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Performance Strategies to Increase U.S. Federal Government Employees' Productivity

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Maurice Fluelling

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Performance Strategies to Increase U.S. Federal Government Employees' Productivity

by

Maurice Fluelling

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

The low productivity of U.S. federal government employees has a high cost. Performance management leaders who lack strategies to increase productivity in federal government employees witness significant goal failures in their organizations. Grounded in Deming's total quality management, the purpose of this single-case study was to explore strategies federal government leaders used to increase employee productivity. The participants were three supervisors who worked in the U.S. federal government. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, annual reports, and publicly available data. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, and four themes emerged: employee engagement, adaptable philosophies, changes in management, and continuous process improvement. A key recommendation is for federal government performance leaders to include frontline employee feedback throughout the phases of process management. The implications for positive social change have the potential to promote employee engagement, decrease costs, and provide more resources to improve public services.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Performance management leaders face various challenges in adjusting their strategies to better support employees who fail to meet productivity goals. Leaders may also lack strategies to address the various underlying issues that impact employees. Often, performance management leaders focus on meeting productivity goals instead of on addressing issues that cause employees to fail to meet productivity goals (Green et al., 2018; Wijayanti et al., 2020). By addressing these issues, leaders can better meet productivity goals (Deming, 1981). The focus of this qualitative exploratory case study was on the strategies that performance management leaders in various agencies within a single U.S. federal government department used to increase employee productivity. Clarifying effective performance management strategies is particularly important in the federal government as it improves the quality of productivity in accomplishing the goal of serving the public.

Background of the Problem

Enhancing productivity is essential for organizational leaders to meet goals and effectively use resources (Roczniewska et al., 2021). For organizational leaders in the U.S. federal government, the issue is particularly important because periodic productivity fluctuations could negatively impact the success of departments in fulfilling their mission. Unclear performance expectations are one factor in poor productivity; scholarly researchers studying productivity have acknowledged the disconnect between the processes and the expectations that performance leaders establish for their employees (Deming, 1981; Roczniewska et al., 2021).

The subject of this study was productivity improvement strategies. When productive employees enter roles that align with the organization's goals and remain with the organization long-term, they have a positive impact on an organization's sustainability (Green et al., 2018). The lack of productivity improvement strategies for federal government department employees can cause a failure to meet productivity goals. Additional research could provide a better understanding of what strategies performance leaders could implement to reverse the impact of federal government department employees' not meeting productivity goals. Improvement strategies that involve the implementation of total quality management (TQM) can improve overall organizational performance (Roczniewska et al., 2021). However, although many performance leaders appreciate the importance of productivity, they often fail to maintain productivity levels that meet productivity goals (Green et al., 2018). As a result, the disconnect between leaders' expectations and employee output remains.

Problem and Purpose

Many business leaders fail to implement TQM strategies to adequately address failed employee productivity goals (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (2020), 42% of federal government employees indicated that the productivity expectations from leadership were unreasonable because the department lacked strategies to meet productivity goals. The general business problem facing the federal government is that employees failing to meet productivity goals within departments may lead to decreased service quality, increased customer complaints, and weaker job security. The specific business problem is that some

performance leaders within federal government departments lack the necessary strategies to increase employee productivity.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies that performance leaders within federal government departments use to increase employee productivity. The target population for this study was at least three supervisor performance leaders in the federal government department located in Washington, DC, who develop and implement employee productivity improvement strategies. The findings of this study could inform performance leaders about ways to shorten the completion time of government service requests, resulting in higher customer satisfaction and improved use of tax dollars through enhanced departmental performance to meet productivity goals. The results of this study could be used to decrease unemployment rates, increase moderate economic growth from employment-based bonuses, promote qualifications as a result of improved employee productivity, and offer more efficient use of organizational resources, such as funding and hours worked, to produce public service-based benefits.

Nature of the Study

I considered three types of research methodologies for this study: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed. Qualitative methodology was chosen for this case study to develop a comprehensive understanding of participants' real-life experiences related to the strategies that they have used to increase federal government employee productivity. Researchers using the qualitative research method seek to better understand the relationship between participant responses using various data collection techniques and

data analysis procedures to develop the conceptual framework for the research (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Researchers use quantitative methodology to understand the correlation between multiple variables that are measured numerically and analyzed using statistics (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). Quantitative methods were inappropriate for this study because statistical data analysis was not necessary. The data collection design and techniques were selected for this study to obtain qualitative data from real-life experiences. Researchers use mixed methodology to understand the combination of participants' meanings and the relationship to the numerical data (Verga Matos et al., 2019). Mixed methodology was inappropriate for this study because the data analysis process did not include statistical methods. Thus, qualitative methodology was the most appropriate methodology for this study.

