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Factors Leading to Organizational Success Despite Low Trust in Leadership

Myriam Elizabeth Seay
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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Myriam Seay

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Factors Leading to Organizational Success Despite Low Trust in Leadership

by

Myriam Seay

MBA, Webster University, 2010

BS, Embry Riddle University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

Generally, research results have suggested that employees' lack of trust in leadership typically results in poor performance. The purpose of this research was to explore the factors that contributed to the federal government's organizational success despite organization employees' low interpersonal trust/distrust in the agency's leadership. This change in the theory of trust was identified as a gap in literature; the change in the traditional knowledge of trust merits this specific problem to be explored and analyzed for further understanding. The conceptual framework was composed of trust, distrust, and employee-leader interpersonal trust/distrust theory. A qualitative exploratory case study was used along with the critical incident technique to collect, analyze and report data results for 77 critical incidents. Semistructured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were used to explore 20 federal employees' experiences and understand this phenomenon. The data collected in this research extended the existing body of knowledge of trust, distrust and offered insight into factors that influence federal employees to perform positively despite experiencing low trust or distrust in leadership. The study results indicated that 90% of participants identified mission as a factor that influenced their positive performance, while 85% of participants identified personality as a second factor that influenced them to perform positively despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. The results of this research extend knowledge to the management field professionals. The results may affect change in leadership's awareness and behavior within the federal government, leading to a social change.

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Dedication

First, I dedicate this dissertation to the Lord for his divine mercy and protection. I also dedicate this dissertation to my husband for his support and encouragement during this journey. My husband pushes me to discover new limits, boundaries and to redefine myself right when I thought I had reached refinement. Randy, thank you for being my inspiration, my biggest supporter, and my running partner. To the Cubi, George, Seay, and McFadden families for nursing me with positive energy, love, prayers, and for always reminding me that everything is possible with hard work and dedication. My success cannot be possible without my warriors; each gives me the strength and courage to push myself to the limit. My angel squad in heaven, grandparents Cesar, Segundo, Maria Digna, and uncles Vicente and Manuel. Thank you for always guiding my path and protecting me. I love you all.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Historically, studies of trust within organizations have suggested that employees' trust in leadership results in positive employee performance and organizational outcomes (Lewicki et al., 2016a), and conversely, employees' lack of trust results in poor performance overall (Latusek & Olejniczak, 2016). Nevertheless, Zaheer et al. (1998) and Langfred (2004) identified organizations that have succeeded despite low employee-leader interpersonal trust. These researchers have recommended that this phenomenon be further studied to identify the variables that have accounted for the apparent disconnect in the theory of trust and understand the concept of trust.

Since 2011, the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results have identified that employees within the Office of the Secretary of Defense had low trust in their leadership (United States Office of Personnel Management, n.d., 2013, 2015, 2018). The employees of an agency under the Office of the Secretary of Defense have also expressed low trust in leadership (A Federal Agency, 2018). According to an agency executive, despite the identified low interpersonal trust, this agency was successful and effective in its mission of safeguarding exports of defense-critical technology.

This qualitative case study added to the literature by providing a perspective on how organizations that do not maintain interpersonal trusting relationships between leaders and employees can still be effective. Understanding the factors that influenced positive performance outcomes despite the low interpersonal employee leadership trust can advance the management theory and practice and can promote social change in the management field.

Background of the Study

To fill in the gap identified by Aryee et al. (2002) and Langfred (2004), future researchers must explore and provide additional understanding of what factors influence employees' positive performance despite low trust in leadership. Understanding the phenomenon may help fill the gap and advance management theory and practice.

Previous attempts to contextualize trust have led to approximately 126 definitions (Lyon et al., 2016). The variety of definitions in literature has produced a variety of methods for trust research. The variety of definitions and concepts have been widely applauded and criticized by researchers and scholars (Lyon et al., 2016). Regardless of extensive research and contextualization, Lyon et al. (2016) noted that further research is needed to understand, explore, and evaluate emergent trust theories and variables that can affect trust outcomes.

Cook and Kramer (2004) and Latusek and Olejniczak (2016) stated that trust in leadership is associated with positive performance outcomes, and low trust in leadership is associated with negative performance outcomes. The premise behind the common belief of the concept of interpersonal trust is that employees who trust are in a better position to experience success, while those who distrust or have low levels of interpersonal trust experience failure (Latusek & Olejniczak, 2016). Trust is commonly associated and viewed as beneficial, and the notion that distrust can also be beneficial is often dismissed (Hardin, 2004).

Despite the diverse amount of research on the concept of trust, some literature findings do not demonstrate the effects of low trust on behavior and performance. Thus,

the available literature is not consistent and is considered weak (Langfred, 2004).

Concepts of management are constantly evolving, and future scholarly research should expand upon the current knowledge and increase understanding of management topics (Lewicki et al., 2016b). Langfred (2004) urged future researchers to explore topics that can help management theory and practice.

Another group of researchers who have identified the need for future research on the concept of trust are Zaheer et al. (1998). Zaheer et al. explored the role of trust in interorganizational exchange and how the individual-level concept of trust affects the organizational-level outcome of the performance. Interpersonal and interorganizational trust is defined as distinct constructs that have different roles in affecting processes such as performance (Krosgaard et al., 2002). Zaheer et al. mentioned that researchers focused on how trust at the individual level translates into an organizational-level outcome: performance. Zaheer et al. suggested that future researchers explore the relationship between low trust and performance to increase validity and knowledge of trust and low trust consequences.

Asencio (2016) explored the concept of trust, distrust, and performance and addressed the need for empirical research on the relationship between transactional leadership, employee, and organizational performance under a public administration setting. Asencio used the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey as a measuring tool to understand whether employees' trust mediates the relationship between leaders and performance. Asencio found that employee trust and performance are affected by leadership behavior, which impacts organizational success. According to Asencio, the

survey failed to study the interactions between employee-leadership interpersonal trust and employee/organizational performance. Asencio urged future researchers to focus on employee-leader interpersonal trust, including factors that affect positive employee/organizational performance under constraints unique to government. I addressed the gaps in the literature mentioned by Asencio (2016) by exploring, analyzing, and understanding the factors that influenced federal government employees' positive performance despite low interpersonal trust.

Another study that identified gaps in the literature was Aryee et al. (2002), where researchers explored the relationship between organizational justice and employee work outcomes. The data revealed that trust concepts mediated employee-leadership behavior and performance. Aryee et al. explored the effect of trust on employee performance by measuring qualitative factors such as trust in an organization/supervisor, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and task performance. In addition, Aryee et al. analyzed mediators that affect an individual's trustworthiness and discussed cognition-based trust as an individual's ability to carry out obligations despite their level of trust. Aryee et al. proposed that future researchers focus on the moderators that affect and influence the outcomes between employee-leader behavior, trust foci, and organizational success or failure.

Previous researchers have urged future researchers to explore and understand the moderators, influencers, or factors that affect trust and employee-leader interpersonal trust (Aryee et al., 2002). Justwan et al. (2018) stated that trust is a broad concept that is not simple to conceptualize because trust can change or take a different connotation

depending on the associated discipline. Justwan et al. (2018) stated that trust had been studied for decades across various multidisciplinary views, and despite the various concepts and definitions, scholars cannot agree to a universal contextualization. Despite the multiple concepts of trust, Dirks and Ferrin (2001) suggested that expanding the knowledge and construct of trust can directly and substantially impact performance outcomes and suggests that future exploratory research is needed.

Despite the disagreement among researchers on the definition and conceptualization of trust, researchers have generally agreed that further research is needed to understand trust and how trust affects employee performance. This study addressed the call from researchers by providing useful information and new knowledge on the topic of trust that may strengthen and better prepare leaders in the management field.

Problem Statement

The general problem is that the literature on the topic of trust within organizations has largely suggested that an agency requires trust to be successful. The theory of trust notes that when employees do not trust leaders, there will be a higher turnover of staff and less productivity by those who stay (Patton, 2012; Subramoniam, 2013), but some organizations succeed even when trust is low. This difference from the expected begs the question about why an organization might succeed when employee interpersonal trust in leadership is low. Some researchers have demonstrated that this phenomenon exists (Aryee et al., 2002; Zaheer et al., 1998), although it is still unclear what variables account for this apparent disconnect in the literature.

The 2018 Pulse Survey results indicated that employees at some federal agencies had low interpersonal trust in leadership. Despite the reported lack of trust in leadership, the agencies consistently accomplished their respective mission (A Federal Agency, 2019). The specific problem is that this organization has not followed the typical theory of trust trend, in which low trust is associated with negative outcomes, and the reason why is not apparent. If researchers fail to explore and understand why these types of government organizations do not follow the typical known trends of trust, the body of literature will remain incomplete, inaccurate, and become a problem as the lack of knowledge create gaps in the literature. The current literature on the theory of trust must be updated to reflect this new phenomenon. Qualitative case studies may add to the literature and promote social change by providing additional perspective on how organizations that do not maintain interpersonal trusting relationships between leaders and employees can still be effective.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the factors that contribute to the federal government's organizational success when the organization's employees have low interpersonal trust in the agency's leadership, which addressed the phenomenon gap in literature. I used semistructured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to address this gap to explore a federal agency employees' experiences and understand how employees maintained positive performance outcomes while experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. The data was collected and analyzed by using the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954). The findings of this

study could help bridge the gap in management literature, which has focused on the quantitative and positive outcomes of interpersonal trust. The results of this study can also introduce additional knowledge to support future scholars, managers, and leaders in a new understanding of the phenomenon.

Research Questions

Scholars and researchers have used research questions (RQ) and subquestions (SQ) to identify the scope of the problem they aim to examine. A study's research question is designed to drive the conceptual framework of every study. The research question defined for this study was as follows:

RQ1: From an employees' perspective and experience, what factors influence an employees' positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership?

SQ1: How does distrust or low trust in leadership affect employees' overall performance?

The methodology developed to answer this research question is explained throughout this chapter.

Conceptual Framework

The framework of this study allowed me to identify and examine factors, from an employees' perspective and experience, that influenced positive performance outcomes, even where low interpersonal trust in leadership exists. Identifying these perceived motivating factors may fill in the gap in literature presented by researchers (Asencio, 2016), expand understanding of how the theory of trust impacts federal organizations,

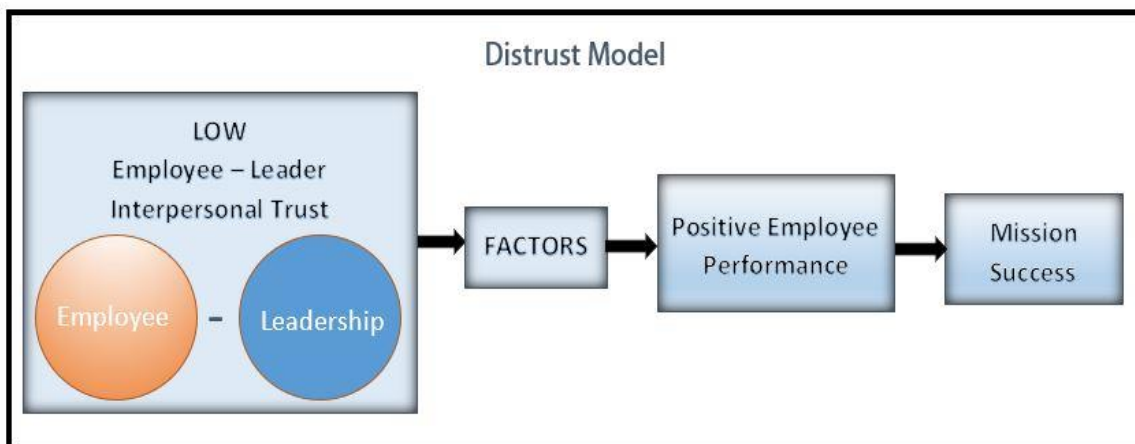
and provide focus areas for improving performance in government leadership. To identify and understand those unknown motivational factors, I conducted a thorough review of trust theory literature. I identified the need to recognize the qualitative factors that modified the impact of distrust on performance in a federal government organizational setting.

The first key concept is the theory of trust and distrust, where good outcomes are associated with the existence of trust, and distrust results in negative outcomes (Jones & George, 1998). Most trust theories categorize trust as good and distrust as bad (Lewicki et al., 1998). Another limitation of the empirical body of trust is that researchers have continuously conducted quantitative research to provide new definitions or conceptualizations of the concept of trust and trust variations (Asencio, 2016; Fink et al., 2010). The numerous variations on the concept of trust fail to adapt to different times and settings. The management field and the theoretical norms of trust have evolved, and a different approach is needed to understand and further the knowledge and context of trust in different settings (Asencio, 2016). Researchers must explore and understand that trust and distrust can produce beneficial outcomes (Lewicki et al., 1998). It is imperative that future research findings specifically contribute new data to understand how distrust can motivate a federal government employee to perform positively despite employee-leadership distrust (see Figure 1). Furthering the knowledge of trust is fundamental for theory and practice. Advancements in technology, different cultural backgrounds, and settings in the management field have evolved. Thus, one single theory of trust cannot universally apply to all settings, scenarios, groups, or individuals (Mahoney & McGahan,

2007). Golembiewski and McConkie (1975) and O'Reilly and Roberts (1976) noted that trust is fundamental and of substantial importance for organizational success and employee positive performance outcomes. Consequently, trust-distrust, the concept of interpersonal trust, should be studied to address the gap in the literature and contribute a new body of knowledge to the norm of trust (Golembiewski & McConkie, 1975).

Figure 1

Proposed Distrust Model (Conceptual Framework Model)



Note. The model was created for visualization of the proposed distrust model.

A second concept that grounded this research is interpersonal trust. Researchers have defined interpersonal trust as the degree or amount of trust, reliability, confidence, and dependability one person can have on another person (Zaheer et al., 1998; Vanhala, 2020). Zaheer et al. (1998) explained that employees' performance and organizational success are negatively affected without interpersonal trust. Jones and George (1998) and Zaheer et al. also associated interpersonal trust between employees and leadership as good and low interpersonal trust as bad. In 2014, Lewicki and Tomlinson (2014)

conducted research in which the findings demonstrated that interpersonal trust deals with more than just high trust or low trust. Interpersonal trust also depends on how individuals deal with internal conflict and how these individuals outwardly handle conflict with other individuals (Lewicki & Tomlinson, 2014). Lewicki et al. (1998) noted that distrust could be beneficial. Therefore, I conducted an in-depth review of current literature that urged future researchers to expand the current knowledge of distrust, low interpersonal, and positive outcomes.

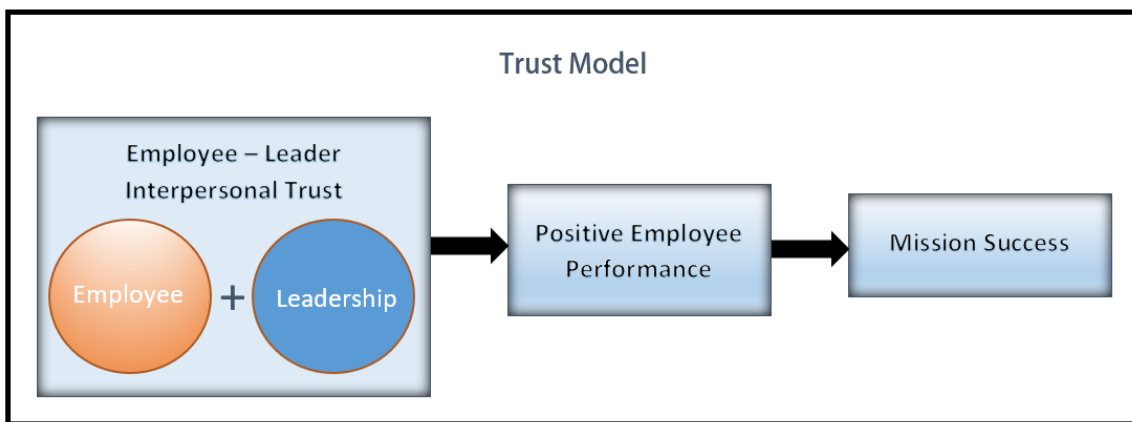
In this research, I used the concept of interpersonal distrust or low interpersonal trust to explore if these concepts contribute to employee positive performance outcomes. I used a qualitative exploratory holistic single case study to explore and understand what factors influence an employees' positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership (see Figure 1). Traditional trust theories associate low interpersonal trust with negative outcomes; however, recent research results have indicated otherwise. Research results findings have indicated that low trust or low interpersonal trust can also lead to positive performance outcomes (Lewicki et al., 1998). In this research, I focused on low interpersonal trust concepts and research results, which have provided evidence that distrust can positively affect organizations and performance.

Understanding what factors influence employees' positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership from an employees' perspective and experience in this research could fill in the gap in the literature identified by Asencio (2016). Asencio clearly articulated that future research should use a qualitative approach within a governmental setting, which was the setting and approach used to obtain and

analyze data. Filling the gap in literature may also contribute to social change by providing leadership with a deeper knowledge of interpersonal trust and what factors influence employees' positive performance despite low interpersonal trust in leadership. Moreover, findings from this research may provide new knowledge and information that can enlighten the management field, employees, and leadership within government agencies. Additional information is provided throughout Chapters 2 and 3 of this study.

Figure 2

Current Trust Model (Conceptual Framework Model)



Note. The model was created for visualization of the current trust theory.

Nature of the Study

Babbie (2017) mentioned that researchers should have a clear and concise plan before observing and analyzing. The first step to define and ground research is to specify what the researcher wants to discover and the best way to do so (Babbie, 2017). I addressed the first step with the background, scope, purpose, and research question. The second step is addressed in this section, the nature of the study. In this study, I addressed

the gap in the literature presented by Asencio (2016) and the phenomenon that the research question addressed: What factors influence employees' positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership.

In this research, I identified and provided an understanding of the factors that influence an employees' positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. Researchers have explored and noted that distrust could also influence employees' positive performance (Asencio, 2016). Researchers have also noted that further research is needed to expand the conceptualization of distrust and distrust effects in employees, leadership, and organizations (Guha et al., 2004). In this study, I used a qualitative exploratory holistic single case study to understand the phenomenon presented in this research.

The nature of this study was a qualitative exploratory holistic single case study. The qualitative approach was appropriate because it pursues the perspective and experience of individuals. The qualitative inquiry results can provide an understanding, discover, and describe an individual's everyday life and what actions mean to these individuals (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this research, I used a case study design to understand the factors that influenced employees' positive performance despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. I selected a qualitative approach based on the repeated recommendations from researchers for studies examining the phenomenon of distrust as a beneficial concept in a federal governmental setting (see Asencio, 2016 & Guha et al., 2004). Asencio (2016), among other researchers, noted that current trust studies have been saturated with quantitative research and statistical figures

but have failed to explore the concept of trust from a qualitative approach and employee perspective.

Qualitative research has different approaches and common purposes. A case study approach was selected because this method involves studying a contemporary life event bounded by time or place (see Yin, 2015). Qualitative case study research has three common purposes (Babbie, 2017) that are also types of case studies (Baxter & Jack, 2008). These case studies are exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory (Babbie, 2017; Baxter & Jack, 2008). I used an exploratory purpose in this research because there are no clear, single set of outcomes to understand why federal organizations can succeed with low interpersonal trust (see Baxter & Jack, 2008). In addition to selecting a qualitative exploratory case study, I selected a holistic, single case designed to understand the phenomenon and address the gap in research.

Results of a holistic, single case study can provide data that can identify the factors involved in the phenomenon as is designed to provide an understanding of the multiple perspectives of the participant (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Unusual cases are one of five primary distinctions of a holistic single-case design (Baxter & Jack, 2008), which was appropriate for this study because the phenomenon in this study deviates from the theoretical norm and is considered unusual. Baxter and Jack (2008) also mentioned that setting propositions in research design can be beneficial over proposals because proposals narrow down the research scope and prevent deviating from that scope in order to make research feasible to completion.

The subject of trust and distrust has been studied for years, and researchers have

developed extensive definitions and concepts (Lyon et al., 2016). The proposition narrowed the scope of this research to ensure the research question and the specific problem statement could contribute to understanding the unusual deviation of theory norm. I used a qualitative holistic case study and a critical incident technique to interview a specific group of participants. I interviewed participants and compiled the data until saturation was met. The participants for this study consisted of federal government employees who met the following criteria: past or present federal employee of a federal agency, at least 6 months of continuous employment at a federal agency, performance appraisal(s) from a federal agency performance with a rating between 3 and 5, and experienced employee-leader low interpersonal trust while employed in a federal agency. Participants were asked specific questions at the beginning of the semistructured interview to determine if participants met all four criteria.

I used Flanagan's (1954) critical incident technique to collect and analyze the data from the semistructured interviews. The critical incident technique requires the data to be collected through interviews, open-ended questions, and inductive data analysis and focuses on participants' perspectives identified as critical incidents in participants' experience. In this research, participants were asked to provide three or more critical incidents that influenced them to perform positively when experiencing low trust in leadership. The critical incident technique requirements align with the description of qualitative research (Butterfield et al., 2009). Lewicki et al. (2016a) noted that qualitative methodologies are suitable for assessing the dynamics of trust. To appropriately conduct the critical incident technique, five steps should occur. Those steps ascertain the study's

general aim, specify a plan and setting, collect the data, analyze the data, and interpret and report the data.

For this research, the general aim was to understand what factors influence an employees' positive performance outcomes while experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. In this research, the government agency was identified as a federal agency. The data collection took place retrospectively through in-depth interviews. Participants were encouraged to talk about at least three critical incidents where they experienced low interpersonal trust in leadership (see Fisher & Oulton, 1999). Flanagan (1954) recommended that the data collection continues until saturation is met, at which point, the interviews can be analyzed and interpreted.

