

2022

## Perception of Promotability Among Employees in Nonprofit Health and Social Impact Services

Victoria Leann Rodino  
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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Victoria Rodino

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Perception of Promotability Among Employees in Nonprofit Health and Social Impact  
Services

by

Victoria Rodino

MPhil, Walden University, 2019

BA, Southern New Hampshire University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial Organizational Psychology

Walden University

February 2022

## Abstract

Many human resource departments are developing and improving their talent management systems to identify and develop employee talent within the organization. However, nonprofit organizations face unique challenges including under-developed human resource structures and limited resources or funds. As a result, many nonprofit organizations are unable to effectively communicate their promotability processes, resulting in negative employee behaviors including lack of motivation, decreased engagement, and enhanced turnover intention. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the employee perception of promotability within the nonprofit sector. Social exchange and social cognitive theories were used to explore the perception of promotability among non-managerial employees in a nonprofit organization using descriptive phenomenology. Semistructured interviews were conducted with nine nonprofit employees to explore the perception of promotability among non-managerial employees working for nonprofit organizations. Seven overarching themes were identified, revealing a predominately negative perception of promotability attributed to limited funds, resources, organizational focus, and lack of interest in employee growth. These results can inform positive social change through promotability priorities and processes, effecting positive social change by creating efficient and effective organizational communication procedures.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is a testament to what we are all capable of as students, thinkers, and individuals. There are so many times in life when we think we can't do something because it is too hard, too complicated, or takes too long. Finishing this dissertation has proved that through sheer determination, commitment, and tenacity, one can accomplish their goal. This dissertation is dedicated to anyone with a fear of the unknown, unsure of whether they should take that first step. Ralph Waldo Emerson said it best, "Make the most of yourself, for that is all there is of you."

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“Here’s to those who inspire you, and don’t even know it.”

–Anonymous

This dissertation was not a solo effort. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge and wholeheartedly thank all those who supported, encouraged, and challenged me during this process.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

To capitalize on the benefits of internal promotion, including the ability to retain an employee's knowledge, skill set, and saving on external recruitment costs (Chan, 1996), human resource (HR) departments have developed comprehensive talent management systems to identify and develop leaders within the organization (Ruggiero, 2008; Webster & Beehr, 2013). However, the issue that has emerged as a result of this process is that organizations are not effectively communicating HR promotability criteria or the process by which promotion decisions are being made with their employees (Webster & Beehr, 2013).

Nonprofit organizations, such as those focused on health and social impact services, face unique issues in this area as many have an under-developed HR structure, low validity in processes, and contradictory HR management (HRM) indicators (Baluch, 2017). Many nonprofit organizations also suffer from less-than-ideal working conditions (Molan et al., 2018), limited access to the resources or funds (McDermott et al., 2013), and are under more pressure to work efficiently, effectively, and remain innovative and responsive to client and market needs; this in turn puts more strain on their management and leadership processes (Nunes & Martins, 2017; Verschuere & Beddeleem, 2013). These types of challenges suffered by nonprofit organizations can lead to serious issues with lack of communication to employees regarding promotability criteria and how promotion decisions are being made (Webster & Beehr, 2013).



## **Background**

In the current business environment, nonprofit organizations must be adaptable in order to compete in an ever-changing market (Nunes & Martins, 2017; Verschuere & Beddeleem, 2013). To do this successfully, they must rely on their internal resources to make appropriate decisions—namely HR (Misuko, 2012). Over the years, organizations have become increasingly aware of the value and competitive advantage HR can offer in terms of the promotion of internal talent (Misuko, 2012). By supporting HR and investing in their internal employees, organizations can retain knowledge, skill sets, and strengthen employee engagement (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Misuko, 2012; Webster & Beehr, 2013).

In contrast, a lack of investment in the HR administration process can lead to ineffective leadership development, promotability processes, and communication (Webster & Beehr, 2013; Vough & Caza, 2017). These ineffective processes can cause downstream issues within the organization including inaccurate and even negative perceptions of promotability, behavior issues, lack of motivation, and increased turnover (Burnett et al., 2009; Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Webster & Beehr, 2013; Vough & Caza, 2017). An incorrect perception of promotability within the organization can significantly affect the employee's attitude and work behaviors within the organization including a decreased sense of commitment and engagement, perceived breach of the psychological contract and organizational injustice, and intentions to leave the organization (Anderson et al., 1981; Baluch, 2017; Vough & Caza, 2017). Additionally, when an employee's perception of promotability is skewed, it prevents them from understanding the valued behaviors that are rewarded within the organization (Baluch, 2017). One study indicated

that employees who thought they were not identified as “talent” (i.e., having potential to advance) were less likely to accept increasing task and performance demands, less likely to be committed or support strategic initiatives, and more likely to quit (Bjorkman et al., 2013). Research has indicated that an employee’s satisfaction and organizational commitment is influenced not only by the organization’s HR practices (e.g., those related to promotion), but more importantly, by their perception of such practices (Piening et al., 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

Research has shown that although effective communication has the potential to secure an employee’s trust, create organizational awareness, and help achieve business outcomes (Verghese, 2017), lack of communication about processes such as promotability determination can lead to an employee creating their own perception of promotability, which may not align with the organization’s actual criteria and standards (Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Webster & Beehr, 2013). This false or negative perception of promotability can result in an employee developing adverse attitudes and behaviors toward the organization (Webster & Beehr, 2013). Employees may also feel that there has been a breach of the psychological contract, perceive organizational injustice, experience decreased organizational commitment, decreased work engagement, and have increased thoughts of leaving the organization (Burnett et al., 2009; Baluch, 2017; Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Vough & Caza, 2017).

Much of the current literature about promotability has focused on the effect promotions have on employee job performance (Webster & Beehr, 2012), organizational

commitment (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Webster & Beehr, 2013), employee turnover (Carson et al., 1994), and employee satisfaction (Chan et al., 2016). There is a notable gap, however, in the research examining employee perceptions of promotability within the nonprofit sector, specifically those focused on health and social impact (Baluch, 2017; Bjorkman et al., 2013; Webster & Beehr, 2013). It was therefore essential to understand the employee's perception of promotability as inaccurate or unintended perceptions can lead to performance and behavioral issues in the organization (Baluch, 2017; Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Misuko, 2012; Webster & Beehr, 2013). The nonprofit sector is a major component in the health, education, social, and economic aspects of communities (McDermott et al., 2013). As such, this study aimed to provide insight into the current gap in research regarding the perception of promotability specifically among employees working in the nonprofit sector in an organization focused on health and social impact services (Baluch, 2017; Bjorkman et al., 2013; Webster & Beehr, 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of promotability among non-managerial employees in a nonprofit organization. An employee's perceptions about promotability can have a significant effect on their attitude, behavior, view of the psychological contract, perception of organizational justice, and their organizational commitment. In this study I explored this perception among employees working in an organization focused on health and social impact services in the nonprofit sector.

### **Research Question**

What is the perception of promotability among employees working in a nonprofit organization focused on health and social impact services?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was based on social exchange and social cognitive theories (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). Social exchange theory (SET) states that mutual respect is obtained through relationships that provide more rewards to the individual than costs (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). An example of this would be a social transaction that combined both material and psychological rewards, including status, loyalty, salary increase or bonus, and leader approval (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). This theory suggests that when an organization invests in its employees, the employee is more likely to reciprocate in a positive way (Bjorkman et al., 2013). In a professional application, an employer who communicates a clear expectation regarding what type of performance and behavior were considered promotable would garner a mutual respect from their employee, and the employee would reciprocate this investment of knowledge through positive behaviors.

SCT explains the impact social influence (e.g., performance outcomes, interactions with others) has on external and internal social reinforcement (e.g., praise, attention, acceptance; Cherry, 2018; LaMorte, 2016). Central to SCT is the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to perform a task or behavior according to their perception of their capabilities, traits, and any environmental barriers or facilitators (LaMorte, 2016). This concept was important to this

study as employees who believe they have a clear perception of promotability, and feel they have the skill set to attain it, will display positive behaviors in the organization (e.g., increased engagement).

### **Nature of the Study**

This study was qualitative in nature with descriptive phenomenological analysis. Qualitative research allowed for an interpretive view and focus on the natural setting of those being studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Phenomenology provides an understanding of human consciousness by prioritizing how an individual perceives or interprets the specific phenomenon being studied (Giorgi, 2010; Ungvarsky, 2017). Meaning is obtained through the individual's unique perception and interpretation informed by their life experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This approach thus allows the researcher to comprehend, as much as is feasible, the individual's state of mind relative to the phenomenon under study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The process of reviewing, modeling, categorizing, and analyzing provided comprehensive insight into the employee's perception of promotability (LaMorte, 2016).

A quantitative study was not used as the intent was not to examine correlational or causal relationships among variables, but to understand the phenomenon from the unique perspective of individual participants. As the intent of this research study was to understand the perception of promotability among employees, the grounded, ethnography, and case study approaches were not considered. Grounded theory focuses on generating a general explanation or theory of a process that has specific steps or phases over time; the intent of this research was not to create a theory of any process or

action (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethnography was not considered as it focuses on a culture-sharing group in order to describe and interpret learned patterns, values, beliefs, and behaviors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher often has to completely immerse themselves in the day-to-day lives of those they are studying to achieve this. Finally, case studies were not used for this study as they are focused on in-depth data collection over time within real-life systems, looking at multiple sources of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study relied solely on the semistructured interview process to understand the participants perception of promotability.

### **Definitions**

The following terms were fundamental concepts of this study.

*Contextual performance:* The social aspect of the employee's role in the organization (e.g., interpersonal helping, cooperating with team members, supporting organizational objectives; Jawahar & Ferris, 2011).

*Employee behaviors:* An employee's actions within the organization that affect their work performance (e.g., engagement, commitment, motivation; Baluch, 2017; Webster & Beehr, 2013; Vough & Caza, 2017).

*Employee perception of promotability:* Employees create strategies for their career growth, personal and professional development, and organizational behavior based on their perceptions of what promotability expectations are unique to their organization (Beehr et al., 2004).

*Nonprofit organization:* An organization tax-exempt under the Internal Revenue Code Section 501 (c)(3) as a public charity to provide a public benefit (National Council of Nonprofits, 2019).

*Performance vs. nonperformance promotions:* Performance-based promotions are based on work output factors. Nonperformance-based promotions are based on factors such as tenure, gender, age, or interpersonal relationships (Beehr et al., 2004).

*Promotability:* The potential for an employee's advancement in their particular organization (Gurbuz et al., 2016).

### **Assumptions**

This study included several assumptions. First, it was assumed that the employee's perception was influenced by assessing their own skill set and environment, as defined by self-efficacy under SCT (LaMorte, 2016). Second, it was assumed that the employee's perception would be influenced by their interpretation of the social transactions that occurred within their organization (i.e. rewards such as promotion vs. costs such as having to work longer hours), as supported by SET (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). It was also assumed that the interview guide would provide the detailed insight required to achieve meaningful data on the employee's perception of promotability within the nonprofit organization. Finally, it was assumed that the NVivo software was the ideal tool to analyze and organize the data clearly.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study was focused on the perception of promotability in nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations face unique operational challenges,

including an under-developed HR structure and contradictory HR performance indicators (Baluch, 2017). These challenges can cause gaps in communication regarding organizational expectations about promotability. The boundaries of this study were to understand the nonprofit employee's perception of what promotability means in their organization. Inclusion criteria included only those employees who currently worked in a nonprofit organization, from any specialty area, who were not currently in a managerial role. These criteria had the potential for transferability and applicability in other contexts, as employee perceptions within multiple specialties of the organization were explored.

A quantitative study was not used as the intent was not to examine correlational or causal relationships among variables, but to understand the phenomenon from the unique perspective of individual participants. As the intent of this research study was to understand the perception of promotability among employees, the grounded, ethnography, and case study theories were not considered. Grounded theory focuses on generating a general explanation or theory of a process that has specific steps or phases over time; the intent of this research was not to create a theory of any process or action (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethnography theory was not considered as it focuses on a culture-sharing group in order to describe and interpret learned patterns, values, beliefs, and behaviors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher often has to completely immerse themselves in the day-to-day lives of those they are studying to achieve this. Finally, case studies were not used for this study as they are focused on in-depth data collection over time within real-life systems, looking at multiple sources of information (Creswell &



Poth, 2018). This study relied solely on the semi-structured interview process to understand the participants perception of promotability.

### **Limitations**

The participants in this study represented a variety of roles, including clinical and administrative support. However, roles that fall into other categories such as engineering, environmental services, or food preparation were not represented here. This limited the scope of experiences that were examined as related to promotability within nonprofit organizations.

### **Significance**

The determination of promotion selection is an essential part of an organization's internal business (Bjorkman et al., 2013), even more so for nonprofit organizations as their leadership are pressured to continue to maintain effective and innovative processes including HRM (Baluch, 2017; McDermott et al., 2013). It is therefore crucial for a nonprofit organization to understand whether their promotion criteria and processes have been clearly and effectively communicated to employees or whether there is a false perception of the promotion process within the organization as this can result in negative employee attitudes and behaviors (Webster & Beehr, 2013). Additionally, comprehending an employee's perception of promotability and what contributed to that perception can help nonprofit organizations understand how an employee systematically processes HR communications and practices (Guzzo & Noonan, 1994). This comprehension can help to positively effect social change within the organization by facilitating a more proactive approach in creating efficient and effective organizational

communication procedures about topics such as key performance indicators, promotability, and organizational expectations in order to prevent false and/or negative employee perceptions (Guzzo & Noonan, 1994).

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the significance of understanding the perception of promotability among employees, highlighting the gap in knowledge within the nonprofit sector. Lack of effective communication, policy, and procedure by HR departments leading to negative employee perceptions and behaviors toward the organization is the problem this study addressed; little is known about employee perceptions specifically related to the promotability phenomenon within the organization. SET and SCT were used to explore how the experience of social transactions and self-efficacy awareness affect an employee's perceptions.

Chapter 2 will outline in the study's theoretical framework in greater detail. It will also discuss the difference in the HR structure between for-profit and nonprofit organizations, and review empirical studies conducted on promotability, employee perception of promotability, and the impact of perception of promotability on employee attitudes and behaviors.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The issue affecting many organizations today is that there is not a common understanding among leaders and employees regarding the perception of promotability. Organizational standards of promotability and promotion decisions are not being communicated effectively (Muczyk & Adler, 2014). This issue afflicts organizations across all sectors, for-profits (Bjorkman et al., 2013) and nonprofits (Baluch, 2017). Because of the benefits of promoting within the organization, including the ability to retain an employee's knowledge of the organization, their skill set, and saving on external recruitment costs (Chan, 1996), many HR departments have developed talent management systems to identify and develop leaders within the institution (Ruggiero, 2008; Webster & Beehr, 2013). However, promotability criteria and how promotion decisions are being made are frequently not communicated with employees (Muczyk & Adler, 2014; Webster & Beehr, 2013), which affects both for-profits (Bjorkman et al., 2013) and nonprofits (Baluch, 2017). Lack of communication and awareness can lead to an employee creating their own perception of promotability and the promotion process, which may not be in-line with the organization's actual criteria and standards (Webster & Beehr, 2013). This lack of communication can lead to employees exhibiting negative emotions, behaviors, and attitudes, such as feelings of envy toward those who may have received a promotion, perception of organizational unfairness, perception of a breach of the psychological contract, decreased organizational commitment, decreased work engagement, and even increased turnover (Anderson et al., 1981; Baluch, 2017; Burnett et al., 2009; Vough & Caza, 2017).

Communication plays a vital role in an organization by helping achieve business outcomes, gaining trust, and creating awareness among employees (Verghese, 2017). Thus, lack of communication and awareness can lead to an employee creating their own perception of promotability and the promotion process, which may not be in-line with the organization's actual criteria and standards (Webster & Beehr, 2013). This false perception of promotability can have a significant negative impact on an employee's attitude and behavior in the workplace (Burnett, Williamson, & Bartol, 2009; Webster & Beehr, 2013). Therefore, it is essential not only to ensure effective communication, but to understand employee perceptions to help avoid inaccurate re-interpretations of Human Resources practices that differ from actual practice (Baluch, 2017).

Though much of the current literature has focused on the effect promotions have on employee job performance (Webster & Beehr, 2012), organizational commitment (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Webster & Beehr, 2013), employee turnover (Carson et al., 1994), and employee satisfaction (Chan et al., 2016), studies have not focused on the employee's perception of promotability (Webster & Beehr, 2012). Further, there is a gap in the literature regarding employees' perception of promotability within nonprofit organizations (Baluch, 2017). It is important to understand the employee perception of HR practices, pointing out that the view of some practices (e.g., promotability) may vary greatly among employees from organizational intentions (Baluch, 2017). This study aimed to provide insight into the employee perception of the HR practice related to promotability, specifically examining organizations within the nonprofit sector.

Organizations must be agile and adaptable to compete in the current ever-changing market. To be successful, they must rely on their internal resources to make appropriate decisions, and one of the most influential decision makers in an organization is the human resource team (Misuko, 2012). Most organizations today have realized the value and competitive advantage that human resources can offer, a key one being promotion of internal talent (Misuko, 2012). By investing in their human resource department, organizations are strengthening the resources available to train and develop employees to have the skills needed to perform and advance (Misuko, 2012).

When there is a lack of investment in the human resource management process, ineffective management of leader development and promotability ensues, which leads to downstream issues within the organization, including inaccurate and even negative perceptions of promotability, behavior issues, lack of motivation, and increased turnover (Burnett et al., 2009; Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Webster & Beehr, 2013; Vough & Caza, 2017). An incorrect perception of promotability can significantly affect the employee's attitude and work behaviors within the organization including a decreased sense of commitment and engagement, perceived breach of the psychological contract and organizational injustice, and intentions to leave the organization (Anderson et al., 1981; Baluch, 2017; Vough & Caza, 2017).

When an employee's perception of promotability is skewed, it prevents them from understanding the valued behaviors that are rewarded within the organization (Baluch, 2017). One study indicated that employees who thought they were not identified as 'talent' (i.e., having potential to advance) in the organization were less likely to accept

increasing task and performance demands, less likely to exhibit attitudes of commitment or support of strategic initiatives, and had higher turnover intentions (Bjorkman et al., 2013). Research has indicated that an employee's satisfaction and organizational commitment is influenced not only by the organization's human resource practices (e.g., those related to promotion), but more importantly by their perception of such practices (Piening et al., 2014). This chapter will provide an introduction and literature search strategy followed by a discussion of the theoretical foundation. The chapter also reviews the literature related to key variables and concepts and closes with a summary and conclusions.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

A literature search was performed using the Walden University online library. Peer-reviewed articles were selected from the following library databases: Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. Four key concepts were researched for the literature review: promotability, employee perception of promotability, the impact of the employee perception of promotability, and HRM practices within for and nonprofit organizations.

When searching the key term of *promotability*, the following Boolean/phrases were searched: *promotability + employee perception + organization*. The term *promotability* was required in the title to identify any studies with a specific, primary focus on promotability, and *employee perception* and *organization* were required in the

body of the text. This search produced 13 articles. After reviewing those articles, only four were relevant to the key concepts in this study. No qualitative articles were found.

When searching for the key concept of the impact of the employee's perception of promotability, search terms included *employee perception + promotion*. When applying these specific criteria, 10 articles were found that addressed promotability and perception. Searching the existing articles and their references, only four articles were found that focused on the employee's own perception of promotability within the organization. No qualitative studies were found. No studies focused on or highlighted nonprofit organizations.