I explored three research designs—case study, narrative, and ethnographic—for their appropriateness for this study. Case studies are detailed explorations of real-life experiences (Carder & Rooney, 2018). A case study approach was appropriate for this research because I conducted in-depth explorations of the real-life experiences of performance leaders who use strategies to increase federal government employee productivity. A narrative approach is used when chronology is a priority during the data collection phase (Salter & Rhodes, 2018). Narrative was not appropriate for this study because chronological order was not a priority during this research. Ethnographic research design is used to study the social world of a people or ethnic group through living among the participants (Verga Matos et al., 2019). Ethnographic research design was not appropriate for this study because I was not living among the participants.

Research Question

What strategies do performance leaders within a federal governmental department use to increase employee productivity?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to increase your department's employees' productivity?
2. What strategies does your department use to provide the necessary resources to increase employee productivity?
3. How does your department assess the effectiveness of its strategies for increasing employee productivity?
4. What, if any, methods of evaluation are used to identify employee productivity stressors?
5. In what ways, if any, is employee feedback considered in the development or improvement of strategies to increase employee productivity?
6. How does your department measure employee productivity?
7. What productivity strategies work to address obstacles when implementing strategies to increase employees' productivity?
8. How would your office address obstacles to implementing strategies for increasing your employees' productivity?
9. What else would you like to share regarding strategies used to increase employees' productivity?

Conceptual Framework

Deming's (1981) model of TQM was the conceptual framework used in this qualitative study. I used the TQM model to evaluate the strategies that increase employee productivity in federal government departments. Because an organization's performance strategy impacts the network of the interdependent components that work together to accomplish a goal, leaders cannot focus only on the desired results (Deming, 1981). In the TQM model, Deming recommended that an organization's leaders focus on improving employees' performance.

The TQM model provides leaders with the concepts, processes, and tools to explore, measure, assess, modify, and implement system improvement strategies (Smith, 2020). Applying the TQM model as the conceptual framework for this study yielded results that could assist other federal government department performance leaders in obtaining quality strategy guidance. The TQM model provides tools for improving employees' work environment and their understanding of the requirements for improving employee productivity (Deming, 1981).

Deming's (1981) TQM model highlights how strategies, processes, and tools are not self-sustaining corrections and do not naturally improve without leader intervention (Sowiyah, 2021). Applying the TQM model to strategies could promote the benefits of breaking down the barriers of competition between departments and building a successful system throughout the organization as a whole (Smith, 2020). By applying the TQM model, leaders can communicate their support for frontline employees through their actions (Sowiyah, 2021). I used Deming's TQM model in this research to evaluate the

effectiveness of the strategies that federal government department performance leaders implemented to increase employees' productivity.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

An assumption is a presumption that researchers have accepted that lacks the evidence of supported findings and verification (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). The first assumption of this study was that increasing employee productivity is essential for enhancing the performance of federal government departments. The second assumption was that participants would articulate their knowledge and real-life experiences to adequately address the interview questions. The final assumption was that the data collected from the interviews would (a) yield evidence of productivity-focused strategies, (b) include some method of measuring employee productivity, and (c) show honesty in the depiction of their real-life experiences.

Limitations

A limitation is a potentially negative impact on the study that could weaken the external validity of the research (Cassell et al., 2018). An exploratory case study poses the limitation of grappling with participants' multiple perceptive experiences while addressing the overarching research question (Smith, 2020). The first limitation of the study was the accuracy of participants' data on their experiences as performance leaders. Meyer et al. (2019) suggested avoiding long, unscripted conversations to reduce, if not eliminate, participants' embellishment and ensure that the responses focus on addressing the interview questions. The second limitation of the study was that, although the

participants came from various agencies, they all served within the U.S. federal government department; this could limit the study's transferability. As each U.S. federal government department has different missions the transferability may vary or not be applicable. The third limitation of the study was that the sample size could prove inadequate to generalize to a broader population. The final limitation was that the use of interviews and supportive documentation would exclude information obtained from other data collection instruments.

Delimitations

As a counterpart to limitations, a delimitation is a process control mechanism that sets boundaries for the study concept (Carder & Rooney, 2018). The first delimitation was that the population of this study was limited to federal government performance leaders in the United States. The second delimitation was that limiting the research to performance leaders' perspectives may limit the research scope. Furthermore, the research sample size was limited to three performance leaders. The final delimitation was using the TQM model as the only conceptual framework to analyze the study's findings.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may provide performance leaders with insight into strategies that could address employees who fail to meet the productivity goals for federal government departments, agencies, administrations, and offices. Employees who fail to meet productivity goals result from ineffective performance management strategies (Deming, 1981; Sylqa, 2020). Deming (1981) stated that failing to implement the TQM model into performance management strategies would result in unsatisfied employees,

leaders, and shareholders. Ineffective performance management strategies can also lead to underemployment, employees not qualifying for promotions, and the organization's scarce resources such as time, funding, and human capital (Mosadeghrad & Afshari, 2021; Tyokwe & Naicker, 2021). With guidance from successful and proven federal government performance leaders, the strategies discovered in the findings of this study could help manage the impact of these negative effects and may help other federal government performance leaders to support employees who fail to meet productivity goals. Using the TQM model in this study, the findings may bring value to federal government departments, agencies, administrations, and offices through improved employee performance, increased employee productivity, and the utilization of resources such as time, funding, and human resources (HR) capital.

