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Leader-Member Exchange and Employee Retention in Municipal Government Agencies

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MBA, Troy University, 2012

BS, Albany State University, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

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Abstract

A significant concern for organizational leaders is the impact of leader-member exchange related to employee behaviors and employee retention. The problem was that some municipal government leaders might not embrace core leadership practices that develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. The purpose of this single case study was to explore practices that municipal government leaders had implemented to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. This single case study sought to identify and clarify core leadership practices of successful leaders in municipal government. The research question asked what core leadership practices municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention. Graen and Uhl-Bien's leader-member exchange theory was the basis for understanding successful leadership practices in a southwest Georgia municipal government agency that developed leader-employee relationships and increased employee retention. Twelve leaders from the government agency participated in semistructured interviews. The emerging themes from the interviews included strategic human resource management, collaborative leadership, internal leadership branding, internal communication system, and performance management. The findings might contribute to positive social change by preparing organizational leadership for adapting to economic, social, and technological challenges leading to business sustainability.

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Dedication

To my children, I’keisha, Brenan, and grandson Isaiah, thanks for your unselfishness as I embarked on this journey to transform the way we live. You all have been the inspiration behind my pursuit. I cannot convey enough gratitude and thanks for your unwavering support and encouragement. I remember the words spoken to me when I discussed the thoughts of giving up on this pursuit: “Momma you never quit anything”—those are the words I carry inside of me when I think the journey has defeated me. For years, you allowed me to forfeit many hours of bonding and vacations to write—thank you. Thank you for walking into the journey with me and not allowing me giving up. To my mother Rebecca Thomas, your sacrifice raising children alone, withholding nothing for yourself only demanding greatness from each of us. You are the mountain for our family and without you; we are nothing, I LOVE YOU.

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This endeavor would have been unimaginable and impossible without the grace and mercy of GOD. Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” is written in my mind and heart. Thank you for being the footprints in the sand; keeping and instilling wisdom and knowledge when I did not know what to do during difficult times.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Retention of existing employees remains an ongoing issue for organizational leaders (Abdul Hamid & Yahya, 2016; Kumar, 2020; Murray et al., 2017). A significant concern for organizational leaders is the impact of leader-member exchange (LMX) related to employee behaviors and employee retention (AlHashmi et al., 2019). Leaders' relationships with subordinates provide a key social context that affects how individuals react to abusive supervision (Mackey et al., 2020). Leaders need to understand the importance of building positive leader-employee relationships because LMX quality is a significant driver of employee outcomes (Maslyn et al., 2017; Pratama et al., 2018). Positive leader-employee relationships can lead to sustainable organizational performance (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018; Drescher, 2017; Erkutlu, & Chafra, 2018). Having an organizational culture enhanced by leader-employee relationships can lead to improved leader-member interaction, increased employee performance, and enriched morale (Deal et al., 2018). The application of LMX produces systematic analysis that affects the outcomes of relationship and application of investment and exchange (Liao & Hui, 2021).

Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, problem statement, purpose statement, and research question. The chapter also includes the conceptual framework, nature of the study, operational definitions of key terms, assumptions, limitations, scope, delimitations of the study, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 consists of the literature review including the search strategy. Chapter 3 comprises the methodology section consisting of the research method, research design, data collection, and issues of trustworthiness.

Background of the Study

Recognizing the importance of leadership may help establish the significance of leader-employee relationships within organizations. Leadership is the pathway to creating an organizational environment, development, and performance, whereas the dyadic relationships between leaders and employees are the building blocks of the organization (Jayeeta & Haque, 2017). Leadership is an essential element for determining employees' levels of engagement within the workplace, organizational performance, and retention (de Oliveira & Rocha, 2017; Ugaddan & Park, 2017; Zeb et al., 2018). Effective leaders develop relationships by motiving employees, rewarding subordinates, and providing support for growth (Zeb et al., 2018). Leaders who are aware of the importance of building high-quality relationships with subordinates create the opportunity to foster employee job satisfaction and organizational engagement (Radstaak & Hennes, 2017).

Municipal government leaders have regarded leader-employee relationships as a significant factor because of the challenges with employee retention leading to decreased organizational performance. Moreover, some leaders have changed their focus from profitability toward positive leader-employee relationships, which may strengthen leadership, employee morale within the organization's environment, employee engagement, and retention (Covella et al., 2017; Dartey-Baah et al., 2019; Dhanpat et al., 2018). High-quality leader-employee relationships can aid with removing bureaucratic constraints and helping employees explore new opportunities, which would lead to goal alignment (Saeed et al., 2019). As the work environment continues to change because of globalization and technological innovation, the development of high-quality LMX involves more resources and efforts from both leaders and workers (Kula, 2017).

Despite the importance of leader-employee relationships, some individuals may not be receptive to leaders' initiatives to foster relationships. Employees view leaders as personified organization representatives (Covella et al., 2017), and employees have guidance expectations of leaders (Kahya & Sahin, 2018). Workers perceive leaders to lead by example and portray the behaviors the leaders desire their subordinates to demonstrate. Thus, workers' attributions and classifications of leaders' work behaviors are essential aspects in forming LMX evaluations, and quality leader-employee relationships are a potential source to enhance employee performance (Kula, 2017; Walthall & Dent, 2016). When followers have positive relationships with leaders, employees increase their performance to be assigned additional job tasks and responsibilities (Kahya & Sahin, 2018). Focusing on leadership practices is therefore a fundamental aspect of achieving organizational goals. Organizational leaders should be continuously innovative in developing an internal process (Min-Seong & Dong-Woo, 2017).

Ineffective leadership practices that may lead to decreased employee retention are a constant concern for leaders, especially municipal government leaders. Municipal government leaders are responsible for creating a vision statement, motivating workers, sustaining high employee commitment levels, and retaining employees (Smothers & Lawton, 2017). According to Battaglio et al. (2017), some municipal government agencies lack workforce-planning metrics to engage in long-term human resource (HR) planning.

Though researchers have explored various aspects of leadership practices to promote positive employee behaviors and improve employee retention, they have not explored leader-employee relationships for enhancing employee retention and organizational performance. Additional research on leadership practices used to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention is needed to address this gap in the literature. The rationale for conducting the study was to provide leaders with information to develop mutual trust and respect, provide support, and build positive relationships with employees. The study's findings could assist organizational leaders in their efforts to retain employees by applying the concepts of LMX in the modern workplace.

Problem Statement

Organizational leaders continue to encounter challenges with building high-quality relationships with subordinates and retaining highly skilled and knowledgeable employees (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Radstaak & Hennes, 2017). Moreover, municipal government leaders continue to encounter challenges with the applicability of the concepts of LMX in the modern workplace and new work relationships and the recruitment and retention of talented employees (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018; Gomez, 2017). Employee turnover is a prominent aspect of public management, whereas the turnover rate for state and local civil servants is 1.6% (Ferreira & Neiva, 2018). The general problem was the absence of understanding the importance of the leaders' interactions with employees to create an environment of engagement, increase employee retention, and enhance organization performance. The specific problem was that some municipal government leaders might not embrace core leadership practices that develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, single case study was to explore core leadership practices that municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention. This case study allows for the examination of leaders and employees within their natural setting (Yin, 2018). The study's purpose was to contribute to the gap in research concerning effective leadership practice implementation in municipal government agencies. The focus of this study was the process of leader-employee relationship cultivation by all levels of municipal government leadership. Data collection consisted of semistructured interviews of 12 municipal government leaders from a municipal government agency in southwest Georgia. Leaders may identify leadership practices for enhancing leader and employee relationships to improve organizational performance, thus leading to business sustainability. The study contributes to the body of research about the effectiveness of LMX and employee retention in municipal government agencies.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was: What core leadership practices do municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework consisted of the LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Graen and Uhl-Bien developed LMX to describe how effective leadership relationships develop between partners such as leaders, employees, and team members within an organization. The key concepts of LMX are role-taking, role-making, and role routinization, which lead to high-quality leader-member relationships. The three facets of dyadic relationships between leaders and employees are trust, respect, and obligations to cultivate relationships created from shared beliefs, mutual admiration, and building relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). I chose this model to explore the specific leadership practices that municipal government leaders use to apply the concepts of LMX to establish high-quality leader-employee relationships. I focused on how leaders build relationships based on mutual trust, respect, and obligations to achieve positive outcomes such as increased employee engagement, commitment, and retention.

Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) LMX originated from research on the traditional leadership approaches and styles such as behavior theories, trait theories, and contingency theories. LMX theory continues to be a significant conceptual framework for studying the reciprocal relationship between leaders and employees (Kula, 2017). For example, Rezapour and Farzad (2017) indicated that leaders of the public sector must pay substantial attention to the significance of LMX to moderate the influence of career adaptability on job satisfaction. Brunetto et al. (2017) also examined the influence of LMX on employee affective commitment and found that LMX influences employees' affective commitment. LMX may also improve positive occupational experiences and supplement leader effectiveness (Bugvi & Wafa, 2018). Using LMX has provided researchers with a method to identify whether leader-employee relationships are needed to understand people's organizational citizenship behaviors and achieve organizational goals. LMX theory shows the influence of high-quality relationships have on leaders to better understand the advancement of the organization. In addition, LMX helps individuals gain an understanding of their value as human capital and the significance of their work behaviors on career development. Graen and Uhl-Bien's LMX applied to the study because leaders may incorporate the facets of role-taking, role-making, and role routinization to create an environment of engagement.

As a constructivist researcher, I used LMX theory to identify how municipal government leaders promote organizational relationships and increase employee retention. Constructivist researchers focus on interpreting the meaning of individuals' views about the situation under investigation (Rechberg, 2018). In addition, I used LMX theory to gain insight into how municipal government leaders may improve practices to enhance leader-employee relationships (Saeed et al., 2019). I added to the body of research using LMX as a framework by applying it in the municipal government. Thus, the framework not only guided this study but supports the model's effectiveness and viability.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this qualitative single case study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex situation by exploring the participants' realities (Abonyi et al., 2020). I used the qualitative research method to gain an understanding of leadership practices used to develop leader-employee relationships from the participants' perceptions. In addition, the qualitative research method was suitable for the study because I explored the core leadership practices used to increase employee retention from the experiences of the participants. Researchers use the quantitative approach to answer the hypothesis by examining the relationships between variables using numerical measurements (Raharjo, 2019). The quantitative method was inappropriate because the purpose of the study was not to answer the hypothesis examining the relationships between numerical variables. Mixed methods researchers draw upon both qualitative and quantitative methods to strengthen the results of the study (Saracho, 2017). Using the mixed method approach was not suitable for the study because I did not focus on strengthening the qualitative data with quantitative results.

The qualitative methodology consists of five common research designs including case study, phenomenology, ethnography, narrative, and grounded theory. For the study, I used a single case study design. Case studies are most appropriate when considering *how* and *why* questions about a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2018). The single case study design was the most suitable for the study because I researched the contemporary issue of leader-member relationships in a real-life context. In addition, my focus was to answer *how* and *why* questions about the importance of an environment of engagement to increase employee retention.

I also considered the phenomenology, ethnography, narrative, and grounded theory designs. Phenomenological researchers focus on gaining an understanding of the topic based on participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Because I did not focus on the participants' lived experiences, the phenomenological design was not suitable for the study. Researchers use the ethnography design to understand the behavioral processes and beliefs of a cultural group (Astroth & Chung, 2018). But the purpose of the study was not to research and understand the behavioral processes and beliefs of a cultural group or specific group within the organization. Narrative researchers focus on the participants' reflection of chronological events presented as stories (Sarasa & Porta, 2018), which was unsuitable because I did not intend to gather information based on the participants' stories about leadership practices used to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. Finally, grounded theory is the use of inductive reasoning to develop a social theory for a phenomenon (Astroth & Chung, 2018). Researchers use the grounded theory design as a systematic inductive method in qualitative research to development theory (Lee, 2019). The purpose of the study was not to use a systematic inductive method to development theory; therefore, the grounded theory design was inappropriate.

After a review of the research methodologies, I decided to use the single case study design to gain an understanding of the leadership practices that municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention. The single case study for analysis included the leadership practices of one municipal government agency located in southwest Georgia serving as the research site. The participants consisted of nine municipal government leaders. I collected data using multiple sources including semistructured interviews with leaders.

Definitions

Employee engagement: An employee's display of positive behavior and continuous contribution towards the achievement of the organization's success (Bui et al., 2017; Ghuman, 2016).

Leader-member exchange (LMX): The interactions between leaders and their subordinates that may impact decision-making, job autonomy, and employee performance (Bugvi & Wafa, 2018). LMX is an explanation of how respondents' tangible or intangible interactions can lead to the development of relationships (Asdani et al., 2018).

Job satisfaction: Employee job satisfaction is the emotional responses or attitudes of individuals toward their work (Barasa et al., 2018; Čič et al., 2018; Kaur et al., 2017).

Municipality: A city or district governed by the local government (Cooper et al., 2019).

Organizational citizenship behavior: A role behavior displayed by individuals within an organization that is not formally rewarded by organizational leaders (Asa & Santhosh, 2017). Organizational citizenship behavior is a reflection of employees' attitudes resulting from different aspects of their work environment (Berberoglu, 2018).

Organizational commitment: Individuals' psychological and emotional attachment to remain with an organization based on their experiences while employed (Kazmi, 2017).

Relationship: The scope of relations that leaders establish regarding trust, friendship, and respect of their employees' ideas and genuine concern for employees' emotional state (Lopes da Silva et al., 2019).

Relationship-oriented leadership: The leadership style is based on relationships between the leaders and subordinates in which leaders' focus is their employees' emotions and respect for employees' beliefs (Raeisi & Amirnejad, 2017).

Trustworthiness: An element of credibility and the assessment of another person or entity's reliability (Kwantes et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018).

Work–life balance: The balance synchronized balance between work life and family life (Dhanpat et al., 2018).

Assumptions

Assumptions are the researcher's beliefs or viewpoints accepted as true without further research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Four assumptions guided this study. The primary assumption was that leaders in municipal government agencies lack leadership practices to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention. The second assumption was that participants would provide responses to address the research question. The third assumption was that participants would openly and honestly answer questions about their experiences during the interview. The final assumption was that participants would be transparent about the specific leadership practices used in their municipal government agency to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope and delimitations are the boundaries set by the researcher to limit the scope of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The scope of the study was to address the purpose, which was to explore leadership practices that municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention. I focused on obtaining descriptions of municipal government leaders' views about the importance of implementing leadership practices to address challenges with cultivating an environment of engagement and enhancing organizational performance. More specifically, I focused on the importance of leader-employee relationships to achieve organizational goals.

The sources of data collection were semistructured interviews and company documents. The participants included 12 municipal government leaders who had implemented leadership practices to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention. A delimitation of this study was the selection of only one municipal government agency. The study was specific to southwest Georgia and not the entire southern region. The study was purposely targeted as small-scale and does not represent all municipal government agencies nationwide. The study did not include private, state, or federal government agencies.

Additionally, this study only addressed the exploration of effective leadership practices to increase municipal government leaders' awareness of the significance of high-quality relationships between leaders and employees and employee retention. As noted, few studies exist on LMX within municipal government agencies (Fan & Han, 2018; Lee & Ji, 2018; Radstaak & Hennes, 2017). The scope of this study did not include issues concerning gender, race, and workforce diversity. Extending the scope of the study to include gender, race, and workforce diversity would have broadened and manipulated the process and purpose of the study.

Though the foundational concept of leadership theories remains, new patterns of social interaction can be used for measuring leadership capability. The path-goal theory approach to leadership depends on individual capabilities and task-related situations (House, 1971). The holistic view of the path-goal theory is that behavior development relies on leadership recognizing a need to allow subordinates to reach preferred goals more structurally (House, 1971). Self-determination theory is an experiential approach to human motivation and personality characterized by innate and psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Self-determination theory provides an account of viewpoints that recognizes compelling evidence that human tendencies are favorable towards active engagement and development that links pay to employee motivation in practical studies addressing compensation and motivation in organizations (Olafsen et al., 2015). Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory focuses on a leader's behavior and the readiness of the followers, which determines the effectiveness of the leader (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). For instance, task-oriented leaders give explicit instructions, create organizational patterns, and establish formal communication, whereas relation-oriented leaders attempt to reduce emotional conflicts, build satisfying relationships, and promote equal participation (Meier, 2016). Further, contingency theory declares that good leader-member relationships along with defined goals and capability to punish as well as a reward are necessities (Fiedler, 1964). Finally, transactional theory is described as exchange processes that are mutually acceptable interactions between followers and leaders, and transformational leadership generates the interest of employees by creating awareness that extends beyond self-interest toward organizational purpose and mission (Bass, 1985). Despite these theories on leadership, LMX theory was used.

The transferability of this study did not presume to represent the experiences of government leaders holistically. The targeted population was municipal government leaders in southwest Georgia. To address transferability, researchers document and record each phase incorporated in the research process (Quimby-Worrell, 2019). To address transferability, I provided extensive descriptions of consistencies in the participants' experiences and leadership practices. Future researchers may extend the scope to improve transferability by researching multiple municipal government agencies, other geographical regions, gender and race diversity, and other considerations.

Limitations

Limitations of qualitative studies relate to potential weaknesses of the study, which the researcher cannot control and may affect the dependability, transferability, and validity of the research findings (Bernard, 2017). The methodological limitations of qualitative studies include the lack of transferability, the small sample population targeted for a study, and the innumerable interpretations that research can yield (Yin, 2018). To address this limitation, I used purposive sampling to select a diverse sample of participants within the study parameters (Biyela et al., 2018). Another limitation of this study was the participants could have provided data to agree with the researcher not based on actual events as they occurred. Participants may respond to interviews to align their answers with the researcher's conclusions of the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To mitigate this potential limitation, I conducted semistructured interviews consisting of open-ended questions. Researchers ask open-ended questions during data collection to include scope for probing questions (Cervantes et al., 2017; Gabriels & Moerenhout, 2018). The geographical location, which was southwest Georgia was also a limitation because gathered data-limited generalizations to the larger population. Another limitation of this study included the use of a qualitative single case study. Future research is needed to address the limitations of geographical location and research design.

The final limitation was potential researcher bias, which could affect the trustworthiness of the study's findings. To avoid bias, I recorded my thoughts, opinions, and perspective in a reflective journal. Using a reflective journal assists researchers to be aware of their beliefs and perceptions (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017; Hiha, 2016). In addition, I conducted member-checking interviews with participants. Reflexivity and member checking allow me to remain neutral during data analysis to provide findings without the researcher's predisposition.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study may increase awareness regarding leaders' interactions with employees to create an environment of engagement that affirms that positive actions and attitudes enhance organization performance. Business leaders may gain insight regarding how cultivating relationships with employees may lead to workers displaying positive organizational citizenship behavior. The findings may be valuable to businesses because leaders may gain an understanding of how leadership practices affect the work environment and business sustainability.