To understand the impact of an employee's perception of promotability on their attitudes and behaviors, the following Boolean/phrases were used: *effects + employee promotion*. This search yielded over 2,000 results. The search was narrowed to *outcomes of employee perceptions + promotability*, which yielded one result. The search was updated to *employee perceptions + promotability + attitudes and behavior*, which yielded two results. When searching *outcomes of employee perception + organization + promotion*, 10 articles were found. The articles were reviewed for additional references that applied to employee perception effects on the organization. Specific key words were searched within the articles (*employee perception, promotability, effects, impact, attitudes, behaviors*) to discover applicable literature. From this search, two articles were selected that focused on the impact of the employee's perception of promotability on their attitude and behavior within the organization. There were no qualitative literature results. There were no studies that focused on or highlighted nonprofit organizations.

To search the final key concept comparing HRM processes within for-profit and nonprofit organizations, the following Boolean/phrases were used: *for profit AND nonprofit + difference between + human resource management OR HRM*. This search produced 73 articles. The search was narrowed further requiring *for profit AND nonprofit* and *human resource management OR HRM* to be in the title of the article. This produced one result. The resulting article's references were reviewed for additional literature pertaining to the structure comparison of for-profit and nonprofit organizations. One additional article was found. There were no qualitative results.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

#### **Social Exchange Theory**

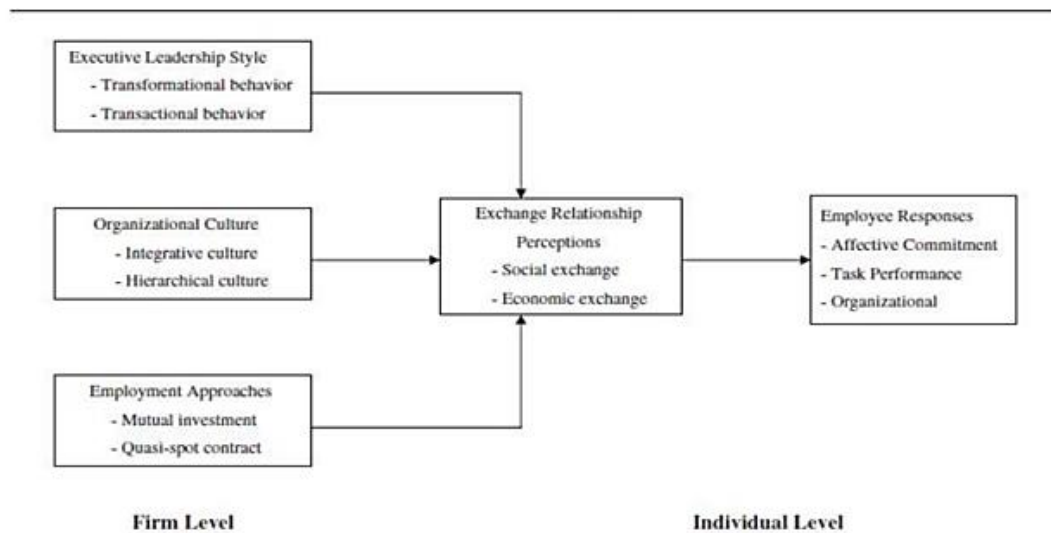
Social exchange theory (SET) is one of the most influential theories used to understand workplace behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). It was developed in the early 1960s as a way to assess the value of social relationships using economic principles to calculate the costs of energy output compared to the subsequent gains (Miller, 2013). According to the theory, many individuals make these calculations when determining which social interactions and relationships will best meet their needs (Miller, 2013). Simply put, SET involves a series of interactions that generate obligations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET maintains that behavior in social situations is a product of the exchange process between maximizing personal benefits and minimizing personal disadvantages (Miller, 2017). P. M. Blau (1964) indicated that there are two different kinds of exchange relationships: the social exchange, which is focused on socioeconomic resources, and the economic exchange, which is focused on short-term exchanges of a



material or economic make-up. The SET further posits that a mutual respect can be gained between an individual's relationships with others when that relationship provides more rewards than costs (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). Rewards are defined and valued differently for everyone, as some may value monetary rewards while others may value acknowledgement. Should at some point the costs exceed the rewards, the relationship will lose its appeal (Miller, 2017). There is an exchange of this kind within organizations between the organization and their exchange mechanisms, the relationship of the exchange with the employee, and the employee perception of the exchange, as depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Cross-Level Model of Organizational Exchange Mechanisms, Exchange Relationship Perceptions, and Employee Responses*



*Note.* Adapted from “Blau’s Social Exchange Theory,” by S. Bulkan, 2013, (<https://www.slideshare.net/SinemBulkan/blaus-social-exchange-theory>).

SET can be applied to topics such as social power, organizational justice, networking, psychological contracts between employers and employees, and leadership (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). It explains the employee–organization relationship as the exchange between an employee’s contributions and organizational incentives (Bordia et al., 2017). This is important to note, as relationships deemed consistently low-cost-high-reward are frequently repeated and patterns are created; thus, the individual who offers the greatest rewards has the most influence or power in the relationship (Miller, 2017). These relationship patterns are important to understand in the organizational setting between leaders and employees, as a high-cost-low-reward relationship with a leader may result in a breach of employee obligations within the organization (Bordia et al., 2017).

SET can help explain how an employee’s perception of promotability may lead to organizational perceptions and attitudes that may subsequently affect their workplace behavior (Webster & Beehr, 2013), organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Jepsen & Rodwell, 2010). In a leader–employee relationship, where the leader exhibits fair treatment and respect, the employee will reciprocate with positive attitudes such as increased organizational commitment (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Webster & Beehr, 2013). One example of social exchange relationships in an organizational setting would be leaders who consistently communicate expectations with their employees regarding tasks, goals, and promotable qualities (Webster & Beehr, 2013). Employees consider the output of organizationally valued behaviors as a sufficient exchange for a reward (e.g., a promotion); this type of transparency can promote behaviors that may garner increased

employee performance efforts as well as positive employee perceptions of promotability (Webster & Beehr, 2013).

It is also important to consider that the relationship that an employee has with their supervisor affects their perceptions, which impact their attitudes, behaviors, satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Jepsen & Rodwell, 2010; Webster & Beehr, 2013; Xu et al., 2016). This supervisor–employee relationship is known as the leader-member exchange (LMX; Jawahar & Ferris, 2011), a concept that suggests leaders form relationships with their subordinates in two categories: in-group and out-group (Miller, 2013). The employees in the in-group are given greater responsibilities, rewards, recognition, and more autonomy; those in the out-group have less access or connection with their leader, receive less attention, rewards, and are held more strictly to formal rules and regulations (Miller, 2013).

Gurbuz and Ayhan (2017) applied SET to understand how LMX affected promotability ratings. Their research examined whether a high quality LMX, task performance, or job tenure of the employee would positively affect the employee's promotability rating (Gurbuz & Ayhan, 2017). Using a time-lagged approach, surveys were collected from 195 employees and 32 leaders examining the promotability rating judgments, quality of the LMX, and employee task performance (Gurbuz & Ahyan, 2017). Results of the study indicated that LMX has a significant effect on both task performance and an employee's promotability rating (Gurbuz & Ahyan, 2017). Gurbuz and Ahyan (2017) also found that job tenure had an influence on the LMX, and the interaction of both job tenure and LMX influenced promotability ratings. This study is

significant as it identifies multiple factors that may impact promotability assessments that employees may not be aware of and can, in turn, affect their perception.

As indicated, there are multiple factors that contribute to promotability assessments. It is because of this that organizations struggle with (a) their dissemination, (b) how to effectively communicate to their employees whether they meet them, or (c) their potential for promotability (Bjorkman et al., 2013). Bjorkman et al. (2013) hypothesized that notifying employees they have been identified as talented is likely to be viewed by the employee as an indication of the organization's investment and commitment to them and as such will enhance their perception of organizational support, resulting in their increased willingness to accept additional performance demands. Data were collected via an online survey with a total sample of 930 managers and professionals (Bjorkman et al., 2013). Results of the study indicated that employees who perceived they were identified as talented were indeed more likely to accept increasing performance demands and to actively support organizational strategic priorities (Bjorkman et al., 2013). These findings indicate the importance of the employee perception of promotability and how it can affect performance and dedication to the organization.

When an organization invests in its employees, the employee is more likely to reciprocate the investment in a positive way within their role and work scope. In other words, the employee feels a certain obligation to repay any reward or benefit they have received with a positive behavior (e.g., accepting a new work assignment/more difficult task; Bjorkman et al., 2013; Muczyk & Adler, 2014). For instance, employees who

perceive they were identified as talented are more likely to accept increasing performance demands and to actively support organizational strategic priorities (Bjorkman et al., 2013). An employee's perception of how a reward (e.g., a promotion) is given can also have a significant effect on their performance in the organization (Webster & Beehr, 2013). Webster and Beehr (2013) used SET in a quantitative study to understand the perception of the criteria used to make promotion decisions. Surveys were conducted with over 12,000 employees and 305 supervisors; results showed that those employees, those who had previously received a promotion had a positive perception of performance-based promotion decisions, promotional justice, and organizational commitment (Webster & Beehr, 2013). Employees who indicated that they had not received a promotion were more likely to perceive that the reason was due to factors unrelated to performance, such as gender or favoritism (Webster & Beehr, 2013). Webster and Beehr's (2013) findings are relevant to the proposed study as they indicate the difference in perceptions of employees who have received promotions in the past compared to those who did not.

SET provides a basis for understanding the social exchanges employees have in the organization, and how these exchanges affect employee perception. In instances where social rewards are high (e.g., promotion), employees will perceive the required social exchanges required to obtain those rewards as worth the cost. However, if an employee perceives social rewards to be low or unobtainable (e.g., low likelihood of promotability), the employee will deduce that social exchanges are not worth the cost. As

such, this theory provided the foundation for understanding the employee's perception of promotability in the organization.

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

SCT began as social learning theory by Albert Bandura in the 1960s and evolved to SCT in 1986. SCT postulates that learning occurs in a social context through dynamic and reciprocal interactions between individuals, their environment, and observed behaviors (LaMorte, 2016). SCT is based on social influence and its impact on external and internal social reinforcement (LaMorte, 2016). Social reinforcements are rewards, or supporters, of behavior that can be external (e.g., praise, attention, acceptance) or internal (e.g., approval of one's own behavior; Cherry, 2018). Though SCT is comprised of several constructs, guiding this study was the construct self-efficacy, added when social learning theory evolved into SCT, which refers to the individual's confidence in their ability to perform a task or behavior based on their perceptions of their own capabilities and environmental barriers or facilitators (LaMorte, 2016). This construct is important when trying to comprehend the employee perception of promotability since employees who believe they understand promotability and have the skill set to achieve it are more likely to exhibit positive behaviors in the organization (e.g., increased engagement, decreased turnover intention). As noted, SCT asserts there are certain social factors that can influence an employee's external and internal social reinforcement (LaMorte, 2016). Examples of such social factors in the workplace include performance outcomes, interactions with others, coaching or training, even the individual's current emotional

status . These factors are significant as they collectively impact an employee's perception of promotability (Shuck et al., 2018).

An example of how SCT can be used to explore employee perception can be found in a study done by Domino et al., Wingreen, and Blanton (2015), who used SCT as the theoretical model to explore employees' perception of whether they fit in with the ethical culture of their organization. SCT proposes that an employee's beliefs and motives are formed from their value judgments (Domino et al., 2015). The researchers wanted to understand the relationship between the employee's perception of their fit with the organization's ethical culture and their attitudes toward organizational constructs such as job satisfaction. Perception of ethical fit falls under the 'vicarious experiences' category of self-efficacy judgments as it is an organizational culture modeled by multiple employees. The study looked at two sociocognitive constructs within SCT: locus of control (LC), and self-efficacy. LC is an individual's internal or external beliefs about control of rewards. In other words, an individual with an internal LC believes they have control over their life through their choices and actions; an individual with an external LC believes their rewards or outcomes are outside their control, determined instead by outside forces. The researchers hypothesized that employees with higher levels of internal locus and self-efficacy would have higher levels of ethical climate fit and job satisfaction (Domino et al., 2015). Data were gathered from 203 employees; results indicated that employees with high levels of internal LC and self-efficacy had a higher perception of ethical climate fit in the organization and greater job satisfaction (Domino et al., 2015).

Domino et al.'s (2015) study was significant because it showed that employees who have higher levels of LC and self-efficacy perceived themselves as fitting in with the organization, had higher levels of organizational commitment and higher levels job satisfaction. Thus, this research is important to the proposed study because it demonstrated how LC and SE, both SCT constructs, impacted employees' perception of their fit, commitment, and satisfaction within the organization. This is significant because it shows that LC and self-efficacy have the potential to impact an employee's perception of promotability. Perception is achieved through self-organization, self-reflection, and self-regulation of things that are seen and heard (i.e., experiences; Bandura, 2011). It is therefore important to understand how both events and communication can influence an individual's perception and actions. SCT provides the framework to understand this influence.

Another study that focused on the effects of the internal and external LC was completed by G. J. Blau (1987). According to G. J. Blau, attitudes, perceptions, and work behaviors are significantly affected by whether an individual has an internal or external LC. G. J. Blau examined how the LC moderated the relationship between an employee's turnover intentions and two facets of satisfaction, promotion, and pay. He hypothesized that locus of control would moderate how satisfaction affects employee withdrawal and turnover. A longitudinal study was completed. A total of 221 staff nurses completed the first set of questionnaires, and 228 nurses completed the second set of questionnaires. The measure of locus of control was done using Levenson's (1973) 8-item Chance Scale, which was adapted from Rotter's (1966) Internal-External Scale. While results of the



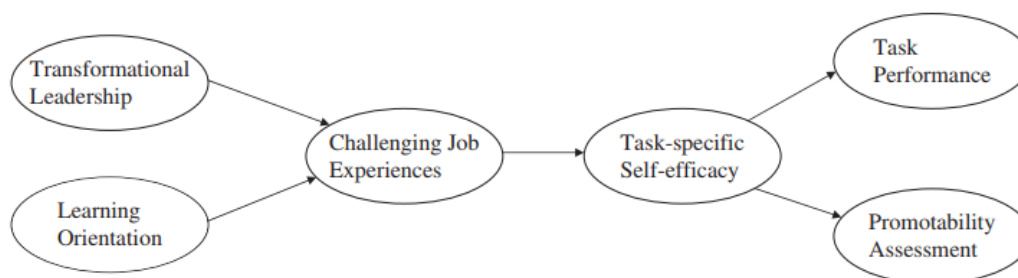
study showed no direct link between LC and thoughts of withdrawal, employees with an internal LC tended to be more satisfied than those with an external LC. This finding is significant to the proposed study as it provides an alternative basis for differing perceptions of promotability outside of employee experience.

Other researchers have used the SCT to focus on self-efficacy and employee behaviors. Consiglio et al. (2015) used the foundation of SCT to examine how self-efficacy predicted an employee's work engagement as a result of how they perceived their supervisor, colleagues, and senior leaders. Work engagement refers to employees who work hard in their role, keeping a positive state of mind through challenges in the workplace. The authors hypothesized that SE can positively increase an employee's perception of social context (PoSC), namely their perception of their supervisor, coworkers, and organizational senior leaders. Data were collected in two waves over a three-year longitudinal study. A 7-item questionnaire was used to measure self-efficacy. Sample items included "In my work I am confident I can solve all the conflicts that may occur with my colleagues" (Consiglio et al., 2015, p. 130). The first and second waves produced 1,172 and 857 responses, respectively. Results of the study indicated that self-efficacy promotes and motivates employees to become more engaged with their work. This indicates the impact self-efficacy can have on an employee's behavior and even their perception of the organization. When an employee perceives their self-efficacy to be high, it can heighten their work commitment, effort, and engagement. This, in turn, affects their behavior and their perception of organizational compatibility, engagement, satisfaction, and promotability.

Aryee and Chu (2012) looked at how SCT impacted employees' motivation to develop themselves in order to grow within their organization. The authors used SCT as the foundation to understand the relationship between challenging job experiences and task-specific self-efficacy and how that can affect promotability as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Relationship of Influence on Challenging Job Experiences and Promotability*



*Note.* Adapted from “Antecedents and Outcomes of Challenging Job Experiences: A Social Cognitive Perspective,” by S. Aryee & S. W. L. Chu, 2012, *Human Performance*, 25(3), p. 217. Copyright 2012 by the Taylor & Francis Group.

Previous studies on challenging job experiences looked at developmental programs designed for leaders (Davies & Easterby-Smith, 1984; DeRue & Wellman, 2009; McCauley et al., 1994). It is important, however, to also consider the nonmanagerial employee's experience with challenging jobs and how they can impact career success (e.g., promotability). According to Aryee and Chu, 2012, work experience is considered an important variable in the review of employee selection, salary, and

promotion. Challenging job (work) experiences provide an opportunity for learning which can lead to career development (promotability).

Aryee and Chu hypothesized that challenging job experiences influenced task-specific self-efficacy, which positively related to promotability. Data were collected in the form of questionnaires from 248 respondents. A 7-item scale developed by De Pater et al. (2009), based on the Job Challenge Profile (JCP) by McCauley, Ruderman et al. (1994), was used with the nonmanagerial employee participants to determine challenging job experiences. Sample items included “To what extent does your job provide you an opportunity for trying something new or initiating strategic changes in your work unit?” The assessments of promotability were done with a 4-item scale by Wayne et al. (1997) and were completed by the supervisors of the nonmanagerial employee participants. Sample items included “I believe that this employee has what it takes to be promoted to a higher-level position.” The study’s findings suggested that challenging job experiences influenced task-specific self-efficacy, which is a precursor to task performance and promotability. Aryee and Chu’s hypothesis that challenging job experiences positively related to promotability was supported. These findings are important to this study as it shows how challenging job experiences can influence an employee’s perception of their own capabilities (self-efficacy) which does affect their promotability.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

#### **Promotability**

The concept of promotability refers to the potential for an employee’s advancement in their respective organization (Gurbuz et al., 2016). The retention of

highly skilled, high-performing employees is important for organizations who want to maintain their intellectual property, knowledge, skills, and competitive advantage (Ferreira et al., 2013). The process of retaining highly skilled employees for placement in upper management positions is done through the promotability evaluation process. Promotability evaluations are a reflection of the supervisor's impression of what their employees expected performance would be at a higher organizational level (De Pater et al., 2009). In 2004, a poll done by Development Dimensions International (DDI) found that internal candidates filled 53% of an organization's management roles compared to only 44% in 1999 (Little, 2007). This statistic indicates the importance organizations place on internal promotability.

There are different ways to determine an employee's promotability in the organization. Jawahar and Ferris (2011) looked at the managers consideration of their employees' task and contextual performance as indicators of promotability. Task performance is the successful completion of what is required as outlined in the job description. Contextual performance, on the other hand, is defined as behaviors that form the social context of all jobs. These behaviors may include things such as volunteering, demonstrating effort in one's role, helping and collaborating with others, following organizational policies and procedures, and supporting strategic objectives. All of these behaviors help to facilitate effectiveness in the organization.

