear (2018), workers alter their behavior if they get paid by hour rather than receive a onetime lump sum payment for completing a task. Employees going from an hourly rate to a onetime lump sum pay out, increase productivity and motivation (Lazear, 2018). Employees attend to complete a job faster knowing that they would be getting a onetime lump sum pay out rather than an hourly rate. The employee's efficiency increases by a fixed rate due to completing the job faster, whereas the hourly rate is less efficient for completing the task because employees would take their time in completing the task to

get more compensation. The quick payout for completion of the job increases motivation, morale, and teamwork due to employees working harder to complete the task at hand (Lazear, 2018). Compensation influences employees' effort and incentives affect the behavior that positively influences employees' well-being and morale. According to Lazear, business leaders who use a pay structure determine compensation by mapping out employees' path to growth based on education and job roles. According to K. Nielsen et al. (2017), employees that experience high levels of well-being are happy workers, and happy workers increase morale and perform well to increase productivity in the workplace. Compensation and the structure in the workplace environment are crucial to increasing employee well-being, motivation, and morale.

A supportive leader brings happiness or well-being into the organization. According to Joo and Lee (2017), subordinates are highly productive, engaged, love their career, and feel a sense of happiness when they had a supportive leader. Work behavior is crucial for influencing motivation, well-being, and morale in the workplace. An inefficient and badly-behaved unsupportive leader would bring negativity to the workplace. According to Moore et al. (2019), leaders' behavior could influence unethical behavior in the subordinates that they lead. A supportive leader can affect organizational outcomes, morale, retention, and positively impact subordinates in the workplace (Gordon et al., 2019). According to Fan et al. (2019), and Maccagnan et al. (2018) a supportive leader reinforces family and personal life and being supportive promotes employees' well-being in the workplace. Employees and organizations benefit from supportive leadership in the workplace. When a leader is supportive of their subordinates,

employees have more control over their families, stress, and have an acceptable time to spend with their families. A leader can contribute to an employee's stress by not being supportive in letting the employee off in time of need.

Training is the key to an increase in employee perceptions by teaching leaders' behaviors for balancing work and life, leading to a positive work environment (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018). Some leaders who never had families may not understand the balance without having the specific training. Incorporating training on employees' behavior would increase productivity, well-being, and morale in the workplace. Leadership behavior workshops would identify topics for the intervention of negative behavior in the workplace. The sustainability of leadership behavior skills would depend on the organization continuing to provide supportive leadership behavior training for the leaders. It is crucial for leaders or the ones that have the opportunity to lead, to have the skills to engage with the employees in a supportive manner. According to Wu and Parker (2017), supportive leadership influences subordinates to behave in a positive way. Organizations that are supportive of employees' needs are central to increasing morale and retaining trained employees. Interpersonal skills are fundamental to increase morale in the workplace. According to Speed et al. (2017), supportive leadership behavior programs are imperative for future leaders for organizations to transform into a supportive workplace.

Montani et al. (2017) found that leaders having strong production ownership, commitment, and supportive leadership stimulate innovative behaviors from employees. Leaders providing subordinates with resources and encouraging them to voice their

opinions facilitated innovation, motivation, and morale within a work environment (Johansen & Sowa, 2019; Montani et al., 2017). When leaders provide little support, the employee may be proactive in meeting workplace objectives. Leader engagement is crucial to follow employee workplace behavior to increase productivity and morale. Leaders who work hard themselves toward being supportive in the work area would increase subordinates' productivity (Kurniawaty et al., 2019; Lazear, 2018). Leaders being flexible with employees' schedules and involving them would build a supportive leadership culture that would increase well-being, productivity, and morale.

Leaders play a valuable role in managing subordinates, and depending on the leaders' actions would increase morale and productivity in the workplace. Leaders need to encourage, motivate, award, and be an example for their subordinates to follow in the workplace. Employees like to have compensation for reaching milestones or even for doing an excellent job throughout the year. When employers are unsupported in compensating employees, the employee was less productive in the workplace. A leader needs to be supportive, mindful, and have a positive attitude to be able to increase morale and productivity in the workplace.

Transition

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies used by successful organizational leaders to increase employee morale to improve productivity in their organizations. The review of the professional and academic literature provided information regarding strategies, business organization leaders can use to increase employee morale, which would improve employee well-being, satisfaction, motivation,

teams, and mindfulness, to improve productivity. In the literature review, I introduced being mindful, coaching, mentoring, team building, individual control, behaviors, tools, and theories that would affect morale, and methods for leaders to be effective in increasing morale in the workplace. Employee morale and productivity were the focus of the literature review. In Section 2, I cover the qualitative methodology used in this research and includes population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present the findings of this study, with implications for applications to professional social change in the workplace, and recommendations for future research.

Section 2: The Project

Leaders from organizations lack behavior strategies to increase employee morale to improve productivity (Laureani & Antony, 2017). Additionally, employees' low morale decreases productivity, well-being, and increases absenteeism and costs toward the organization (Noor & Ampornstira, 2019; Street & Lacey, 2018). In this research, I explored strategies to increase morale and improve productivity. In Section 2, I include the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, reliability and validity, and transition and summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies used by successful organizational leaders to increase employee morale to improve productivity in their organizations. The target population consisted of five managers, at a company in Knoxville, Tennessee, who successfully used strategies to increase employee morale resulting in increased productivity and profitability. The research findings could help increase employees' morale at other companies, which could reduce the turnover rate. The implications for positive social change include the potential to reduce crime in the community by enabling employees to maintain their salaries by reducing employee turnover rates. According to Braun (2019), having a good income can deter people from committing crimes.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher conducting this study was to ensure that the study complies with the ethical principles and guidelines in the *Belmont Report* and the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The *Belmont Report* principles and guidelines consist of three primary areas of ethical conduct: (a) beneficence (i.e., balance between the risks taken by the participant while reducing harm and maximizing the benefits from the research), (b) respect (i.e., researcher have respect for the participant and participant have to remain autonomous), and (c) justice (i.e., parts of society bared the cost while others received the benefit for being the research subject; Loue & Loff, 2019; Salganik, 2018). Researchers have to behave ethically toward the participants and follow ethical procedures throughout the study (Mpofu, 2017; Yin, 2018). I provided an informed consent form to the qualified participant via email to reply by email before taking part in the study. An informed consent form is an ethical principle to inform the participant of methods, anticipated benefits, potential risk, and any other relevant characteristic of the study (Kelly & Halabi, 2018). I informed participants of their right to refuse to participate at any time during the study without retaliation (Kelly & Halabi, 2018).