Significance to Practice

The goal of most managers and leaders is to create an environment of engagement that encourages job satisfaction and increases retention for employees who are conscious of the vision and mission. The results can help identify leadership practices to assist organizations toward successfully incorporating LMX concepts to cultivate relationships. The findings reveal strategies for municipal government leaders that may alleviate the challenges of developing leader-employee relationships. Leaders in municipal government can change the dynamics of the organization by correlating with employees to generate new ideas and display other means of resolution that include leader-employee synergy. The study can provide leaders with information to change their perceptions regarding leader-employee relationships, which may lead to high-quality LMX, employee commitment, and increased job satisfaction. The quality of the leader-employee relationship affects individuals' work experience (Li et al., 2018). Moreover, employee job engagement and organization engagement are higher among individuals with a high-quality LMX than those with low-quality LMX (Min-Seong & Dong-Woo, 2017). Employees with high-quality leader-member relationships actively engage in crafting their job demands and resources (Radstaak & Hennes, 2017).

Significance to Theory

There is a gap in the literature on leadership practices successful leaders in municipal government agencies use to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. Previous and current research on leadership practices demonstrates that LMX impacts job outcomes in different industries (Jutras & Mathieu, 2016), but few studies have explored the experiences of municipal government leaders to understand using the concepts of LMX in the municipal government agencies to influence employee retention. The study contributes to the idea that organizational leaders should focus on the concepts of LMX such as trust, respect, and cultivating relationships to foster organizational citizenship behaviors among employees. Leaders may build relationships with workers by portraying leadership styles to express shared beliefs and mutual admiration. Through the incorporation of role-taking, role-making, and role routinization, the leaders' and subordinators' level of engagement, job satisfaction, and retention may increase, which may lead to decreased employee turnover and enhanced organizational performance.

Significance to Social Change

The findings may contribute to social change related to leadership preparation of individuals for adapting to economic, social, and technological challenges leading to business sustainability. All stakeholders may gain an understanding of the significance of implementing the concepts of LMX to build partnerships between leaders and employees to ensure organizations are prepared to compete in the diverse global environment. The study results might contribute to positive social change by providing organizational leaders with a comprehension of LMX to create an environment of engagement to generate the necessary actions to enhance individuals' morale. In addition, a social contribution to the community might be continuous gainful employment for local citizens, which may result in stimulating economic growth in the community and the United States.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 1 introduced the study, background, problem statement, purpose, and significance of the research. I also presented the dominant research question, conceptual framework, followed by the nature of the study. The conclusion of Chapter 1 expounded on the definitions, provided the scope of the study, and summarized the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the research. Chapter 2 consists of a review of the current literature that provides an in-depth exploration of the effects of positive leadership interaction with employees.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

An organization's investment in relationships between leaders and employees increases capitalization on employee retention (Mackey et al., 2020). The problem was that some municipal government leaders might not embrace core leadership practices that develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019). The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore core leadership practices that municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. Leader-employee success relates to LMX and organizational support, which are enhanced by extended opportunities, rewards, and flexibility (Peng et al., 2019). Based on LMX, leaders guide and assess the competencies of followers through role making, role-taking, and role routinization (Emirza & Katrinli, 2019).

Chapter 2 summarizes findings of the literature review, supporting the study and presenting connections to the problem statement and conceptual framework. Chapter 2 includes strategies that upper management could explore to positively impact change within municipal government to engage with employees that will increase employee engagement and retention. The literature review provides an overview of the history and development of leader-employee relationships and an outline of the definitions concerning LMX used in the study. Chapter 2 concludes with a summary of the literature regarding the importance of effective leadership practices, leadership styles, high-quality LMX, employee engagement, and employee retention in public sector organizations.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review derives from peer-reviewed journal articles, textbooks, and additional published resources relevant to leadership engagement. The database searches of professional literature were constructed through strategic related word searches. My article search was facilitated by using databases such as ProQuest Central, EBSCO Business Source Premier, ABI Inform, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, Sage Publications, and Emerald Full Text.

My strategy encompassed collecting articles by using common search words and a combination of words and phrasing in each database to retrieve related articles, creating an alert to receive new articles when published, and searching various sites to gather related journals and statistical information. Using guiding processes to review related literature, the following search terms and a combinations of terms included: *leadership*, *leadership styles*, *leadership practices*, *leader-member exchange theory*, *leader-employee relationships*, *high quality leader-member exchange*, *employee engagement*, *employee retention*, *supportive leadership*, *perceived organizational support*, *effective leadership*, *leadership responsibility*, *municipal government*, *employee job engagement*, *employee organization engagement*, *organizational citizenship behavior*, *employee performance*, *employee commitment*, *employee creativity*, *innovative behavior*, *job satisfaction*, *employee turnover*, and *organization performance*.

The literature search included select topics regarding leadership in municipal government: (a) role of leadership in municipal government agencies, (b) significance of leader-employee relationships, (c) leadership practices for employee engagement and (d) employee retention issues regarding municipal government agencies. I established parameters to limit my results to peer-reviewed articles from 2016 to 2020. The literature search strategy was to initially focus on peer-reviewed journals, but I extended the scope of the search to include government websites and seminal works in instances where there was little current research. The second stage of the search comprised researching articles referenced in the initial articles. As a result, the literature review includes citations of 207 peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2016 to 2019.

Leader-Member Exchange

The key factor in organizations is relationships that influence the retention of high-potential employees (Letchmiah, & Thomas, 2017). The distinct aspects of LMX highlight the elements that shape the dyadic relationships of leaders and subordinates in an organization (Jayeeta & Haque, 2017). Individuals develop greater affiliation to the organization when leaders maintain social relationships with their subordinates (Lee et al., 2016). Cultivating relationships between leaders and workers is thus an essential element for developing an individual's psychological connection with the organization's high-quality LMX (Chen & Wu, 2017; Krishnaveni & Monica, 2016). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) argued that the dimensions of LMX reflect a good employment relationship between the worker and the organization. LMX serves as a moderator in the adverse effect of employee performance and psychological contract breach (Kula, 2017).

Overview of the LMX Theory

Various theories introduced the concept of dyadic relationships in the business environment, but the conceptual basis for the literature review was Graen and Uhl-Bien's

(1995) LMX theory. The LMX theory has theoretical roots from 1975 research on vertical dyadic relationships between leaders and subordinates (Jayeeta & Haque, 2017). The foundation for the vertical dyad linkage framework evolved from the concepts of role theory (Han et al., 2018). Graen and Uhl-Bien developed LMX as a leadership theory that focuses on the significance of roles and dyadic relationships between leaders and subordinates. The holistic view of LMX is that leaders build unique dyadic relationships with their subordinates based on the concepts derived from the social exchange theory and role theory (Jayeeta & Haque, 2017; Maslyn et al., 2017). LMX theory serves as a foundation for exploring the working relationship shared by employees and leaders (Garg & Dhar, 2017). Furthermore, the concept of LMX serves as a core social exchange instrument for defining the quality of relationships between leaders and employees (Jibao et al., 2018).

The focus of the LMX theory is on the quality of leader-subordinates' relationships, which are important factors for successfully managing organizations and improving performance (Megheirkouni, 2017). The quality of LMX relationships can vary within workgroups, whereas leaders differentiate among subordinates and groups (Bugvi & Wafa, 2018; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The core tenet of LMX is the two classifications of the leader-employee relationship as high quality or low quality (Lu & Sun, 2017). In high-quality relationships, leaders are a resource of organizational support (Dartey-Baah et al., Anlesinya, & Lamptey, 2019). High-quality LMX, which consists of loyalty and professional respect, involves more interactions, resources, and support between leaders and subordinates (Kula, 2017). High-quality LMX also consists of social exchange of mutual admiration, trust, and obligation with formal monetary exchange (Khan & Malik, 2017). In contrast, low-quality LMX consists of minimal leader-member interactions and behaviors based on the written employment contract (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Kula, 2017; Lu & Sun, 2017). Low-quality LMX relates to workers receiving only monetary exchanges for services over time (Khan & Malik, 2017). Having high-quality LMX could lead to individuals building quality relationships with coworkers (Dartey-Baah et al., 2019), whereas low-quality LMX and job dissatisfaction can lead to decreased employee engagement (Aleksic et al., 2017).

Concepts of LMX

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) posited that LMX has led to a change from the traditional categorizing of leader-employees from leader-subordinate to partnerships built on shared beliefs, trust, mutual admiration, and obligations to cultivate relationships. The key constructs underlying LMX are (a) role-taking, (b) role-making, and (c) role routinization. The process of developing LMX consists of the leaders and employees viewing work-related issues (role-taking), building trust (role-making), and incorporating their behaviors into routine work interactions (role routinization; Kazmi, 2017).

Role-Taking

Role-taking involves leaders establishing the organizational roles and expectations with employees (Lu & Sun, 2017). In addition, employees may share their perspectives and negotiate with leaders regarding the organizational roles and expectations (Kazmi, 2017; Lu & Sun, 2017). Leaders assign roles and responsibilities in the workplace to direct work activities (Kwantes et al., 2018), and they develop role-oriented relationships in exchange for performance rewards (Hasel & Grover, 2017). Role relationships, which describe the interactions between supervisors and subordinates, are relevant for understanding trustworthiness in the organization (Kwantes et al., 2018). Leaders inform workers of role expectations and provide intangible and tangible benefits to individuals who meet the expectations (Covella et al., 2017). Leaders utilize goal setting, feedback, and incentives to implement role-oriented behavior (Hasel & Grover, 2017). But the employees' willingness to perform extra roles, which demonstrates employee commitment to the organization, depends on the organizational support (Khaleel et al., 2018).

Role-Making

Role-making is the second phase of LMX in which leaders focus on building trust among their subordinates (Kazmi, 2017). Trust is a mutual understanding and respect between two parties (Phong Ba & Hui, 2018). Trust is a vital facet within an organization because employees' level of trust in a colleague may differ from their trust in leadership (Kwantes et al., 2018). Trust has become a major element of ethical business enterprises because trust is an essential component to establish value-added relations with external and internal stakeholders (Ozmen, 2018). Followers exert higher degrees of respect, commitment, trust, and obligation when leaders establish an advantageous social relationship in their organizations (Chen & Wu, 2017).

An important factor in building trust is the leader's willingness to understand the individual needs and abilities of followers (Setyaningrum et al., 2017). The types of trust consist of calculus-based trust, knowledge-based trust, and identification-based trust

(Hasel & Grover, 2017). Calculus-based trust is the calculation of costs and benefits when entering a relationship based on deterrents of untrustworthy behavior (Hasel & Grover, 2017). Leaders use the knowledge-based trust to observe their employees' actions in different situations to build relationships (Hasel & Grover, 2017). Identification-based trust is the mutual understanding and acceptance of another person's values (Hasel & Grover, 2017). Identification-based trust involves the rational practices that illustrate follower's trust in leaders rather than a leader's behavior (Hasel & Grover, 2017). Further, followers can have character-based trust, aligning their goals with the organizational mission presented by the leader (Williams et al., 2018). Additionally, reliance-based trust is a follower's reflection of the work-related skills, abilities, and knowledge of leaders, and disclosure-based trust is an employee's willingness to disclose work-related aspects, personal opinions, and shared information (Phong Ba & Hui, 2018).

Numerous internal and external factors influence trust, which is the mainstay of employee's attitudes in the organization (Khaleel et al., 2018). Employees' perception and trust in supervisors depend on how supervisors exercise their power with social interactions and social roles (Kwantes et al., 2018). Trust is influenced by fair and friendly treatment by management and the fulfillment of promises and obligations for the future (Khaleel et al., 2018). Trust in management is a factor in the quality of the work environment that fosters an enjoyable workplace (Chan & Mak, 2016). Establishing trust in the leader-subordinate relationship actively demonstrates integrity through honesty, consistency, and moral behavior (Engelbrecht et al., 2017).

Role-Routinization

Kazmi (2017) defined role-routinization as the third phase of LMX, which consists of incorporating role-taking and role-making as routine behaviors in the exchanges between leaders and workers. According to Lu and Sun (2017), the role-routinization phase of LMX results in leaders defining their subordinates' role obligations and organizational citizenship behavior. Asa and Santhosh (2017) asserted that employees will exhibit organizational citizenship behavior when they perceive organizational justice and high-quality LMX. Employees' desire to perform citizenship behavior derives from leaders' willingness to establish quality LMX (Ibrahim et al., 2017). For instance, LMX affects workers' organizational citizenship behaviors such as empowerment, performance, and commitment (Pratama et al., 2018).

Research on LMX

Researchers have comprehensively studied leadership practices, LMX, employee workplace behaviors, and employee retention (Garg & Dhar, 2017; Megheirkouni, 2017). For example, Garg and Dhar (2017) conducted a study on employee service innovative behavior in the banking industry. Based on the findings, LMX has a positive relationship with employee service innovative behavior and engagement. In addition, the results indicated that job autonomy was a moderating factor that strengthens the relationship between LMX and employee service behavior. Li et al. (2018) also compared LMX and leader identification as concurrent mediators between three leadership styles. Li et al. focused on the following leadership styles: (a) individual-focused transformational, (b) benevolent paternalistic, and contingent reward. Li et al. found that LMX was the dominant mediator between leadership styles and citizenship behavior. Furthermore, the choice of leadership style and behavior affects the quality of leader-employee relationships, whereas, employees may feel stress and display job dissatisfaction when working with an unsupportive leader (Dartey-Baah et al., 2019; Kiarie et al., 2017).

Additionally, researchers have explored the effects of LMX on employee engagement, employee performance, job satisfaction, and retention. For example, Radstaak and Hennes (2017) examined the relationship between LMX and work engagement. According to Radstaak and Hennes, the presence of high-quality LMX enriches employees' work engagement, where employee-crafted social job resources increase their work engagement. Megheirkouni (2017) also examined the effects of LMX on the relationship between employee organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and performance. The findings revealed that LMX is a mediating factor in the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment and the relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance. Further, Fan and Han (2018) examined how leader-follower dyadic communication influences the quality of LMX, focusing on the relationship between LMX and employees' job satisfaction and performance. According to Fan and Han, LMX quality is higher when the leaders use effective communication techniques that fit the employee's communication styles. The results indicated that some followers with higher LMX quality demonstrated better performance. Building respect and trust between leaders and workers can expand further than their work responsibilities (Choy et al., 2016). Having a trusting relationship with leaders is a significant factor for empowering leadership and promoting employee creativity (Chow, 2018).

Researchers of behavioral science have investigated many aspects of the interaction between subordinates and their superiors to explore, understand, and investigate concepts of LMX from different theoretical approaches (Jayeeta & Haque, 2017; Lee & Ji, 2018; Megheirkouni, 2017). However, few studies have focused on the leadership practices that municipal government leaders use to apply the concepts of LMX to increase employee retention. LMX is relevant because an organizational leader's initiative is to satisfy and increase motivation to retain employees and enhance the organization's commitment index (Jena et al., 2017). Both employees and organizational leaders benefit from the development of high-quality LMX within the organization (Radstaak & Hennes, 2017). As applied to this study, the key concepts of LMX may allow municipal government leaders to explore leadership practices regarding cultivating high-quality relationships, employee engagement, and retention.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Municipal Government Leadership

Municipal government agencies have become an essential element in the national administration system and urban planning for smart cities, which may impact the economy (Veselitskaya et al., 2019). The most common municipal government structures are the mayor and council, city council and manager, and commissioner (Veis, 2019). The primary purpose of municipal government agencies is to serve the public (Risakotta & Akbar, 2018). Municipal government agencies are the primary suppliers of citizen-oriented services (Seena & Olugbara, 2018). Local government leaders invest in infrastructure improvements that may lead to changes in the quality of community members' life (Andersson & Valdivieso, 2018). In addition, municipal government agencies provide services such as police services, programs at community centers, public transit, fire services, and garbage pickup (Cooper et al., 2019).

Kukovič (2018) asserted that the responsibilities of municipal government leaders require individuals to be creative and focus on operations and the accountability of local government agencies. Municipal government leaders are responsible for influencing subordinates towards accomplishing the organizations' objectives (Ibrahim et al., 2017). For example, local leaders set a clear vision statement and business strategies that include diversity and advanced innovation (Koohang et al., 2017). Demir et al. (2019) asserted that the lack of clear and coherent guidelines can lead to challenges with achieving goals. The implementation of successful strategies combats the myriad of challenges that threaten the fulfillment of the organizational mission (Leskaj, 2017).

Challenges Experienced by Municipal Government Leaders

One extreme challenge for municipal government leaders in the management and leadership of a diverse workforce (Smothers & Lawton, 2017). Researchers (Lee et al., 2016; Maslyn et al., 2017) have established that LMX and employee retention are two of the most significant challenges experienced by municipal government leaders. Municipal government leaders experience challenges with the recruitment and retention of committed employees (Smothers & Lawton, 2017). For example, municipalities may dissolve or merge with other local cities because of failure to retain employees in mandatory offices, financial distress, or mandates from higher governments (Beck & Stone, 2017).

Application of LMX Concepts

Constraints of limited time, effort, and resources to apply the concepts of LMX can cause difficulties in cultivating relationships with members to accomplish group effectiveness (Lee et al., 2016). According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), leader-employee relationships begin as strangers. Moreover, leaders and employees begin the employment relationship without full knowledge of the characteristics each person will convey to the relationship (Maslyn et al., 2017).

Leadership Role. The concept of role-taking involves leaders establishing the employees' roles and the expectations related to accomplishing organizational goals (Lu & Sun, 2017). Some leaders use the self-other agreement to increase their awareness of how their leadership behaviors influence the behaviors of employees (Ertürk et al., 2018). Municipal government agencies consist of non-partisan organizations with bureaucratic leadership (Copus & Steyvers, 2017). Municipal government agencies lack HR such as skilled administrative personnel in leadership positions (Mischen & Sinclair, 2017).

Organizational leaders must select the appropriate leadership style when interacting with subordinates (Afshari et al., 2017). Leadership style is the consistent patterns in a leader's behavior, manners, and tendencies influencing others (Afshari et al., 2017; Garg et al., 2018; Novel & Purbasari, 2017). The primary influence on employee behavior is the leadership style of organizational leaders and supervisors (Ermasova et al., 2017). The lack of the development and cultivation of the appropriate leadership style is a cause of the problems associated with the sustainability of leadership, absence of strategic communications, and teamwork (Liao et al., 2017). Leaders will adopt different management methods to develop LMX with subordinates (Peng et al., 2019).

Cultivating Relationships. Relating to the concept of role-making, leaders can foster acceptance by subordinates through the cultivation of high-quality relationships (Ertürk et al., 2018). Leaders should develop a relationship with each employee (Aleksic et al., 2017). A leader must develop rapport with workers and inspire individuals to collaborate in the achievement of organizational goals (Kiarie et al., 2017). Leaders develop supportive relationships with followers because they share common goals (Ivanoska et al., 2019). A leader-member relation is a relevant aspect in organizations because group members develop a degree of trust and respect for the leaders (Matthews et al., 2018).

Some leaders form unique relationships with employees based on the varying levels of workers' ability to meet work expectations (Han et al., 2018). Leaders indirectly denote followers as members of the in-group or out-group; based on their status, group members receive positive and negative feedback that affects their performance and work behavior (Matthews et al., 2018). Passive or out-group members follow their leaders by completing tasks as assigned without expressing their views, whereas proactive or in-group members seek challenging job duties and take the initiatives to provide feedback when completing tasks (Mehnaz et al., 2018).

