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Communication Strategies to Enhance Productivity for Virtual Advertising Account Executives

Gregory Scott Christman
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Gregory Scott Christman

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Communication Strategies to Enhance Productivity for Virtual Advertising Account

Executives

by

Gregory Scott Christman

MBA, Strayer University and the Jack Welch Management Institute, 2013

BS, Oklahoma State University, 1975

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2022

Abstract

Significant communication challenges experienced by leaders in managing virtual

dispersed teams can hinder production schedules, completion timelines, and service to

stakeholders. Grounded in situational leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative

single case study was to explore communication strategies three online automotive

managers used to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity in

California, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Data were collected from semistructured

interviews and a review of organizational documents, including performance reports, and

were interpreted using thematic analysis. The three primary themes that emerged were (a)

accountability, (b) leadership communication and engagement practices, and (c)

leadership role in virtual teams. A key recommendation for virtual leaders is to

implement communication strategies that support and train virtual leaders in defining

their roles. The implications for positive social change include the potential to provide

opportunities for community members to become employed at organizations globally

while contributing to the local tax base.

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Dedication

I am dedicating the successful completion of my Doctor of Business

Administration degree to my late mom and dad, Gloria and Ted Christman. Their tireless

support and direction of me at a young age helped form the values, ethics, and fortitude

that guide me today. Mom and Dad gave me the will and desire to reach for anything that

I dedicated my mind, body, and soul to. Mom and Dad taught me never to blame others

but to credit these individuals for any success that I achieved. Earning a Master of

Business Administration degree and then taking the deep dive to pursue and complete my

Doctor of Business Administration degree is an achievement that I would never have

thought possible a few years ago. I recognize just how fortunate I was to have Ted and

Gloria as my parents.

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I want to acknowledge my best friend in life, Joni, for giving me the time to complete my terminal degree successfully. We laughed every day, which was so crucial in achieving my goal. You believed in me, which gave me the strength to keep pushing forward. Taylor (my daughter) and the rest of my family, thank you for always asking how I was doing and offering encouragement and understanding regarding what I was working to accomplish. Taylor, you are an incredible woman in all that you do. To my doctoral chair, Dr. Gwendolyn Dooley, I am so blessed that you came into my life and demonstrated patience in giving me direction and defining a path for success. Dr. Dooley, you made this journey about us, leaning into me to where I was at any given moment. Your guidance will always be remembered and used with others who I may be fortunate enough to mentor.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Virtual teams in organizations have continued to grow exponentially. A survey of virtual teams in 2016 found that 85% of the corporate respondents in the U.S. work in virtual teams (Hacker et al., 2019). Organizational leaders consider virtual teams an essential work system for companies to achieve their goals. Although it may seem easy for companies and their leadership to set up virtual teams, it is more challenging to lead virtual teams (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Leaders in virtual teams must adjust their corporation's structure to become less hierarchical to remain competitive (Contreras, 2020). Virtual team leaders have continued to examine and learn new methods and techniques to develop their teams. Although there are challenges related to ongoing changes in digital technology (Cortellazzo et al., 2019), virtual teams have become a part of the physical nature of teams and the organizations they represent.

The concept of virtual teams holds excellent promise, although challenges remain. The team configuration may accomplish positive outcomes like swift product development and improved networking that collocated teams cannot (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). One of the virtual team structure fundamentals is communication, a strategic team performance indicator (Sonmez Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020). Virtual leaders are pivotal in the virtual team's performance due to their virtual communication participation with team members (Gilson et al., 2015). Leadership influences communication in tasks and builds relationships critical to success (Liao, 2017). One of the fundamental competencies that leaders must learn is building high trust levels at all team levels. Virtual teams with substantial autonomy demonstrate superior trust versus weak independence (Choi & Cho,

2018). In this study, I explored communication strategies that virtual leaders use to maintain and enhance the productivity of their virtual sales teams.

Background of the Problem

Business leaders began to introduce work teams in the 1960s. In the 1980s, the team structure morphed into the total quality management movement (Ebrahirm et al., 2009). By the mid-1990s, an increasing number of companies, such as Goodyear, General Electric, and Motorola, began to export the team concept globally (Ebrahirm et al., 2009). In the 21st-century, communication technology offers leaders and organizations global resources and the capacity to function anywhere in the world. The concept of virtual teams also presents several different challenges. One of the significant challenges is how to lead geographically dispersed teams. There is a need for studies on different leadership styles in virtual teams (Batirlik et al., 2022).The leadership in organizations has continued to evolve from leading traditional collocated work structures to a virtual team dynamic that operates across time, space, and distance. The reliance on virtual teams and the leader's ability to bring together knowledgeable workers, combined with their agility in making the best decisions, has driven the realignment of conventional, hierarchical team structures (Jimenez et al., 2017). E-leadership must consolidate and effectively lead virtual teams and achieve and exceed the objectives defined by the organizational hierarchy (Contreras et al., 2020). The business problem is the disconnect in how leaders communicate strategies that motivate virtual workers to maintain and enhance productivity.

Advances in technology have made it easier to connect with virtual teams.

Miscommunication between leaders and their teams using electronic communication may, however, create roadblocks for leaders and their followers (Arendt et al., 2019)). Virtual teams also continue to have challenges stemming from trust-related issues among the organization's members (Owens & Khazanchi, 2017). Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020) suggested that miscommunication between team members may also cause barriers and untimely work assignments. Trust is considered leadership. Unity and enabling team empowerment is vital to the success of virtual teams(Garro-Abarca et al., 2021). The issue of trust is a reliable indicator of the performance of virtual teams.

The relationship between trust and performance suggests that there are opportunities for additional study (Guinot & Chiva, 2019). Virtual team leaders must develop a unique leadership skill that fosters team cohesion in building a highly functional virtual team (Liao, 2017). The level of success in organizational achievement depends on the unique development and training of virtual leaders in trust, emotional intelligence, and respectful communication between all parties up and down organizations (Alward & Phelps, 2019). Competencies for the leaders of virtual teams must include a working knowledge of individual team functions based on distinct team roles, comfort levels, and skill set evaluation (Zeuge et al., 2020). Understanding the core competencies needed for virtual leadership effectiveness is vital to the leader's success and virtual teams.

Problem Statement

Amid the growth of virtual teams, many leaders struggle to effectively lead their followers. Problems include formalizing virtual teamwork processes and communication

strategies (Mehtab et al., 2017). A lack of trust often impacts communication and decreases productivity between leaders and virtual teams (Humala, 2017). Trust has a vital role in and positive influence on virtual team performance (Gardner et al., 2020). Verbal communication constitutes only 45% of communication (Savu, 2019). The centrality of nonverbal communication to meaning making can thus be problematic for virtual teams. The general business problem is that managing a virtual workforce requires further communication and leadership strategies to achieve organizational outcomes. The specific business problem was that some online automotive managers lack communication strategies to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive single case study was to explore the communication strategies that some online automotive managers in one organization used to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity. The target population was three virtual leaders located at the same organization in the United States who had experienced success in leading virtual sales teams in the online automotive industry. Identification of their strategies for achieving success could be useful to other team leaders wanting to increase team and organizational performance metrics. A positive social change could be more motivated employees who have greater job satisfaction and less employee turnover. Satisfied workers may potentially create a better standard of living for themselves, their families, and their communities. Employees are more willing to make greater efforts for an employer that genuinely promotes for the greater good of

the community (Tonin, 2020). Motivated employees are more eager to support social responsibilities outside the home to support their communities.

Nature of the Study

The chosen method for this study was qualitative. The qualitative method was appropriate for exploring leaders' specific communications strategies to maintain the high productivity of virtual sales teams. Researchers can gain significant insights and understand a phenomenon using the qualitative method. Qualitative theorists believe in multiple potential realities and use inductive theorizing to understand a phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2016). A researcher selects the qualitative method to explore a social phenomenon in depth (Moalusi, 2020). The qualitative method was thus appropriate to elicit detailed descriptions of communication strategies used by leaders with virtual teams.

Researchers use the quantitative method to analyze statistical relationships among variables or characteristics (Marshall & Rossman, 2016. I rejected the quantitative method because answering the research question did not require explaining the features of or relationships among study variables. Mixed-methods research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods; researchers use it to address the strengths and weaknesses of each method (Regnault et al., 2018). Mixed-methods research was not appropriate for this study because there was no need to examine the characteristics of study variables or investigate differences among groups. Therefore, the qualitative method was appropriate for addressing the descriptive research question in this study.

The chosen research design for this study was a single case study. Yin (2018)

argued that a single case study is similar to a single experiment to include similar conditions that justify using a single case study. The single case study is better than a multiple case design when the study focus is on a particular organization or a defined group (Yin, 2018), as was the case in this research. I considered the phenomenological design but determined that the design was not appropriate as I was not attempting to describe the personal meanings of participants' lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). An ethnographic design was also not appropriate for this research because there was no focus on studying human beings and their social relationships to characterize a group's culture (Black, 2021). For these reasons, I used a single case study design to explore the participants' strategies to motivate their specific virtual sales teams.

Research Question

What are the communication strategies that some online automotive managers use to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity?

Interview Questions

The 10 interview questions were as follows:

1. What communication strategies did you use in developing trust with the goal of maintaining productivity?

2. What communications strategies did you use to assess the productivity of the virtual sales team members?

3. What communication strategies did you use with virtual sales team members who were not maintaining productivity?

4. What communication strategies did you implement to validate that everyone

on your virtual sales team had a working knowledge of maintaining productivity?

5. What communication strategies did you use with virtual sales team members to exceed expectations and maintain productivity?

6. What communication strategies were least effective in motivating virtual sales team members to maintain productivity?

7. What communication strategies did you use to follow up with virtual sales team members for maintaining productivity?

8. What communication strategies did you use to reduce risks and uncertainty in maintaining your virtual teams' productivity?

9. What communication strategies, if any, did you use to manage disputes between what you, as a leader, have defined as acceptable methods of maintaining productivity and what your virtual sales teams think is fair?

10. What additional information about communication strategies you use to maintain your virtual sales teams' productivity would you like to share that we did not address in this interview?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study was the situational leadership model by Hersey and Blanchard (1969). The situational leadership model proposes a partnership based on a leader's working knowledge of the individual's developmental needs (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Hersey and Blanchard (1997) suggested that elite leaders select the best leadership style based on their followers' ability to respond effectively to different

situations. Leaders must have the core competency to assess the problem and then apply the correct style to address it (Hersey & Blanchard, 1981). The four situational styles are (a) telling, (b) selling, (c) participating, and (d) delegating (Henkel & Bourdeau, 2018). The key to a leader and follower relationship's success is that the leaders must also know that the follower is ready and willing to take on the task assigned (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). Situational leadership offers leaders the correct management practices and leadership qualities to effectively attain organizational goals (Islam et al., 2021). The situational leadership model aligned with this study's purpose by providing a lens to explore and understand the various communication strategies and practices that virtual leaders used in motivating their virtual sales teams to maintain productivity.

Operational Definitions

I use the following terms and phrases throughout this doctoral study. The identified terms and definitions are necessary for developing a working knowledge of the conceptual framework and research topic.

Communication standards: As applied to virtual teams, standards that emphasize the suitable exchange of information, continuous follow-up, and interaction, combined with less vagueness, better measurement processes, and faster response times, to ensure team success (Cortellazzo et al., 2019).

Communication strategies: The usage of various communication tools to avoid miscommunication; the tools should align with the defined work (Gilson et al., 2015).

Leadership: The influence that one or more individuals have over their followers (Kumar, 2018).

Situational leadership theory: A theory that emphasizes employees' task and relationship behavior as well as the team's current readiness related to a specific task or project (Hersey & Blanchard, 2013).

Virtual team leadership: Management of a specified number of followers who are distributed across multiple geographic locations (Batirlik et al., 2022).

Virtual teams: A dispersed team of employees who use computer-aided technology to interact independently across space, time, and organizational boundaries (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017).

Virtual team trust: A belief shared by all team members when addressing the team members' hesitation and exposure to a specific item of discussion (Choi & Cho, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are the unverified thoughts of a researcher. Assumptions are presumed to be accurate at the study's outset, although the actual outcome of the study may not be correct under any circumstance (Yin, 2018). One of my assumptions was that the study participants were versed in communication strategies that enhanced their virtual teams' performance. I assumed that the participants were the best performers in terms of leading virtual sales teams in the study organization. Another assumption was that the participants would be forthright and truthful in answering each interview question. After receiving the published results, I anticipate that the participants will share the identified communication strategies with their virtual teams and other leaders. Furthermore, I assume positive social change through job performance resulting in higher earned

incomes and greater job satisfaction.

Limitations

Limitations are the weaknesses of a study. These potential vulnerabilities may be beyond the researcher's command (Theofanidis & Antigoni, 2019). One of the limitations of this study concerns the credibility and dependability of the data collected from the frontline leaders selected for the study. The frontline managers may have responded to the interview questions based on their immediate leader's direction versus offering strategies that they used when working with their team members. This case study also has limitations in terms of its sample size, which limits the transferability of the findings. Yin (2018) noted that one of the concerns of case study design is the inability to generalize or transfer the results to other venues. Interviewing the virtual leaders and not their team members is a limitation because trust is vital vertically and horizontally between leaders and followers (Choi & Cho, 2019). Interviewing the leaders and their followers would have allowed me to validate the level of trust between the leaders and their followers.

Delimitations

Delimitations relate to the decisions that the researcher makes when conceptualizing and conducting a study. Theofanidis and Antigoni (2019) defined delimitations as the study decisions that the study's researcher consciously explains. The delimitations can include the theoretical background, objectives, research questions, study variables, and sample (Theofanidis & Antigoni, 2019). The conceptual framework for this proposed study was the situational leadership model by Hersey and Blanchard (1969). The situational leadership model is a partnership based on a leader's working

knowledge of the individual's developmental needs and assigned to the leader (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). My selection of situational leadership limited the potential depth of analysis, as did other factors, including the sample size, organization type, geographic location of participants, and the data collection method. I selected the three leaders over a large geographic area, including Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Each participant was an employee of the same organization. The primary delimitations include the research question, the research design, the participants' physical location, the selection of the conceptual framework, and the population. The delimitations constituted the foundation of the study.

The three leaders participating in the study had successfully used communication strategies that helped them to maintain and increase productivity within their markets located in the United States. At the time of the study, each of the three virtual leaders worked for the most extensive online listing of automobile sales in the United States. The three leaders each had 2 or more years' experience of exceptionally successful leadership and building trust among the members of their virtual sales teams. In my interviews, I asked the same 10 questions. I conducted a qualitative single case study to explore the research question, which concerned communication strategies that virtual leaders use to enhance communication strategies to enhance their virtual teams' performance.

Significance of the Study

Virtual online automotive managers may consider the findings of this study to be of value in offering communication strategies that improve their teams' performance. Increased knowledge of multiple strategies may reduce costs and increase virtual teams'

productivity and motivation (Ji & Yan, 2020). Benefits occur in society when employees are productive, engaged, motivated, and generally satisfied with what they produce (Van Wingerden & Van der Stoep, 2018). As leaders value their employees' contributions, they may be able to achieve a transformation that spreads throughout the organization and beyond. By improving profitability, organizations' leaders may benefit local communities by increasing profits to fund educational programs and job opportunities.

Contribution to Business Practice

Virtual team leaders are searching for strategies to improve performance to maintain and increase productivity (Mehtab et al., 2017). Some virtual leaders may not fully trust that virtual teams are successful without traditional face-to-face interactions (Mehtab et al., 2017). Virtual team leaders may use this study's results as a guide in developing and motivating successful virtual teams. Implications include improved virtual sales team productivity and work performance and improved overall organizational performance.