Additionally, this study's results may help close the gap in the literature regarding federal government employee productivity. The results of this study could contribute to the knowledge about federal government performance management by guiding the successful implementation of employee productivity improvement strategies. Through the use of the TQM model, the findings from this study may also contribute to positive social change by communicating the performance management challenges of increasing employee productivity in the federal government.

Contribution to Business Practice

Non-government organizations implementing the TQM model have witnessed notable improvement in employee productivity (Deming, 1981; Sowiyah, 2021). The non-government organizations used in recent studies were a part of the private sector

(Sowiyah, 2021). In contrast, this study focuses on the public sector, specifically federal government departments, agencies, administrations, and offices. Thus, the results of this study are uniquely related to the application of the TQM model to improve employee productivity. While studies comparing the public and private sectors may overlap, the two are vastly different in operation (Rice, 2018). Though the public sector operates differently than the private sector, some performance management improvement strategies from the public sector have transferability into the private sector (Saleh et al., 2018).

Implications for Social Change

This research can contribute to positive social change by helping federal government performance leaders better understand the impact of ineffective performance strategies on employee productivity. Nkurunziza et al. (2018) stated that whether a strategic plan is effective or ineffective is based on organizational meeting projected progress or not. The public benefits from the fulfillment of services by productive government employees (Office of Personnel Management, 2021a). Performance management success in public services, such as the federal government, may impact people, businesses, and communities worldwide. Office of Personnel Management (2020) found that 35% of federal government employees are concerned with the lack of resources from leaders to complete the expected production level, 33% are concerned that productivity expectations from leaders are unreasonable, and 51% are concerned that leaders allow poor performers remain and continue to underperform. All of these concerns may contribute to employees failing to meet productivity goals. The

contributions of this study could result in decreased unemployment rates, increased moderate economic growth from employment-based bonuses, promotion qualifications as a result of improved employee productivity, and more effective use of organizational resources such as funding and hours worked to produce public-service based benefits. Performance management strategies that promote better support for employees could also increase employee confidence that the leaders address their concerns.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to identify strategies to increase employee productivity through performance management. I review key literature in several areas, including employees' perceptions and expectations of leaders and organizations, employee productivity, leaders' style, employee retention, employee motivation, performance leaders, federal government department job satisfaction, and contributing factors to increased productivity. Collectively, the literature shows the differing levels of performance leaders' effectiveness in various organizations to increase employee productivity.

To find literature, I searched nine databases and search engines: ProQuest Central, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Education Source Complete, Research Information Center, Sage, Emerald Management, and Google Scholar. I gathered 148 references consisting of scholarly peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, papers and reports, and books. Of these, 133 (90%) were published in the past 5 years (2018-2022), and 131 (89 %) were peer-reviewed articles. I used the following search terms alone and in combination: *performance leaders*, *productivity*, *employee job*

satisfaction, motivation, government strategies, employee retention strategies, employee productivity, employee morale, influence, government productivity, sustainability, and rewards system. This literature review section contains five main topics: (a) TQM, (b) leaders, (c) job satisfaction and work conditions, (d) productivity, and (e) performance.

Critical Analysis and Synthesis of the Literature

The justification for this study comes from an applied business problem: Performance leaders within federal government departments lack strategies to increase their department's employee productivity. Failure to meet productivity goals could be problematic for the federal government as it wastes resources (OPM, 2022), such as hours worked and funds, and more importantly the time of the public requesting the service. I want to better understand the strategies that multiple performance leaders in various agencies within a single federal government department use to increase employee productivity. Using Deming's (1981) TQM model as a guide, I explored the successful strategies performance leaders use to increase their department's employee productivity.

In this literature review, I examine performance management related to productivity strategies, employee job satisfaction, leaders-employee relationship, positive work environment, change and sustainability management, TQM, process improvement, and performance measurement. Hence, scholarly research on the importance of implementing quality performance strategies could center around process improvement, performance and productivity measurement, employee morale, and strategy development and implementation. Deming (1981) described reduced employee productivity due to

business leaders' failure to understand the inefficiencies within their current performance process.