The key determinants of defining the quality of the relationships and a follower's in-group or out-group status are the follower's commitment, trust, respect, and loyalty (Jayeeta & Haque, 2017; Keskes et al., 2018). Being an in-group member or an out-group member influences how individuals perceive their level of LMX with leaders (Sarti, 2018). In-group members have a closer relationship with the leader than the out-group (Ertürk et al., 2018). The in-group subordinates, who are willing to accept additional responsibilities and tasks, are more communicative and dependable than out-group subordinates (Megheirkouni, 2017). In-group members have more freedom, better job assignments, trust, respect, support, and rewards than the employees in the out-group (Sarti, 2018).

Out-group members do not receive the same benefits as in-group members and tend to have negative feelings toward their leaders (Ertürk et al., 2018). Members in the out-group perceive lower levels of LMX, which affects their willingness to share knowledge and remain with the organization (Sarti, 2018). Alienated followers or the out-group represents the conscience of the organization because they actively voice their opinions and display behaviors related to job dissatisfaction because of the lack of recognition from leaders (Ivanoska et al., 2019).

Workforce and Human Resource Planning Metrics. Role-routinization entails organizational leaders outlining the aspects of employees' role obligations and organizational citizenship behaviors (Kazmi, 2017). HR planning or workforce planning is the process HR leaders use to forecast an organization's future needs in terms of the workforce (Madanat & Khasawneh, 2018). Workforce planning is one of the top challenges for employers because of the evolving workforce (Zoller, 2018). Workforce planning is a measurement approach in HR planning and strategy implementation that provides HR leaders with processes to manage their human capital (Buttner & Tullar, 2018). Many employees become demotivated when there is a lack of HR planning and training programs to enhance their professional development within the organization (Tamunomiebi & Okwakpam, 2019). HR strategies such as talent management are forms of employee development for attracting, recruiting, hiring, retaining, and developing future leaders to realize the present and future organizational goals (Milad et al., 2018).

Organizational leaders depend on HR professionals as strategic partners and change agents to link strategic planning efforts to resolve critical decision-making processes and collaborate with leaders to facilitate change within the organization (Forsten-Astikainen et al., 2017; Leskaj, 2017). A responsibility of HR leaders is the recruitment of knowledgeable personnel who can develop the appropriate capabilities required to perform job tasks in technical and behavioral areas (Forsten-Astikainen et al., 2017). Some responsibilities of HR leaders are HR processes such as human capital development, talent management, and performance management to achieve organizational objectives (Milad et al., 2018). HR leaders may encounter challenges with recruitment in terms of hiring functions such as interviewing, extending employment offers, post-offer follow-ups, and onboarding the new hire (Gupta et al., 2018).

Strategies to Improve LMX

To build high-quality LMX, leaders offer to develop a positive exchange with others (Maslyn et al., 2017). To implement the concepts of LMX, leaders adapt their leadership styles to incorporate the relationship-oriented approach to leadership (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Li et al., 2018). Min-Seong and Dong-Woo (2017) asserted that leaders can build high-quality LMX by mentoring their employees. Jibao et al. (2018) added that leaders should take actions to promote LMX by increasing communications and team-building activities. The acknowledgment of followers' interests and ideas may increase the quality of LMX within the organization (Ertürk et al., 2018).

Mentoring. Mentoring represents an interpersonal relationship between leaders and employees (Chrysoula et al., 2018). Wang et al. (2018) asserted that a leader's mentoring ability affects employees' level of engagement. According to Rixse (2019), leaders can share knowledge, expertise, and experience with new members interested in leadership positions through mentorship programs.

Mentors are role models who lead protégés through career success by illustrating desired skills, attitudes, and behaviors by means of observation and modeling (Kim, 2017). Iverson (2019) stated that mentors possess specific attributes and personnel resources necessary to impart critical thinking, develop interpersonal skills, enhance engagement, and transfer knowledge. Moreover, mentors motivate the protégé to develop appropriate goals and help their protégé identify political relationships and assimilate the organization's culture (Guthrie & Jones, 2017).

Organizations use mentoring as an innovative and low-cost solution to counteract multiple HR-related challenges (Feyissa et al., 2019). Organizations use mentoring to enhance workplace learning (Mohtady et al., 2019). Organizations use mentoring to assist new employees through career development (Chrysoula et al., 2018).

The two types of mentoring are institution instigated (formal) or spontaneous (informal) (Mohtady et al., 2019). Leaders implement formal mentoring programs to formulate career goals by offering interesting and challenging work, sponsorship, and visible status (Kim, 2017). Munson (2017) asserted that an organizational leader uses structured mentoring, which is a combination of both formal and informal scheduled sessions, to establish new ideas, resolve issues and discuss existing concepts. Iverson (2019) noted that additional mentoring concepts include co-mentoring, reverse mentoring, and group mentoring to enhance employees' skills. The concept of reverse mentorship is listening and obtaining feedback from employees and staff members who perform less technical skills (Hernandez et al., 2018). In addition, Hernandez et al. 2018 stated that group mentoring involves the dissemination of new ideas and concepts among peers.

Mentoring is an effective leadership practice that improves employee performance and effectiveness (Ratiu et al., 2017). Bear and Hwang (2017) asserted that mentoring enhances the development of human capital. Mentorship programs provide extensive benefits such as the development of future leaders, enhancement of employee engagement, integration of knowledge, and retention of employees (Iverson, 2019). Curtis and Taylor (2018) argued that mentoring is an effective management tool for building relationships between leadership and subordinates. Peng et al. (2019) noted that mentoring from leadership is an important resource for followers to obtain high-quality LMX because workers receive vocational counseling, better professional discourse rights, and more career success opportunities.

Internal Communication System. Singh (2018) defined communication as the process of transferring information from one person to another. To address employees' input and concerns, organizational leaders should provide a credible, internal communication system (Ahmad et al., 2017). Having a sound internal communication system can lead to less disengagement, stress, and burnout among workers (Ghuman, 2016). Efficient communication channels should focus on employee learning orientations (Beneke et al., 2016).

Organizational leaders should engage in regular transparent communication with employees (Naidoo et al., 2019). Open and honest communication allows leaders to demonstrate support and show encouragement for subordinates (Choy et al., 2016). Open communication consists of leaders disseminating information about new job offerings, promoting interconnection within the workforce, employee development, and job satisfaction (Chaddha, 2016).

Researchers have suggested that employees in high-quality LMX situations have open communication with leaders and receive sufficient information to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (Dartey-Baah et al., 2019). Building and sustaining relationships within an organization depends on a leader’s ability to demonstrate good interpersonal communication skills (Koohang et al., 2017). Collaborative relationships between leaders and followers consist of leaders possessing good communication skills to manage, guide, inspire, give direction, and set the example in the organization (Joseph, 2016). Working collaboratively depends on building and maintaining relationships and developing networks within the organization (Blake & Whallett, 2016).

Relationship-Oriented Leadership. Relationship-oriented leaders focus on developing close interpersonal relationships with subordinates (Azeska et al., 2017). Relationship-oriented leaders focus on interpersonal success rather than task success

(Kundu & Mondal, 2019). Relationship-oriented leaders display respect for individual team members by not dominating and manipulating subordinates (Franco & Haase, 2017). Leaders display relationship-focused behaviors to cultivate harmonious relationships with subordinates and promote organizational cohesion within an organization (Xi et al., 2017). Relationship-oriented behavior includes characteristics such as being people-centricity, maintaining cohesion, being open and transparent (Srivastava & Jain, 2017).

The goal of relationship-oriented leaders is to encourage transparent communication chains, assign responsibilities, and provide opportunities for subordinates to use to maximize their potential (Novel & Purbasari, 2017). Relationship-oriented leadership involves leaders implementing practices such as coaching, individualized consideration, and team building to cultivate relationships with workers to help individuals cope with work challenges (Schwarzmüller et al., 2018). Relations-oriented leaders can increase employee commitment by recognizing and rewarding workers (Franco & Haase, 2017). According to Tognazzo et al. (2017), the actions demonstrated by leaders illustrating relationship-oriented behavior are inclusive of showing support and positive regard, providing recognition for achievements and contributions, providing coaching and mentoring, and delegating and empowering subordinates (Tognazzo et al., 2017).

Researchers noted that leader-employee relationships are an essential element that connects HR management (HRM) practices and strategies to tangible business outcomes (Kang, & Sung, 2017). Success for leaders depends on them understanding the individual motives of members and building appropriate levels of LMX differentiation and achieving goals (Lee et al., 2016). Covella et al. (2017) asserted that positive leader-employee exchange can encourage employee engagement and increase employee retention.

Employee Retention

An essential goal for organizational leaders is to retain knowledgeable employees (Anitha & Begum, 2016). Researchers have conduct studies regarding employee retention in several different contexts (Bibi et al., 2016). Naidoo et al. (2019) defined employee retention as the ability to keep employees for a long time. A challenge for most organizations is how to retain skilled and technical professionals (Čič et al., 2018). Retaining knowledge and skilled workers employees is an ongoing issue for company leaders (Abdul Hamid & Yahya, 2016). Employee retention relies on organizational policies and procedures to sustain employees for a long time (Anitha & Begum, 2016).

Components that Affect Employee Retention

Employers need to focus on both external and internal factors that affect the recruitment and retention of workers (Zoller, 2018). Compensation and job security are vital factors in employee retention (Bibi et al., 2016). Compensation is a cost-effective pay structure designed to attract, motivate, and retain skilled and knowledgeable employees (Singh, 2018). Variables such as job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational attractiveness, person-organization fit, and organizational support influence employee retention (Alshammari et al., 2016). Factors that promote retention of high-potential employees are leadership, organizational culture, organizational purpose, developmental opportunities, meaningful work, and collegiality (Letchmiah & Thomas, 2017). Some determinants for employee retention are work environment, perceived organizational support (POS), work-life balance, and career development opportunities (Adom, 2018).

Organizational Culture. Organizational culture is a set of extended values or norms shared by employees as behavior in solving organizational problems (Barasa et al., 2018). According to Zhitlukhina et al. (2018), organizational culture is an effective instrument for organization development, whereas inappropriate management of the culture can result in an inefficient organization. Sivakami and Samitha (2018) revealed that an organization's culture is an essential building block for establishing a favorable workplace. Afonja (2019) stated that people desire to work for organizations with a sustainable culture. Incorporating the organizational culture in daily work activities should be a priority for organizational leaders (Ott et al., 2018). Creating a cohesive environment that fosters and attracts the right people provoke leaders to focus on developing an organizational culture that is strong and promotes the purpose and development of employees (Letchmiah & Thomas, 2017).

A healthy workplace culture stimulates employees' motivation and loyalty (Anitha & Begum, 2016). Sivakami and Samitha (2018) suggested that organizational culture is a significant factor that affects job satisfaction and employee retention, and organizational effectiveness. The culture of an organization has a significant influence on employee retention and organizational success (Isa et al., 2018). Kim et al. (2017) stated that organizational culture affects long-term organization-employee relationships and the employee's intent to remain with the organization. Managers who recognize the complexity of human behavior foster the correct kind of culture to develop high-quality relationships with employees (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017).

Perceived Organizational Support. Perceived organizational (POS) support is an employee's perception of obligation based on the norm of reciprocity (Latif et al., 2016). Perceived organizational support is an indication of how workers perceive themselves as being valuable to the organization, whereas the more the employees perceive the organization cares about their employees' wellbeing the better the individuals perform (Prabhu & Drost, 2017). Employees who experience high levels of POS will reciprocate with higher levels of commitment and performance (Sarti, 2018). Subordinates are willing to demonstrate their abilities and utilize their skills when they believe they have a POS (Chan, 2017).

Previous research indicates that POS has a relationship with employee behavior and retention. For example, Isa et al. (2018) studied the relationship between POS and employee retention. According to Isa, et al. workers require constant motivation to provide them with a sense of POS, which may result in improved work outcomes. Borden et al. (2018) examined how POS as a moderator influences the degree to which leader arrogance affects employee outcomes of feedback. Borden et al. identified POS and feedback orientation as significant moderators; whereas workers were less vulnerable to the leader's negative feedback when they experienced high levels of POS. Dar and Rahman (2019) examined the relationship between procedural justice and deviant workplace behavior using POS as a mediator. Dar and Rahman revealed that POS has a positive relationship with procedure justice and a negative relationship with deviant workplace behavior. According to Dar and Rahman (2019), leaders should establish policies based on procedural justice to minimize negative employee behaviors and to achieve organizational goals. Organizational leaders may portray POS by using positive discretionary actions to enhance employees' perception of the organization (Zin, 2017).

Supportive leadership is a highly ranked aspect of employees' perception of leaders and organizations (Jagdeep & Singh, 2017). For instance, Akram et al. (2018) examined the effect of supervisory justice and perceived supervisor support on employees' trust in their supervisors. Akram et al. revealed that trust in supervisors partially mediates the relationship between supervisory justice and perceived supervisor support. In addition, supervisory justice and POS significantly affect organizational citizenship behavior & commitment to supervisors (Akram et al., 2018). Supervisory support may aid in the creation of a sense of belonging for employees which may lead to employee retention (Dhanpat et al., 2018). Supportive supervisors can contribute to employee wellbeing and improve organizational performance (Arici, 2018). To encourage supervisor support, organizational leaders should communicate the expectation of POS to supervisors (Frear et al., 2018).

Perceived organizational and supervisor support has a direct association with positive employee outcomes, which can affect organizational outcomes (Frear et al., 2018). POS, which is workers' perception of their value to the organization, can lead to increased organizational commitment and employee retention (Alabalawi et al., 2019). Supportive leaders develop leader-employee relationships by displaying concern for workers and their individual needs (Keskes et al., 2018). Providing POS can enhance LMX and employee retention (Brunetto et al., 2017).

Workplace Environment. Worku (2018) exposed key features of a conducive, work environment consists of the physical elements within the work area that allow individuals to perform their job duties. Pandita and Ray (2018) pronounced that a healthy work environment is an atmosphere conducive to learning and socializing. The work environment should be an atmosphere that meets the basic emotional drives that individuals need to acquire the necessary skills to efficiently complete their job (Chaubey et al., 2017). Afonja (2019) suggested that a family-friendly work environment consists of policies that meet the employees' needs for work-life balance and help employees manage their family responsibilities.

Nandedkar and Brown (2017) research demonstrated that work environment affects organizational commitment and performance. An environment of trust and good relationships contributes to the organizational commitment of the employees and improves their perception of organizational performance (Berberoglu, 2018). An employee's positive perception of the working environment creates favorable behavior such as engagement (Handayani et al., 2017).

The work environment is a factor that affects a worker's intent to remain with an organization (Abdul Hamid & Yahya, 2016; Bibi et al., 2017). Individuals prefer to work at organizations that provide a supportive work environment, growth opportunities, and favorable economic conditions (Peluso et al., 2017). Kundu and Lata (2017) investigated the relationship between a supportive work environment and employee retention. Kundu and Lata found that a supportive work environment is fundamental for successfully retaining employees. In addition, Kundu and Lata noted that employee engagement is a mediating factor between a supportive work environment and employee retention. A supportive work environment characterized by care and concern for employee well-being helps foster work engagement and organizational engagement (Byrne & MacDonagh, 2017). The challenges associated with the changes within the workplace environment require leaders to retain skilled and knowledgeable employees who are adaptive and focused on the future (Chaubey et al., 2017). Having a healthy work environment, which positively contributes to the employees' well-being, can lead to increased employee retention (Pandita & Ray, 2018).

Job Satisfaction. Employee job satisfaction is a result of the perception that an organization has met a worker's material, social, and psychological needs which creates an emotional balance (Azeez et al., 2016). Kiarie et al. (2017) defined job satisfaction as employees' feelings towards their work performance. Raza and Kamran (2017) asserted that job satisfaction is a tool used to measure employees' performance. Megheirkouni (2017) noted that job satisfaction has a direct relationship to employee performance and organizational commitment.

Both organizational leaders and employees use person-organization fit, perceived support, and pay satisfaction to measure job satisfaction (Alshammari et al., 2016). Factors used to determine the level of job satisfaction are behavior, salary, job security, welfare measures, promotion, and work environment aspects (Awan, 2016; Kahlon, & Shilpa, 2017). Factors of job satisfaction vary depending on context or content factors;

context factors are compensation, activities, environment, and security unlike content factors concentrate on work, customer interaction, and promotion (Awan, 2016; Gupta, 2016). Employees' overall job satisfaction does not solely depend on salary (Gupta, 2016). Motivation is another factor of job satisfaction (Barasa et al., 2018).

Fostering employees’ satisfaction creates more successful organizations that led to more committed employees (Anitha & Begum, 2016). A strategy to foster employee job satisfaction is providing employees with opportunities to develop and acquire new skills (Chaddha, 2016). For example, career improvement opportunities and career advancements may result in high levels of job satisfaction (Barasa et al., 2018). Employees’ natural quest for learning and growth is instrumental to job satisfaction (Kaur et al., 2017).

Having transparent leadership, teamwork, and a trustworthy wage system can lead to enhance workforce satisfaction (Awan, 2016). A respectable relationship with superiors positively influences job satisfaction and commitment and reduces employee burnout and turnover (Lee & Ji, 2018). High levels of job satisfaction depend on positive attitudes from employees that may result in favorable organizational outcomes (Kaur et al., 2017). As job satisfaction increases, employee intent to leave resulting from job stress decreases (Hyo & Yoon, 2016). Reduced turnover and increased productivity are results of job satisfaction (Kahlon, & Shilpa, 2017). The unsatisfied employee eventually switches jobs (Anitha & Begum, 2016).

Employee Turnover Intentions. Turnover intentions and lack of commitment are results of employee dissatisfaction that affect economic and academics that spills over into organizations, workers, and families (Azeez et al., 2016). Turnover intention occurs when an employee-employer commitment has been broken (Chen & Wu, 2017). Turnover affects all employees including the owner (Anitha & Begum, 2016). Turnover affects organizations by increasing operating costs and reducing profits which impact customer satisfaction and loyalty (Anitha & Begum, 2016). The replacement cost of employees to employers includes reference checks, temporary worker costs, training costs, and employee induction expenses which are mostly underestimated (Johennesse & Chou, 2017).

Organizational leaders use practices to circumvent employee turnover and job burnout through talent management (Johennesse & Chou, 2017). The goal for organizations is to decrease the negative effect on the turnover by creating job satisfaction for employees (Alshammari et al., 2016). Organizational leaders focus on reducing employee turnover by concentrating on job satisfaction that affects commitment and turnover intentions (Dartey-Baah & Emmanuel, 2016). Turnover intentions tend to be lower among employees with higher levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Naidoo et al., 2019).