In a longitudinal study, Jawahar and Ferris (2011) hypothesized that task and contextual performance would be positively related to judgments of promotability. Data were collected at a workshop from 26 managers of a retail chain store. The managers

were asked to rate their employees on their task and contextual performance; the resulting data set included ratings for 210 employees. The second workshop was held six and a half months later, and the same managers (excluding four managers who were unable to attend the second workshop) were asked to rate their employees again on task and contextual performance. These data included ratings for 184 employees. Task performance was measured using Williams and Anderson's (1991) seven-item scale, e.g., "fulfills responsibilities specified in the job description" (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011, p. 258). Contextual performance was measured with Moorman and Blakely's (1995) scale, which assessed four types of behaviors:

- Interpersonal helping (e.g., goes out of their way to help coworkers with work-related problems)
- Individual initiative (e.g., frequently communicates to coworkers' suggestions on how the group could improve)
- Personal industry (e.g., always meets or beats deadlines for completing work)
- Loyal boosterism (e.g., actively promotes the organization's products and service offerings to potential users) (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011)

Finally, promotability was rated using Kiker and Motowidlo's (1999) measure which included four assessments: (a) He/she has a very high potential to move up in the organization, (b) He/she is promotable, (c) He/she is ready for a promotion now, and (d) I strongly recommend him/her for a promotion (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). These assessments were rated on a 9-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree).

Results of the study indicated that task and contextual performance did influence promotability ratings (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). The study's findings demonstrated that not only did task and contextual performance explain any variances in a supervisor's rating of promotability, but that they interact, meaning that employees with high task and contextual performance are determined to be more suitable for promotability than employees with a high rating in only one or the other. This study indicates that employees who have higher levels of task performance as well as higher levels of contextual performance have higher ratings of promotability. This is important when seeking to understand what contributes to promotability within an organization and what is valued by supervisors in their ratings of promotability.

In addition to task and contextual performance, supervisors also look at employees challenging job experiences as an antecedent of promotability. De Pater et al. (2009) looked at how challenging job experiences (i.e., work activities that can no longer be completed with existing processes and so new ways of completing them must be determined) affected supervisor ratings of promotability. The authors hypothesized that the amount of time employees spent on challenging tasks would lead to higher promotability ratings by their supervisor than job performance or tenure in the organization. To determine this, data were gathered from 49 government employees. The employees were asked to complete Saville and Holdsworth's (1993) Work Profiling System questionnaire, indicating out of the 31 categories listed (e.g., communicating, working with people, managing business) which they considered to be most important for their current job and how much time they spent on those activities. The work profiling

system categories were rated (independently from the study) by two academically trained experts to determine which of the 31 categories could be considered ‘challenging’. While the analysis determined that of the 31 total categories only 9 could be considered as challenging, the specific items that were considered as challenging tasks were not explicitly identified in the article.

Results of the study indicated that the amount of time employees spent on the categories determined to be challenging were positively related to the supervisor’s evaluation of promotability over and above the employee’s current job performance or their tenure in the organization (De Pater et al., 2009). The researchers performed regression testing to determine if challenging job tasks were actually assigned to employees who were already determined to be promotable. Results of that analysis showed that there was no support of the alternative explanation that challenging job duties were assigned based on higher potential for promotability; in other words, while supervisors did not assign challenging tasks to employees, they already felt were promotable, they did have higher promotability ratings for employees who were already performing challenging tasks outside of their normal job duties. This study is relevant as it shows the subjective factors of supervisors’ promotability evaluations above and beyond the duties described in the organization’s job descriptions.

As noted, performance is usually the most commonly perceived antecedent to promotability (Beehr et al., 2004; Bjorkman et al., 2013; Gurbuz & Ayhan, 2017; Gurbuz et al., 2016; Jawahar & Ferris, 2011; Webster & Beehr, 2013). However, in 2016, Yin-Mei Huang conducted a study to understand how networking impacted an employee’s

promotability in the organization. Career-based (i.e., career focused) networking is a means of achieving and improving individual competence within one's role in the organization, which can impress supervisors as a desirable, qualifying behavior towards a promotion. Huang (2016) hypothesized that career-based networking behavior would be positively related to promotability evaluations.

Data were collected from 160 employees (103 of whom were supervisors) across 20 branches of a large Taiwan bank. Networking behavior was measured using Forret and Dougherty's (2001) 28-item networking behavior scale (Huang, 2016). The scale measured five aspects of career-based networking behavior: maintaining contacts, socialization, engaging in professional activities, increasing internal visibility, and participating in community activities. Employee promotability was measured using Lin and Huang's (2005) three-item scale for developmental potential. Supervisors were asked to rate questions such as "If possible, I will promote the employee in the future" (Huang, 2016, p. 914).

Results of the study indicated that of the five career-based networking behaviors, only two (maintaining contacts and participating in professional activities) were positively related to promotability. Initial results of Huang's analysis also found that socialization was negatively related to promotability, however when Huang (2016) performed a second analysis which examined socialization, compensation, and personal career success, results indicated a positive relationship to promotability. As a result, Huang surmised that an employee's engagement in socialization can lead to different observations and evaluations depending on the individual supervisor. This study is



noteworthy as it identifies additional factors that can impact an employee's promotability in the organization.

Another factor outside of performance that can affect an employee's promotability is the perceived sincerity of the employee by the manager. Valle, Kacmar, and Andrews (2015) looked at whether perceived insincerity among employees influenced their managers rating of promotability. The researchers hypothesized that perceived employee insincerity would weaken the supervisor's promotability rating of that employee. Data were collected from 59 managers in a state agency who were asked to provide ratings on the sincerity and promotability of their full-time employees; 203 supervisor ratings were collected. In order to determine employee insincerity, the researchers created a six-item scale which had the supervisor assess things such as whether the subordinate manipulates information in order to make himself/herself look good. The supervisors were asked to rate these statements on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). To determine the employees promotability rating, Valle et al., (2015) used seven items from Thacker and Wayne (1995), asking questions such as whether the manager believes the employee has high potential. Results of the study indicated that when the employee was perceived by the supervisor to be highly insincere, promotability ratings were lower than when the employee was perceived to be highly sincere (Valle et al., 2015). This study provides an additional, subjective factor that managers take into account when assessing an employee's promotability in the organization.

## **Employee Perception of Promotability**

Employees develop their career strategies, personal and professional development, and behaviors based on what they perceive to be the expectations for promotability (Beehr et al., 2004). Many times, however, there are different perceptions among employees in terms of what is required to actually ‘get ahead’ in the organization (Beehr & Taber, 1993). It is therefore important for organizations to implement clear, strategic HRM initiatives, specifically those related to the internal promotion process, as they can greatly influence an organization’s growth, profitability, and turnover (Akinlade & Shalack, 2016).

The perception that performing well will result in a promotion gained its importance during the Industrial Revolution, which introduced the concept that work provided an individual the opportunity to progress through the achievement of increasing responsibility (Beehr & Taber, 1993). However, this new outlook created confusion among employees who were uncertain of what constituted promotable behavior within their organization, resulting in tension between the employee and their leaders (Beehr & Taber, 1993).

To better understand what the employee perceived as promotable behavior, Beehr and Taber (1993) conducted a study that focused on the idea that employees perceive, and are affected by, four different promotional channels: exceptional performance, reliable performance, personal characteristics, and luck and/or favoritism. Data were collected from 573 employees within four different subgroups of a medical college: administrative, technical, maintenance, and clerical. Beehr and Taber hypothesized that

each subgroup would have a different perception of what were considered promotable factors in the organization. The participants were given the Intra-Organizational Mobility Channels Questionnaire to indicate their perception of what important factors were considered during promotion decisions (e.g., doing a good job, having good ideas, taking initiative). The results of the study indicated that the administrative group rated exceptional performance as significantly more important in promotion decisions than the other three subgroups, while the maintenance group rated reliable performance as the most important factor in promotion decisions. The maintenance group also perceived that race and gender affected promotion decisions more than the other three subgroups. The study further indicated the employees who perceived promotions were based on exceptional or reliable performance had higher promotion satisfaction and job satisfaction and lower intentions of leaving the organization than perceiving promotions were based on personal characteristics and luck and/or favoritism.

One limitation of Beehr and Taber's (1993) study was in the Intra-Organizational Mobility Channels Questionnaire that was used. The questionnaire asked only general questions regarding the importance of each of the four factors in obtaining a promotion within the organization, which may have prompted general responses from the participants on their perception of how to generally obtain a promotion in the organization as opposed to what they perceived to be important in their own promotability. This study is significant as it indicates the potential for differences in perception of promotability among employees in different subgroups within the

organization and opens the door for future research to look at additional factors of promotability (e.g., education, skill set, tenure, etc.).

In 2004, Beehr et al. conducted a study to understand the employee perception of why a promotion was given and their reaction to the promotion. Promotions are based, in part, on performance appraisals; however, this is not the only consideration as most promotions have unique factors. First, promotions are limited in some organizations as a result of the hierarchical structure. In other words, due to the limited number of open management positions available in some organizations (e.g., smaller staff size), there are usually not many promotions that can be issued at the same time, resulting in a limited number of employees who are able to receive a promotion. Second, promotions are final decisions (i.e., unlike salary, they cannot be negotiated). And third, when one co-worker receives a promotion, they may end up supervising someone who was previously a peer, which has the potential to produce negative behaviors from the employee who was passed over for the same promotion.

The researchers looked at the employees' perceptions of their own promotability in the organization as well as the organization's general promotability channels. Beehr et al. (2004) hypothesized that when an employee perceives promotions are based on performance (e.g., work output), the employee would also have a positive perception of promotional justice (i.e., fairness), and when an employee perceives that promotions are based on non-performance (e.g., gender or tenure), the employee would have a negative perception of promotional justice (i.e., felt the promotion was unfair). The sample consisted of 130 full-time employees who were also enrolled in college courses. Beehr et

al. used the Intra-Organizational Mobility Channels Questionnaire to determine the participants perception of general promotability channels within their organization and the participants perception of their own, individual promotability channels within their organization. Participants were asked to rate how important factors such as ‘doing a good job’, ‘experience and ability’, ‘having the right skills’, and ‘leadership ability’ were to receive a promotion in their organization (i.e., general promotability). They were then asked to rate how important the same factors were for them to receive a promotion in their organization (i.e., individual promotability).

Findings of the study indicated that performance-based promotions were positively related to promotional justice, and nonperformance-based promotions were negatively related to promotional justice (Beehr et al., 2004). In other words, employees who felt that promotions were based on performance (e.g., work output) were fair, and promotions that were based on nonperformance (e.g., tenure) were unfair. One limitation of the study that paves the way for new research and supports the need for the proposed study is that the researchers did not indicate the participants’ role in the organization, i.e., the sample was not broken down into frontline staff employee, team lead, or manager. This is relevant based on the assumption that depending on the role the employee holds, and whether they received a promotion in the past, their perception of promotability would differ. Future research can expand on this study by defining the job or title the employee has in the organization in order to determine if perceptions differ based on the employee’s role in the organization.

The promotion process within the organization is a sensitive one and affects employees differently. Internal promotions can either help an organization achieve its goals or contribute to its failures (Misuko, 2012). As previously noted, much of the current literature about promotability focuses on the effects certain factors have on promotion (e.g., race, gender) and what organizations consider when making promotion decisions. When an employee perceives promotion criteria to be unfair, they can become unmotivated, subsequently affecting the achievement of the organization's goals. Misuko's study was conducted to examine the employee perceptions of positive promotability factors (performance-based) and negative promotability factors (nonperformance-based). Participants consisted of 120 students working part time at a University in Kenya. Students rated their perception of promotion decisions made in their respective organizations on a 5-point scale (Very Professional to Very Unprofessional). The students were also asked to rate their perception of the extent performance, qualifications, interviews, skills and training, tribe, gender, physical make-up, and age were considered when making promotion decisions. Results indicated that employees perceive both positive (performance-based) and negative (nonperformance-based) factors are considered in promotion decisions. This research is pertinent to the proposed study as it indicates different employee perceptions of promotability within an organization and the need for the HR to be aware of these differences.

Webster and Beehr conducted a study in 2013 to determine the employee and leader perception of specific promotion criteria within performance-based and nonperformance-based categories. The study was broken down into two parts: (1) to

examine how the experience of being promoted (or not promoted) affected perceptions of promotion criteria (the details of this study will be reviewed in the ‘Impact of Perception’ section of this literature review) and (2) to explore how an employee’s ego-defensiveness can influence their perception of promotability and whether it explains the relationship between promotion decisions and internal promotability channels. Ego-defensiveness, as indicated earlier in this chapter, is any attitude that can enhance and/or maintain the self-esteem of an individual (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.). Promotions in an organization can be a signal or communication to the rest of the organization about an employee’s performance, value, and future potential; these signals can test an employee’s self-esteem which activates their ego-defensiveness. As such, Webster and Beehr hypothesized that employees with high ego-defensiveness who had received a promotion would perceive internal promotability channels to be performance-based, and employees with high ego-defensiveness who had not received a promotion would perceive internal promotability channels to be non-performance based. To test these hypotheses, Webster and Beehr surveyed 145 students who graduated with a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree and worked full-time. To determine the participants perception of internal promotability channels, the Intra-Organizational Mobility Channels Questionnaire was used. To determine the employee’s ego-defensiveness, the researchers used Tuckey, Brewer, and Williamson’s (2002) 8-item measure, which asked participants to rate on a 6-point scale from 1 (extremely true) to 6 (extremely untrue), how they receive feedback (Webster & Beehr, 2013).

The study results indicated that there was not a significant relationship between promotions and performance-based internal promotability channels (Webster & Beehr, 2013). While ego-defensiveness was not found to control the relationship between promotions and perceptions of performance-based promotability, it did affect the relationship between promotions and nonperformance-based internal promotability. In other words, employees who have not been promoted within an organization tend to use their ego-defensiveness to protect their self-esteem, perceiving that those promotions were given based on nonperformance criteria.

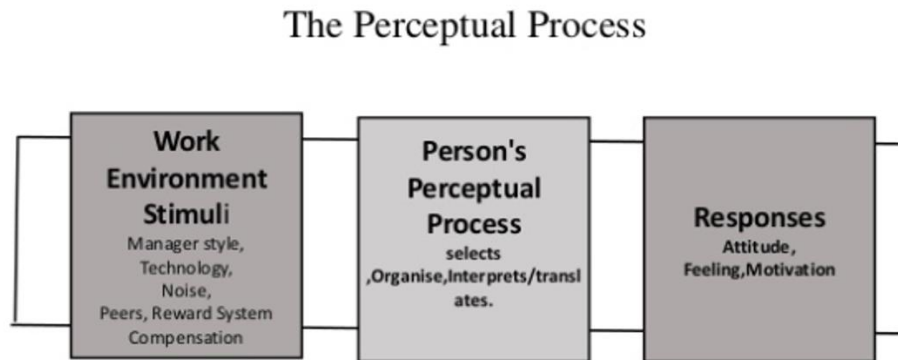
### **Impact of the Perception of Promotability on an Employee's Attitudes and Behaviors**

The concept of perception is the understanding and interpretation of information that is seen and heard in our everyday life (Keenan, 2015). According to Keenan, the goal of perception is to take information and make sense of it. Employees make sense of their perception of promotability with information collected through what they see in the organization's documentation, what they hear their leaders saying, and what they have experienced with promotions in their past. The resulting perception can positively or negatively affect the employee's attitudes (e.g., satisfaction, dissatisfaction) and behaviors as shown in Figure 3 (e.g., increased engagement, withdrawal) (Albin et al., 2018). Dissatisfaction with promotional processes is often the primary cause of employee turnover in an organization, and employees who have not been promoted are less attached to the organization, have a less positive perception of the organization, and withdraw more.



**Figure 3**

*Process of Employee Perception Within an Organization*



*Note.* Adapted from “Employee Perception,” by Albin, Anjana, Roshna, & Samrutha, 2018, (<https://www.slideshare.net/SamruthaKS/ob-employee-perception>).

Research has progressed over time to focus not just on the employee’s perception of promotability and organizational factors, but to how being identified as talent (or not) impacts their attitudes and behavior. Bjorkman et al. (2013) looked at employees within a multinational organization to see how the perceptions of whether or not they have been identified as talent impacted attitudinal outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment, support of strategic priorities). Bjorkman et al. hypothesized that employees who perceived that they were identified as talent were more likely to accept additional tasks, support organizational strategies, identify with their department, build their skill set, and have lower turnover intentions than those who were unsure if they were identified as talent.

Data were collected from 11 different multinational enterprise corporations whose goal was to achieve a corporate-wide talent management system. The study sample consisted of 769 managers (with direct reports) and professionals (with no direct reports). The survey asked participants whether they had been formally identified as talent in the organization, and then rate the importance of acceptance of increasing performance demands, commitment to building competencies, support of strategic priorities, identification with their unit, identification with their multinational enterprise, and turnover intentions (Bjorkman et al., 2013). Results of the study indicated that employees who perceived they had been identified as talent were more likely to accept increasing performance demands, build their skill set, actively support strategic initiatives, identify with their unit and multinational enterprise, and have fewer turnover intentions. The authors suggested that leaders should communicate to employees whether they have been identified as talent, as transparent communication has motivational effects.

Another study that examined the outcome of the employee perception of promotability was conducted by Webster and Beehr in 2013, who sought to understand the effects of promotion decisions on employees. They found that employees' perceptions translate into attitudinal and behavioral responses and that even if organizations base their promotions on performance, some employees may still not perceive it that way. Of the three hypotheses that were developed in Webster and Beehr's research, two are significant to this study. The first hypothesis proposed that employees who had received a past promotion were more likely to perceive performance (e.g., work output/results) as the path to promotability in the organization, and employees who had not received a

promotion more likely to perceive that nonperformance (e.g., gender or tenure) as the way to promotability in the organization. The second hypothesis proposed that performance-based promotability channels would be positively related to promotional justice and nonperformance-based promotability channels would be negatively related to promotional justice. To determine the perceptions of promotability criteria, the Intra-Organizational Mobility Channels Questionnaire was used focusing on two dimensions of performance-based perceptions (exceptional and reliable) and two dimensions of nonperformance-based perceptions (race/sex and luck/favoritism). Surveys were sent out to alumni students of a large midwestern university. The total sample consisted of the 305 employees.

The results of the study found that employees who had received a promotion in the past were more likely to perceive that promotability criteria was performance-based, while employees who had never received a promotion were more likely to perceive the promotability criteria as nonperformance-based. The findings also suggested that perceptions of performance-based internal promotability channels were positively related to promotional justice, whereas perceptions of nonperformance-based promotability channels were negatively related to promotional justice. Webster and Beehr's research is relevant to the proposed study as it supports the need and importance for organizations, specifically HR departments, to understand how employees perceive promotability and promotion practices within the organization. This study leaves room for additional research to examine whether these employee perceptions extend beyond just the HR practices related to promotion, but to other HR practices related to promotability (e.g.,

training and development) and the potential outcomes of such perceptions (e.g., turnover).

### **Comparing HRM Structure in For-Profit and Nonprofit Organizations**

Over the last few decades, there has been much debate on how the evolution and growth of organizations has affected internal promotion opportunities and processes (Benner & Mane, 2011). In the 1980s and 1990s, governments in the UK were encouraging nonprofit organizations to emulate the strategic behavior of for-profit organizations, suggesting a more commercialized approach within the nonprofit business plan (Boyne et al., 1999).