Total Quality Management

TQM is a performance management system of processes (Deming, 1981). Its core principle is that employees must commit to maintaining high productivity standards through efficient performance processes (Ahmed et al., 2018; Deming, 1981; Timotius & Sutrisno, 2019). Deming (1981) found that TQM can be used as a business practice to improve performance management and make businesses as competitive as possible while attempting to improve the worth of the products produced, services rendered, people employed, processes created, and environments established (see also Ahmed et al., 2018). If applied, TQM improves the quality and efficiency of performance management awareness, business operations, and services. The TQM model improves business operations through improved performance management, communication-based collaborative processes, better products, more efficient services, and an inclusive and comfortable work environment for employees (Timotius & Sutrisno, 2019). TQM consists of innovative business practices; if business leaders implement its process approach and continual improvement and communication aspects to meet employees' needs, they may be able to improve workplace processes and performance management and increase productivity (Ahmed et al., 2018). TQM offers principles that empower employees to produce the best possible product and ultimately improve performance, business operations, and product quality, as well as increase the competitive capabilities of the organization (Rice, 2018).

Ahmed et al. (2018) found that TQM features eight principles. These are, as follows: (a) it is customer-focused, (b) it incorporates total employee investment, (c) it is process-centered, (d) it is an integrated system, (e) it uses a strategic and systematic approach, (f) it continuously seeks to improve, (g) it uses science and facts to make decisions, and (h) it emphasizes communication. Ahmed et al. explained that in the first element, customer focus, the customer is the ultimate decision-maker who determines whether the effort is valid. Second, total employee investment occurs when all team members are empowered, and no one fears job security or competition, resulting in improved performance. In the third element, being process-centered, TQM ensures that all inputs from suppliers transfer into viable outputs, such as communication between leaders and employees on productivity. Fourth, the integrated system element ensures consistency and unification across position responsibilities because of many different functional specialties. The fifth element, strategic/systematic approach, is synonymous with strategic planning or performance management that holds quality as the essential component (Timotius & Sutrisno, 2019). The sixth element, continual improvement, refers to continually improving performance management and processing systems, such as using creativity and innovation to meet performance expectations (Rice, 2018). The seventh element, using science and facts to make decisions, provides an opportunity to understand how well the organization performs and make informed decisions about its future. Finally, employee morale can suffer without effective communication with leaders (Hope et al., 2019). Although all aspects of TQM are essential for making process improvement systems better, creativity and innovation are critical.

Creative thinking could help an organization to achieve maximum productivity. Company success, creative thinking, and strategic planning come from an emphasis on acknowledging and embracing the unique importance of people as capital (Satyal et al., 2018). These factors often mean adopting new leaders' styles as a strategic response to effective human capital management (Cunliffe, 2018). Historically, companies have operated as top-down, bureaucratic organizations that discount what the employee offers the organization (Rice, 2018). Making an organization more flexible as a part of strategic planning can permit leaders to use different ways of managing employees (Hope et al., 2019). Implementing TQM as part of an employee's job performance and overall productivity can increase with all-inclusive feedback in developing, implementing, and improving performance management strategies.

Process Improvement

The full scope of performance management includes a process that begins with the leaders and ends with employees' completion of a task or responsibility. A process is a series of tasks in a specific order with clearly identified inputs and outputs (Davenport, 1993). For an organization, these tasks could be valuable not only to the customers and organization but also to employees' performance expectations and task completion results. The organizational improvement process incorporates Deming's (1981) TQM model through the lens of performance management impact (Davenport, 1993). Although TQM provides an overview of process improvement, more focused research on the specific components within the TQM model and performance management could provide

a more transparent structure for organizations to use when identifying areas for process improvement (Beerepoot et al., 2019).

One component of TQM is process improvement (Deming, 1981). Process improvement capabilities concerning performance management rely on three key components: (a) engagement of leaders to identify areas of improvement, (b) the development of methods and skills across departments to create improved processes, and (c) delivery of the changes necessary to make improvements (Beerepoot et al., 2019). However, Holzer et al. (2019) found that some improvement process strategies lack a TQM principle by depending heavily on the organization's leaders' capabilities to identify areas of process improvement. This lack could be problematic as exclusively depending on the leader's contribution lacks the all-inclusive perception of the frontline employee. TQM involves all employees throughout the completion of the task (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2018). Holzer et al. (2019) found two key challenges that could negatively impact both the support and execution of any process improvement strategy: the challenge with leader's support and the execution of the strategy. Support and execution challenges occur when the leaders disagree on the focus of process improvement efforts; this typically results in divided agendas and approaches, respectively (Beerepoot et al., 2019; Holzer et al., 2019). Adopting TQM principles would not prevent all the issues in the process improvement stages, but it would provide leaders with more information when developing process improvement strategies and could lead to more favorable or positive outcomes (Rice., 2018).

Employee Engagement

Academics and professionals have implemented various performance management strategies, such as proactive personality, transformational leaders, and growth mindset, into their process improvement strategies on employee engagement (Caniëls et al., 2018). Bakker and Albrecht (2018) found that because employee engagement is essential to the TQM principles, leaders must consider employee personal traits and work habits when developing employee engagement strategies. The main reason for employee engagement in TQM is that engagement with employees is an indicator for leaders of the essential employee, team, performance, and organizational outcomes (Caniëls et al., 2018).