Flanagan (1954) and Butterfield et al. (2009) stated that saturation is met when participants produce redundant data. In this research, saturation was met when critical incidents no longer developed new factors that influenced employee performance despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. During analysis, the data collected via interviews were reviewed, and incidents were categorized to establish similar trends related to those factors that influence employees' positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. Saldaña (2015) mentioned that coding is the link between the data collection and meaning, and coding may undergo several cycles before researchers can identify the data's true meaning. During the first coding cycle, interview transcripts were in narrative format. The narratives were analyzed and provided a description code. During the second coding cycle, the codes and narrative transcripts were analyzed. A third and fourth coding cycle was completed to build

categories and themes. Large categories of the data were divided into subcategories during these later cycles, and smaller categories of the data were combined as appropriate. Categorizing the data improved the results' clarity (FitzGerald et al., 2008). Flanagan provided a list of considerations to establish and name categories. Following Flanagan's list of considerations, after analyzing, identifying, and interpreting similar trends, a taxonomy was created to understand what distrust conceptual factors influence employees' positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership.

Definitions

Distrust: One person's unwillingness to become vulnerable to another's person. This unwillingness to become vulnerable is based on the belief that the other person will behave in a harmful, neglectful, or incompetent manner (Truong, 2019).

Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey: A survey developed and administrated by the Office of Personnel and Management measures employees' perceptions of conditions and characteristics of successful organizations (United States Office of Personnel Management, n.d., para. 1).

Interpersonal trust: Liebeskind and Oliver (2001) defined interpersonal trust as trust directly engendered when two individuals are involved in an exchange relationship over time.

Leadership: Leaders and leadership are in an authority-based position, hierarchy, job responsibility, management, delegated authority, and authority power. Whether the

person possesses or cannot exercise leadership skills, the leadership/leader designation is vested in the person's position and not the skill set (Yielder & Codling, 2004).

Success: Federal government agencies define mission success as the degree to which the mission goals are achieved (Venturini, 2017). An agency is successful if that agency is meeting that agency's set goals.

Trust: One person's vulnerability acceptance of another individual's potential ill will or potential lack of goodwill. The decision to trust another is accepting that one is vulnerable to the action of another because one has reasons for believing that the negative outcome will not materialize (Humphrey, 2001).

Assumptions

The following assumptions in this research were necessary to ground and frame the conceptual framework and the nature of the study. Trust and distrust have different constructs across different fields, and these constructs are not clearly defined nor complement each other (Zaheer et al., 1998). Due to the different interpretations of trust and distrust, the assumptions listed below were made to clarify and define this research approach.

For this research, I assumed that referencing leaders or leadership includes all members in a position of authority in a federal agency. Leaders in a federal agency in a position of authority can include managers, directors, deputy directors, section chiefs, or team leads. The generalization was made to encompass and group all authority positions into one role. I made this assumption because different fields may define leadership differently from management. When discussing the topic of trust, researchers often

identify their research participants as trustees and trustors. The second assumption identified key actors as leadership and employees versus trustees and trustors. In this research, trustees are leadership, and trustors are current or former federal agency employees. A third assumption was that all research participants would participate voluntarily and be trustful and honest when providing data and recounts of their critical incident. I assumed that the critical incident technique and open-ended interviews were the best methods to collect, analyze, and report these research findings. A fourth assumption was that all research participants would truthfully and voluntarily confirm that they scored between 3 through 5 on performance appraisals. A fifth assumption made was that all participants were representative of a federal agency. A sixth assumption was that distrust, mistrust, and untrust share the same definition and conceptualization in this research.

Scope and Delimitations

I used this research as a tool to obtain information that helped me identify and understand the factors that influenced employees' positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. A qualitative exploratory holistic single case study was used to explore the factors that have contributed to the federal government's organizational success when the organization's employees have low interpersonal trust in the agency's leadership. I decided to focus on a federal government setting because current researchers mentioned the need to examine trust in the private sector (see Asencio, 2016).

I used a qualitative holistic, single case study and the critical incident technique to address the identified gap. I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to government employees until I met saturation. Participants were asked to provide at least three critical incidents that influenced them to perform positively when experiencing low trust in leadership. The methodology and approach chosen to collect and analyze the data were selected because researchers often focus on quantitative approaches when studying the topic of trust (see Asencio, 2016). Asencio (2016) mentioned that current researchers typically use a quantitative approach that provides statistical data but does not provide the qualitative data needed to understand factors that influence positive employee performance despite low trust in leadership. Identifying those factors may help other researchers bridge the research gaps and provide new data that can be used to understand employee behavior within federal government agencies.

In this research, I chose a few delimitations to shape this research. Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) noted that researchers use delimitations to set boundaries to control, define, and narrow down the scope of the research. The first delimitation of this study included population and geographical location. Participants who are or were assigned to a federal agency were considered the population. The specific agency within a geographical location was a federal agency located in Alexandria, Virginia. The second delimitation was identified as the period when the phenomenon occurred; for this research, participants were asked to focus on specific critical incidents that influenced them only when assigned to a federal agency. The third delimitation was the research methodology and the data analysis. A qualitative holistic single case study methodology along with the

critical incident technique for the data analysis was used in this research to construct a specific delimitation. Using a qualitative approach and understanding the factors that have influenced positive employee performance within a government setting may help researchers bridge additional gaps. Bridging additional gaps may provide new qualitative data that can be used to understand employee behavior within other federal government agencies.

Limitations

Potential limitations of this study included the possibility of not being able to have a face-to-face interview with all research participants due to the current pandemic and institutional review board (IRB) guidelines that required all interviews to be completed virtually. To mitigate this limitation, I interviewed all participants via telephone calls. Participants' honesty and openness were presented as a limitation.

An additional limitation presented was that the results of this research would not be reflective of all the agencies and all employees within the Department of Defense. Additional research will be needed to advance the knowledge in this phenomenon to include other unique government agencies.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study could advance knowledge and insight into the perspective of employees. Understanding factors that motivate employees to perform successfully in the high security-oriented environment of the Department of Defense despite low interpersonal trust in leadership can provide federal government leaders positive professional practices in leadership, decision-making, and effective social environments.

Significance to Practice

The annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2018) noted that many employees working within federal agencies do not trust their leadership. Although the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey provided evidence that a trust problem exists, there is a lack of qualitative empirical research to understand why some federal agencies perform well even with low interpersonal employee-leader trust (Asencio, 2016). The results of this study make an original contribution by advancing knowledge in the management field across the Department of Defense, field agencies, and federal government agencies. These research findings may help shape and better equip leaders with the knowledge to assist them in their day-to-day practice. Research findings may benefit current, and future government leaders as this information may help improve leadership practices such as interactions with employees, development of policies, and training. Developing leaders through research can improve participants' work environment and better leadership business practices and employee relationships.

Significance to Theory

Researchers have typically focused on quantitative data that provided statistics and general trust constructs in the private sector (Asencio, 2016). Quantitative data, often obtained through limited and restrictive surveys, usually do not provide in-depth interpretations of the participants' views (Welter & Alex, 2016). Lewicki et al. (2016a) noted that the study of trust could be ambiguous, complex, and limited when using

quantitative approaches and encouraged researchers to consider qualitative approaches and complementary methods.

This research was framed to obtain qualitative data from government employees through in-depth interviews. Participants elaborated and provided specific details on their experiences and what factors influenced their positive performance. I used a different approach for this research, as Lewicki et al. (2016) suggested, to analyze and answer the research question. The findings of this research produced qualitative data from the perspective of a government employee. I used a case study approach and the critical incident technique to analyze the data obtained through in-depth interviews, which provided possible unknown federal employee-leadership knowledge and a new conceptualization of trust construct. Babbie (2017) mentioned that a quantitative approach produces numerical data, which are not adequate when researchers try to understand, explore, and develop new trust constructs. Lewicki et al. asserted that qualitative methods are particularly suitable for analyzing, studying the dynamics, and developing trust over time. Lewicki et al. recommended using critical incident techniques, in-depth interviews, case studies, and communication analysis to advance the management body of knowledge and current theories.

Significance to Social Change

The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by increasing federal leadership knowledge and understanding of employees' perceptions of leadership and motivating factors that affect an employees' positive performance. Leadership knowledge and understanding of what motivates or affects employees' performance

despite the lack of trust in leadership can contribute to social change. The knowledge gained from this study may assist leaders in making changes and adjustments in leadership practices. Leaders who understand factors that motivate their employees can change the organizational culture (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009) and create safe environments where employees can engage freely and experience job satisfaction.

Summary and Transition

Researchers have explored the concept of trust for years. Regardless of the available data on trust and distrust, researchers have continued to identify the need for further exploration and understanding of trust through a qualitative approach. A qualitative holistic single-case design was used to provide a holistic account of the phenomenon at hand to contribute to the gap in the literature. In this chapter, I provided a synopsis of the current theory of trust and trust research limitations and aligned the current limitations to the research specific problem and gap in the literature. I described the research overview on the design in the nature of the study and aligned all sections of Chapter 1 to provide a systematic way forward. While Chapter 1 was an overview of the research, Chapter 2 provides insight into the literature search strategy and conceptual foundation. Chapter 2 also presents an extensive review of the current literature, which was aligned with the key concept of this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The general theory of trust indicates that low interpersonal trust between employees and leaders can result in low morale, reduced productivity, or staff turnover, affecting organizational success (Patton, 2012; Subramoniam, 2013). Although the general concept of trust has proven to be true, some organizations have succeeded despite low interpersonal trust between employees and leadership (Aryee et al., 2002). Zaheer et al. (1998) studied and demonstrated that this phenomenon exists, although their research results did not identify what variables accounted for this apparent disconnect in the trust theory. The specific problem of this research is that a federal agency has not followed the typical theory of trust trend, in which low trust is associated with negative outcomes and the reason why is not apparent. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to identify the factors that contribute to the federal government organization's success when the employees have low interpersonal trust in the agency's leadership. In the following sections, I describe this study's literature search strategy and the literature review that supports this study's purpose and conceptual framework.

Literature Search Strategy

Keywords used in this search were *accomplishment measurement scale, affective trust, benefits of distrust and benefits of trust, critical incident technique, components of trust, cognitive trust, deceitful organizational culture, deviant behavior, dimensions of social trust, distinguish between trust and distrust, distrust, distrust impact, distrust influence, distrust performance, effects of distrust, employee engagement, employee resilience scale, employee stress and performance, employees lack of trust, exploratory*

single case study, federal employee viewpoint survey, federal government distrust, federal leadership, federal trust, high-trust organization, interpersonal trust, interpersonal trust scale, job satisfaction, leadership, leadership and hierarchy, leadership and position of authority, leadership behavior and job satisfaction, leadership distrust, levels of trust, low trust, low turnover, management and employee engagement, management distrust, measurement scale of success, methodological triangulation, mission success defined, mistrust, negative effect of trust, organization resilience, organizational citizenship behavior measurement tool, organizational commitment scale, organizational culture, organizational resilience and untrustworthiness, organizational trust, perception, performance outcomes, phenomenon of kiasu, positive effect of distrust, power and leadership, relationship between organizational culture, resilience, resilience and untrustworthy leaders, resilience scale, retention, social conceptions of trust, success, success definition, successful deviant workplace, successful organizations, the enemies of trust, transformational leadership, trust, trust and empowerment, trust and high security, trust scale, trust and performance, organizational cultures, trust antecedents, trust assessment tool, trust commitment, trust dilemma, trust measurement scale, trust psychology, trust scale, trustworthy cultures, types of trust, untrustworthiness, untrustworthy culture, untrustworthy leadership, untrustworthy organizational culture, and workplace resilience. The primary sources used in this research included peer-reviewed articles exported from the following database search engines: SAGE Journal, EBSCO, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Thoreau multidatabase. The strategy used to develop the literary search was based on the conceptual topics of trust, distrust, and a

combination of leadership, organizational culture, and resilience. These topics surround the specific problem and the research question. A second strategy was to retrieve information on methodology, data collection, and analysis techniques selected for this study. I conducted literature searches to determine conceptual variables on the principal topics of trust, distrust, and positive employee performance. Finally, I made literary searches to ensure that I could capture all possible dissertations and studies that could answer this research question.

I found an abundant amount of research on the topic of trust and the benefits of trust, but this was not the case for the specific benefits of distrust. When completing a database search for literature on the benefits of distrust, the research found was not relevant to this research-specific problem. All research containing topics closely related to employee distrust, benefits of distrust, and low interpersonal trust were examined. The literary research was reviewed to ensure that current and robust information was collected relating to distrust and distrust benefits.

Finally, books were reviewed in addition to the database searches to capture theoretical and methodological concepts, definitions, processes, and guidance. The information collected during the literature search process was used to construct the framework and provide alignment throughout this research.

Conceptual Framework

Research and information identifying and understanding the factors that influence a federal employees' positive performance when experiencing a low employee-leadership interpersonal trust are limited. The conceptual framework for this study served as a

blueprint for exploring this phenomenon. It is important to study this phenomenon because failing to study this shift in the traditional knowledge of the theory of trust may limit the ontological and epistemological knowledge and consequently affect the validity of the general theory of trust. New data contributions may enrich the general theory of trust and fill in the gap in the literature presented by Asencio (2016). Asencio mentioned the need to study this phenomenon because the general theory of trust is generally conducted using quantitative methodologies, surveys, and commonly in a private sector setting. Asencio identified the need for future studies to focus on using qualitative methodologies to explore the phenomenon from an employees' perspective within a government setting, fill the gap in literature, and address the limitations presented in previous research.

The conceptual framework of this study builds upon and enriches the current, general theory of trust model. The framework guides the research to identify and understand the unknown factors that influence the positive performance of government employees when they distrust leadership. Unlike trust, research on the construct of distrust is limited and complicated (Bewsell, 2012) and requires qualitative approaches to expand the body of literature and knowledge (Kujala et al., 2016; Schmidt & Schreiber, 2019). Kramer (1999) urged the further exploration of distrust in public organizational settings to expand the distrust construct.

I first examined the key concept behind the general theory of trust and distrust, current common knowledge, and existing norms. The next key concept studied was interpersonal trust -- the relationship between two people, low trust employee-leadership

relationships, and its limitations. The key concepts and data gathered from interviews grounded the study in qualitative methodologies needed to enhance the current theory of trust and distrust. These key concepts and data addressed the gap in contemporary literature on understanding how low employee-leader interpersonal trust can yield positive employee and organizational performance in government.

Identifying and understanding factors that influence federal government employees' positive performance despite low interpersonal trust may lead to identifying how to achieve beneficial outcomes in these situations. Beneficial outcomes for the organization can include contributions to economic growth and organizational success. Beneficial outcomes for the employee include social integration, cooperation, harmony, personal and professional satisfaction, development, good health, and longevity (Delhey & Newton, 2003).

Trust and Interpersonal Trust

The current theory of trust notes that beneficial outcomes are generally associated with the existence of trust (Jones & George, 1998). Interpersonal trust is one of the concepts studied to understand better and broaden knowledge on trust theory. The literature search revealed several definitions of trust. Baier (1986) defined trust as the relationship of one person's accepted vulnerability to another person's possible ill will. The general theory of trust is defined as the general reliability of one person to fulfill a commitment to another person (Hawley, 2014). Rotter (1967) defined interpersonal trust as the reliance or expectancy of an individual or a group on another individual's word or promise and usually emerges after frequency interaction and time. Deluga (1994) and

Vanhala (2020) applied interpersonal trust to a workplace setting and redefined interpersonal trust as a relationship between an employee and leadership. Deluga (1994) indicated that interpersonal trust is critical for effectiveness and work productivity and identified the supervisor's behavior as the primordial factor in determining the level of interpersonal trust between an employee and leadership (see Figure 2). Schmidt and Schreiber (2019) concluded that interpersonal trust and/or interorganizational trust are needed to operate in organizational settings with governance mechanisms.

Hawley (2014) defined trust as a three-place relationship that involves a trustor, trustee, and a task, such as keeping a secret or telling the truth. In an interpersonal trust setting, a three-place relationship occurs when an employee trusts a leader to handle personnel matters discreetly or fairly process employee performance appraisals. Hawley identified competence and willingness as an expectation that accompanies trust. Competency and willingness can be observed in an interpersonal trust setting when an employee trusts leadership to look after an employees' best interest. Employees trust their leadership's capability to take care of their employees' best interests and believe that leadership will willingly exercise that capability as required. Hawley presented a generalization on trust theory from a normative lens but cautioned that these generalizations do not offer a complete picture of the theory of trust.

Distrust and Low Interpersonal Trust

Asencio (2016) mentioned that contrary to the general belief that trust contributes to beneficial outcomes, low interpersonal trust can also lead to beneficial outcomes such as employee positive performance outcomes and organizational success. Distrust is

generally associated with expectations of ill will or malevolent acts towards others and expectations of betrayal (Schul & Peri, 2015). Kramer (1999) and Jukka et al. (2017) noted that an individual's perceptions and expectations are the basis for forming trust and distrust. Distrust generally manifests from perceptions, antecedents, and interactions involving employees' uncertainty, cautions, and suspicion of leadership and organizations (Kramer, 1999). Distrust also plays a pivotal role in an employee's decision-making, dissecting information, and openness to feedback (Wang et al., 2016). Unlike trust, research on the construct of distrust is limited and complicated (Bewsell, 2012) and requires qualitative approaches to expand the body of literature and knowledge (Kujala et al., 2016; Schmidt & Schreiber, 2019). Kramer (1999) urged the further exploration of distrust in public organizational settings to expand the distrust construct.

Distrust is conceptually associated as the opposite of trust, but some distinctions merit further exploration of the general concept of distrust. Kramer (1999) and Jukka et al. (2017) noted that individuals' perceptions and different expectations are the bases for forming trust and distrust. Research by Lewicki et al. (1998) conceptualized distrust and trust as coexisting concepts and explained that distrust, like trust, should be studied and measured on a low-to-high scale. Distrust and trust have various levels in their respective spectrum: high trust, low trust, distrust, and low distrust (Kujala et al., 2016). The levels of trust and distrust help simplify and illustrate the complexity of these constructs (see Table 1). The levels of trust and distrust are defined by the employee's cognitive characteristics, such as the real-life interpersonal relationship with their leadership, and

affective characteristics, including emotions and perceptions of their leadership (Kujala et al., 2016).

Table 1

Relationships With High and Low Trust and Distrust

Variable	Low distrust	High distrust
High trust	Positive and productive	Conflicting and ambivalent
Low trust	Neutral and benign	Cautious and suspicious

Note. Adapted from “Trust and Distrust Constructing Unity and Fragmentation of Organizational Culture,” by J. Kajula, H. Lehtimäki, and R. Pučétaitè, 2016, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 139(4), p. 703 (<https://doi-org/10.1007/s10551-015-2915-7>). Copyright 2016 by the Journal of Business Ethics.

Interpersonal trust and distrust are considered multidimensional constructs that encompass cognitive and affective trust components that lead to forming an employee's trust and/or distrust of their leaders (Kujala et al., 2016; Lewicki et al., 1998; Punyatoya, 2019). In an employee-leader interpersonal trust relationship, cognitive trust and distrust components refer to the employee's knowledge that develops from interactions and experiences on their leader's capability and competence (Kujala et al., 2016). Affective trust and distrust construct refer to the emotional bond between employee-leadership; this construct aligns with an employee's instinct, intuition, or feelings concerning leadership (Punyatoya, 2019).

Cognitive and affective trust and distrust can complement one another (Punyatoya, 2019) and characterize an employee's perception and knowledge (Kujala et al., 2016; Punyatoya, 2019). In an interpersonal setting, employees perceive their leadership as unpunctual due to their leaders' tardiness for the last 6 months (cognitive). However, the employee has faith in the leader's capability and commitment to the project that the employee feels (affective) the leader will show up in time for the conference. High or low interpersonal trust and distrust are constructed from experienced rational thinking, complemented by examining an individual's feelings, instincts, and intuition (Kujala et al., 2016; Punyatoya, 2019); knowledge and perceptions influence employees decision-making progress (Wang et al., 2016).

Low interpersonal trust relationships are generally associated with no hope, no faith, no confidence, passivity, and hesitance (Lewicki et al., 1998). Low interpersonal distrust relationships are associated with no faith, absence of skepticism, absence of cynicism, low monitor, and nonvigilance (Kujala et al., 2016; Lewicki et al., 1998). Although different, low trust and low distrust are levels of trust that can coexist and are affected by employees' perceptions and experiences, which influence an employee's decision-making process (Kujala et al., 2016). Researchers have noted that low trust and low distrust can be beneficial (Asencio, 2016; Conchie & Donald, 2008; Lewicki et al., 1998; March & Oslen, 1995). I have not been able to identify any research that identifies and provides an understanding of the factors that may influence positive employee performance when these employees are also experiencing low interpersonal trust (see Figure 1). The constructs that contribute to employee-leadership low interpersonal trust

and research has indicated that distrust can lead to positive performance outcomes do not identify the specific factors that influence employees' positive performance despite perceived low interpersonal trust (Figure 2).