Nonprofit organizations need to carefully consider how to manage their processes in order to maintain a competitive advantage with their for-profit counterparts (Akinlade & Shalack, 2016). One important area of consideration for both nonprofit and for-profit organizations is HRM. Boyne, Jenkins, and Poole (1999) discuss the difference between the for-profit and nonprofit HRM structure of organizations, citing the primary characteristics of nonprofit (i.e., public) and for-profit (i.e., private) HRM practices. For the public sector, Boyne et al. (1999) define four traditional HRM practices:

- Paternalistic style of management which was intended to protect and promote the wellbeing of the workforce (e.g., staff efficiency, effective use of manpower, health, safety, and welfare of staff)
- Standardized employee practices which implied that workers who performed the same tasks had the same terms and conditions within and across

organizations providing the same services, providing full-time employment, job security, pay structures, and conditions of service

- Collectivized industrial relations, which required extensive staff participation and consultation and a strong role for trades unions in wage negotiations, which reflected higher union occurrences in the public sector
- Aspiring to be a model employer and setting the standard for private organizations in areas such as staff training and equality of opportunity in the workplace

Due to financial constraints from political and economic climate changes, the public sector was forced to update its HRM practices (Boyne et al., 1999). According to Boyne et al., paternalistic management became rational management, which was not driven by fairness but by the demands of those leading the organization regarding effective job performance, work output, customer service, and value for the cost of services provided. Because of the increased emphasis on the customer's needs, the assignment of power shifted to the front-line manager instead of with personnel specialists whose focus was on equal opportunity and staff training.

Another change observed by the public sector was the shift from focusing on uniform and standardized employment practices to focusing on flexibility and differentiation (Boyne et al., 1999). Public sector organizations were no longer able to offer their employees the security of a 'job for life' or promotions based on seniority. Many employees were instead offered either part-time or contracted work, and their promotions were based on their managers perceptions of their performance. Perhaps the

biggest change was the transition from collectivism, to individualism, which meant that employment equity was no longer based on ‘the going rate’, but on labor market trends and individualized performance criteria.

To compare the HRM practices between the public and private sectors, Boyne et al. (1999) conducted a survey with 909 members of the Institute of Management; of those participants, 30% indicated they worked for a public-sector organization. Participants were asked to rate the following factors:

- The extent their organization’s HRM policies linked with rewards and performance on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly against) to 5 (strongly supports) for items that included rewarding employees for enhancing their own skills and knowledge and merit philosophy and emphasis on individual performance
- The extent of their organization’s rewards practices for items such as equal pay for equal work and skill-based pay
- The extent their organization supported training and development (e.g., coaching, continuous self-development)
- The extent their organization supported flexible HRM practices (e.g., flexible cross-functional teams, opportunities for autonomy)
- The extent of organizational involvement in employee participation practices (e.g., management committees for employee unions, attitude surveys, work councils)

- The extent their organization supported equal opportunities and employee welfare policies (e.g., help employees meet personal and family needs, provide flexible retirement opportunities)

Results of the survey indicated that in public organizations, there is less support for policies which link rewards to the employee's contribution to organizational performance, specifically regarding rewards for productivity, and less support for performance-related pay and fringe benefits in public organizations compared to private (Boyne et al., 1999). The results also indicated that individualized methods of rewarding employees (e.g., pay, promotion) are less likely to be adopted in the public sector, preferring instead more uniformed practices (e.g., pay determined by the going rate). Where employees were asked to rate their organization's HRM flexibility, both private and public sectors scored similarly in the perception that the organization supports flexible cross-functional teams and autonomy in the workforce. Regarding training and development, results indicated more support for staff training and development in the public sector than the private sector. As for the extent of organizational involvement in employee participation, the public sector was more involved in staff participation and consultation. Finally, results indicated that the public sector scored significantly higher in support for equal opportunities than the private sector. The relevance of this study is two-fold. First, it establishes that there are major differences in the HRM structure between public and private sector organizations. Second, it shows that the perception of HRM practices differs, at times greatly, between public and private sectors, thus providing a

basis for additional research to further understand the public sector (nonprofit) employee perceptions as related to promotability.

The implementation of structured HRM practices is essential for the success of an organization. While extremely limited, research has indicated that successful adoption of HRM practices in health services (HS) organizations can improve an organization's performance and is the primary mechanism for developing employees (Rodwell & Teo, 2004). Their intent was to examine the impact of strategic HRM practices on both for-profit and nonprofit health services organizations performance. Health services organizations are a key fixture in the health industry; however, due to the constant reform of health policies, organizations are constantly going through transformations within their organizational structures, quality management, and changes in how the hospital is managed and funded. The goal of Rodwell and Teo's research was to explore the adoption of HRM practices between for-profit and nonprofit organizations. The researchers hypothesized that health services organizations would adopt strategic HRM in the same manner, irrespective of their organizational type (i.e., for-profit or nonprofit).

Data were collected from 61 participants from a list of all companies in the Australian health and services industry with greater than 50 employees. Strategic HRM practices were determined through four human capital HR scales used by Snell and Dean (1992); these measures included selective staffing, comprehensive training, performance appraisal, and equitable reward systems (Rodwell & Teo, 2004). Results of the study indicated there were no differences in the adoption of strategic HRM practices between for-profit and nonprofit health services organizations. This study is relevant as it supports



the idea that it is considered best practice to implement strategic HRM practices in both for-profit and nonprofit organizations in order to improve organizational performance. Based on this finding, it could be argued that differences in perceptions of HRM effectiveness can be attributed to specific industry (e.g., for-profit or nonprofit) conditions, which paves the way for future research in the nonprofit sector regarding HRM promotability processes.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Although several quantitative studies have focused on the perception of promotability (Beehr et al., 2004; Beehr & Taber, 1993; Misuko, 2012; Webster & Beehr, 2013) and the impact perception has on an employee attitudes and behaviors (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Ripley, 2003), there is still a lack of qualitative research examining employee perceptions of promotability, specifically in a nonprofit sector. Existing research has looked at (a) employee perceptions related to promotional fairness (Misuko, 2012), (b) relationship between employee perception and employee commitment in the organization (Lemons & Jones, 2001), and (c) perceptions related to employee turnover (Carson et al., 1994). These components increase understanding of an employee's perception of promotability within their organization, as that perception can affect the employee's attitudes and behaviors toward organizational commitment, satisfaction, and turnover intentions. Findings suggest that (a) different groups (e.g., administrative, maintenance) have different perceptions of promotability in the organization; (b) employees who perceived that promotions are based on exceptional and/or reliable performance have higher promotion satisfaction, job satisfaction, and lower turnover intentions; (c)

perceptions of performance-based promotions have stronger perceptions of promotional justice than nonperformance-based promotions, and (d) HRM practices differ between for-profit and nonprofit organizations. It is therefore essential to understand promotability and how the perception of promotability can affect employees, as this perception can affect the organization's ability to achieve its strategic goals. The perception of promotability can also affect an employee's organizational commitment, psychological contract, intentions for turnover, and perception of organizational justice.

As there are different triggers that affect an employee's perception (e.g., ego-defensiveness, HRM processes, for-profit/nonprofit work sector), the exploration of these perceptions will be guided by exchange theory to better understand their antecedents. SCT will provide the foundation for understanding the employee's perceptions of promotability based on what they have learned from their past experiences and how these experiences influence their reinforcements, expectations, and self-efficacies (Afzaal, 2014). This qualitative study addressed the perceptions of employees who work at a nonprofit organization within different specialties (e.g., finance, population health, clinical service lines). The methodological design of the study will be outlined in Chapter 3.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of promotability among non-managerial employees in a nonprofit organization. Many organizations have begun to acknowledge that internal promotion is beneficial because it retains personnel knowledge and skill set and keeps recruitment costs down (Lee et al., 2018; Webster & Beehr, 2013). Despite this heightened awareness, many organizations continue to struggle communicating these processes throughout the organization (Webster & Beehr, 2013). This lack of communication leads employees to misinterpret promotability in the organization, potentially causing negative employee behaviors (Baluch, 2017; Vough & Caza, 2017). Though previous research has focused on employee perception of general HR practices, organizational justice, or leader communication, this qualitative study explored employees' perceptions of the concept of promotability in a nonprofit organization. This chapter will cover the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, study methodology, procedures for recruitment, participation and data collection procedures, data analysis plan, and ethical procedures.

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

##### **Central Concepts of the Study**

Guided by SET and SCT, this study explored the perception of promotability among employees in a nonprofit organization to answer the research question: What is the perception of promotability among employees working in a nonprofit organization focused on health and social impact services? SET suggests that mutual respect is achieved in relationships that provide more rewards to the individuals than costs (Jawahar

& Ferris, 2011). In other words, organizations that reward their employees (e.g., such as a promotion) receive respect from the employee in the form of enhanced engagement and loyalty. SCT suggests that social influence (e.g., interactions with others, emotional status) has an impact on external and internal social reinforcement (e.g., praise, acceptance) in the organization (LaMorte, 2016). The main SCT concept that guided this study is self-efficacy, which states that an individual's confidence in their own capabilities is influenced by their perception of their skill set as well as their perception of environmental barriers or facilitators (LaMorte, 2016). In other words, an employee who has confidence in their own skill set yet a negative perception of promotability due to unstructured organizational processes may display negative behaviors in the organization (e.g., lack of engagement, increased turnover intent). Understanding promotability through the lens of SET and SCT provided insight into the employee perception of promotability and the impact it has on their behaviors in the organization.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Descriptive Phenomenology**

The qualitative phenomenological research method was most appropriate as it facilitates the ability to investigate a phenomenon's deeper meaning among those who share the experience, examine an organization's social practices and operational processes, identify barriers as well as opportunities for change, and discover contributors to an organization's success or failures (Marjan, 2017). On the other hand, quantitative research is based on positivist beliefs in a singular reality or truth that can be discovered through research (Wadhwa, & Varpio, 2015). The quantitative method was therefore not selected since the purpose of this study was not to discover a singular truth about the

promotability phenomenon but to understand the participants' unique experiences in relation to it.

Phenomenology is useful when examining the what and why of topics that are complicated, ambiguous, and/or emotional (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Phenomenological research is aimed at determining essential components of experience that makes it unique in relation to a specific phenomenon, allowing the researcher to comprehend the individual's state of mind while acknowledging that this is never completely possible (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Descriptive phenomenology was specifically used in this study as it focuses on the direct exploration and analysis of a phenomenon, describing the participants' experiences as accurately as possible—shedding any preconceptions—to achieve a true and rich understanding (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). The descriptive method provides context to the lived experience of the participant, focusing on their perspective without using deception or inserting the researcher's point of view (Broome, 2011). Transforming data through descriptive phenomenology is done through clarification, not explanation, of the lived experience as given by the participant (Giorgi, 2014). If a transformation is not rooted in what the participant said, then the researcher has improperly analyzed the data in a way that does not accurately represent the participant's experience (Giorgi, 2014). The intent of descriptive phenomenology is to ignore all preexisting knowledge of a phenomenon in order to grasp and understand its essential, core, and true elements as experienced by the participants (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015).

According to Giorgi (2003), there are four key characteristics of phenomenological research:

- It is descriptive, meaning the researcher's analysis and interpretation must follow the description given by the participant in order to avoid premature analysis on the part of the researcher
- It uses reduction, which requires the researcher to take meaning and intent exactly as it is given or presented by the participant
- It searches for essences, which means that the researcher looks for the unchanging and definitive characteristics of the phenomenon being studied
- It focuses on the notion of intentionality, which is based on human consciousness, i.e., the participant's conscious, direct state of mind in reference to the phenomenon being studied

Other variations of qualitative research were also considered for this study. Jobin and Turale (2019) list six methods in addition to phenomenology: grounded theory, ethnography, narrative inquiry, case studies, action research, and participatory action research (Jobin & Turale, 2019). The goal of grounded theory is to develop an explanatory theory based on the data collected and the range of the participants' shared experiences, while phenomenology describes, through emerging themes in the data, the meaning of the lived experience related to the phenomenon (Marjan, 2017), which did not fit this study. Because the intent of this study was to examine and understand the participants' specific and unique experiences as they relate to the phenomenon of promotability, the phenomenological approach was the method of choice (Marjan, 2017).

Case studies rely on anecdotal information, focusing on a specific issue, using a case to provide insight into the issue (Range, 2019). This method did not fit into the design of this study as this study was focused on the perception of promotability through semistructured interviews with the employee, so it was not selected. Ethnographic research was also not appropriate for this study as it is the study of people through in-depth observation of groups of individuals and immersion within their native populations (Jones & Smith, 2017). Additionally, narrative inquiry was not used for this study as it is an inquiry into experience through the collaboration between the researcher and participants over time, in one or more places, with social interaction, as a way to gather information for research through storytelling (Clandinin & Huber, 2000). Finally, action research was not appropriate for this study as it is used typically in an academic setting as a collaborative way for researchers to discuss how to improve processes (Ferrance, 2000; Sagor, 2020). Participatory action research was also not considered as it is, at its core, a self-reflective inquiry that researchers and participants take in order to enable action or change (Baum et al., 2006).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher's identity is a central consideration in the qualitative research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As interviews are a key part of the qualitative data collection process, it is the role of the researcher to act as an attentive and unbiased listener, examining the phenomenon being studied through the individual's relayed personal experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Another primary responsibility of the researcher is to ensure that the data collected are safeguarded to protect the participant's

confidentiality (Austin & Sutton, 2015). My interview questions were reviewed by context experts to ensure their applicability to the study's focus regarding the promotability phenomenon.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

When it comes to selecting participants for a qualitative research study, the researcher must ask themselves whether the participant has direct experience with the phenomenon under study (Englander, 2012). For the purpose of this study, I looked for participants with experience in a nonprofit organization focused on either health and/or social impacts to the community, employed full or part time (i.e., not a contractor), and not currently in a leadership role. Therefore, the target population inclusion criteria included nonmanagerial employees who were working at a nonprofit health and social impact services organization. To ensure participants had experienced promotability, they were all employed for at least 18 months with their current organization and had received at least one performance review. Employees who had been leaders in the past were considered as long as they were not in a leadership or manager role at the time of the study. Any employees in a leadership role (e.g., have employees reporting to them) at the time of the study were excluded. This logic was created to target participants who could provide unique perspectives and perceptions of promotability based specifically on their role and work experience in a nonprofit organization.



### **Sampling Strategy**

The purposeful sample strategy was used for this study. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to recruit for and select participants who have a unique and/or important perspective on the phenomenon being studied based on defined criteria that relates to the core constructs of the study (Marshall, 1996; Robinson, 2014). This sampling strategy allowed selection of participants who could best address the research question based on the following criteria: organization type, work experience, and role. All participants worked at a nonprofit health and social impact organization and had at least 18 months of work experience. This allowed for participants to have participated in at least one performance review and accounted for any time they may have had to strengthen their skills and/or create new goals based on their performance review(s). Finally, by interviewing participants who were not currently in a leadership role provided a perception of promotability as experienced by someone who had not yet gone through a formal HR process of being promoted. The intent was to understand employees' perceptions of promotability as a factor of the organization's HR and communication processes. As such, any individual who had already been guided through those processes by their supervisor and/or HR was excluded.

### ***Participant Selection Criteria***

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of promotability among non-managerial employees in a nonprofit organization. Therefore, only individuals who were currently employed with a nonprofit organization were considered. Participants had to have received, at minimum, one performance review within their current organization.

Only employees who were currently not working in a leader or manager role were considered for this study. All positions within the organization from administrative to clinical to janitorial were considered as part of the selection criteria. This allowed the study to target multiple specialty areas in the organization, providing a greater breath of diverse experience as related to the phenomenon being studied (Englander, 2012). This study also included participants from diverse cultural backgrounds, as cultural background has the possibility of steering the results in a certain direction (Englander, 2012). Both full-time and part-time employees were considered for this study. Confirmation of whether participants meet the selection criteria was done during the recruitment process.

### ***Sample Size and Rationale***

There are varied approaches among researchers in determining qualitative sample size. Giorgi (2009) recommended using a minimum of three participants when utilizing the phenomenological method, Morse (1994) suggested at least six participants, and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested between 12 to 20 participants when doing in-depth interviews. Other researchers, however, have suggested that qualitative sample size can be determined in relation to the information power that a sample has (Malterud et al., 2016). Information power is influenced by the aim of the study, specificity of the sample selection logic, theoretical background, quality of the interview dialogue, and the analysis strategy (Malterud et al., 2016). Some consider sample size in relation to saturation, stating that code saturation can be achieved in qualitative data when there are no additional issues identified, and meaning saturation can be achieved when there are no

further insights collected (Hennink et al., 2017). My sample size consisted of nine total participants, which is when data saturation was achieved.

### ***Procedures for Identification, Contact, and Recruitment of Participants***

To recruit participants for this study, I utilized public sites, including LinkedIn, nonprofit organizations' public webpages, and Facebook to identify employees of nonprofit organizations. Using the contact information found on these public domains, I emailed employees from my Walden University account who met the study's inclusion criteria and asked if they were interested in participating in a qualitative research study. In my message, I included the interview guide (Appendix) and the consent form, explaining that the consent form detailed the purpose of the study as well as the specific participant selection criteria; prospective participants were informed that they could reply via email with any questions they may have or with their consent to participate.

I also posted electronic flyers to online public nonprofit organization sites. The flyers included the study's background, participant selection criteria, and my Walden email contact information. I asked that anyone interested in participating who met the criteria contact me via that email address. Once contacted, I replied with the interview guide and consent form, letting them know they could email me any questions or with their consent to participate.

Finally, I recruited via my Facebook account. While my account is private, I created a public post that could be shared. The post clearly communicated the study background and participant criteria; those who were interested were advised to contact me directly at my Walden University email. Once contacted, I replied with the interview

guide and consent form, letting them know they could email me with any questions or with their consent to participate.

### **Procedures for Data Collection**

Once I had a sufficient number of participants and confirmed that they met the selection criteria, I set up interviews based on their availability. All interviews were scheduled via Zoom. The intent of conducting a video interview was to allow a convenience factor for the participant while still facilitating a face-to-face interview. The online interview settings allowed me to view any body language cues, indicating whether the participant was anxious, uncomfortable, tired, or stressed. The interviews were scheduled for 60- minutes and were all completed in one session.

During the interview, I took notes on the participants' replies to the interview guide questions, also noting any body language responses. I also recorded the audio portion of the interview on my iPhone, using the "voice recorder and audio editor" application. This app requires a password login and will be stored on my personal computer which also requires a secure password to login. Each interview was saved using the data and the individual's role in their organization; I used the same information to save any written notes from their interview. Throughout the interview, I adhered to the interview guide to ensure the conversation stayed on-track, focusing specifically on the phenomenon being studied. I used the prompts to help guide the participant on any questions they may not have initially known how to answer.

When the interview was complete, I thanked the participants for their time and willingness to contribute to this study. I asked them if they had any questions about the

interview or the study. They were advised that I may contact them to schedule a follow-up phone call in the event anything needed to be clarified after I reviewed the interview notes; this was to guarantee the transcript captured verbatim what they relayed in their interview. I also let them know to expect a copy of the interview transcript for their review via the email they provided with the initial contact. If the participant had no further questions, I ended the interview and the audio recording. I then emailed them the electronic \$25 Visa gift card as a thank you for their time and participation.

### ***Instrumentation***

Instrumentation in phenomenological research is focused on the subject-phenomenon relation (Englander, 2012). The phenomenon is the object of the research, using the subject (i.e., participant) to describe that phenomenon (Englander, 2012). To ascertain these descriptions, semi-structured interviews were used to obtain an in-depth understanding of each participant's unique experiences as they related to the central phenomenon of promotability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Weller et al., 2018).