Strategies to Improve Employee Retention

Organizational leaders may reflect their intentions for retaining employees by establishing a diversity policy within the HRM strategies (Jin et al., 2017). Municipal government leaders need to reform their HRM to operate effectively and within the limited budgets (Fragouli & Christoforidis, 2019). Effective HRM consists of leaders addressing concerns such as which approaches profitable organizations to recruit and select workforce and which hiring practices are the most effective to the contribution of achieving organizational goals (Idrees et al., 2018). Having effective HRM can ensure that organization leaders gain a return on their investment in human capital development (Ling Florence et al., 2018). Establishing effective HRM practices would help leaders to redesign their organizations to successfully achieve objectives (Singh, 2018).

HRM is a process that involves management decisions and practices directly related to human capital within the organization (Singh, 2018). The five basic constructs of a high-performance work system are recruitment, job design, training and development, compensation, and performance management (Ling Florence et al., 2018). Recruiting is the process of anticipating future staffing needs and having a sufficient number of qualified people to ensure the organization meets the set objectives (Singh, 2018). According to Meng and Wu (2017), leaders may offer financial incentives such as merit pay policies to attract and retain employees. To increase workers' performance and job satisfaction, some organizational leaders offer training and development which may lead to reducing cost and developing the quality of work (Madanat & Khasawneh, 2018). Zoller (2018) stated that leaders can help close the talent gap by creating opportunities for educational advancement, professional development, and leadership during their employment with the organization.

Human Capital Investment. Human capital is the most valuable asset within the organization (Anitha & Begum, 2016; Kiarie et al., 2017). As the most valuable asset of organizations, human capital contributes to the organization's competitive advantage (Azeez et al., 2016). To develop and maintain engagement within organizations, organizational leaders invest in human capital (Babu & Pingle, 2017). Alievna et al. (2017) added the development of a state's economy depends on the level of the government's investment in the development of human capital. Human capital development comprises learning, development planning, and the execution of development and improvement programs. (Milad et al., 2018).

Organizational leaders invest in employees through training and development (Alievna et al., 2017; Azeez et al., 2016). Employees may receive formal training through education, instruction, and development, and planned experience (Singh, 2018). Training and development is a way organizations invest in people to help them acquire and enhance skills to advance up the career ladder (Antony, 2018). Career development is the major concern for employees trying to achieve enhance their levels of employment and economic power (Chrysoula et al., 2018).

Leaders provide employee training and development to ensure that their workers have the necessary skills and knowledge to meet organizational requirements (Singh, 2018). Organizations use strategic training and development to enhance employee's knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience to promote employee retention (Abdul Hamid, & Yahya, 2016). Leaders focus on ethical awareness to create training programs to deal with moral challenges and dilemmas by using interactive learning techniques (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Efficient training techniques include heightened technology usage and engagement (Beneke et al., 2016). Organizations aim to train employees to ensure they have good investments along with recruiting from other companies (Dartey-

Baah & Emmanuel, 2016). Employers should encourage employees to continue professional development through training to develop long-term skills (Zoller, 2018).

Job Autonomy. Nandedkar and Brown (2017) stated that job autonomy is a significant element of the workplace environment. Job autonomy is the extent to which the individual has discretion and independence regarding their work schedules and the implementation of work procedures (Johari et al., 2018). Butt (2018) suggested job autonomy is an individual's ability to make work-related decisions without authorization from upper management. Job autonomy and employee empowerment are the ability of employees to make decisions and act on their own (Agarwal & Gupta, 2018; Bailey et al., 2016).

Park and Jo (2018) revealed that job autonomy allows employees with the power to seek opportunities to change their work situations without direction from leadership. Autonomy enhances an employee's intrinsic motivation, feeling of accomplishment, and self-actualization (Agarwal & Gupta, 2018). Empowering employees with opportunities to execute their jobs allows leaders to promote ethical behavior (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). Okolo et al. (2018) suggested employees will increase their level of engagement when they have job autonomy and receive organizational support and professional development opportunities.

Employee Motivation. Employee motivation begins with organizational leaders recognizing workers for their best work (Chaubey et al., 2017). Risakotta and Akbar (2018) stated employee motivation may lead to employees feeling a sense of belonging within the organization, thus resulting in increased organizational commitment. Adom

(2018) suggested motivated employees display high productivity levels that contribute to the organization’s success.

Organizational leaders must select the best practices to motivate employees to ensure workers deliver quality outputs (Ramakrishnan & Arokiasamy, 2019). Vlacseková and Mura (2017) suggested leaders can motivate employees by giving workers job autonomy and creating a work environment incorporating self-motivation. Leaders can promote employee motivation by providing equal opportunities for advancement, respecting and recognizing employees’ achievements, and allowing workers to participate in decision-making (Sivakami & Samitha, 2018). Leaders use personalized incentives, which may be financial and nonfinancial, to motivate employees (Tokarz-Kocik, 2018). Tokarz-Kocik (2018) verified that leaders may offer financial motivators such as monetary compensation and a bonus or nonfinancial incentives such as benefits packages, rewards, and letters of recognition. To ensure employees feel valued, leaders should continuously motivate employees (Avis, 2018). Gopalan (2019) stated employee motivation contributes to employee retention.

Work–Life Balance. Work-life balance is a significant factor for an employee to choose a flexible working schedule (Ramakrishnan & Arokiasamy, 2019). Work-life balance is the concept of harmonious and complementary stability between an individual’s personal life and work-life (Johari et al., 2018). Most employees prefer a balance between their jobs and non-work obligations; therefore, many organizations provide programs such as work-life balance to address the personal wellness of their employees (Oludayo et al., 2018).

An appropriate work-life balance contributes to employees working more effectively (Hadi & Ahmed, 2018). Ramakrishnan and Arokiasamy (2019) asserted that conflicts between work and family obligations may negatively affect employees' performance. Jaharuddin and Zainol (2019) stated that an imbalance between work and personal life responsibilities may lead to higher stress levels among employees.

Previous research shows that work-life balance affects employees' intentions to remain with the organization. Work-life balance influences employees' commitment and intention to remain with an organization (Dhanpat et al., 2018). For example, Kraak et al. (2018) examined the role of work-life balance inducements of the psychological contract on breach and turnover intentions. Results show that the fulfillment of work-life balance is important in predicting an individual's feelings of psychological contract violation (Kraak et al., 2018). Oludayo et al. (2018) investigated the extent to which work-life balance initiative predicts employee behavioral outcomes. According to Oludayo et al., leaders should review the relevance of work-life balance programs, policies, and activities aimed towards inspiring acceptable workplace behavior. Oludayo et al. identified work leave arrangements, flexible work arrangements, and dependent care initiatives as predictors of employee job satisfaction, employee retention.

Succession Planning. Succession planning is an aspect of training concentrated on the long-term human capital development within the organization (Farrell, 2017). Succession planning contributes to continuous leadership and knowledge sharing within an organization (Phillips, 2019). Succession planning is a process that involves training, hiring, and the development of internal human capital (Tamunomiebi & Okwakpam, 2019). Succession planning is the process of ensuring the continued availability of qualified candidates for pivotal leadership roles within the organization (Budhiraja & Pathak, 2018; Moore, 2018; Oppong & Oduro-Asabere, 2018). Predictable succession planning is the process to ensure leadership transitions by selecting future leaders from a group of internal employees (Cavanaugh, 2017). A core aspect of predictable succession planning is having professional development programs within the organization (Cavanaugh, 2017). The identification of qualified individuals for leadership positions is a vital component of succession planning (Oppong & Oduro-Asabere, 2018).

Succession planning involves practices that support employee development and retention (Ballaro & Polk, 2017). Organizational leaders have developed succession-planning practices because retaining talented workers is an ongoing concern (Tamunomiebi & Okwakpam, 2019). Organizational leaders must develop a succession planning strategy because leaders in every position will eventually leave the organization (Gehrke, 2019; Moore, 2018). Government agencies should develop succession-planning practices because without succession planning strategies government agencies may have high turnover rates (Ballaro & Polk, 2017; Cavanaugh, 2017). Rixse (2019) argued that an organization's growth and success to develop new leaders depends on succession planning.

Outcomes of High Quality LMX

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) stated that the indication of LMX is how the quality of leader-employee relationships relates to positive outcomes for leaders, members, and organizations. Benefits of LMX relationship evolve into high quality and strong exchange that extends beyond organizational obligations (Choy et al., 2016). According to Dartey-Baah et al. (2019), based on the LMX theory, employees will display organizational citizenship behavior when they experience positive feelings toward the organization.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is an individual's intentional, thoughtful, and energetic pursuit of work tasks (Joo & Lee, 2017). Top management agrees that employee engagement is one of the most important responsibilities for leaders within an organization (Babu & Pingle, 2017). Strong leadership and communication are fundamental elements for employee engagement (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016; Antony, 2018). Cheng et al. (2019) stated that leaders can encourage engagement by outlining the need for creative action and the effectiveness of creativity. Park and Jo (2018) mentioned that employees who have trust relationships with their leaders generate and propose new ideas more actively.

To be an innovative organization, leaders must be supportive mentors and integrators having a clear shared vision (Liao et al., 2017). According to Park and Jo (2018), employees' innovative behavior is a vital component to enhance the innovation and survival of an organization. Liao et al. asserted that leaders must support and encourage innovation through individual initiatives centered on learning and open communications.

Some aspects that influence employee engagement include organizational culture, coworkers, company goals, and customer satisfaction (Jena et al., 2017). Additional factors that impact engagement are favorable surroundings, compensation, rewards, recognition, growth opportunities, and job enrichment (Babu & Pingle, 2017). Engelbrecht et al. (2017) argued that management consistent monitoring and enforcement interferes with employee work engagement.

Engaged employees work with passion, drive innovation, and are forward movers; however, dissatisfied employees are unhappy and often act in the same manner (Ghuman, 2016). Engaged individuals who are satisfied with their career development programs, often express feelings of enthusiasm toward their jobs and organizations (Joo & Lee, 2017). In contrast, disengaged employees exhibit a lack of overall connectedness, emotional absence, and passive behavior (Krishnaveni & Monica, 2016).

A critical component of organizational success is the retention of engaged employees (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016; Anand et al., 2017). Having engaged employees within organizations can result in better customer experiences, improved productivity, increased revenue, and a collective rapport between management, employees, and customers (Anand et al., 2017). Engagement leads to employee satisfaction and long-term commitment which may lead to better business performance and more stakeholders (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Employee engagement is a significant concept for enhancing staff recruitment and retention (Naidoo et al., 2019).

Employee Commitment

The three dimensions of organizational commitment are affective, continuance, and nominative (Anitha & Begum, 2016; Bushra & Masood, 2017). Affective commitment is an individual’s emotional attachment to their workplace (Brunetto et al., 2017). Affective commitment is workers’ involvement and identification with an organization based on the acceptance of organizational goals and values (Cansoy & Polatcan, 2019; Nadeem et al., 2017). Normative commitment is the individual's sense of obligation to an organization because they will not have the achieve organization goals without the employees (Azeez et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2017). Singh (2018) defined normative commitment as a person's feeling of obligation to remain with the organization for moral or ethical reasons. Continuance commitment is the worker's feelings of obligation to remain with the organization based on their beliefs that they will not find gainful employment after leaving the organization (Cansoy & Polatcan, 2019). Singh (2018) continuance commitment is a worker's perceived economic value of remaining with an organization compared to pursuing other employment options (Singh, 2018).

In the age of globalization, employee commitment is a crucial factor for the survival and success of organizations (Azeez et al., 2016; Bushra & Masood, 2017). Khalid et al., (2016) stated that committed employees perform beyond a normal job requirement. Employee commitment has a significant role in the change process for an organization because committed workers display more motivation to support the organization (Nadeem et al., 2017).

Performance Management

Performance management is the process that leaders use to evaluate employees' performance and establish business goals for the forthcoming year (Milad et al., 2018). An important function of an organization's structure is employee performance and engagement (Aghaz & Tarighian, 2016; Antony, 2018). Factors that hamper employee's performance and deteriorate an organization's performance are societal pressures;

environmental and organizational factors; and LMX (Asdani et al., 2018; Bushra & Masood, 2017; Hassan & McCann, 2018).

Competitive Advantage

Firms create competitive advantages to contribute to the overall performance to hire talented employees and add rare inimitable value (Alshammari et al., 2016). The acquisition and retention of qualified employees is a fundamental aspect for gaining a competitive advantage and organizational success (Hadi & Ahmed, 2018). Organizations must utilize maximum resources to receive efficiency of employees and to maintain competitive advantage (Anitha & Begum, 2016). Organizational leaders can achieve a competitive advantage by focusing on employee needs (Yildiz & Kara, 2017). To establish an organization's competitiveness and success, engaged employees must demonstrate a willingness to work harder and reach optimal performance (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). The competition requires an environment of engaged enthusiastic and positive employees (Wang et al., 2018).

To succeed in the global environment, local government leaders need to distinguish themselves from other government agencies while abiding by the same sets of rules as an international society (Park & Eom, 2019). The four main patterns of strategic orientation behavior involve sustained regeneration, organizational rejuvenation, strategic renewal, and domain redefinition (Gilinsky et al., 2018). Deployment of valuable and key resources assists businesses to achieve a competitive advantage to enhance organizational success (Jaber & Caglar, 2017). Government agency leaders seek to fill gaps in their collaboration with local communities by using open data to provide information about civic innovations, entrepreneurial programs, and economic growth (Evans et al., 2018).

The evolution of mobile technology has introduced the creation of new abilities in e-government in developing and developed countries (Burksiene et al., 2019). E-government is the application of technology to improve government efficiency for delivering services to citizens through modernized systems (Gilman, 2017). Municipal government agencies have developed websites with a responsive web design because most citizens use the internet via mobile devices (Serrano-Cinca, & Muñoz-Soro, 2019).

The evaluation of municipal e-government readiness can provide a useful measurement to understand the needs of citizens, improve the effectiveness of government services, and revolutionize the way municipal governments deliver services (Seena, & Olugbara, 2018). Some government leaders faced difficulties with the implementation of e-projects because they were focused on policymaking, traditional bureaucratic red, and their preparedness for implementation of the projects (Qureshi et al., 2017). External environment aspects of e-government readiness comprise of social information communication technology infrastructure and social environment; whereas, the internal aspects consist of workforce planning metrics, leadership, workforce capability, and internal information technology infrastructure (Seena & Olugbara, 2018).

Organizational Performance

Operational level employees have a fundamental role in improving organizational performance (Xi et al., 2017). The organizational objective is to become populated with empowered and engaged employees (Ghuman, 2016). Organizational success happens as engaged employees connect to the company's future and invest in their discretionary effort (Anand et al., 2017). Organizations that recognize group dynamics produce a culture of positive employee engagement, increase effectiveness, improved performance, and better business results (Antony, 2018). Factors regarded as fundamental for organizational success are effective leader personality and employee job satisfaction (Kiarie et al., 2017). Organizational efficiency and effectiveness are affected by low employee motivation and attitude due to an absence of employee voice (Ahmad et al., 2017).

Retaining employees require that organizational leaders value the workers (Afonja, 2019). Employees can provide valuable information to employers on how to improve employee retention through employee engagement surveys and informal meetings (Zoller, 2018). Retention strategies include implementing training and development programs, employee motivation practices, and succession planning (Adom, 2018). Organizational leaders can increase employee retention by offering work-life balance arrangements and job autonomy (Afonja, 2019; Ott et al., 2018).

Researchers noted that leader-employee relationships are an essential element that connects HRM practices and strategies to tangible business outcomes (Kang, & Sung, 2017). Success for leaders depends on them understanding the individual motives of members and building appropriate levels of LMX differentiation and achieving goals (Lee et al., 2016). Business leaders seek to positively influence their employees' involvement; enhance employee performance and satisfaction; increase retention, and reduce turnover intentions (Alshammari et al., 2016). Employee retention is a fundamental factor for business sustainability; therefore, organizational leaders need to adopt strategies to retain employees (Bindu, 2017; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). LMX is a fundamental factor in the retention of highly skilled human capital (Letchmiah, & Thomas, 2017). To retain employees, organizational leaders should implement innovative HR practices such as hiring leaders who focus on establishing quality leader-employee relationships (de Oliveira & Rocha, 2017; Dhanpat et al., 2018). Improved supervisor-subordinate relationships and organizational outcomes derive from the LMX construct (Jayeeta & Haque, 2017). To improve organizational effectiveness, increase productivity, and retain talented employees, organizational leaders need to understand the relevance of employment relationships (Naidoo et al., 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 2 consisted of my review of the literature, which revealed that there is a need for further research about the leadership practices used to cultivate leader-employee relationships. Some municipal government leaders may lack leadership practices to implement the concepts of LMX to develop high-quality relationships with employees, enhance employee engagement, and increase employee retention. Workforce diversity changed the roles and responsibilities of leadership creating challenges for municipal government leaders to ensure organizations have effective succession planning. LMX contributes to improved employee organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Kazmi, 2017). Leader-member relationships and leadership practices indirectly link to employees' organizational behaviors; therefore, municipal government leaders need to develop effective leadership practices to apply the concepts of LMX if they expect to sustain and improve employee retention. Chapter 3 provides an outline of the methodological framework for the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore core leadership practices that municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. I explored the impact of leader-subordinate relationships in the municipal government sector in southwest Georgia to bridge the gap between management and employee engagement. The research focus was the specific leadership practices used to build a relationship between leaders and members resulting in a collaboration that enhances organizational performance.

Chapter 3 consists of the explanation of my selection of the research design selected for this study. I outline my role in the research, and I discuss the factors of my chosen methodology including the rationale for participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment, and data collection techniques, and the data analysis strategy. Chapter 3 also includes discussions explaining the elements of the study's trustworthiness including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

The focus of this qualitative single case study was to answer the following research question: What core leadership practices do municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention? This study aimed to explore the relationship between leaders and team members through phases in their relationship based on the concepts of LMX. Furthermore, I focused on the dynamics of leadership practices to offer a rigid structure with expectations that employee engagement may lead to a successful leader-member relationship.

Research Method

The research method was the qualitative single case study approach. Researchers base their selection of research methodology and design on their philosophical worldview (Bernard, 2017). The constructivist worldview researcher seeks to understand and generate theory based on their interpretation of the participants' views about the subject (Faure & Casnova, 2019). By adopting the constructivist worldview, qualitative researchers rely on the participants' views to gain an understanding of the complexity of the research topic (Sultan & Javaid, 2018). The constructivist worldview was appropriate for this study because it is consistent with the qualitative research approach.

Qualitative researchers rely on data from the participants to gain an understanding of a complex social process (Arar, 2017). The intent of researchers using the qualitative approach is to explore a process or phenomenon and ascribe meaning to the participants' experiences (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). Information provided by qualitative research relates to a problem or phenomenon that only can be addressed through dense description unlike quantitative research, which answers questions using surveys and questionnaires (Ward et al., 2018). The qualitative method generates theories relying on subjectivity and objectivity for uncovering the truth, remaining bias, independent perceptions, and lived experiences (Kaur, 2016). The qualitative method was most suitable because I explored the leadership practices used to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention from the participants' experiences.