Implications for Social Change

The study organization is a business located in all 50 U.S. states. As such, the leaders of other U.S. companies may be able to implement or adapt the study findings to maintain and grow productivity among their virtual teams. The implications for social change could be increased revenue to offer virtual sales staff employment opportunities for benefiting needy citizens. Inspired employees participate more in local events and activities than unmotivated employees (Laurent et al., 2021). Employees with higher job satisfaction levels are more motivated and less likely to become unemployed, thus

reducing unemployment rates (Dorendahl et al., 2020). Thus, the study's implications for positive social change include contributions to overall economic growth for local communities that benefits citizens and families.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive single case study was to explore the communication strategies that some online automotive managers in one organization used to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity. The research question was, What are the communication strategies that some online automotive managers use to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity? Some of the tools managers use include analysis of dealer activity reports, one-on-one teaching opportunities, and a variety of technology communications devices to motivate their sales team members (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). In reviewing the academic literature, I identified communication strategies that offer virtual leaders the best opportunity to support their teams' productivity. The literature review includes peer-reviewed articles and other sources from databases and search engines such as Emerald Management Journals, SAGE Premier, Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, and Walden University's ScholarWorks repository of dissertations. Search terms included *virtual productivity*, *virtual performance*, *leading virtual teams*, *situational leadership*, *virtual teams*, *e-leadership behaviors*, *workforce speed in decision-making*, and *trust*. The final study includes 260 references, of which 80.37% were published between 2017 and 2022.

In this literature review, I discuss the conceptual framework of situational leadership theory. The purpose of reviewing the literature was to (a) identify gaps in the

literature, (b) build my knowledge of the research topic applicable to the purpose of the study, and (c) explore communication strategies used by leaders to enhance the productivity of virtual advertising account executives. The eight main discussion topics for the literature review are virtual teams, trust in virtual teams, leadership, advantages and disadvantages, leadership, communication strategies, communication standards, emotional intelligence, and technology resources. I explore three subtopics: the origins of virtual teams, obstacles facing virtual teams, and enhancing virtual team success. The literature review sections are all linked to the research question and problem statement.

Situational Leadership Theory

Leadership is the art of bringing a group of people together to accomplish a goal. The concept of leadership has existed since people first gathered into groups to achieve shared objectives (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2018). Several researchers have sought to determine if leaders are born with specific personality traits, including intelligence, honesty, self-confidence, appearance, and energy (Henkel & Bourdeau, 2018). The trait leadership theory was the initial theory that emerged to describe leaders and what makes them successful.

Trait Leadership Theory defines a specific set of leadership characteristics (Asrar & Anwar, 2018). Extensive research indicates that leadership characteristics are wide-ranging and that no one leadership style determines organizational success (Asrar & Anwar, 2018). Because the leadership traits approach did not yield the best set of leadership attributes, researchers began to explore other alternatives based on leaders' behaviors and followers' satisfaction and performance (Henkel & Bourdeau, 2018).

Leadership style, they have found, is a significant element in determining individual and team success. Management researchers have extensively examined the different leadership styles that influence employee performance (Ghazzawi et al., 2017). The discussion of organizational leadership is a multidisciplinary field, though, and is an area of continuous interest by scholars with backgrounds focused not just on management but on sociology, political science, and organizational studies (Ghazzawi et al., 2017).

Situational leadership theory is often cited in academic literature as one of the most recognizable leadership theories and is commonly used in leadership training programs, but it is one of the least-researched views relating to leadership effectiveness (Thompson & Glaso, 2018). I drew from Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situation leadership model for this study. Hersey and Blanchard (1977) determined that successful leaders engage in the best style centered around the followers' readiness to be led. Situational leadership theory, also referred to as contingency theory of leadership, studies task and behavior relationships (Fielder, 1967). The initiating structure or task-oriented leadership is the degree to which a leader explicitly defines their team members' roles and focuses on achieving goals to include specific communication methods (Mikkelson et al., 2019). Other models address situational leadership.

According to Fielder (1967), there is no singular type of leading. Fielder argued that leaders are either task-oriented or relationship-oriented. A conclusion from the situational leadership model is that leaders should not adopt a singular leadership style. The appropriate leadership style should be directly related to the readiness of the followers.

The building of sound and transparent relationships is vital to leaders' success in the situational leadership model. Bourke and Titus (2020) suggested that relationship-oriented leaders are defined by demonstrating concern for their team and genuinely looking out for their general welfare in addition to expressing appreciation for their contribution. Task-oriented leaders, Kleefstra (2019) focus on the details to include having all tasks completed before making any decisions, included those that affect the trust and respect of their followers. Both task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership positively affects team performance (Mikkelson et al., 2019). Successful leaders must align their leadership style with the task capabilities of the team members.

The balancing of tasks and relationships is essential in leading teams. Situational leadership theory offers a balance between task behavior and relationship behavior based on the employees' or the maturity of the team's current readiness related to a specific task or project (Hersey & Blanchard, 2013). The combination of maturity and preparedness is the sum of competence, task-relevant knowledge, and skills that are easily transferred (Henkel & Bourdeau, 2018). Situational leadership theory includes four different levels of maturity and readiness.

Situational leadership consists of multiple dimensions. The first concerns employees with low-level maturity/readiness who are too new to the position or lack sufficient job knowledge, skills, and confidence by completing the task themselves (Hersey et al., 2001). Hersey and Blanchard (1969) explained that followers who might moderate maturity/readiness might also desire to execute the task but lack specific experiences and education to complete the task successfully. Next are employees or

teams with high maturity and readiness; they may have the core competency to do the work, but they lack the confidence to achieve success (Hersey et al., 2001). The final grouping of employees possesses the motivation and readiness to do the work independently, maintain high levels of confidence, commitment, and persuasive skills, and assume personal ownership of the task (Hersey & Blanchard, 2013). The opportunity for leadership success is selecting the right leadership style that aligns with the individual's or team's maturity and readiness level based on the defined situation (Felicity & Price-Dowd, 2020). Leaders' challenge is to know what style to use with employees and teams and when to do so.

There is not just one leadership style that guarantees success. As Hersey and Blanchard (1982) noted, effectively executing the four basic styles presents leaders and their team members the best opportunity to succeed. Leaders may select from four different styles when directing their employees and teams. A leader with a telling style uses a who, what, when, and how approach whereas a leader with moderate maturity/readiness uses a selling style that encourages employees or team to buy into the direction, goals, and objectives they are assigned. A leader with higher maturity/readiness levels uses a participating style to perform the tasks. Leaders use one or multiple styles when motivating individual team members but primarily depend on one style (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). Employees with high maturity and readiness only look to their leader for empowerment.

Studies have shown that leaders often possess two leadership styles, one for leading individuals and one for teams (Henkel & Bourdeau, 2018). Leaders use their

primary style to encourage a specific individual or the team. Leaders lean on their primary style as their default style when leading individual followers and the team (Hersey & Blanchard, 1974). Leaders tend to engage in one leadership style over others (Henkel & Bourdeau, 2018). Some leaders demonstrate only one leadership style with no secondary backup.

Leaders can possess more than two leadership styles. Some leaders, for instance, may use three different leadership styles that they use, depending on the individual and circumstance (Hersey & Blanchard, 2013). Hersey (2009) suggested that when a leader uses their primary or secondary leadership style, the result should be the same; to be successful, leaders must communicate expectations clearly. Leaders must validate that every employee on the team understands the goals and objectives of completing the task. Thompson and Glaso (2018) argued that when the leader and follower come together and form a "partnership for performance," agreeing on a direction that includes competencies and commitment, the opportunity for success by the follower increases substantially. Successful leaders in virtual teams effectively manage, plan, organize, and direct the principles that lead to organizational success.

Throughout history, leaders have turned to different leadership theories to manage people correctly. Ghazzzai et al. (2017) suggested that situational leadership focuses on task orientation and relationship orientation. Hersey and Blanchard (2001) argued that good leadership positively influences workers while working diligently to achieve the corporation's objectives. Although it has often been overlooked, situational leadership is an effective leadership style for motivating employees of different backgrounds, business

roles, and industries (Ghazzawi et al., 2017).

Leading in virtual teams can be different from traditional, collocated team structures. The goal in organizations is always to win, but how virtual leaders win can differ in a virtual team structure. As an example leaders in virtual teams engage more often with their team members than in collated teams (Chamakiotis, 2021).. Situational leadership theory has made positive strides in understanding the relationship between virtual leaders and team members (Thompson & Glaso, 2018). Leaders who have embraced situational leadership theory have treated their followers as individuals. Virtual leaders should have the talent and skills to develop their followers and promote success.

Leaders may disagree on the follower's self-evaluation of competency and commitment to their work. Thompson and Glaso (2018) used a leader-follower approach as a moderator variable to measure the degree of agreement between how the leader rates the follower competency and commitment versus the follower's self-rating They found that leaders and their team member may disagree when assessing the team members' development until the leader and follower gain a higher level of agreement with one another.

There can be disagreements between the leader and follower as the follower's may evaluate their skills inaccurately or have an unrealistic self-perception may include being too modest in evaluating their skills and potential strengths. Yan and Carles (2021) suggested that follower self-assessment is not an accurate score. Thompson and Glaso (2018) concluded by suggesting that Blanchard's three-way predictions interactions can overcome any limitations in testing the validity of situational leadership theory.

Reliability is essential when evaluating the follower's self-evaluations.

Reliability is a vital tool when aligning follower self-evaluation and competency. The situational leadership style predictions are reliable when the leaders evaluate the followers' self-evaluation of competency and alignment (Thompson & Glaso, 2018). The leader's objective is to know just how much direction and support they should be offering their team members. Multiple researchers have explored the topic of situational leadership. It is one of the most recognized and popular leadership models (Thompson & Glaso, 2018).

Reflecting its popularity, there are different models for situational leadership (Blanchard et al., 1993; Hersey & Blanchard, 1996; Hersey et al., 2001). The situational leadership model (Blanchard et al., 1985, 2013) is a widely accepted model that proposes four different leadership styles that define how leaders direct and motivate their virtual teams. The Directing S1 style is directive, combined with a low level of leader support behavior. The Coaching S2 is driven by a high level of direction and support from the leader. The Supporting S3 style offers low direction to the follower, and the leaders demonstrate a high level of behavior support. The Delegating S4 provides low levels of direction and poor supportive behavior by the leader. The best possible outcome is the alignment between the follower and the leader (Blanchard et al., 1985, 2013). Researchers have found that when leaders use more objective means of measurement, they elicit more exceptional agreement, performance, and overall satisfaction from their followers (Zigarmi & Roberts, 2016). Alignment between the leader and their followers is paramount in the overall success and satisfaction of the team.

Virtual Teams

Virtual teams are an assembly of people who work independently for a common purpose. Workers assigned to virtual teams work independently for a defined reason (Saxena, 2017). Although there were many different virtual teams, their one foundational characteristic was that their members could not meet face-to-face (Serrate, 2017). The virtual team members' independence depended on their group goal, although individual team members work across distance and potentially numerous time zones. Using technology innovation in communication was the underlying reason for virtual teams' existence (Gilson et al., 2015). As technological advancements multiply in organizations, virtual teams proliferated (Gilson et al., 2015). Organizations and their virtual teams have become increasingly agile and adapt to the environment's changes and playing field (Arunprasad et al., 2022). Over time and space, virtual teams need to adjust to the many changes in any organization's environment.

The advances in communication include many new technology forms (email, cell phones, text messaging, teleconferencing Zoom, GoToMeeting, Skype, and others). These technologies offered organizations the opportunity to form and lead virtual teams. Virtual teams are no longer an anomaly as virtual teams and their members come from different business segments, genders, experiences, and backgrounds (Bartik et al., 2020). There are four key characteristics of virtual teams: (a) virtual teams are temporary by design, (b) culturally diverse with their members coming together with different expertise, (c) geographically dispersed, (d) communicates electronically using a variety of other technologies that eliminate boundaries between the members of virtual teams

(Bartik et al., 2020). Virtual teams' end goal was to find the best solutions to complex problems and opportunities in an ever-changing global environment.

Virtual teams are becoming more prevalent in organizations. The competitiveness of virtual teams offers corporations the flexibility to make decisions with greater agility and execution. Much of the research associated with virtual teams is face-to-face versus study. I am studying virtual teams through the lens of video conferencing, where there is little or no face-to-face interaction. The goal was to go beyond additional face-to-face study, adding a new view that looks at leaders' communication strategies to enhance virtual advertising account executives' productivity using video conferencing as the discovery tool.

Origins of Virtual Teams

The origins of virtual teams resulted from finding solutions to complicated problems. When virtual teams first came into existence, their first use and formation were to bring people together for short-term projects (Lipnack & Stamps, 1999). Virtual teams have progressed far beyond their original intent in organizations**.** The origins of virtual teams date back to the 1960s and, at that time, were referred to as work teams (Ebrahirm et al., 2009). Virtual team descriptions came in many different forms. Virtual teams can be stable with an established team base as members can move in and out of the team consistently and easily (Orhan, 2017). Virtual team members can also come from the same organization or other differing organizations (Orhan, 2017). The growth of virtual teams began in the 1960s.

The chronological growth of virtual teams dates back to the 1960s. Virtuality has

grown exponentially from an individual level centered around individual tasks to team

virtuality (Kiely et al., 2021). Following the work-team concept came the next evolution

spurred on by the Total Quality Management movement in the 1980s (Ebrahirm et al.,

2009). Total Quality Management was a principle that all team members must be

committed to maintaining high work standards in all organization areas. The next updated

iteration came about in the latter part of the 1980s and into the 1990's when many

organizations began introducing self-managed teams and empowered them to make their

own decisions (Ebrahirm et al., 2009). By the late 1990s, the team concept was being

exported worldwide by United States corporations and their enterprises abroad (Ebrahirm

et al., 2009). There is not just one size that fits all for virtual teams.

Virtual teams came in many different sizes and shapes based on the needs of the

organization. Virtual team configurations included organizational (short and long-term),

functional versus project-based teams, and differing task types (Gibbs et al., 2017).

Examples of virtual teams exist in multiple configurations. Virtual teams can have a

formal leader; others may be self-managed teams based on the team members'

qualifications. Virtual teams may have current relationships, while other members come

from different cultures and other locations globally (Gibbs et al., 2017). Virtual teams are

often organized based on technical needs and expertise (Gibbs et al., 2017). The

enhancements and usage of information communication technology tools have made it

cheaper, more comfortable, and faster to use synchronous technology, making it easier to

communicate between members in virtual teams (Orhan, 2017). Leading virtual teams

requires specialized training in learning how to engage in leading virtual teams, trust,

communication, virtual work environments, and defining employee motivation and engagement (Alward & Phelps, 2019). Leadership within organizations will continue to make virtual team changes based on their organizations' needs, sustainability, and relevancy.

Obstacles Facing Virtual Leaders

Virtual teams face unique challenges that traditional brick and mortar leaders do not have to work on daily. The phenomenon was leading virtual teams was different than that of face-to-face interaction. Virtual teams and their leaders are dependent on impersonal methods of electronic communication. To that point leaders in virtual teams should consider reading all of the personal and detailed nuances in electronic exchange up to and down the organization. According to (Maduka et al., 2018), virtual leaders' most critical challenge is integrating personal life and work demands. Like their team members, virtual leaders may work from home and find difficulty balancing work and family (Maduka et al., 2018). As technology changes the opportunities for communication between leaders and their followers, frustration may take hold of the team because insufficient new technology quantities make it easier to communicate and be successful (Maduka et al., 2018). Having the best technology was not the principal determiner of a virtual team's success.

How virtual teams organize the work was different from that of a traditional brick-and-mortar team. The nature of work was changing in virtual teams, and so was the organizing of the work that virtual leaders perform (Torre & Sarti, 2020). Virtual teams and their leaders were more than just a conglomeration of broadband, connected devices,

and tools that offer technology connectivity. Successful virtual teams and their leaders demonstrate respect for everyone on the team, knowing and accepting that everyone were different (Pullan, 2016). Defining a common ground for the leader and their followers was a good starting point.

Within the structure of virtual teams, the team members must be successful in collaborating. Lau et al. (2021) argued that virtual teams were successful because they have a diverse background in education and work experiences. Virtual team members must work in close collaboration to maximize their effectiveness. Leaders in virtual teams had a direct effect on how effective teams work together. Successful virtual leaders provide ongoing training, resource allocation and, more importantly, created an environment that develops high collaboration levels between team members and their relationship with the leader (Liao, 2017). The assembly of virtual team members from assembling a diverse team consisting of different work experiences can positively or hinder the team's overall performance.

The lack of face-to-face contact between virtual team members may negatively affect collaboration between members. Liao (2017) argued that virtual leaders must be conscious of the conflict that can arise because workers can reside in a large geographic area. The solution is to initiate virtual parties that can open communication between team members and leadership. Although virtual leaders have to focus on the team's overall success, leaders should know that it is the summation of individual performance that determines a virtual team's success. Leaders in virtual teams recognize the team's value in its entirety. Those leaders who are the most successful intellectually know that they have

to lead and guide each team member individually (Lau et al.,2021). One of the obstacles facing virtual leaders were how virtual leaders manage the efforts displayed by the team members.