Grounded in SET and SCT, the interview guide created for the semi-structured interviews was developed with the intent to understand the employee perception of promotability. SET is anchored in the reciprocal relationship between employees and the organization, focusing on the notion that when something is given (e.g., work performance), there is an expectation that something is received (e.g., bonus) (Moilanen & Ikaheimo, 2019). To ascertain the employee's perception of promotability according to SET, the interview guide included questions such as "what is your perception of what your organization requires in order to promote an employee?" or "what do you feel

should be required to receive a promotion?” Questions like this solicited the employee’s perceptions of the promotion criteria within their organization.

The self-efficacy construct of SCT highlights how an individual’s confidence in their ability to perform a task or behavior is directly related to their perception of their capabilities, as well as any positive or negative environmental factors that may affect their ability to perform that task or behavior (LaMorte, 2016). To address that, the interview guide included questions about the employee’s perception of their own performance and the expectation of how that performance may or may not relate to promotability (e.g., “describe your views on whether or not you think it is important to develop and improve your skills sets in order to receive a promotion?”).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The semi-structured interviews with the study participants were analyzed through the process of coding. This process was completed by engaging five steps of data analysis based on Giorgi’s model as outlined by Broome (2014) and Koivisto et al. (2002). I assumed the phenomenological attitude by bracketing my everyday knowledge and viewpoints, putting aside any opinions or assumptions of the data I had in order to look at it from a new and fresh point of view. I read the entire naïve description provided by the participant to get a sense of the whole experience being relayed without critical reflection or presuppositions. I identified meaningful units within the participants narrative in order to organize and subsequently code the data in a manageable way. I labeled each meaningful unit with a significant description, re-expressing them in the third person.

Finally, I identified the psychological constituents within the participants' experiences relevant to the study.

Jobin and Turale (2019) provide additional detail on the steps needed for effective data analysis that I also engaged. I engaged familiarization by reading the participant interview transcripts until I was familiar with the data. I then implemented compilation by categorizing all participant statements based on similarities and differences, and condensation by filtering the categories in order to extract relevant statements from irrelevant ones, as related to the phenomenon of promotability being studied. I then grouped similar categories into succinct groups, also known as preliminary grouping, and identified significant categories between succinct groups, which is preliminary comparison of categories. After that, I named the groups and categories, and finally, arranged all categories based on the nature of the occurrence in order to get the whole essence of participants' experience as related to the phenomenon of promotability.

In order to prepare for the data analysis process, Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggest precoding, which is a process of reading, questioning, and engaging with the data (e.g., noting short phrases, ideas, or key concepts). Coding in qualitative data analysis involves both inductive (i.e., bottom-up, data-driven) and deductive (i.e., top-down, theory-driven) coding processes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To code using the inductive approach, I reviewed the transcript and used the participants' words to label specific data segments rather than my own.

To code using the deductive approach, I immersed myself in the data, reading it multiple times to look for something specific that related to the literature that informed

this study. These two coding processes were done in tandem as they are not mutually exclusive. Engaging in this process allowed me to become more familiar with the data and answer questions such as “which data, if any, do I still need to collect?” “Do I see my presence or influence in these data?” “What other questions do I have after reading through my data set?” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). After the first interview, I reviewed the audio recording and interview notes to ensure that my interview guide questions solicited responses that directly related to the study’s research question and did not go off-topic.

To ensure that I formally acknowledged any biases or personal experiences I may have had relating to the perception of promotability, I used bracketing, i.e., the identification of the researcher’s vested interests, beliefs, personal experience, and assumptions about their research (Fischer, 2009). As the researcher, I continuously identified any assumptions, interests, and/or positions I had in the study’s central concept by bracketing or identifying and documenting my personal experiences with it.

Finally, I utilized the NVivo qualitative software analysis platform as a tool to help manage and organize the full data set. The platform provides functionality that can manage and organize multiple data sources (e.g., text, audio, video, emails, spreadsheets). NVivo provides researchers a way to look at different patterns in the data, emerging themes, and discovery of key concepts using word frequency queries. The platform also provides visualization tools including charts, mind maps, word clouds, and comparison diagrams. I utilized the NVivo platform along with my interview notes to interpret and develop themes in the data. After the themes were identified, I assessed the data interpretations. This process involved making judgments about what was meaningful in



the themes that emerged. Grbich (2013) suggests guiding these interpretative judgments by asking “what surprising information did I not expect to find?” or “what are the dominant interpretations and what are the alternate notions?” After the data analysis was completed, I represented the data in visual form using the NVivo platform.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a crucial aspect of all research. According to Korstjens and Moser (2017) there are five criteria qualitative researchers should follow in order to establish trustworthiness within their studies findings: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity. The following section will review these criteria in detail.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility in qualitative research is achieved when the study’s findings can be considered believable and trustworthy (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, n.d.-a). To establish credibility in my study, I engaged in member checks. The process of member checking, or participant validation, involved checking in with participants during the study to assess and even challenge my interpretations and analysis of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To this end, I asked specific follow-up questions when sharing the interview transcripts with participants so they could verify the accuracy of their comments (Statistics Solutions, 2019). These questions included “Does this transcript accurately reflect your perspective?” “Is there anything I have misunderstood?” “Are there any areas you would like to clarify or add to?” and “Do my descriptions seem accurate or appropriate to you?” In this way, I was able to validate that my interpretation

and representation of the data was in-line with what was relayed to me and to correct any analysis of the data that may have been misinterpreted.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is achieved when the level of detail provided is sufficient for the reader to apply the procedures used to another population and/or context. One way to accomplish this is by providing a thick description, which is a detailed account of what I as the researcher experienced during the data collection process (e.g., interviewing in a conference room or over Facetime, interviewing over the weekend, right after the participant got off work, or during their shift). This thick description helps the reader understand how the cultural and/or social context could have affected the participant's responses.

### **Dependability**

Dependability in qualitative research refers to studies that can be viewed as consistent and stable. In other words, the researcher clearly documents alignment between the research question and the method by which data are collected (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To establish dependability, I created an audit trail that detailed the methodological procedures used to collect the data, including recruiting rationale and procedures, interview protocol and question guide, and logic supporting the data interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). This audit trail provided the necessary information for reviewers to determine whether the study findings derived logically from the data collected.

**Confirmability**

In qualitative research, it is important to be reflexive about the identity, positionality, and subjectivities the researcher may have. This reflexivity needs to be apparent to ensure unbiased participant selection or interpretation of interview responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To establish confirmability, I reflexively identified and disclosed any biases, values, or experiences I had that related to the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is the continual process of reflecting on the research, examining both my role as the researcher and my relationship to the research (Hsiung, 2010). To accomplish this, I followed the guidelines provided by Weis and Fine (2000) when engaging in qualitative writing during the interview process and in interpretations made from the data to ensure that I did not insert my own biases or pre-conceived notions about what the data would reflect. To acknowledge any biases I had, I documented any preconceived notions about the phenomenon being studied. In order to ensure that my interpretation of the participants' information was accurate, I asked myself whether my writing captured and correctly connected the participants' feelings, interpretations, and perceptions to the correct historical experiences/stories/accounts with which they were associated. When reviewing my interview documentation, I asked myself whether my analysis of their experiences and perceptions of promotability inadvertently created an alternative interpretation of what was relayed in the interview. These questions as noted

by Weis and Fine (2000) helped to ensure that my analysis stayed on-track and accurately captured the participants' own perceptions as related to promotability.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Researchers must abide by specific ethical standards when conducting research. The APA lists the fundamental ethical considerations that should be adhered to when conducting a research study. One such consideration is when delegating work to others, the researcher must ensure they are only engaging those who can perform competently with the appropriate level of education, training, and or experience (APA, 2017). Before sending my interviews to be transcribed, I ensured the transcription company was competent and agreed to the required level of confidentiality and privacy (per APA Principle E: Respect for People's Rights and Dignity, 2017). Per section 4.02 of the APA standards (APA, 2017), I also ensured that all participants understood that their interview would be recorded. The email invitation as well as the informed consent included the appropriate descriptions and background of the study for participants using language that was reasonably understandable, as detailed in section 3.10 of the APA standards (APA, 2017).

All participants were of the legal age of consent. There were no participants who could be classified as vulnerable to coercion defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (e.g., children, prisoners, individuals with impaired decision-making capacity, or economically or educationally disadvantaged persons) (Government Publishing Office, 2018). There were no incentives, monetary or otherwise, offered to potential participants as an inducement to participate in the study. A \$25 gift card was

mailed to participants after they completed their interview as a thank them for volunteering their time for the study.

The process of recruiting for study participants began after the study was approved by the institutional review board (IRB; approval no. 10-07-20-0529960). All prospective participants who volunteered for the study were provided the interview questions (Appendix A) as well as the background, intent of the study, and the consent form to review and sign (Appendix B). The consent form outlined any potential risks of the study (e.g., stress, fatigue), stating that participation in the study was not a requirement and that they could decline at any time. To protect the participants' identity, they were only referred to by their first name and/or role in the organization in the audio recording, in my written notes, and in the transcript (Lee & Hume-Pratuch, 2013). The transcribed data was sent securely by encrypted email with password-protected documents. Absolutely no identifying information was included in the file to be transcribed. Documents returned by the transcriptionist were sent by encrypted, password-protected email. All documents and recordings related to the study were password protected and saved on a private hard drive accessed only by me. The data will be stored for five years as required by the IRB and then destroyed.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the rationale for use of qualitative versus quantitative research for the purpose of understanding the perception of promotability among employees in a nonprofit organization. Qualitative research provides the ability to explore nuanced experiences related to the phenomenon as relayed by the participant. The

participant selection logic, criteria, and sampling strategy were also discussed as well as the procedures for recruitment. The data analysis and coding process were described as was the process of ensuring trustworthiness of the study's findings, focusing on credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity. Finally, applicable ethical procedures were emphasized to maintain and ensure that participants are treated ethically.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of promotability among nonmanagerial employees in a nonprofit organization focused on health and social impact services. The following research question guided the interviews and data analysis: What is the perception of promotability among employees working in a nonprofit organization focused on health and social impact services? This study was grounded in SET and the self-efficacy concept of SCT. SET suggests that the employer–employee relationship is affected when mutual respect is achieved, and the employer rewards their employees for their work (e.g., promotions, bonuses; Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). SCT suggests that both the individual’s perception of their skill and of the organizations processes will affect their perception (LaMorte, 2016). This chapter will describe the procedures used to conduct the study, including the organizational setting of the participants, demographics and characteristics of the participants, data collection, analysis, and results.

### **Setting**

Participants were recruited virtually via posts made on public nonprofit pages (with the organizations’ approval) and on my personal social media accounts. The study interviews were conducted virtually over the Zoom video conferencing platform. None of the participants reported significant personal or organizational conditions (e.g., layoffs, budget cuts) that may have affected their perceptions of the phenomenon being studied.

### **Demographics**

The participant sample ( $N = 9$ ) for this study were men and women over the age of 18 from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds; five responded to a public

recruitment flyer posted to my Facebook social media account, two of whom forwarded the electronic flyer to a coworker, resulting in an additional two participants. Another participant responded to a post published on my neighborhood's Facebook page, and the final participant had received the electronic flyer from a coworker and Walden University student.

Except for leadership positions (e.g., staff reporting to them), all roles within the organization would be considered and included an associate program coordinator, crisis worker, intervention counselor, medical assistant, program assistant, program director, two nurses, and a switchboard operator. The participant interviews were organized according to their role in the organization and the date of the interview (e.g., registered nurse [RN]\_11-11-20). For the purposes of this chapter, each participant is referred to as P1–P9. A breakdown of the participants is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Tenure in Current Organization (Years)	Length of Interview (Minutes, Seconds)	Pages of Transcribed Data
P1	F	8	17.57	8
P2	F	2	27.55	13
P3	F	12	17.2	10
P4	F	15	39.16	15
P5	F	2.5	23.3	16
P6	F	4	24.39	13
P7	F	2.5	31.55	14
P8	F	7	19.37	8
P9	M	2	40.24	18



P1 is a female RN who has been with her current nonprofit organization for eight years. This nonprofit organization is focused on health services. At the time of the interview, she was working in the endoscopy unit in the hospital.

P2 is a female RN who has been with her current nonprofit organization for two years. This nonprofit organization is focused on health services. At the time of the interview, she was working in a Level 4 hospital maternity unit.

P3 is a female switchboard operator who has been with her current nonprofit organization for 12 years. This nonprofit organization is focused on health services. She worked at the switchboard unit handling calls, pages, alarms, and security for the hospital.

P4 is a female program director who has been with her current organization for 15 years. This nonprofit is focused on social impact services. She had self-proclaimed multiple roles and duties, having worked with local hospitals to create programs and coordinate events for cancer patient and their families. She also engaged in fundraising for her organization.

P5 is a female crisis worker who has been with her current nonprofit organization for two and a half years, working per diem, doing drug, alcohol, and mental health services assessments. This nonprofit organization is focused on both health and social impact services.

P6 is a female medical assistant who has been with her current nonprofit organization for 4 years. This nonprofit is focused on health services. She works in

multiple positions as a medical assistant in the hospitals COVID, urgent care, and primary care clinics.

P7 is a female intervention counselor who has been with her current nonprofit organization for two and a half years. This nonprofit organization is focused on health and social impact services. She is an intervention counselor for a school district, offering counseling to referred students within multiple different schools in her assigned district.

P8 is a female associate program coordinator who has been with her current organization for close to seven years. This nonprofit organization is focused on social impact services. She works as an assistant youth coordinator as well as a prevention educator. These roles are within two different departments housed under one department focused on the organization's youth population.

P9 is a male program assistant who has been with his current nonprofit organization for 2 years. This nonprofit organization is focused on social impact services. He works as an educator, training volunteers to become state certified to work on a crisis hotline for sexual violence.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted and recorded on a PC desktop computer, using Zoom and a back-up digital recording app on my iPhone called "voice recorder." Both devices are password protected. All Zoom interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes. The interviews ranged from 17 minutes to 40 minutes in length. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded participants that interviews would be recorded and that I would send them the transcription to review for accuracy. I also reminded them that the study

was strictly confidential and that no participant/organization identifying information would be shared. After the interview, I stopped the recording and ensured it was saved under the correct coding on both the computer and back-up recorder. After each interview, I sent a thank you email and electronic gift card to the participant's email.

I personally transcribed three of the nine interviews in Excel and then copied them into Word. All files were saved on my password-protected computer. The remaining six interviews were transcribed by Rev, an online transcription company. A consent form was signed with the company to authorize the transcription. After the interviews were transcribed, I compared the transcription of each interview against the audio file to ensure the participants' statements were captured verbatim to establish confidence in the data (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Once complete, I sent a copy of the transcription to each participant to review and confirm that it accurately captured what they had stated in their interview. Three of the participants replied, confirming that the transcripts accurately captured what they had intended to say. Six participants did not reply to the email. No unusual or extenuating circumstances were noted during the data collection process.

### **Variations to Initial Recruitment and Data Collection Strategy**

A variation in the data collection occurred during recruitment. The approved proposal outlined a recruitment strategy for purposeful sampling. However, two of the participants were recruited through coworkers who had already agreed to participate in the study, resulting in recruitment through snowball sampling. Another variation occurred during the data collection process. The transcription company, Rev, had their own

confidentiality form that was completed and approved by Walden's IRB in addition to IRB approval from Walden secured before data collection began.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was completed using Giorgi's (2017) five-step approach. First, I bracketed any biases, opinions, or assumptions I had by identifying and document any assumptions about the possible results from the data, assuming a phenomenological attitude to keep an open mind. During the interviews, I only deviated from the script when I needed to ask a clarifying question regarding a term or process relayed by the participant that I was not familiar with. After the interviews were complete, I read through each transcript thoroughly, ensuring that I had an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences as they described them. I then read the entire participant description, immersing myself in the data in order to become familiar with it and ensure I fully understood the participants' experiences and perceptions of promotability. Re-reading and analyzing the data within the transcribed interviews allowed me to identify and highlight the meaningful units. The following is an example of how I transformed one of the shared experiences from P2 into meaningful units. This quote is the response I received when I asked her what her views were of what should be required in order to receive a promotion. The meaningful units are shown in brackets:

And like I believe that we, so I don't like that my institution does it by years.

[Doesn't like that institution does promotions by years] I think that we should

have, like smaller achievable promotions. [Thinks organization should have

smaller achievable promotions] Like, not necessarily saying that we should have

like RN2.5, like you go up like, if you progress before you necessarily hit that time maybe you should get something different, like maybe you should get a different title. [If employee progresses before years required, should get maybe a different title] Or like, I don't know. But um, I don't necessarily think it should just be with years of service. [Does not think promotions should just be on years of service] I know that's why we do years of service because it is in the medical center, and so that's a way to keep nurses who transfer in, you keep your title you know, I understand that. But I think that...it doesn't help me strive to be better. [Doesn't help her to strive to be better] Because I get my raise, but I won't get a better title.

Once I identified the meaningful units derived from the transcribed interviews, I entered each unit into a table so that I could detect, draw out, and elaborate on it in order to transform them into phenomenological expressions (Giorgi, 2009). Each meaningful unit transformation resulted in a description that represented the phenomena as they were presented, without manipulation. The goal was to describe the phenomena as it was relayed, not to interpret or theorize (Giorgi, 2009). This transformation process, or condensation, allowed each meaningful unit to be transformed further to achieve a more generalized concept, resulting in psychological constituents. These constituents were created to clarify, not explain, the lived experience of the participant (Giorgi, 2014). The last step was to synthesize the condensation into major themes relevant to the phenomenon being studied. An example of the transformation process from meaningful units to emerging constituents and finally major themes is illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Example of Transformation from Meaningful Units to Psychological Constituents to Themes in P2 Interview*

Meaningful Unit	Transformation	Final Transformation / Code	Constituent	Theme
No, I definitely don't think...I don't think promotability is a focus. I think...just like your care...like I feel like your everyday care is a focus. But I don't think...striving for a promotion is their goal.	Thinks focus is more on everyday care for patients and not employees striving for promotions	Doesn't think promotability is a focus	Perception that promotability is not a focus	Negative perceptions of promotability
But I think that...it doesn't help me strive to be better. Because I get my raise, but I won't get a better title.	Promotability process in organization does not provide motivation to do better in organization	Lack of motivation to be better due to lack of reward	Experiences lack of motivation	Perception of internal drive
...we have like two educators on my unit...they do, like, they do want you to better yourself. If they find out, I mean, they've posted things about um, like, a master's degrees and stuff like that and online programs that are doing current deals or whatever, uh, their tuition's kind of lower...I have seen that.	Acknowledges that educators that post about education opportunities to better oneself	Feels there are resources available to advance skill/knowledge set	Perception that organization is supportive	Positive perception of organization

The transformation process resulted in 10 major themes related to the phenomenon of promotability: (a) perception of internal motivation, (b) perception of what should be required for promotability, (c) perception of nonprofit requirements for promotability, (d) perception of performance reviews, (e) negative perceptions of leader, (f) negative perceptions of organization, (g) negative perceptions of promotability, (h) positive perceptions of leader, (i) positive perceptions of organization, (j) positive perceptions of promotability.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

Data immersion and member checking were used to establish credibility and ensure that the findings accurately reflect participants' interview responses (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, n.d.a). I then emailed the verbatim transcriptions to all nine participants via the same email used to contact me initially, asking them to confirm the accuracy of their interviews. Three participants replied that everything looked correct and that they had no additional comments or questions on the file. Six participants did not reply to the email.