Kahn (1990) first introduced the concept of employee engagement. The researcher found that employee engagement occurs when individuals express themselves cognitively, physically, or personally when performing a given role or task. This finding led Kahn to initially define employee engagement as personal engagement. Kahn observed engagement periods (or disengagement) as reactions to work environments and individual variables. The principles of TQM align with Kahn and take things further to focus specifically on the engagement or relationship between employees and leaders. Researchers (Caniëls et al., 2018; Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2018) recognized that employee engagement, as it relates to TQM, is interchangeable with personal engagement, role engagement, work engagement, and job engagement.

Huertas-Valdivia et al. (2018) and Bakker and Albrecht (2018) found that TQM heavily depends on employee engagement for process improvement strategy

development. Employee engagement could supply leaders with valuable data about the processes and operations of the organization. Caniëls et al. (2018) found that employee engagement is a process of continuous generational behavior-based energy that assists the employee in connecting mentally, physically, and cognitively to a given task. Some researchers have concluded that employee engagement is the total mental and cognitive commitment that an employee has toward their organization and the employees' willingness to invest additional efforts to assist their organization in achieving its goals (Tortorella et al., 2020). Deming (1981) stated that employees need to feel that their feedback and value to the organization matter if they invest their best efforts into a quality outcome. Other researchers have described employee engagement as a positive employee perspective and supported the concept that employee engagement operates as an essential tool that drives organizational outcomes and goals of improvement (Caniëls et al., 2018; Deming, 1981).

Huertas-Valdivia et al. (2018) and Haven and Van Grootel (2019) stated that the value of the organizational contribution from employee engagement is typically ranked the highest in productivity and strategic development. Employee engagement remains a popular topic and a critical and foundational strategic concept for maximizing organizational success for small organization leaders (Caniëls et al., 2018). The TQM model includes employee engagement and requires leaders to monitor and assess business processes for improvement using the employee's perception (Timotius & Sutrisno, 2019).

Productivity

Rapp et al. (2019) explained that productivity measures efficiency and not effectiveness. Deming (1981) explained that in TQM, the efficiency of employees directly impacts the quality of productivity. Federal government productivity is the efficiency with which resources produce a government service or product at specified levels of quality and timeliness (National Archives, 2021). Deming stated that TQM-based strategies to improve productivity via performance rely on leaders to support employee engagement for insightful feedback on processes. Although collecting insightful feedback from employee engagement is essential to leaders, measuring performance and productivity is vital in setting productivity goals (Ahmed et al., 2018). However, there is no single, universally accepted method to measure performance and productivity across multiple organizations (Green et al., 2018).

Researchers have found that performance and productivity are directly and indirectly related (Cassell et al., 2018; Delmas & Pekovic, 2018; Roczniowska et al., 2021; Timotius & Sutrisno, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). Regarding TQM principles, Deming (1981) stated that the connection between employee, performance, process, and productivity is natural within the organizational operations. Although there are many different methods to calculate productivity and performance using multiple factors and variables, the most common method involves comparing inputs or tasks to the outputs or results and stated in absolute terms (Delmas & Pekovic, 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). TQM utilizes a comparison of the input with the output by including the feedback from all employees involved throughout any process (Ahmed et al., 2018; Deming, 1981).

Productivity methods investigated in one research study focused on human capital productivity and performance and included the qualitative review of productivity for measuring success, failure, and means to process improvement (Delmas & Pekovic, 2018). Timotius and Sutrisno (2019) found that although qualitatively measuring productivity is more difficult because of the interpretation factor, the method allows for more freedom from leaders to explain the full scope of an employee's productivity in greater detail. Deming stated that TQM must extend beyond the quantitative charts and worksheets of a numbers-based performance quota.

When measuring worker productivity and performance, there are several factors to consider: (a) the tools needed to perform the job task, (b) competencies needed to perform the task, and (c) the complexity of the job task (Meyer et al., 2019). Leaders calculate productivity and performance at the individual worker, team/group, or organizational levels (Deming, 1981). An increase in an individual worker's productivity may impact the team's overall productivity and performance. TQM utilizes the insight from all employees when determining the set goals, the path toward meeting those goals, and possible issues in being successful (Deming, 1981). Thus, some researchers perceive the individual employee as the best level to measure employee productivity (Zhang et al., 2018). However, other researchers calculate productivity at the individual worker level and compare it to individual perceptions of the organizational leaders based on individual participation in research survey data collection (Roczniowska et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2018). One of Deming's (1981) 14-points of quality management stated that leaders

should redefine their measurement methods for employee productivity by eliminating numerical quotas for the workforce and numerical goals for management.