Research Design

The qualitative method consists of different research designs of which the most commonly used are case study, phenomenology, ethnography, narrative, and grounded theory. The research design for this study was a case study. Qualitative researchers use the case study design to explore individuals' experiences with an event within a real-life context (Husband & Schendel, 2017; Yin, 2018). The case study design is a valuable approach to explore and describe the research topic in their natural contexts (Houghton et al., 2017). The case study design is the most advantageous method to answer *how* and *why* questions (Tookey et al., 2018). The qualitative case study design is used to explore potential solutions to the issue from the participants' perspectives (Blum, 2017) in addition to answering the research question. Researchers use the case study design to explore in-depth the participants' experiences to answer the research question (Bapuuroh, 2017). The rationale for using the case study design was to explore and capture how municipal government leaders use the concepts of LMX to develop relationships and increase retention.

The common case study types are exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, single, multiple, and holistic (Yin, 2018), which can further be intrinsic, collective, and instrumental (Stake, 2013). Researchers select the exploratory case study design to present an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences (Omidire et al., 2018). The single case study consists of the researcher exploring one case, which may be a unit, person, entity, or collective group (Gauche et al., 2017; Kaarst-Brown, 2017). A municipal government agency located in southwest Georgia served as the case for this study. Using an exploratory single case is suitable for inductive exploration testing of cases with special circumstances related to a specific problem (Gammelgaard, 2017). According to Yin (2018), conducting a single case study can provide a significant contribution to the knowledge about the phenomenon beyond the selected participants and study unit. The single case study provides comprehensive understanding of a complex issue within the natural context in which a phenomenon occurs such as organizational context (Egli et al., 2016; Gremyr et al., 2019). The exploratory single case study is also conducive to gain a better understanding of the theoretical perspective of the issue (Ortiz et al., 2019). An exploratory single case study is the most appropriate type of case study for analytic generalizations using a study's theoretical framework to establish a logic that might be applicable within another context (Yin, 2018). Though multiple case studies allow researchers to gain an understanding of processes across cases for comparison (Akgün et al., 2017; Burns et al., 2019; Dillworth et al., 2019; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2018), the focus was on one unit in this study—the experiences of municipal government leaders and employees in a real-life context at one municipal government agency.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers act as interviewers and gather information from the participants during the data collection process (Broekhuis et al., 2017). The qualitative researcher gathers data using multiple sources such as semistructured interviews and document reviews (Stake, 2013; Venselaar & Wamelink, 2017; Yin, 2018). Further, researchers construct the research project, which involves a selection of research topics, participants, method design, and data collection techniques (Dahl et al., 2017). The researchers' role is to ensure that data collection includes key sub-topics that the participants feel are relevant and seek clarification as necessary (Curtis, 2017). The role of the researcher is also to review and analyze data (Kijima et al., 2018). As the researcher, I selected the research site, defined the participant selection criteria, selected participants, conducted semistructured interviews, and analyzed data. For this research study, my role was as a participant facilitator of the interviews during data collection.

My relationship with this topic was that I have a desire to understand the importance of leader-employee relationships within an organization. Working as a federal government employee and focusing on my daily interactions with mid-and upper-level management provided insight into the deficiency of employee engagement in the workplace. Although I am a resident of southwest Georgia, I did not have any affiliations with the potential participants in the municipal government sector.

Researchers must also be aware of the significance of being nonjudgmental and eliminating bias (Giatras et al., 2017). To avoid bias, researchers should consider their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences by using systematic reflection (Pretorius, 2016). To mitigate bias during the research process, I recorded my thoughts, opinions, and perspective in a reflective journal, which is a tool for researchers to record their personal beliefs, thoughts, and biases before and after the data collection process (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017; Hiha, 2016; Roger et al., 2018). Using reflexivity allowed me to bracket my personal opinions and remain neutral during data analysis and provide results without the researcher's predisposition.

Methodology

This section includes a detailed description of the process for selection of research site, participants, and data collection instrument. Included in this section is the outline for data collection, data analysis, and procedures for establishing trustworthiness. The Methodology section also consists of a measure to ensure ethical research practices.

Participant Selection Logic

The population group for this study consisted of executive leaders, municipal government leaders, administrative managers, and employees from a municipal government agency in southwest Georgia. The eligibility criteria for participation were municipal government leaders and have leadership practices to develop leader-employee relationships. Thus, the selection process did not target vulnerable populations. To gain access to the research site and participants, the researcher must communicate with the gatekeepers at the organization (Mustafa, 2018). After receiving institutional review board (IRB) approval (approval number 08-20-20-0500107), I contacted the leader at the Consortium, which is a community service alliance in southwest Georgia, to introduce myself and explain the intent of the research study (see Baum-Talmor, 2019). I also submitted a copy of the IRB approval letter to gain access to the research site and potential participants (see Liu & Babchuk, 2018). I provided the leader with a follow-up email requesting permission to conduct research at their facility. Once the leader granted permission to access the research site, I asked the leader to facilitate a meeting with potential participants without interrupting daily workflow processes.

The relationship between the researcher and participants has a fundamental role during the data collection process (Roller, 2019). Developing a rapport with participants is an essential element to establishing strong research-participant relationships and encouraging participants to openly share information (Edirisingha et al., 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To establish a relationship with potential participants, I contacted all qualifying employees to introduce myself and discuss the details of the study. Participants received an invitation to participate, which included my contact information, during the initial meeting (see Burns et al., 2019; Gant, 2017). Participants responded expressing interest in participating via email. Once participants responded expressing interest in participating, I scheduled interviews with the municipal government leaders. I did not have any affiliations with the potential participants in the municipal government sector.

Participant selection consisted of purposive sampling, which is used to choose participants based on specific characteristics or criteria (Biyela et al., 2018; Çakmak & Akkutay, 2016). Selecting participants using purposive sampling aids the researcher to establish the reliability of the analysis of the collected data and the study (Moustakas, 1994). The rationale for using purposive sampling was to select those participants who have knowledge of the phenomenon and to add to the reliability and validity of the study.

The most appropriate sample for qualitative research is the number of eligible individuals able to provide the most accurate information to maximize the credibility of study results (Asiamah et al., 2017). The number of participants for this case study was 12 municipal government leaders who met the criteria. The rationale for selecting municipal government leaders was that they would represent the individuals with the ability to provide valuable data about the leadership practices used to build leader-member relationships and increase employee retention. The number of participants varies for qualitative research; however, a sufficient sample size may be five–10 (Burns et al., 2019), six–15 (Haynes, 2019), or nine–15 (Edgcombe et al., 2019). Some qualitative researchers may determine the sample size based on the specific topic (Boddy, 2016). But the most common method to determine the sample size for qualitative studies is based on the ability to achieve data saturation (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Shepherd et al., 2017). During the data collection process, I continued to conduct follow-up interviews until reaching data saturation. I asked additional probing and follow-up questions during the member checking interviews until no new emerging themes occurred.

Instrumentation

As the researcher, I served as the primary instrument conducting semistructured interviews during data collection. The researcher is the primary instrument in data collection for qualitative research (Bernard, 2017; Mustafa, 2018). The qualitative researcher serves as an instrument collecting data through interviews and analyzing data (Roller, 2019). Semistructured interviews served as the secondary data collection instrument. The semistructured interview is a widely used instrument to gain knowledge about people's perspectives of their worlds in social interaction (Grinsted, 2017). Qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews to gather an in-depth understanding of the research topic based on the perspectives and experiences of individuals (Cervantes et al., 2017). Researchers use semistructured interviews to focus on the views of a small sample of participants (Young et al., 2018).

For this study, I developed an interview protocol to use during data collection (see Appendix A). Using an interview protocol serves as a guide during semistructured interviews (Mullinax et al., 2017). Qualitative researchers develop the interview protocol consisting of predetermined questions as a guide during data collection, which also includes scope for probing questions (Gabriels & Moerenhout, 2018). Researchers conduct semistructured interviews using an interview protocol as a guide to ensure each participant answers the standard question (Young et al., 2018). The interview process followed the established interview protocol and participants answered open-ended questions (see Appendix B; see also Ben-Zeev et al., 2018; Cervantes et al., 2017).

The third data collection instrument was company documents including leadership strategies, leadership practices, and employee retention levels. For case studies, the six data sources can include (a) interviews, (b) direct observation, (c) participant-observation, (d) company documentation, (e) archival records, and (f) physical artifacts (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2018). For example, Fefer et al. (2018) used archival documents to enhance their understanding of the contextual variables that prompted leaders to apply the Visitor Experience and Resource Protection framework in national parks. Sources of company documents consist of organizational policy manuals, meeting notes, written reports, and administrative documents. Company documents serve as a source to corroborate evidence from several data sources (Yin, 2018).

I used member checking to strengthen the validity and reliability of the collected data. I emailed participants a copy of my interpretations of their interview responses for review to ensure I captured what the participants meant to convey (see Ang et al., 2016; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2018). The researchers' role during the interview is to obtain relevant information and ensure they have an understanding of the participants' responses (Grinsted, 2017), and member checking is an accountability practice used as an iterative-generative method throughout data collection (Naidu & Prose, 2018).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I submitted the required application and supporting documents to IRB. Upon receiving IRB approval to conduct research, I provided the municipal government leader with a copy to obtain access to the research site and permission to recruit participants. After gaining access to the research site and permission to recruit participants, I discussed with the leader the details about visiting the organization to introduce myself without interrupting daily workflow processes. Potential participants received information regarding the purpose of the study, the requirements to participate, and a letter for participating. Individuals responded expressing interest in participating via email.

Data collection consisted of semistructured interviews and company documentation reviews for approximately 4 weeks. Once participants respond stating interest in participation, I scheduled interviews. After receiving participants' responses affirming interest in participation, I scheduled 30 minute- to 1-hour interviews with municipal government leaders and inform them of the requirement to participate in member checking interviews. An appropriate duration for interviews should be approximately 30 minutes (Gremyr et al., 2019; Liu & Babchuk, 2018), though semistructured interviews are usually 30–60 minutes (Gordon et al., 2018) or may last between 40 and 60 minutes (Burns et al., 2019).

Before the interview, participants reviewed the consent form and ask any questions they may have had. The researcher can facilitate a trusting relationship with the participants during the informed consent process (Hart-Johnson, 2017). The researcher should inform participants about the expectations of the study during the consent process (Hart-Johnson, 2017). The researcher should provide individuals with information regarding the intent of the study, the risks and benefits, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, confidentiality measures, and an informed consent form (Quimby-Worrell, 2019). I provided the municipal government leaders with pertinent information about voluntary participation, withdrawal procedures, and interview recording. Individuals should sign an informed consent form before participating in research (de Araújo Moreira et al., 2020). Participants should also provide written consent for interviews to be recorded (Haynes, 2019). The researcher records interviews with participants' permission to ensure the accuracy of the transcription of individuals' responses (Gordon et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2017). Researchers should record interviews for data analysis (Liu & Babchuk, 2018). The recording of interviews aids with establishing the validity of collected data (Gremyr et al., 2019). Participants received an emailed copy of the consent form and replied via email stating "I Consent" in the subject line at the time of the interview.

During the interview, I followed the established interview protocol (see Appendix A). Researchers use the semistructured interview protocol to allow for probes to gain an in-depth clarification and understanding of the phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers use the semistructured interview protocol as a guide during data collection to prompt interviewees (de Araújo Moreira et al., 2020). Semistructured interview protocols allow researchers the flexibility to ask probing questions to gather detailed information (Akgün et al., 2017).

I conducted semistructured interviews via phone with 12 municipal government leaders to discuss their experiences on leadership practices used to build leader-employee relationships and to increase retention. Municipal government leaders participated in semistructured interviews via phone. If participants prefer a more suitable location, I sought the most comfortable and private location for the participants. Interview schedules and settings should be planned to maximize the participants' trust, comfort, and confidentiality (Dillworth et al., 2019). Researchers usually conduct interviews at a location suitable to the participants (Burns et al., 2019). Interview settings should be in an on-site location and quiet places free from distractions and interruptions (Haynes, 2019). Conducting on-site interviews allows the researcher to identify key informants and gain access to empirical data (Lavikka et al., 2017).

I asked participants open-ended questions to allow the municipal government leaders to elaborate and share information. In qualitative research, data collection consists of semistructured interviews with open-ended questions (Naheed & Mohsin, 2018). Interviews consisting of open-ended questions allow the researcher to determine the most significant areas to focus on (Burns et al., 2019). An interview guide with open-ended questions allows for further probes regarding the participants' experiences (Dillworth et al., 2019). During the interviews, I incorporated probing questions based on the municipal government leaders' responses.

Participants had the right to withdraw from the study via email until member checking was complete without penalty. Participants had my contact information such as telephone number and e-mail address if they need to withdraw from the study. Gant (2017) reminded participants of their right to cease the interview at any time during data collection. In alignment with Gant (2017), I will inform the leaders that they may cease the interview at any time in which they feel uncomfortable. Researchers should inform participants that participation is voluntary (Chen et al., 2017). In addition, I explained to the participants that I would maintain their confidentiality by using pseudonyms (see Gremyr et al., 2019; Haynes, 2019; Shepherd et al., 2017). To protect their identities, pseudonyms consisted of names such as L1–L12 for leaders and MA1 for the organization.

After the interviews, I obtained company documents regarding leadership strategies, leadership practices, and employee retention levels from the municipal government agency website. I reviewed company documents for 1 day following the completion of the semistructured interviews with the municipal government leaders to corroborate themes that emerged from the interviews. The company documents served as the secondary data source to triangulate the collected data from the leaders' interview responses to ensure validity. Company documents may serve as a data source to correlate with data obtained during interview sessions (Hall et al., 2019). Case study research allows researchers to use multiple data collection sources such as semi-structured interviews and company documents (Bernard, 2017). Napathorn (2018) asserted that reviewing company documents aids the researcher to triangulate data. According to Yin (2018), a disadvantage associated with using company documents is the relevance of the data varies from case study to case study.

Municipal government leaders participated in member checking. Member checking involved the municipal government leaders receiving an emailed copy of my interpretations of their interview responses and participating in follow-up interviews. Member checking involves researchers sharing their interpretations of the interview transcript with participants to review for accuracy (Blum, 2017). Member checking is an iterative-generative method used throughout data collection to enhance the dependability of the research findings (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Participants received an emailed one-page summary of the findings.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis procedures in case studies are combined by examining data, probing for patterns, and conceptualizing properties for what to analyze and why simultaneously (Yin, 2018). Data analysis consisted of the researcher transcribing the interviews, reading the transcripts to gain a preliminary understanding of the data, and coding the transcriptions (Lavikka et al., 2017). Data analysis included an iterative coding process to identify emerging themes and discrepant data relevant to the research question. The research question for this study was as follows: what leadership practices do municipal government leaders use to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention? I continuously analyzed data while collecting data using semistructured interviews.

Yin (2018) identified five methods for analyzing data in a case study as follows: (a) pattern matching, (b) explanation building, (c) time-series analyses, (d) logic models, and (e) cross-case synthesis. For this qualitative single case study, the data analysis consisted of using Yin's pattern matching method for data analysis. Yin stated that researchers use pattern matching in case study analysis to compare empirically-based patterns with a predicted outcome. Pearse (2019) asserted that the goal of pattern matching is to compare prior predictions to other contextual conditions and strengthen the validity of the results in a single case study. According to Massaro et al. (2019), researchers using the case study design should describe which components of Yin's methodology have been applied. Data analysis included the following process: (a) compiling the data, (b) categorizing the data, (c) recombining the data, and (d) understanding and interpreting the meaning of the data.

Compiling the Data

Data compilation began with transcribing the interviews in Microsoft Word and participants' validation of my interpretation of their responses. The first step of data analysis is the transcription of the interviews and the development of a general understanding of the content based on the researcher's interpretations (Akgün et al., 2017). After data collection, researchers transcribe the interviews and then review the transcriptions to gain an understanding of the data and to mark similarities and irregularities (Chase, 2017). Data analysis consisted of methodological triangulation using multiple data collection sources including semistructured interviews and review of company documentation such as the organizations' policy manual, written reports, and administrative documents regarding leadership strategies, leadership practices, and employee retention. Methodological triangulation involves using multiple processes such as interviews and company document reviews to collect data (Moon, 2019). Researchers achieve triangulation by using multiple data sources such as company documents and semistructured interviews (Fefer et al., 2018). According to Olomi et al. (2018), researchers can identify emerging themes through the triangulation of multiple data sources.

Leaders participated in member checking interviews to address the issue of discrepant data and add any new information. Researchers conduct member checking during the early stages of data analysis to ensure the accuracy of their interpretations of the participants' responses (Chase, 2017). In member checking, researchers share information based on the researchers' interpretations and analysis of the participants' thoughts (Blum, 2017). During member checking, participants provided additional information to clarify my interpretations of their responses.

Categorizing the Data

After the completion of member checking, categorizing the collected data will consist of the initial creation of codes. Codes any sort of information extracted from information sources that may relate to each other (van Rijnsoever, 2017). Data analysis involves the researcher reading transcripts, coding phrases, developing emergent themes, and searching for patterns (Fung, 2018). I used open coding to identify emerging themes from the semistructured interview transcripts. Open coding consists of organizing data based on repetition of key phrases with similarities and differences between the interview responses (Ahmed et al., 2019). Open coding occurred until no new themes emerge indicating data saturation.

Recombining the Data

Recombining the data consists of using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) software such as NVivo12, MAXQDA, and Leximancer for the ease of organization and coding of data (de Araújo Moreira et al., 2020). Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software should have the capacity to code for descriptive labels, sort for patterns based on a pattern-matching approach, and identify outliers to generalize constructs and theories (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019). The advantage of using CAQDAS is the software allows researchers to organize, store, and retrieve data to work effectively (Brandão & Miguez, 2017). MAXQDA is a qualitative software to code and analyze interview data in three stages of open, axial, and selective coding associated with the grounded theory approach (Harati et al., 2019). According to Lemon and Hayes (2020), Leximancer is a CAQDAS that researchers conducting a phenomenological or grounded theory study used to conduct semantic and relational analyses of text to identify concepts, themes, and how they relate to one another. NVivo12 is the appropriate CAQDAS tool for this study because NVivo12 allowed me to analyze data such as semistructured interviews from case studies, ethnography, phenomenology, and mixed methods research (Brandão, & Miguez, 2017).

Qualitative researchers use CAQDAS because the coding of transcripts can be both time-consuming and tedious in qualitative research; I coded and themed the patterns that emerge from the interview transcripts using NVivo12 software for coding textual data into a manageable format. I used NVivo12 to reviewing the interview transcripts, creating the initial codes, identifying keywords and phrases, classifying the phrases using in vivo codes, and categorizing the phrases into themes. NVivo12 software serves as an aid to code and organizes data (Gremyr et al., 2019). NVivo12 is a tool for data management, storage, and collation of all data (Ayton et al., 2019). Feng and Behar-Horenstein (2019) added that NVivo12 is a CAQDAS that allows the coding and analysis of open-ended responses. The reason for using NVivo12 software is to code and categorize the data for an understanding of the participants' experiences (Quimby-Worrell, 2019). NVivo12 will serve as the tool for qualitative data analysis to refine emerging themes from the collected data (Edgcombe et al., 2019). An advantage of using NVivo12 is that it aids the researcher to find and manage ideas, explore relationships in the data, and identify emergent themes without transforming the original data (Brandão, & Miguez, 2017). NVivo12 software served as a tool for the efficient analysis of data and establishing the credibility of the study.