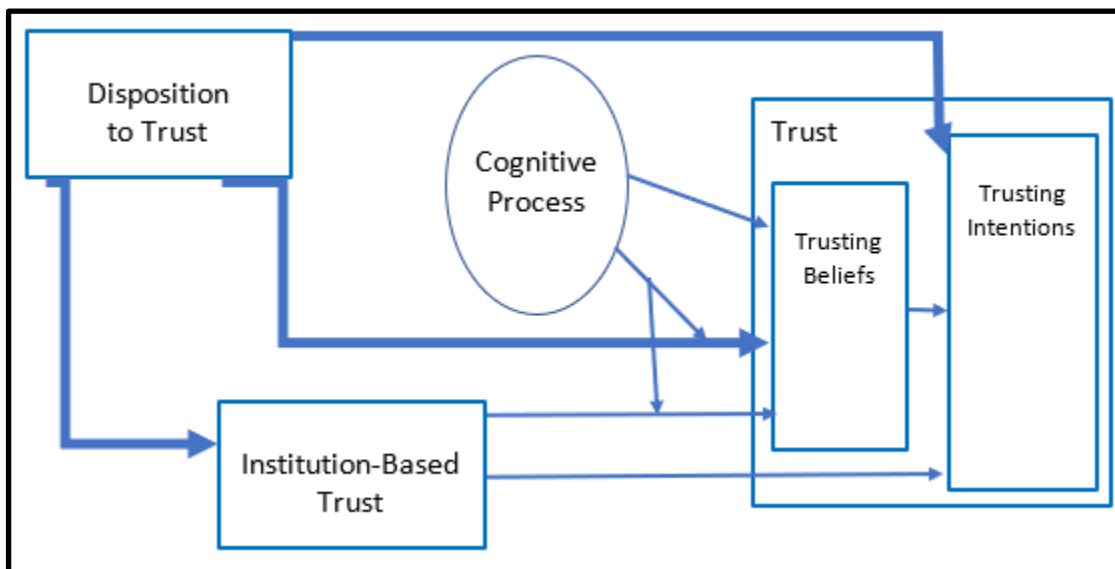
Therefore, it became imperative to conduct a qualitative holistic single case study to understand the unknown factors that lead to an employee's positive performance despite employee-leaderships perceived low interpersonal trust relationship. I completed an in-depth review of current literature that urges future researchers to expand the current knowledge of low interpersonal trust and positive outcomes. I used a qualitative exploratory holistic single case study to explore and understand the phenomenon. Understanding from an employee's perspective and experience what factors influenced employees' positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership in this research could fill in the gap in literature identify by Asencio (2016). Findings from this research may provide new knowledge and information that can enlighten the management field, employees, and leadership within government agencies. Identifying and understanding the phenomenon may also lead to social change within federal agencies and multidimensional fields.

In the literature review, I describe the various studies related to employee low interpersonal trust/distrust, the characteristics of trust and distrust, the different levels of trust/distrust, and how these characteristics affect employee interpersonal relationships. After detailing the general understanding of the current theory of trust/distrust and identifying the need for further understanding of the phenomenon identified in this research, a synthesized review was conducted on the chosen methodology consistent with

the scope of the study. This section provides a synopsis of the existing knowledge on trust and distrust, the phenomenon that remains to be studied as identified by researchers, and potential benefits to social change and management fields by researching and answering this study's research questions.

Theory of Trust

Generally, trust is defined as the belief in the goodness of others (Rotter, 1967). Trust is viewed as a relation between one person's accepted vulnerability to another person's possible unexpected ill will (Baier, 1986). The general theory of trust, as grounded by Rotter, regarded trust as an important contributor to success. Trust is a strong contributor that creates a safe environment perfect for interpersonal and organizational success (Rotter, 1967; Cheng, Fu, & De Vreede, 2016). Trust's impact is versatile and so extensive that the existence of trust and trusts contributions have been cited across multiple disciplines such as management, leadership, performance, and labor-management relationships (Meyer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Theorists have stated that trust is not only fundamental for success, but trust can also produce positive feelings for all parties involved, increases confidence, integrity, motivation (Deutsch, 1958), and familiarity (Luhmann, 1979). Meyer, Davis, & Schoorman (1995) and McKnight et al. (1998) presented a comprehensive initial formation of trust model that has been referenced and cited by researchers since 1998 (Figure 3).

Figure 3*Initial Formation of Trust Model*

Note. Copied from “Initial Trust Formation in New Organizational Relationships,” by D. H. McKnight, L. L. Cummings, and N. L. Chervany, 1998, *Academy of Management Review*, 23(3), p. 475. (<https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1998.926622>). Copyright 1998 by the Academy of Management Review.

McKnight et al. (1998) noted that trust starts with a disposition to trust. An employee's disposition to trust involves an employee's tendency to depend on another. In this phase, employees display a trusting stance and faith in humanity, or this case, in leadership, which is often perception and personality-driven (McKnight et al., 1998). The next antecedent referenced institution-based trust, which refers to an employee's belief that structures and rules are in place to enable employees and leadership successful interaction. In this phase, McKnight et al. state that situational normality and structural

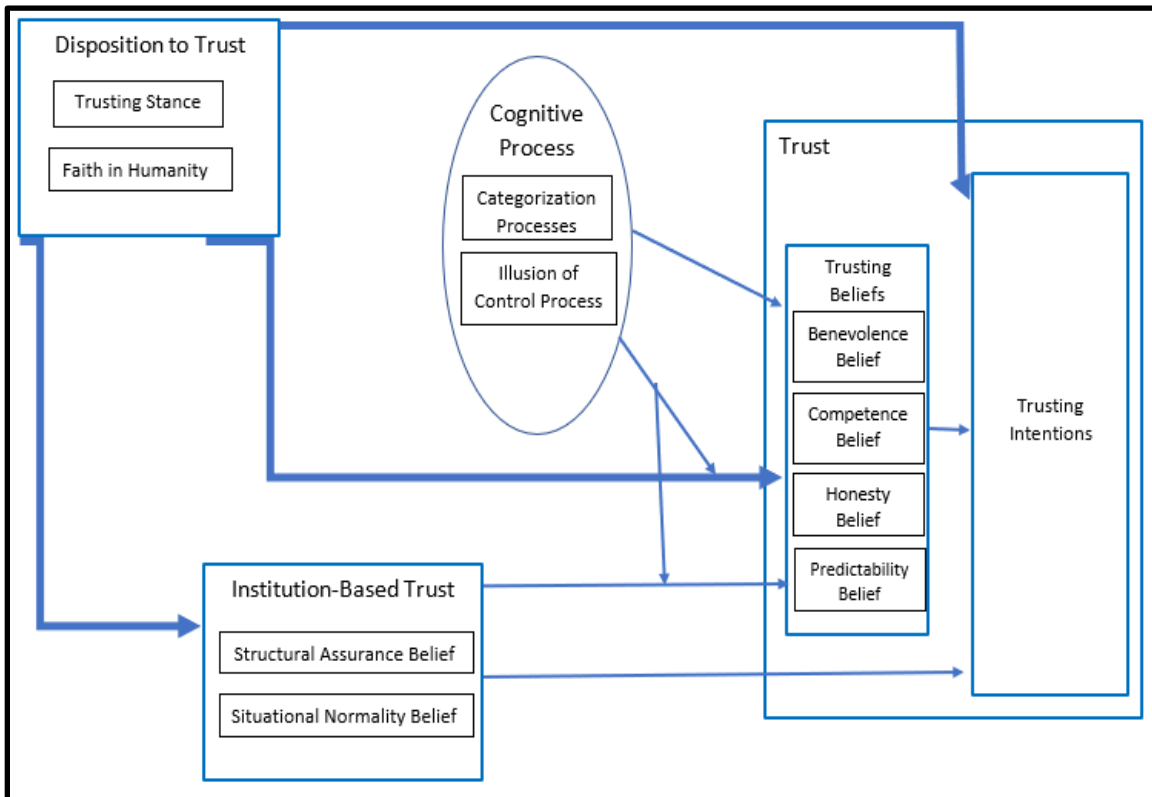
assurances provide confidence to the employee. Structural assurance involves a structured environment with regulations, and situational normality lends hierarchical roles and responsibility setting, increasing the chances of success.

The employee reflects on their leadership's experiential knowledge during the cognitive process and labels their perception with a selected social category (McKnight et al., 1998). These social categories include leadership's reputation, stereotyping, and unit grouping (McKnight et al., 1998). Employee-leadership interaction may lead to employees discovering similarities between leadership, such as shared values and goals, and consequently categorize these leaders under a unit grouping (McKnight et al., 1998). Employees can also categorize their leadership based on secondhand feedback or information; an employee evaluates if leadership is trustworthy based on the leadership's reputation (McKnight et al., 1998). Stereotyping refers to an employee inferring leadership's trustworthiness based on the employee's perception of leadership characteristics, general and other specific stereotypes (McKnight et al., 1998). When stereotyping, employees may infer trustworthiness based on personality or personal bias. For example, leadership's physical appearance or behavior may exude confidence and openness and impact employees' judgment and behavior toward their leadership (Ferrari et al., 2017). Employees experiencing uncertain situations may attempt to reassure themselves with the illusion that they have personal control of the situation, even when the illusion is unrealistic and inflated (McKnight et al., 1998). In this stage, an employee forms a tentative belief but looks for clues to reaffirm the preliminary trust belief and set

their trust intentions. These unfounded experiences may lead to a false perception or categorization of trust (McKnight et al., 1998).

Figure 4

Detailed Model of Initial Formation of Trust Model



Note. Adapted from “Initial Trust Formation in New Organizational Relationships,” by D. H. McKnight, L. L. Cummings, and N. L. Chervany, 1998, *Academy of Management Review*, 23(3), p. 476. (<https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1998.926622>). Copyright 1998 by the Academy of Management Review.

McKnight et al.'s (1998) trust model outlined potential paths during trust formation (Figure 4) and provided a basic understanding of an individual's categorization of trust. Employee trust exists when employees believe and willingly depend on leadership. According to McKnight et al., this combination is categorized as high trust. Trust has two components, an employee's trust beliefs and trust intentions (McKnight et al., 1998). Employees believe they can predict leadership's actions or decisions in any given situation because an employee believes that their leadership has integrity, is benevolent, and is competent to represent and look out for the employee's best interest (McKnight et al., 1998). Trust belief is constructed through the employee's disposition to trust, institution-based trust, and/or cognitive process where the employee had previous opportunities to categorize their leadership. In the McKnight et al. model, employee perception affects trust formation at various levels. To truly understand trust, all factors have to be considered, evaluated, and studied.

To understand how employee-leadership trust contributes to organizational success, researchers first understand how trust forms, the different levels and types of trust, and how these concepts influence organizational success. The construct of trust is fundamental and has been studied in various fields. Trust has been studied by sociologists, political scientists, economists, and psychologists (Lewicki et al., 1998). Economists and political scientists view trust as calculative and the underpinning foundation of economic growth and political stability (Hudson, 2004). Psychologists focus on trust attributes between individuals, and sociologists view trust as socially embedded relationships between individuals and institutions (Hudson, 2004). Although

research on the theory of trust has expanded over time, an agreement nor a general universal definition has not been conceptualized (Reiersen, 2017).

Each discipline has studied and conceptualized trust as trust best fits the study's discipline (Lyon et al., 2016; Bigley & Pearce, 1998). The extensive research and attempts to contextualize trust have led to approximately 126 definitions (Lyon et al., 2016). The variety of definitions in the theory of trust has also produced various methods for trust research. The different definitions, concepts, and themes have been widely studied, documented, applauded, and criticized. Regardless of the extensive research and contextualization, further research is needed to understand, explore and evaluate emergent trust theories and variables affecting trust and performance outcomes (Lyon et al., 2016). Although there are a variety of definitions, many researchers agreed that reliability and willingness to be vulnerable are two common, critical, key components in the multi-dimensions of trust (Siebert et al., 2015); table 2 notes some of the most relevant research to this research. In this research, willingness to be vulnerable relates to an employee's inclination and exposure to leadership, possible wrongful actions, or wrongdoing (Mitchell, 2020). Vulnerability is conceptualized as a relational or material condition that affects human life in which an individual is susceptible to suffering or being harmed (Mitchell, 2020). When trust is present in an interpersonal relationship, vulnerability embodies a promise of good care and lowers the risk of possible wrongdoing (Mitchell, 2020). In this research, reliability refers to an employee's ability to depend on their leadership and expect efficient and effective behavior (Fortino et al., 2020). When leadership is effective and efficient, employees' develop a dependency on

leadership as they feel confident, less vulnerable and can predict employees' trustworthy behavior (Fortino et al., 2020). Reliability is a belief-formation process in which an employee's perception of leadership produces trustworthiness (Frise, 2018).

Table 2

General Critical Key Components of Trust

Key component	References
Reliability	Andaleeb, 1995; Andaleeb & Ingene, 1996; Brock Smith & Barclay, 1997; Cho, 2006; Dahlstrom & Nygaard, 1995; Fang, 2008; Fathurrahim, Arifin & Musadieg, 2018; Grewal, Hardesty & Iyer, 2004; Harris & Goode, 2004; Holland, Cooper & Sheehan, 2017; Javed, Rawwas, Khandai, Shahid, & Hafiz, 2018; Milne & Boza, 1999; Moorman, Deshpandé & Zaltman, 1993; Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpandé, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Pan & Zinkhan, 2006; Rifon, Larose & Choi, 2005; Schoenbachler & Gordon, 2002; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002; Villena, Choi & Revilla, 2019; Walsh & Beatty, 2007; Yang, 2016; Zaheer, Mcevily & Perrone, 1998
Willingness to be vulnerable	Cheng, Yin, Azadegan & Kolfshoten, 2016; Humphrey, 2001; Krosgaard, Brodt, & Whitener, 2002; McElroy-Heltzel, Jordan, Futris, Barton, Landor & Sheats, 2019; Peng & Wei, 2018; Saunders, Dietz & Thornhill, 2014; Schmidt & Schreiber, 2019

Note. Adapted from “Interorganizational Trust: Definitions, Elements and Operationalization,” S. Schmidt, and D. Schreiber, 2019, *Desenvolvimento Em Questão*, 17(48), pp. 71–83. (<https://doi.org/10.21527/2237-6453.2019.48.71-83>). Copyright 2019 by Desenvolvimento Em Questão.

While various definitions and concepts are associated with trust and distrust, common related components of trust belief include competence, benevolence,

honesty/integrity, and predictability (Schmidt & Schreiber, 2019; Fang et al., 2015). These key components and commonly related concepts aligned with McKnight et al., (1998) formation of trust concept and will be referenced in this research to analyze the formation of interpersonal trust. Benevolence refers to the ability to provide support, be fair and objective (Atuahene-Gima & Li, 2002). Atuahene-Gima and Li characterized benevolence as genuine leadership that shows interest in employees' wellbeing and aims for mutual beneficial outcomes. Benevolent leadership generally inspires confidence and trust in an interpersonal employee-leadership relationship.

Competence is referenced in this research as leaders display efficiency, expert power, skillset and ability, and knowledge (Savolainen & López-Fresno, 2014; Gupta & Bhal, 2017). Engelbrecht et al. (2017) defined integrity as an honest consistency and trait displayed by leadership's values and behavior. A leader who displays integrity and honesty is categorized as an ethical leader, resulting in a trustworthy interpersonal relationship (Heine & Mahembe, 2017). Predictability is a common component of trust/distrust and refers to leaderships consistent positive or negative display behavior such that leaderships behavior can be predicted (Fang et al., 2015). Similar to McKnight et al. (1998) Initial Formation of Trust Model, Fang et al. presented a model of trust that defined benevolence, integrity, competence, and predictability as four different trust aspects and beliefs trust antecedents. These antecedents of trust/distrust are considered interpersonal aspects and are dynamic depending on the employee-leader interaction, setting, or different situations (Fang et al., 2015).

Extensive studies have led to the conceptualization of types and levels of trust. These different concepts have aided in the interpretation and understanding of trust and how trust works. Bigley & Pearce (1998) suggested that data collected can be grouped into four basic categories: trust as an individual attribute, trust as a behavior, trust as a situational feature, and trust as an institutional arrangement. Lewicki & Bunker (1995) categorized trust data into three categories depending on the discipline's perspectives: personality, sociology, and social psychology. Hosmer (1995) noted that one general agreement among scholars revolves around the need and importance of researching trust in human conduct. Commonly related concepts of trust include competence, benevolence, honesty/integrity, and predictability (see Table 3; Schmidt & Schreiber, 2019). These key components and commonly related concepts aligned with McKnight et al., (1998) concepts on the formation of trust and Rotter's (1967) concepts on interpersonal trust.

The diverse conceptualizations of trust have led to lamentation and concern of many scholars (Bigley & Pearce, 1998). Most of these conceptualizations have expanded trust theory but failed to generalize trust and further understand trust theory and interpersonal behaviors. One of the lenses utilized to view trust and human conduct is conceptualized by Rotter (1967) when he defined interpersonal trust as the reliance or expectancy of an individual or a group on another individual's word or promise and usually emerged after frequent interaction and time. Rotter conceptualized trust as a trait that is developed over time and across a variety of situations. General trust is fragile, and based on personal interactions and experiences, trust can rapidly be replaced by specific

levels of trust-based (Yamagishi et al., 2015). General trust is the foundation for different trust levels and interpersonal trust (Yamagishi et al., 2015).

Table 3*Common Related Concepts of Trust*

Related concept	References
Competence	Bart, 2005; Brock Smith & Barclay, 1997; Cho, 2006; Coulter & Coulter, 2003; Dahlstrom & Nygaard, 1995; Harris & Goode, 2004; Holland, Cooper & Sheehan, 2017; Hutchinson, 2018; Lui & Ngo, 2004; Lusch, O'brien & Sindhav, 2003; Moorman, Deshpandé & Zaltman, 1993; Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpandé, 1992; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002; Ning, Feng, Feng & Liu, 2019;
Benevolence	Andaleeb, 1995; Andaleeb & Ingene, 1996; Ashnai, Henneberg, Naudé, & Francescucci, 2016; Atuahene-Gima & Li, 2002; Cho, 2006; Harris & Goode, 2004; Holland, Cooper & Sheehan, 2017; Johnson, 2007; Kwon & Suh, 2004; Lee & Dawes, 2005; Maclachlan & Spence, 1976; Ning, Feng, Feng & Liu, 2019; Schoenbachler & Gordon, 2002; Somers, 2018; Zaheer, Mcevily & Perrone, 1998
Honesty/integrity	Andaleeb, 1995; Andaleeb & Ingene, 1996; Ashnai, Henneberg, Naudé, & Francescucci, 2016; Fang, 2008; Geyskens, 1996; Grayson, Johnson & Chen, 2008; Harris & Goode, 2004; Hutchinson, 2018; Johnson, 2007; Kwon & Suh, 2004; Lee & Dawes, 2005; Maclachlan & Spence, 1976; Milne & Boza, 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Ning, Feng, Feng & Liu, 2019; Schoenbachler & Gordon, 2002; Somers, 2018; Zaheer, Mcevily & Perrone, 1998
Predictability	Engelbrecht, Heine & Mahembe, 2017; Harris & Goode, 2004; Heyns & Rothmann, 2018); Jaiswal & Dhar, 2017; Maclachlan & Spence, 1976; Peng & Wei, 2018; Rodríguez & Wilson, 2002; Zaheer, Mcevily & Perrone, 1998

Note. Adapted from “Interorganizational Trust: Definitions, Elements and Operationalization,” S. Schmidt, and D. Schreiber, 2019, *Desenvolvimento Em Questão*, 17(48), pp. 71–83. (<https://doi.org/10.21527/2237-6453.2019.48.71-83>). Copyright 2019 by Desenvolvimento Em Questão.

Theory of Interpersonal Trust

Studies results have demonstrated that interpersonal trust is the foundation of cooperation, stability, and achievement (Rempel et al., 1985); therefore, it is important to expand the knowledge on the interpersonal trust construct. Interpersonal trust was conceptualized as an individual's trust through belief or faith in another person's goodwill (Mcknight & Norman, 2001). In an interpersonal trust setting, an employee trusts leadership and believes or has faith that leadership will make decisions that benefit employees (Gupta et al., 2016). Edin et al. (2019) explained that interpersonal trust is a primary characteristic associated with leadership. Lau and Rowlinson (2009) provided a general distinction for interpersonal trust and noted that interpersonal trust emphasizes integrity and reliability. Integrity refers to one person's quality, generalized as honesty and confidence (Lau & Rowlinson, 2009). Reliability refers to employees knowing what can be trusted, expressing confidence, and establishing leadership's credibility (Lau & Rowlinson, 2009). Similar to McKnight et al. (1998) cognitive categorization process, when interpersonal trust exists, an employee expects and may predict that leadership will behave in a manner that reflects the values and interests that both parties have in common (Kujala et al., 2016). Predicted leadership behavior outcomes are expected to benefit employees and the workplace environment. Gupta et al. noted that interpersonal trust is a fine-grained and dyadic level of trust that shapes behaviors and attitudes of the two parties involved. Rotter (1967) defined interpersonal trust as the reliance or expectancy of an individual or a group on another individual's word or promise and usually emerges after frequency interaction and time. The construct of trust generally involves trusting

humans, while interpersonal trust involves trust in a specific individual (Ogawa et al., 2019). Interpersonal trust is delicate and does not develop overnight. Interpersonal trust, like general trust, has different levels of trust that develop over time and depends on observed leadership behavior and employee perception (Hawley, 2014). Sartain et al. (1958) noted that individual perception of another person influences individual trust.

Employee Perception

Employee perception forms an important factor in the development of interpersonal trust. Perception is generally defined as a process in which individuals interpret stimuli by finding, constructing meanings, and associations of critical incidents or experiences (Sartain et al., 1958). Sartain et al. conceptualized perception as composed of outer and inner factors, stimulus, and personal factors. What an employee perceives depends on the individual and what the individual perceives. It seems impossible to separate inner and outer factors as they are interdependent (Sartain et al., 1958). An employee's interpersonal trust as a psychological state involves an employee's attitude and expectation that can develop after interaction with a leadership (Sartain et al., 1958; Hawley, 2014). Diamond et al. (2017) stated that perception is integral for the development of interpersonal trust. Perception contributes to cognitive and affective trust and the formation of a type of level of trust.

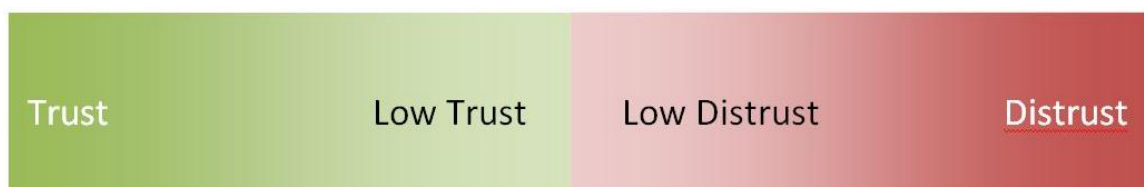
Different Levels of Trust and Distrust

Employee-leadership interaction helps form perception that influences different levels of trust in an employee-leader interpersonal relationship (Kujala et al., 2016). When analyzing trust, an assumption that trust and distrust are on opposite spectrums

cannot be made (Kujala et al., 2016) without explaining the different levels of trust. Understanding that trust is not a one-dimensional concept but rather a multidimensional construct composed of different types and levels of trust is important because it provides a deeper understanding of how employee-leadership relationships develop and work (see Figure 5; Kujala et al., 2016).