The role of the researcher in a qualitative case study is to gather the thoughts and feelings of the participants from within the workplace and to understand why such behaviors would take place (Ospina et al., 2017). As the primary researcher in this study, I was familiar with the topic because of my 20 years of experience in various leadership roles within a substantial business. As a researcher, by acknowledging my personal views, I mitigated bias so I could develop an understanding of the organization and the

participants. Researchers use the qualitative study method to explore the beliefs, values, and motives behind the behavior (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The role of the researcher in a case study is to explore the phenomenon encountered by employees in the workplace (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

As the researcher in this qualitative single case study, I explored strategies leaders used to increase employees' morale within the workplace. I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews with research participants. The interview questions were open-ended. I explained to the participants that their identities would remain confidential and that they may answer or refuse to answer any questions at any time during the process. From the data I collected from the participants, I generated themes.

Researchers should report the findings irrespective of their personal knowledge, experience, or expectations. Researchers use strategies such as reflexivity, examining negative cases, bracketing, memoing, keeping field notes, and spending more time with the participants or in the field to lessen the bias in a qualitative study (Kleinknecht et al., 2018; Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2018). To minimize bias, I did not contact the participants before the start of the study, and I used an interview protocol (see Appendix) to enable participants to receive equal treatment during interviewing. According to Gearing (2004), bracketing is a technique that facilitates the identification of core elements during interviewing. Bracketing is fundamental in qualitative research to avoid the damaging effects of a predetermined idea or opinion of the study (O'Halloran et al., 2016). As an instrument in this research and for bracketing purpose, I set aside my attitude, prior knowledge, and assumptions to remain engaged in the present phenomena

to understand the participants' experience.

To lessen bias, I performed member checking, which is an external audit to validate the findings from data that are obtained by the participants' responses. According to Winkel et al. (2018), member checking is crucial in supporting the credibility of the analysis in research. In recording and analyzing the data, I looked for meaning and determine which pieces of data brings value. I focused on analyzing the data to answer how to increase workplace morale to improve productivity in organizations. I identified patterns, themes, connections, and relationships from the data using NVivo software. I established reliability, validity, and efficiency in my research by using member checking from participants' responses. Researchers use journaling, peer review, triangulation, member checks, trustworthiness, and addressing potential ethical issues in establishing reliability, validity, and efficiency (Ary et al., 2019).

I directly engaged leaders who had increased employee morale through strategies in the last 5 years. I aligned my study with peer-reviewed articles to give the reader an understanding of my role in conducting the research. I built a participant and researcher relationships by asking probing questions to answer the research questions. Odonoghue et al. (2017) stated that the closeness among leaders and the researcher is a unique feature of qualitative data.

Participants

For this study, I interviewed five managers of a company located in Knoxville, Tennessee, who successfully used strategies to increase employee morale, resulting in increased productivity and profitability. The inclusion criteria were that participants must

(a) be managers who successfully used strategies to increase employee morale resulting in increased productivity and profitability, (b) have a successful career in managing an organization of more than 10 employees, (c) be able to answer the research questions, and (d) have been with the company for more than 5 years. I received approval from the IRB at Walden University, I then contacted the company by phone and email.

Before starting the research, I obtained permission from a company to interview managers. I used Google and LinkedIn to find the phone numbers and emails for the company to start the recruitment for my research through professional networking by contacting professional leaders through these two websites. Once I established communication with the company, I sent a letter of cooperation by email to the organization to obtain permission to conduct my study. I received names and email addresses from the human resources director, and according to human resources director the participants are leaders who successfully used strategies to increase morale resulting in increased productivity and profitability, who have a successful career in managing an organization of more than 10 employees, and they have been with the company for more than 5 years. According to McRobert et al. (2018), the use of social media is an effective recruitment strategy for researchers.

I approached my participants by email and used the consent form to obtain the individuals' permission to participate in the research study voluntarily. According to Dorsten and Hotchkiss (2019), participants should sign a consent form before the start of the interview. An informed consent letter affirms that the participant agrees to participate with the understanding of benefits, risk, and any other relevant characteristic of the study

(Kelly & Halabi, 2018). I followed the Walden University IRB guidelines as well as the *Belmont Report* protocols to ensure ethical research practices.

To have a successful research interview, researchers should build a working relationship with the participants in their working environment (Sivell et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). As the first step, I identified and engaged with workplace leaders who met the inclusion criteria of this study. I established a working relationship with the participants by introducing myself as the researcher of this study and communicating with them in a professional way by Skype or Zoom, and email.

Research Method and Design

In conducting research, there are three methods (a) quantitative, (b) qualitative, and (c) mixed methods (Yin, 2018). I used a qualitative research methodology rather than a quantitative or mixed method to answer the research question. According to Bell et al. (2019), in a quantitative or mixed study, researchers use mathematical equations. However, my study was not about applying measurements to social life. A qualitative case study methodology is a valuable method for scientific research (Gupta et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Researchers use the case study to conduct an in-depth investigation to understand a phenomenon to answer how, what, or why rather than how many or how much that would be answered using quantitative methods (Gupta et al., 2019; Yin, 2018).

Research Method

In this case study, I used a qualitative rather than quantitative or mixed method to investigate successful strategies to increase employees' morale from managers located in Knoxville, Tennessee, who have already been successful in increasing morale. I engaged

in the qualitative method to explore and provide an in-depth understanding of how managers use strategies to increase morale. Researchers use the qualitative method to provide in-depth semistructured interviews from participants with real-world experiences (Yin, 2018) that have increased morale in the workplace.

Researchers use a quantitative research method to build a knowledge-based correlation of variables to give numerical expressions of the correlation (Maxwell, 2019). Using the quantitative method, the researcher analyzes the data to accept or reject the null hypothesis based on independent and dependent variables (Myers et al., 2017; Nardi, 2018). The purpose of this study was not to provide numeric expression to the correlation of variables nor to test the hypotheses on the strategies used to increase employee morale. A quantitative method would not support the basis for this study.