Explicit management was a challenge for virtual leaders. In virtual teams, leaders explicitly define each team member's requirements if they work collaboratively to successfully execute the desired outcome of projects (Liao, 2017). The virtual team leaders play a vital role in the training, guiding personnel, coaching, providing resources, and enabling the virtual team's relationship building (Liao, 2017). Teams that perform at successful levels do so because there are high levels of consistent communication between the leader and their followers, creating trust and engagement up and down the team's structure (Rhmadani et al., 2020). Virtual leaders face challenges associated with the varying skill levels of their team.

Where there are highly skilled and functional teams, leaders can share leadership responsibilities. Teams that have less experienced members can affect the success of the virtual team. Among teams with skills that require additional development, leaders must take a more authoritative leadership style to achieve the desired objectives (Schaubroeck & Yu, 2017). Teams with highly skilled workers but have a centralized authoritarian figure leading the team can negatively influence the team results and performance over the longer term (Schaubroeck & Yu, 2017). Autonomy was an essential factor in the success of virtual teams. The level to which leaders offer autonomous decision-making directly affects the team members' relationships, including the team's readiness to share knowledge (Schippers & Rus, 2021).The concept of trust was key to individual team

members' overall success and the virtual leader's mutual trust.

Trust in Virtual Teams

Trust was one of the most studied subjects in virtual teams' discussion and how vital trust was in virtual teams' success and the organizations they represent. The topic of trust has received increased attention in the debate on virtual team performance (Gilson et al., 2015). Trust was the number one component that defines virtual team members (Breuer et al., 2016). Where there was trust vertically and horizontally within a vertical team, and the results were apparent in several characteristics relating to trust and the team's success. Katzenbach and Smith (2015) identified seven factors of high performing teams, (a) solid personal commitment to each other's development and success, (b) a definite sense purpose is established, (c) goals were set high for individuals and the team, (d) plans were well-developed; (e) clear accountability for everyone on the team, (f) skill sets were duplicated and align directly with the needs of the assignment, (g) members of the group shared the leadership. Long-distance communication between members of virtual teams was vital in finding solutions to complicated situations.

Trust between team members was vital to their success. Zhu and Lee (2017) suggested a need for a high level of trust between team members. One area that impacts trust in virtual teams was the use of different forms of technology capabilities. Owens and Khazanchi (2017) suggested various forms of technology used in communicating with team members were valuable in team collaboration. Specific technology platforms such as e-mail, Facebook chat, Google docs, Zoom, Skype, and GoToMeeting were vital communication tools in team members' trust and productivity (Jimenez et al., 2017).

Communication between leaders and followers is paramount in creating trust in a virtual team.

Virtual teams' core responsibility were that they work together, collaborating in finding solutions to complicated assignments. Companies and their groups must find alternatives in leading organizations' methods to become productive and successful (Middleton, 2021). Collaboration in virtual teams occurs when two or more members successfully achieve mutually beneficial outcomes because of the mutual working relationship (To & Ko, 2016). Literature showed that shared decision-making in virtual organizations were vital to trust and success in the team experiences (Choi & Cho, 2018). Organizations can differ in the degree of autonomy of the members of the team. High levels of trust may profoundly affect the team's collaboration in how they come to solutions (Breuer et al., 2016). Trust was affected by how well teams and leadership communicate with each other.

Trust and performance were directly related to the alignment of the leader and their followers. Trust does affect the behaviors of the team. Trust in the team members was the key variable that affects team members' actions (Baker et al., 2016). According to Choi and Cho (2018), trust does affect virtual teams' interactions and outcomes. Virtual team trust was a belief shared by all team members when addressing the team members' hesitation and exposure (Choi & Cho, 2018). Studies have shown that one of the disadvantages of virtual teams and the trust quotient is there was no face-to-face contact. Flavin et al. (2019) argued that when there was little or no face-to-face contact discussion in virtual teams and electronic technology were required to communicate, communication

coordination becomes more difficult to accomplish. When there is little or no trust in virtual teams, the results were a valid predictor of team performance (Breuer et al., 2020). A direct relationship exists between trust and performance in virtual teams.

The level to which virtual teams perform directly relates to the trust level between team members and their leaders. Individual performance and overall team performance directly correlate with each other in determining if there are either high levels or lower levels of trust among team members and their leader (Breuer et al., 2020). Where there is trust among virtual team members, there was also alignment based on the three dimensions of virtual teams: (a) cooperation, (b) coordination, and (c) knowledge sharing (Choi & Cho, 2018). Combining these three dimensions offers leaders and team members the best opportunity to achieve and exceed their objectives. Krawczyk-Brycka (2017) argued three pillars were paramount for virtual team success, (a) collaboration transparency, clear vision and defined individual and team goals, (b) cohesion between team and management (trust and motivational issues), (c) empowerment (shared responsibilities and emergent leadership). Neubert et al. (2015) noted that depending on how demanding the task, there was an inverse relationship between team members' confidence in their contributions and the consequences, which manifests itself in trust and collaboration.

The success of a virtual team was dependent on the trust between the leaders and their followers. When there was trust in the team leader, the virtual team members have a corresponding higher commitment level (Flavin et al., 2019). Virtual leaders were trustworthy when there was a direct and positive outcome of organizational commitment.

Once leaders have developed some level of trust between themselves and team members,

they should focus on the methods they will use to monitor the group's success (Fulmer &

Gelfand, 2015). There were differences in traditional leadership than that of virtual

leadership among their teams that result in different levels of trust. How trust works in

traditional teams were not transferable to vertical teams because vertical teams' structure

differs from traditional teams because in vertical teams there is no non-verbal

communication (Flavin et al., 2019). The physical looks of someone can affect how the

team perceives someone's value and credibility.

The physical attractiveness of the leader in virtual teams was considered an

advantage. Previous research has determined that the more physically attractive the

virtual leader, the greater trust the team members display toward their leader (Flavin et

al., 2019). Studies showed that even a digital picture may impact how employees trust

their leader (Zhao et al., 2015). Previous research confirms a direct relationship between

the physical attractiveness of the virtual leaders and the trust displayed by their team

followers (Zhao et al., 2015). Zhao et al. (2015) also defined a direct relationship between

the leader's physical attractiveness and perceived empathy. Perceived empathy is an

essential characteristic of leaders in virtual teams. The perception of fairness delivered by

the virtual leader and their followers were vital in work environments with little or no

face-to-face contact (Zhao et al., 2015). Because of the virtual team's physical

attractiveness, it was prudent that the leader presents themselves as positive and upbeat

when working with teams with little to no face-to-face contact. The concept of being

optimistic and positive includes any visual looks and voice inflections when using

electronic audio and optical technologies. Leadership in virtual teams was different than that of traditional team dynamics.

The traditional means of leadership in collated teams was different than that of virtual teams. There was not a consensus that leadership in traditional teams was transferable to virtual teams. In a virtual team environment, the leader plays a significantly more significant role in its success (Hooijberg & Watkins, 2021). Trust was considered the number element in the team's success (Breuer et al., 2019). It was the perceived factor of justice in the leader that was important to the team members Sheeraz et al., 2021). Organizational justice was the perceived interpretation or feeling of fairness between the leader and their followers in predicting job satisfaction (Bakotic & Bulog, 2021). There were three different levels of justice when defining trust in virtual teams policies and procedures, distributed, and respect (Bouazzaoui et al., 2020).

The first area of justice describes procedural justice. Saha (2022) defined the first area of justice as associated with policies and procedures. Distributed justice was the second area of justice, addresses the opportunity for promotions and other forms of recognition (Saha, 2020). The third area relating to justice was the presumption that everyone on the team treats each other with respect (Saha, 2020). It was then reasonable to think that in teams where the leader's perception were fair-minded, there was also the perception that the leader holds a higher level of trust among the team members. For teams to be successful, there must be a commitment from the team members of virtual teams.

Team commitment is another indicator of team success. Flavin et al. (2019)

suggested that there was also commitment among the team members within a virtual team where the leader's trust was within a virtual team. Flavin et al. (2019) also contended that there was a positive influence on organizational citizenship behavior where there are high levels of trust in virtual teams. Fu and Deshpande (2013) suggested a direct relationship between employee commitment and the team members' performance, reflecting the entire organization's success. Leadership in virtual teams was different from that of traditional teams. Virtual teams' leadership must be more engaged with their teams' members through various computer technology forms.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Teams

Virtual teams have numerous benefits for organizations and their employees. Organizations using virtual teams can bring together the best minds no matter where they reside, offering flexibility while reducing expenses associated with travel and housing costs (Schulze & Krumm, 2016). As technology grows, virtual teams have corresponding growth. In 2016, more than 26 million Americans, or approximately 16% of the total workforce, now work at least part of the time remotely (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2016, 1-33). Between 2005 and 2015, the USA's total number of virtual workers increased by 15% (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2016, 1-33). Virtual teams are the norm for organizations; the team member locations were anywhere globally (Bartik et al., 2020). Through technology, virtual team members connect in real-time, sharing information (Bhat et al., 2017). Information sharing were essential to the success of the team. Because virtual team members live in different geographies and time zones, the importance of virtual team members sharing information with all team members were a

measure of their success (Hacker et al., 2019). Sharing information can be a challenge when the members of the team live in other geographical areas. The degree to which the team is effective depends on the information sharing and the team members sharing information (Peifer et al., 2021). Organizations may create a competitive advantage by recruiting the best and the brightest talent anywhere in the world (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). Virtual teams can offer companies the flexibility of maximizing their expertise to be used with multiple virtual teams (Handle et al., 2020). Virtual teams are a win-win for the employer and employee, with each achieving their objectives.

Virtual teams continued to grow in importance in their organizations' overall success; there was concern about their validity. One area of concern was that virtual teams are more challenging than traditional teams (Flavin et al., 2019). The challenge for virtual teams were that team members did not have the opportunity to see each other face-to-face or see verbal and non-verbal cues during discussions and transfer information sharing among the virtual team members (Bartik et al., 2020). Studies show a lack of motivation by the virtual team members because of geographical alienated physical distances (Gilson et al., 2015). Workers could feel professional isolation and separation from the workplace when working remotely (Van Zoonen & Sivunen 2021). Language and culture may also be a barrier to virtual teams' success even when everyone speaks the same language (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). Issues of trust development and conflict management can also create virtual teams' problems to be successful (Breuer et al., 2020). Communication can continue to offer challenges for virtual teams for different reasons.

Virtual teams can continue to experience communication challenges, even with the best technology resources available to leadership and followers. Companies offering chat rooms for employees located virtually continue to experience communication-related problems. The absence of meeting face-to-face in real-between team members may create problems (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). Leadership also plays a pivotal role in the success of virtual teams. One crucial factor that can lessen the problems identified has the right virtual team leader. The primary reason virtual teams fail to meet the virtual leader's expectations was ineffective (Mehtab et al., 2017). Leaders who fail in virtual teams must motivate and empower their employees to exceed expectations (Mehtab et al., 2017). The challenge for leaders who lead in a virtual environment was their ability to communicate effectively with their team members (Newman et al., 2020). Motivation and empowerment were no different from leadership in traditional face-to-face environments. Virtual communication often adds complexities to the environment resulting in the leader's work becoming more complex when leading in a virtual environment. Although challenges face virtual leaders and their respective teams, the growth of virtual teams will continue to increase. COVID-19 is an example of how organizations adopted new tools to lead virtual teams effectively.

Enhancing Virtual Team Success

As the introduction and proliferation of virtual teams continued to grow, the discussion of how to improve virtual team success is vital to individual and organizational success and growth. Scholars offered different views on the enhancement of virtual teams. All successful virtual teams had one specific asset: everyone on the team

had a clear understanding of the team's role and value within the organization (Mangla, 2021). New technologies and the need to make quicker decisions have led to organizational structures with a different look and feel than traditional settings. Knowledge and information have become more visible in the digital world, and information sharing is easier to achieve. Leaders share leadership with their team of followers. Schwarzmuller et al. (2018) argued that everyone on the team feels a higher level of responsibility when two-way communication occurs. In virtual teams, the collaboration between the leader and followers is essential.

In traditional leadership environments, the leader defines goals and objectives. The collaborative process was more appropriate when defining jobs and tasks (DiFranza, 2019). Virtual teams' performance can depend on the successful collaboration between the leader and the team members. Teams' effectiveness can be traced back to the team's influence through shared leadership and collaboration (Liao, 2017). Leaders in virtual teams have the most knowledge of the goals, resources, and procedural issues that allow the team to function (Liao, 2017). When leaders customize specific tasks and goals for their team members, they demonstrate greater confidence and a willingness to follow their assigned leader (Liao, 2017). Training virtual team members were vital so that individual team members and the organization could exceed expectations.

The leadership in organizations recognized the importance of making investments in team development. Leadership consistently makes investments in people to ensure that teams, individuals, and companies thrive and compete (Shuffler et al., 2018). Because teams were an essential part of many organizations, corporations were willing to make

significant financial investments to ensure teams succeed, offering scholarships, resources, and other learning tools (Lacerenza et al., 2018). Sylvester (2019) argued that technical skills training in virtual teams helped leverage overall team productivity. Flexibility was inherent in virtual teams' success, and training was just one area where flexibility is vital to the team's success.

Virtual teams work and navigate the environment was more flexible than traditional work settings. The makeup and design of virtual teams were considerably more flexible than conventional working environments (Mehtab et al., 2017). Leaders within virtual team environments used synchronous and asynchronous methods to communicate with the leader and were also used for team members to share (Mehtab et al., 2017). Virtual teams have evolved to be more diverse than traditional teams (Mathieu et al., 2017). Although multiple factors differentiate virtual and traditional teams, traditional and virtual teams' key factors were leadership.

Leadership in Virtual Teams

The study of leadership dates back to Greek philosophers Pluto, Socrates, and Aristotle. Leadership was essential in organizational behavior and the degree of success that leaders and their followers experience (Kumar, 2018). Leadership was the influence that one or more individuals have over their followers. In the global universe of the 21st Century, leaders must possess and present the right leadership style, talent, and skill to develop, inspire, motivate, and empower the individuals and teams they are assigned to lead (Kumar, 2018). From 2006 through 2016, considerable research accumulation was aiding in defining and understanding effective leadership in virtual teams (Liao, 2017).

How leaders manage virtual teams continues to evolve.

The introduction of the Internet and the role of leaders in virtual teams continue to change and progress. Virtual teams in the modern-day model require different learned leadership skills (Maduka et al., 2018). Modern leaders must consider the differences in leading virtual teams if they are to be successful. Although achieving success was the same, achieving the goals has changed with the introduction of virtual teams. Virtual teams offer organizations new methods in organizing the work in organizations while at the same time successfully managing scarce resources in achieving their objectives (Levenson & McLaughlin, 2020). Successful leaders working in virtual teams need to alter their leadership styles.

Leadership in virtual teams involves changing the characteristics of how the leader influences their virtual team. Leadership styles and how they function with their team had to adapt and align with the knowledge that their communication is not face-to-face (Levenson & McLaughlin, 2020). As virtual teams continue to grow in numbers and different industries, successful strategies in traditional face-to-face environments may not be effective in virtual teams (Alward & Phelps, 2019). Virtual teams need to intellectually understand unique differences that enhance unity, trust, and communication when working with virtual teams (Alward & Phelps, 2019). Purvanova and Kenda (2018) suggested that virtual team leadership was the same as traditional. Still, it was the difference in how virtual leaders use different strategies in achieving success for their organizations. Because employees in virtual teams are dependent on e-communication to connect the possibility of misunderstandings between team members, their leader raised

substantially (Liao, 2017). As a result, virtual team leaders needed to develop and then successfully introduce new skills into the virtual team to build a mutual, trusted relationship between their followers and the team members (Liao, 2017). Virtual leaders should recognize a difference in how they communicate with their teams.