Input Versus Output

Klonoski and Easton (1967) defined input as events external to the system that change or affect the system's operations. When applying Klonoski and Easton's (1967) research to employee performance, translate input into a task given to an employee. Then, break down those tasks into demands and support. Inputs can be specific and cause significant stress on the system, which would make it a demand, or the input can be a disturbance from new technologies, ideas, culture, business leaders, or other environmental changes (Klonoski & Easton, 1967). The federal government's initial resources, such as human capital, could be defined as input.

Deming (1981) defines output as the result of a system of processes. Outputs can also be objective or subjective and stem, in theory, from situational or behavioral data, respectively (Klonoski & Easton, 1967). The federal government defines output as the services provided to the public (National Archives, 2021). When applying Klonoski and Easton's (1967) research to employee performance, translate the output into an employee's task performance. Although Deming agreed with this research, he believed the collective performance of all employees would create a quality output method for leaders to improve the process and thus the quality of the output. Organizational performance policies could be effective if implemented in an objective structure. While performance policies are objective in structure, the adaptation could be subjective for federal government employees (Bentley, 1908). Subjective performance policies for

federal government employees could merge with Deming's TQM model of utilizing employee performance feedback and equip leaders with the tools to accomplish production goals.

Leaders

Understanding the role that leaders play in organizational performance management is essential to its success (Caniëls et al., 2018; Cunliffe, 2018; Holzer et al., 2019). The analysis of the academic literature on leaders and organizational effectiveness stated that there are three critical points about leaders (Cunliffe, 2018). Deming (1981) believed that implementing TQM leaders could serve the purpose of improving the performance of employees and the process in which they use to perform a task. Holzer et al. (2019) stated there are three functions of a leader: (a) first, leaders are broadly consequential and arguably the most important issue in the human sciences, (b) leaders contain the performance management of teams, groups, and organizations and promote the capable team and group performance and well-being, and (c) leader personality predict leader style, which influences employee attitudes and team performance that in turn influences organizational performance. Some researchers have argued that leader styles vary depending on the organization's performance management goals (Cunliffe, 2018; Holzer et al., 2019; Wen et al., 2019). Holzer et al. (2019) also indicated that a leaders' leadership style heavily influences employee performance. Deming (1981) believed that as a principle of TQM, leaders are responsible for installing a sense of workman's pride to encourage the employee's sense of self-investment in increasing production quality. A leader's style could influence employees' desirable behavior and

thus performance through a useful team leaders model. As an organizational leader's goal, trust works as a motivator, which positively impacts intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships and all over performance, both inside and outside of the organization (Holzer et al., 2019).

Northouse (2016) described the Hill model for team leaders as a tool to understand the complex team leader's real-life experiences. Northouse stated that this starts at the top with the primary leader's decisions, moves to leaders' actions, and, finally, focuses on team performance indicators as a test of effectiveness. Deming (1981) believed that leaders are critical to TQM via the improvement process of an organization and require a leader that can focus on the employees instead of the goals. The Hill Model suggested that a leader's decisions directly affect team performance through internal and external actions. While Deming's (1981) TQM framework aligns with the Hill Model, it also takes it a step further and includes frontline workers in decision-making. Timotius and Sutrisno (2019) stated that a leader and his followers could together reach a higher level of performance and motivation. Ahmed et al. (2018) found that starting with the tone at the top; the leaders must understand that performance management advancements require effectively supporting employees with communication-based collaboration, adequate resources, and efficient processes. Deming (1981) stated that leaders are responsible for the TQM of organizational processes and thus the failure of those processes to meet goals. Leaders could align performance management, the Hill Model, and organizational goals by implementing TQM principles into their processes.

Strategic Alliances

Some researchers (Busu, 2019; Meyer et al., 2019; Saleh et al., 2018) have defined strategy as the performance management-based plans and related activities that create and sustain an organization's competitive advantage. Organizational strategies drive and innovate employee performance to help organizational leaders to make informed decisions from the frontline worker's perspective (Holzer et al., 2019; Saleh et al., 2018). This definition aligns with Deming's (1981) belief that as a principle of TQM, the inclusion of all employees when gathering information on making decisions for process improvement. The leaders should take critical steps to advance strategic alliances with employees that increase employee inclusion, thereby improving employee performance (Cassell et al., 2018; Timotius & Sutrisno, 2019).

Job Satisfaction

Employee performance could connect to job satisfaction. An employee's performance depends on two factors: job satisfaction and work conditions (Ulus & Gabriel, 2018). Understanding the impact of job dissatisfaction on employee performance could help leaders better understand the importance of effective performance management strategies. Employee performance expectations and job satisfaction could differ significantly by occupation within an organization (Ahmed et al., 2018; Yang, 2016). For example, employees may feel less satisfied with their jobs and ultimately have poor performance when they experience significant stress in their daily interactions with colleagues, particularly if exposure occurs in a position of high stress (Holzer et al., 2019; Ulus & Gabriel, 2018). Deming (1981) believed that as a principle of TQM, leaders

should make the necessary adjustment in resources to ensure that employees are satisfied and have pride in their workmanship. Ahmed et al. (2018) found that organizations with outdated performance management strategies by default support work conditions that negatively impact perceived job security, performance expectations, and organizational commitment to accomplishing goals.