According to Levitt et al. (2018), a researcher who uses the mixed method approach integrate and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data collection in a single study. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods leads to additional insights that are not gathered from the findings from quantitative and qualitative methods alone (Levitt et al., 2018). The mixed method was not appropriate because the focus was to explore data from real-world scenarios, and not quantify numerical data. Therefore, the basis of the study was to gain awareness of strategies to increase employees' morale in the workplace, and this did not align with using both quantitative and qualitative standards.

Researchers use a qualitative study method to form the groundwork for initiating the planning of the research and helps to find the best method to explain the result

(Bengtsson, 2016). I had in-person interviews with organization leaders, the interview questions were open-ended, and I allowed participants to respond promptly to the questions asked to gain a high degree of perspicacity. I gathered anecdotal data rather than numerical data from interviews for the qualitative findings. The framework of a qualitative study is a systematic and flexible approach to understand the attitudes and behaviors in the workplace from participants (Nilsen et al., 2018; Vogl et al., 2017). Moses et al. (2019) suggested that lived experiences, behaviors, and attitudes of participants are the best fit for a qualitative research method to gain insight into participants' perceptions.

Research Design

According to Blaikie and Priest (2018) and Yin (2018), researchers can pick from a few designs, including case study, phenomenology, and ethnography to analyze their research subject of choice. A case study design is a common research tool used for the group, organizational, social, psychology, business, and education purposes (Yin, 2018). Researchers use case study design for in-depth evaluation for exploring a real-world approach to understand the phenomena (Raeburn et al., 2015; Wirth et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). The design for my research was a case study to explore a phenomenon, and my intent was to explore successful strategies organizational leaders use to increase employee morale to improve productivity and profitability in a real-world setting. According to Dieleman and Widjaja (2018), researchers use a single-case study design to enable the researcher to focus on one case in depth and provides for greater contextualization. Researchers can use case studies as a tool to answer interview

questions with “how,” “what,” or “why” (Kopackova, 2019; Lee et al., 2018; Yin, 2018), which was in line with the interview questions used in my research. My goal as a researcher was to interview participants and answer the research question in a real-world context.

The ethnographic design is for researchers to understand beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape a particular culture of behavior in human society over an extended period and share the findings with other groups (Parker-Jenkins, 2018; Yin, 2018). A researcher using ethnographic design becomes part of the real-life culture to understand the beliefs, values, and attitudes he or she studies (Leslie & Paradis, 2018; Yin, 2018). Ethnographic research was not appropriate for this study as the intent of this study was not to be part of the real-life culture nor study groups of people over an extended period.

Researchers who use the phenomenological design seek a deeper understanding of individual lived experiences that produce descriptions of a phenomenon in depth (Chen et al., 2018; Handwerker, 2018; Hearn et al., 2018; Vagle, 2018; Willig & Wirth, 2018). A phenomenological design was not acceptable for this study as the purpose of this study was to explore strategies to increase morale in its normal environment and not studying people’s lived experiences. According to Collins and Thomas (2018), researchers use phenomenological design to collect data from a social study, which would be more detailed than the scope of this DBA study.

Researchers achieve saturation when no new themes or information emerge during the data analysis to influence the findings (Lowe et al., 2018; Weatherall et al., 2018). I collected data until no additional facts affected the findings; at that point, I

reached data saturation. I achieved my sample size based on amount of data required to warrant the trustworthiness of the findings and the point at which no additional facts affected the findings. In qualitative research, sample size and data saturation are crucial for credibility and validity (Chironda & Bhengu, 2018; Pratt & Yeziarski, 2018). Data saturation occurs when researchers have gathered enough data when interviewing to the point at which no new additional information affect the findings, and when coding is no longer practical (Kabir et al., 2018).

Population and Sampling

The participants for this study consisted of five professional managers of a company in Knoxville who successfully used strategies to increase employee morale resulting in increased productivity and profitability. I explored different views of participating managers in the successful use of strategies to increase morale. The interview setting was comfortable for the participants because the participants were able to choose a time and location for the interview. The participants could choose between an in-person interview or an online interview with Zoom or Skype. According to Sivell et al. (2015), participants feeling comfortable facilitates a more open and in-depth response during the interview.

I applied purposive sampling to the select five managers who successfully used strategies to increase morale in the workplace. Purposive sampling was the most relevant for this study in identifying participants with distinct knowledge and experiences of the research subject. For the selection of participants, the purposive sample would be the most effective for answering a specific topic (Baillie et al., 2017; Valerio et al., 2016;

White et al., 2017). In a qualitative study, the purposive sample method is routinely used, and the researcher can select the place that would allow for in-depth information on answering the research question (Ilgun & Ugurluoglu, 2018). The purpose of this study was not to measure variables, so a smaller sample size would be efficient. The choice of sample size was based on the best opportunity for the researcher to reach saturation. I reached data saturation after interviewing five participants and no new themes became apparent, and this determined my sample size was satisfactory. I used prolonged engagement, in-depth interviews, member checking, field notes, and triangulation of the data to ensure information redundancy. Qualitative research has no rules regarding the sample size unless the researcher is looking into more extreme cases for more insightful answers that would require a more significant population (Gupta et al., 2019). If saturation did not occur with the five participants' I would have selected new participants and interview until saturation occurs.

In qualitative research, a nonprobability selection is useful for nonrandom selection, whereas probability sampling is well defined from simple to complex sampling techniques (Link, 2018). In qualitative research, the most crucial part of sampling is that it needs to align with the research question, methods, and research design (Sykes et al., 2017). The purposive sampling method is most common because the researcher can influence sample configuration, and it is inexpensive and faster to obtain (Bourne et al., 2018; Sarstedt et al., 2017).

For the purpose of this study, it was best to keep the population small due to time and money restraints with a more significant population. The focus of my research was to

understand and explore the strategies managers use to increase employee morale to improve productivity and profitability. I interviewed five managers who had knowledge and experience of increasing morale in the workplace. I aimed to understand and explore strategies managers use successfully to increase employee morale resulting in increased productivity and profitability.