As virtual teams continue to grow in popularity and necessity, contemporary organizations and leadership recognize that virtual teams are different from traditional groups in multiple areas. Therefore, it was prudent that organizations identify the unique competencies and environmental issues that virtual leaders have to navigate for their teams and organizations to succeed successfully (Maduka et al., 2018). Leaders in virtual communities of practice build trust, motivate, and develop personal relationships with their team members through technology (Chrisentary & Barrett, 2015). Chrisentary and Barrett (2015) concluded that for virtual leaders to be successful, they should (a) empower the members of the team in making shared decisions, (b) two-way communication was vital in leading, and (c) there should be a common theme of trust spread through the team.

Leading in virtual teams requires a different set of leadership skills, and leaders need to adapt to achieve sustainable success for their teams and organizations. Leaders require train to be effective (Milner et al., 2018). As virtual teams grow out of popularity and necessity, a new leadership style evolves (Shared Leadership). Traditional leadership may not work when there are low levels of face-to-face contact between the leader and their followers (Zhu & Lee, 2017). Because the virtual world's roles are more elastic and dynamic, leaders may find their team members demonstrated leadership qualities (Serban

et al., 2015). The concept of shared leadership has come about because of virtual teams. Shared leadership is the collective expertise virtual team members bring together in supporting decisions that include the expert knowledge that members bring to the virtual team (Serban et al., 2015). Members of virtual teams are often more comfortable in their work produced than are traditional team members.

The respect for each team member was in direct relationship to their contributions. Team members who come from virtual teams were often more satisfied with their experiences when a level of care was associated with each member's contributions, shared leadership (Eseryel et al., 2020). Shared leadership promoted their followers to feel freedom and independence because they knew their role produced results (Chiniara & Bentein, 2016). Wu et al. (2015) argued that the more independent and decision-making members of the team possess, the more valuable the work feels to each individual representing the virtual team. Leaders recognize clear communications between the virtual leader and their followers for the team to become successful.

Communication Strategies for Virtual Teams

The exponential growth of virtual teams has spawned an escalated interest in how effective leaders communicate with their teams successfully. Virtual team leaders' primary challenge was not having the luxury of meeting with their teammates face-to-face (Flavin et al., 2019). Accomplished leaders learned to lead and communicate with their virtual teams (Ford et al., 2017). The leadership in virtual teams used various communication tools to avoid miscommunication, and the selection of one or more tools should align with the defined work (Gilson et al., 2015). Virtual leaders' behavior toward

individuals and the team levels was paramount in determining and shaping cognitive, affective, and motivational states and contributing to performance and achievement (Liao, 2017). Virtual teams were the best equipped to know the goals, resources, and processes in communicating with their teams (Liao, 2017). The leadership in virtual teams was influential on the team's performance because of the impact leaders have on the team through collaboration (Gilson et al., 2015; Roodt et al. (2016). Leaders' communication strategies played a vital role in clarifying and establishing personal goals with each team member and defining the policies and procedures to complete the work (Liao, 2017). The continued growth and expansion of virtual teams will require leaders to learn a unique set of communication strategies that may enhance their virtual team members' productivity.

The concept of virtual team leadership was an area of study that garnered significant attention. Leadership in virtual teams was one of the most critical subjects studied in the broader virtuality theme (Gilson et al., 2015). The changing workplace relies on virtual teams creating a unique set of problems that current research does not adequately address (Jimenez et al., 2017). Leading virtual teams was different than leading face-to-face teams (Paul & Jefferson, 2019). When leading face-to-face individuals and teams, the leader and follower visually see the expression, voice inflection, and other body movements that told a story versus an impersonal email or phone call. There was no face-to-face interaction; the results led to miscommunication between leaders and their teams using electronic communication (Arendt et al., 2019). Khan (2021) suggested that one of virtual team leaders' critical challenges is

communicating their strategies to their virtual team members. Leaders and their team members explored different communication standards with the same or similar meaning as if the leader and follower were speaking face-to-face.

Communication Standards for Virtual Leadership

The communication standards that virtual leaders initiate were a significant factor concerning individual team members' core competencies. Functioning in an interactive team environment versus working as a unique virtual employee, such as joining a virtual meeting, are communicated differently (Jakobsen & Mortensen, 2015). Leaders should avoid traditional behavioral norms in virtual team structures and lean toward more clear-cut and specific communication forms (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). For example, many traditional monitoring measurements introduced real-time digital technology; the fundamental process used in face-to-face feedback remains in communicating digitally (Petrucci & Rivera, 2018). The use of explicit communication norms by leaders in virtual teams had several advantages. Initiating the suitable exchange of information, continuous follow-up, interaction combined with less vagueness, better measurement processes, and faster response times are vital in virtual teams' success (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). There are challenges that virtual leaders must be aware of to be successful in leading their teams.

One of the challenges virtual leaders should be familiar with was that contextual information might be challenging when presenting to virtual teams. Contextual factors may bring about substantial differences when working in a traditional team versus a virtual team. The effects of performance visualization in contextual information defined

the teams' effectiveness and value (Coronas et al., 2015). Marlow et al. (2017) suggested that one of the reasons there may be a lack of clarity in virtual teams was ambiguity concerning the various elements that constitute valued communication between the leaders and their teams' members. Virtual teams were more successful when effective communication between their leader and followers, supply chain partners, and other stakeholders was associated with the team (Baker et al., 2016). Defining communication standards between the virtual leader and their assigned team members was valuable for successfully achieving individual and corporate objectives.

Leadership consistency in communication with their followers was vital in developing successful virtual teams. Consistent expectations around team communication, including virtual meetings' tempo, were a determiner of team success (Alward & Phelps, 2019). Virtual leaders should be cognizant that working with virtual workers is significantly more complicated, causing feelings that include isolation and exclusion (Vega et al., 2015). Alward and Phelps (2019) concluded that a leaders' conscientious efforts to align the message delivery should align with the communication technologies and frequency to include the pace that may create a trusting environment between the virtual team members. Performance enhancement of a virtual team depends on the leaders' clear feedback. Team members who have customers were vital to the virtual team's success. Lippert and Dulwicz (2018) recommended that additional training positively impacts team performance based on the current competency level. Virtual leaders, team members, and customers communicated that meeting and accepting advice improved communication (Lippert & Dulwicz, 2018). Leadership coaching's

effectiveness depended on how legitimate the team member perceived their leader and not on the leader's authority (Schaubroeck & Yu, 2017). Virtual leaders must recognize the importance of the perceptions they leave with their team and how information funnels back-and-forth between the leader and members of the virtual team.

The frequency of communication was recognized and played a pivotal role in developing virtual teams and their function. The communication volume was essential at the initial stages of a virtual teams' life cycle (Marlow et al., 2017). Marlow et al., 2017) argued that selecting different communication features were vital to the virtual team's functioning. Virtual leaders should be aware that highly functional virtual teams can adversely affect their performance when there is an overload of communication moving back and forth with the team leader and members (Marlow et al., 2017). As with all teams, virtual teams require nurturing and development (Synder, 2015). There were pitfalls in communication where asynchronous communication was the primary communication method between team members, affecting the virtual team's decision-making quality.

Communication quality may also play an essential role in communication with virtual team members. Two types of communication forums (videoconferencing and computer-based video like Zoom or GoToMeeting) demonstrate that the virtual team dynamics and the members impacted based on the working knowledge of the technology (Synder, 2015). Additionally, the team's quality of interaction aligned with the professionalism displayed during the video forum was a key factor (Synder, 2015). Synder (2015) concluded that one of the drawbacks of video forums is video camera

accessibility limitation. The disappointment was understandable because working virtually, your leader and teammates may not see you, which adds another layer of isolation. The quality of communication was vital for work teams that interact virtually compared to teams that do not work in teams or groups (Schaubroeck & Yu, 2017). The technical quality of the technology used in virtual communication was essential when there was a pooling of information in finding solutions for problems. Scott and Wildman (2015) suggested challenges in leading virtual teams because of the team dynamic's diversity. The focus should be on finding solutions to severe problems versus worrying about the quality of the technological devices used to meet in the virtual world.

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

There was constant pressure on organizations and their leadership to change if they expected to win. Leaders had a significant responsibility to make an ongoing change in their organizations. Leaders must build a winning coalition (Issah, 2018). The challenge for leaders was that change also comes with emotions related to change. Emotional intelligence was the driver for feelings, thinking, learning, problem-solving, and decision-making (Issah, 2018. Change can be difficult because those affected must surrender their current beliefs and values (Issah, 2018). People enjoyed the comfort, so fear was always with the unknown (Issah, 2018). For any leader to be successful, the leader will have to rely on their own experiences, covet and build relationships, respond successfully to environmental clues, and continue a process of educating themselves in developing their emotional intelligence (Watkins et al., 2017). Success for leaders will only come when leaders have learned the skills associated with emotional intelligence.

Leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence have learned how to create an open communication environment for everyone affected by the change. Successful virtual leaders encourage everyone to share their ideas relating to the company's future (Ferrell & Kline, 2018). There is evidence that a leaders' trait positive effect aligns with transformational leadership and leadership effectiveness, which trait negative affect was related to poor results (Joseph et al., 2015). Drigas and Papouts, (2018) argued that emotional intelligence runs parallel with other knowledge areas, such as social intelligence, that focuses on reasoning, emotions, and seeing oneself. Therefore, effective leadership was paramount to an organization's success, and the leader's level of emotional intelligence in managing feelings was a substantial factor in successful organizational change.

One of the benefits of an online workforce with a leader demonstrating high levels of emotional intelligence was that each individual and the team had a more significant opportunity to succeed. However, virtual leaders' challenge was not always having face-to-face interaction when developing and introducing strategies and plans. Traditional methods and motivating virtual team members were no longer valid (Alward & Phelps, 2019). Virtual leaders will have to learn the intricacies of leading teams without face-to-face contact and develop the tools that create cohesiveness, trust, and communication. Potentially, virtual leaders will have to master the number one skill in becoming successful in developing their emotional intelligence (Alward & Phelps, 2019). For example, online university learning was becoming more attractive as an alternate means of attending classes in a brick-and-mortar environment. Because there was no

face-to-face contact in a traditional sense, faculty and staff found ways to meet students'

needs (Mohr & Shelton, 2017). Virtual leaders put aside traditional learning tools in a

contemporary working environment and achieve employees' needs working and operating

in a virtual world.

There are distinct differences between virtual and non-virtual leaders. One factor

differentiating virtual versus non-virtual teams is that virtual team members show high

compliance levels, while non-virtual teams demonstrate lower compliance levels

(Shwartz-Asher & Ahituv, 2019). Emotional intelligence is an critical driver of virtual

team member well-being, and it underlines the effectiveness of team emotional

management intervention that softens the impact on virtual teams ((Gamero et al., 2021).

The results would seem counterintuitive. Shwartz-Asher and Ahituv (2019) concluded

that the virtual team members felt they had higher power than traditional collocated

teams. At the same time virtual team members feel there is an inherent lack of

information, specifically team feedback (McLarnon et al., 2019). Developing a working

knowledge of how virtual teams function based on individual team roles, skills, and

comfort levels was a successful requirement for virtual leaders (Zeuge et al., 2020).

Virtual leaders who display the necessary skills to lead virtual teams had the best

opportunity to be successful.

Leaders equipped with high levels of emotional intelligence managed employees

and produced better results. Higher levels of emotional intelligence in leaders force

virtual leaders to focus on others' thoughts and feelings versus focusing on their own

needs, resulting in a hostile environment, thus reducing the virtual team's cohesion

(Quisenberry, 2018). The more developed leaders' emotional intelligence quotient, the more accomplished they are with strategizing and motivating employees to forecast team members' emotional responses and make the proper adjustments (Quisenberry, 2018). Reshetnikov et al., 2020) suggested that leaders with higher levels of emotional intelligence is an aid to leaders making the best decisions for individuals and their team. Leaders who have learned emotional intelligence skills make the right decisions for their teams'.

The best leaders know when it is the best time to change among their team members. Leaders with highly developed emotional intelligence levels identified and eliminated members on a team who refused to move in the same direction (Quisenberry, 2018). Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017) observed that some team members might resist change because their underlining objections are leadership prioritization. Gaubatz and Ensminger (2017) also determined that department chairs' difference between successful and unsuccessful change efforts resulted from the participants' relationship. Leaders who possess higher emotional intelligence levels recognized they must focus on the team versus any individual attempting to derail the change. Training virtual leaders in emotional intelligence have positive effects as more organizations introduce virtual teams.

Leaders of virtual teams can also demonstrate empathy even if there is little or no physical information consumption. Bertrand et al. (2018) suggested that it is conceivable that leaders can demonstrate empathy through computer technology communication. The more empathy the leader is perceived to display, the higher the team's trust level

Mayfield et al., 2019). The introduction of social networks can create empathy based on the team member's ability to access other team members and throughout the organization

The Impacts of New Technology Resources on Virtual Teams

Information technology advancements have introduced new forms of information and knowledge sharing. The introduction of new technology offered businesses greater flexibility and management through virtual work teams (Larson & DeChurch, 2020). Over 60 different digital technology tools included e-mail, audio conferencing, texting, web conferencing, and video conferencing (GoToMeeting, Zoom, and WebEx). Other digital communication tools include cloud sharing, live chat, email, texting, and electronic bulletin board. Information technology advancements have introduced new forms of information and knowledge sharing.

Companies of all sizes and dimensions have no choice but to embrace digital technology as communication technology as an essential tool for virtual teams in organizations (Latinen & Valo, 2018). The introduction of computer technology has made virtual collaboration unavoidable for teams that expect to remain competitive in a rapidly changing business environment (Chae, 2016). Teams and organizations are increasingly evaluating and introducing new technologies to support workers and enhance a thriving environment (Collins., 2019). The most significant contribution technology has brought to organizations was that new technology has transformed work structures and communication methods in virtual teams (Synder, 2015). Recent technology advancements had several different positive effects on virtual teams.

The introduction of digital tools offers companies the opportunity to flatten their

organizational structures and allows for virtually dispersed teams to exist (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). Leaders encourage two-way communication when interacting with their followers (Schwarzmuller et al., 2018). When there are high levels of autonomy in an organization between the leader and their followers, workers create a greater sense of responsibility by producing increased accountability levels (Schwarzmuller et al., 2018). Facilitating workers worldwide and combining various perspectives had stimulated increased creativity and innovation levels in organizations (Gupta & Pathak, 2018). Virtual teams allowed the best players with exceptional talents to locate anywhere globally, so there was little need to duplicate technical expertise when using digital technology.

New technology played a vital role in supporting virtual teams and their workers. Teams and organizations were increasingly evaluating and introducing new technologies to support virtual workers and enhance a thriving environment (Collins, 2019). The most significant contribution technology has brought to organizations is that new technology has transformed work structures and virtual teams' communication methods (Synder, 2015). The introduction of low-cost smartphones has made it easier to communicate, no matter where people live and work in the world.

Digital technology has changed forever the way people, organizations, and leadership communicate with each other. In a Eurobarometer survey, the majority of those responding found that the impact of technology has a positive effect on the economy (75%), quality of life (67%), and society as a whole (64%) (European Commission, 2017). More than 8 billion cell phones globally connect people (World

Economic Forum, 2017). Digital technology has changed the nature of organizations in how their leaders connect with individuals and teams. Digitized information offers real-time value to leaders, workers, and their customers, including modifying these same three groups (Vidgen et al., 2017). There was an interconnection between technology and leadership, as technology can influence the leaders' decision-making.

Technology affected virtual leaders' decisions and influenced how developed leaders become accomplished virtual leaders. The connection and dependency of technology are bound together in defined virtual leaders' roles (Roman et al., 2018). (Cortellazzo et al., 2019) suggested that all companies incorporate digital technology in support of the leader's defined strategies. Leaders can eliminate the confusion and disconnection from organizations and present strategies and plans more structured (Toepfl, 2018). How leaders and their followers initiate and practice digital technology can directly affect the virtual team's success.

Digital technology has changed how leaders and followers communicate with one another. Technology is not just about workers communicating through various communication technologies, but now there are well-defined acceptable standards and norms in communication. Cortellazzo et al. (2019) argued that instead of focusing on acceptable behavior norms when working in traditional teams, virtual teams must define a clear definition of the norms and standards when using a different technology form to communicate. Leaders and their followers must have a keen understanding of the underlying meaning of words, expressions, and tone when communicating up and down their virtual teams (Cortellazzo et al., 2019). Technology is a critical tool in the success

of leaders and their team members.