Figure 5

Trust Levels of Trust Model



Note. Adapted from “Trust and Distrust Constructing Unity and Fragmentation of Organizational Culture,” by J. Kajula, H. Lehtimäki, and R. Pučėtaitė, 2016, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 139(4), p.701-702 (<https://doi-org/10.1007/s10551-015-2915-7>).

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A general understanding must be considered when analyzing interpersonal trust: trust is composed of different types (Strohmaier et al., 2019) and levels (Kujala et al., 2016). Strohmaier et al. and Kujala et al. identified trust scales that support the difference in interpersonal trust levels. They confirmed that trust and distrust are not two simply opposite constructs but concepts composed of different levels. The different levels of interpersonal trust illustrated by Kujala et al. provided an in-depth view of the intricacies and characteristics of the different levels of trust (see Table 1). However, they did not

identify characteristics and components of interpersonal trust that influence employee behavior.

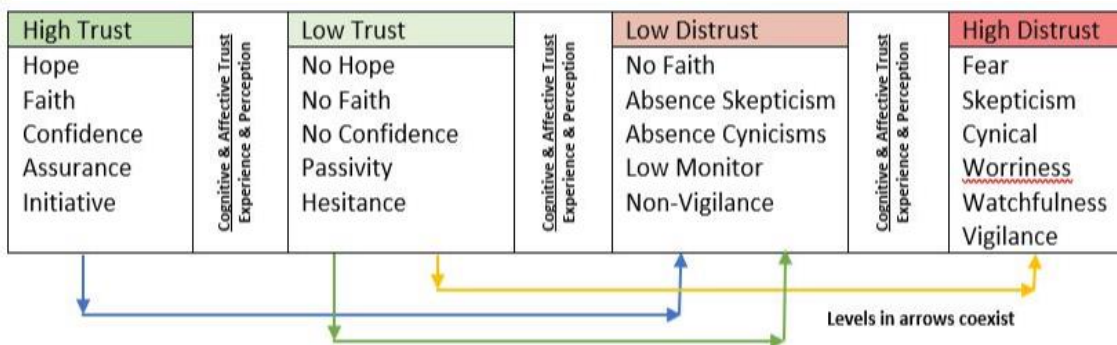
Kujala et al. (2016) explained that components of trust such as cognitive and affective trust could affect employees' perception, performance, and experiences. Employees' experiences and perceptions can lead an employee to experience different levels of trust. Another important factor to consider when analyzing trust and distrust is that the different levels of trust and distrust can coexist and influence employees' attitudes and behavior (see Figure 6). Kujala et al. identified that three levels of trust could coexist, but two levels will generally never coexist due to their characteristics. Figure 6 provides a comprehensive model based on Kujala et al.'s four levels of trust, trust and distrust characteristics, cognitive trust, affective trust, and identifies coexisting trust levels.

Kujala et al. (2016) analyzed different levels of trust and distrust. They concluded that different levels of trust and distrust, such as high trust, low trust, and low distrust, can co-exist due to employees' attitudes and experience, perception, and belief. Trust levels can lead to organizational unity and result in the fragmentation of organizational culture and success. In contrast, high interpersonal trust may reflect false unity and may not accurately represent employees' different cognitive and affective trust levels. Employees can develop groupthink in an oppressive or confrontational environment (Kujala et al., 2016). Therefore, due to the possible difference in outcomes of trust and distrust, researchers should study the different levels of trust and factors that affect employee behavior and performance. McKnight et al. (1998) described the formation of trust (shown in Figure 4). However, they did not explore different levels of trust and

distrust and how these levels can affect employee behavior and organizational success through affective and cognitive trust (Kujala et al., 2016). In an interpersonal setting, the different levels of trust between employee-leadership can create critical incidents that can affect employees' cognitive and affective trust, consequently affecting employee behavior and performance (Kujala et al., 2016). Kujala et al. added cognitive and affective trust components to their levels of trust model to clarify how the levels and trust type affect employee behavior and shape situational and structural environments (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Four Levels of Trust Model



Note. Adapted from “Trust and Distrust Constructing Unity and Fragmentation of Organizational Culture,” by J. Kajula, H. Lehtimäki, and R. Pučėtaitė, 2016, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 139(4), pp. 701-716 (<https://doi-org/10.1007/s10551-015-2915-7>).

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Cognitive and Affective Trust

Researchers such as Lewicki et al. (1998), Saunders et al. (2014), and Kujala et al. (2016) have studied and theorized that trust and distrust are separate constructs that are in

various ways linked and can co-exist. To the contrary of trust's general belief, trust is not just the opposite of distrust. In between the trust-to-distrust spectrum, other levels of trust exist, which enlighten the theory of trust and provide clarity on how trust and distrust can coexist (Table 4) (Kujala et al., 2016). The coexistence of different levels of trust and distrust demonstrates that these two constructs and their sublevels are context-dependent, interchangeable, and dynamic (Kujala et al., 2016). In an interpersonal employee-leader relationship, high trust includes hope, faith, assurance, initiative, and low trust, which generally has no hope, faith, confidence, passivity, and hesitance (see Figure 6; Kujala et al., 2016). Low distrust denotes no faith, the absence of skepticism, the absence of cynicism, low monitoring, and non-vigilance. In contrast, high distrust denotes fear, skepticism, cynicism, wariness, watchfulness, and vigilance (see Figure 6) (Kujala et al., 2016).

According to Kujala et al. (2016), high trust and low distrust, low trust and low distrust and low trust and high distrust can coexist. These different levels of trust and distrust can coexist due to an individual's ability to simultaneously experience cognitive and affective trust. An employee can trust their leadership in one matter due to cognitive experiences and observations but distrust the same leadership regarding other matters due to affective distrust. As an example, coexisting levels of trust are evident when employees expect leadership to act with fairness and make decisions that will benefit employees during the decision-making process but may distrust leadership capacity and behavior to be punctual to staff meetings. One consistent component observed when trust and distrust levels coexist was that both constructs were influenced by cognitive and

affective trust/distrust. Affective trust/distrust materializes from lived experiences, perceptions, and observations (Kujala et al., 2016).

Kujala et al. (2016) combined the level of trust with characteristics of cognitive (C) and affective (A) trust (T) and distrust (D) to expand the understanding of the different levels of trust (see Table 4). Kujala et al. overlapped Tables 1 and Figure 6 and provided a perspective on cognitive and affective trust/distrusts and the influence on the four levels of trust and distrust. While Table 1 explains the relationships between high and low trust and distrusts, Table 4 illustrates the characteristics found in two trust types and four levels of trust combination.

Table 4

Relationships Between Cognitive and Affective Trust Component

Variable	Cognitive distrust (CD)	Affective distrust (AD)
Affective trust (AT)	Sincerity, confidence, and reliance	Vigilance, watchfulness, and fear
Cognitive trust (CT)	Hesitance, passivity, and limited confidence	Skepticism and cynicism

Note. Adapted from “Trust and Distrust Constructing Unity and Fragmentation of Organizational Culture,” by J. Kajula, H. Lehtimäki, and R. Pučėtaitė, 2016, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 139(4), p. 704 (<https://doi-org/10.1007/s10551-015-2915-7>). Copyright 2016 by the Journal of Business Ethics

Affective and cognitive trust must be clearly defined to understand the possible settings or scenarios in which these concepts are present. Kujala et al. (2016) noted that emotion, feelings, and perceptions drive affective trust. Each individual's affective perception or interpretation of trust is unique given the intuition, setting, situation, emotions, and fears (Punyatoya, 2019; Kujala et al., 2016). Cognitive trust is driven by an employee's firsthand experience and leader observation; cognitive trust expands and builds with interactions and time (Punyatoya, 2019; Kujala et al., 2016).

Kujala et al., 2016 described an employee experiencing affective trust (AT) and cognitive distrust (CD). In this state, the relationship characteristics are sincerity, confidence, and reliance because the employee's perception of the leader is positive. There is minimum experience, direct contact, or factual data to imply that the leader is unreliable, incapable, or untrustworthy. In a high trust - low distrust, AT/CD, the overall relationship is positive and productive. An example of this relationship can generally be found in an environment where a new leader is assigned to the office, and the leader's reputation is positive and ethical. A positive perception of a leader may lead employees to be hopeful and have confidence in their new leader even though they have not had firsthand experience (Kujala et al., 2016). Unless the new leader displays untrustworthy behavior, the state will remain in this quadrant.

In the cognitive trust (CT) and cognitive distrust (CD) quadrant relationship, Kujala et al. (2016) found hesitance, passivity, and limited confidence because the employee's experienced and direct contact with leadership results in a neutral and benign relationship. An employee's experience with leadership is not one of full trust but not one

of full distrust either. There is a level of trust and distrust that influences employees' limited confidence in leadership. An example of this can generally be found in an environment where a relatively new leader has been with the office for a few weeks or months; during this period, this leader displays positive and negative traits. At this junction, the employee was unable to trust or fully distrust his/her leader. Leadership positive behavior is crucial for the development of high trust (Kujala et al., 2016).

In the cognitive trust (CT) and affective distrust (AD) quadrant, Kujala et al. (2016) identified relationship characteristics of skepticism and cynicism because employees experienced and direct contact with leaders has led the employee to form an untrustworthy perception of leadership. As a result of employees' experiences and interactions, perceptions are formed that resulted incautious and suspicious relationships. An example of this can generally be found in an environment where a leader's behavior is perceived as bad behavior, unreliable, and/or incompetent. Consequently, employees distrust their leaders and develop cautious and suspicious relationships (Kujala et al., 2016).

In an affective trust (AT) and affective distrust (AD) quadrant, the relationship characteristics are vigilance, watchfulness, and fear. Employees' perceptions, intuition, and emotions toward leaders led employees to form an untrustworthy perception of leadership. The result of employees' belief that leadership is untrustworthy is a conflicting and ambivalent relationship. An example of these types of relationships can generally be found in environments where a new leader's negative reputation precedes him or her, which can lead employees' intuition and perception to believe that this leader

is unethical, incompetent, and unreliable (Kujala et al., 2016). Unless this new leader displays trustworthy behavior, the state will remain the same in this quadrant. Kujala et al. and McKnight et al. (1998) presented valuable models which demonstrated that trust and distrust are more than opposite constructs. Trust and distrust are two concepts that can be dynamic. Depending on trust and distrust components and environment settings can lead to the coexistence of different levels of trust and distrust. Celestina (2018) cautioned that although different levels of trust can co-exist, trust builds incrementally with time and interaction. Nevertheless, distrust is a catastrophic quality that develops quicker, and it is harder to transition from a level of distrust to trust once distrust exists.

Elements of Low Interpersonal Trust and Distrust

As stated by Celestina (2018), Kujala et al. (2016), and McKnight et al. (1998), low trust and distrust levels can coexist and can influence employees' behaviors and performance. Cognitive and affective trust components helped in building these employee-leadership relationships (Kujala et al., 2016). An analysis of low trust and distrust formation is warranted to understand the coexistence and interactions of the different levels of trust and distrust. In this research, I focused on low interpersonal trust and distrust, as these levels were highlighted in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, 2011-2019, in which federal agencies were successful in their mission despite the low employee-leader interpersonal trust.

Kujala et al. (2016) presented affective and cognitive trust as valuable components in developing different trust levels. Kujala et al. explained that experiences of low trust and distrust could be categorized as an alternative relational situation

composed of employees' emotions and expectations of leadership behavior. These alternative relational situations may change at any given time for any number of reasons to include but not limited to benevolence, competence, honesty, and predictability (Kujala et al.). Employees may experience alternative relational situations based on leadership's unkind behavior – benevolence, inability to perform the job – incompetence, violation of norms - honesty, constant mood and attitude change – unpredictable. Additionally, individual life experiences, mental state, familiarity with the societal context, vague social values, and organizational culture can also influence employees' categorization of high trust, low trust, low distrust, and high distrust (Kujala et al., 2016). Interpersonal trust and distrust are essential components of relationships and are considered the foundation of healthy societies (Hill & O'Hara, 2006). Trust and distrust significantly affect an employee's thought pattern and, consequently, employee behavior as they choose whom to trust, distrust and how closely employees monitor leadership.

According to Hill and O'Hara (2006) and Schul et al. (2008), distrust can be a mental state that can trigger a warning signal alerting employees that something is not normal. Generally, when an employee senses this trigger, an employee's defense mechanism is activated, and the employee's guard goes up in anticipation of the potential negative occurrence (Schul et al., 2008). Knowles and Hanson (2018) stated that distrust is an instinct or a rationalization that manifests itself when uncertainty or a given amount of tension is present and when present is rarely welcomed (Hawley, 2014). Hawley stated that a deeper analysis of distrust is needed as there is a high misconception that distrust is the mere absence of trust and reliance, and this is not the case. Hawley provided an

example that simplifies his conceptualization of distrust; Hawley (2014) explains that our reliability on something or someone does not mean that we trust or distrust that something or someone. An employee can rely on a shelf to support his/her books, but this reliability does not denote if an employee will trust or distrust the shelf. In an Interpersonal setting, an employee can rely on a leader to post employees' weekly work schedule; however, this reliability does not denote that the employee trust or distrust this leader. In a different example, if this leader fails to post employees' weekly schedules, his/her employees may categorize this leader as unreliable. This categorization does not mean that employees categorize this leader as untrustworthy. When analyzing interpersonal trust and distrust, reliability alone does not categorize trust or distrust or trustworthy or untrustworthy leadership (Hawley, 2014).

Interpersonal trust is the positive expectation of good things we hoped for, while interpersonal distrust is related to the positive expectation that the things we fear will come to fruition (Hill & O'Hara, 2006). Employees' interpersonal trust/distrust and the various types of trust/distrust in leadership can be personal or professional and involve trusting another person's behaviors, intentions, attributes, and beliefs (McKnight & Norman, 2001). In an employee-leader interpersonal trust setting, an employee's cognitive and affective trust can lead to the perception that leadership is trustworthy when related to work matters but may also be untrustworthy in a personal setting. An example of this can be an employee who trusts leadership to complete a fair performance assessment but does not trust leadership enough to talk about employees' personal lives.

Situations and structures may influence one person's trust/distrust level (McKnight & Norman, 2001). Situations can lead to different individual experiences that deeply impact a person and consequently become a critical incident that provokes reactional behavior (Viergever, 2019). In this research, I used the critical incident technique to explore experiences that deeply impacted employees. Structures can be viewed as institutions, policies, or governmental processes that act as protective structures for employees and leadership (McKnight & Norman, 2001). McKnight and Norman explained that trust in structures such as institution-based trust involves installing protective element structures to give employees a feeling of security and believe that favorable conditions may lead to situational success and goal achievements.

When interpersonal trust exists, the employee believes that leadership is capable, benevolent, and possesses integrity (Strohmaier et al., 2019). Interpersonal trust is critical for effectiveness, work productivity, and success as trust is associated with action, while interpersonal distrust is associated with discourse (Wond, 2017). Interpersonal distrust is the unwillingness of one person to be vulnerable to another (Simon & Cagle, 2017). In this research, Interpersonal distrust is defined as an employee's unwillingness to be vulnerable to leadership. Interpersonal trust is associated with positive implications; however, Wang et al. (2016) concluded that low trust or distrust in leadership could aid decision-making by using cognitive and affective forms of distrust. Gago-Rodríguez and Naranjo-Gil, (2016) added to the conceptualization of distrust by explaining that distrust may lower observed slack, increases awareness, and develops strategic thought patterns as employees define distrust as the belief that leadership is dishonest and harmful. The

perceived existence of eminent harm and observed leadership dishonesty may lead to a defensive barrier in which employees set mitigations to protect themselves from untrustworthy leadership behavior (Gago-Rodríguez & Naranjo-Gil, 2016). Gago-Rodríguez and Naranjo-Gil analyzed low trust and low distrust and concluded that while these levels shared similarities, low trust is more positive than low distrust.

Positive Consequences of Low Trust and Distrust

Donovan (2019), Gago-Rodríguez and Naranjo-Gil (2016), and Lewicki et al. (1998) identified distrust as an effect of observed behavior or perception – cognitive and affective trust. Asencio (2016) and Donovan explained that distrust reinforces managers' need to manage employees, reinforces the need for employees to self-manage, and provides the reasoning behind the need to self-manage. When distrust exists, employees may perceive leaderships lack one or all four of the commonly related concepts of trust/distrust (Kujala et al., 2016). If interpersonal trust is low, it leads to distrust rather than trust (Vallentin & Thygesen, 2017). Distrust can lead to structural and administrative changes such as the implementation of government policy; these controls in place may lead to better management of organizations and employees (Vallentin & Thygesen, 2017). Employees may benefit from employee-leadership distrust as implementing controls in the workplace can provide clarity, a sense of fairness, and structure. Generally, controls in place reduce complications and regulate the number of possible outcomes. Regulations out of an employee-leader distrust relationship are generally risk-averse, safe, and do not tolerate deviance (Vallentin & Thygesen, 2017; Lewicki et al., 2016a).

Strohmaier et al. (2019) explained that distrust of individuals' behavior could have a better effect than trust depending on the situation, setting, and specific context. Strohmaier et al. noted that distrust could lead to better predictability of behavior. The fear in distrust fosters individual risk perception and management, leading to the employee's decision to protect themselves from potential negative outcomes; this protective behavior can maximize positive outcomes (Strohmaier et al., 2019). Distrust increases uncertainty; consequently, employees become watchful and vigilant, which can lead to the preparation of negative impacts or behaviors (Strohmaier et al., 2019). This preparation for the unknown can minimize negative impact, and therefore contribute to positive outcomes.

Simon and Cagle (2017) suggested that distrust provides stronger motivations and behaviors because employees base their decision-making process on two factors, level of risk and outcomes to avoid. Employees engage in protective actions and calculative decisions to reduce risk, leading to protective, proactive, and planned behavior to ensure wellness and satisfactory production (Simon & Cagle, 2017). Distrust may lead to employees' careful and cautionary analysis before and after taking action and may lead to uncertainty reduction, leading to employee agreement, understanding, and positive performance (Simon & Cagle, 2017).

Saunders et al. (2014) noted that although different levels of trust-distrust exist, these levels of trust can be grouped based on common experiences. Caniëls and Hatak (2019) explained that employee resilience could emerge when employee-leadership interpersonal trust and leadership support exist. However, employee resilience can also

be seen in certain occasions where distrust exists. Although not clear on what consistently influences resilient employee behavior when in an untrustworthy relationship, Caniëls and Hatak (2019) noted that a general understanding of trust/distrust is first needed to further understand the phenomenon of positive employee behavior. Saunders et al. (2014) researched trust and distrust levels and categorized these experiences as prototypical relationships. These relationships are defined as interpersonal trust-distrust levels and environments where employees can experience one of the four prototypical relationships.

In Low Trust/Low Distrust relationships, employees' position is casual indifference regarding trust/distrust judgments, and employees keep leaders at an arms-length. Employees are neither willing nor reluctant to become vulnerable to their leaders because leaders perceive that leadership has not provided reasons to expect favorable or unfavorable treatment (Saunders et al., 2014). Research results demonstrate that Low Trust/Low Distrust relationships eventually shift to a more definite category after the parties involved interact with one another and cognitive knowledge increases (Saunders et al., 2014). In a Low Trust/Low Distrust interpersonal relationship, employees' perceptions lead to the expectation of unfavorable treatment from leadership when there is little evidence suggesting a positive outcome (Saunders et al., 2014). In this environment, employees are unwilling to become vulnerable, and leadership interdependence is not impossible but extremely difficult (Saunders et al., 2014). This type of environment is used as an incentive for employee independence, self-guidance, and self-management (Godart et al., 2017). Simon and Cagle (2017) and Caniëls and

Hatak (2019) mentioned that employees' uncertainty in this environment could lead them to be motivated and resilient.

When High Trust/Low Distrust coexists, the considerable level of trust influences employees to expect favorable treatment from leadership with very few reasons to suspect unfavorable treatment (Saunders et al., 2014). Here, employees' perceptions were influenced by both positive and negative experiences (Sanders & Thornhill). In this type of environment, employees generally expect favorable treatment and are willing to trust but may expect unfavorable treatment in certain situations – leading to a reluctance to trust leadership (Sanders & Thornhill). In these types of environments, employees can behave in a productive and resilient fashion depending on employees' level of self-guidance and self-management (Godart et al., 2017).

In this first section of the literature review, I discussed the research discipline, controversies, and other researchers' approaches to the concept of trust and distrust. Also, I reviewed the inherent approaches used to expand the knowledge of trust and distrust and what factors affect these theories. In the next section of the literature review, I reviewed specific research that addressed the specific phenomenon of positive performance outcomes despite poor trust in leadership as a means to justify the rationale for selecting this phenomenon and methodology.

Gap in Literature and Assumption of Importance

Asencio (2016) investigated whether government employees' trust in leaders influenced transactional and transformational leadership behaviors and organizational performance. Asencio's findings suggested that leadership behavior and employees'

trust/distrust in leadership positively affect organizational performance. Employee trust and distrust in leadership were found to mediate employee-leader relationships and organization positive performance. Asencio's research utilized the 2010 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey as a source of data to answer the research questions. Asencio noted that additional research is needed to expand the knowledge of trust/distrust on employees' performance behavior in government environments. Asencio (2016) explained that the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey does not measure interactions between employees and leadership and urged future researchers to investigate what influences employee-leadership performance behavior related to trust/distrust in a federal government setting. I utilized the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey as a source of information to identify employees' lack of trust towards leadership. Even with a lack of trust, employees can positively perform and contribute to organizational mission success.