Understanding and Interpreting the Meaning of the Data

Sense-making served as the process for ascribing meaning to the data. Finley et al. (2018) defined sense-making as a process that enables researchers to make sense of events as they occur. Sense-making is the process of ascribing meaning to peoples' experiences (Hoff, 2019). Sense-making involved providing in-depth explanations of the patterns and interpreting the meanings of the textual data. Owen and Ashcraft (2019) stated that researchers use sense-making to categorize dialogue shared by participants, interpret codes, and develop an understanding of the model. As a government employee, I could understand any technical terms that the participants may use during data collection.

Researchers code the transcripts based on the conceptual framework (de Araújo Moreira et al., 2020). By identifying the themes relevant to the research question and the leadership practices municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention, I further categorized emerging themes from the data relating to LMX. The LMX theory formed the conceptual framework for this qualitative single case study and the analysis of leadership practices municipal government leaders use to build leader-employee relationships and retain employees. The LMX theory provides a construct that enhances employee engagement, job satisfaction, employee retention, and business sustainability through high-quality relationships between leaders and employees (Dartey-Baah et al., 2019). Based on LMX, employees' intention to voluntarily leave an organization decreases when workers perceive they have high-quality relationships with leaders (Chow, 2018; Kahya & Sahin, 2018).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The issues of trustworthiness section include the description of the processes to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves dependability, transferability, confirmability, and credibility (Bernard, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I addressed the four components of trustworthiness relevant to qualitative research, which is (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility relates to the truth value of the findings supported by the collected data (Akgün et al., 2017). To address credibility, I used member checking and triangulation. According to Varadarajan and Malone (2018), methodological triangulation and member checking are two processes for qualitative researchers to establish the credibility of their study. In qualitative studies, researchers use triangulation, which helps the researcher to identify discrepant cases and non-confirming data, to establish credibility (Moon, 2019). Triangulation allows researchers to analyze data and check their interpretations of the data to avoid disconfirming information (Rashid et al., 2019). Methodological triangulation will involve data collection by conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing company documents. Methodological triangulation involves the combination of methods such as interviews and company document reviews to obtain more complete and detailed data and gain a better understanding of a phenomenon (Abdalla et al., 2018). Methodological triangulation can be an effective tool for the researcher attempting to gain insight into participants' experiences in a real-life context (Tan, 2019). Smith (2018) stated that conducting a case study requires researchers to entail data triangulation to gain a contextual understanding of the phenomenon. Data triangulation entails the researcher synthesizing data from two or more sources (Edelstein et al., 2019). Data triangulation can be a beneficial methodological aspect in coding and analyzing narrative and textual data (Ramakrishna, 2018). Further, the data triangulation strategy for this study will include multiple perspectives (e.g., executive leaders and municipal government leaders) and a vigorous literature review (Yin, 2018).

Member checking consisted of municipal government leaders reviewing a transcribed copy of my interpretations of their interview responses. The primary source of data can influence research credibility, which is of principle to every research study (Asiamah et al., 2017). The municipal government leaders participated in follow-up interviews until no new information emerges. The concept of saturation in qualitative studies is the point at which all codes have been observed (van Rijnsoever, 2017). In addition, data analysis occurred during the data collection phase to confirm the achievement of saturation.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the results may be applied to other research settings or contexts (Akgün et al., 2017). Transferability includes an audit trail that links the source of data, the data collection process, and the reliability of the data (Quimby-Worrell, 2019). I documented the research process in the final study to assist other researchers to apply the process in other contexts. To enhance transferability and dependability, researchers record all phases of the research process including the recruitment processes, interview transcripts, and data analysis decisions (Ahmed et al., 2019). I provided a detailed description of the participant recruitment, data collection instrument selection, data collection technique, data analysis, and research findings.

Dependability

Dependability links the source of information and data collection process to establish the reliability of the data (Quimby-Worrell, 2019). I conducted member checking interviews, which entailed the participants reviewing my interpretations of their interview responses for accuracy. Member checking involves the participants reviewing the interviewer's interpretation of the interview response as a method of ensuring validity (Chase, 2017). To ensure dependability, researchers provide the participants with a copy of the interview transcripts for member checking (Dooley et al., 2019). Municipal government leaders received an emailed copy of the interview transcripts to review before commencing the member checking interview. Member checking served as the process to verify the accuracy and validity of the data in the interview transcripts and clarify bias by respondent verification of transcripts.

Confirmability

Confirmability or reflexivity is essential to enable researchers to consider equality and fairness during interviews and provide evidence of their actions and bias (Gant, 2017). To address confirmability, I used reflexivity by recording my personal beliefs, thoughts, and bias in a reflective journal after each interview. Reflexivity as a method for capturing time-sensitive data may also support effective sense-making (Finley et al., 2018). Researchers may document their reflections of questions and biases in a reflective journal relating to their data analysis decisions (Lee & Kelley-Petersen, 2018). Strategies of reflexivity include researchers recording their emotional reactions and thoughts to participants' responses in a research journal for self-appraisal (Fung, 2018). After each interview, I found a neutral location to record my assessment of the research process, interview, and any personal thoughts that may affect data analysis.

Ethical Procedures

To ensure the implementation of ethical research procedures, I sought IRB approval before participant recruitment and data collection. IRBs serve as the enforcers of researchers' ethical behavior and mitigates the potential risk of harm researchers may cause to participants (Daku, 2018). For ethical practices, researchers gain approval from the ethics committee (Giatras et al., 2017). I submitted to IRB the required documentation regarding the research study and procedures for ethical practices.

After receiving IRB approval to conduct research, I provided the municipal government leader a copy of the IRB approval letter to gain access to the agency and permission to recruit participants. Researchers must develop procedures and constraints for ethical research practices bounding their research and the protection of participants (Daku, 2018). As the researcher, I complied with the ethical guidance standards of IRB. In addition, I adhered to the Belmont Report protocol guidelines. The Belmont Report protocol serves as ethical guidelines for conducting research involving human subjects (Corbie-Smith et al., 2018). The Belmont Report protocol serves as a fundamental reference for IRBs during the research proposal review and approval process (Laage et al., 2017). To ensure the ethical protection of potential participants, I completed an ethical training course by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative and received a certificate (certificate number 36886226) of completion.

Adherence to the Belmont Report protocol consisted of demonstrating respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The three fundamental ethical principles of the Belmont Report protocol are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Adashi et al., 2018). The principle of respect is the act of acknowledging individuals' right to voluntarily participate without coercion (Adashi et al., 2018; Laage et al., 2017; United States. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical, & Behavioral Research, 1978). Respect for persons refers to people's right to voluntarily participate and withdrawal without intervention or stress (Annas, 2018). Beneficence refers to the ethical obligation of researchers to discuss the risks of harm and benefits associated with the research study with participants (Adashi et al., 2018; Laage et al., 2017; United States. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical, & Behavioral Research, 1978). The principle of justice is the fair selection of participants without biases (Adashi et al., 2018; Laage et al., 2017; United States. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical, & Behavioral Research, 1978).

Participants received an invitation to participate during the initial meeting. Once individuals reply agreeing to participate, I scheduled interviews. Ethical practices consist of a fair selection of participants, informed consent, the autonomy of individuals, and dissemination of risks and benefits to the stakeholders (Corbie-Smith et al., 2018). Before the interview, participants had the opportunity to review the consent form and ask any questions (see Appendix B). In addition, I explained that participation is voluntary, participants' right to withdraw, and the rationale for recording the interviews to ensure the accuracy of the responses. The consent form included information regarding the purpose of the study, the role of leaders as participants, guidelines for voluntary participation, withdrawal procedures, and the risks and benefits of the study. Participants received an emailed copy of the consent form and replied via email stating “I Consent” in the subject line at the time of the interview. Researchers provide participants with pertinent information such as the purpose of the study and the requirements to participate (Kijima et al., 2018). Researchers should advise participants about the purpose of informed consent (Giatras et al., 2017). Participants should receive information regarding the study and voluntary participation before signing an informed consent form (Dahl et al., 2017). After ensuring the participant has clarification regarding informed consent, the interview process commenced. Participants had my contact information to inform me of their decision to withdraw via email. Participants have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time (Dahl et al., 2017). A fundamental aspect of ethical research is individuals’ autonomy to withdraw as a participant (Annas, 2018). Participants did not receive an incentive for participation.

In the event of participant reveals personal information such as an employee or leaders’ name, I deleted this information from my interview transcripts. An adverse event did not occur; therefore, I did not stop the study at the point or notify the Chair of my committee and seek the counsel of the Chair regarding the appropriate course of action to take. I did not complete and submit an adverse event notification form to the IRB. In addition, I did not have to make any required modifications to the interview protocol. I did not have to submit the Request for Change in Procedures to Walden’s IRB.

I used pseudonyms to ensure the protection and confidentiality of the participants and organization. Pseudonyms consisted of names such as L1–L12 for leaders and MA1 for the organization. To protect participants' identity and confidentiality, researchers assign pseudonyms (Gant, 2017). The researcher uses pseudonyms in the transcripts to maintain participant confidentiality (Ayton et al., 2019). A method used to optimize participant confidentiality is the replacement of their names with pseudonyms and anonymized stored data (Dayal et al., 2018).

I stored all collected data on a password-protected flash drive and computer in a locked box within my home for 5 years to protect participants' confidentiality. I was the only person with access to the data. After 5 years, I destroyed the collected data in keeping with the confidentiality of the participants in the study. Researchers shall store collected data and researcher files on a password-protected personal computer and a secure file cabinet to protect the participants' confidentiality (Liu & Babchuk, 2018). Storage of collected data will be on a password-protected device and in a locked box aids with maintain the participants' confidentiality and minimizing the number of people with access to the data (Quimby-Worrell, 2019).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore leadership practices that municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. Chapter 3 included an explanation of the rationale for the chosen research methodology and design for this initiative as a qualitative single case study. In Chapter 3, I expounded on my role as the researcher, which consists of serving as the primary data collection instrument. I facilitated semistructured interviews with selected participants meeting the established criteria. Chapter 3 included a description of the approaches and procedures that I used to adhere to ethical research practices and ensure the trustworthiness of the findings through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Chapter 4 will include data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore core leadership practices that municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. The research question for this study was "What core leadership practices do municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention?" Chapter 4 consists of a description of the setting, demographics, the data collection and analysis processes, presentation of the data, evidence of trustworthiness, and concludes with the summary and transition.

Research Setting

The study was a qualitative single case study that included one municipal government agency in southwest Georgia. The data I obtained included descriptions of core leadership practices implemented by municipal government leaders to build leader-employee relationships and information from company documents for corroboration of sources. The study focused on municipal government leaders within the agency that had addressed challenges with cultivating leader-member relationships and creating an environment of engagement to enhance employee retention and organizational performance.

Data collection occurred during the national COVID-19 pandemic and leaders had a transition to working from home, which may have influenced the participants' views at the time of the study. Although the recruitment process was conducted via email and telephone, most of the leaders were receptive to participating in the study. Some participants requested interview sessions, which consisted of meetings via teleconference or WebEx before or after work hours because of their current work conditions, concerns for the privacy of data, and possible interruptions. The changes did not influence the results. I reassured the leaders that I would remain considerate and flexible to accommodate their requests while conducting research and member checking.

Demographics

The municipal government agency selected for this study was in rural southwest Georgia. The municipal government agency consists of 1,100 employees and 24 different entities. More than 75% of the employees within the agency are native residents and predominately African American with an education level range from high school diploma to master's degree. The population for this study consisted of 12 executive leaders, municipal government leaders, and administrative managers who had core leadership practices to develop leader-employee relationships. To ensure confidentiality and protection of participants' identities, I used pseudonyms such as L1–L12 for leaders and MA1 for the organization.

Participant selection consisted of purposive sampling to select those individuals who knew about the phenomenon (see Kalu, 2019). Municipal government leaders represent the individuals with the ability to provide valuable data about the core leadership practices used to build leader-member relationships and increase employee retention. The participants were male (58%) and female (42%) and between 35 and 60 years of age. Out of 12 research participants, nine were leaders with 13 to 25 years of experience within the municipal government. Most of the participants (nine) shared they began working as lower-level employees then transition through the years to leadership positions. For example, one leader began as an entry-level worker and transitioned to a director. In addition, the leaders provided insight into their leadership experience before employment within the municipal government agency. For instance, some leaders transitioned from the military and the municipal government in a large metropolitan area. Each municipal government leader had experience with developing practices for cultivating high-quality leader-member relationships and increasing employee retention.

Data Collection

Data collection included recruitment, consent, semistructured interviews, company document review, and follow-up interviews for member checking. After receiving IRB approval, I contacted and submitted a copy of the IRB approval letter to the leader at the Consortium, which is a community service alliance within southwest Georgia to gain access to the research site and permission to recruit participants. The population for this case study consisted of a purposeful sample of 12 municipal government leaders with the ability to provide valuable data about the core leadership practices used to build leader-member relationships and increase employee retention. During the recruitment and semistructured interviews, I was able to build a trusting relationship with leaders. Because I was doing continuous coding and no new information emerged by the end of the 12th interview, I perceived that data saturation occurred and data collection ceased.

Recruitment

Upon approval from Walden's IRB, I contacted the leader at the Consortium via phone and set up a date and time to meet with potential participants to introduce myself and begin my research. The executive leader informed the municipal government leaders of the scheduled teleconference. To establish a relationship with potential participants, I contacted all qualifying employees via phone to introduce myself and discuss the details of the study. During the teleconference, I clarified the intent of the study and the requirements for the leaders' participation. Participants received an invitation to participate, which included my contact information via email following the teleconference. Recruitment of participants was a challenge because of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the social climate. Many potential participants were more concerned with adhering to regulations for social distancing during face-to-face interactions.

Participants responded expressing interest in participating via email. The 12 participants consisted of municipal government leaders from a municipal government agency in southwest Georgia. Once participants responded expressing interest in participating, I scheduled interviews with the municipal government leaders. Participants received an emailed copy of the consent form and replied via email stating "I Consent" in the subject line at the time of the interview. Informed consent to participate in research is the ethical measure required to protect human subjects (Conway, 2021).

Semistructured Interviews

I conducted semistructured interviews with municipal government leaders to discuss their experiences on core leadership practices used to build leader-employee relationships and to increase retention. The semistructured interview approach allows the researcher to have an open dialogue with individuals sharing relative information during the interview (Wong et al., 2021). After receiving participants' responses affirming interest in participation, I scheduled 30- minute to 1-hour interviews with municipal government leaders and inform them of the requirement to participate in member checking interviews. After receiving the leaders' emailed consent form, I followed the interview protocol to ensure fidelity of the research and aid in guiding the interview process.

Before commencement of the interview, I shared pertinent information about voluntary participation, withdrawal procedures, and interview recording. In addition, I explained to the participants that I would maintain their confidentiality by using pseudonyms. To protect their identities, pseudonyms consisted of names such as L1–L12 for leaders and MA1 for the organization. During the interview, I asked participants open-ended questions and incorporated probing questions to allow the municipal government leaders to elaborate and share information. I also took hand-written notes to help fill any missing gaps and prompts for probing questions. Municipal government leaders participated in semistructured interviews via phone. If the leaders preferred a more suitable location or time, I made the necessary schedule adjustments to accommodate the participants.

After the interviews, I obtained company documents regarding leadership strategies, core leadership practices, and employee retention levels from the municipal government agency website. Company document review was for 1 day following the completion of the semistructured interviews with the municipal government leaders to corroborate themes that emerged from the interviews. In addition, the review of company documents served as a data source for triangulation to ensure validity.

Municipal government leaders also participated in member checking, which entailed the municipal government leaders receiving an emailed copy of my interpretations of their interview responses and participating in follow-up interviews. Researchers conduct member checking with interview participants to validate the researcher's interpretations of their responses and verify data findings (Mellor et al., 2020).During member checking, participants answered questions to provide additional information based on their initial responses to ensure data saturation.

Company Document Review

After the interviews, I obtained company documents regarding leadership strategies, leadership practices, and employee retention levels from the municipal government agency website. I reviewed company documents such as policy and procedures manuals, HR policies, and fiscal reports for 1 day to corroborate themes that emerged from the interviews and ensure validity. The company documents related to core leadership practices, leadership strategies, and workforce-planning metrics served as the guidelines to implement the concepts of Graen and Uhl-Bien's LMX theory.

Data Collection Summary

The data collection methods and protocols presented in Chapter 3 guided data collection for this study. During data collection, I relied on my abilities such as interpersonal and professional skills as well as the semistructured interview questions. I maintained an unbiased position throughout the data collection process and a level of professionalism as a student researcher while expressing understanding. To mitigate bias, I used reflexivity so that my personal experiences and perspectives did not affect data collection and interpretation. Data collection included listening to the experiences of participants who have successfully implemented core leadership practices to cultivate leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention.

Although I encountered a few unusual circumstances such as restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic during data collection, I was able to follow the data collection process outlined in Chapter 3. Immediately after conducting each interview with the municipal government leaders, I wrote reflective notes to assist in analyzing the data results (see Johnson et al., 2020). The reflective notes allowed me to connect some of the prominent points of the interviews to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the setting, the participants, and the social climate objectively. After transcribing interviews, the municipal government leaders received an emailed transcription of my interpretations of their responses for review. Because the municipal government leaders were working from home and preparing for fiscal year-end, member checking occurred immediately after transcribing the interview. The transcription of the first leader's interview served as the initial point for coding and analyzing subsequent data. Following the coding of the first interview, I continued to code each interview transcript and company documents for similarities and differences. Throughout the data collection process, the participants shared experiences, and my reflexivity and careful data analysis process led to the development of major themes.

Data Analysis

For this qualitative single case study, the data analysis consisted of using Yin's (2018) suggested pattern matching method for qualitative researchers to conduct an interpretive data analysis. Using Yin's pattern matching approach, five main themes emerged from the data. In this section, I present the interpretation methods, the keywords and codes that emerged from the data, and the themes that evolved from the codes. In addition, I provide quotations from the participants' interviews to emphasize the importance of the codes and themes. Descriptions of the material outlined in the company documents provided data to corroborate the codes and themes from the participants' responses. This section concludes with a brief discussion of discrepancies and transitions into the section on the trustworthiness of the study. Presentation of the results is by the emerging themes about the research question.

Methods of Analysis

Data analysis involved the use of Yin's (2018) pattern matching method, reflexivity, and NVivo12 qualitative data software for coding and analyzing emerging themes. In addition, I mitigated biases by bracketing my knowledge and experiences in my perspectives did not affect data collection and interpretation. Analysis, which began during the first interview, occurred concurrently and continuously while collecting data using semistructured interviews. Upon completion of data collection, I coded and analyzed data to interpret the themes and patterns concluding to answer the research question to arrive at the five main themes. The analysis process consisted of compiling the data, categorizing the data, recombining the data, and understanding and interpreting the meaning of the data.