As virtual team environments continue to increase, so will the complexity and demands of virtual teams. Technology and management skills play a vital role in the virtual team's success (Groberm & Baumol, 2017). The use of technology by virtual leaders needs to align with how the leader will use the technology (Groberm & Baumol, 2017). When introducing new technologies, it was incumbent to validate that leaders have a working knowledge of the technology introduced to the virtual team (Groberm & Baumol, 2017). Every team member, including the leader, must have a working understanding of the technology to maximize their success.

The more successful teams using technology validated that all team members have the core competency to use and manage technology (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Virtual team structures had a heavy reliance on new technology. One of the critical factors that support successful virtual teams is digital technology. The groups that experienced the highest success as virtual teams were the team members who had first a working knowledge and value of the technology (Kilcullen et al., 2021)). Clark et al.(2019) concluded that strong leadership was the differentiator in generating results. Virtual team members' training in digital tools was vital in building virtual team collaboration and increasing productivity.

Transition

This qualitative case study explored the communication strategies that some online automotive managers use to motivate virtual sales teams to maintain productivity. Virtual teams have evolved and are considered a vital method of doing business daily

(Garro-Abarca, 2021). Virtual teams are standard practice in many organizations globally (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). Although there has been considerable growth in virtual teams, issues remain, such as a lack of trust between leadership and team members. Section 1 contained foundational elements of this study that included the background of the study, problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, and conceptual framework. I also introduced Hersey's and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership model, the conceptual framework for this study. I provided a critical review of the academic and professional literature. Section 1 also included operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and the significance of the study.

Section 2 included a thorough analysis of the research process and defined my role as a qualitative researcher. Section 2 consisted of the participants and research method and sampling, design, population, ethical research, collection data analysis techniques and validity., reliability, and the study findings'. The transition from Section 2 to Section 3 included the research findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and further research, reflections, and conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2 of the study, my objective is to present a detailed description of the research process, including my responsibility as a qualitative researcher. The role of the qualitative researcher is essential to data collection and data analysis. I describe the data collection and data organization techniques that I used. Also, I discuss the participant eligibility criteria and the ethical protections for participants. The protection of the participants was vital to maintaining high ethical standards throughout the study. In addition, I discuss the strategies that I used to ensure the study's dependability, credibility, and confirmability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive single case study was to explore the communication strategies that some online automotive managers in one organization used to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity. The targeted population was three virtual leaders located at the same organization in the United States who have successful experiences in leading virtual sales teams in the online automotive industry. Positive social change might result from motivated employees performing at higher levels with greater job satisfaction and less employee turnover. Satisfied workers may potentially create a better standard of living for their families and communities and companies that they represent (Kropp, 2022). Motivated employees are more eager to support social responsibilities outside the home to support their communities.

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher plays a vital role in data collection and analysis. The

researcher is the primary data collection instrument in a qualitative study (Yin, 2018) and plays a vital role in collecting and analyzing the data (Busch & Amechi, 2019). My role therefore was an essential component of the study. One aspect of my research role that was essential in the collection of the data was establishing trust with the participants.

Trust between a researcher and participants is a critical factor in the success of a qualitative case study. Relationships of trust developed between the researcher and participants are vital to the success of the research (Guillemin et al., 2018). Developing trust with the participants in this study included active listening, accuracy in the data collected from the interviews, and creating a working knowledge of the responses presented by each participant.

The study's quality is supported when the researcher has intimate knowledge of the industry studied and there is a high level of trust developed between the participants and the researcher. Karagiozis (2018) argued that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is based on trust and originates when there is a higher level of respect. I have intimate knowledge of the automotive industry and online services in selling automobiles. As a former leader in the automotive online advertising industry, I carried personal views on the communication strategies that enhanced the productivity of virtual sales teams.

To minimize the potential influence of my personal biases and experiences, I sought to listening intently without judgment and focus on what the participants shared as their successful strategies. Clark and Veale (2018) recommended that the researcher avoid any exposure indicating personal bias when collecting, coding, and sorting the

gathered data to precisely represent the data supplied from the participants. To ensure that

my research was credible, I incorporated reflexivity throughout the study. Subramani

(2019) defined reflexivity as an acceptable measurement when using qualitative research.

Reflexivity was an ongoing process of mutual sharing between me as the researcher and

the participants.

I avoided any pitfalls that may unintentionally sway the participants' reactions to

the semistructured questions. Madrill and Sullivan (2017) suggested that avoiding bias

and not influencing the interviewees is the researcher's principal objective. I minimized

any potential bias by listening to the participants without making comments. I also sought

to be aware that the participants may have views and experiences that may differ from

my personal experiences. The researcher's personal experiences, beliefs, and opinions

shapes how they interpret the study's findings (Karagiozis, 2018). I also avoided my own

bias through bracketing. Bracketing helps minimize the damaging effects and bias that

may corrupt the research process (Joseph et al., 2015). Spirko (2019) defined bracketing

as a process where the researcher cognitively holds back their bias and previous

experiences in determining the studied phenomenon. More than 10 years had passed

since I had any personal knowledge of the study organization but avoided personal bias

that would reflect on the study's interpretations or outcomes.

I adhered to the *Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of

Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research when conducting the study. The

Belmont Report serves as a vital reference in assessing the ethical understanding of

studies that involve human participants (Anabo et al., 2019). The report emphasizes

respect for the participants of the study, beneficence relating to risks, and justice and fair treatment of all participants' fair treatment (Anabo et al., 2019). I used the three principles of the Belmont Report to protect each participant's responses. Beneficence is the ethical obligation to the well-being of individuals by way of the risk-benefit ratios, and justice refers to who should receive the benefits of the research and who should be responsible for its burdens (Giles et al., 2018). As the researcher, I was accountable for protecting the privacy and confidentiality of each participant in the study.

I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to collect data for the study. An interview protocol is another strategy to reduce bias in collecting data and presenting findings. Yeong et al. (2018) suggested that the interview protocol is vital in obtaining quality interview data. The use of an interview protocol was essential to the data's quality trustworthiness.

A researcher uses an interview protocol for consistency by asking the same questions of each participant. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) recommended that the research details should include the interview protocol. Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested that researchers use a four-phase process for developing an interview protocol: (a) ensuring that the interview questions align with the research questions, (b) constructing an inquiry-based conversation, (c) receiving feedback on the interview protocol, and (d)mapping the interview protocol. I used the interview protocol as the primary data collection instrument to optimize the time appropriated in the interview process. The use of interview protocol safeguards the quality of the data collection in a trustworthy and impartial manner (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). My goal in using an

interview protocol was to ensure alignment between my research question and the interview questions. Young et al. (2018) suggested that the refinement process offers the researcher the best opportunity to correct limitations within the interview questions. In addition, refinement safeguards with the result are the intended responses aligned with the researchers' objectives. I asked each participant the same interview questions. I also asked that each participant confirm the accuracy of their recorded responses.

Participants

The participants targeted for this study included three highly successful sales leaders of virtual teams from one organization. Newman et al. (2020) suggested that successful virtual team leaders and followers trust each other through effective communication practices. Ford et al. (2017) argued that virtual leaders with faster responsiveness and timeliness in their communication practices construct more effective teams. The three participants work in California, Oregon, California, and Idaho. The participants selected exceeded performance expectations for 2 or more years in their current positions.

Each participant had experienced success in achieving the defined expectations of their leader. The study participants have had personal experience leading virtual teams to include lived experiences and views relating to the phenomenon studied. Each virtual online automotive leader had no less than 2 years of successful experience leading virtual teams and had the authority to make decisions that affected their overall performance.

Gaining access to participants can be challenging, as Amundsen et al. (2017) noted. Researchers may feel pressure because of the frustration in gaining access to the

study participants (Vuban & Eta, 2019). Once I received approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I contacted the executive leader in the online automotive advertising industry to ensure no conflicts of interest and then selected three participants' names and contact information for the study.

The executive leader offered a pool of participants who met the study's eligible criteria. Vuban and Eta (2019) recommended that researchers consider using relationships within their network to define predetermined participants. Purposive sampling ensures that the study represents a wide geographical spread (Amers et al., 2019). The participants are from a pool in four states in the United States (California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho).

After I obtained approval from the IRB (approval no. 08-11-21-0658796), I sent a letter of cooperation to each participant (see Appendix B). Researchers are encouraged to develop relationships with each participant (Guillemin et al., 2018). I contacted each participant using a combination of phone, email, and video conferencing. My goal was to gain the participants' trust. Using a communication strategy that establishes participant trust furthers the quality and depth of data originating from the interviews (Kowal et al., 2017). Rich data offered by the participants results from building trust between the researcher and the participants

Developing a trusting relationship with each participant was essential in gathering data from the semistructured interviews. A trusting relationship includes being open and respectful of one another, which enhances the quality and richness of the data (Kowal et al., 2017). Recognizing the importance of having an open relationship, authentically

building trust, and ensuring that the participants felt free to offer their leadership experiences was vital to study success. The participants' character, ethics, and values needed to be aligned with the research question. The ethical relationship between the researcher and participant is a determiner in the quality of the data gathered (Kara & Pickering, 2017).

Developing a relationship with research participants was critical to eliciting rich data. Maduka et al. (2018) recommended the researcher build a rapport with the participants before their interviews. To create a connection with the participants, a researcher should consider writing a summary of expectations and general discussion areas and presenting it before the interview (Maduka et al., 2018). I made sure that the participants' background experiences aligned with the research question. During the research, I met each participant via telephone and video conferencing and established a continuous and affirmative relationship to collect data to achieve data saturation.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

I chose the qualitative research method and a single case study design based on the business problem, study purpose, and research question. My goal was to develop an increased understanding of the studied phenomenon. Researchers use the qualitative method to gain a working knowledge of the participants' personal experiences (Yin, 2018). The research question is the foundation for selecting the best research method for any study (Yin, 2018).

I selected the qualitative research method because it enabled exploration of the

similarities and differences in participants' descriptive accounts. In this study, I examined communication strategies that enhance the productivity of virtual advertising account executives. The qualitative research method was appropriate because the study involved exploring strategies used by virtual leaders to enhance their virtual team members' productivity. Qualitative research offers the researcher an in-depth working knowledge of the participants' personal experiences through direct questioning (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Use of the qualitative research method deepened my understanding of the participants' individual experiences leading their teams.

I also considered quantitative and mixed methods for this research but did not select either approach. Quantitative was not appropriate for this research because there were no hypotheses or theories that were tested. The quantitative method is appropriate when analyzing the statistical relationships between variables when testing a theory (Park & Park, 2016). There were no particular occurrences associated with the study.

Mixed methods research was also not appropriate for this study. Mixed methods are appropriate when a researcher wants to combine qualitative and quantitative research. Yin (2018) suggested that a mixed methods methodology is relevant when a researcher collects data from qualitative and quantitative analysis. Mixed method research offers a researcher a more in-depth and broader explanation of the phenomenon (Hesse-Biber, 2016). I did not select the mixed method approach because it would not offer additional data by introducing a quantitative component to the research study. The qualitative method was appropriate for participants to share the communications strategies that they used to enhance their productivity.

Research Design

The research design was a descriptive single case study. Fusch and Fusch (2015) indicated that a descriptive case study provides a detailed picture of the research and the participants' actual individual experiences. The sources of evidence for case studies include interviews, other documents, records, direct observations, and participants (Alpi & Evans, 2019). Yin (2018) suggested that the case study design answers what, why, and questions. Ebneyamini and Moghadam (2018) argued that a researcher could select either a single or multiple-case design based on the study's needs. The single case study offered a more in-depth and richer description of the studied phenomenon for this study. The single case study is superior to the multiple method case study when a researcher wants to study a specific group of people (Gustafsson, 2017). Gonzales-Diaz and Bustamante-Cabrera (2021) argued that single case studies could describe the existence of the phenomenon studied. As the researcher, I aimed to explore the communications strategies used to enhance the productivity of virtual sales teams.

Consideration for other qualitative designs included phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative. A phenomenological design was considered but was not selected because there is no focus on human life experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). The section of the ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study because the intention of the research was not to study people in their environment or culture. Researchers also use narrative research design to inquire about participants' life experiences in gathering data to justify facts versus perceptions (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016). The narrative design was also inappropriate for this study because addressing the

participants' life experiences would not successfully address the research question.

One of the critical objectives of qualitative research was to achieve data saturation. Saunders et al. (2018) reasoned that data saturation was the number one goal in conducting qualitative research. Fusch and Ness (2015) argued that failure to reach data saturation affects the research quality. Data saturation was possible only when the participants' questions revealed the same data previously collected. Data saturation achievement is when there are no new emerging themes or ideas, and the continued process of interviews produces no additional themes (Guest et al., 2016). Favourate et al., 2020) suggested that data saturation was the guarantee in the quality of rigor that researcher can provide. There was not one specific approach in achieving data saturation.

Saturation is achieved based on the participant's data at a specific point in the interview when the participant cannot offer any new data. According to Yin (2018), to achieve saturation, researchers use several sources to collect data, including interviews, onsite visits, telephone, video conferencing, and document reviews. I ensured there was data saturation using member checking. With the completion of each interview, I (a) examined my interpretation of the interview responses, (b) offered a concise synthesis of what I wrote relating to each question asked, (d) validated with the participant to determine the accuracy of my notes versus each participant's responses. I continued asking questions until each participant offered no new data.

Population and Sampling

This single case study included virtual sales leaders in California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho who work for the same organization. Three virtual sales leaders

successfully lead virtual sales teams in achieving and exceeding their objectives (contracts signed and total revenue achieved versus the goal achievement) and defined by their virtually located leader. The three participants were working in their respective markets for a minimum of 2 years. The participants provided rich and thick data on this study's research question. Careful consideration of the selection of the participants was paramount in gathering rich data. The selection criteria for participants included inclusion and exclusion criteria. Patino and Ferreira (2018) suggested defining inclusion and exclusion criteria for study participants to design quality research standards. I selected from a pool of participants using specific criteria. Each participant exceeded expectations in contracts signed and revenue achievement versus defined revenue objectives.

The selection of three participants was appropriate for this single case study. Yin (2018) suggested that smaller sample size was suitable for the study when the conceptual framework aligns with the study. Qualitative research experts argue there was no precise answer to "how many" because the sample size combined methodological and practicality issues (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Busetto et al., 2020) posited that the more useable data collected from each participant translates into fewer participants. Aguboshim (2021) argued that a justification is based on the judgement and experience of the researcher; therefore, the sample size of three participants for this study was appropriate. The sampling technique was critical to the development of the study.

I used purposeful sampling for this study. Palinkas et al. (2015) described purposeful sampling as a technique that provided rich data to observe and analyze. Benoot et al. (2016) submitted that a significant advantage in adopting purposeful

sampling was that the researcher used exceptional performing participants willing and eager to share their personal experiences. Although convenience sampling is available in qualitative and quantitative research, purposeful sampling was the primary choice in qualitative research (Benoot et al., 2016). Convenience sampling was appropriate when the researcher examined the whole population (Ilker et al., 2016). The central conflict in convenience sampling was that the research participants might not apply to the research problem (Ilker et al., 2016). In this study, I was using a finite population that fit the criteria for the study. To be credible in qualitative research, the researcher must achieve data saturation.

Qualitative researchers strive to attain data saturation. Hennink et al. (2017) argued that even the most narrowed angle relating to saturation at the individual participant level offered no new data. (Johnson et al., 2020) suggested that data saturation was achievable when data collection and analysis produced no new data that addresses the research question. Furthermore, saturation was the evidence that the database development was adequate information for the qualitative researcher to address the research question successfully (Constantinou et al., 2017). I used member checking to validate the credibility of the results. Member checking allows the participants to reflect on personal experiences and create opportunities to add new data. Data saturation was complete when there were no new themes from the participants.

Ethical Research

The principal requirement for conducting research was the ethical treatment of the participants. Palinkas et al. (2015) defined research ethics as treating the research

participants with respect and dignity. When conducting qualitative research, informed

consent is considered the number one responsibility in protecting the participants. I was

the researcher and will follow the standards defined in the Belmont Report's principles

for my protection and the three participants in the study. Artal and Rubenfeld (2017)

advised researchers to offer and proceed after the participants first agreed and then signed

a consent form for the interview. Yin (2018) recommended that researchers use a

standardized consent form defining all defined ethical points related to privacy and

confidentiality. The consent form for this study included (a) my contact information, (b)

information on confidentiality, (c) the date of IRB approval, (d) withdrawal procedures

for any participant, (e) definition of potential study risks, and (f) information on record

and document retention.