Ethical Research

After receiving the approval from the Walden University IRB, I commenced data collection. I interviewed professional managers from a manufacturing corporation in east Tennessee. The consent form together with an invitation email were sent via email to qualified participants to reply by email before taking part in the study. The consent form includes details about the study, processes that the researcher used to protect participant's confidentiality, details about the voluntary nature of the study, and the ways individuals can withdraw from the study at any time without ramification. Participants may withdraw at any time before or during an interview by written or verbal communication without any clarification (Efunshile et al., 2018). Participants have the opportunity not to respond or to withdraw from this study by written notice, email, verbally at any time with or without a stated reason. There were no rewards or incentives for participating in the research study strictly voluntary. Business organization may benefit from this study through newly developed strategies to increase morale of employees.

I identified topics and interpreted the data responsibly. By using Walden University guidelines, I used proper research techniques, correct information, and accurate reporting. Instead of using participants' names in the study, I coded the

participants as P1, P2, P3, etc. to keep confidentiality. I stored my research in a secure safe according to the Walden University guidelines, and after 5 years from the date of being published, I will permanently destroy the data by shredding the documents and deleting files. I obtained approval from Walden University IRB (approval no. 05-13-20-0610592) before gathering any data. The researcher must maintain ethical research by respecting participants' privacy, confidentiality, protecting identity, and ensuring the protection of participants from harm (U.S. Department of Health et al., 1979).

Data Collection Instruments

My role in this qualitative study, as the primary data collection instrument, was to interview in-depth and record experiences, behaviors, actions of participants, and analyze data from semistructured interviews and information from relevant company documents. For allowing sufficient flexibility to exploring new and emerging concepts, researchers use a semistructured interview format (Retzer et al., 2019). I asked six open-ended questions during the interview to attain knowledge and understanding of strategies used successfully to increase employee morale resulting in increased productivity and profitability. Yin (2018) stated that the most valuable tools in research are interviews to obtain data collection. According to Galipeau et al. (2019), participants should be willing and able to participate in a research study to collect data. I used the interview protocol (see Appendix) to serve as a guide to interview participants. Galipeau et al. stated that researchers would follow a semistructured interview guide with open-ended questions to cover the topics related to answering the research question. In qualitative research,

researchers use interviews, observations, archival records, physical artifacts, and participant-observation to gain data for analysis (Yin, 2018).

According to Glegg (2018), researchers should review the interview material beforehand in preparation for interviewing the participants to enhance and refine the research instrument. During the interview, I used appropriate note-taking techniques and watched the participant's body language to capture the responses. Dawson (2019) stated that researchers should listen, paraphrase, and probe for more information. To ensure the accuracy of the collection instrument, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and validated after each interview. I confirmed the credibility and dependability of the data through member checking. To achieve member checking, I transcribed the data and sent back a summary of the responses to the participants to review accuracy. Baik and Zierler (2018) stated that member checking establishes credibility and dependability. The credibility and dependability of a study are established through participants confirming the accuracy of the interpretations and addressing inaccuracies in the data (Harrison et al., 2019).

Data Collection Technique

The primary data collection technique for this study was in-person semistructured interviews with participants. The semistructured interviews were composed of open-ended questions and align by the interview protocol (see Appendix), audio-recorded, and transcribed. When necessary, I asked probing questions and paraphrase as needed to gain more in-depth data or for clarification about the significant themes, to ensure the accuracy of my understanding of the participant response. During the interview, I

captured the observations by taking notes and recording to document emotions, feelings, and behaviors. Researchers use semistructured interviews to give the participants full freedom to convey themselves to the researcher (Potts et al., 2018). In qualitative data collection, the researcher commences the discussion about the research and purposely tries to motivate and probe participants to expand and articulate answers (Yin, 2018). The researcher gain insight into the participant experiences, knowledge, and opinions with in-depth semistructured interviews (Hagler et al., 2018).

According to Growe (2018), face-to-face interviews build trust as an exchange for knowledge. Face-to-face interviews enable researchers to capture participants' detailed emotions, feelings, and behaviors (Brace, 2018). According to Brace (2018), face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and respondent can influence the accuracy of the data. The disadvantage is that semistructured interviews are time-consuming, expensive, the depth of information could be hard to analyze, not very reliable, lack of validity, and limited generalizability (Alotaibi & Potoglou, 2018). I followed up each interview by transcribing and validating the responses through member checking. I provided the participants with a one to two pages summary of the interview for them to approve the validity and accuracy of the content. Member checking refers to providing opportunities to check the accuracy of, expand, and comment on data collection with the participants (Brear, 2018; Chaleshgar-Kordasiabi et al., 2018; Iivari, 2018; Madill & Sullivan, 2018; Smith & McGannon, 2017). Member checking is a means used to increase the validity or credibility of qualitative research and controlling the bias by means of checking the trustworthiness of interpretations (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Each participant received a

thank you letter for participating once the research was completed.

I asked each participant for company documents as a secondary data source to support strategies to increase employees' morale such as emails and yearly performance evaluations. The advantages of reviewing company documents are to support data validation, accuracy, and improve data saturation (Mohajan, 2018; Yin, 2018). The disadvantages of using document review is that the information could be sensitive and not be for public viewing or incomplete, disorganized, inapplicable and time-consuming to collect, review, and analyze (Akhu-Zaheya et al., 2017; Li et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2018). According to Yin (2018), documents are applicable to every case study. The advantage of researchers collecting multiple sources of data is to promote social change, mitigate bias, and enhance reaching data saturation through triangulation (Fusch et al., 2018).

Data Organization Technique

Researchers use multiple collection techniques to organize data, but the most common method is computer software (Pokorny et al., 2018). According to Yin (2018), after collecting data, researchers organize and interpret data into common themes. I transcribed the data after audio recording and saved the information on my Hewlett Packard Pavilion laptop with a backup on an external hard drive. I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to capture detail records of each interview, such as individuals interviewed, data, company, and interview notes. According to Bantjes et al. (2019), assigning pseudonyms to the participants protected their identity and ensured confidentiality; and storing data in a safe place safeguarded their privacy. To protect participants'

confidentiality and identity, I coded participants such as P1, P2, and P3. These documents are in a password-protected file and stored in a safe location that I only had access to. In 5 years from CAO approval, I will shred the documents and delete computer files of the study.