Asencio (2016) noted that employees' trust and performance are affected by leadership behavior, and this behavior impacts organizational success. Asencio acknowledged this phenomenon, where employees' behaviors result in positive performance even when the employee-leadership relationship is not ideal due to trust/distrust. The positive effects of distrust can, generally, lead to employees developing mechanisms to protect themselves from leadership perceived as untrustworthy (Asencio, 2016). As a protection mechanism, employees document their positive performance to ensure fair assessment and note their positive contribution to organizational success and mission accomplishment (Asencio, 2016). Asencio identified the phenomenon studied in this research and noted that additional research should be conducted to investigate this

phenomenon in a public sector/government setting utilizing an approach other than quantitative. Government sectors must focus on future research because these have environmental settings and constraints unique to the government.

Asencio (2016), Lewicki et al. (2016b), Schmidt and Schreiber (2019) noted that further research utilizing a qualitative approach on the topic of employee-leadership interpersonal trust and positive performance is needed. A qualitative approach such as a holistic single case study can provide a deeper understanding of employees' positive behavior and performance when experiencing low trust/distrust in their leadership within a government organization. Asencio, Lewicki et al., Schmidt and Schreiber, also mentioned that further research in this phenomenon might benefit government leadership as this type of leadership should continue to develop their skills and build trust. In this research, I explored what factors influenced government employees to perform positively in an environment of distrust. I addressed the gaps in the literature mentioned by Asencio, Lewicki et al., Schmidt and Schreiber by utilizing a qualitative case study to explore and understand the factors that influence federal government employees' positive performance despite low interpersonal trust.

Qualitative Versus Quantitative

Since 2011, the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey has highlighted that employees from some federal agencies do not trust in their leadership (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2013-2018). Although the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey is a tool that can be used to highlight issues and provide feedback for leadership (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2013-2018), the survey fails

to indicate in-depth employee experiences, which are important to understand trust (Asencio, 2016). Structure questions or surveys are insufficient to explore individual motives or influencers to perform positively despite low interpersonal employee leadership trust. Delmas and Pekovic (2018) explained that researchers tend to isolate research by utilizing quantitative methods, while qualitative approaches tend to explore phenomenon from a holistic perspective. Delmas and Pekovic mentioned that qualitative methodology considers different characteristics, environmental practices, and individual employee perspectives that can vary depending on the subject, experiences, and backgrounds. Asencio (2016), Lewicki et al. (2016b), Schmidt and Schreiber (2019) mentioned that researchers tend to approach the theory of trust and distrust from a quantitative approach. This approach lacks empirical evidence that explores cognitive and affective experiences. Neither quantitative nor mixed-method research methodologies are appropriate because these approaches focus on gathering information via surveys and analyzing information via quantification methods (Lewicki et al., 2016b; Schmidt & Schreiber, 2019). Qualitative approaches focus on in-depth interviews and explore individual experiences and perceptions to understand better the phenomenon being studied (Schmidt & Schreiber, 2019). Creswell and Poth (2017) explained that the qualitative research approach is designed to explore specific situations, such as human issues, and allows researchers to build complex holistic pictures from written or oral data analysis. In this research, participant interviews served as the first data collection tool. Open-ended questions were utilized to collect employees' cognitive and affective

experiences to obtain an in-depth perspective on what influences or motivates employees to perform positively when experiencing low employee-leader interpersonal trust.

Holistic Single-Case Study

A holistic single-case study was selected for this research because it complements a qualitative approach and produces the information needed to understand how distrust can produce positive performance in a government setting. In general, a *holistic case study* approach involves collecting cognitive and affective experiences to obtain an in-depth perspective (Yin, 2015) on what influences or motivates participants. Massaro et al. (2019) noted that case study research could review critical realistic perspectives when paired with a complimentary ontology. Yin also noted that a qualitative, holistic case study approach generally encourages participants to share personal life experiences, which can be critical and life-changing depending on the impact of the experience (Heyler et al., 2016).

I selected a holistic *single-case* study approach because this method involves studying a life event that is bounded by time or place (see Yin, 2015). A holistic single-case study is designed to understand the phenomenon and address the gap in research as the holistic single-case study approach identifies and reports the factors involved in the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The holistic single-case approach allows for a single targeted topic of analysis, which can help understand multiple perspectives on a single phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Baxter and Jack noted that a holistic single case study is appropriate when the phenomenon under study deviates from the typical theoretical norm and is considered an unusual case – one of the five primary distinctions

of a holistic single-case design.

Critical Incident Technique

John Flanagan introduced the critical incident technique in 1954. It was originally developed during World War II to identify effective and ineffective behavior within the aviation psychology program of the United States Army Air Forces (FitzGerald et al., 2008; Flanagan, 1954). The critical incident technique is a well-established tool used in many fields of study and is specifically complementary to qualitative research (FitzGerald et al., 2008). The purpose of the critical incident technique and qualitative research is to understand and represent the experiences and actions of participants' life situations and encounters (FitzGerald et al., 2008). Qualitative methods and the critical incident technique are useful when there is no or little-known information regarding the phenomenon (Morgan et al., 2013). Morgan et al. explained that a qualitative study's purpose is to provide data to explore question(s) that may lead to the formation or contribution to the studied phenomenon, which aligns with the critical incident technique purpose (FitzGerald et al., 2008). The critical incident technique was the first truly systematic effort developed to gather and analyze specific incidents regarding lived experiences which lead to effective or ineffective behavior in a designated activity (FitzGerald et al., 2008; Flanagan, 1954; Wotruba, 2016). Wotruba mentioned that the critical incident technique is also complementary to case study research as a case study is a flexible methodology. Case study research designs are not limited to a specific data collection or analysis method and can accommodate various research designs and data

analysis methods; therefore, the critical incident technique is appropriate for this research (Wotruba, 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

Although there are numerous studies on employee behavior and employee-leadership trust, researchers such as Asencio (2016); Lewicki et al. (2016b); Schmidt and Schreiber (2019); Kujala et al. (2016) have identified a gap in the literature and urge a closer look at the phenomenon identified in this research. Exploring and understanding the factors that influence positive performance outcomes from an employee perspective can contribute to the current trust theory and lead to future social change. This study can be an important contribution to fill the gap identified in the problem statement and advance management theory and practice.

The current theory on trust has defaulted to treating distrust as an opposite measure of trust but has failed to explore any benefits resulting from distrust. Researchers such as Punyatoya (2019) and Kujala et al. (2016) identified that trust is a multidimensional concept that can coexist with trust and influence employees differently depending on experiences, setting, and backgrounds. In addition, Asencio (2016) mentioned that government agencies have unique settings that make these agencies important to explore, as the norm that applies for commercial settings might not be the norm in a federal government setting.

I used a qualitative approach to explore the gap in the literature regarding distrust and positive outcomes in a federal government setting. As presented in the literature review, a qualitative approach is appropriate to explore the factors influencing an

employee to perform positively despite a low interpersonal trust in leadership. A qualitative approach collects information through semistructured interviews with an exploratory aim (Babbie, 2017; Baxter & Jack, 2008). It also bounds the life event by time or place (Yin, 2015). Chapter 3 contains detailed information on the process for the research methodology, design, rationale, pilot/field study, and data collection method

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, holistic, single-case study was to explore the factors that contribute to the federal government's organizational success despite employees' low interpersonal trust in the agency's leadership. In addition, the case study addressed this phenomenon's gap in the literature identified by various researchers, such as Asencio (2016), Kujala et al. (2016), Punyatoya (2019), and Schmidt and Schreiber (2019). I used semistructured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to explore employees' experiences and understand how these employees can maintain positive performance outcomes while experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. The data gathered from employee interviews were collected and analyzed using Flanagan's 1954 critical incident technique. In this chapter, I present and explain the rationale, design, methodology, pilot/field study, and trustworthiness issues. The results of this qualitative study addressed the gap in management literature, which had generally focused on quantitative studies (see Kujala et al., 2016; Punyatoya, 2019) and positive outcomes of trust versus positive outcomes of distrust.

Research Design and Rationale

Scholars and researchers use research questions to define the scope of the problem under examination and drive the study's conceptual framework. In this chapter, I explain the methodology developed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: From an employee's perspective and experience, what factors influence an employee's positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership?

SQ1: How does distrust or low trust in leadership affect employees' overall performance?

I selected a qualitative, exploratory, holistic, single case study focused on exploring and understanding the phenomenon to answer the research questions. Furthermore, the research questions were qualitative and identified factors that influence employees' positive performance. This approach enhanced my understanding of employees' low interpersonal trust in leadership and subsequent decision to perform positively. Studies on trust have recommended that qualitative research be used in future research to capture perspectives and experiences from the view of the employee otherwise not available, thorough surveys (Asencio, 2016; Kujala et al. 2016, Punyatoya, 2019). Researchers have explained that an entirely quantitative approach is not ideal because it collects data to test a hypothesis and statistically analyze it to determine if it is correct (Raheim et al., 2016). Quantitative surveys do not allow for in-depth, open-ended semistructured interviews. A mixed-method approach could complement the existing body of knowledge, but Carey et al. (2019) mentioned that the mixed method approach is generally used when the studies' goal is to develop complex interventions, such as psychological therapies or reconciling incompatible epistemologies call for qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Therefore, a mixed method approach was not appropriate for this study on trust and distrust and how they influence an employee's positive performance when experiencing low interpersonal trust (see Stephens et al., 2019). Because I focused on understanding the employee's viewpoint, I performed a holistic study that used inductive reasoning (see Stephens et al., 2019).

A qualitative case study approach is generally used to capture holistic, real-world, in-depth perspectives regarding the studied phenomenon (Yin, 2015). A qualitative case study was the best approach for this research because it allowed me to use semistructured interviews to explore and understand employees' personally lived experiences related to the phenomenon. Baxter and Jack (2008) supported a qualitative case study methodology to study a complex phenomenon. Baxter and Jack, and Yin (2008) mentioned that a case study approach should be used when researchers answer how and why questions. Based on Baxter and Jack and Yin's analysis, a case study was the appropriate approach to understand how and why distrust in a federal work environment still produces positive employee performance outcomes.

Role of the Researcher

All researchers need to understand and define their role in conducting their research (Sigurdardottir & Puroila, 2020). Understanding, defining, and identifying potential issues or conflicts of interest can prevent biases and maintain the integrity of the research (Karagiozis, 2018). Researchers are important because they are the individuals who conduct the studies (Hernández-Hernández & Sancho-Gil, 2015; Saxena, 2017). Researchers themselves are tools for obtaining information from research participants (Hernández-Hernández & Sancho-Gil, 2015; Saxena, 2017). Researchers are charged with a vital responsibility to ensure the integrity of the research. Sigurdardottir and Puroila (2020) noted that researchers are expected to be confident and have honesty and respect for others and themselves. For case studies, in particular, good communication skills, sensitivity, patience, openness, creativity, and responsiveness are skills that a

researcher will need to explore and understand participant perspectives (Sigurdardottir & Puroila, 2020; Karagiozis, 2018). These skills are important in forming relationships that allow the researcher to access settings and participants' intimate experiences (Sigurdardottir & Puroila, 2020). The researcher must maintain a level of sensitivity towards the participants as this may affect the depth and quality of the interview and the research data participants might be willing to provide (Sigurdardottir & Puroila, 2020).

My role as the researcher included enlisting participants, conducting interviews, and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data collected during the interviews. In addition, I created a data collection protocol coding process for analyzing data and adhering to ethical standards that protect the integrity and study participants. At the beginning of the dissertation process, I was an employee of the federal agency mentioned in this research, from which participants were previously or currently employed. I did not have a leadership role in the organization, nor was I a supervisor to any participant in this case study. Although I was an employee of this federal agency for years, I did not develop personal relationships with other employees. Therefore, I did not have personal or professional conflicts of interest. In order to manage possible perceived biases and preserve the integrity of this study, I transferred out of the federal agency before beginning interviews.

As a researcher, my role consisted of conducting investigative work to understand and identify what factors influence federal government employees' positive performance despite low interpersonal trust. As a researcher, I conducted semistructured interviews and asked open-ended questions. Interviews were the main data source for this research;

therefore, I interacted and listened to the participants personally to generate confidence. I connected with participants by providing private virtual sessions where participants openly and confidentially talked about their experiences. Due to the pandemic environment during the interviews, I conducted all interviews virtually. I explained to all participants the possible benefits of the research and how the individual's experience contributes to understanding the phenomenon under study. My role shifted from a developer to an investigator and finally to the analyst that reviewed and clearly articulated the study results. Minott (2020) noted that reflective journals are beneficial to control personal bias and review developed beliefs and attitudes. To prevent the formation of personal bias, I maintained a reflective journal to raise self-awareness and capture possible personal experiences.

Methodology

An employee's perspective was required to explore and understand the factors that contribute to the federal government's organizational success despite employees' low interpersonal trust in an agency's leadership. Examining the phenomenon from an employee's perspective was necessary to address the current gap in the literature identified by Asencio (2016), Lewicki et al. (2016b), and Schmidt and Schreiber (2019). Asencio noted that minimal data exist that obtain information directly from the employee's perspective that recounts critical events and experiences that influence positive performance despite low interpersonal trust in leadership.

To address the gap in literature identified by Asencio (2016), Lewicki et al. (2016b), and Schmidt and Schreiber (2019), I used an exploratory, holistic, single-case

study method. The exploratory process allowed me to analyze the participants' perception of how and why employees performed positively when leadership trust was low or not existent. The holistic approach permitted me to understand and put into context factors that caused federal employees to perform positively in a low trust environment. I used a single-case study following Yin's (2015) and Baxter and Jack's (2008) recommendations. Yin and Baxter, and Jack recommended that a single-case study is preferred when generally exploring one phenomenon. In contrast, a multiple-case study is recommended when researching the similarities and differences between a number of cases. I collected and reviewed data using the critical incident technique to ensure the successful and appropriate execution of the qualitative analysis process in this single-case study approach. Pairing the critical incident technique methodology with a holistic single-case study permitted a review of the positive performance phenomenon through the perspective and experiences of the employee in an environment of distrust (see Butterfield et al., 2009).

I implemented the critical incident technique using the five steps outlined in Flanagan's (1954) seminal work on this technique. Each step was important for the success of my approach. In Step 1, I identified the general goals and aims of the study. I designed and identified the research questions necessary to understand the phenomenon and address the gap in literature. Because Flanagan emphasized that the research questions and selected study methodology must be established before conducting any research, my research questions were reviewed and approved before I began participant selection or interviews. In the planning stage (Step 2 in Flanagan's model), I identified

participants, the events to be collected, and the role of the observer in the data collection and analysis process. Next, I conducted participants interviews in a one-on-one setting. I then analyzed the data collected, selected a frame to reference, determined how the data were to be used, and established incident categories to identify trends and subtrends (see FitzGerald et al., 2008; Flanagan, 1954). The data were placed in defined categories that were coded and later interpreted in Step 5. In addition to categorizing and interpreting the data, I recorded the results and summarized experiences, processes, and any personal bias within the first four steps. Last, I provided a transparent report and conclusion.

Participant Selection Logic

Moser and Korstjens (2018) and Devers and Frankel (2000) defined the participation selection design and sampling development as a rough sketch requiring additional researcher definition as the study evolves. Moser and Korstjens noted that researchers should focus on the research questions when developing the participant selection design. Before developing the participant selection logic, studies are generally written drafts that have not been linked to a specific individual or group. The participant selection logic provides organization and alignment and defines the sample population, recruitment process, and social or physical settings. This organization, alignment, and definition of the participant selection logic provides an understanding and considers unique characteristics of the phenomenon and the research participants.

The researcher's responsibility is to design a sampling or participant frame that identifies criteria for selecting a site, participants, and other resources capable of answering the research question (Devers & Frankel, 2000; Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Moser and Korstjens (2018) noted that sampling/participant frames identify and define participants and their sample population. According to Yin (2015), all participants and study samples are chosen deliberately and purposely when conducting qualitative research. The sampling population for this study was composed of federal government employees who have been employed or are currently employed in a federal agency located in Alexandria, Virginia. Current and previous employees' were recruited by first using professional networks and any personal contact information that was previously provided directly to me. If additional participants were needed, snowballing sampling was used.

Since 2011, the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results have identified that employees within the Office of the Secretary of Defense had low trust in leadership but continued to be effective agencies (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2013, 2015, 2018). Despite the low interpersonal trust, a federal agency has achieved success and effectiveness in its mission (Agency Executive, 2019). The specific problem of this research is that this agency has not followed the typical theory of trust in which low trust is associated with only negative outcomes. The reasons why there are positive outcomes in this agency were not apparent and merited further research. I sought to identify factors that influence an employee's positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership to understand how leadership distrust/low trust affected an employee's performance. These questions involve identifying factors that influence employees' positive performance outcomes despite

experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership and understanding how leadership distrust/low trust affects employees' performance.

To address the research questions, each participant had to meet four criteria to participate in this research. The first criterion required participants to be past or present federal employees of the specific federal agency. The second criterion required participants to have a minimum of at least 6 months of continuous employment with the specific federal agency. The third criterion for inclusion required participants to confirm that they received performance appraisal rating(s) between 3 and 5, which are considered satisfactory employee performances (Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service, 2016). The fourth criterion required participants to confirm that they had experienced employee-leader low interpersonal trust while employed in a federal agency. The specific federal agency was identified as the sample/participant selection logic setting. The purpose of selecting federal employees was to ensure that the data extracted were relevant to the phenomenon noted to exist in the federal government. The deliberate selection of participants for this research was crucial to ensure that only the specific federal agency's employee perspective was collected and analyzed.

Following the dissertation minimum participation requirement for a qualitative approach, I interviewed 20 participants until data saturation was met. For this research, I followed Flanagan's (1954) suggestion to use a range of 50 to 100 critical incidents (positive performance in a low trust environment) to analyze the phenomenon rather than setting the number of participants. Each participant provided three or more critical incidents that influenced them to perform positively when experiencing low interpersonal

trust in leadership, thus ensuring a minimum of 60 critical incidents were included in this study.

Participants who meet the first criterion, which required participants to be a past or present federal employee of the specific federal agency, were contacted via email requesting their participation in this research (Recruitment Invitation, Email 1, see Appendix A). To save time, the email inviting current or former employees of a federal agency to participate in this research listed the criteria needed to be an eligible participant. Each participant was asked to confirm the three specific questions listed in the Recruitment Invitation during the semistructured interviews (see Appendix A). Confirmation of the three specific questions was done to verify participants' eligibility. Upon verifying participant's eligibility, all participants reviewed and responded to the email with the response "I consent" after participants read the Informed Consent Agreement before participating in this research. The Informed Consent Agreement was emailed in the Recruitment Follow-Up, Email 2 (see Appendix A). The recruitment follow-up, Email 2, asked participants to contact me, the researcher, with available dates to schedule an interview. At the beginning of each interview, prospective participants were asked to answer three specific questions listed in the Recruitment Invitation to revalidate their participation (see Appendix A).

Instrumentation

When composing a case study, a researcher should ensure that the research aligns with all research chapters (Hoadley, 2004). Researchers should use research tools to increase validity, credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Hoadley, 2004). It is also

imperative that alignment is found throughout data collection instrumentation, data sourcing, and research methodology and design (Hoadley, 2004). Empirical methods and research design often face challenges for rigor, consistency, understanding, and application of validity (Hoadley, 2004). Researchers manage these challenges via research instrumentation and methodology, design, inquiry methods, data collection, and analysis (Hoadley, 2004).

Devers and Frankel (2000) explained that a researcher must understand how to collect data and proceed once the data is collected. Researchers should also focus on selecting a type of instrumentation that will complement the methodology selected for the research (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Devers and Frankel noted that open-ended interviews complement exploratory case studies because open-ended interviews are flexible and can use very detailed, broad, or semistructured interview protocols. Instrumentation generally includes a topic summary guide with eight to 12 questions (Devers & Frankel, 2000). These questions are generally broad, open-ended and allow the researcher to probe and trigger participants to share information that can potentially answer the research question (Devers & Frankel, 2000).

I utilized audio recording, interview notes, and observation sheets as data collection instruments in this research. I developed an interview protocol that included an interview script and in-depth interview questions, which included interview preparation, wrap-up, and a list of nine interview questions (see Appendix B). The nine interview questions confirmed participant eligibility, identified low or no interpersonal trust in

leadership, and explored employees' positive performance while experiencing low or no interpersonal trust in leadership.

In a qualitative study, the researcher generally seeks to understand a phenomenon (Bearman, 2019). Semistructured interviews are commonly used as data collection instruments in qualitative studies (Bearman, 2019). Semistructured interviews are considered in-depth interviews where participants answer preset, open-ended questions (Jamshed, 2014). In this study, semistructured, open-ended interviews were the primary data collection instrument. The data collection method and research participants were the direct data collection source. As the researcher, I conducted interviews, took observational notes, and transcribed audio recordings for analysis. Collected and analyzed the data generated from the qualitative interviews enhanced understanding of the phenomenon being studied and provided validity, credibility, and transferability (Abdalla et al., 2018).

Risjord, Moloney, and Dunbar (2001) and Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville (2014) noted that triangulation complements qualitative methods. Methodological triangulation is beneficial in confirming findings, collecting comprehensive data, and understanding the phenomenon, which increases the validity of the research (Risjord et al., 2001). The validity of research is important because it can affect the efficacy and acceptance of the research findings (Ryu et al., 2018). In this research, I used methodological triangulation to establish validity and support data collection/instrumentation. Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted that researchers utilizing methodological triangulation must use multiple data sources to validate their findings.

Interviews were the main data collection method; however, I also evaluated observational notes and transcripts of audio recordings from the semistructured in-depth interviews. Different participants provided different perspectives, which was collected. I compared the data collected from participants' interviews to generate a taxonomy and research validity. Data from different sources, such as different participants and critical incidents, provided insight into the research question from various angles.

Another important component of instrumentation is choosing the appropriate data source (Carter et al., 2014). Researchers should aim to establish the sufficiency of the chosen research data collection instrument to answer the research questions (Crabtree et al., 2013). Carter et al. mentioned that researchers must describe the data collection method, target an approximate number of participants, and identify the approach or tool used to compare the study data. I utilized Flanagan's (1954) critical incident technique to build a method for collecting and analyzing the data from the semistructured interviews. Data collection took place through in-depth interviews. Participants were encouraged to talk about at least three critical incidents retrospectively (Fisher & Oulton, 1999), where the participant experienced low interpersonal trust in leadership.