Once approved by the IRB, each participant received a formal invitation letter via

email that defined the study's details, participant criteria, and personal contact

information. In addition to the formal invitation to participate, a confidential consent

form described the study's benefits and risks. Xu et al. (2020) recommended that the

consent form include a statement indicating voluntary participation.

There was no financial remuneration for participating. Following the consent

form's receipt, the participants had five days to consent using an 'I Consent' electronic

notification of approval to proceed. Should a participant decline, then the same process

would have included selecting a new participant for the study. Participants' could choose

the drop from the study at any time. I requested that anyone who decides to drop from

participation call or use email. Aguila et al. (2016) recommended that participants elect

not to answer but must answer the other nine interview questions or be removed and replaced by a new participant. Any participant who elected to drop out of the study would not have their data included in the study. No participants dropped out of the study.

The participants were encouraged to view the consent form throughout the study to remind them of their responsibility to be transparent and authentic. All participants were aware they could use email or a phone call as the researcher. I was mindful of the legality of gathering the study's information to be successful. Haines (2017) argued that academic research in leadership and business might be taxing, but the learning could be valuable to the researcher and participants. Haines also recognized that the researcher must balance risk to the participants and the study's benefits.

To ensure the participants' ethical protection, I used an informed consent form to share participants' information about the study, including gaining each participant's approval to engage in the study. I secured the participant's identity and safeguarded all the data collected from the initial interview and all other follow-up engagements. Protecting the participants' names and their responses to the interviews was a significant area of importance. Yin (2018) advocated using pseudonym coding to secure the confidentiality of the participants. The participants will log on with their coded credentials to protect their identity. I used a coding system for the P1, P2, and P3 participants. The participants and the researcher referred to themselves as either P1, P2, and P3 to maintain their confidentiality.

I collected data only after Walden University's IRB had given me the approval to start data collection (approval no. 08-11-21-0658796). Restriction access to the data was

paramount to all involved (Xu et al. (2020). I was responsible for all documents, recordings, computer hard drives, external hard drives, USB drives, and written material. Confidentiality was the underlying norm of research ethics and is considered an essential practice of researchers. As the sole individual responsible for all the video conferencing materials, phone calls, written documents, and other storage devices, I was held accountable for all the materials locked in my residence and the only individual with access to all research material for 5 years. Following the 5 years, all information was to be shredded.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument for this study. The researcher was the primary instrument in conducting qualitative case studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Saxena, 2017). Researchers may use several data sources to collect the data, including interviews, onsite visits, telephone, video conferencing, and document reviews Yin, 2018). I selected semistructured interviews for this study. Semistructured interview questions were appropriate in developing communication strategies that enhanced productivity for virtual sales team members. I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) as a guide when collecting data via video conferencing. Researchers use an interview protocol to ask probing questions of the participants (Saxena, 2017). The interview protocol included 10 semistructured questions and any future questions and member checking procedures that offered information from communication strategies that enhance virtual sales teams' productivity. The 10 participants were asked the same 10 questions in the same sequence.

The interview protocol offered information relating to the participants and the potential for follow-up questions. Yeong et al. (2018) suggested that the interview protocol's reliability should direct the interviewer to be systematic, consistent, and detailed during and after the interview process. Yin (2018) recommended that a researcher incorporate multiple data collection sources to increase the data's dependability and enhance case study research credibility. Other data sources included performance results, performance appraisals, and other written documentation to members assigned to their virtual leader.

Member checking allowed participants to check my interpretations of their responses to the 10 questions. Motulsky (2021) described member checking as a technique used to explore the credibility of the interviews. I asked the participants' to review my interpretation of their responses and make changes that align with their initial interview. Member checking included potential follow-up interviews adding to the thickness of the participants' initial interview responses, requiring them to review their updated answers' interpretation. There were no new follow-up interviews following the initial member checking procedure.

Data Collection Technique

Researchers utilize various data collection techniques in exploring a qualitative research phenomenon. Chu and Ke (2017) suggested that researchers collecting data may want to consider the data collection technique that best aligns with their study. Three primary data collection forms include interviews and document reviews (Snyder, 2019) . Yin (2017) suggested the minimum use of two data sources for case studies when

conducting qualitative research. New communication technology introductions offer

researchers the opportunity to conduct qualitative research. Archibald et al. (2019)

suggested that Zoom is an innovative video conferencing technology for researchers that

do not have the resources to conduct face-to-face interviews.

1. I incorporated the interview protocol (see Appendix B) as a guide to collect

   data using video conferencing technology (Zoom). Arslangilay (2018) argued

   that researchers first develop an interview protocol that aligns with the

   study's purpose, review the literature, and conclude with an expert review of

   the participants' experiences. Following each interview, I shared a summary

   of their responses for member checking.

Different data collection techniques offered advantages and disadvantages. The

primary benefit of using semistructured interviews was the high quality of data collection

technique and the large quantity of data yielded in the process (Marshall & Rossman,

2016). The researcher added order by their presence during the interviews. Because of

my presence as the primary data collection instrument, I answered questions the

participants' may have while encouraging the participants to offer more straightforward

responses to the interview questions.

Researchers' perception was that face-to-face interviews are preferable because of

the flexibility and personal engagement, thus offering a higher level of control during the

interview than a remote facility (Arslangilay, 2018). The disadvantage to video

conferencing was that the participants needed to access the internet and potentially may

be reluctant to show their faces on camera (Heath et al., 2018). There are advantages of

archival data that are easily accessible and do not require personal out-of-pocket costs (Das et al., 2018). Disadvantages of archival records include gaining approval from corporate leadership for the participants' files (Barnes et al., 2018). As part of the process, I gained support from the leader for each participant's specific performance records.

Researchers approve pilot testing to validate data and collection instruments techniques. Pilot studies value assessing and preparing data collection and analysis techniques (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Malmqvist et al. (2019) suggested that pilot studies were not critical in qualitative research but can help identify potential qualitative research weaknesses. I do not plan to conduct pilot testing but call upon my chair for guidance and support.

Data Organization Technique

The data organization plan included managing the data using Microsoft Word and Excel software. To ensure data integrity, researchers recommend that the data be easily accessible, organized, and maintained in an appropriate locked location to safeguard the data's significance (Cooper, 2017). I made written notes to support the transcripts during the interviews' data analysis. Taking notes actively during the interviews may raise other questions that require further explanation from the interview participants.

Researchers are encouraged to use field notes to include the setting's details, directed as providing rich content for the study (Phillipi & Lauderdale, 2018). Phillipi and Lauderdale (2018) further reasoned that field notes serve multiple purposes that include (a) directing the researcher to stay alert and observe the environment and interaction during the interview, (b) documenting sights sounds of the physical

environment, and the researchers' impressions as they occur, (c) researchers should reflect and identify if there is any potential for bias, (d) execute the coding and the study design, (e) continue to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of the data collection process, and (f) offers the essential context to inform the data analysis.

The recording of the interviews accomplished two critical objectives for the researcher. First, the recordings captured each word the participants spoke during the interviews. The recordings offered the researcher the potential to identify patterns between the three participants' responses to the questions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I assigned codes to the participants, eliminating any of the three participants' potential identification with a unique identifier applied to each participant, including the interview's date and times. The data storage is for 5 years, and then I will shred and destroy all files, including external hard drives and written material files relating to my personal computer.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was vital to research integrity. The use of thematic analysis supports achieving an objective evaluation of strategies that virtual leaders use in communicating strategies that enhance the productivity of virtual advertising account objectives. Thematic analysis was an appropriate qualitative research method (Nowell et al., 2017) and involved identifying themes with specific reference to the research's focus, question, context, and theoretical framework. Researchers should be mindful and move with caution in preparing the details to ensure the accuracy of research findings' (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The implementation of thematic analysis was critical to the success of the study.

I will be using thematic analysis to analyze the data from this qualitative case study. I adhered to the six phases of thematic analysis by Braun et al. (2017), who argued that thematic analysis should be the foundational method for qualitative analysis because thematic analysis offers core skills for conducting multiple qualitative analysis forms. The six-phase method was an iterative and reflective process that improves over time and involves a continual motion of the back and forth between the different phases. The 6 steps include (a) familiarizing yourself with your data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. During the thematic analysis process, I took the following actions:

1. I submerged myself into the data by conducting multiple reviews of the interview transcripts. Triangulation of different data collection modes, detailing my theoretical and reflective thoughts, managing and organizing all field notes reflective journals. Also, I documented my thoughts concerning the potential coding of varying themes vital to the study's success, including primary and secondary data in the analysis.

2. I included participant debriefings added initial codes from the literature review conceptual framework to have an audit trail of code generation. I used the NVivo™ (2018) software program to organize and label the data to identify codes and continue my reflexive journal's development richness.

3. I diagramed any theme connections that arose, kept detailed notes coding primary and secondary themes, and recognized patterns that bring out significance from the data relating to the research question.

4. I continued defining primary and secondary themes and determining the accuracy in testing for referential adequacy by going back and massaging the data for consistency, new themes, and eliminating previous ones that were no longer valid. I relied on the NVivo software program to confirm that all themes align with the data.

5. I reviewed and organized each primary and secondary theme to determine if they answered the research question. In this final phase, I defined in specific terms what each theme represented in relationship with the primary and secondary themes.

6. I submitted a review of the overall findings of my study.

The researcher is responsible for accurately defining the procedures and processes in collecting and interpreting the findings. Data analysis in qualitative research involved systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts and observation notes to include other non-textual materials used in developing a working knowledge of the phenomenon. Yin (2018) described data analysis as categorizing data that results in evidence-backed results. Popence et al. (2021) defined data analysis as a tool for collecting, filtering and organizing data to describe conclusions based on the researcher's data. I used Microsoft Excel and Word as tools to record, code, adjust and redefine themes and present results in multiple tables. Korstjens and Moser (2018) argued that researchers should repeatedly interact with the data on an ongoing basis, leading to re-imaging different understandings and perceptions.

Researchers rely on qualitative data analysis software during the analysis phase of

the research study. I used NVivo as a software tool to collect, organize, and visualize the semistructured interviews. The software classifies, sorts, and arranges information, examines the data's relationships, and combines analysis with linking, shaping, searching, and modeling (Patias et al., 2016). Hurst et al. (2015) identified four stages in analyzing the NVivo™ software: comprehension, synthesizing, theorizing, and recontextualizing. The data analysis culminated with the linking and contrasting emergent themes utilizing the reviewed literature and the conceptual study framework.

Triangulation uses more than one method in collecting data on the same topic. Triangulation was suitable for data analysis in case studies (Yin, 2018). Triangulation uses multiple approaches in applying different investigative methods to the same phenomenon (Braun et al., 2017). There were four different types of triangulation that include (a) data triangulation, (b) theoretical triangulation, (c) research triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation (Abdalla et al., 2018). I incorporated methodological triangulation to secure information from the participants as my primary source of interviews for this study. I analyzed written performance documentation and other direct field observations and agreed-upon commitments as the secondary data sources.

Researchers use methodological triangulation to increase their ability to interpret their conclusions (Renz et al., 2018). Honorene (2017) argued that methodological triangulation involves using multiple data sources to understand the data. I used performance appraisals, sales results performance, and other written communications between the participants and their teams and included my field journal notes to strengthen my study's validity. Honorene argued that methodological triangulation gives the

researcher a more thoughtful understanding while making sense of the data and information discovered. Helle-Valle and Borchgrevink (2018) argued that triangulation supports reducing potential problems in the data's reliability. I proceeded through the methodological triangulation of data for this study by securing information from the participants through semiconstructed interviews as the foundational data source.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are fundamental to all research. Chattaraj & Vijayaraghavan (2021) suggested that qualitative researchers focus on credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. Researchers emphasized that the rigor of qualitative research links to reliability and validity are central features of quality. Yin (2018) argued that reliability and validity strengthen the research results' accuracy and quality. Researchers outline the data collection and analysis so others may replicate the study for reliability and dependability. The goal for qualitative researchers was to ensure the research results' trustworthiness. Trustworthiness was essential in evaluating qualitative research studies (Maher et al., 2018). Researchers should consider that during the study's research and implementation phases, describe strategies that enhance the study's credibility and validity. My goal was to develop communication strategies that enhance the productivity of virtual sales teams.

Reliability

Procedural consistency is vital to the reliability of a study. Cypress (2017) suggested that the findings' replicability improved a researcher's findings' stability and reliability. Chae (2016) described dependability as the stability of the results over time

and the study's conditions. Dependability is a vital factor in performing reliable research. Dependability relates to researchers' procedures and processes to collect, interpret, and analyze the research data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Lemon and Hayes (2020) characterized dependability as a substitute for reliability and that the findings are unique and consistent throughout the data collected. Some of the ways used to enhance the study's dependability included member checking of data interpretation, transcript review, and interview protocol. I demonstrated trustworthiness by defining with detail the business problem's documentation, purpose, study participants, data collection methods, data analysis, expert validation of the research questions, and concluded with the research findings.

Methodological triangulation offers the researcher a multi-method approach when exploring the same phenomenon. Heesen et al. (2019) defined methodological triangulation as the convergence of multiple methods upon a single conclusion as the best-supported conclusions than only one method. Campbell et al. (2022) recommended that the researcher use a minimum of two data sources when using methodological triangulation. I achieved dependability by offering detailed information collected during the study to enable future researchers to achieve similar results.

Validity

Validity (trustworthiness) is continually developing through qualitative research studies. Truth in a study increases when there is ongoing contact with the participants' (Peterson et al, 2021; Faris, 2017). Interpretive validity captures the researcher's sensitivity and mental process used in interpreting the meaning of the objects, events,

values, and behaviors of the participants involved in the studied phenomenon (Maxwell, 1992). Trustworthiness is a technique researchers can use to persuade others that their research findings are valuable (McNutt et al., 2021). The research study's value is the study's trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1986) defined the four components of trustworthiness as, (a) credibility is the confidence in the truth of the findings, (b) transferability demonstrates that the findings have applicability in another context, (c) dependability reveals that the findings are consistent, replicable and (d) confirmability was the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the respondents shape the findings of study respondents and not researcher bias shape the findings of a study.

I performed member checking and methodological triangulation to confirm the researcher's interpretation and objectivity to ensure the study's validity. Researchers use member checking and triangulation to ensure reliable results and data. Hersey et al. (2001) argued that member checking involves sharing collected data anonymously with the expectation of the participants' feedback to the researcher.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research was the correct and factual interpretation of participants' personal experiences. Credibility was rooted in truth and values from a detailed response from the participants' lived experiences (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). The more time devoted to staying in communication' with the participants' will result in a deeper and broader data range. To ensure credibility, I (a) maintained a thick field journal accounting of this study, (b) using interview protocol, I eliminated any personal bias by

remaining neutral with the intent of not influencing an expected response and kept the interview questions simple by avoiding words that may introduce a bias, (c) maintain contact throughout the study with the participants, (d) initiate member checking, and (e) triangulation. I kept detailed notes in a journal to reflect and compare the three participants' original interviews. My overreaching objective was to create richer information in the development of this study.

Yin (2018) suggested that researchers be objective and accurate when interpreting the participants' interview questions to ensure researcher credibility. Engaging with the participants, I used triangulation to compare archival records to the interpreted data from future interviews to confirm or compare the findings. I used triangulation to reinforce and corroborate the outcomes of my research.

Transferability

The transferability of findings was the ability of future researchers to discover similar outcomes to the original research. Yin (2017) defined transferability as a process where future researchers replicate effects identical to previous research. Transferability was a characteristic of a trustworthy study (Nyirenda et al., 2020). The objective of a study is to present rich details so that others could determine if the findings are transferable for other research studies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Although research findings may not be directly transferrable to other industries, leaders in other areas may find their leadership circumstances similar and use the further study's conclusions as a valuable tool for their studies (Levitt et al., 2017). The study results may also offer leaders the best communications strategies working with virtual sales teams. My study's

conclusions may offer different researchers strategies to enhance their virtual team members' performance.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the final gauge of trustworthiness that qualitative researchers precondition for achievement. Korstjens & Moser (2018) argued that researchers achieve confirmability when the outcomes become consistent. Ultimately, once the researcher accurately replicates the participants' experiences, there was conformability (Prochner, 2022). Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested using member checking to confirm confirmability. Reflexivity (member checking) and data triangulation confirmed my research findings' confirmability. Reflective journals are records that maintain information to establish confirmability (Rania et al., 2021). I used a reflexive journal to chronicle history and preserved each step's audit trail in the research process.