Compiling the Data

Data compilation began with transcribing the interviews in Microsoft Word immediately following the interviews. After transcribing the interviews, participants received an emailed copy of their transcripts for validation of my interpretations of their responses to ensure reliability and validity. Although data saturation occurred during the analysis of the initial interviews, leaders participated in member checking interviews to ensure data saturation and address the issue of discrepant data. Member checking is the process involving the researcher and participants discussing the researcher's interpretations of the interview responses and ensuring validity and accountability of the data (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Member checking consisted of telephone interviews because of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions. Although I conducted follow-up interviews, the participants did not elaborate to add additional information in which the participants reiterated the information from the first interview. After the completion of member checking, I conducted the initial review by hand to assist me with preparing the documents for coding using NVivo12 software. Data analysis commenced and established the completion of data collection.

Categorizing the Data

Categorizing the collected data consisted of open coding to identify the initial creation of codes from the semistructured interview transcripts. I loaded the transcripts in NVivo12 software for coding by participant interviews. Data coding consisted of reading each municipal government leader's interview transcript and creating the initial codes followed by the review of the company documents for similar and discrepant data. Open coding occurred until no new themes emerge indicating data saturation.

The first step involved conducting a word query to identify the 100 most frequently used terms. NVivo12 software served as a tool for reviewing the interview transcripts, creating the initial codes, identifying keywords and phrases, classifying the phrases using in vivo codes, and categorizing the phrases into themes. After uploading the transcribed interviews into the Nvivo12 sources feature, I used the word frequency feature to view the count of recurring words to create codes. For example, the word "performance" was mentioned 95 times, "training" was noted 76 times, and "practices" was cited 61 times. In addition, I reviewed the terms to further identify the most frequently reoccurring keywords and stem word phrases. The text search feature allowed me to identify how many times each research participant referenced a word. I refined the word search to review phrases and sentences using the 31 most frequently used keywords, which became the codes.

Recombining the Data

Recombining the data consists of using CAQDAS. Open coding of the data consisted of identifying keywords and phrases, then theming the patterns that emerge from the interview transcripts using NVivo12 software. For the second step of coding, I grouped the collected keywords and stem word phrases from the municipal government leaders' interview responses for emerging themes related to the research question explored in this study. For example, keywords employee and performance became code employee performance and keywords leadership, and practices became code leadership practices. For this study, I used data display for description, order data collection, and prediction of results. Using Nvivo12, I identified 28 individual leadership topics from interviews conducted with the municipal government leaders and narrowed those down to five themes. Table 1 represents the themes that emerged during the data analysis, the specific codes that contributed to the themes, and a representative quotation from each theme.

Table 1

Themes, Codes Contributing to Themes, and Representative Quotations

Themes	Codes contributing to theme	Representative quotation
Strategic Human Resource Management	strategic plans, strategic work plans theme or organizational value name TERRIFIC, committed to organizational goals, accountability, improve the execution and organizational strategies, become a more highly performance organization, partner with other diverse ethnic organizations or associates for recruiting, promoting leadership and employee relations, develop the next generation of leaders, performance evaluation process, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), exceptional employee benefits and working environment	"From an organizational expectation it is centered around our organizational values, more so we have a theme or organizational value name TERRIFIC".

Collaborative Leadership	open-door policy, communicate the strategic objectives, set goals for team members, review strategic objective and goals, implemented an organizational philosophy, employee engagement, shared responsibility, shared success, expectations are verbalized to prospective employees, codify TERRIFIC, developing better employee relationships with leaders, build trust in relationships, be transparent, be interactive, training schedule	"We have to take TERRIFIC and codified it in the way we deal with our actual employees". "What I have done personally is implemented an organizational philosophy into the department. This organization philosophy that I believe in and introduced into the department is based on three things, share responsibility, shared accountability and shared success".
Internal Leadership Branding	internal training, leadership class, supervisory training course, mandatory effective supervision practice webinars, annual training schedule, cross training, formal education, achieve a bachelor's degree, achieve certification in a twelve-week training program	"We have engaged upon as it relates to promoting leadership and employee relations within municipal government".
Internal Communication System	open communication initiative, monthly newsletter, quarterly leadership forums, weekly and monthly staff meetings, disseminate information, be transparent, we get emails, all hands meetings, open-door kind of concept, gain knowledge via conferences, webinars	"Executive leadership has tried to keep open lines of communication to all employees by sending a monthly newsletter and having quarterly leadership forums with about 45-50 individuals to go over important topics to relay information to employees".
Performance Management	annual appraisal, performance evaluations are used to measure engagement, commitment, expectation and professional results, setting goals or expectations for employees, performance improvement plan, merit performance appraisal, a pay for performance model	"The performance evaluation is to hold employees accountable and to make sure they display a professional demeanor and decorum when interacting with their colleagues and the public". "The performance appraisal is kind of your roadmap that you created with leadership to meet expectations".

Triangulation of data sources was the third step for data analysis, which consisted of the identification of emerging themes from the review of company documents by highlighting significant data relating to the emerging codes by hand. Triangulation consists of incorporating information from different sources of data to strengthen the validity of the study and minimize the risk of systematic biases (Ashworth et al., 2019). After I reviewed the policy and procedures manuals, human resources policies, and financial reports from the municipal government website, data analysis continued by using Microsoft Excel to construct a list of key terms for coding and theming. Table 2 represents the themes that emerged during the data analysis of company documents and the specific codes that contributed to the themes.

Table 2

Themes and Codes Contributing to Themes from Municipal Government Documents

Theme	Key codes contributing to themes	Municipal Government Document
Strategic Human Resource Management	human resources management, leadership roles, acronym terrific, effective organizational processes, guidelines, fair treatment, workplace, policies and procedures, open-door policy, employee benefits, health plans, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), employee responsibility, job performance, retaining valued employees	Policy and Procedures Manual
Collaborative Leadership	employee relations, open-door policy, training, employee discipline, work-life balance, staff development, leadership teams, accountability, professional conduct, acronym terrific, job investment, encouraging high morale for employees, fair treatment in work environment	Policy and Procedures Manual, Employee Relations and Training Policies
Internal Leadership Branding	professional and educated workforce, training, staff development, innovative leadership, tuition reimbursement, professional development leave, student internships, educational training	Policy and Procedures Manual
Internal Communication System	communication, open-door policy, quarterly planning meetings, administering policies to employees, communication of policy and changes to employees, e-mail communication	Policy and Procedures Manual, Employee Relations and Training Policies, City Strategic Plan 2023
Performance Management	performance management systems, performance improvement plans, competitive salaries, training to assure high-quality performance, merit system, promotions and transfers	Policy and Procedures Manual, Employee Relations and Training Policies

Understanding and Interpreting the Meaning of the Data

To ascribe meaning to the data, I used sense-making served. As a government employee, I could understand any technical terms that participants may use during data collection. Researchers use sense-making to categorize dialogue shared by participants, interpret codes, and developed an understanding of the model (Hoff, 2019).

Interpreting the meaning of the data consisted of categorizing the emerging themes from the data relating to LMX by identifying themes relevant to the research question and the core leadership practices municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. An explanation of the findings relating to the conceptual framework and literature is located in the Interpretation of the Findings section.

Themes

Five main themes emerged from all collected data: (a) strategic human resource management (SHRM), (b) collaborative leadership, (c) internal leadership branding, (d) internal communication system, and (e) performance management. I provide a brief description of the five main themes in this section. The first theme indicates the importance of having SHRM to meet organizational goals. The second theme includes the fundamental aspects of core leadership practices that the leaders used to cultivate high-quality relationships and shows the importance of all stakeholders in the involvement of the development of practices for achieving organizational goals. The third theme provides relevant information regarding the leaders' beliefs regarding internal branding through training to increase employee retention. The fourth shows the significance of effective communication as a contributor to high-quality leader-member relationships and employee retention. The fifth and last theme represents the most significant strategy the participants believed they needed to increase employee retention. The presentation of findings is by the emerging themes and subthemes concerning the research question are in the Results section.

Discrepant Cases and Non-Confirming Data

Discrepancies found in the research regarded the leaders' interpretations of the questions when providing their responses. For example, some leaders stated the executive leaders had implemented an open-door policy to improve employee engagement. Many leaders stated that they established open-door policies to allow employees opportunities to openly express personal or professional concerns and issues. Only two leaders did not implement an open-door policy due to the paramilitary organizational atmosphere that eroded the chain of command. Regarding the questions about barriers, the majority of the leaders stated there were no true barriers when applying the concepts of LMX. Relative to the effectiveness of the implemented core leadership practices, most of the participants gave of high rating of 7-10. In contrast, some leaders indicated that a shortfall of workforce planning metrics was hiring employees who do not yield longevity with the agency. Many of the leaders recognized recruitment and the financial aspect of offering competitive salaries to new employees as barriers to retention.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The evidence of trustworthiness section includes the description of the processes to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves dependability, transferability, confirmability, and credibility (Bernard, 2017;

Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I addressed the four components of trustworthiness relevant to qualitative research, which is (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is the truth value and researcher's articulation of the level of confidence in the findings (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). To address credibility, I used member checking and triangulation. Methodological triangulation will involve data collection by conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing company documents. Lemon and Hayes (2020) defined method triangulation as the process of using multiple methods to collect data to ensure credibility and validity. Triangulation, which is the process of using multiple sources of data to confirm or refute interpretation assertions, themes, and study conclusions, is an important aspect of data analysis (Johnson et al., 2020). Methodological triangulation consists of the research using a combination of methods such as semistructured interviews and document review to collect data to improve the credibility of the findings (Amin et al., 2020).

Member checking consisted of municipal government leaders reviewing a transcribed copy of my interpretations of their interview responses. Johnson et al., 2020 noted member checking is a standard to increase credibility and confirmability in which researchers share the interview transcripts with participants to ensure their interpretations reflects the intent of person's contribution. According to Amin et al. (2020), member checking provides a researcher with the opportunity to assess the meaning of the information the participant actually intended to convey. The municipal government leaders participated in follow-up interviews until no new information emerges. In addition, data analysis occurred during the data collection phase to confirm the achievement of saturation. A standard of trustworthiness in qualitative studies is data saturation, which involves sufficiently collecting relevant data until no new information and new themes are emerging (Johnson et al., 2020).

Transferability

Lemon and Hayes (2020) defined transferability as the concept of trustworthiness concerning the extent to which the findings could apply to other contexts and settings. I documented the research process in the final study to assist other researchers to apply the process in other contexts. I provided a detailed description of the participant recruitment, data collection instrument selection, data collection technique, data analysis, and research findings. Researchers establish transferability by reporting in the research procedures in the study to ensure future researchers can repeat the study (Johnson et al., 2020). Amin et al. (2020) noted that qualitative researchers should provide descriptions of the setting, subjects, and data collection processes to establish transferability to other contexts.

Dependability

To address dependability, I conducted member-checking interviews, which entailed the participants reviewing my interpretations of their interview responses for accuracy. Municipal government leaders received an emailed copy of the interview transcripts to review before commencing the member-checking interview. Member checking served as the process to verify the accuracy and validity of the data in the interview transcripts and clarify bias by respondent verification of transcripts. Member checking is the process of the researcher returns conclusions to participants for review to validate the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations of their responses (Amin et al., 2020).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the researcher's objectivity when interpreting the findings from the participants' experiences presented in the data (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). To address confirmability, I used reflexivity by recording my personal beliefs, thoughts, and bias in a reflective journal after each interview. Reflexivity refers to the researcher preconceptions during each phase of the research process and the elimination of researcher bias (Amin et al., 2020). After each interview, I found a neutral location to record my assessment of the research process, interview, and any personal thoughts that may affect data analysis. Researcher reflexivity is an essential element to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative studies (Johnson et al., 2020).

Study Results

The foundation of the analysis was the research question for this study: What core leadership practices do municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention. Presentation of the results is by the emerging themes to the research question. The five main themes gathered from the municipal government leaders' interview responses and company documents were SHRM, collaborative leadership, internal leadership branding, internal communication system, and performance management. I will review the findings for each of the five main themes. Table 3 shows the percentages of the emergent themes from the municipal government leaders' interview responses.

Table 3

Emergent Themes from the Overarching Research Question

Theme	Referenced
Strategic Human Resource Management	96%
Collaborative Leadership	60%
Internal Leadership Branding	28%
Internal Communication System	19%
Performance Management	19%
Employee Empowerment	14%

Note: Referenced= the number of responses linked to the themes.

Theme 1: Strategic Human Resource Management

The results of this study revealed that 100% of the participants' responses indicated that c SHRM was the most significant aspect of leadership in the municipal government agency to meet organizational goals. L4 shared, "HR department has been advocating for effective supervisory training and providing opportunities for not only the manager but also subordinate staff." L11 added, "The HR department has provided training to us through classes regarding customer service, leadership, ethics, and how to be a supervisor to ignite that leadership in us." Leadership illumination of strategic SHRM as the foundation for recruiting good employees suitable to organizational departments in municipal government. The HR department catalyzes to ensure the recruitment, hiring, and development of qualified employees. Leaders stated that the HR department also recruits from outside entities to bridge the gap when employees retire or transition to other careers. According to L1, "We reach out to organizations such as Latino, Hispanic, and those other diverse ethnic organizations or associates to partner with them for recruiting." The city manuals from policy and HR provided information regarding employee expectations and functional duties.

The executive leaders developed a performance evaluation process to communicate the employees' expectations relating to job functions and organization success. Having a performance evaluation system opens the lines of communication for the employee and leader to discuss specific organizational and personal goals (Koziel, 2000). L2 said, "Performance evaluations are used to measure engagement, performance and commitment." Providing training to prepare individuals for new positions was the succession planning strategy mentioned. L1 stated, "We have engaged in practices for promoting leadership and employee relations within municipal government." Participants noted that they focused on encouraging employees to obtain certifications for specific skillsets for promotional opportunities. In addition, the leaders stated that as an incentive to employees receive reimbursement for out-of-pocket training expenses.

The analysis revealed that 100% of the participants' responses indicated that having retention strategies was the second significant aspect of motivation in the workplace. Many of the municipal government leaders mentioned both external and internal factors that affect the recruitment and retention of workers. Some external factors noted were high-performance HRM, job security, the well-being of individuals, and work-life balance. Employee motivation using factors such as competitive salary and family-oriented work environment were the internal factors mentioned. "Having good benefits and good working conditions have been motivators for employees" said L10. The participant leaders noted that creating an employee assistance program to support employees with professional services for well-being fostered a greater sense of community.

The municipal government leaders acknowledged that compensation was one of the most challenging factors among many that sustain employees in municipal government. According to L4, “We are trying to stay competitive with attracting and retaining those qualified by offering a salary that is commensurate to their capabilities and qualification.” Most of the municipal government leaders mentioned the onsite health and wellness program to provide medical assistance for the employees at a reduced cost. The participants stated that initiating a 401k and 457-retirement plan offset compensation for employees and offering performance pay kept the employees striving to perform at higher levels. Participants stated that MA1 offered incentives such as performance rewards, credit union memberships, and COBRA benefits. L1 mentioned that the employees just want to be rewarded for anything they do. L10 and L11 stated, “Annually the City Manager has an All Hands meeting at which time we recognize the accomplishments of the employees.”

The creative need to generate a conducive work environment for employees was a common statement from most of the municipal government leaders. Some of the leaders stated their goal was to create an atmosphere of inclusion, fairness, and promotion. The city manuals from policy and HR participation upon onboarding and information sharing helped new and seasoned employees feel welcome and comfortable in the work setting.

The majority of the municipal government leaders stated that implementing practices for employees' work-life balance was one of the most fundamental aspects for employee retention. Moreover, participants shared that they prefer to provide family-like work. L9 stated, “the MA1 has an Employee Assistance Program [EAP].” L1 defined an employee assistance program “as a program to provide professional services designed to enhance the health, performance, and well-being of individuals while fostering a greater sense of community.” Many of the leaders mentioned that the absenteeism and tardiness rates amongst employees have decreased since the initialization of the onsite wellness clinic. For example, employees can seek medical services during work hours. Another practice mention was the option for employees to telework during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.

A review and analysis of company documents included the policy and procedure manual, strategic planning document, and fiscal year budget brief. The city strategic plan 2023 and the fiscal budget brief were material about MA1’s proposal for developing innovative leadership teams and accountability measures. In addition, my review of the city strategic plan 2023 outlined the guidelines for establishing professionalism focusing on the policy to require employees to exhibit high ethical standards and professional conduct based on the agency’s organizational value or theme. The strategic plan outlined information regarding MA1’s provisions for leaders and employees working together to promote the city as a welcoming tourist attraction. L1 stated, “The center of our organizational expectations is the theme or organizational value T-try E-effectiveness R-responsiveness R-respect I-integrity F-fun I- innovative C- customer satisfaction (TERRIFIC).” L3 added, “The organizational values are codified in an acronym Terrific in which we start with accountability and then follow with professionalism.”

Theme 2: Collaborative Leadership Practices

Evidence of the collaborative leadership practices used to develop leader-employee relationships and improve employee retention manifested throughout the participants' responses. The policy and procedure manual provided information regarding leadership practices and expectations for experienced leaders and employees. L11 mentioned the organizational philosophies of shared responsibility, shared accountability, and shared success. Leader 12 added that employees have empowerment through shared responsibility along with shared success. Some of the collaborative leadership practices mentioned were open communication policy, employee empowerment, and situational-leadership style. Participants stressed that the second principle of MA1's SHRM was having an open communication policy. The leaders (83%) provided responses related to collaborative leadership practices and consensus that communication flows both ways. For example, L4, L5, L6, and L11 stated, "I keep up an open line of communication, open door concepts, so my employees can always come in and talk about whatever may be going on and expectations." The municipal government leaders recognized the impact of employee interactive platforms in which encouraged interaction and engagement.

Participants mentioned employee empowerment was a positive practice for leadership in municipal government. L1 shared, that "We selected individuals from various departments to come and sit on the committee. A combination of department heads and employees; they would come to us with the feedback from their coworkers or peers about the pay for performance model." L9 noted that one of the things like that relates to our pay for performance model it allowed employees to have a voice because every employee has this as part of their performance evaluation. Moreover, "It also allows employees to be able to put in a few of their own goals and weigh in on their goals for the year," said L6. Many of the leaders practiced empowering employees to participate in setting specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based (SMART) goals with their directors to ensure achievable performance standards. L10 stated, "I review that with them first to make sure they are in harmony with the strategic objective, goals are obtainable, measurable and reachable." Many of the leaders took the initiative to meet with a different group representing specific ranks every month to talk about those issues that are important to them it allows them to bring their ideas straight to leadership. L11 mentioned his initiative of allowing all employees seven days to review new policies, concur or refute policies before implementation. In addition, MA1 allows employees to voice any concerns about government issues during the town hall meetings. L9 stated, "We selected individuals from varies departments to come and sit on the committee." L6 added, "when we have an all-hands meeting, we have on some occasions had input from employees on what they would like to discuss and issues they may be seeing that they want somebody to talk about in the all hands meeting."