#### **Transferability**

A study achieves transferability when the design can be implemented by other researchers using different participants in other contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure transferability, thick description is used to detail participant behavior, experience, and context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Thick description is provided in detailed notes, interview question prompts, and noted researcher observations during data collection

(Billups, 2014). This study explored the perceptions of promotability among individuals in a non-leader position working for a nonprofit organization. Participants were located in Texas, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Florida, representing the health care and social impact service fields, specifically. Both females and males participated, spanning multiple organizational levels, including program directors, RNs, assistants, and counselors. This study can be replicated with any nonprofit organization that is focused on health and/or social impact services.

### **Dependability**

Findings that are stable and consistent over time and across multiple settings are the result of implementing successful strategies for ensuring dependability (Billups, 2014). All methods of data collection followed the protocol approved for this study design. The research questions during the interviews were all followed verbatim and in the same order to ensure consistency. I created individual folders where I stored the outreach emails, consents, interview guide, transcription company's non-disclosure agreement, interview recordings, and participant transcripts. The participants' interviews were organized into cases within the NVivo software to associate each response to the appropriate interview. Each case created a link to the interview transcript and the participant so that when I referred to a comment or code and clicked on it, it would automatically reference it to the correct interview.

### **Confirmability**

To establish confirmability in this study, I engaged in reflexivity, constantly examining my role as researcher and my relationship to the research. Reflexivity is an



objective way for a researcher to acknowledge and set aside their own preconceptions, assumptions, and personal values that may relate to the phenomenon being studied (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). As a leader in a nonprofit organization, I was acutely aware that I had a vested interest in the perceptions of promotability among non-managerial employees in a nonprofit organization. I engaged in bracketing by identifying any biases and experiences I had with promotability while employed in a nonprofit organization, ensuring that I set aside those experiences while interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing the data. To that end, I conducted each interview with an open mind, making sure that I accurately captured the participants' experience free of any personal bias I may have had.

Finally, interpretation of the data was done using the descriptive phenomenology method, ensuring that the descriptions followed Giorgi's (2014) model by clarifying the data, not explaining it. This was accomplished by assuming a phenomenological point of view by bracketing my personal views and preconceptions of the research question to assure that my reporting of the results was clear and unbiased. I read each participant's interview in order to gain an appreciation of their entire experience without assigning my own reflection or interpretation to it. Next, I identified meaningful content and then labeled the phenomenological/psychological constituents of the meaningful units. Finally, I transformed those components into themes relevant to the phenomenon being studied.

## **Results**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perception of promotability in nonprofit organizations. Using P. M. Blau's (1964) SET and Bandura's (1986) SCT as the framework guiding the research question, which explored the

perception of promotability among non-managerial employees in a nonprofit health organization focused on health and social impact services. The analyzed data produced a total of 20 psychological constituents and ten themes highlighted in the following table.

**Table 3***Major Themes and Supporting Psychological Constituents*

Major Theme		Supporting Constituents	
1	Perception of internal drive	1.	Displays good work-ethic
		2.	Has high expectations of self
		3.	Experiences a lack of motivation
2	Perception of what should be required for promotability	4.	Values good performance
3	Perception of nonprofit requirements for promotability	5.	Opportunity needs to exist
		6.	Feels that organization values performance
		7.	Years of service are prioritized
4	Perception of performance reviews	8.	High value placed on receiving feedback
		9.	Feelings that reviews were unmemorable
5	Negative perceptions of leader	10.	Feelings that leader was not invested
		11.	Perception that leader was not available
6	Negative perceptions of organization	12.	Perception that employees are not valued
7	Negative perception of promotability	13.	Perception that promotability is not a focus
		14.	Perception that promotability process is unorganized
		15.	Perception that promotability process is unsuccessful
8	Positive perception of leader	16.	Perceives that leader is engaged
9	Positive perceptions of organization	17.	Perception that organization is supportive of advancing skills and education
		18.	Feels that organization communicates resources available successfully
10	Positive perceptions of promotability	19.	Perception that organizations promotability process is successful
		20.	Perception that promotability is a focus

The major themes support the two theories that served as the foundation for this study. For example, the theme perception of performance reviews supports P. M. Blau's (1964) SET, that individuals are motivated to perform based on the reward(s). The theme perception of what should be required for promotability supports Bandura's (1986) SCT, that an individual's confidence in their own capabilities is dependent upon their own skill set as well as external environmental factors. The two main socio-cognitive constructs of SCT on which this study focused were self-efficacy and LC. Self-efficacy posits that an employee's confidence in their ability to perform a task or behavior depends on their self-perceived skillset, capabilities, and any external facilitators or barriers (LaMorte, 2016). LC focuses on the individual's belief that they have control over their life by way of their choices and actions (Domino et al., 2015). In other words, an individual who has an external LC believes that outcomes or rewards in their life are outside of their control, instead influenced by external, or outside, forces or events. Alternatively, with an internal LC believe that they have control over their life through choices and actions that they make.

### **Theme 1: Perception of Internal Drive**

Having the confidence and commitment to achieve a specific task or behavior is the essence of self-efficacy. However, of the nine participants, only three relayed specific experiences that exuded confidence indicating a higher work ethic in their performance and abilities. For example, P7 indicated,

I've actually never had a review where I've had anything less than satisfactory. And so, obviously, I feel like I have high expectations for myself and I'm probably a little bit of an overachiever. I had done better than satisfactory and even exemplary in some examples.

P4 said, "I asked for a raise and I got a small raise, not much. But in my fifth year coming in with a third board president I said 'I'd really like a raise this year, a real raise'... I think I've done a great job," to which P1 added, "And it was probably my best yearly review that I've ever had."

Work ethic is also displayed through an employee's loyalty to their organization. SET suggests that when rewarded by their organization, either through intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (i.e., praise or promotion), an employee's sense of engagement or loyalty to the organization may increase (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). A few of the participants shared experiences that attested to their loyalty and commitment to their organization and role within it. Some participants had been with their organization for close to ten years or more. Others commented that they had a passion for the work, not only the community that they served, but to their fellow teammates as well. P3 had been with their organization for close to 12 years, P4 was with their organization for 14 years, and P1 and P8 had both been with their organizations for eight years. One of the participants shared experiences about how committed they were to the communities they serve. P4 indicated,

So we don't say, "Okay we're punching in at eight and leaving at five." Some people want to leave their work at work, and they don't want to talk about it

again. But ... because of the nature of who we serve, those feelings stay with you, and it's heavy on my mind. Because I love this, and I can't see doing anything else.

P4 felt that the fact that she had been loyal to the organization, doing everything in her power to promote it, should be taken into account when considered for a promotion, saying, "I think for me, what I felt was that I've been loyal, and I've done everything I can to promote my organization for years. Everybody I talked to, everybody that knows me knows what I do."

P2 relayed a few examples that contributed to her lack of motivation to excel. One example was that she felt that achieving a promotion in her organization was an extremely slow process, stating "It's such a slow...like time to change titles...it takes so long." She also mentioned that she did not think promotability was an organizational focus, "I don't think ... like striving for a promotion is their goal." She commented further that because promotions at her work are due only to years of service, there is no incentive for her to do additional tasks or go above and beyond, because "I'm not going to be promoted yet." She went on to say:

I feel like ... there's like no incentive for me to go back. There's nothing pushing me besides like ... me bettering myself to get a raise ... so I feel like there's no real like, there's no small goal for me. There's like ... I can do all these little things, but why would I? When I'm not going to be promoted yet.

P3 relayed a negative experience she had with promotability in her organization, stating that another employee was selected over her for a promotion because of who she

knew, not because of her performance. She recalled “even though she doesn’t train, she had poor attendance ... she had cut her hours down, and it all came down to the fact that, you know, it’s who you know.” And P6 chimed in:

So, it’s kind of scattered actually all in one building. So, half of the building is urgent care. The other half is PCP building or PCP side. So, actually, one side is COVID / urgent care, the other side of the building is your PCP. So, we have six rooms aligned on each side of the building, so, I’m usually bouncing everywhere.

One participant commented that she did have to get a second job in order to supplement her income:

Well ... when I wanted to make more money ... there’s another organization that does monetary benefits for ... residents ... so they brought me on as a liaison. So, I make money there too. So, for me it’s a win-win. I actually make more money, because I have a second job. (P4)

## **Theme 2: Perception of What Should Be Required for Promotability**

Of the nine participants, eight commented that good performance was a key indicator in what they perceived should be required to be considered for promotion. P8 made the comment, “I think it definitely has to do with the work that you’re putting in ... work ethic and just overall performance on the job.” P5 stated, “They should look at the performance ... as far as with the participants you’re working with ... your coworkers. Just being reliable.” P7 said, “I think promotability requires a hard work ethic, and positive attitude, and persistence, and pride in your work.” P6 felt that skills and knowledge were key, stating “So definitely skills ... your knowledge of course ... that

you know, from point A to point B ... your customer service, especially in healthcare it's good to have good bedside manner, ability to deal with stressful situations." P9 described the quality of work as what was important, "I think quality work always has to be important. I think being dedicated to the work. You just have to be on top of things at all times ... you're passionate, you're dedicated." P1 stated, "In order to receive a promotion I would say you need to have more responsibilities." P2 focused on social aspects, commenting "I think people should have a good demeanor ... able to communicate ... customer service is very important ... and ... good working relationships." P3 talked about reliability and good work habits as important, stating "Overall I think you need to have excellent habits of work. I think you need to be reliable. I think you need to be able to take initiative to solve problems that come up."

When referencing what they felt the organization required for a promotion, four of the participants stated that their organization considers competence, high ethical standards, reliability, and skillset as key requirements when reviewing an employee for a promotion. P8 perceived that her organization looked at "your performance on the job" and "whether or not you have the skills to get promoted." P7 stated that "I think hard work and persistence is definitely something they're looking for...and people that are socially and emotionally competent ... fair, honest ... somebody also who is a good representation of the district." P6 felt that the required skills meant that the person could handle the job they were being considered for, stating,

They got to make sure that ... this person can handle what they're getting themselves into. Like their skills, they got to make sure that they know what



they're doing, their knowledge about that situation or about that position. And then yeah, again, their ability to deal with the special stuff that's coming ahead. Finally, P9 perceived that the organization would require "someone reliable ... I think reliability is key. I think someone who just exudes leadership skills."

### **Theme 3: Perception of Nonprofit Requirements for Promotability**

When thinking about what their organization considered important for a promotion, one of the participants acknowledged that to be considered for a promotion, that opportunity has to first be available and approved by the organization. P1 stated, "First they have to have the position" and went on to acknowledge the organizational promotion process by commenting, "I know that they have to have approval from the Director before they can promote you to a higher position." P5 made the comment that she finds herself frequently asking "Is there room for me to grow," going on to say, "We have a lot of openings or promotions ... for them to say we have room for you to grow within the company, that means a lot."

Many of the participants perceived that their organization prioritized performance as a requirement for promotability. P7 stated, "I think hard work and persistence is definitely something that they're looking for" going on to add:

I think they're really looking for people that are socially and emotionally competent. Somebody also who is a good representation of the district. Somebody who can be on the news cameras if they have to, or talk to our board of directors, or even those who are then talking to the public on our behalf.

P9 commented that “reliability is key,” adding “I think someone who just exudes leadership skills.”

While not mentioned as often as performance, years of service was also noted as an organizational criterion when promoting an employee in some of the nonprofits. P2 stated that “you can’t just expect to be promoted...that’s not how we promote at my establishment ... it’s by years of service.” P7 had a similar perception, noting that “we have a salary schedule and it’s predetermined, and so it’s based on years of seniority.” They went on to comment that even though they had maxed out on the education level required for their position, their promotions were still based only on years of service.

#### **Theme 4: Perception of Performance Reviews**

Seven of the nine participants commented on the importance of feedback related to performance, goal setting, acknowledgement of skills, notification of areas of improvement, and understanding the organization’s performance related to the overarching organizational goals. When asked what their expectations were of a performance review, the participants replied as follows: P8 said,

I think definitely to recognize good work or improvement, but also if you're lacking in any certain area or could improve, then they're also great for that, for constructive criticism or for, like I said, just for doing a great job, I guess.

And P5 said., “I just expect that they tell me the things I’m doing really well so that, of course, I can know that there’s no issues.

P7 felt that performance reviews were a way to audit an employee’s performance, stating “I do think that it is a paper trail if somebody does do something that's not very

good quality.” P6 felt that performance reviews were a way to acknowledge the employee’s skills and how they handle difficult situations in their job. P2 indicated that performance reviews were a way to provide the employee with constructive criticism and to “let you know what the institution expects from you.” P3 added, saying that performance reviews were a way to recognize an employee’s strengths, but also to “point out any areas where you might need improvements. That your supervisor can bring to your attention, areas that you may be lacking, so that they can help you work on that area, to improve your overall performance.”

P1 thought that performance reviews should include feedback on performance, what can be improved upon, and how the employee is doing at achieving their set goals, also commenting on her expectation that employees receive an update on how the organization is performing, stating “I definitely wanna know how we’re performing as a hospital ... if we’ve met or if we haven’t met those goals that the hospital has set, and kind of what the plan is if we haven’t met those goals.” This comment indicates an interest not only in how she is performing in her role, but how her organization is performing as a whole.

While most of the participants described their expectations of performance reviews, there were two participants who perceived their performance reviews to be unmemorable, noting that nothing about the review stood out to them as something that required their attention. When I asked P4 if there was a performance review that stood out to her, she replied that “nothing in particular stands out, because we just, it never feels good when someone says you didn’t do something right.” When I asked P9 his

perception of his performance review, and whether it was successful or not successful, he replied, “I would say it was pretty low key for the most part. It was just very average. There was nothing memorable of that situation that I was like okay, that was, I guess, a proper review.”

### **Theme 5: Negative Perceptions of Leader**

One participant, P9, reflected on his leader’s performance review, commenting that it was “very just average ... nothing memorable.” P9 went on to comment that he felt he would be receiving a more formal review, that it “would be more proper,” but that “in this setting I’m not receiving that.” P9 also mentioned that he feels that there is a lot of work that is delegated from upper management down to the staff, saying “there’s definition someone on the team currently who does a lot, and it really seems to just be tasks that the upper management just didn’t want to do.” Other participants discussed how they were not able to regularly check in with their leader. P2 commented that she rarely interacted with her supervisor, stating “She works four nights a week, and I work three nights a week, and so there's so weeks where I literally don’t see her regularly. I can schedule myself to not see her.” P5 also mentioned that she rarely interacted with the supervisors at her organization, stating, “So we have three different locations at three different hospitals, so each hospital has a different supervisor, basically, and they’re not even there when we’re working.”

**Theme 6: Negative Perceptions of Organization**

A few of the participants talked about their perception that their organization did not value their employees. P9 made a comment about how he felt that his team was not a focus of his organization, stating:

There have been some positions where they've been forgotten by management, which again, they're like my kids, even though half of them are older than me. I still feel like my job is to focus on their wellbeing, and for them to be forgotten when they're the backbone of the hotline was not a good feeling for me.

**Theme 7: Negative Perceptions of Promotability**

Some participants felt that promotability was not a priority or focus of their organization. P5 mentioned that her company was more focused on expanding their service offerings rather than investing in their employees, "There's people over you that you can't control, and you have to do what they really say. I feel like a lot of companies ... they're just worried about continuing to expand. I think their main focus is just ... continuing to grow." She went on to comment that she felt that her organization did not value employees in certain roles, stating that staff with her same title had no room to grow, and that she felt that her leaders only promoted those on a higher level in the organization, looking at "promotions within the administrators and for themselves ... I only feel like they want to promote when someone leaves in a position that's high up."

P7 felt that "there just is not a lot of opportunity for advancement ... there's not a lot of positions where people would move to something that was promotable." P2 stated "No ... I don't think promotability is a focus ... like I feel like your everyday care is a

focus. But I don't think ... like striving for a promotion is their goal." Some of the participants discussed the unorganized processes within their nonprofit organizations related to promotability. P9 relayed his experience applying for a higher role in his organization, recalling that the process took a long time, and seemed "very zigzaggy." P9 went on to relay a negative experience with promotability in his organization, stating that he did not feel that the overall promotability process was successful and that his experience was "a really bad time for me ... just because, I mean, I'm so in love with what I do, and I'm so dedicated to what I do, and I just felt like there was absolutely no worth in me with how I was treated."

#### **Theme 8: Positive Perceptions of Leader**

Many of the participants commented that they had positive perceptions of their leader in their current organization. P7 talked about their leader's ability to support them when they were overwhelmed and understaffed. She recalled an experience when she was overwhelmed in her position, after collecting the necessary information to support the need for a new resource and presenting this to her supervisor, her boss "was able to get an additional position." P4 felt "a comfortableness" with her leader and felt that her leader would pick up the load for her if she needed to take a day off. She felt confident that her leader knew she did a good job, "if she asks me to do something, she never has to think about it again. It's done." P1 said that her manager was "the sweetest manager I've ever had, and so supportive." She also felt that her manager was "engaging" and "always pushing us to find out what our goals are ... and how she can help us achieve those goals."

Two of the participants said that they appreciated that their managers noticed specific things they did in their position, whether it was helping a specific patient, or going above and beyond with their coworkers. P6 felt that her supervisor acknowledged what she did in her role, citing specific examples during their performance review. P3 appreciated that her supervisor's manager paid attention to her as a person, sending a comment to her supervisor about how she "went above and beyond and how I worked really well with my other employees, and how I helped all the trainees feel really comfortable."

#### **Theme 9: Positive Perceptions of Organization**

A few of the participants commented on how well staffed their organization was. P8 acknowledged that her organization had a little turnover, saying "for the most part... a lot of the staff ... have been there for a long time." P3 made similar comments, saying that "people that come to work for the hospital tend to stay ... even if they move to different departments they do tend to stay with our organization." P5, when comparing her current organization to the previous nonprofit she worked for, commented that "the staff that they have are good." P4 relayed that she had a wonderful working relationship with her team, and even though they were an organization of three, they were comfortable giving each other feedback and advice, "because we're such great friends." She went on to comment:

I think, I really feel like in regards to me or any employee, I really, really feel like we do a great job. We don't do a perfect job. We probably have great room for improvement, but we do a really good job given what we have.

Organizations show their support and evolution of advancement in processes and procedures in different ways, such as streamline processes or advancement programs. P8 noted this, commenting:

I do have to say, being ... a college student ... my job was so flexible with me and really understood that I was trying to get my degree while also at work. So they were extremely flexible with my hours and really understood what my goals were. And I can say they were definitely supportive.

She went on to add "I can say from working with my colleagues and a lot of them were also college students or taking classes. So yeah, it's definitely, it wasn't just me, education was definitely important." P3 talked about how her organization would help pay for tuition for employees furthering their education:

I do know that they will ... help pay for schooling if you want to move into like a specialized area. So, if you wanted to go for radiology or something like that they do offer programs where you know if you sign on to work with the hospital after you graduate, they'll help you with financial costs for education and stuff like that.

P6 commented that because her organization was a teaching hospital, they offered classes that supported certain positions, stating:

It's a teaching hospital, so they're always giving you information about positions. Some of them even offer classes, they've actually offered a few classes. So if you're not sure on something, they'll teach you definitely about it. But yeah, they



always have opportunity to fall back on, in case you're not sure on something. But they'll definitely give you the opportunity throughout the facility to learn.