Data Analysis

Researchers use the triangulation method to increase validity in qualitative research by combining the diversity of data, investigators, theories, and methodologies (Kern, 2016). Methodological triangulation was my method of choice for cross-checking data from multiple sources and developing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. According to Natow (2019), methodological triangulation is a common research strategy for combining interviews with documents to capture different dimensions of the topic and to increase the validity and credibility of the findings. To reinforce the findings and reduce the uncertainty of interpretation, researchers gather data from two or more independent measurement methods (Brodie et al., 2018; Lind et al., 2018; Ries, 2019). In qualitative research, data analysis is an essential component of the study (Hu et al., 2019). Data analysis begins with finding themes that answer the research question from gathering documents, compiling notes, transcribing interviews (Yin, 2018).

To find themes, patterns, and categories I used Yin's (2018) five-step data analysis method for a case study: (a) compile, (b) disassemble, (c) reassemble, (d) interpret, and (e) conclude. The first phase of data analysis is to organize from compiling data (Healy et al., 2017). During this phase, the researcher ensured accuracy by reviewing the recordings with the transcripts (Chiwaridzo et al., 2019). I listened and relistened to

the audio recordings and transcribe the interviews. I transcribed and analyzed participant recordings for reoccurring themes. To strengthen my interpretation, I read the transcript line-by-line and become familiar with the data. After the organization of the data, I used the NVivo software tool to import the interview textual transcript data. I gave each participant a code such as P1, P2, and P3 to keep confidentiality.

In the next phase, I disassembled data into identifiable segments from information gathered to find themes and patterns (see Chiwaridzo et al., 2019). With the use of NVivo software to organize data, codes emerged. Code is a short name for categorizing segments of data (Maher et al., 2018). According to Phillips and Lu (2018), NVivo software adds significant value when coding and analyzing data based on the noted themes and patterns. According to Castleberry and Nolen (2018), a thematic analysis is a method to identify, analyze, and report themes and patterns within data by reducing the data into manageable themes. In qualitative research, researchers use NVivo software to conduct a thematic analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

In the next phase, I reassembled the data based on clusters and codes and explore possible new themes and patterns that could replace each code. The fourth phase of data analysis, I performed a comprehensive interpretation of the data results based on themes and patterns formation. The final part of data analysis is the discussion of the findings concluding the study (Healy et al., 2017).

According to Robertson et al. (2017), the conceptual framework is a tool to assign meaning presented in the research findings. I presented the findings and conclusions based on the transformational leadership theory, which was the conceptual framework for

this research. By focusing on the themes, I answered the research question. To draw a conclusion and recommendations, I compared prior literature findings with my research findings.

Reliability and Validity

In qualitative research, researchers address reliability and validity through credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Grover et al., 2017). To prove the quality of social research inquiry, researchers use reliability and validity as two critical criteria (Doi et al., 2018). Techniques such as triangulation and member checking can address the reliability and validity of documents and personal accounts of a phenomenon (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Member checking is the process of sending back a summary of the responses to the participants to review for accuracy (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Data triangulation is the process of gathering data from multiple sources to provide multiple perspectives of the phenomenon under study (Renz et al., 2018). For my qualitative case study, I used member checking to check participants' responses and triangulation for gathering data to ensure the reliability and validity of this research.

Reliability

Reliability refers to research free from error (Sliwinski et al., 2016). In qualitative research, dependability refers to data stability and is often compared to the concept of reliability (Forero et al., 2018). In research, having a reliable source also means having a trustworthy or dependable source, dependability is a substitute for reliability (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). By conducting member checking, researchers can enhance the level of

reliability in a qualitative study (Halldorsdottir et al., 2017). I addressed the dependability of my data through member checking with participants. Member checking is a process that involves participants checking the researcher's interpretation and providing input on the accuracy of the data that reflect their experiences, which help reduce biases (Griggs et al., 2019; Smith & McGannon, 2017). To ensure dependability, researchers provide detailed descriptions of the research context by using well-established research methods such as triangulation and member checking (Adams et al., 2019). After the interview, I had each participant review a short report of the interpretations and address the accuracy or inaccuracy that ensured the dependability of my results, also referred to as member checking. Researchers use member checking as a tool to increase validity from the preliminary data (Isendahl & Stump, 2019).

Validity

According to Yin (2018) in qualitative research, validity is crucial. According to Fitzpatrick (2019), researchers cannot trust the research conclusion without validity. According to Yin (2018), honesty from the researcher ensures the accuracy of the data. The key for research is collecting sufficient data to represent the phenomenon accurately with a full range of observations (Fitzpatrick, 2019). For the interview, I transcribed after using a Samsung audio recorder and digital recorder to strengthen validity. According to Fitzpatrick, having both audio recording and transcription of an interview increased validity because recordings capture the tone of voice and pauses in statements, at which the transcript may not capture. Validity refers to findings that reflect the true meaning of the phenomenon under study (Cassol et al., 2018).

I choose methodological triangulation and member checking methods to ensure credibility in this qualitative study. I transcribed and validated data with a short report of the interpretations after each interview so the participant can verify the accuracy of the transcript, which in research terms is member checking. In qualitative research, credibility is equivalent to validity (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Triangulation and member checking are methods researchers use to ensure the credibility of research data and to reduce bias (Abdalla et al., 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2019; Moon, 2019). To improve the quality of qualitative data, researchers use the member checking method (Moon, 2019). According to Fitzpatrick, member checking is seeking respondent validation of data that confirms the quality of data.

According to Korstjens and Moser (2017), transferability is the degree to which the findings can be transferable to other respondents' contexts or settings. The researcher provides in-depth experiences and behaviors of the participants and the overall research described in detail to be transferability to an outsider (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I ensured transferability by giving a thick description of the phenomenon under study, detailed information on the research setting, and the overall research process.

Confirmability pertains to the trustworthiness and accuracy of the overall research process from data collection to the development and reporting of the findings with all records kept throughout the study as an audit trail (Kettunen & Tynjala, 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). An audit trail ensures dependability and confirmability in the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). In addition, to achieve confirmability, researchers validate the correctness of information from participants' responses by member checking, which

ensures the study is trustworthy (Hayre & Muller, 2019). In this study, I achieved confirmability by asking open-ended questions during the semistructured interview to obtain data from the participants. After the interview, the participant verified the accuracy of data taken, and all data that I obtained were on file as an audit trail to confirm accuracy of the research. According to Scharp and Sanders (2018), researchers improve confirmability by illustrating their notes in a way to link their data to the findings and this is achieved through an audit trail. I described in detail all the processes in this study to allow a professional to make informed decisions on the conclusion of the study. In qualitative research, member checking remains a critical tool to check the credibility of the data of researcher participants (Hayre & Muller, 2019; Smith & McGannon, 2017). Credibility involves ensuring that the findings of a study represent the original data correctly (Penny et al., 2018).