John Flanagan created the critical incident technique in 1954. The critical incident technique is complementary to qualitative research because both aim to understand and represent the experiences and actions of participants' life situations (FitzGerald et al., 2008). This qualitative case study and the critical incident technique share an additional purpose which is to provide data to explore a question(s) that may lead to the formation or contribution to the studied phenomenon (FitzGerald et al., 2008; Morgan et al. (2013).

The critical incident technique has been regarded as flexible and insightful when used across different fields, phenomena, populations, subjects, and methodologies. This study's purpose, alignment, validity, and instrumentation are appropriate based on the critical incident technique's qualitative methodology. I did not make changes to the critical incident technique tool, as it aligns with the purpose of this research. No context or culture issues specific to this study population emerged throughout the instrument specific to federal employees.

Since Flanagan's initial introduction of the critical incident technique in 1954, many researchers have utilized and reviewed Flanagan's tool. One notable researcher and reviewer for this tool is Lee Butterfield. In 2005 he partnered with William Borgen, Norman Amundson, and Asa-Sophia Maglio and published research titled *Fifty Years of the critical incident technique: 1954–2004*, which noted the impact and benefit of this tool in different fields (Butterfield, 2005). The following researchers utilized and highlighted the tool's versatility and ability to be used and benefit different fields. Butterfield et al. (2009), *Counselling psychology research*; Wotruba (2016), *Leadership coaching*; Franken & Plimmer (2019), *Mediocre leadership in the public sector*; Bott and Tourish (2016), *Organizational practices and build theory*; FitzGerald et al., (2008), *Health Department, dentist, and educators*; Stitt-Gohdes, Lambrecht and Redmann (2000), *Job Behavior*; Falcão de Oliveira, Zouain, Souza, and Duart (2019), *Tourist and performance factors*; Ashley, C., Gilbert, J. R., and Leonard, H. A. (2020), *Marketing and psychological*; Papouli, (2016), *Social work and ethics in the workplace*.

Field Study

Two professionals conducted a field study to validate research question alignment and interview questions' objectivity. Both professionals have a doctoral degree and understand leadership, trust, case studies, and the critical incident technique. The feedback obtained from the two reviewers led to changes in the number of research questions because some questions were redundant. Additionally, I completed grammatical changes to provide clarification to the questions. Based upon the purpose of the study and research questions, the final interview questions generated information for analysis.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Bott and Tourish (2016) noted that it is important that researchers clearly define the data collection protocol, tools, and data analysis methods when composing the research design. Researchers must define and understand the alignment between the critical incident technique and the purpose of the research (Bott & Tourish, 2016). Gremler (2004) encouraged the critical incident technique in qualitative studies because data from previous studies specified that critical incidents could constitute changes in behaviors. Through observations, semistructured interviews, or questionnaires, the critical incident technique increases awareness of behavior styles and provides information on how these behaviors affect performance in a work setting (Bott & Tourish, 2016; Flanagan, 1954; George, 1989). The general aim of the study is to answer the two research questions by exploring the factors that contribute to the federal

government's organizational success when the organization's employees have low interpersonal trust in the agency's leadership.

Recruitment

The sampling population for this study was composed of federal government employees that have been employed or are currently employed in a federal agency. I contacted current and previous employees through professional networks and personal contact information previously provided directly to me. If additional participants were needed, snowballing sampling would have been utilized.

During the recruitment process, I contacted potential participants via email and invited them to participate utilizing two email samples listed in Appendix A. The first email was an invitational email forwarded to known federal government employees that work or have worked in a federal agency. The first invitational email was designed to ensure potential participants meet the specific criterion required for this research. These specific criteria required participants to confirm that they previously or presently work at a federal agency for at least 6 months of continuous employment. Participants confirmed that they had received performance appraisal(s) ratings between three and five during their employment in the federal agency. The last criteria required participants to have experienced low employee-leader interpersonal trust while employed in a federal agency. All participants were asked to answer the four criteria questions during the recruitment process.

After the initial contact, a follow-up recruitment email was forwarded to the participants to notify them of their selection to participate in this study and schedule an

interview time and date (see Appendix A). The follow-up recruitment email included an Informed Consent Form. The Informed Consent form provided a background of the study, procedures, sample interview questions, privacy, voluntary statement, and risk and benefits of participating in the study. The Informed Consent form contained a thank you message, instructed participants to review the consent form and reply giving consent to participate, and provided interview setting information such as telephone, Facetime, Skype, Zoom, or Teams. I used a virtual setting for this study due to the current COVID-19 environment and participants' geographical locations.

Participation and Data Collection

Flanagan's (1954) third step requires researchers to collect data. Viergever (2019) reminded researchers that data collection should reflect what participants perceive to be factors, events, behaviors, or experiences that helped or hindered the activity at hand. I collected data through in-depth semistructured interviews with participants using open-ended questions until saturation was met. Current or past government employees were asked to provide at least three critical incidents that influenced them to performed positively when experiencing low trust in leadership. Virtual semistructured interview length lasted between 30-60 minutes. Bott and Tourish (2016) mentioned that critical incidents should not be predetermined by, or driven by, the researcher. The critical incident technique provided a rich data source by allowing respondents to determine the most relevant incidents without researcher intervention or suggestion related to the research phenomenon (Flanagan, 1954). I adopted a reflexive approach to the research to ensure I remained self-aware of predispositions and fully engaged in a critical dialogue

with participants. As the researcher, I aimed to increase the usefulness of the data without sacrificing comprehensiveness, details, and specificity. Participants were assigned a numerical designation used throughout the study to maintain participants' confidentiality. After each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed, reviewed, and annotated with additional notes captured during the interview. The processes to collect and compile data focused on ensuring comprehensive capture of the data. Participant interviews continued until saturation was met.

Participant exit procedures are identified in Appendix B Interview Wrap Up. I ended each interview by addressing any questions the participant may have had to ensure the participant felt comfortable with the next steps in the study and address any concerns that might not have been addressed at the beginning of the interview. Participants were given a chance to ask or answer any final question(s) and were thanked for participating in the study. Flanagan (1954) and Viergever (2019) mentioned that it is important that all data is explained in detail and clearly because the critical incident technique relies on the participant's communication and the interviewer's interpretation. I used transcript verification to ensure data accuracy. I also emailed participants a transcript of the interview within five days of the interview. Participants had an opportunity to review the interview transcript and provide additional information or changes as needed. Follow-up interviews were not needed. Once all interviews were conducted, audio recordings reviewed, and data transcribed, the data was ready for Flanagan's fourth and fifth steps. The fourth and fifth steps included data analysis, interpretation, and reporting. Having a

protocol for data collection is important for the success of the research, but it is equally important to develop a data analysis plan (Franken & Plimmer, 2019).

Data Analysis Plan

Flanagan (1954) mentioned that a researcher should understand the purpose of data analysis in order to be able to develop an effective data analysis plan. The purpose of the data analysis is to summarize and describe the collected data in a manner that is efficient and readily available for effective use in many practical purposes (Flanigan, 1954). Saldaña (2015) mentioned that qualitative exploratory case studies benefit from intense contact with the research participants to collect data.

Once data is collected, the researchers have to execute data analysis to interpret the data (Saldaña, 2015). Stitt-Gohdes et al., 2000 mentioned that the purpose of analyzing the interview data is to understand the commonalities between the data. I utilized the critical incident technique tool to analyze and connect all the data collected during the semistructured interviews. Viergever (2019) and Sandberg (2019) noted that the critical incident technique complements qualitative case studies because it examines behaviors occurring within a real-world setting.

While analyzing the interview transcript, researchers generally start segmenting data into meaningful units. Once data is segmented, researchers generally take a step back and reflect on the data's commonality or difference and start compiling these data characteristics into codes (Agbadjé et al., 2020). After the data collection process, I reviewed the interview transcripts and started coding by segmenting the interviews and designing a description code. After I coded all the interviews, the codes and narrative

transcripts were analyzed a second time to identify categories. I conducted a final review a third time to build themes.

Flanagan (1954) discouraged the development of a priori, or pre-identified, categories/themes before the data analysis process. Instead, Flanagan (1954) suggested that researchers build a taxonomy that emerges from the collected interview data. Besides validating the data, the purpose of a taxonomy is to identify and classify themes (Watson-Brown et al., 2018). The data analysis plan must have a frame of reference to connect the data with the research purpose effectively and research question(s) (Flanagan, 1954; Bailey et al., 2016). Saldaña (2015) cautioned that researchers should not drive or influence participants' answers or manipulate the data coding to conduct an inductive study.

The data analysis did not include pre-determined themes or categories. Instead, themes emerged during the data coding process. A Microsoft Excel document was utilized to segment the transcripts into excel cells, code, categorize, and build a taxonomy identifying the data commonalities and differences (see Appendix C). The emerging themes were identified in the excel document and categorized utilizing the first and second cycle coding process. I cataloged all data collected that included interview notes in the excel document. During the data analysis and reporting process, I reviewed the empirical data and studied the data intensively to identify the connection between the data and the research purpose.

The first coding process formulated a rough classification system that allowed me to identify themes. In the second coding process, I grouped the data commonalities to

formulate subcategories. I repeated this process until I categorized all the data into general themes and reached saturation. Once I reached saturation, I counted/tallied and calculated percentages in the excel document. I calculated all the data and themes to build a report that identified the findings. Although the critical incident technique is a flexible collection and analytical tool, Flanagan (1954) cautioned researchers that no minimum criterion or set rules exist. Therefore, there is no set structure in every case, and data coding is as subjective as it is objective.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The credibility and validity of research are critical because they ensure the efficacy of the message and audience acceptance of data results (Ryu et al., 2018). I used methodological triangulation to establish credibility and internal validity. Methodological triangulation requires researchers to use multiple data sources to validate their study's findings (Wilson, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2015). In this research, I collected data from different participants who provided different perspectives. I compared the data obtained from participants' interviews to generate validity. I compared different sources of data to support the validity and achieved saturation of the study's results. Interviews were the main data collection method; however, I also evaluated observational notes and transcripts of audio recordings from the interviews. Analyzing and using all data from the qualitative interviews enhanced understanding of the novel concept of distrust, what factors contributed to positive performance, and provided validity, credibility, and transferability (Abdalla et al., 2018). Additionally, to establish

credibility, I cited peer review sources to establish valid assertion and consequently built confidence in the research intention being asserted and put forward in good conscience as the most valid information sources (Ryu et al., 2018).

Transferability

Thick description was used in this research to ensure transferability or external validity (Serra, 2016). Thick descriptions provide coherent, in-depth, detailed descriptions of critical incidents or occurrences (Henning et al., 2004). Thick description also provides contextual information that a researcher can obtain during the interview and transcribe to analyze and ensure transferability (Henning et al., 2004). Transferability emerges when the research can be generalized or transferred into a different situation (Serra, 2016). To obtain transferability, I interviewed participants until saturation was met on their various perspectives of the phenomenon and utilized thick descriptions to provide an accurate description for other researchers regarding how these findings were obtained.

Dependability

Yin (2015) defines dependability as the quality of a study in qualitative research. Dependability plays a key factor in conducting reliable research and focuses on the procedures and processes used in collecting, interpreting, and analyzing research data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Dependable and consistent data collection procedures and processes are required to replicate research (Yin, 2015).

To ensure other researchers can replicate this research, I provided clear and numerous descriptive information on the process and procedure of collecting data on a

federal agency. I provided descriptive notes from my reflective journals and included information on participants to capture a description of the setting and the sample population. I addressed dependability by utilizing audit trails to preserve the authenticity and validity of the data collected through in-depth interviews. I provided a detailed description of the agency, setting, participants, interview process, researcher organization, triangulation, validity, data collection, and analysis to ensure dependability and allow other researchers to transfer this research model into their own. I addressed reliability by handling and documenting clear audit trails of interview records such as audio recording, interview notes, and observation sheets. These notes are available for peer review should other researchers require this material to support the study results. I created audit trail folders to store the interview records, details, and factual evidence obtained from the participants of this study.

Confirmability

Miles and Huberman (1994) explained that one of the key objectives of confirmability is to expose the direct reflections of those who participated in the study and not the researcher's bias, preferences, or characteristics. Yin (2015) noted that confirmability in qualitative research is similar to objectivity in quantitative research. Therefore, researchers should address confirmability to minimize researcher bias. To address potential issues of confirmability, I used methodological data triangulation, which was collected from multiple sources until saturation was met. Collecting information from multiple sources strengthens the validity construct (Yin, 2015). Confirmability also aims to ensure a sense of self-awareness is exercised during the data

collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To address any potential for research bias, I transferred from the agency that is the research setting. I utilized open-ended and topic-focused questions to ensure I captured the participants' experiences and no assumptions were made on my part during interview sessions. I also kept a reflexive summary after each interview throughout the interview process, maintained an audit trail, and annotated any systematic account of decisions made throughout the data collection process.

Ethical Procedures

The Ethical Standards of American Educational Research Association (AERA Council, 2011) addresses the importance of participant protection and the researcher's role in maintaining ethical practice throughout all research. I have aligned this research in accordance with the ethics guidelines established by the AERA Council (2011). The Walden University's IRB approval number for this study is 04-26-21-0660689, and it expires on April 25, 2022. I have included processes that emphasize the respect of rights, privacy, dignity, concerns, and sensitivity of the participants in his research. I have also emphasized the ethics and integrity guidelines provided by the Walden University Institutional Review Board. I utilized the research ethics approval checklist and planning worksheet to validate the ethical practices utilized in this research align with the Walden University Institutional Review Board ethical standards.

I applied responsible and accountable practices through all stages of this research, specifically during the collection and analysis of the data. I have also included various research forms throughout the appendix section. The forms and letters establish procedures for recruitment, interview protocol, and interview questions. I addressed

consent with each participant through both verbal and written formats, which have been written in plain English and crafted with the intent of informing participants of the conditions of the interview, topic of study, and description of the research questions. The informed consent agreement ensured ethical issues were addressed before the interview so that transparent and honest discussion occurred with informed participants. Interview steps and the data collection procedures are highlighted throughout Appendixes A-C.

Confidentiality of Data

Flanagan (1954) noted that researchers should ensure that studies present minimal risk to participants, and under no circumstances should a researcher violate the confidences of the participants. As the researcher, I did not use participants' personal information for any unrelated research purposes. Personal information such as names or any other information that could identify participants in the study was not be used or included. Participants in interviews were assigned a numerical designation and were referred to as Interview Participant 1, Interview Participant 2, and so on. The consent agreement addressed and informed participants of the confidentiality of their participation and the data collected.

Protection of Confidential Data

The Informed Consent form provided a detailed assurance about the information, storage, and processes of how the study addressed confidentiality. I labeled data collected during the research process as confidential to protect the participants and deleted all identifiable information such as participants' names and contact information from the study. The data collected in this study, including audio recordings, is being kept secure

by executing processes specifically to protect confidential data. Protection includes storing information on a password-protected hard drive under a catalog system and password-protecting all manuscripts of captured interviews.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided the design and methodology used in this research along with a description of the role of the researcher, trustworthiness, and participants of this study. I used a qualitative method, single case study design, and the critical incident technique to analyze the information for this study. I emailed all participants during the recruitment process and screened them to ensure they qualified to participate in this research. I developed interview protocols and participant in-depth interview question forms that were used during the recruitment, data collection, analysis, and report process (see Appendix A-D). Developing a good recruitment process was imperative in preventing the recruitment of unqualified participants and necessary in developing a pool of data that can contribute to understanding the phenomenon (Sun et al., 2017 & Basso, 2017).

In this study, I utilized semistructured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to explore the federal employees' experiences and understand this novel phenomenon where distrust in leadership can lead to positive employee performance and organizational outcomes. The data collected in this research provides knowledge to the management field professionals and can produce leadership awareness and behavior changes. Understanding trust and distrust should influence leadership behavior and supervision tactics (Yeşilbaş & Çetin, 2019).

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the factors that have contributed to the federal government's organizational success when the organization's employees have low interpersonal trust in the agency's leadership, which addressed the phenomenon gap in literature. I used semistructured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to address this gap in the literature and RQ1 and SQ1. The research questions for this study were as follows: RQ1: From an employee's perspective and experience, what factors influence an employee's positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership? and SQ1: How does distrust or low trust in leadership affect employees' overall performance?

I conducted a field study before the data collection. The setting for this research was a federal government agency. I collected demographic information throughout the interviews. Data were collected and analyzed using the critical incident technique (see Flanagan, 1954). The data analysis resulted in the identification of categories and themes. The RQ and SQ were answered based on the identified categories and themes. Tables were composed to assist with the illustration of the results of the study.

Field Study

Two professionals conducted a field study to validate research question alignment and interview question's objectivity. Both professionals had a doctoral degree and understood leadership, trust, case study, and the critical incident technique. The feedback obtained from the two reviewers led to changes in the interview questions as the reviewers determined that some questions were redundant. The reviewers also

recommended grammatical changes to provide clarification to the interview questions. Based upon the purpose of the study and research questions, both reviewers determined that the interview questions may generate information to answer the two research questions in this study. During the field study, both professionals conducted a conference call to provide feedback regarding the interview process, recommendations, and common interviewer errors to ensure interviewer self-awareness.

Research Setting

I recruited current and previous federal employees through professional networks and personal contact information that was previously provided directly to me. I conducted a total of 20 telephone interviews through telephone calls. I provided participants with weekend and after business hours' time slots to ensure participants' convenience, maximum participation, and flexibility. Participants selected discreet and quiet locations in the commodity of their homes; this setting provided a neutral and private place that allowed participants to open up and reflect on their critical incidents freely. I assigned participants pseudonyms; I did not use participants' names during the data collection. All telephone calls were audio-recorded, and after each interview, I transcribed the audio recordings and interview notes. I saved the Interview notes in a password-protected external drive. I took the necessary measures to minimize risks by saving all information about this research in an external hard drive stored in my office safe. Participation was voluntary, as noted in the recruitment email and Informed Consent Agreement. The recruitment email and Informed Consent Agreement were both emailed to all participants prior to scheduling interviews.

Demographics

During a 4-week period, I asked a total of 20 participants to provide three or more critical incidents that influenced them to perform positively when experiencing low trust in leadership. Participants provided a total of 77 critical incidents. All 20 participants shared critical incidents where participants experienced low or no interpersonal trust in leadership while performing positively. Of the 20 study participants, 65% (13) were female, and 35% (7) were male. A total of 68% (52) critical incidents were collected from female participants, and 32% (25) critical incidents were collected from male participants. All 20 participants were currently or previously federal employees of a federal agency. Table 5 shows a visual depiction of the participant's demographics.

Table 5

Participant Gender and Critical Incident Demographics

Gender	Participant number	Percentage	Critical incident number	Percentage
Female	13	65%	52	68%
Male	7	35%	25	32%

Note. Model was created for visualization of the participants' demographics.

Data Collection

An IRB approved invitation email was used to recruit participants (see Appendix A). I forwarded the invitational email to current and previous federal employees recruited through professional networks and personal contact information provided directly to me. I contacted potential participants via email during the recruitment process and invited them to participate, using two email templates listed in Appendix A. The first email I sent was an invitational email designed to ensure that this research's criteria was met. Participants answered yes to all three questions in the invitational email and forwarded my responses (see Appendix A). I contacted 26 participants, and 20 participants responded to my invitational email; all 20 participants met the required criterion. A total of six individuals contacted did not respond to the invitational email.

After receiving participants' responses to the invitational email, I reviewed the responses and, based on the responses, determined if participants met the inclusion criteria. I followed up with a recruitment follow-up email to all participants notifying them of their selection to participate in this study and scheduled an interview time and date (see Appendix A). I included the Informed Consent Form in the follow-up recruitment email. Participants were asked to review the consent form and reply to the email stating that they consented. All 20 participants responded with the words "I Consent." The responses to the recruitment follow-up email were reviewed and stored in my personal external hard drive.

After receiving a response from participants giving consent, I followed up to schedule their interviews. Each interview was scheduled for 30 to 60 minutes, but all

interviews concluded within approximately 30 minutes. A total of nine questions were asked during the interview. I asked the first three questions to ensure the participants met the inclusion criterion, although this criterion was previously determined. Questions four and five were asked to identify low or no interpersonal trust in leadership. I asked questions six through nine to explore employees' positive performance while experiencing low or no interpersonal trust in leadership. Participants were encouraged to share personal experiences, personal stories, or anecdotes to ensure the continued information flow that started in Questions 4 and 5. Participants' stories were identified as critical incidents. Seventeen participants provided four different critical incidents where they experienced low or no trust in leadership, for a total of 68 critical incidents. Three participants provided three different critical incidents where they experienced low or no trust in leadership for a total of nine critical incidents. Participants provided detailed critical incidents, reflected on the complexity of their experiences, and identified what factors influenced their performance and why these factors influenced their performance.

All 20 interviews were conducted via telephone, were audio-recorded, and were transcribed. Each interview was transcribed using a Microsoft 365 transcription service. All transcriptions were reviewed while listening to the audio recording to ensure all transcriptions were accurate. Transcriptions were corrected as needed to ensure transcription accuracy. I emailed each interview transcription to the correspondent participant for review and accuracy confirmation. All participants acknowledged that their transcript was accurate and did not require changes or provided additional comments or feedback.

Unexpected Circumstances

There were only two unexpected circumstances during the data collection that caused a short break to define interpersonal trust. Questions 4 and 5 were asked to identify low or no interpersonal trust in leadership. During this set of questions, only two participants requested that I clarify low interpersonal trust to ensure that their interpretation and my interpretation were the same. After defining the term interpersonal trust, the participants stated that their understanding was the same and proceeded to answer the question. I addressed the interruption by recapping the last portion of the interview before we continued with the interview. Participants were able to pick up from where we left off with no evidence of distraction, confusion, or frustration. I did not experiences any additional interruptions or unexpected circumstances during the interview process.