Job Stress and Burnout

There is a growing need to critically examine the composition of and reasons for organizational stressors and their impact on employee performance to promote productive employees and healthy work environments (Singh & Singh, 2018). Employees' workplace stress could have the potential to negatively impact performance and the success rate of implemented strategies within the organization. In the workplace, stress, and burnout impact the employee performance of between 19–30% of the frontline employee population (Eldor, 2018). Deming (1981) stated that leaders supporting TQM principles should accompany performance management improvement strategies with sufficient resources to manage workplace-based stress effectively.

Eldor (2018) and Singh and Singh (2018) defined job stress and burnout as the physical and emotional state experienced when a mismatch between the performance demands placed upon employees and leaders' perceptions of employees' performance to meet these demands. Many researchers (Deming, 1981; Eldor, 2018; Islami et al., 2018) stated that employee workplace-based stress results from organizational leaders being neglectful to the needs of their employees. Leaders using TQM principles would seek inclusion from all employees during the decision-making, strategic development, and

implementation phases (Deming, 1981). In the long term, job stress can lead to burnout and feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, detachment, ineffectiveness, and lack of personal accomplishment (Singh & Singh, 2018). Deming (1981) believed that workplace-based stress could destroy employee performance and productivity without implementing TQM if leaders allow it to persist.

Deming (1981) stated that workplace burnout negatively impacts employee performance. Eldor (2018) found that performance stress is often confused with the competition; the difference between them stands out in the manifestations of real-life experiences. When the performance demands placed upon employees balance their ability to cope with them, it creates everyday stress (Singh & Singh, 2018). Leaders are responsible for the negative impact of workplace-based stress on employee performance and need to listen to the employees to discover possible solutions. Eldor (2018) stated that distress, or bad stress, has adverse effects, lowering employees' creativity and failing to meet productivity goals. Through TQM principles examining organizational stressors, leaders are more informed about the impact of job stress and burnout on employee performance, retention, and upward mobility (Deming, 1981). Hence, job stress and burnout can occur in employees with decreased performance and organizational commitment and is associated with failed productivity goals and unsatisfactory job performance (Eldor, 2018; Singh & Singh, 2018). By implementing TQM principles, leaders can reduce employee workplace-based stress while improving performance management and increasing productivity (Deming, 1981).

Performance

Gilbert (1978) developed the widely used behavior engineering model. As an engineer, Gilbert applied his understanding of the technology-based process with human performance improvement. According to Gilbert, poor performance was no evidence of a person's lack of skill or knowledge. Instead, a person not having quality support in the performance of a task significantly diminished a person's ability to perform at an improved level. In this regard, Gilbert's understanding of poor performance was in alignment with the principles of Deming's (1981) TQM since the lack of proper support from leaders is one of the baseline causes of employees' poor performance. Gilbert recommended that leaders widen their view of performance to include the workplace environment. The employee's workplace includes coworkers, employees, leaders, culture, training, and other resources (Gilbert, 1978; Ye et al., 2019). In this respect, Gilbert's (1978) poor performance definition and Deming's (1981) TQM principles aligned on the workplace environment's impact on employee performance and the need for leaders to support employees in accomplishing tasks.

Gilbert identified six components essential for improving human performance: incentives, resources, knowledge, capacity, information, and motives. These components align with Deming's (1981) TQM principles of instituting a vigorous program of education and self-improvement for all employees. Gilbert stated that the lack of performance-based support in the workplace, not an individual's lack of knowledge or skill, negatively impacts an individual's potential for improved performance. Deming (1981) believed that TQM addresses the issues with leaders not supporting employees to

accomplish tasks. Researchers (Al-Ababneh et al., 2018; Deming, 1981) found evidence behind Gilbert's views on leaders widening their view of performance to include the workplace environment. TQM principles consider the workplace environment as an impactful factor to employee performance (Deming, 1981).

Performance Reviews

Performance reviews identify factors of an employee's work experiences that display strengths and weaknesses as predictors of the employee's future performance (Gurmu, 2019). Deming's (1981) TQM principle considers the need to review processes instead of specific employees. TQM utilizes the feedback from all employees when reviewing processes for areas of growth and improvement (Deming, 1981). Many organizations' performance review process is a chart or a roadmap for achieving the desired goals (Wijayanti et al., 2020). Similar accomplishments occur when implementing Deming's (1981) TQM principles to address gathering information, including feedback from all employees on the processes. Including feedback from all employees during the performance review process could provide the data needed to plan future employee training and resources effectively. Using TQM principles of assessing employees' performance usually includes obtaining feedback from all employees involved in a process from start to finish (Deming, 1981).