Incorporating member checking offers the participants' the opportunity to verify the research data and check their accuracy in offering new details to their original responses (Busetto, 2020). Methodological triangulation will add to the power of the reliability and validity of the study. I used member checking to contact the participants for a follow-up interview to confirm that what I recorded was the correct response.

Participants' may also add information after the initial interviews. I asserted that any assumptions, including any bias in transcribing the responses to each participant's questions and other details missed during the initial interview and all subsequent meetings, were included in member checking. Examining the research data thoroughly to ensure accuracy and validity achieves confirmability. Forero et al. (2016) argued that

confirmability achievement occurs when other researchers can replicate the exact outcomes of a research study. I achieved confirmability in that other researchers could replicate and corroborate my research findings by carefully following each step of the research process.

Data Saturation

Researchers use data saturation as a criterion for discontinuing further data collection and analysis. Fusch and Fusch (2015) defined data saturation as that moment in the research where no new information is being observed by asking the participants questions. Fusch and Fusch (2015) determined that data saturation occurs only when additional coding and interpretation presents no new information. Saunders et al. (2018) suggested that saturation is helpful in qualitative research as a condition for discontinuing the data collection process. Guest et al. (2020 argued that saturation was the most publicized guarantee of qualitative rigor. When researchers fail to achieve data saturation, the study's quality is harmful, as is its credibility and dependability, including its quality (Tran et al., 2016). I achieved data saturation through member checking and methodological triangulation. I sought further information, including themes and patterns, while exhausting every opportunity to gather new data. I reviewed all documents referencing communication strategies that enhance the productivity of virtual sales teams. I determined that their results would align with this study if other researchers asked the same interview questions in the same order and time frame that I experienced in this study.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included the problem statement and the purpose of the study. I defined my role as the researcher to have the selection criteria and processes leaders use to manage virtual sales teams in the online automotive sales industry. The section presented a detailed description and justification of the research method and design used for the study. I offered the population and sample, and I defended the ethical standards throughout the study. The participants' ethical protection and results were paramount during and after the study was completed and published.

Also, I defined the value of using a qualitative single case study design. I presented a discussion related to the data analysis methods to include the reliability and validity of the study. I explained the member checking process with the completion of the interviews. Using methodological triangulation in the review of historical information added richness to the research data. I conducted virtual semistructured interviews using Zoom video conferencing to see the interviewees in real-time. I used NVivo software to manage, organize, code, and analyze the data.

In Section 3, I presented my research findings and application for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for virtual leaders, and reflections on the study. I delivered the results and offered how they may affect other virtual leaders and their virtual teams. In addition, I included a detailed discussion on the applicability of the findings to professional business practices.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive single case study was to identify communication strategies that some online automotive managers in one organization used to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity. Organizational leaders have increasingly shifted from conventional collated teams to virtual teamwork amid advancements in technology (Davidaviciene et al., 2020; Mehtab et al., 2017). Virtual leaders representing California, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho participated in this qualitative single case study. The data collection included semistructured interviews, journal notes, video conferencing observations, and other documents aligned with their teams' performance.

I used NVivo software to code the gathered semistructured interview transcripts into Microsoft Word. After completing the data analysis, I identified themes from the three selected leaders currently leading successful sales teams. The findings identified the communication strategies that the participating virtual leaders reported relying on to enhance their teams' performance.

Section 3 includes the thematic presentation of the findings. I present the communication strategies that, based on the data analyzed, enhanced the productivity of participants' virtual sales teams. In addition, I consider future applications of study findings for virtual leaders responsible for the productivity of their sales teams as well as the study's implications for positive social change. Finally, recommendations for action

and future research are presented. Section 3 closes with my final reflections and conclusions.

Presentation of the Findings

The primary research question for this study was, What are the communication strategies that some online automotive managers use to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity? To answer the research question, I conducted semiconstructed interviews with the support of Zoom conferencing technology. Each of the three online automotive managers from one company responded to the semistructured, open-ended questions. The focus of the questions was on how each participant communicates strategies to maintain productivity among their team members. In addition to the interviews, I reviewed other leader correspondence and documents, which included (a) regional reports, (b) the NVision leadership training manual, (c) the regional team website, and (d) dealer performance tracking reports and account executive performance appraisals. I relied on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase analysis to identify potential themes and patterns within my collected data. In addition, I used NVivo software to organize the data to include the study. Three primary themes emerged from an analysis of the data: (a) accountability, (b) leadership communication and engagement practices, and (c) leadership roles in virtual teams.

Theme 1: Accountability

Accountability was the first theme to emerge from the data. All three leader participants defined accountability as a communication strategy to enhance productivity. Two subthemes related to improving the productivity of the virtual sales team emerged:

quantitative goals and transparency. I report the outcomes of the themes to answer the research question.

Quantitative Goals

In the study of this industry segment, quantitative goals were the number one measurement defining success between the leader and their assigned followers. Each virtual team member was responsible for a limited list of quantitative measurements. P1, P2, and P3 declared that the success measurement was quantitative. P2 stated, "We view our individual and team success quantitatively." P2 continued, "Productivity was a combined measurement of multiple variables that included account growth, retention of business, and the level of success in developing the relationship between the account executive and the various decision-makers within each dealership." P1 shared the customer relationship management tool to identify each dealership in any specific account executives' market along with detailed data for each account. P1 went on to say, "One of the goals for each account executive was to sell only those programs that are justifiable for the dealership."

P1, P2, and P3 added ongoing quantitative evaluations of how each dealer was performing based on the different products offered by the account executive. The dealer performance spreadsheet was a forever-changing measurement tool discussion between the leader and account executive. P1 revealed, "Strategies included statistical achievement reports, virtual audits of products with sales members and dealers. CRM (Customer Relationship Management) workforce reviews and the reset of expectations with sales team members and auto dealers." Although P1, P2, and P3 worked virtually

with their account executives, the COVID-19 pandemic further restricted opportunities to meet face-to-face with executives. Enhanced virtual leadership training offered P1, P2, and P3 the chance to work closely and more effectively with their team members by performing a more in-depth review of dealer results and defining where the account executive should focus their efforts.

Communicating using video conferencing (Microsoft Teams) gave the account executives in the study more time to reach out to more dealer decision-makers daily, offering their guidance and expertise. Leaders of account executives were in a position to meet virtually and spend more time evaluating and teaching account executives to become more successful. P1 commented, "As the leader, we can now become laser-focused on finding solutions to dealer problems with well thought out solutions based on telemetry provided by the organization."

Transparency

Transparency was a core tenet in the success of the virtual teams that participants led. P1 identified transparency "as the number one issue in leading a virtual team of sales consultants." Gierlich-Jonas et al. (2020) defined transparency as the disclosure of information between groups of individuals to create a higher level of trust and accountability. P1 also expressed that transparency was important because team members want to know how they perform as individuals and as a team. P2 suggested that transparency was essential when the organization determined a need for change. P2 continued expressing that when there was transparency, everyone on the team heard from one voice as to why the change was needed and how it will benefit the team and

company. As individuals, P2 explained that the entire team could learn from their wins and losses with transparency.

P3 did not use the term *transparency* but spoke at length about the Customer relationship management they used to measure the performance of the account executives and the automotive dealerships they are assigned. Technology has played an essential role in the ability of companies to become more transparent. Some leaders view the generation of large volumes of data made possible by technology as promoting higher transparency levels (Gierlich-Jonas et al., 2020). Also, in addition to increases in data availability, the data can now be quickly processed and potentially acted upon by the leader (Rodríguez-Mazahua et al., 2016). Others, though, note a potential downside to how leaders introduce transparency.

The perception of the term transparency can have a negative connotation and potentially direct blame versus as a tool for sharing how an individual or team can improve. In that case, unintended negative consequences may arise, resulting in a lack of trust and motivation and decreased performance (Valentinov et al., 2019). How teams view transparency is dependent on how leadership uses the data with the team. P1, P2, and P3 voiced their concerns about data in regard to transparency of delivery and the leader's intentions. The participants recognized that communication with each team member could have unintended consequences because each team member may hear the message differently. P1, P2, and P3 recognized the importance of delivering their messaging through transparency.

Theme 2: Leadership Communication and Engagement Practices

The second theme that emerged from the data was leadership communication and engagement practices. The data from my analysis supported one subtheme: technology tools for the engagement of individual team members. Each of the three participants shared their interpretations of what it means to engage with their assigned team members. The outcomes of the subtheme appear to support the research question.

Leading virtual teams is fundamentally different than collocated teams. Bekirogullari and Thambusamy (2020) determined that one significant difference was that virtual teams need increased engagement time. P1, P2, and P3 each participated in an earned certificate program directed at coaching virtual teams, of which engagement was a crucial component. The 48-page training manual includes 13 sections of sales effectiveness training for the frontline leaders in developing successful virtual teams. The coaching sections includes core coaching competencies that include, (a) establishing the coaching agreement with the leader and account executive, (b) establishing trust, active listening skills, (c) direct communication, (d) creating awareness, (e) planning, and (f) goal setting. Each of these areas is in some form directly associated with how leaders should communicate and engage with their virtual team members individually and collectively.

P3 elaborated on the subject of engagement by noting how the account executives engage with one another. P3 encouraged the team to address current events that shape the auto industry. Sharing industry insights encourages the team to discuss how to manage this knowledge in developing the relationship between the auto dealer and their account

executive. P3 viewed himself at times as the facilitator while encouraging sales team members to share their successes to include their personal best practices.

Technology Tools Used for Communication and Engagement

Technology tools for engagement were an active item of interest for each of the participants. P1, P2, and P3 each expressed a need for not overcommunicating with either the team as a whole or individually. The participants asserted that overcommunicating with various forms of technology could have unintended consequences for the team, thus losing the intent of the engagement and lowering the impact of the communication. The three participants were all from the same organization and used the same quiver of technology tools: cell phone, text messaging, email, video conferencing, and personal and team websites. Microsoft Teams offered a bundle of products that leadership and the sales team could use to communicate and engage with their dealer clients.

Leaders of virtual teams also need to be aware of overengaging with their team members with an excessive volume of technology. P2 stated, "We made a list of by-laws that defined what, when, and how different technology was acceptable when corresponding with members of the team." This participant's assessment aligns with Chamakiotis et al.'s (2021) voicing of concerns that virtual teams can catch Zoom fatigue. Sugden (2020) suggested that the inappropriate use of technology can impact workers' health and potentially have an adverse response lowering their performance. P1, P2, and P3 intimated in comments outside their interviews that there was constant change in how leadership and sales teams interact using different forms of technology. The interaction included the best method to call a team member versus sending an email or

text message. The time of day was also a consideration in determining the best method of contacting a team member. Powell (2020) noted that problems could arise due to the overlapping of working from home while caring for a family. At times work-life balance can become blurred working from home.

The three interviewed leaders spoke extensively about video conferencing technology, specifically Microsoft Teams. P2 agreed that when the team met using video conferencing, everyone on the call would dress for work and participate in the agenda for the video conference. Also, there was a requirement that all members on the video conferencing call would have their cameras turned on. The meetings needed to stay on script and not exceed 45 minutes to 1 hour. Although each leader was different, they met with their respective teams weekly or biweekly using video conferencing.

Theme 3: Leadership Role of Virtual Teams

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis was the leadership role of virtual leaders. The leadership role in virtual teams emerged from the discussions of virtual leaders' responsibilities in communicating strategies virtual leaders use to enhance the productivity of their virtual sales teams. Two subthemes aligned with the central theme. These include communication with team members and trust between leaders and followers.

Leadership Communication in Virtual Teams

When working with virtual team members, there can be a misinterpretation of the terms *communication* and *engagement*. P1 and P2 noted that although the definitions of communication and engagement are subtle, there is a difference between the two terms

that requires explanation and understanding by the participant's to maximize their leadership skills. In offering a sharper definition, communication focuses on content to the intended audience, and engagement focuses on who was listening and what they hear in the conversation. Another way of presenting the differences between communication and engagement is that communication can occur without engagement. Engagement, though, cannot take place without communication. The NVision coaching certificate course, which all frontline leaders of virtual teams attended, including P1, P2, and P3, focused directly on the importance of different processes in communication and engagement with their sales teams. Some of these areas of learning include active listening skills, powerful questioning skills, and creating awareness. P2 talked about communicating with an account executive to find common ground while balancing corporate quantitative objectives and the quantitative objectives that account executives define personally.

P3 talked about focusing on how the sales team was interpreting the tone and words of the conversation. Communication and engagement were areas for improvement and would require ongoing evaluation and adjustments. P2 emphasized that communication should be timely and precise and make sure that the team are made aware of any changes that would affect them directly. P1 offered that open communications were vital to the entire team's success. P3 stated that "leaders and the team members must make themselves vulnerable to success." P1, P2, and P3 all supported the notion that they would use language that has the most significant positive impact on the team to communicate effectively.

Trust in Virtual Teams

Trust dynamics was an issue that was front and center for the leaders in this study. Leaders needed to trust the production, effectiveness, and reliability of their team members working virtually. Agarwal et al. (2020) argued that where there are high levels of trust throughout the organization, workers demonstrate higher levels of commitment to their area of responsibility and make the right decisions. Hacker et al. (2019) emphasized that virtual leaders need to continuously monitor and groom a culture of trust between the leader and the team members and cultivate trust between the team members themselves. Where trust exists in virtual teams, cohesion within the group also includes team empowerment (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021). The participants offered their definition of trust.

P2 offered a short and accurate definition of trust, stating, "The leader must trust and have faith in each team member." P2 continued by offering, "have the courage as a leader to let your team try new ideas; just don't let them fall off the cliff." P3 talked about "co-creating the relationship by establishing trust with the team member." P3 continued by noting that the leader's responsibility was to create a safe, supportive environment that nurtures mutual respect, resulting in trust between the leader and their followers. In areas where the sales member may show sensitivity, the leader should consider asking for permission to coach the team member. P3 concluded that demonstrating trust includes respecting your team members' perceptions, learning style, and being, and trust between the leader and follower. P3 noted that trust had championed new behaviors and actions, including risk-taking and the fear of failure.

Relevance of the Findings to the Literature

Three themes emerged from the data analysis that answered my research question: What are the communication strategies that some online automotive managers use to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity? The themes included accountability, leadership communication, engagement practices, and leadership roles in virtual teams. The leader participant's responses to the questions demonstrated that each used communication strategies to enhance the productivity of their virtual sales team members. One of the keys to employee performance was the virtual leader defining specific goals. Rodriguez and Walters (2017) posited that as leaders work to achieve higher levels of employee performance, there was a need to define goals and standards measurement. Leaders of virtual teams who define communication strategies that enhance productivity will recognize superior results.

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was the accountability of the virtual sales executive. Moving forward, the meaning of enhancing performance will change. Sharma et al. (2020) contend that account executives still need to evolve beyond just financial expectations to include multiple measurements such as customer feedback, teamwork, and expanding the account executive's ability to learn. Leaders also have to evolve with their sales teams. Leaders need to adapt and refrain from acting as micromanagers. Magpili and Pazos (2018) argued that leaders' excessive intervention could negatively affect team performance. In addition, future account executives need to have creative problem-solving skills innovativeness and build trust up and down the organization. The study results indicate that accountability was an ongoing

transformational process between auto dealers and account executives.

Leadership communication and engagement practices were the second theme that emerged from the data analysis. Although there can be stressful times for leaders in virtual teams, leaders must remember the advantages of exceptional leadership. Influential leaders encourage open and honest two-way communication with their teams, including the employee's input and reasoning for their decision-making processes (Agarwal et al., 2020). Video conferencing was now an accepted practice in virtual team settings. Virtual team meetings are now the standard for virtual teams. Virtual team meetings are now a standard when working remotely (Zeuge et al., 2020). Leadership engagement was an ongoing responsibility of virtual leaders. Virtual leaders should recognize that leadership was not a one-time event but should foster an environment of continuing engagement with team members (Chamakiotis et al., 2021). The study's results suggested that leaders who value ongoing communication and engagement techniques may support the communication strategies that enhance the performance of their virtual teams.