### **Theme 10: Positive Perceptions of Promotability**

Three of the nine participants relayed having at least one positive perception of promotability in their organization in that they all felt promotability was a focus. P9 acknowledged that his organization “definitely will focus on staff first” before they engaged in an external search. P8 also felt that, especially in her department, they looked to promote from within, saying “Promotion is definitely encouraged and it’s something that we definitely try to do before going elsewhere outside of the organization.” She went on to say that her personal experience with promotability in her organization was “extremely positive.” Other positive perceptions revolved around the resources dedicated to supporting promotability. P1 stated that her organization had an infrastructure that was dedicated to promotability, saying that they “have a separate webpage that they will post...these internal job openings,” she also mentioned her organization’s mentor program, and how “mentoring ... can actually head you into those higher promotion jobs.”

One participant compared her current organization to her previous nonprofit, saying that in her previous nonprofit organization “those that were responsible for hiring and organizing ... weren’t doing a very good job at all.” When I replied “Okay. And then by contrast do you feel that your organization is organized with hiring, and promoting, and getting that information out there?” She replied, “yes, it’s definitely much more than the previous one.”

## Summary

Chapter 4 included the findings from the qualitative interviews, noting the meaningful units, psychological constituents, and major themes developed from the data set. Participants defined their understanding of the phenomenon of promotability and provided their personal experiences in relation to it, as well as their overall perception of it. The data indicated that while there were significant overall positive employee perceptions, perceptions specifically related to promotability in the nonprofit organization were predominantly negative. Negative experiences related to promotability suggested that promotability was not a focus, that the organization lacked infrastructure, resources assigned to successful communication were limited, and there was a lack of management dedicated to the promotability process. While most of the participants agreed that promotability in the organization could be defined as moving up or excelling in their organization, one participant had an outlier response, answering instead that promotability was promoting services offered by her organization to the community they served. P4 did however also use term “promotion” to refer to receiving a raise at her organization, so the term was used interchangeably during her interview.

Overall, the participants’ perceptions of their leader and organization tended to be positive; however, there were almost twice as many references to negative perceptions of promotability among the participants. Chapter 5 will provide additional detail, including interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research among nonprofit organizations, and implications for positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of promotability among nonmanagerial employees in a nonprofit organization focused on health and social impact services. Though promotability has been studied in terms of its effects once a promotion has been achieved, this study addressed a gap in the literature by focusing on employees' perception of promotability in the nonprofit sector. The study was conducted using the descriptive phenomenological qualitative method. This research method facilitated a deeper understanding of the lived experiences, as described by the participants, that contributed to their perception of promotability.

When considering the perception of promotability within a nonprofit organization, a negative perception was pervasive among the participants. Most of the participants who had a negative perception felt that their organization was unorganized, offered low salaries, had ineffective leaders, and was not focused on promotability. They supported their perceptions with comments related to budget constraints, a focus only on service expansion but none on resource expansion, and at times showing a lack of consideration of how promotability impacts employees. Some participants felt that their organization did not support internal promotion and instead chose to look for resources externally, believing that their organization did not value the existing employees and instead chose to look externally to fill vacant positions. Many of the participants also had a lack of motivation to excel in the organization due to the ineffective, stunted, and in some cases non-existent procedures dedicated to internal growth. Other participants commented that though their organization hired internally, vacant positions were filled solely based on

who the applicant was connected to in the organization. Although there were some positive perceptions from participants who had engaged leaders, felt their organization did focus on promotability, and had resources dedicated to knowledge and skill growth, the majority of the perceptions related to promotability were negative.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The following research question was addressed in this study: What is the perception of promotability among employees working in a nonprofit organization focused on health and social impact services? This was done through interviews to elicit experiences related to the promotability process, including the performance reviews process and any organizational requirements pertaining to promotions. The following sections provide a detailed overview of the themes and how they support the relevant literature and the study's theoretical foundation.

In order to understand the participants' perceptions, I first had to understand their definition of promotability, which would serve as a baseline for understanding their perception of promotability. Most participants defined promotability as showing the skill set, drive, and characteristics of someone who was promotable. P6 defined it as "having the knowledge and skills to be able to be placed in a higher level." P8 added that it had to do with the employee's "work ethic and just overall performance on the job." P1 defined promotability as an employee "advancing to a higher skill level and also incorporating new job roles." P2 added that promotability is when an employee can "strive for achievements" and "show some kind of progress." One participant, however, had an alternative definition of promotability that stood out from the rest:

Well, within the organization, it would mean that, the more people that know about us, the more people we can touch ... I do think within our organization, promotability is very important, because without promotability, people don't know about you. (P4)

The fact that this participant's definition of promotability was focused on the promotion of the organization, and not the advancement of the employee, illustrates how imperative it is to understand the employee perception as it may not align with the organization's. The general concept of promotability refers to the employee's path to professional advancement in their organization (Gurbuz et al., 2016). Understanding the potential for employees to have perceptions that differ from those of the organization can help to prevent inaccurate or unintended perceptions, which can lead to potential performance or behavioral issues (Baluch, 2017; Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Misuko, 2012; Webster & Beehr, 2013).

### **Theme 1: Perception of Internal Drive**

The first theme emerged from the following constituents: (a) displays good work ethic, (b) has high expectations of self, and (c) experiences a lack of motivation. All participants noted having high expectations of themselves in the workplace, understanding their value, and being dedicated to the work. P4 stated,

Some people want to leave their work at work, and they don't want to talk about it again. But unfortunately, I think because of the nature of who we serve, those feelings stay with you, and it's heavy on my mind. A mom posted something earlier about her daughter, and I called her and I was like, "I'm here for you. Let's

talk.” And it’s not good news. And so, I think to myself, “If she calls me at 10 o’clock tonight, I’m going to answer the phone. I’m going to talk to her. And in 2011, I got laid off. We all did. ... so, I told my boss, I claimed unemployment and I kept working, and I never stopped. And then, the following year, we did a fundraiser, and I was able to get rehired in March. I was still working, because I love this, and I can’t see doing anything else.

Adding to that, P1 stated,

And so one of the goals that I have for this year is to join the PNAP, which stands for Professional Nursing Advancement Program, and I am actually doing that right now, and she’s signed off on all that paperwork for me to join that program today.

P6 noted,

But actually, when I first started ... I was just urgent care alone. That was the only thing that I knew. But then they had offered a position where they needed help with vaccines or just like help staff pretty much in the morning. So, in the morning, they hired me as a Par P for PCP and then in the morning and then I would transition into urgent care.

This theme was guided by the SCT framework in that perceptions of either internal or external barriers that impede achievement of some task or behavior may negatively affect an employee’s motivation (Aryee & Chu, 2012). Three of the participants mentioned feeling a lack of motivation to move up in their organization. This was either due to their own personal lack of desire or due to the lack of organizational

incentive. For example, P7 said, “I want to be where I am, and I don’t want to be ... I guess, I don’t know how I could be promoted without losing the parts of my job that I enjoy.” Environmental factors such as experience, team structure, and role responsibilities are all components that reflect the SCT framework and can positively or negatively affect an employee’s perception of their organization. Additionally, extrinsic motivators such as salary are a component of SET and can positively or negatively affect an employee’s perception of their organization. Many of the participants commented that they have dual roles in their current organization. For example, P8 indicated, “So right now, my title is, it’s kind of a dual role ... I technically work for two departments ... and we kind of overlap them ... and that all has to do with the population of students that we serve.”

These findings illustrate the commitment and positive attitudes and behaviors exemplified by employees who had the desire and motivation to advance in their organizations and who had been granted additional responsibilities as a result of their contextual performance. These results are consistent with Jawahar and Ferris (2011), who found that an employee with higher levels of task performance (e.g., goes out of their way to help others, good communication skills, meets deadlines, actively promotes organization) is more likely to be deemed promotable and, as a result, is given additional responsibilities and opportunities in the organization.

The inverse of this is when an employee does not feel that they have true opportunity for advancement based on skill and, as a result, adopt negative attitudes or behaviors, such as a lack of motivation to advance their knowledge or skill beyond the

required tasks or prescribed goals. P2 remarked that when promotability is only aligned with years of service, it does not motivate her to strive to improve:

I know that's why we do years of service because it is in the medical center, and so that's a way to keep nurses who transfer in, you keep your title you know, I understand that. But I think that ... it doesn't help me strive to be better. Because I get my raise, but I won't get a better title.

She went on to add:

But before that, people were saying that you didn't ... that you couldn't reach like level 4 and level 5 unless you had a master's degree. And I thought that like, to me that is really holding education to a standard. So I feel like since they took that away like there's no incentive for me to go back.

Consistent with previous research like Bjorkman et al.'s (2013) study, these results suggested that when an employee has not been identified as talent, they are less likely to accept additional tasks or build their skills sets. In other words, when an organization only promotes employees based on their years of service, the employee is less likely to feel that they have been singled out and identified as someone who could be promoted based on their performance, and as such are less motivated to excel within their role and build up their knowledge or skill.

## **Theme 2: Perception of What Should Be Required for Promotability**

The second theme emerged from the constituent "values good performance." This constituent was identified when the participants were asked to share what their own perceptions were of what should be required to receive a promotion and the overarching



response was focused on the employee performance. This theme is important to understand as employees develop strategies for career development based on what they perceive to be important for promotability (Beehr et al., 2004). Most of the participants talked about how they felt that good performance was the most important requirement for promotability. Employees may feel that exceptional performance is the most significant factor in promotion decisions (Beehr & Taber, 1993). P5 shared her views on what should be required when being considered for a promotion:

I think they should look at the performance, like a performance as far as with the participants you're working with, with your coworkers. I feel like also performance with your time and everything. Just being reliable. I think everything, overall, they should take into consideration.

P9 commented,

I think quality work always has to be important. I think being dedicated to the work. So I think when I think of promotability, I just think of someone who has a lot of those qualities, so you're passionate, your dedicated, you ... I know it's bad to say, but there is not really room for error. Of course, once or twice, but if there is this consistency of dropping the ball, I don't see why anyone would have any reason to be promoted. Yeah, I guess those are the main qualities I think of.

And P7:

I think it's somebody who possesses the skills and attributes to be successful in their career and maybe grow further ... I think that promotability requires a hard work ethic, and positive attitude, and persistence, and pride in your work.

It is essential to understand employees' perceived requirements for promotability. The overwhelming response from the participants suggests that many employees focus on performance as a significant qualifier for promotability. This is significant as research has indicated that employees who feel that promotions are a result of performance equate that with promotional justice (Beehr et al., 2004). In other words, employees who perceive promotability to be fair are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes (e.g., satisfaction, dissatisfaction) and behaviors (engagement, withdrawal) in the organization (Albin et al., 2018).

### **Theme 3: Perception of Nonprofit Requirements for Promotability**

The third theme emerged when asking participants to share their perception of what their organization requires for promotability. The following constituents emerged: (a) opportunity needs to exist, (b) feels that organization values performance, and (c) years of service are prioritized. Most participants responded that they felt performance should be a key factor when determining promotability, perceiving it to be a main consideration of their organization. One participant, P1, took a step back and suggested that the opportunity to be promoted has to first be approved by the organization and made available for internal recruitment before any other action can be taken:

If that manager feels like they're fit to even apply for that position ... then they would start going through the interview process ... which is that manager along with a panel of other people ... so like if you were going to be promoted to a manager's position, then it would include all the other managers kind of around that unit ... and then also the director over that area.

Most of the participants felt that performing well at their job, knowing how to handle difficult situations, and being reliable were important factors to promotability. P7 focused on the performance aspect of consideration, sharing her perception of what her organization required for promotability:

Well, I think especially in my field as a counselor, I think that you really have to have a lot of positivity and enjoy what you do, because if you don't, kids know that. I mean, they know if you're genuine, they know if you're really there for them, or if you're just there for a paycheck. And so, I mean, I think in terms of just being successful in your role, that it's really about ... I mean, how you work reflects on how you, I guess, how successful you are in your job.

P8 added, "I think, obviously a good performance review, a good attendance record punctuality, just overall accountability, flexibility," and she went on to state that she felt her organization looked at "whether or not you have the skills to get promoted ... and just your performance on the job." P6 summed it up with,

they got to make sure that ... this person can handle what they're getting themselves into. Like their skills, they got to make sure that they know what they're doing, their knowledge about that situation or about that position. And then yeah, again, their ability to deal with the special stuff that's coming ahead.

Two participants highlighted a third focus around years of service. Though she acknowledged that performance was key, P7 also stated that her organizations raise increases were based on years of service:

We have a salary schedule and it's predetermined, and so it's based on years of seniority ... I can't even really get promoted in the sense that, unless I ... well, I even maxed out my education, and so now I just get raises for years of service.

P2 also discussed the promotability structure based on years of service, stating, "Technically if you go to RN2 to RN3 its by years, years of service" adding "It's an automatic ... time-based thing."

These results support the current literature that shows performance is a significant factor in leadership's consideration of who is promotable within the organization (Beehr et al., 2004; Bjorkman et al., 2013; Gurbuz & Ayhan, 2017; Gurbuz et al., 2016; Jawahar & Ferris, 2011; Webster & Beehr, 2013). The employee perception of their organization's requirements for a promotion is critical, as performance-based promotability channels are more likely to be related to promotional justice, whereas nonperformance-based promotability channels would be negatively related to promotional justice (Webster & Beehr, 2013). The results of this study pave the way for additional research to examine at a deeper level whether employees equate performance-based promotability requirements in nonprofit organizations to promotional justice.

#### **Theme 4: Perception of Performance Reviews**

The fourth theme emerged when asking participants their perception of performance reviews within their nonprofit organization. The following constituents emerged: high value placed on receiving feedback, and feelings that reviews were unmemorable. Performance reviews are an opportunity for leaders to communicate goals, expectations, and opportunity for advancement within the organization. All participants

communicated an expectation of feedback from their leader, whether it was related to performance, recognizing strengths, or communicating goals. P8 shared her views, stating,

I think definitely to recognize good work or improvement, but also if you're lacking in any certain area or could improve, then they're also great for that, for constructive criticism or for, like I said, just for doing a great job, I guess.

P3 revealed,

I think that it should be to recognize your strengths, but also point out any areas where you might need improvements. That your supervisor can bring to your attention, areas that you may be lacking, so that they can help you work on that area, to improve your overall performance.

P6 noted,

So, I would think it's always by acknowledging the skills of that person, what they've done and how they've handled the situation. Always good customer service, of course. Especially when you're working with healthcare, you're dealing with people every single day, just how they handle the situation. So I think that plays a big role in that.

P1 also spoke about the expectation of feedback on performance, stating,

Um, definitely to give me feedback on how my performance is, as a nurse during the year what have I done well, and what she thinks I need to improve on. Um, so again tying back in with those performance, um, the yearly goals, um how if I have met them or not.

She went on to add that she also expects her leader to communicate goals and performance expectations, “I expect her to go over what are my goals, and have I met my goals, and if I have not what she can do and I can do to help further those goals,” and then added that she is also interested in learning about the organization’s goals as well:

I definitely wanna know how we're performing as a hospital. Um, if we've met or if we haven't met those goals that the hospital has set, and kind of what the plan is if we haven't met those goals.

The perception of the performance review process can be indicative of the employee’s perception of the organization’s HRM processes. Nonprofit organizations face unique challenges compared to their for-profit counterparts, many of which revolve around HRM. A study by Boyne et al. (1999) compared HRM practices between nonprofit and for-profit organizations and found that there was less support in nonprofit organizations for HRM practices that linked rewards to the employee’s contribution to the organization, specifically with regard to performance and productivity. The findings of this study are important as they suggest that nonprofit employees feel strongly that performance should be an acknowledged factor when evaluating employees. If an employee does not feel that they are being acknowledged and/or rewarded for their work performance, there is potential for the employee to develop and exhibit negative attitudes or behaviors within the organization (Webster & Beehr, 2013).

#### **Theme 5: Negative Perceptions of Leader**

The main constituents supporting this theme were: feelings that leader was not invested and perception that leader was not available. There were three participants who

expressed negative perceptions in relation to their leader or direct supervisor. P9 did not view his supervisor as the resource to go to for help or questions, stating, “I personally ... didn’t feel as my two supervisors as my boss, even though they are. I think I always turned a lot more towards the volunteer program manager and not the two co-directors we have in my organization.” P2 talked about how there were no set times that she and her leader could meet to talk or review the days’ work, stating, “we really don’t sit down, I don’t really sit down with my manager like super often, just to touch base with what’s going on in my life, and ... my career goals, because ... things are so touch and go.” According to P5, supervisors at each location were there not to oversee the crisis workers work, but acted more as coordinators, stating “It’s crisis workers, such as myself, and then it’s the service ... Is it a coordinator? It’s like a coordinator. Basically, the supervisor.” She went on to explain that the supervisor position is “just overseeing the schedule, any call outs and stuff like that.”

A few of the participants commented on the lack of interaction that they have with their direct leader. Lack of interaction between an employee and their leader can result in limited communication, potentially creating negative perceptions as communication in an organization is essential to promote trust between leader and employee and create awareness of organizational goals and leader performance expectations (Verghese, 2017). An employee who perceives that they cannot communicate with their leader may exhibit negative emotions, behaviors, and even perceive a breach of the psychological contract (Baluch, 2017; Vough & Caza, 2017). Understanding the importance of employee-leader

interaction and communication is essential to preventing unwanted or unintended negative perceptions.

### **Theme 6: Negative Perceptions of Organization**

Theme 6 was based on the constituent “perception that employees are not valued.” Some participants felt their organization did not value their employees. P9 talked about how he felt that his team was “forgotten” about. Employees who feel that they are not valued, or even identified as having the potential to advance, can make them less likely to accept additional tasks outside their defined job or role, less committed to the organization and mission, and can increase turnover (Bjorkman et al., 2013).

Another way that many organizations indicate that they value their employees is through market competitive wages or salaries. Three of the participants, however, discussed the low pay at their nonprofit organizations. P5 stated that her organization was “one of the lower paying crisis centers,” and that even when they changed her title, “they changed it, so they don’t have to up the pay.” P4 admitted that she and another coworker had to work two jobs, saying “I actually make more money, because I have a second job ... and my other co-worker ... we both also work somewhere else to make more money.” P7 went on to add:

One thing I don’t care for is that we are ranked in that same pay scale with the counselor, even though we do have to maintain our licensure. And we’re required to have much more education and carrying liability insurance. So, I mean, definitely our roles are much more intensive, and I don’t think we’re necessarily compensated for that.



Under SET, employees view compensation as an extrinsic reward that, when received, can lead to the employee reciprocating in a positive way (e.g., increased engagement, dedication). An employee who feels that the reward (i.e., salary) is not commensurate with social exchange of their time and work commitment may feel resentful, possibly leading to negative behaviors within the organization.

Nonprofits face specific challenges compared to their for-profit counterparts, including HRM, unstructured processes, and limited access to resources or funds (Baluch, 2017). These issues were reflected in participants' comments, specifically related to resource management and lower pay. These challenges can lead to issues in effective communication, including providing expectations, feedback, and successful acknowledgement of an employee's work. This lack of communication creates a barrier between employees and their leaders, and distances the employee from the organizational mission, which can lead to lack of commitment, drive, and, ultimately, turnover (Baluch, 2017; Vough & Caza, 2017).

### **Theme 7: Negative Perception of Promotability**

Many of the participants noted negative perceptions of promotability practices within their organization. Among those who had a negative perception, problems with availability of resources related to promotability, inefficiencies in communication, lack of structure regarding promotability, and lack of opportunities for promotion were noted. P2 did not feel that promotability was a focus of the organization at all, stating,

I don't think there's that much focus on promotability, there's more focus on improving our unit. There's more focus on improving the actual like, just our

practice in general, like not necessarily us individually. Definitely, I don't think that's a big focus.