Data Analysis

I used the critical incident technique to analyze the collected data. Once I conducted all interviews, I reviewed the audio recordings. I transcribed and analyzed the data using Flanigan's (1954) fourth and fifth steps, including data analysis, interpretation, and reporting. I did not use the Rev Audio Transcription service as initially planned. Instead, I used the Microsoft Office 365 professional transcription feature to transcribe the interview audio files. I used MAXQDA for data analysis along with a manual review to code critical incidents.

One of the purposes of analyzing interview data is to understand the commonalities between the data (Stitt-Gohdes et al., 2000). Flanagan (1954) mentioned

that a researcher should understand the purpose of data analysis to develop and execute an effective data analysis. I first read all the transcripts two or three times during the analysis process to familiarize myself with the data. As I reviewed the transcript, I started generating initial codes, categories, and themes within the data using Microsoft Excel (see Appendix C). After the first coding cycle, I uploaded all transcripts, audio files, my interview, and journal notes, along with the first set of general codes, into MAXQDA.

I reviewed the transcripts a second time within MAXQDA. During this second coding cycle, I identified and combined categories and themes from the codes identified previously. I created a total of three categories: (a) participants' feelings and thoughts, (b) symptoms, causes, environment, and (c) factors, motivators, drivers. The three categories were created based on the research questions. The participant's feelings and thoughts categories were composed of the participants' responses to Questions 4 through 7. Questions 4 through 7 identified low or no interpersonal trust and explored participants' attitudes and performance challenges. The symptoms, causes, and environment category was composed of participants recounting their low interpersonal trust in leadership. The factors, motivators, and driver's categories emerged from participants' specific recounts on what factors led to their positive performance.

During the second coding cycle, I defined, realigned, and renamed the themes. I continued to review and segment the data into meaningful units of data. Once the data were segmented, I took a step back and reviewed my interview and journal notes to ensure I incorporated any additional information in the comment section of MAXQDA. Adding interview and journal notes into the comment section of MAXQDA assisted me

with the data analysis. As mentioned by Saldaña (2015), qualitative data review demands meticulous attention and deeper reflection on emergent patterns and capturing the human experience. During the second coding cycle, I also used color coding to help visualize the categories and themes.

During the coding cycles, I reviewed all empirical data, studied the data intensively, and established a connection between the data and the research purpose. The first coding process formulated a rough classification system that consisted of 10 categories and approximately 60 themes. During the second coding cycle, the data commonalities were grouped to develop categories; a total of three categories and 49 themes were identified (see Table 6). These categories were organized based on the data analysis, interview notes, and journal notes. I repeated the coding process two additional cycles until all relevant data were assigned a theme and placed under an appropriate category. During this process, I noted that I reached saturation early in the interview process. After the coding process, I tallied all the identified themes and calculated percentages manually and through MAXQDA. I extracted a report from MAXQDA; this report included the data categories, themes, theme frequencies, and percentages. During the coding process, I reflected on Flanagan's (1954) warning, where Flanagan mentioned that all data is as subjective as it is objective; no minimum criterion or set rules are applied to the coding process.

Table 6*Categories and Themes*

Categories	Themes
Factors, motivators, drivers	Personality, mission driven (gov service commitment), principles (do what is right), team spirit (camaraderie), job satisfaction, self-preservation, positive feedback & recognition, salary & promotion, faith, feeling of accomplishment, t situation (time & future rotation), conscientious (workload), mentors motivation, personality: competitive, meditation
Feelings & thoughts	Change ways & strategize, demoralizing, frustration, self-awareness, passive/give into leader, not focus in leader (ignore/bypass), disparity, self-preservation: attitude, professional attitude, helpful attitude, voice your opinion, knowledgeable: job, positive interpersonal relationship, courage, audacity, play into ego (pretend pleasantries).
Symptoms, causes, environment	Lack of leadership traits (breaks rules), dismissive behaviors nonexisting interpersonal relationship, lack of communication, competency issues, uncertainty, lack of clarity, egocentric/narcissistic, unaware ignorance careless, lack of recognition (unappreciation), lack of interaction, no action as promised, disrespectful, leaders ambiguity, lack of self-improvement/proactiveness, reluctant, lack of positive feedback, exclusion

Note, Table was created for visualization of categories and themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

As noted in Chapter 3, the credibility and validity of research are critical because both ensure the efficacy of the message and data results acceptance (Ryu et al., 2018). I utilized methodological triangulation to established credibility and validity.

Methodological triangulation requires researchers to use multiple data sources to validate their study's findings (Wilson, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2015). I collected and compared the different data sources from different participants through interviews to support the validity and achieve saturation. I also evaluated observational notes using reflective journaling. I transcribed the notes from my journal into the note sections of the MAXQDA software. The next source that I analyzed was the audio recordings from the interviews. Notations collected from the audio recordings were also analyzed and uploaded into MAXQDA.

Transferability

As noted in Chapter 3, thick description is generally used in research to ensure transferability or external validity (Serra, 2016). Thick descriptions also provide coherent, in-depth, detailed descriptions of critical incidents (Henning et al., 2004). To obtain transferability, I interviewed 20 participants and analyzed their various perspectives of the phenomenon. I transcribed the interviews, utilized thick descriptions, and provided an accurate description of how these findings were obtained to other researchers. Future researchers can determine the transferability of this study to their own study as I provide thick descriptions that provide contextual information that a researcher

can collect during interviews, transcriptions, and analysis to ensure transferability (Henning et al., 2004). In this study, I generalized to ensure transferability is attainable (Serra, 2016).

Dependability

Dependable and consistent data collection procedures and processes are required to replicate research (Yin, 2015). In this research, I focused on the procedures and processes used in collecting, interpreting, and analyzing research data, as suggested by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016). To ensure other researchers could replicate this research, I provided clear and numerous descriptive processes and procedures for collecting the data. I provided the Participation Email Samples (see Appendix A), Participant In-Depth Interview Questions (see Appendix B), critical incident technique collection tool (see Appendix C) and Interview protocols (see Appendix D).

I utilized audit trails to preserve the authenticity and validity of the data collected through in-depth interviews. As stated in the data collection and data analysis sections, I audio recorded all interviews. I backed up audio files and transcripts and provided a detailed description of the setting, participants, interview process, researcher organization, triangulation, validity, and analysis to ensure dependability and allow other researchers to transfer this research model into their own. These notes are available for peer review should other researchers require this material. I created audit trail folders to store interview recordings, other research details, and evidence obtained from the participants of this study.

Confirmability

Yin (2015) noted that researchers should address confirmability to minimize researcher bias. Miles and Huberman (1994) indicated that confirmability should expose the direct reflections of participants and not the researcher's bias. To address confirmability, I utilized methodological data triangulation, which involved collecting data from multiple sources. In this research, I collected data from 20 participants until saturation was met. I utilized open-ended and topic-focused questions to capture the participants' experiences and addressed any potential research bias. I summarized and repeated responses to each question and ensured that I did not misinterpret or make assumptions. I kept a reflexive journal, took notes during the interview, summarized the interview process, maintained an audit trail, and annotated any systematic account of decisions made throughout the data collection process.

Study Results

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the factors that contributed to the federal government's organizational success when the organization's employees have low interpersonal trust in the agency's leadership. To address the phenomenon gap in the literature, I utilized semistructured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. I explored federal agency employees' experiences to understand how employees can maintain positive performance outcomes while experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership.

The research question for this study was, from an employee's perspective and experience, what factors influenced an employee's positive performance outcomes

despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership? The sub-question is, how does distrust or low trust in leadership affect employees' overall performance? During the data analysis, categories and themes emerged based on the research question and sub-question. I gained an understanding of what individuals experience when they have low or no interpersonal trust in leadership while employed in a federal agency. I gained an understanding of what factors influenced employees' positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership.

Research Question 1 Results

RQ1: From an employee's perspective and experience, what factors influence an employee's positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership?

Participants shared Critical Incidents where they recalled experiencing low or no trust in leadership but continued to perform positively because of a specific factor or several factors. I created a taxonomy with the identified factors during the data analysis. The taxonomy was labeled Factors, Motivators, and Drivers. A total of 15 themes emerged throughout a total of 77 participants' experiences. The emergent themes for this category are mission driven (gov service commitment), personality, personality: competitive, principles (do what is right), team spirit (camaraderie), job satisfaction, self-preservation, positive feedback & recognition, salary & promotion, faith, feeling of accomplishment, temporary situation (time & future rotation), conscientious (workload), mentors motivation, and meditation. I defined the themes to establish meaning and understanding (see Table 7).

Table 7*Themes Definitions*

Themes	Definition
Mission driven (gov service commitment)	These participants derived meaning from the organization's mission. They found meaning, purpose, and a sense of service commitment with the federal government.
Personality	These participants noted that they possess sets of enduring traits and styles related to their underlying behavior. Participants indicated that their personality and underline behavior set them apart from other federal employees.
Personality: competitive	This type of participant specifically defined competitiveness as a trait of their personality and identifies a competitiveness personality as the factor that leads to resiliency when experiencing low or no interpersonal trust in leadership.
Principles (do what is right)	These participants defined themselves as employees motivated by personal ethical principles that driven them to do what is right every time.
Team spirit (camaraderie)	These participants identified their teammate's support and camaraderie as the factor that drove them to perform positively.
Job satisfaction	These participants identified themselves as loving their jobs and having a level of contentedness with their jobs.
Feeling of accomplishment	These participants identified themselves as loving their jobs but specifically finding purpose and motivation in the feeling of accomplishment when they do their jobs while experiencing low or no interpersonal trust in leadership.
Positive feedback & recognition	These participants find that Positive Feedback and recognition from other people related to the mission energize these participants and motivates these participants to perform when experiencing low or no interpersonal trust in leadership positively.

Self-preservation	When experiencing low or no interpersonal trust in leadership, these participants adopted defensive attitudes and were driven by the need to watch their backs. Self-preservation becomes the factor that drives these participants to perform positively. Their strategy is to perform positively or overachieve to prevent negative consequences from leadership and protect their job.
Salary & promotion	These participants recognized that the factors that motivate them to continue to be positive performers are their salary and potential future promotion opportunities.
Faith	These participants identified faith as the factor that influences them to continue to be positive performers.
Temporary situation (time & future rotation)	These participants identify themselves as being motivated specifically because their leadership or their own time within the organization was limited. The opportunity to rotate, transfer or find a new job was a factor to keep these participants performing positively.
Conscientious (workload)	These participants noted that they had to continue to perform positively despite low or no interpersonal trust because the workload was massive or too critical to allow themselves to stop performing.
Mentors motivation	These participants identified themselves as being influenced and motivated by mentors. Mentors influenced positive participant performance.
Meditation	These participants noted that meditation was a factor in their positive performance.

Note. Table was created for visualization of Themes and Definitions.

A total of 77 Critical Incidents were captured and analyzed. A theme was assigned to each story during the coding cycles to meet saturation and develop patterns to answer RQ1. Participants recounted critical incidents where they had experienced low or no interpersonal trust in leadership from their perspective. For each of the 77 critical incidents, participants identified specifically what factor influenced them to perform positively. Out of a total of 77 critical incidents, The mission driven theme emerged in 75 critical incidents. Personality was a factor that appeared in 68 critical incidents, followed by principles, team spirit, job satisfaction, positive feedback, and recognition (see Table 8).

Table 8*Factor That Influenced Employees' to Perform Positively*

Themes out of 77 critical incidents (CI)	CI recurrence	Response percentage
Mission driven	75	97%
Personality & personality: competitive	68	88%
Principles (do what is right)	34	44%
Team spirit (camaraderie)	33	43%
Job satisfaction & feeling of accomplishment	28	36%
Positive feedback & recognition	11	14%
Self-preservation	8	10%
Salary & promotion	6	8%
Faith	6	8%
Temporary situation	6	8%
Conscientious (workload)	4	5%
Mentors motivation	2	3%
Meditation	1	1%

Note. Table was created for visualization of themes occurrence and percentage.

Mission Driven (Gov Service Commitment)

The Mission driven theme emerged from 75 critical incidents (97%). From a total of 20 participants, 18 participants (90%) confirmed that the primary factor that motivated them or drove them to perform positively was their commitment to the mission (see Table 9). These 18 participants found meaning, purpose, and a sense of service commitment with the federal government and derived meaning from the organization's mission. These federal employees found that their duty was to utilize their skills that contributed to the mission, regardless of what the mission entailed. The drive to accomplish the mission was the factor that pushed these employees to continue their positive performance and find the resilience needed to cope with the symptoms and causes of low or no interpersonal trust in leadership. Participants identified these symptoms and causes during the critical incidents as toxic environments, incompetent and disrespectful leaders, which often led to low or no trust in leadership, and at times affected participant's attitude.

Table 9

Top Two Factors That Influenced Employees' to Perform Positively

Themes	Participants 20 total	Participants percentage	Critical incidents 77 total	Critical incident percentage
Mission driven (gov service commitment)	18	90%	75	97%
Personality & personality: competitive	17	85%	68	88%

Note. Table was created for visualization of themes occurrence and percentage.

Participants Mission Driven (Gov Service Commitment) Comments

A partial list of participants' comments is noted below.

P01: "Missions was something that I could support and motivated me."

"The mission in my particular field was the best motivator for me."

P02: "I am stimulated by understanding the mission and my role. For me, it is probably a combination of a good sense of mission, and then the contribution I make to the delivery of that mission the value, my value."

"I do believe that mission can be very important to motivate me."

P03: "Over the course of the last probably five years, irrespective of what is going on in leadership that is in the role that I served, I will still perform because I identified with the agency's mission."

P04: "It was the day-to-day job which was still serving a broader mission, so having sort of an awareness of why the organization existed, to begin with, and then how everyone had a small part to play in its overall success. I just kept my eyes set on the big picture, if you will, the mission."

P05: "I look at it as people do not matter to me; what matters is my mission, my job."

P06: "I really had no choice 'cause we are working in the federal government. If you do not do your job, someone can end up dying. So, the mission is my main motivator. That is not what you want or need, so that is probably one of the reasons why most of us continue to do our jobs."

Personality

Of the 20 participants, 17 participants (85%) confirmed that the primary factor that motivated them or drove them to perform positively was their personality (see Table 9). These 17 participants provided a total of 68 critical incidents (88%). These participants noted that they possessed a set of enduring traits and styles related to their underlying behavior. Participants indicated that their personality and underlying behavior set them apart from other federal employees. These participants specifically defined competitiveness as a trait of their personality and identified a competitiveness personality as the factor that led to resiliency when experiencing low or no interpersonal trust in leadership.

Personality Comments

A partial list of participants' comments is noted below.

P02: “You still have something that you were supposed to do today, and that is why I got up in the morning. I just did it anyway; I am like that; it’s my personality.”

P03: “When I run into a brick wall, I am just going to change direction. So that is my attitude, my personality.”

P04: “I have a competitive personality by nature; it just drove me harder to do my absolute best, despite what was going.”

“No matter what is going on around me, I do not want to fail. My competitive personality turns that opportunity into a competitive sort of thing with self.”

P05: “I am a much more bigger person than my leadership, and because of their weakness and they not understanding, I am not gonna let that bother me because I am me.”

P06: “ It is really personality driven on whether or not a person continues to push through.”

SQ 1 Results

SQ1: How does distrust or low trust in leadership affect an employee’s overall performance?

Participants shared critical incidents where they recalled experiencing low or no trust in leadership but continued to perform positively because of a specific factor or several factors. I asked interview question seven to all participants to understand the research sub-question. I asked participants, “how do you think the lack of trust in leadership affects your performance? How did you tackle the challenge?” All 20 participants reflected, and without hesitation, concluded that their performance was not affected by the low or no interpersonal trust in leaders. However, participants tackled the challenge of experiencing low or no interpersonal trust by strategizing how they handled leaders when experiencing low or no interpersonal trust.

During the data analysis, I created a taxonomy to identify how participants handled the challenge of positively performing while experiencing low or no interpersonal trust in leadership. The taxonomy created was labeled Feelings and Thoughts. A total of five themes emerged from a total of 77 critical incidents. The emergent themes for this category were Strategize (Self Awareness, Self-Personality), Not Focus in Leader, Give into Leader, Professional Attitude, and Courage & Audacity. The themes were also defined to establish meaning and understanding on how

participants tackled the challenge of not having trust or low trust in leadership (see Table 10).

Table 10*Themes Definitions and Percentages*

Themes	Definition	Critical incident recurrence	Response percentage
Strategize (self-awareness, self-preservation)	These participants noted that they had to strategize on coping with their lack of trust or low trust by becoming self-aware and working on their self-preservation by becoming aware of their feelings, frustration, and body language.	51	66%
Not focus on the leader	Participants noted that they focused on the mission and stopped focusing on the lack of trust in leadership.	5	6%
Give into leader	These types of participants noted that they had to give into leaders to Play into leader's ego to cope with low or no interpersonal trust in leadership and not make the daily interactions worse.	5	6%
Professional attitude	These participants leaned on having professional attitudes to cope with the low or no interpersonal trust in leadership.	4	5%
Courage & audacity	These participants identified themselves as having the courage and audacity to tackle the challenges that leadership brings when experiencing low or no trust in leadership.	3	4%

Note. Table was created for visualization of themes definitions and percentages.

All 20 participants mentioned, without hesitation, that their performance was not affected by the low or no interpersonal trust in leaders. The same factors that drove them to perform also positively influenced them to maintain the same level of performance. Question seven was asked throughout all 77 critical incidents. Participants noted during 68 critical incidents that they had to strategize how they cope with leadership when experiencing low or no interpersonal trust.

Strategize Comments

A partial list of participants' comments is noted below.

P02: "I played into his ego and kept performing as normal."

"I also found a lot of allies that also helped me think about how to approach some of these leaders that I did not trust."

P03: "My performance did not change, but I had to work on keeping my attitude towards my leadership is neutral."

P04: "I just became more aware, more alert of comments, behavior, and prepared myself for contradictions from leadership, but did not let this affect performance. My personality would not permit failure."

P05: "I needed to watch my back, so I withdrew a lot from people and leadership. I just went there to do my work. This way, I got the work done and went home."

P09: "It did not affect my performance; it just made it harder to put the work in, but I supported the mission; I just kept email trails from leadership."

P10: "you just have to roll with the punches, figure how to minimize interactions, keep notes, continue the mission, but it does affect your performance."

P11: “I continue performing as normal, but I started doing things to protect myself, meaning I aligned myself with higher leadership than that person.”

P12: “you are always second-guessing yourself and quite frankly taking the extra time to cover your back, but you never let that drama with your leader affect your performance.”

P13: “making sure that you did not put yourself in a vulnerable position, like sharing any confidential information with that individual. You find ways and keep giving it your all.”

P14: “I was not gonna let that affect my performance. I had to connect with the right people to help with this issue. I used the deputy to carry that information and then communicate it to that leader. At times it was a struggle, but I found ways to communicate.”

P15: “I would not rely on my supervisor's help for anything. I just focused on the mission and performed as usual. I feel as if you cannot let bad leadership affect who you are or how you perform.”

P17: “you have to learn to negotiate and navigate through the dangerous areas and particular situations. My attitude may change to navigate the mistrust and frustration, but my performance stays constant.”

P20: “had to strategize and make the process in place work to obtain accurate information from leadership to complete the mission. This was key to maintain our performance.”

Summary

The purpose of this exploratory case study research was to explore one research question and a sub-question. RQ1: From an employee’s perspective and experience, what factors influence employees’ positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low

interpersonal trust in leadership? And SQ1: How does distrust or low trust in leadership affect employees' overall performance? Throughout the 20 interviews, all participants shared candid experiences and were open to sharing their critical incidents. The data analysis indicated that mission-driven factors are within 97% of the participant's critical incidents. Personality was the second factor within 88% of participants' critical incidents. Mission driven was identified in 75 out of 77 critical incidents, while 68 out of 77 critical incidents identified personality as a factor. All 20 participants mentioned that their overall performance was not affected. The interviews revealed patterns of meaning across all participants. I summarized participant responses in detail into different themes. I initially manually coded the interviews and continued the analysis using MAXQDA to identify patterns in the data. Chapter 5 provided an interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and social change implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The nature of this study was a qualitative exploratory holistic single case study. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the factors that have contributed to the federal government's organizational success when an organization employee has low interpersonal trust in the agency's leadership, which addressed the phenomenon gap in literature identified by Asencio (2016). Researchers have explored and noted that distrust could also influence employees' positive performance. However, further research is needed to expand the conceptualization of distrust and distrust in employees, leadership, and organizations (Asencio, 2016; Guha et al., 2004). I selected a qualitative approach based on the repeated recommendations from researchers for studies examining the phenomenon of distrust as a beneficial concept in a federal governmental setting (see Asencio, 2016; Guha et al., 2004). Asencio, among other researchers, noted that current trust studies have been saturated with quantitative research and statistical figures but have failed to explore the concept of trust from a qualitative approach and employee perspective.

Interpretation of Findings

The results of this study indicated that 90% of the participants identified mission as one of the factors that influenced an employee's positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. Eighty-five percent of participants identified personality as a second factor that influenced an employee's positive performance outcomes despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership. One-hundred percent of participants indicated that their performances were not affected

due to the factors identified in this study. Participants stated that they strategized on handling untrustworthy leadership to cope with the lack of trust, ensuring their performance was not affected, and ensuring mission accomplishment. Identifying and understanding these factors that influenced the positive performance of federal government employees despite low interpersonal trust extended knowledge in the management discipline and trust theory.

Trust and Interpersonal Trust

The current theory of trust noted that positive outcomes are generally associated with the existence of trust (Jones & George, 1998). Rotter (1967) defined interpersonal trust as the reliance or expectancy of an individual on another individual's word or promise and usually emerged after frequency interaction and time. Deluga (1994) and Vanhala (2020) applied interpersonal trust to a workplace setting and redefined interpersonal trust as a relationship between an employee and leadership. Deluga indicated that interpersonal trust is critical for effectiveness and work productivity and identified supervisor's behavior as the primordial factor in determining the level of interpersonal trust between an employee and leadership. Schmidt and Schreiber (2019) concluded that interpersonal trust and/or interorganizational trust are needed to operate in organizational settings with governance mechanisms.