To obtain data saturation, I interviewed until no new themes emerged. Data saturation occurs when no new information emerges during the iterative coding process (Walzl et al., 2019). According to Hennink et al. (2019), in a qualitative study, having a sufficient sample size is determined by the number of interviews the researcher conducts to achieve data saturation.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case studying was to explore strategies used by successful organizational leaders to increase employee morale to improve productivity in their organizations. The population of the research consisted of five managers who successfully used strategies to increase employee morale. In Section 2, I outlined the

plans for data collection and analysis. Section 2 includes the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, the design and method, the participants of this research, the population and sampling technique, the data collection instruments, the ethical research, data organization technique, data collection technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity. I supported confidentiality and ethics in my study for the decisions I made.

In Section 3, I outline the guide to this research, which includes the purpose statement and the research question. In addition, I discuss findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, the recommendations for action, the recommendation for future research, reflection, and conclusion based on the experience of the doctoral research. For future research, I discuss gaps in the existing literature and provide a recommendation based on the research findings. I discuss how the study reinforces the conceptual framework.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies used by successful organizational leaders to increase employee morale to improve productivity in their organizations. The findings of this research indicated that effective communication, employee engagement, and rewards are strategies to increase morale in the workplace. Participants in this study agreed that implementing these strategies would increase morale in an organization leading to an increased productivity and profitability.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do organizational leaders use to increase employee morale to improve productivity and profitability? The three main themes that emerged from the data collection analysis regarding strategies to increase employee morale to improve productivity in organizations were (a) effective communication, (b) employee engagement, and (c) employee rewards.

Theme 1: Effective Communication

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis is to have effective communication in the organization. According to Do and Nuth (2019), leaders benefit from high-quality communication with personnel on all organizational ladder steps. Communication was a recurring theme in response to the interview questions. Each participant noted that effective communication was crucial to their success in implementing strategies for increasing morale in their organization. The five participants agreed that successful leaders use effective communication to achieve organizational goals. According to John et al. (2019), human performance relies on team communication

to succeed. I obtained support documents from participants such as emails and yearly performance evaluations to augment the evidence collected.

According to the participants, performance evaluation is a tool used to communicate to employees. I read emails and performance evaluations documents that I received from P2 and P3 that encouraged communication and teamwork. The emails I read gave recognition for a job well done and goals to complete. The performance evaluation I reviewed showed positive notes, such as yearly achievements and an understanding of the individual's expected performance that confirm effective communication. In the interview, P3 stated, "During the performance evaluations, I ask each individual what I can do to help them be more productive." Each participant agreed that using emails to convey messages immediately to their employees is the most efficient means of business communication. The emails I read gave brief instructions for employees' daily goals and employees' responses that support effective communication. Table 1 includes the subthemes of effective communication for strategies to increase morale by the participants. Participants indicated the importance of using email and performance evaluations to increase employee morale, thereby increasing productivity and profitability.

Table 1*Subthemes of Effective Communication*

Subthemes	No. of participants	Frequency
Email	5	15
Performance evaluation	5	10
Communicating face to face	2	5
Communication as a tool	2	8
Clear communication	5	9
Concise communication	5	6
Tone of communication	5	11
Way leaders communicate	5	6

According to Do and Nuth (2019), leaders benefit from high-quality communication with personnel on all organizational ladder steps. Participants agreed that open communication is a strategy for increasing employee morale in an organization. P1 and P2 decided the most effective way of communicating is face-to-face. Effective communication is a transformational leadership strategy that engages personnel to transfer knowledge between the leaders and subordinates. P4 stated that leaders should be on the work floor, communicating with their employees. P3 and P4 agreed that to achieve organizational success, leaders should collaborate with employees.

P2 emphasized that successful leaders use communication as a tool to increase employee engagement to increase productivity. P5 also stated that leaders should communicate regularly, be clear and concise, and set the tone for organizational achievement. P1 and P5 agreed that leaders' tone of voice and body expressions could increase or decrease employee morale in an organization; therefore, leaders are instrumental to organizational success. The way leaders communicate can be for the better or for the worse in an organization (Irving, 2019). P4 shared that having a leader

who communicates poorly affects employee morale leading to less productivity. The first theme aligned with the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory (see Burns, 1978). Leaders can use transformational leadership theory to understand strategies to increase morale by communicating with employees in the organization (Cohrs et al., 2019).

Theme 2: Employee Engagement

The second theme to emerge from the data collection analysis was employee engagement. Participants expressed the importance of employee engagement. Table 2 represents subthemes of the theme employee engagement. Only two participants used the term of empowering employees throughout the interview. They indicated that strategies were beneficial to increasing morale, thereby increasing productivity.

Table 2

Subthemes of Employee Engagement

Subthemes	No. of participants	Frequency
Leading by example	5	13
Empower employees	5	11
Meeting with employees	5	10
Employee opinions	5	9
Employee team	5	18

The theme of employee engagement aligns with an inspiring vision, fostering morale, and encouraging teamwork is part of the conceptual framework of transformational leadership (see Burns, 1978). According to Erkutlu and Chafra (2019), employee engagement in decision-making positively influences organizational performance. A review of organization performance evaluations and emails confirmed

that leaders were engaging with their subordinates. The use of email gave the employee an opportunity to communicate freely to the leaders. P1 stated that giving recognition, even through email, inspires motivation.

An essential part of an organization's strategy is achieving a sustainable competitive advantage by having employee engagement (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). P1 and P2 emphasized that employee engagement creates trust between leader and worker. P2 stated, "I engage my employees when I can when matters pertain to them." According to Davis (2020), engaging employees builds trust between leaders and employees. P2 and P3 agreed that managers lead by example, and if they are not engaged, then the employees will also not be engaged. P2 stated that, "giving organization teams a voice makes them feel valued and increases organization success." P3 and P4 emphasized that managers should empower employees by delegating authority and encouraging decision-making. According to Choi (2019), employee empowerment influences performance.