The leadership role in virtual teams was the third theme that emerged from the data analysis. Leadership in virtual teams was essential to the team's success, and the organization and virtual teams will continue to be the dominant working method (Barnes, 2020). Gibbs et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of the virtual leader interaction and communication within the team's configuration. Leaders can have an effect that diminishes the reputation of status differences between the members, thus influencing the members' engagement. Hacker et al. (2019) argued that virtual leaders should

continuously monitor and promote a culture where there was trust between the leader and their followers and trust between the team members resulting in higher performance. Therefore, based on the study's results, leaders that effectively communicate strategies can enhance the productivity of their virtual sales teams.

Relevance of the Findings to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the situational leadership model. I used the situational leadership model to understand communication strategies in one organization to motivate virtual sales team members to maintain productivity. The situational leadership model was a union based on a leader's knowledge of the individual's developmental needs and assigned to the leader (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Hersey (1997) suggested that elite leaders select the best leadership style based on their follower's ability to respond effectively to different situations. Leaders must have the core competency to assess the problem and apply the correct type (Hersey & Blanchard, 1981). The key to a leader and follower relationship's success was that the leaders must also know as a precondition that the follower was ready and willing to accept the assigned task (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). P3 talked specifically about knowing when the account executive is ready for the next step in their development. P1 and P2 addressed the need for leaders to lean into their account executives based on where the account executive was in their willingness and confidence level to take steps in their individual development. The participants' responses aligned with Hersey's and Blanchard's situational leadership model, showing how the leader's communication strategies can directly impact performance.

The themes identified in the study were accountability, leadership communication and engagement practices, and leadership role in virtual teams. All of the themes identified aligned with the Hersey and Blanchard situational leadership model. P1, P2, and P3 talked about balancing corporate objectives and balancing that with the core competency of each team member. Five different subthemes surfaced from communication strategies: quantitative goals, transparency, technology tools used for communication and engagement, leadership communication in virtual teams, and trust in virtual teams.

The five subthemes align with successful situational leaders' leadership and follower performance. Performance management was dependent on technical tools that measure performance data and evaluation. Asif and Rathore (2021) argued that organizations must bring together management and employees to define and meet goal expectations. Transparency was one of the fundamental indicators of success in virtual teams. Transparency plays a vital role in innovations relating to digital leadership (Gierlich-Jonas et al., 2020). P1, P2, and P3 talked about the importance of transparency between the leader and followers.

The advancement of digital technology has made it unnecessary for organizations to have company offices because of the access to personal computers, cloud computing, and other mobile devices (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021). Effective leadership communication was a vital function in the success of virtual teams. Without the innovations of technology tools to support virtual teams, there would be no virtual teams. Communication was a critical indicator of the performance of a virtual team (Topaloglu

& Anac, 2021). P1 and P2 expressed that without all of the technology tools resources, they would not have been able to meet the needs of their followers and the auto dealers they represented. In virtual teams, trust was essential to performance. Shaik and Makhecha (2019) posited that the role of trust in virtual teams requires additional trust levels because there was limited or no face-to-face interaction. P1, P2, and P3 agreed they are working to hone their skills in the area of trust. Therefore, accountability, leadership communication, engagement practices, and leadership in virtual teams are strategies that virtual leaders can use to enhance their teams' performance.

Effective Business Practices

The findings from this study revealed that communication strategies enhance the productivity of virtual account executives. Marlow et al. (2017) determined that effective communication processes improve virtual team performance. Although virtual leaders have made great strides in virtual communication, virtual members and leaders face communication and collaboration challenges (Cordes, 2017). Garro-Abarca et al. (2021) concluded that leaders in virtual teams must use a style that fosters trust that directly impacts team performance. Larson and DeChurch (2020) argued that leadership was a prerequisite with high performance and sustainability expectations. Therefore, the alignment of communication strategies by leaders appears to align with the three themes of this study (accountability, leadership communication engagement practices, and leadership role in virtual teams).

Document Analysis

The participants presented documents I reviewed, including the NVision leadership training manual, account executive performance reports, and their regional website page. The documents provided by the participants presented additional confirmation and consistency with their description in answering the research question. Virtual leaders that offer communication strategies can develop plans that address the developmental needs to increase the productivity of each individual on their team. Leaders in virtual teams who use various communication strategies offer greater clarity to their role resulting in enhanced performance of their team members. The use of the NVision leadership manual supported the conclusion that leadership communication strategies are essential for individual and team performance.

Triangulation of Data Sources

I engaged in the use of methodological triangulation in developing a working knowledge of the communication strategies leaders use to enhance the productivity of their virtual sales teams. Campbell et al.(2020) suggested that methodological triangulation can improve the analysis that includes the interpretation of the findings. Zoom technology was the video technology used in conducting semistructured interviews with the three participants. I reviewed the NVision training manual, account executive performance reports, and their regional website. These are all documents used in offering communication strategies to enhance their team's productivity. I used methodological triangulation to synthesize and analyze the data and merge the collected information to support my research question. The themes and subthemes that emerged included

accountability, communication, trust, and the leader's role in virtual teams supported by the interviews and supporting documents provided by the three leaders interviewed. Following the interviews and reviewing all the documents, I determined that the findings from the data collection were in alignment in supporting the interviewees' responses.

Applications to Professional Practice

Enhancing productivity is an ongoing issue with virtual teams. As more organizations gravitate to incorporating virtual team structures, each will need to learn how virtual teams differ from collated team structures to remain competitive. In the digital era, the processes of businesses have changed, and companies are pivoting to update and increase their core competency to compete successfully in a digital world comprised of virtual teams (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021). The findings may add relevance to virtual sales leaders learning in the automotive industry. This study's findings are relevant to virtual team structures and how leaders execute communication strategies that lead to superior performance.

Leaders may use the findings to enhance the performance of virtual sales teams in the online automotive industry that leaders should initiate (a) accountability, (b) leadership communication and engagement practices, and (c) leadership roles in virtual teams. Virtual leaders who elect to institute these three themes and subthemes could potentially experience enhanced productivity from their virtual sales team members. Leadership plays a fundamental role in influencing the collaboration and execution of virtual team performance (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021). Virtual leaders may find this study

of value in offering solutions that enhance the accountability, communication, and engagement practices and the role leaders play in the success of virtual teams.

Implications for Social Change

The findings regarding virtual teams may positively influence hiring employees who may have limited employment opportunities in local and rural communities. One effect of social change is that leaders could employ the best employees in a large metropolitan area or small rural communities no matter where they live. There is a shift to working virtually, reducing commuting time and transportation costs (De Fraja et al., 2021). Barrero et al. (2021) suggested that the change to working virtual will have financial benefits to other communities because employees no longer have to commute longer distances to corporate and regional offices. Abrams (2019) suggested that virtual workers can also increase employee productivity and morale when implemented correctly. Therefore, the findings may influence social changes from overall economic growth for local communities, thus benefiting the citizens and their families.

Virtual workers may have other positive effects on social change that reflects not only on the individual but also on the community. When individuals and organizations learn to master techniques to increase their performance working virtually, there was also a corresponding positive economic effect for local communities in the form of supporting local schools and other local programs. Financial and intellectual investments such as mental and physical well-being programs increase residents' engagement (Weideman & Hofmeyer, 2020). Finally, when members of communities are successful, they are more likely to engage in the support and welfare of their local community

Recommendations for Action

Virtual leaders seeking to enhance the productivity of virtual sales executives through new communication strategy practices may find the study's results valuable. The discovery findings found that when virtual leaders use specific communications strategies, productivity does increase. For the three participants involved in the study, all of the members of their vertical sales teams were either achieving or exceeding performance expectations. The second theme of the study was leadership communication and engagement practices and found that leadership practices in virtual teams are different than that of collated team structures.

An essential characteristic of virtual teams that was functionally different from collated teams was a significant reliance on technology tools (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021). The three participants talked about the heavy use of technology between the leader and their team members and how the account executives communicate with their assigned accounts. Without technology, it would be difficult for virtual teams to function successfully. Business dynamics and the successes in developing different technologies (software and hardware infrastructures, personal equipment, laptops, and cell phones) had made virtual teams a reality (Sanchez, 2017). Using the findings from this study, I encourage leaders that rely heavily on continuous training opportunities for their virtual leaders and virtual team members.

Leadership in organizations that rely heavily on technology in communicating with their vertical sales teams may want to consider offering ongoing training to develop a working knowledge of new technologies and become certified masters of the

technology. During their weekly video conferencing meeting, the participants discussed that training and learning new methods of developing their account base were advantageous. Rodriquez and Walters (2017) suggested it was the responsibility of organizational leaders to be aware of the importance that training and development impact the performance of the individual team members. The participants in the study all agreed that the primary incentive for sales executives was financial rewards. Therefore, leaders in virtual organizations may want to consider compensating sales executives based on sales and completing a series of different training courses.

Recommendations for Further Research

As virtual teams continue to grow, there remain challenges in multiple areas. Effective management in terms of trust and performance are just two of the numerous risk factors in leading virtual teams (Zaharie, 2021). I initiated a single case study to identify communication strategies leaders use to improve the performance of their virtual teams. My recommendation is for further study and research into a deeper understanding of communication strategies that enhance the productivity of virtual sales executives in the automotive industry.

The primary limitation of this study was a qualitative single case study. A multiple case study user includes more than one observation of the phenomenon (Halkias & Neubert, 2020). The interviews conducted were with one organization. Future researchers could use a multiple case study inviting different leaders from varying industries. There was the potential for future researchers to include more leaders in a multiple case study that focuses on communication strategies leaders use to enhance

productivity with their teams. Gustafsson (2017) articulated that numerous case studies may be more desirable than single case studies because the researcher can analyze the data within each situation to include different situations. The sample size for this study included three participants. Researchers in the future may want to use a larger sample size, thus contributing more details from a broader collection of participants. Some interview studies can have as many as 50 to 60 interviews to reach saturation (Vasileiou et al., 2018). My research took place in California, Oregon, Washington, and geography located in Idaho. Future studies could include other geographies throughout the United States.

Reflections

Upon reflection, in earning my doctoral degree from Walden University, the journey has taught me to become a more astute leader relating to critical thinking in viewing issues and problems deeper and broader. Specifically, my writing skills have developed where I now feel confident in thoroughly presenting my thoughts and then supporting that thinking with scholarly literature. The annotated bibliographies suggested a structured approach that offered a more applicable method for conducting literature reviews for my area of study. Reflecting on time management skills, I had learned the main priorities and then applied the resources necessary to achieve my objectives within a defined time. In addition, the collaborative nature of the learning environment between my chair and classmates was invaluable in bringing out my best work as a researcher, writer, collaborator, and leader.

The research I conducted heightened my comprehension of communication strategies that leaders use in maintaining the productivity of their virtual team members. Although I had 30 years as a leader in virtual teams and the automotive industry, I did not allow my knowledge and experiences to reflect in data collection and analysis. I viewed my role as a researcher to let the data collection and analysis process define the themes and outcomes of the study. Exploring communication strategies to enhance the productivity of virtual advertising account executives has given me a working understanding of how virtual leaders' deliver and execute communication strategies that improve productivity. This doctoral study has provided me with the best opportunity to collect data and offer findings that give leaders exceptional communication strategies that enhance virtual team productivity.

Conclusion

Some leaders of virtual teams require further development in understanding the strategies required of virtual leaders to enhance the productivity of their assigned team members. The purpose of this single qualitative case study was to explore the strategies that some virtual sales leaders use to improve the productivity of their virtual account executives. The processes used in the data collection included semiconstructed questions, triangulated data, member checking, direct observations using video conferencing, and reflective journaling. In addition, I incorporated methodological triangulation for validation of the three main themes and subthemes. The conceptual framework for this study was based on the situational leadership model by (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). The conclusions of this study offer insight into multiple strategies that virtual sales leaders

employ to enhance the productivity of their sales teams. Three main themes and five

subthemes emerged: accountability, leadership communication, engagement practices,

and leadership role in virtual teams. Leaders of virtual groups should recognize that

communication and engagement are different in leading versus collated teams. Virtual

teams require enhanced engagement using various tools (email, texting, wireless calling,

website communication, and video conferencing) by their leader, leading to increased

productivity.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Title: Communication Strategies to Enhance Productivity for Virtual

Advertising Account Executives

Before receiving IRB approval from Walden University, I appointed my doctoral

chair to assess my interview protocol's depth, and I made any changes identified by the

chair. Each meeting began with a welcome and introduction. I reviewed the consent form

with each participant to determine if there were questions or to offer more information on

the interview's format. Before asking the 10 interview questions, I introduced myself and

defined the study's reasoning and background. Each participant described their roles as

virtual leaders. The introduction process offered each participant the opportunity to

become comfortable before the questioning began. My goal was to have each participant

feel at ease and calm in answering the interview questions. I explained to each participant

that my goal in the interviews was to accurately record factual data regarding how they

led their virtual teams. Participants were reminded repeatedly throughout the interview

that they could withdraw from the study at any time during the research process.

Zoom meetings had an audio and visual recording capability. Also, Zoom

capabilities included a speech-to-text function. The speech-to-text function, under ideal

circumstances, is 89% accurate (Roy, 2021). Member checking was an essential step in

the process of validating transcripts. Once the speech-to-text interviews were complete, I

added any journal notes made during the interviews. The participants were encouraged to

read my interpretation of their interviews. After each participant read the transcript, I

scheduled member checking follow-up meetings to address discrepancies or add other

definitions to each of the 10 questions. I made changes, based on their responses, to accurately reflect their interview responses. I uploaded the interview transcripts into NVivo software after the member checking process and analyzed the data.

I expected that the semistructured questions would induce other questions and a curiosity to dive deeper into each question. The interview questions are as follows:

1. What communication strategies did you use in developing trust with the goal of maintaining productivity?

2. What communications strategies did you use to assess the productivity of the virtual sales team members?

3. What communication strategies did you use with virtual sales team members who were not maintaining productivity?

4. What communication strategies did you implement to validate that everyone on your virtual sales team had a working knowledge of maintaining productivity?

5. What communication strategies did you use with virtual sales team members to exceed expectations and maintain productivity?

6. What communication strategies were least effective in motivating virtual sales team members to maintain productivity?

7. What communication strategies did you use to follow up with virtual sales team members for maintaining productivity?

8. What communication strategies did you use to reduce risks and uncertainty in maintaining your virtual teams' productivity?

9. What communication strategies, if any, did you use to manage disputes between what you, as a leader, have defined as acceptable methods of maintaining productivity and what your virtual sales teams think is fair?

10. What additional information about communication strategies you use to maintain your virtual sales teams' productivity would you like to share that we did not address in this interview?

At the close of each interview, I thanked each participant for their time and interest in the study.

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

Email Requesting Permission to Conduct Research Study

Online Automotive Industry: _____

Contact Information: _____

Date: _____

Dear Gregory Scott Christman

Based on your review of your research proposal, I permit for you to conduct the study entitled Communication Strategies to Enhance Productivity for Virtual Advertising Account Executives within _____(Organizations' Name). As a part of this study, I authorize Gregory Scott Christman (Student Researcher) to recruit, do on-site and/or Zoom interviews, retrieve and use our company's non-confidential documents, including internal newsletters, promotional materials, marketing plans, and reports that could provide additional information for your study.

We at _____ (Organizations' Name) **agree to primary researcher's data collection procedures:**

- ***Standard Procedure:*** *Before contacting participants, the researcher will obtain approval from IRB.*
- ***Recruitment:*** *After obtaining IRB approval, he plans to recruit participants by calling the Area Vice President and requesting each leader's email address and phone number.*
- *After gaining access to emails or speaking with the leaders, he will send out an email introducing himself and informing the leaders that he is doing a study on Communication Strategies to Enhance Productivity for Virtual Advertising Account Executives.*
- *In his initial contact with the leaders, he will ask for permission to explain the title, background, confidentiality, and consent form.*

We at _____ (Organizations' Name) **agree to primary researcher's data collection procedures:**
We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: Provide knowledgeable Leaders, a secure and private interview location (if needed): resources, and any necessary needs to meet the researcher's data collection. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.
I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report published in ProQuest.
I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.
I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

_____ (Authorizing Official) Title

_____

_____ (Email Address)

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. The Uniform Electronic Transaction Act regulates electronic signatures. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the email's sender or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., email address officially on file with Walden).