Research results revealed that an employee's positive performance/positive outcomes are not associated with the existence of trust. In this study, participants indicated that they had no or low interpersonal trust in leadership. Participants coped with the lack of trust by focusing on the mission and participants' personalities as motivator

factors. In this study, interpersonal trust was not critical of the effectiveness of work productivity, contrary to Deluga (1994) and Schmidt and Schreiber (2019). However, in this study, the supervisor's behavior was a primordial factor in determining the level of interpersonal trust between an employee and leadership. The result of this study showed that interpersonal trust and/or interorganizational trust is not needed to operate in organizational settings with governance mechanisms. All the participants of this study are federal employees who confirmed that they had low or no interpersonal trust but could perform positively within a government setting.

Distrust and Low Interpersonal Trust

Asencio (2016) mentioned that contrary to the general belief that trust contributes to beneficial outcomes, low interpersonal trust can also lead to beneficial outcomes, such as employee positive performance outcomes and organizational success. The results of this research confirmed Wang et al.'s (2016) and Asencio's (2016) positions where they mentioned that distrust plays a pivotal role in an employee's decision making and dissecting information to contribute to beneficial outcomes. Participants mentioned that identifying their low or no interpersonal trust in leadership contributed to their decision to react and perform positively. Kujala et al. (2016) and Punyatoya (2019) mentioned that affective and cognitive distrust within the interpersonal trust components derived from an employees' knowledge, experiences (cognitive), and emotional bond (affective). Affective and cognitive distrust can be complementary to one another and characterized by the employee's perception and knowledge that assist in the decision-making process of an employee (Kujala et al., 2016; Punyatoya, 2019). In this study, employees noted

that cognitive and affective distrust led to participants' need to strategize to cope with low or no interpersonal trust and toxic environments. Identifying and understanding employees' low or no interpersonal trust in leadership leads to participants' decision-making process as participants decide on what type of strategy to apply when dealing with untrustworthy leadership. Participants needed to strategize to find appropriate ways to handle untrustworthy leadership. Handling leadership was important to participants as this was necessary to focus on completing the mission.

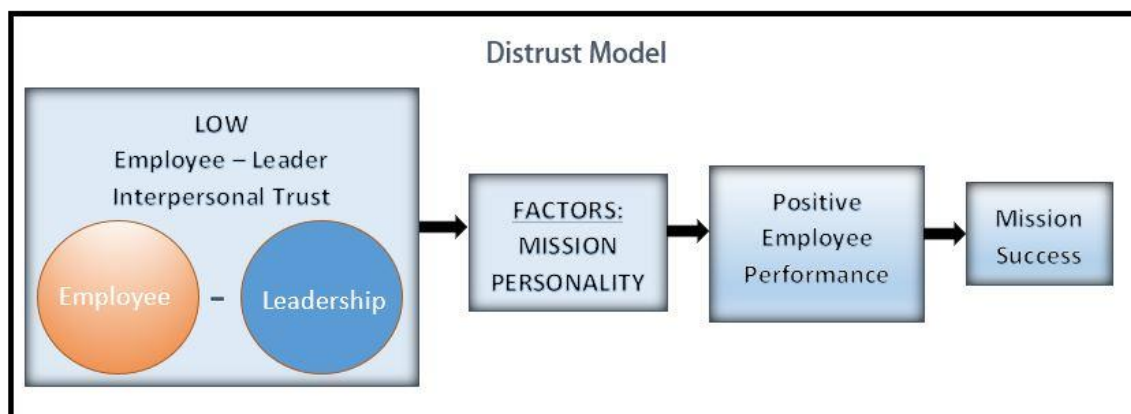
The scope of this research was designed to address the gap in literature. Asencio (2016), Conchie and Donald (2008), Lewicki et al. (1998), and March and Oslen (1995) noted that further research is needed to identify and provide an understanding of the factors that may influence positive employee performance when these employees are also experiencing low interpersonal trust. Asencio (2016) and Bewsell (2012) also mentioned that research on the construct of distrust is limited, complicated, and requires a qualitative approach to expand the body of literature and knowledge. Asencio (2016) and Kramer (1999) urged the further exploration of distrust in public organizational settings to expand the distrust construct. Extensive research was carried out, but I have not been able to identify any research that identified factors that have led to an employee's positive performance when experiencing low or no interpersonal trust in leadership.

The population of this study was participants who are or were employees of a federal agency within a geographical location in Alexandria, Virginia. I asked participants to focus on specific critical incidents that influenced them during their assignment to a federal agency. I used a qualitative holistic single case study

methodology along with the critical incident technique for data analysis. The results of this study identified that mission and personality were the main factors that influenced positive employee performance within a government setting (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Proposed Distrust Model (Conceptual Framework Model)



Note. Model was created for visualization of proposed distrust model.

Mission Driven (Gov Service Commitment)

Ireland and Hitt (1992) mentioned that employee commitment is important for organization and mission success. Researchers have claimed that a well-defined mission statement, the definition of an organization's mission, or an organization's unique purpose is vital to employee commitment (Ireland & Hitt, 1992). Generally, employee commitment to an organization and mission is observed when employees understand what the organization intends to accomplish and their role within the organization's mission. Cantarelli et al. (2020) noted that motivational drivers and employee identification with the mission are important; these independently and simultaneously affect an employee's behavior and choices regardless of a stable or dynamic work

environment. Researchers such as Cantarelli et al. (2020) and Bart et al. (2001) mentioned that employees' understanding and alignment with the organization's mission are critical to motivating employees. This understanding, identification, and alignment with the mission are considered critical starting points for all actions and initiatives (Bart et al., 2001; Cantarelli et al., 2020). Bart et al. (2001) and Desmidt (2016) explained that an employee's understanding, alignment, and service commitment are important factors that influence employee behavior. The data presented in this research align with the opinion of these researchers.

Personality

Li and Tong (2021) mentioned that employee personality is a factor that influences employee resilience in the workplace. Employee resilience emphasizes psychological and behavioral processes in which employees proactively cope with toxic environments and adverse situations (Li & Tong, 2021). Cooke et al. (2019) and Lin and Tong (2021) also noted that employee personality influenced resilience and suggested that this factor is significant to the success and development of organizations, especially when employees encounter narcissistic leaderships and toxic environments. Cooke et al. suggested that narcissistic leadership produces a process of awakening in individuals' goal-directed energy, which is possible due to employees' resilient personalities.

Research results have identified that employees' personality and resilience stem from employees' wish to strengthen organizations, organizational sustainability, and mission accomplishment; these findings have increased interest in employees' resilience (Näswall et al., 2019). Franken et al. (2020) mentioned that employees who lack resilient

personalities find collaboration and performance difficult. Bani-Melhem (2021) mentioned that employees' characteristics, such as personality traits, influence employees' responses to abusive supervision and toxic work environments. The data presented in this research align with the opinion of these researchers, in which employee personality provides the ability to bounce back after facing adversity.

Limitations of the Study

In Chapter 1, three potential limitations were identified. These included the possibility of not conducting face-to-face interviews due to the current pandemic and IRB guidelines that required all interviews to be completed virtually. Although the virtual setting was identified as a limitation, I mitigated this limitation by conducting teleconferences and following the research protocol to establish rapport and a relaxed setting where participants could candidly provide information.

Another limitation identified was the participant's honesty and openness. I initially planned to add a statement in the Informed Consent Form that required participants to acknowledge that all information provided was truthful to the best of their knowledge. The IRB removed the acknowledgment statement. Instead, the focus was the Informed Consent Form, which had enough information to establish the importance of the research, impact, and how meaningful the potential contributions of each participant could have in the management field and social change.

A final limitation presented during Chapter 1 was that this research results would not reflect all the agencies and employees within the Department of Defense. This limitation was reasonable because participants in this study represented a small

population. These participants may or may not have similar interpersonal trust in leadership and/or are affected by other factors not identified by this group of participants. The mitigation for this limitation was to conduct additional research and include other unique government agencies to advance the knowledge in this phenomenon.

Recommendations

Future studies should address the few limitations identified in this research. In contrast, other identified limitations may have turned out beneficial and may become useful in future studies. Asencio (2016) and Wang et al. (2016) identified that trust does not always lead to beneficial outcomes such as employee positive performance, contrary to the general belief of trust. Both researchers have urged future researchers to focus on employees' interpersonal trust and how trust/distrust can lead to beneficial outcomes, such as employee positive performance. This research was conducted based on these researchers' recommendations. The results of this research support Asencio's and Wang et al.'s position that positive outcomes such as employee positive performance can result when employees experience low or no interpersonal trust. Although these research results highlighted that positive employee performance could develop in an untrustworthy setting, additional researchers should continue to explore other factors that contribute to this phenomenon. The theory of trust and distrust coupled with different federal backgrounds, locations, and federal employees' personalities and backgrounds may lead to other factors influencing positive performance outcomes. Future researchers should continue to interview federal employees to understand and further the trust and distrust knowledge theory.

Additional studies should expand the number of participants in future studies. In this study, 20 participants were interviewed and provided with 77 critical incidents. Increasing the number of participants may increase the critical incidents, identifying other factors that may lead to employees' positive performance while experiencing low or no interpersonal trust. Broadening the scope of this study can help researchers identify additional factors that influence employees' performance. Researchers should continue to explore this phenomenon as constructs such as advancements in technology, different cultural backgrounds, and settings in the management field are constantly evolving (Mahoney & McGahan, 2007). Mission and personality were strong factors that influenced federal employees' positive performance; therefore, future researchers should continue to focus on these two factors contributing to this phenomenon as these factors may evolve with changes in mission and personalities. Mahoney and McGahan (2007) noted that trust is a discipline that should continually be studied because it is impossible to apply one single theory of trust universally to all settings, scenarios, groups, or individuals.

Participants' honesty and openness to share critical incidents was an initial concern in this research. However, these concerns were addressed by establishing rapport and initiating small conversations with all participants before starting the interview. Engaging in small conversations and showing genuine gratitude for individuals' participation created a relaxed atmosphere. Developing an interview protocol assisted with defining the interview setting and a transition to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their critical incidents.

Through my journaling notes, I highlighted participants' comments and sense of engagement when I provided participants with the background, the purpose, and the potential implications of their contribution to the study and management field. I noted that discussing the study's background and purpose with participants allowed participants to identify the importance of their data and how their critical incidents may impact the research, the management field, and possibly affect social change. Identifying participants' potential contributions allowed participants to engage and provide open and honest stories. Peacock, Cowan, Irvine, and Williams (2020) noted that providing individuals information and explaining their impact or contribution creates a sense of belonging, leading to openness, confidence, and honesty. Future researchers should create interview protocols and take the time to explain the purpose and background of the study to participants. Future researchers should also focus on informing participants how their contributions may affect the discipline. Creating a setting where participants understand their role and impact may assist with this potential limitation in future studies.

Initially, a virtual setting was a limitation in this research because a face-to-face setting seemed to be appropriate for semistructured, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. However, conducting this research virtually through telephone calls provided scheduling flexibility and bridged the gap with geographically dispersed participants. Additionally, participants mentioned that participating via a telephone call allowed them to choose their setting versus driving or going to an agreed location, which would otherwise deter participation with current COVID-19 concerns. I highlighted participants' feedback on their setting and commented on their preference to participate virtually

through my journaling notes. Future researchers should consider conducting virtual interviews to provide participants flexibility, which may increase participants.

Implications for Theory

The results of this study might have possible implications for the theory of trust and distrust. The findings of this study indicate that the general theory of trust and distrust may vary depending on factors that influence federal employees. This research reinforces other researchers' positions where researchers stated that trust is not always necessary to achieve beneficial outcomes such as employee positive performance or organizational success (Asencio, 2016; Wang et al., 2016). The study findings indicated that positive employee performance when experiencing low or no interpersonal trust correlates with employees' sense of belonging to the mission and personality. This correlation is seldomly mentioned when researchers address the theory of trust. Researchers must explore other factors that may cause performance rather than generalizing positive performance with interpersonal trust. Expanding the knowledge of the trust theory may benefit the management discipline. Future scholars and researchers must maintain an open mind to explore different constructs that can change theory or discipline. Every researcher's responsibility is to contribute new knowledge to preserve the propagation of accurate and current knowledge.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study might have possible implications for practice. The research data highlighted that trust is not always needed to obtain positive outcomes; nevertheless, participants confirmed that low trust and distrust in leadership created toxic

environments full of incompetent and disrespectful leaders. Participants strategized on how to handle negative leadership behavior and toxic environments. Even though trust is not a consistent factor for beneficial outcomes, employee–interpersonal leadership trust is important for creating harmonious, stress-free, diverse, and inclusive environments in the workplace.

Annually, the federal government allocates funding to thousands of schools that provide leadership training (Davis, 2019). The federal government has a vested interest in educating and training its leaders at all levels to guide and develop an understanding of their responsibility. Federal government leadership is responsible for creating a diverse, inclusive, open, and safe work environment free from harassment (Lytell, Keller, Katz, Marquis, & Sollinger, 2016). The Department of Defense requires all leaders to understand and display their core values: duty, integrity, ethics, honor, courage, and loyalty (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2009). In this study, participants highlighted that their leaders do not reflect the commonly known federal government's core values. Participants noted that the leaders mentioned in their critical incidents were characterized by their dismissive, egocentric, narcissistic, and disrespectful behaviors. This study identified that individuals assigned to leadership positions do not align with the Department of Defense leadership responsibilities and core values. Future researchers must continue to identify untrustworthy leadership and highlight the negative environments these leaders generate to expand awareness within the discipline of management, the federal government, and future leaders.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this research could positively affect social change and be useful for the federal government, the discipline of management, the theory of trust, and leadership awareness. Identifying the factors that motivate positive employee behavior can assist the management field in identifying this construct within other organizations and incorporating this knowledge in future leadership training that can positively change leadership behavior and promote awareness within the discipline. This research identifies untrustworthy leadership and the need for change in leadership behaviors. These untrustworthy leaders within the Department of Defense are not leading by example or exemplifying the Department of Defense's core values. Thus, an implication of this study may lead to heightened organizational training and employee-leaders relationships. The use of leadership training programs emphasizing this phenomenon may be the first step to promoting awareness within the federal government and leadership. The implication for social change may lead to future changes that may affect disciplines outside of the management field and organizations outside the federal government.

Conclusions

The Department of Defense is at the forefront of our country's defense; with 2.91 million employees, the Department of Defense is one of many federal agencies that the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey annually assesses (United States Department of Defense, n.d.). The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey identified low employee trust in leadership in a federal agency within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2013, 2015, 2018). Asencio (2016) explored the concept of

trust, distrust, and performance and identified the need for qualitative empirical research on this phenomenon. Asencio (2016) urged future researchers to focus on employee-leader interpersonal trust, including factors that affect positive employee/organizational performance under constraints unique to government. The findings of this study suggest that participants are driven by the organizational mission and the participant's personalities. Participants indicated that leaders were untrustworthy and created a toxic workplace environment. While participants' low or no trust in leadership did not negatively affect employees' performance, participants strategized handling untrustworthy leaders and navigating toxic environments. The results of this study shine a light on a phenomenon that requires additional research. Future researchers should explore different factors that positively affect employees' performance in a broader federal agency and a larger participant sample. Future studies can expand the knowledge in trust theory and promote social change through awareness, training, and change in behavior.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Email

Subject: Recruitment Invitation (Email 1)

Greetings Sir/Ma'am,

I hope this email finds you and your family well and safe! I am currently completing my Doctorate Degree of Philosophy with a concentration in Leadership, Management, and Organizational Change. I would like to invite you to participate in my study entitled: Understanding Factors Leading to Organizational Success Despite Low Trust in Leadership. Thank you in advance for taking the time to read this email and for your willingness to consider my request. In order to determine if you are eligible to participate, I need to ask you a couple of questions.

1. Are you or have you been an employee of a federal agency for more than 6 months?

Yes or No

2. While assigned to a federal *agency*, did you received a satisfactory rating in a performer's appraisal/evaluation? Yes or No

3. While assigned to a *federal agency*, at any time did you experience low trust in leadership or no trust in leadership? Yes or No

Based upon your responses to the questions, you may be asked to move forward with the study, which will only require an additional 30-60 minutes of your time. My goal with this study is to add profession knowledge and insight to the managerial field. My goal is to share insights on what factors influence federal employees to continue to perform positively while experiencing low trust in leadership. If you are interested in participating in this study; the study contributions to the management field and the

federal government, please reply to this email with the questions addressed above. Thank you again for your time and consideration in this matter.

Next Steps: Follow up email after the review of the responses in email 1:

Subject: Recruitment Follow up (Email 2)

Greetings Sir/Ma'am,

Thank you very much for your time and your responses to the questions in the email entitled "Recruitment Invitation." Based on your responses to the three questions in my previous recruitment email, you are eligible to participate in this study, and we will move forward to the next step. As part of this research and confirmation of your participation, attached, you will find the informed consent form. Please review the form for additional information and a more detailed description of the study.

Due to the current COVID-19 state, CDC guidelines, social distancing, and our geographic constraints, I would like to schedule a virtual meeting for us to meet. If you prefer, you can reply or contact me after you have reviewed the consent information, and we will schedule the time then. My contact information will be enclosed in this email for your convenience. Again, I thank you for your time and participation in this study.

V/R
Myriam E. Seay

Appendix B: Participant In-Depth Interview Questions

Interviewer Prompt:

An interview process has been designed to gather your experience and experiences related to incidents that may have led you to have lower trust or no trust in a federal agency's leadership and the factors that may have influenced you to performed positively despite you experiencing low interpersonal trust with leadership. The following interview questions will be used to gather your perspective and experience with the phenomenon mentioned earlier.

Participant ID # _____

Date _____

Questions (1-3) will be used to confirm participant qualification

1. Are you or have you been an employee of a federal agency for more than 6 months?
2. While employed by a federal agency, did you receive a satisfactory rating in a performer's appraisal/evaluation?
3. During your employment by a federal agency, do you recall at any time experiencing low trust in your leadership or no trust in leadership?

Questions (4-5) will be used to identify low or no interpersonal trust in leadership

4. Can you describe how do you know if you have trust or no trust towards a leader?
5. How did your interpersonal relationship between you and your leadership influence your opinion of trust in leadership?

Questions (6-9) will be used to explore employees' positive performance while experiencing low or no interpersonal trust in leadership.

6. How do you think the lack of trust in leadership affects your attitude towards your leader?

7. How do you think the lack of trust in leadership affects your performance? How did you tackle the challenge?
8. Can you recall one or more incidents where you performed positively despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership? What happened? Please be as detailed as possible.
 - a. Although you had low trust in leadership, what were your personal motivations or factors that influenced you to positively performed while assigned to a federal agency? What pushed you to do well despite what you experienced?
9. Why do you think you performed positively despite experiencing low interpersonal trust in leadership? What pushed you to do well despite what you experienced?

Interview wrap up:

The research questions above and below will be asked in a natural progression. I will aim to end the interview with any question the participant may have in the efforts to ensure the participant feels comfortable with the next steps in the study and address any concerns that might not have been addressed at the beginning of the interview.

- Is there anything else you would like to add or share with me? Is there anything else I forgot to ask?
- Thank you for your participation. I also want to confirm that a transcript of our interview will be emailed to you within five days of today. If you have any questions in the next few days, please feel free to contact me. Thank you again for your participation!

Appendix D: Interview Protocols

Individual interviews will be conducted virtually, by telephone. Open-ended questions will be utilized to facilitate and allow participants to create options for responding. Open-ended questions will also allow participants to voice their experiences and perspectives. The interviewer will respond to what the participant shares and will look for clarification and additional detail where needed.

Interview Checklist: Introduction

- Introduction by Myriam Seay
- Participant introduction
- Purpose of the study
- Provide informed consent
- Provide interview structure: audio recordings, taking notes, use of a pseudonym
- Do you have questions?
- Time to test audio equipment and virtual connection
- Small chat – Time to make participants feel comfortable and relaxed

Interview # _____

Date _____ / _____ / _____

Script

Welcome, Mr./Mrs. Last Name. First, let me start by saying thank you for your time and for deciding to participate in this research. As you know, my name is Myriam Seay, and I'm a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting this research as part of my fulfillment of the requirements for my doctoral degree in Management. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this in-depth interview process in which will take

approximately 30-60 minutes and will include questions regarding your experiences, insights, and perceptions about factors that influence you to perform positively despite experiencing low interpersonal trust or no trust in leadership during your assignment with a federal agency.

I would like to start by asking you, Mr./Mrs. Last name, your permission to audio record this interview so I may accurately document and transcribe the information you share with me today. If, at any time during our interview session, you wish me to stop recording or stop the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. If at any time you wish to take a break, please feel free to let me know, and we can stop right away. I will also like to remind you that all of your participation and responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and your peers have viewed and experience the phenomenon previously mentioned. This interview will allow us to delve further into the topic of trust by exploring and understanding what factors have influence employees like you to performed positively regardless of experiencing low trust or no trust in their leadership. Your contributions will impact future scholars as scholars may benefit from the data you provide us today. Your contributions today can also help bring additional knowledge to the management field and the trust theory. The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that contribute to the federal government's organizational success when the organization's employees have low interpersonal trust in the agency's leadership, which will address the phenomenon gap in the literature

I would also like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study, which was your response email stating “I consent” after your review of the Informed Consent Form. I also want to note that I am the only responsible investigator and interviewer for this research. For your situational awareness, I will email you a copy of this form, and I will keep a copy under my private external hard drive, which is password protected and separate from your reported responses. While all responses are confidential, if any illegal or criminal activity/information is noted during our interview, I am obligated to inform you that I have to report these to pertinent authorities. Do you have any questions or concerns so far? Once again, your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please feel free to let me know, and we will stop immediately. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Before we begin, do you have any concerns, questions or do you need me to clarify anything? With no questions or concerns and your permission, let’s begin!