P1 shared that leaders need to ensure that their employees are part of the organizational mission by regularly meeting with employees to review their work ethics toward the mission. P4 stated, "One nonperforming employee would decrease morale." P4 shared that they sit down with the employee and get them motivated to perform. P1 stated, "It is imperative to keep the employees informed and engaged to be able to increase morale." Participants claimed that employee engagement begins and ends with the organization leader, and improving employee engagement would increase morale. According to Amarnah and Muthuveloo (2020), employees' productivity and creativity increase when they are satisfied with their organization.

According to Francis and Keegan (2020), communication from senior and frontline managers is critically important in building work environments that enable employees to engage. P5 defines engagement as a motivational process to which employees express their thoughts to promote work. P4 stated “In having a bond with my employees, I have a close family relationship with each employee.” Moments of engagement gives an individual a sense of meaningfulness to engage in work-related tasks (Francis & Keegan, 2020). P3 and P4 expressed that employees’ opinions contribute to having the most successful outcomes in an organization, and the employee wants to feel that they are part of a team. The second theme aligned with the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory (see Burns, 1978). Leaders can use transformational leadership theory to understand strategies to increase morale by engaging employees in the organization (Mahmood et al., 2019).

Theme 3: Employee Reward

The third theme to emerge from the data collection analysis was employee reward. The literature review and conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory support this theme. According to Mahmood et al. (2019), social factors such as rewards and top managers as role models can influence employee behavior. Transformational leaders positively contribute to boosting intrinsic motivation and process engagement (Mahmood et al., 2019). Table 3 represents subthemes of the theme employee rewards. Participants gave recognition or rewards when objectives were met or exceeded.

Table 3*Subthemes of Employee Rewards*

Subthemes	No. of participants	Frequency
Recognize effort	5	14
Give incentives	5	10
Show appreciation	5	12
Encourage employees	5	16

The five participants agreed on using rewards as a strategy to increase employee morale, productivity, profitability, and achieve company goals. P3 stated, “If not a good leader, all the rewards in the world do not mean anything.” Participants want a productive and happy workforce, and all employees should be recognized for their efforts. The review of emails and performance evaluation confirmed that the leaders gave recognition to their employees when completing a goal and in times of doing a good job. Participants agreed that morale could be increased by rewards and recognition programs. P1 stated, “offering incentives can improve employee performance.” P1 and P2 agreed that simple handwritten notes or emails from managers would increase morale within an organization. The email responses that I read showed appreciation toward the leader and the employee. P4 mentioned that employers need to find different ways to show appreciation and recognition to the team or to the best performers. To increase morale, P5 suggested employees feel valued with the end-of-the year party for reaching milestones.

The five participants agreed that rewards are beneficial to increasing morale. Participants agreed that they encourage employees by email, face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and being involved with each employee. According to Shafagatova and Van Looy (2020), rewards are an essential strategy for the organization to facilitate employee

motivation. According to Mahmood et al. (2019), rewards positively influence employee behavior and attitude. A review of administrative emails and performance evaluations confirmed rewards positively help in achieving organizational success. The third theme aligned with the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory (see Burns, 1978). Leaders can use transformational leadership theory to understand strategies to increase morale by rewarding employees in the organization (Kwapisz, 2019).

In conclusion, having strategies to increase morale, such as effective communication, employee engagement, and employee rewards, will increase productivity and profitability in a workplace. Managers can use the conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory to build a strong relationship with their employees to help each other to advance to a higher level of morale (see Burns, 1978).

Transformational leaders influence followers to perform above their expectations by increasing morale and motivation and changing the organization as a team (Lange et al., 2018).

Applications to Professional Practice

Business leaders faces many challenges to stay productive and profitable. Strategies to increase morale are essential for improving productivity and profitability in an organization. According to Noor and Ampornstira (2019), organizations are less productive when employees lack morale, and with an increase in morale, employees' productivity, performance, motivation, loyalty, and engagement increase. This study's findings are essential to organization leaders because the findings showed that effective communication, employee engagement, and rewards are strategies to increase morale to

improve productivity and promote sustainability and stability. The lack of effective communication, employee engagement, and employee rewards will influence turnover and affect an organization's productivity (Stater & Stater, 2018).

Communication is an essential tool for having a strong relationship with employees, customers, and suppliers to achieve productivity and profitability. Clear lines of communication can be from email, phone calls, social media, one on one, and because of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders could use Skype or Zoom to communicate with employees, customers, and suppliers. Leaders who demonstrate competence in knowing their product will strengthen communication with customers and suppliers (Crome et al., 2019).

Engaged employees are motivated, intensely involved in their work, enormously enthusiastic, and immersed in doing their job (Hidayah Ibrahim et al., 2019). Business leaders engage employees by collaboration, empowering them, and leading by example (Jha et al., 2019). Employees who interact with organization leaders will have a clear goal and the same vision towards achieving success. Leaders engage employees by letting them know how the organization is doing, giving them tools for success, motivating and inspiring them, and promoting transparency and collaboration in the workplace. The benefits of engaging employees could foster a supported workplace with a team atmosphere.

According to Crome et al. (2019), rewards and recognition increase motivation, engagement, and productivity. Leaders can reward employees by giving them a card, hand-written note, phone call, email, end-of-year party, plaque, raise, or anything that

would show appreciation for meeting or exceeding goals. Leaders who show recognition of employees' efforts confirm that their employees' work is valued. According to Henderson (2020), employees are the primary asset in an organization. A happy worker is a productive worker.

Implication for Social Change

The study's findings could contribute to positive social change by providing organization leaders with a framework to increase and maintain employee morale. Leaders may use these study findings to increase employee morale and improve productivity, which would increase employee well-being. Better life outcomes and higher productivity have come from employees' well-being (Maccagnan et al., 2018).

Leaders who implement effective leadership strategies could attract and retain talented employees, improve relationships with coworkers, and gain a positive reputation in the community. A leader who has a supportive work environment creates a sense of security, which gives a feel of living at home for the employee (Kurniawaty et al., 2019). Effective communication between leaders and employees would establish clear expectations that build trust and loyalty (Vega-Zamora et al., 2019). Employees, who learn about the organizations' culture, products, and services, could advocate for their brand and mission. This type of communication would build a positive relationship between the organization and the community to appreciate the goods and services.