One participant commented that their department was more focused on relationships versus performance when it came to promotability. P3 noted that individuals were promoted based on who they knew, not how well they performed, saying "honestly ... in the twelve years that I've been there, it's always been who you know, not how your work is." Another participant, P5, felt that promotions were not even considered for employees in their specific role, stating, "I honestly don't think they really look at promotion like that within the crisis workers. I feel like they look at promotions within the administrators and for themselves." P5 also went on to confess that she felt her organization was "one of the lower paying crisis centers," adding "Even when they just recently, they changed the title for the crisis worker, but they changed it so they don't have to up the pay."

Participants who viewed the promotability process within their organization as lacking attributed this to limited resources, no opportunity for growth, promotions based on favoritism, lack of organizational focus on promotability, inefficient and unorganized promotability procedures, and negative personal experiences with the promotability process. One of the participants (P9) noted that not only did they have a negative experience with promotability, but they felt that they were treated as though they had no worth to the organization, "I just felt like there was absolutely no worth in me with how I was treated." A study completed by Huang (2016) examined how networking could potentially impact an employee's promotability within their organization. The study

found that out of five career-based networking behaviors examined, maintaining contacts and participating in professional activities were positively related to promotability.

A negative perception of the promotability process, or aspects of promotability, can have serious downstream effects on the employee's attitudes and behaviors (Webster & Beehr, 2013). Negative perceptions can result in the employee becoming unmotivated, which can directly affect their work output and subsequently put the organization at risk for not achieving its goals (Misuko, 2012). It is, therefore, important that nonprofits understand the cause and effect relationship between negative employee perceptions of promotability and employee organizational behavior.

#### **Theme 8: Positive Perceptions of Leader**

The next theme emerged from positive perceptions communicated by participants as related to their leader. The contributing constituent was that the participant perceives leader is engaged. P1 discussed her perception and relationship with her manager, stating,

My, the manager that I currently have is the sweetest manager I've ever had, and so supportive. She is always very engaging, um, and she is always pushing us to find out what our goals are, um, our professional goals, and how she can help us to achieve those goals.

P1 acknowledged that her manger had recently approved her to join a nursing advancement program and was one of the participants who felt that the promotability process in her organization was a focus and successful. Another participant discussed the relationship she had with her leader:

Well, I'll tell you what, my boss ... who is really a great friend of mine. And I think it's because of where I came from. I was a mom. So, for her, she feels like whatever I do is invaluable, only because I'm coming from the experience, and I can truly relate. Of course, because we're friends, there is, not that she does this out of meanness, but she'll be like, "That was ..." But we're very honest with each other. (P4)

The relationship an employee has with their leader is critical. Low-cost-high-reward employee-leader relationship can impact the employee's perception, as those relationships with the highest reward and lowest cost to the employee have the most significant impact on employees (Miller, 2017). Positive perceptions of a leader can lead to positive behaviors, such as increased commitment, attitude, and an increased desire to achieve organizational goals (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Webster & Beehr, 2013). As such, these relationships are essential and an important part of HRM.

### **Theme 9: Positive Perceptions of Organization**

Theme nine was based on the following constituents: perception that organization is supportive of advancing skills and education and feels that organization communicates resources available successfully. As nonprofit organizations face certain challenges compared to for-profits, it is important to understand the employee perception of whether the organization is successfully managing their HR, communication, and advancement processes. Research has suggested that by adopting successful HRM processes, organizations can improve their performance and, subsequently, development of employees (Rodwell & Teo, 2004).

A few participants commented on the support they perceived their organization offered, whether it was towards promotability or skill advancement and education. P8 mentioned that her boss “definitely made that clear to us that education is extremely important as well as your job.” P5 talked about the different programs her company offered, “You have all these different programs, which are really good. They have mobile crisis, they have the forensic team, they have the crisis center.” P6 also confirmed that her organization had educational classes:

It’s a teaching hospital, so they’re always giving you information about positions. Some of them even offer classes, they’ve actually offered a few classes. So, if you’re not sure on something, they’ll teach you definitely about it. But yeah, they always have opportunity to fall back on, in case you’re not sure on something. But they’ll definitely give you the opportunity throughout the facility to learn.

Explained by SCT, having resources available to employees can affect the employee’s perception of their LC. An employee who perceives that their organization provides the support to advance through education, classes, skill enhancement, and formal training may lead to strengthening an employee’s internal LC as they will perceive that the tools they need to grow and move up are available to them when needed. This is significant, as studies have shown that employees with an internal LC tend to be more satisfied within the organization than those with an external LC (G. J. Blau, 1987).

**Theme 10: Positive Perceptions of Promotability**

The last theme was based on two constituents: perception that organization's promotability process is successful and perception that promotability is a focus. A few participants acknowledged that their organizations did look to promote from within. P8 felt that promotability was successful in her organization because leadership were intent on hiring from within, adding "in my department ... that's definitely something that we look into ... and we try to promote." P1 talked about how her organization has resources dedicated to promotability, and that "they have a section as well that we can reach out to if we have any questions regarding those positions."

The organization's promotability process affects each employee differently. Understanding the employee's unique perception of whether and which aspects of the promotability process are successful has a direct link to the employee's subsequent attitudes and behaviors. Perceptions of the internal promotability processes and structure can have a considerable effect on an employee's attitude and behavior (Albin et al., 2018; Beehr et al., 2004). A positive perception can lead to enhanced commitment and engagement; therefore, it is essential to understand the perception and, if positive, to foster it in order to retain and grow the employee within the organization.

**Theoretical Frameworks****Social Exchange Theory**

SET is used to understand workplace behavior by looking at how individuals determine the value of social relationships based on how much work they invest versus the reward they will receive (Webster & Beehr, 2013). In other words, SET can explain

how an employee's perception of promotability may affect their workplace behavior. For example, an employee who feels that their work (output) is acknowledged, appreciated, and rewarded (e.g., bonus or promotion) may in turn have a positive approach to their workplace behavior, including enhanced workplace commitment and a higher likelihood of accepting additional assignments. Many of the participants in the study described the commitment and dedication they felt toward their role in the organization. Rewards for their hard work came in all forms, including caring for their families and patients they served, acknowledgment from their leader(s), promotions, or additional responsibilities in their role, raises, and advancement programs:

Some people want to leave their work at work, and they don't want to talk about it again. But unfortunately, I think because of the nature of who we serve, those feelings stay with you, and it's heavy on my mind. A mom posted something earlier about her daughter, and I called her and I was like, "I'm here for you. Let's talk." And it's not good news. And so, I think to myself, "If she calls me at 10 o'clock tonight, I'm going to answer the phone. I'm going to talk to her." And in 2011, I got laid off. We all did. ... so, I told my boss, I claimed unemployment and I kept working, and I never stopped. And then, the following year, we did a fundraiser, and I was able to get rehired in March. I was still working, because I love this, and I can't see doing anything else. (P4)

Adding to that, P1 stated,

And, so, one of the goals that I have for this year is to join the PNAP, which stands for Professional Nursing Advancement Program, and I am actually doing

that right now, and she's signed off on all that paperwork for me to join that program today.

P6 noted,

But actually, when I first started ... I was just urgent care alone. That was the only thing that I knew. But then they had offered a position where they needed help with vaccines or just like help staff pretty much in the morning. So, in the morning, they hired me as a Par P for PCP and then in the morning and then I would transition into urgent care.

Other employees, however, spoke about additional responsibilities added to their roles that were not compensated. This is an example of when an employee perceived that their work output was greater than the reward, which could potentially result in negative workplace behaviors, such as loss of motivation, lack of organizational commitment, and even turnover. For example,

So, I guess ... one thing I don't care for is that we are ranked in that same pay scale with the counselor, even though we do have to maintain our licensure. And we're required to have much more education and carrying liability insurance. So, I mean, definitely our roles are much more intensive, and I don't think we're necessarily compensated for that. (P7)

And P5 said,

Even when they just recently, they changed the title for the crisis worker, but they changed it so they don't have to up the pay. I think when the job has good promotability, you're also looking at how can it benefit your employees that have



been there for so long that are dedicated, and also how can you financially help them, because we do need money to take care of our family.

SET explains how the relationship between an employee and their leader, also known as the LMX, can affect the employee's perceptions within the organization and subsequently their attitude and behavior (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Jepsen & Rodwell, 2010; Webster & Beehr, 2013; Xu, Loi, & Ngo, 2016). LMX can affect how a leader assesses an employee for promotability, a decision that can, in turn, affect the employee's perception of the organization. Most of the participants commented that they felt they had a good relationship with their leader and felt their leader acknowledged their hard work. For example, P1 said, "My manager ... is always very engaging ... always pushing us to find out what our goals are ... and how she can help us to achieve those goals." P5 mentioned, "My supervisor, she does really good at ... acknowledging work that you do." And, finally, P3 stated,

I had one where my supervisor's supervisor wrote a comment about how he really appreciated that I went above and beyond, and how I worked really well with my other employees, and how I helped all the trainees feel really comfortable. And that really stood out to me, because I felt like he really paid attention to me as a person, and my personal performance, and not just the numbers as far as call volumes and stuff like that.

There was one participant who felt that they were not able to meet with their leader very often and only had their performance review as the time when they could talk about their performance:

I don't really sit down with my manager like super often, to just touch base with what's going on in my life, and like, my career goals, because like they ... things are so touch and go. She works four nights a week, and I work three nights a week, and so there's so weeks where I literally don't see her regularly. (P2)

Another participant did not feel that they could look to their immediate leader for direction:

being the assistant to the volunteer program, I kind of looked at the volunteer program manager as my boss specifically ... I just kind of focused on her feedback to me, or her and I just were very tight-knit collaborative that I personally in my head didn't feel as my two supervisors as my boss, even though they are. I know that probably sounds bad, but just when it comes to feedback or reviews, I think I always turned a lot more towards the volunteer program manager and not the two co-directors we have in my organization. (P9)

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

SCT examines the impact that social influence (e.g., employee/leader interactions) has on external and internal social reinforcement (e.g., positive performance review, bonus). The central concepts of SCT that were the focus of this study were self-efficacy and LC. Self-efficacy looks at an individual's confidence in their ability to perform a specific task based on their perception of their own skill set, capabilities, and knowledge (LaMorte, 2016). LC refers to an individual's perception of whether they have control over rewards (e.g., promotion) in their life. For example, an individual who believes rewards are within their control, based on their choices and actions, has an internal LC;

an individual who believes their rewards are not in their control, determined instead by outside influences, has an external LC (Domino et al, 2015). A few of the participants relayed experiences that indicated an internal LC. For example, P4 attributed their raise directly to their work output and took the initiative to ask for it, which indicated that they felt that they were in control of their rewards:

But now, my fifth year coming in with a third board president, I said, I'd really like a raise this year, a real raise, not a \$35 a month raise. And I think I've done a great job, because I know the families, I'm the link between them and the families. And I said to them, I don't want you to feel like I'm ungrateful, but I also want you to understand that I know my worth. And I know that these families, I make them feel comfortable enough to where they are doing the things that you ask them to do, because I've asked them to.

P7 also indicated an internal LC by relaying an experience where they requested additional resources from their leader:

So, this last year, I mean, I was super overwhelmed and swamped with the kids, and after kind of recording that and collecting data on my boss was able to get an additional position.”

The participant understood that in order to receive the reward of a new position, they had to take control and provide the needed data as justification for it. There were also participants whose experiences indicated an external LC. For example, P2 felt that because of the way their organization structured their promotions, there was no incentive or level of control they had that would affect the outcome:

I don't like that my institution does it by years. So, I feel like since they took that away like there's no incentive for me to go back [to school]. There's nothing pushing me besides like, me bettering myself to get a raise. So, I feel like there's no real like, there's no small goal for me. There's like, I can do these little things, but why would I? When I'm not going to be promoted yet.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The interviews ranged from 17 to 40 minutes. All questions and prompts from the interview guide were covered; however, it is possible that the shorter interviews may have posed a risk to the data collection and, ultimately, to the analysis and interpretation, as the participants may not have had sufficient time to share the full extent of their experience. Another potential limitation was the risk of non-response bias as a result of recruiting individuals on social media such that individuals who do not have social media or LinkedIn accounts, who otherwise would have met the study's criteria, had no opportunity to participate. Additionally, while the participants in this study represented a variety of roles, including clinical and administrative support, roles that fell into categories such as engineering, environmental services, or food preparation were not represented here. As a result, the scope of experiences as related to promotability within nonprofit organizations was limited. This limitation impacted the generalizability of the study. Generalization of qualitative research is focused on representing the phenomenon in all its dimensionality through the lived experiences of the participants (Osbeck & Antczak, 2021). Generalizability is established through diversity or variations observed related to the phenomenon being studied (Osbeck & Antczak, 2021). Due to the limited

roles captured within the participant sample, the diversity or variations of experiences related to promotability was significantly narrowed. Purposeful sampling was engaged for this study which required that I recruit only participants that met specific inclusion criteria. The results of this recruitment garnered participants from only four states (Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Texas). The limited geographical representation within the participant sample limits the generalizability of the study as different parts of the country may have different cultural and societal views on work ethic and subsequently promotability.

### **Recommendations**

The results support the SCT and SET that informed this study by providing experiences that illustrate the influence of both internal and external LC, the application of self-efficacy informed by SCT, and the value of employee and leader relationships as described by SET. Participants' responses were consistent with research indicating that negative experiences with and perceptions of promotability can affect employee attitudes and/or behavior (Burnett et al., 2009; Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Webster & Beehr, 2013; Vough & Caza, 2017). The data also provided opportunities for future research to expand the literature.

One opportunity for future research pertains to the context in which promotability decisions are made. One participant commented that their organization was more focused on employee relationships than their performance, stating that in all the time they have been employed at their organization "it's always been who you know, not how your work is." A study by Huang (2016) found that maintaining contacts and participating in

professional activities was positively associated with promotability. There is room for additional research in this area, to determine if career-based networking behaviors affect promotability decisions specifically in nonprofit organizations.

Another opportunity for future research might address how being identified as talent can affect an employee's perception of the organization. For example, P1 commented that their leader was very good at identifying their talents and encouraging them to set and achieve specific goals. P1 also mentioned that one of their goals was to be accepted into an advancement program within their organization and had just received word that they had. P1 also mentioned that an expectation of their performance review was to understand the organization's goals, whether or not those goals have been met, and what the plan was to meet them. This shows interest in how the organization is performing as well as commitment to understanding how those goals are going to be achieved. This is consistent with Bjorkman et al. (2013) who found that employees formally identified as talent in the organization were more likely to accept additional responsibilities and had lower turnover. There are a few opportunities here for future research to understand whether nonprofit employees who have been identified as talent show increased interest and commitment to organizational performance than employees who have (a) not been formally identified as talent and (b) employees who have been turned down for a promotion.

### **Implications**

Findings from this study have implications for positive social change at an individual as well as an organizational level. Organizations who understand the

importance of their employees' perceptions of processes, specifically those related to promotability, stand to gain immense insight into how those perceptions can positively or negatively impact their employees' decisions, attitudes, and behaviors. There is research indicating that employee satisfaction is influenced by an employee's perception of HR processes (Piening et al., 2014). There is also research indicating that employees who have negative perceptions of their organization may in turn display negative attitudes, behaviors, lack of engagement, and motivation (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Webster & Beehr, 2013).

Participants in this study expressed both positive and negative perceptions, though most were negative. These negative perceptions were attributed to insufficient communication processes, lack of resources, and unfair/unstructured decision-making procedures. Many of the participants expressed a lack of motivation to better themselves, to obtain a promotion because their organization either had a set-schedule (e.g., promotions based only on years of service) or their organization did not provide opportunities for advancement (e.g., promotions focused on specific roles), and their organization did not have clear communication, announcements, or resources dedicated to disseminating promotion procedures and/or opportunities.

The results of this study provide real-world examples of how employees in nonprofit organizations perceive their organization's promotability procedures. Organizations that understand the implication of these perceptions allows them the opportunity to adjust their current processes to create clearer, more streamlined communication. This adjustment and improvement of communication and promotability

processes may lead to improved employee perceptions, and consequently, improved attitudes, behaviors, commitment, motivation, and decreased turnover rates. Decreased turnover saves organizations money that would otherwise be used for recruitment to backfill employees. Retaining talent also allows organizations to strengthen their employees' skillset and knowledge base, increasing employees' value to the organization. This also increases the opportunities for internal promotion, which can benefit employees who have the desire and motivation to continue to grow within their organization.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides insight into the perception of promotability among non-managerial employees. It extends the current literature, which is primarily focused on the impact of promotions on employees, by exploring employees' perceptions of promotions and promotability who have not received promotions from their current organization. This study went further by narrowing the scope to look at these perceptions within nonprofit organizations as they face unique challenges compared to their for-profit counterparts, including limited access to resources and under-developed HR processes.

Most of the participants acknowledged that limited resources, funds, lacking HR structure, and disorganized communication contributed directly to the deficient promotability processes perceived in their respective nonprofit organizations. This study also illustrated that while employees may have a positive perception of their leadership and performance review process, they were still able to separate those perceptions from their perception of the promotability process. As a result, the results of this study revealed an overall negative perception of promotability among all participants.



Negative employee perceptions can lead to decreased commitment and motivation, negative attitude, behavior, and eventually turnover (Burnett et al., 2009; Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Webster & Beehr, 2013; Vough & Caza, 2017). The HR department is the core of the organization when looking to retain and promote employees (Misuko, 2012). Organizations who invest in their HR department to create and maintain effective and efficient communication and procedures to support the promotion of internal talent can facilitate the strengthening of employee engagement within the organization (Misuko, 2012). It is essential for employees to understand what behaviors are valued to reduce employee misperceptions of their worth to the organization (Baluch, 2017).

Understanding the employee perception of promotability in the nonprofit sector provides opportunities to identify, diagnose, and improve inefficient organizational processes that could result in negative perceptions, leading to employees exhibiting negative behaviors, decreased commitment and motivation, and eventually voluntary resignation from the organization. Nonprofit organizations face unique challenges and are more reliant on their employees to do more with less. It is, therefore, essential that nonprofits invest in their employees not only to retain, but to enhance, strengthen, and promote their internal talent. Satisfied employees and successful nonprofits have the potential to benefit themselves and will benefit the communities they serve.



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## Appendix: Interview Guide

### 1. Work History

- Please describe your current role in your organization and what you do.

### 2. Employee Experience

- What has been your experience with promotions and promotability in your current organization?
- What has been your experience with promotions and promotability in your any previous nonprofit organizations you have worked for (if applicable)?
- What are your expectations for performance reviews?
  - i. Prompt: What do you think the purpose of performance reviews is?
- Have you ever received a promotion before?
  - i. If yes, tell me about that experience.

### 3. Employee Perception

- How would you define the term promotability?
  - i. Prompt: What do you think of when you hear the term promotability? What does that word mean to you?
- What do you feel should be required in order to receive a promotion?
- Describe your views on whether or not you think it is important to develop and improve your skills sets in order to receive a promotion
- Do you think promotions are something you can control? Why or why not?

- What is your perception of what your organization requires in order to promote an employee?
- If you worked toward a promotion and did not initially receive it, how would you feel?
- What is your perception overall of the promotability process in your organization?
- What is your perception of the way promotability is communicated in your organization?
- Describe your perception of how your organization prioritizes promotability.
- Describe resources in your organization dedicated to help employees and their promotability?
- Do you feel that your organization promotes employees fairly? Why or why not?
- Do you think promotability in your organization is currently successful or not successful? Why do you feel that way?
- Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not already discussed?