Incorporating the situational-leadership style was noted as a fundamental practice to ensure awareness of organizational goals and effectively achieve those goals. "Leadership may operate as servant leaders to enhance employee's knowledge of organizational goals," said L12. Leaders expressed that they use transformational leadership to lead by example. Some of the participants used situational leadership for providing direction, coaching, and delegating tasks. For example, L3 stated, "I try to have a conversation with them taking the time to articulate, the philosophy at the same time the theory to codify TERRIFIC". L1 noted, "What I have done in my department is to make sure I encourage my staff to join organizations and be involved in the Society for Human Resource Management, or International Public Management Associates for Human Resource [IPMA], General Municipal Associates [GMA], and the ICMA [International City-County Management Associates]." L4 stated, "I never give employees anything that is above their capabilities, but I will certainly nudge and pull them in a direction that may be out of their comfort zone."

Theme 3: Internal Leadership Branding

Internal leadership branding was mentioned as the focus to build employee knowledge and professionalism. The participants provided information about the municipal government agency's implementation of a leadership training program as the most prominent long-term human capital development practice within the organization. Leader 1 mentioned the internal goal encompassed promoting leadership and fostering engagement within the organization. L4 added, "One of the things that I can say that the city does is to make sure that it is creating leaders within and some of most of the positions that are advertised do commit opportunities for existing staff to be promoted internally." Participants mentioned the initiative to enhance employee's personal and career development by offering a six-part leadership effective practicum online seminar series. L1 shared that the HR department offers a six-part practicum webinar series through the International City-County Management Association. L10 added, "There have been approximately 285 individuals who have participated in the six-part supervisory training course." Working flexible schedules was mentioned as an alternative for employees to obtain specialized skills and certification for promotional advancement.

Based on my review of the company documents, the HR department collaborates with department supervisors and managers to encourage employees to pursue secondary education and other leadership classes. "One of the things they encourage us to be certain that we do take advantage of professional outlets than whether that be that their training within the city government or even trainings and there were other organizations who are providing those skillsets for us," said L9. Moreover, "We have been very fortunate with those people taking advantage of that through all kinds of the leadership class, development class, formal education; several people have formal education" stated L11. Participants stated the importance of career and professional development derived from endorsing the city manager's initiative to invest in employee growth.

Theme 4: Internal Communication System

The participants revealed that one leadership practice used to set direction was using an internal communication system to disseminate information to all employees. More than two-thirds of the participants mentioned that over the last year there has been an upward trend towards better understanding the importance of communication and positive interaction with employees. Leader 4 stated, "Regarding internal communication to build leader-employee relationships, MA1's executive leadership has an annual all-hands meeting to provide the leadership team and employees with updates about forthcoming initiatives." L6 added, "The all-hands meeting is also a forum to celebrate the accomplishments of the municipal government agency and employees." L9 stated, "Communication is for me is big on levels." Many of the participants revealed that the organization used internal communication systems to distribute news and information from senior management officials to the workforce. L10 and L12 stated that HR keeps open lines of communication by sending monthly newsletters and emails about city positions and community engagements to both employees and supervisors. The participants provided information regarding the dissemination of information to subordinates. For example, L2 shared, "As I gain environmental knowledge via conferences, webinars, and emails, I share that knowledge with staff." L7 stated, "I keep them informed about what's going on because employees get upset when they learn information through the grapevine."

Theme 5: Performance Management

Leaders mentioned that employees received performance improvement plans throughout the year and an annual merit increase based on the pay for performance evaluation. Performance management and evaluation succession target organizational innovation, employee talent, and benefits (Jiang et al., 2019). L2 stated that performance evaluations are used to measure engagement, performance, and commitment. Ninety-one percent of the participants mentioned the performance incentive offered to employees who rated exceptional on their performance standards. L3 shared "Performance evaluations are an essential part of their graded behavior and shared organizational values." Eighty-three percent of the participants illuminated that allowing employees to be inclusive in their performance standards helped to better manage and promote employees. The municipal government leaders acknowledged that compensation having true unremitting feedback through performance management creates more opportunities to identify performance behavior that keeps employees feeling fulfilled and engaged. According to L1, “their performance evaluation so that the context is to hold employees accountable and to make sure their professional demeanor and decorum as it relates to dealing with the public and interacting with their coworkers and colleagues.” L3 and L4 mentioned that leaders may implement a performance improvement plan for staff not meeting performance standards. My review of the HR manual provided evidence of the details about the standards for employee accountability and the pay for performance model.

Summary

Chapter 4 focused on the results of the study. Inclusive in Chapter 4 was an overview of the data analysis process used for coding and identifying the emerging themes, the research question, setting of the study, demographics, and the data analysis procedures. I outlined the analysis of the emerging main themes and subthemes that aligned with the research question. I provided an analysis of the company documents, discrepant cases, nonconforming data, and evidence of trustworthiness. Chapter 5 presents the conclusion, recommendations, a summary, interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and concludes with the implications of contribution to positive social change and recommendation for practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore core leadership practices that municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. The nature of this qualitative single case study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex situation by exploring the participants' realities (Abonyi et al., 2020). According to Verleye (2019), researchers use the single case study design to explore rigorous paths, which can contribute to a better understanding of the complex phenomenon under study. Using a single case study allowed me to record practices used by leaders in municipal government to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention.

The findings of this research established that municipal government leaders require specific leadership practices to increase employee retention. The results indicated that the leaders focused on the practical application of leadership behaviors and styles to cultivate high-quality leader-employee relationships and retention. In addition, the results of this study showed that municipal government agencies may use various core leadership practices to serve the public by providing excellent customer service and advanced innovation.

Interpretation of Findings

This study contributes to the qualitative data on leadership practices that municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. The leader-member exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) served as the framework that guided the development of the study. Based on the findings, municipal government leaders suggested that SHRM, collaborative leadership, and internal leadership branding are essential elements for improving employee retention. For the leaders, the implementation of core leadership practices was driven by the desire to increase employee retention and enhance organizational performance, which confirmed Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) representation of LMX as a tool to build high-quality LMX.

The municipal government leaders incorporated the facets of role-taking, role-making, and role routinization to create an environment of engagement. Relating to the three facets of dyadic relationships—trust, respect, and obligations—to cultivate relationships, the municipal government leaders provided insight about the leadership practices implemented to develop leader-member relationships with employees to increase employee retention. To cultivate high-quality leader-employee relationships, the leaders in my study used team-building activities, employee empowerment, and open-door policies. Some of the reoccurring leadership practices mentioned were role-taking by effectively communicating the organizational roles and expectations, role-making through building relationships with employees, and role-routinization by defining organizational citizenship behaviors with employees. Moreover, the findings showed that the municipal government leaders used the situational leadership style to develop effective leadership practices.

Role-Taking

The participants voiced that role-taking constitutes communicating to the stakeholders the vision and organizational goals, which should be transparent. L1 said, "One responsibility of HR is to improve the execution and organizational strategies for organizational effectiveness; what that means is that everything we do in HR must be aligned with the strategic plans set by our board of commissioners." During the interviews, the leaders shared that they were accessible and visible to the employees for guidance and direction within the work environment. L2 stated, "Staff is always available for interaction, networking, and guidance." An analysis of the interviews also revealed that 83% of the participants mentioned that team-member exchange quality predicted work performance. Leaders identified the most clearly communicated source of branding by using the mission statement identified the acronym TERRIFIC and activities centered on improving municipal government employees, achievement, and direction. Moreover, the various training programs and professional development opportunities served as tools for the leaders to monitor the performance of the employees and conduct performance evaluations. Leaders utilized the results of the employees' performance management to guide their leadership strategies for role-taking, role-making, and role-routinization.

Role-Making

Relating to role-making or building trust among subordinates, the leaders implemented practices incorporating organizational support. Leaders practice an open-door policy to allows employees the opportunity to discuss any issues or concerns they have with supervisors on personal or work issues. L6 mentioned, "Creating an atmosphere that is comfortable for the employees to come to me to discuss work as well as things outside of work." Some of the leadership built relationships with employees by engaging in eating lunch with them on different occasions, developing office book clubs, and attending special functions. During the pandemic of 2020, many leaders contacted employees to provide support. The participants expressed that one of the most significant factors for positive relationships and employee retention is to express the value of each employee.

Role-Routinization

The leaders stated that the primary leadership practice for LMX and employee retention was role-routinization or incorporating role-taking and role-making as routine behaviors between leaders and workers. L9 stated, “I try to demonstrate the expectations of what the MA1 executive leader expects of me, so I think that employees who can see the professionalism.” During the interviews, the leaders provided details regarding organizational policies and practices implemented to define their subordinates’ role obligations and organizational citizenship behavior. L10 stated, “We also have quarterly leadership forums to discuss organizational goals in turn the leaders disseminate the information to employees during weekly meetings.” Leaders shared that they scheduled meetings with employees to discuss accountability and expectations related to their job duties: “We meet on a nonformal basis to discuss the workload” (L5). L2 also mentioned that leaders express their expectations of employees’ performance during the hiring process and redefined them during department orientation. Employee feedback served as a source for monitoring organizational performance. A consensus among the participants was that role-routinization is an essential aspect of leader-member relationships and employee retention.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study related to the chosen research design were issues with establishing trustworthiness. Case study research has not been recognized as a method of choice because of a lack of trust in the credibility of the researcher's procedures and the lack of transferability (Gregory, 2020; Musharraf et al., 2020). Amin et al. (2020) asserted that an insufficient examination or exploration of a research problem can affect transferability. A limitation of this study linked to credibility was the participants could have provided data to agree with the researcher not based on their experiences. To mitigate this potential limitation, I conducted semistructured interviews consisting of open-ended questions and member checking interviews. To address transferability, I documented and recorded each phase incorporated in the research process to allow future researchers the ability to replicate the study.

Limitations that I could not control included data collection processes, sample size, specific geographical location, and potentials for bias. Johnson et al., 2020 argued that factors related to sampling such as timing of the interviews in relation to experience, interview setting, and methods of recording the data, may impact the quality of the study result. The most significant limitation occurred with the recruitment of participants because of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which affected every facet of the country, especially the small community in southwest Georgia. The second limitation was a venue change to conduct interviews because of the limited access to the municipal government facilities resulting in teleconference interviews. The third limitation was the sample size of 12 participants. The limited sample size may not truly represent the experiences of leaders within the larger municipal government population. To address this limitation, I used purposive sampling to select a diverse sample of participants within the study parameters resulting in 12 participants. Purposive sampling is the intentional selection of individuals to collect data for answering the research question (Johnson et al., 2020). The geographical location of the municipal government agency was a limitation because gathered data-limited generalizations to all government agencies within the vicinity. The final limitation was potential researcher bias. An important aspect was for me to mitigate biases related to my research study as a researcher rather than a public service employee. To avoid bias, I recorded my thoughts, opinions, and perspective in a reflective journal and conducted member-checking interviews with participants. Reflexivity provides researchers with means to address their biases relating to research topic and participants' responses (Amin et al., 2020).

Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore leadership practices that municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention. I conducted a single case study using the data collection processes and procedures outlined in Chapter 3. Reflecting on the method and process used to collect data, I would recommend case studies into other aspects of leadership experiences (i.e., leadership styles, employee turnover, and human capital investment, etc.) at municipal government levels would reveal more about the phenomenon of LMX. Future researchers could expand the knowledge and gap in the literature on the LMX by researching the private government sector.

Using the conceptual framework of this study as a guide, future researchers could explore specific leadership practices related to leader-employee relationships and employee motivation. The approach to LMX surpasses expanded and negotiated role responsibilities of individuals in leadership positions due to the generational changes in employee dynamics. An overarching recommendation for further research is to explore individuals' capability as appointed leaders within organizations to influence productive employees in the workforce. The research might generate insight into the rationale of leaders' suitability for upper management positions. The lack of leadership confidence, development, and training amongst established leadership may generate challenges for the organization. Researchers could benefit from studying tools leaders utilize to convey change within the organization and maximize retention in municipal government agencies.

The methodological limitation of this qualitative study included the lack of transferability because of the single case for the study. I recommend that future researchers conduct a multiple case study within a larger metropolitan area with a more diverse group of potential participants to generalize the results to a larger population of municipal government. The recommendation to conduct a multiple case study is to explore in-depth the aspects of core leadership practices, LMX, and employee retention from the views of leaders at more than one municipal government agency. In addition, I would include focus group interviews with employees to gain an understanding from their experiences and perceptions of the overall municipal government vision and leader-member relationships to retain.

Further research could consist of using a phenomenological or quantitative analysis to compare leader and employees' perceptions of how the concept of LMX could enrich leader-member interaction and increase employee retention. A future researcher may use the phenomenological design to explore leaders' perceptions of the effectiveness of leadership practices that develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention in municipal government. Conducting a phenomenology design would allow the researcher to perform in-depth studies that produce extensive subjectivity of human experiences and consciousness from every participant in the study. Researchers use the phenomenological design to focus on the consciousness of lived experiences of participants (Leigh-Osroosh, 2021). Another recommendation is to conduct further research using a quantitative methodology to examine the relationship between leadership practices, professional development of leaders, and leader-member relationships to increase retention. Quantitative researchers utilize semi-experimental designs, pre and post-control groups as models of research (Türkmen & Soybaş, 2019).

Minimal research existed on leadership practices developed to cultivate leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention with a diverse workforce. Future researchers could address how workforce diversity affects the application of the concepts of LMX. A study within municipal government concerning diversity could lead to the development of coaching and mentoring programs and enhanced employee retention. Another recommendation that illuminates from this study is to focus on implemented practices linked to regulatory training for all leaders in technology, inclusion, and diversity that meet the need of the organization's workforce. To address this gap in research, future researchers could conduct a study to gain a better understanding of workforce inclusion, more specifically the in-group and out-group dynamics of LMX. The generational shift in workforce dynamics and diversity changes has led to organizational leaders focusing more on employee retention and succession planning. The goal of most organizational leaders is to maintain their competitive advantages in the market and enhance organizational performance.

Implications

The findings of the study might contribute to positive social change by providing municipal government leaders with the acumen to recognize practices and identify strategies to overcome organizational stagnation to increase employee retention. The insight gained from this effort could equip leaders and employees with the knowledge of perceived interferences that limit practical opportunities and techniques to a leader more effectively in the workplace. The knowledge gained from this study could help other leaders to become gain awareness and understand the behaviors, actions, and impediments that realistically focus on the interactions between the leader and followers that inevitably increase retention in municipal government.

Impacts to Social Change

The findings might provide individuals with knowledge of their value as human capital within the municipal government agency. As employees develop leadership skills, they become confident, decisive, enthusiastic, and effective communicators who generate awareness, solution-driven, and models for others to produce at the same level of commitment. An indication of positive social change might be that individuals could become influential members of positive leaders within the local community and society.

The results of this study can assist municipal government leaders in recognizing proactively potential internal and external interferences. In addition, this research effort elucidated the strategies and techniques the participants used to maneuver, overcome, and navigate through career difficulties. The findings of this study may provide insight to municipal government leaders about strategies to facilitate employment opportunities. Leaders and employees may partner with stakeholders to deliver dependable services to a thriving community that supports economic development. Leaders may identify core leadership practices for enhancing leader and employee engagement to improve organizational performance leading to business sustainability, thus resulting in continuous economic growth.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of the findings confirm that municipal government leaders consistently implemented core leadership practices to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention by role-taking, role-making, and role routinization. The leaders provided evidence that they maintained good work ethics with employees by displaying trust, respect, empathy, patience, and persistence. The consensus among the participants was leadership implemented effective core leadership practices to develop leader-member interaction to increase retention within the municipal government agency.

My first recommendation is that municipal government leaders continue to focus on employing core leadership practices to develop leader-employee relationships and to increase employee retention. According to L6, “Over the past 5 years, leadership within MA1 has improved with cultivating relationships between leadership and employees and having the open communication initiative.” I would recommend leaders create more defined accountability measures for the leaders and employees to promote the municipal government agency’s vision.

My second recommendation is that municipal government leaders address the changing dynamics of employees in the workforce by creating a mentor-coaching program resulting in knowledge sharing among employees to create a viable knowledge-based workplace. Participants mentioned challenges with retaining knowledge within the organization because of the retirement of experienced employees and the entrance of millennials into the workforce. The participants revealed that creating a positive balanced and diverse culture in which all stakeholders understand the vision statement could result in improved organizational achievement.

A common consensus revealed by participants illuminated the lack of diversity within the organization. Employees within the organization did not fully represent the citizens of the community. The third recommendation is that municipal government leaders continue to focus on implementing a strategic recruitment plan to hire a more diverse workforce. In addition, municipal government leaders could collaborate with local employment agencies in the surrounding areas to recruit employees from other ethnicities to produce more diversity within the workforce.

Conclusions

Many municipal government leaders experience challenges with building high-quality relationships with subordinates to retain highly skilled and knowledgeable employees. Municipal government agency leaders invest in resources for training, developing, and engaging employees. Although leader-employee relationships are needed, some municipal government leaders may not embrace core leadership practices that develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. However, many municipal government leaders have implemented core leadership practices for developing leader-employee relationships and retaining employees.

The findings of this study indicated that municipal government leaders might need effective core leadership practices and situational-leadership style to cultivate high-quality relationships with employees resulting in employee retention. The leaders in the municipal government agency used effective core leadership practices to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention. Leaders should be aware of the educational and skill development challenges of employees, the social-economic issues of the employees, and the lack of professional development resources available to employees that affect employee retention. Furthermore, if our municipal government employees are to effectively serve the public and contribute to society as community leaders, municipal government leaders should implement core leadership practices needed to meet the challenges of municipal government agencies.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview #_______________
Date_______/_____/_______

Interview Protocol

Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Cynthia Thomas-Williams, and I am a graduate student at Walden University conducting my doctoral study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy- Management. This semistructured interview will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour and will include nine questions regarding your experiences and leadership practices leaders in municipal government leaders rely on to develop leader-employee relationships and retain employees. I would like your permission to tape record this interview, so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please let me know. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how you and your peers view leadership practices municipal government leaders perceive to affect employee engagement, employee retention, the execution of client objectives, and the establishment of strong communication channels while interacting with employees, and reporting to ensure quality performance. The purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of the practices leaders in municipal government agencies use to develop leader-employee relationships and increase employee retention.

At this time, I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible researcher, specifying your participation in the research project: *Exploring Leader-member Exchange and Employee Retention in Municipal Government Agencies*. You have replied to the consent email with the words, “I consent”, which I will store a copy securely in my home, separate from your reported responses.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission, we will begin the interview.

Thank the participant for his or her participation.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

The leaders will answer the following questions:

1. What leadership practices has the municipal government agency initiated to promote leader-employee relationships within the organization?
2. How have you demonstrated role-taking or communicated the organizational roles and expectations with employees?
3. How have you demonstrated role-making or building relationships with employees?
4. How have you implemented role routinization or defining organizational citizenship behaviors such as engagement, performance, and commitment with employees?
5. What are some barriers that you have faced while interacting with a diverse workforce?
6. What practices did the municipal government agency developed to retain employees?
7. What specific leadership practices have you implemented to retain employees?
8. How would you rate the effectiveness of the implemented practices for developing leader-employee relationships and retaining employees?
9. What additional information would you like to add to this interview?