Recommendations for Action

The three identified themes were the result of implementing strategies to increase employee morale and thus improve productivity, I recommend that leaders use effective

communication, employee engagement, and employee rewards as strategies to improve employee morale within the organization. According to Alozie (2020), productivity and profitability can be improved by an increase in morale. I recommend that organizational leaders seek to bring teamwork, motivation, trust, engagement, growth, and development to their employees.

I recommend leaders encourage open communication through emails, face-to-face meetings, phone calls, and yearly performance reviews. I recommend leaders go out in the work area to communicate regularly, clearly, and positively. According to Crome et al. (2019), effective communication can positively affect employee engagement, motivation, and productivity. I recommend leaders increase employee engagement by employee empowerment and engaging them in decision making when it pertains to them. According to Jha et al. (2019), employee engagement is crucial for individual outcomes, job satisfaction, well-being, and organizational success. I recommend leaders encourage feedback from their employees. I recommend offering a professional opportunity to develop and carve out a career path. According to Davis (2020), engaging employees builds trust.

According to Crome et al. (2019), rewards motivate employees to be more productive. I recommend leaders reward achievements for the performers that meet or exceed expectations. I recommend leaders evaluate establishing a reward and recognition program in the workplace. I recommend using phone calls, face-to-face, and emails with words of encouragement. Human resource scholars posited that rewards play a crucial role in an organization (Koo et al., 2019). Leaders could discover ways to increase

morale and minimize the decrease in productivity by understanding the positive outcomes of different reward systems.

I will submit this study or part of it for publication through journal websites such as ProQuest, ResearchGate, Elsevier, and the Journal of Business Research. I will also provide a summary of the study to the five participants who participated in answering the interview questions. I intend to share the findings with my organization leaders through continuous training and conferences.

Recommendations for Further Research

I conducted a qualitative single case study on the strategies used by successful leaders who increase productivity and profitability. The sample consisted of five leaders in Knoxville, Tennessee, who successfully used strategies to increase employee morale resulting in increased productivity and profitability. This study was limited to one organization, five participants, and one location. I recommend using multiple organizations, more participants that can answer the research question honestly, and a different geographical location for future research. I recommend doing workplace observations to gain a more profound in-depth knowledge. I limited myself to doing a single qualitative case study. I recommend future researchers conduct a quantitative or mixed-method analysis to incorporate statistical data on the subject matter. I recommend using quantitative research to assess the existence, strength, and direction of a relationship between (a) effective communication, (b) employee engagement, and (c) employee rewards and employee morale. According to Maxwell (2019), a mixed-method or quantitative analysis could be used as another means to check the research question. I

recommend researchers do a multiple case study rather than a single case study. Instead of limiting research merely on morale, future researchers could gain data through other means of increasing productivity and profitability.

Reflections

The doctoral program was a challenging and arduous journey. At times, I did not think I would complete the journey, but I kept pushing through obstacles, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, to achieve my professional endeavors and grow as an academic. During this journey, I learned how to become a writer, researcher, and scholar. I learned how to use acquired skills such as critical thinking to answer the research question, what strategies organizational leaders use to increase employee morale to improve productivity and profitability. I recruited experienced leaders as participants to add value to my study and answer the research question through purposive sampling.

My doctoral research has expanded my understanding of the importance of strategies to increase morale in the workplace. I was open-minded, remained neutral, remained on topic, and set aside my personal biases about organizational behaviors in exploring the research topic. From conducting interviews, I mitigated my own biases. I had a personal agenda to increase morale in the workplace, and I appreciate each participant in fulfilling this journey. My doctoral research has enabled me to collect data and present findings that organization leaders may find instrumental in increasing morale. I have significantly gained an understanding and appreciation of the doctoral program, and my doctoral research has expanded my knowledge of the importance of strategies to increase morale in the workplace.

Conclusion

Increasing productivity, sustainability, and profitability from using strategies directly relies on leadership understanding of morale and how it can impact employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Organization leaders must develop and implement workplace strategies to increase productivity, sustainability, and profitability. To create a positive working environment, organizations need morale (Muhammed & Soumyaja, 2019). Sustaining high morale is crucial for productivity and profitability, and some leaders lack strategies to increase workplace morale. The findings from this study indicated that organization leaders wanting to increase productivity and profitability should implement (a) effective communication, (b) employee engagement, and (c) employee rewards. I concluded that organizational success relies on leaders developing and implementing strategies to increase workplace morale.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

What you will do	What you will say script
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage often over lunch, breakfast, dinner, or tea.</p>	<p>My name is Shannon Coffey and I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Hammoud towards a Doctor of Business Administration degree at Walden University. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled “Strategies to Increase Employees’ Morale”.</p>
<p>Watch for nonverbal queues.</p> <p>Paraphrase as needed</p> <p>Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth information</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What strategies did you use to increase employee morale to improve productivity? 2. What strategies did you use to increase employee morale to improve profitability? 3. What were the challenges you faced in maintaining and increasing employee morale? 4. How did you address the challenges you faced in maintaining and increasing employee morale? 5. What other information would you like to share regarding strategies to increase employee morale? 6. What other information would you like to share regarding strategies to increase employee morale?

Wrap up interview thinking participant	I appreciate the time you have set aside to participate in this interview, and is there anything else that you could add to be helpful for me to fully understand strategies to increase employees' morale?
Schedule follow-up member interview checking	To seek clarification on my interpretation of the data or any more questions would it be alright to call you?
Follow-up Member Checking Interview	
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	I have collected data from other matter experts' participants,' and I need to confirm my comprehension and clarification of the issues discussed.
Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question	From my recordings I have gathered evidence from other matter experts like you, and I have summarized my understanding from my transcription, and I would like to check with you if my comprehension and clarification are correct.
Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found—note the information must be related so that you	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed 2. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed 3. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—perhaps one paragraph or as needed 4. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation—

<p>are probing and adhering to the IRB approval.</p> <p>Walk through each question, read the interpretation and ask:</p> <p>Did I miss anything?</p> <p>Or, what would you like add?</p>	<p>perhaps one paragraph or as needed</p>
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