Gurmu (2019) found that reviewing performance is a criteria step in the performance and process improvement phases. Leaders cannot rely exclusively on past performance to increase the objectivity related to performance reviews since a person's ability to handle one level of responsibility adequately does not mean that they can

perform well when the goal is elevated (Gurmu, 2019; Wijayanti et al., 2020). In TQM, Deming (1981) expressed that the performance review process is essential to gathering quality data to improve performance management and productivity strategies. Gurmu (2019) stated that leaders and employees should schedule at least two formal annual conversations to discuss long-term performance goals and express any experienced or foreseeable issues. Additionally, implementing TQM as a structured performance review process could better assist organizations to remain or improve the effectiveness of their productivity improvement strategies to meet organizational goals.

Performance Improvement

Organizational leaders promote employee performance improvement by providing opportunities for employees to perform meaningful work (Gurmu, 2019; O'Brien, 1995). Deming (1981) believed that leaders need to install within the workplace environment support for employees to have a sense of pride in their workmanship. Promotions could be a way to encourage performance improvement in employees. However, unlike in the private sector, federal government employee promotions must go through a public application process unless a grade increase, installed and not an automatic promotion, is already set in the employee's current position (Office of Personnel Management, 2021b). Some of the ways leaders could encourage employees to perform meaningful work include: (a) interactions between employees and the leaders' team, (b) creating job training, (c) promotions based on merit, (d) recognition programs, and (e) tuition reimbursements (Wijayanti et al., 2020). Through TQM, leaders need to support employee performance beyond pep talks and bonuses; instead, they need to

listen to the employee and find out what motivates, drives, and inspires them to do better, and then implement support for those things (Deming, 1981).

The outdated method of retaining employees using financial incentives is a thing of the past; adopting fringe benefits and financial incentives could help engage and retain hard-working employees in this global and mobile workforce (Pugna et al., 2019; Putra & Maarif, 2019). Deming (1981) supported incentivizing employees but believed leaders need to listen to employees, find out what they need to accomplish the goals, and provide employees with a path of resources to succeed. Organizational leaders should develop strategies to retain talented employees for improved performance (Deming, 1981; Holzer et al., 2019; Wijayanti et al., 2020). Implementing TQM could assist federal government leaders in retaining employees who may leave a position by assisting and supporting the employees with the resources needed to accomplish the tasks and goals.

Transition

In Section 1, I highlighted the importance of employee productivity. The research conducted was on the TQM model (process improvement, employee engagement), productivity (input vs. output), leaders (strategic alliances, job satisfaction, job stress, and burnout), and performance (performance reviews, performance improvement). Section 2 will include a comprehensive description of the research design and approach used to determine the importance of employee productivity. It will also include a detailed description of my role as the researcher in a qualitative case study, population and sampling, ethical research principles, and data collection and analysis techniques. Section 2 will conclude with a transition to Section 3. Section 3 includes a description of the

application to professional practice and implications for social change, presenting the findings, recommendations for action and further research, and a detailed discussion of the experience throughout my Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) journey at Walden University. Section 3 will conclude with a summary of this study and its outcomes.

Section 2: The Project

In this section, I present an overview of the project focusing on five areas. The first part of the section contains the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, and the eligibility requirements for participation in the study. The second part contains a review of the research project, research methods, and design techniques. The third part includes justification for my decision to use a qualitative research method and case study design to explore strategies that multiple performance leaders in various agencies within a single federal government department use to increase employee productivity. The fourth part includes a review of the population and sampling, ethical research, instruments used for data collection, and data collection procedures. The fifth and final part includes a review of the data analysis process and the procedures used to accomplish data validity and reliability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that performance leaders within federal government departments use to increase employee productivity. The target population for this study was at least three certified senior executive service (SES) performance leaders in a single federal government department located in Washington, DC, who develop and implement strategies to improve federal government employee productivity. The findings of this study could improve the completion time of government service requests, resulting in higher customer satisfaction feedback and improved use of tax dollars through increased departmental performance to meet productivity goals. The contributions of this study could result in decreased

unemployment rates, increased moderate economic growth from employment-based bonuses, promotion qualifications as a result of improved employee productivity, and the efficient use of organizational resources such as funding and hours worked to produce public service-based benefits.

Role of the Researcher

A qualitative researcher plays an essential role in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). Carder and Rooney (2018) suggested that a study should follow an unbiased process regardless of the researcher's experience. I work in a U.S. federal government department with employees who fail to meet productivity goals and leaders who lack an effective productivity improvement strategy. Therefore, my professional experience has influenced my interest in better understanding the performance management strategies that some U.S. federal government leaders use to increase productivity. I did not have any personal or professional relationship with the participants, which helped to ensure an unbiased and ethically sound study.

The *Belmont Report* (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) provides ethical guidelines and principles to help protect participants in research studies and includes three basic ethical principles for research involving participants: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Research with human subjects requires approval from the institutional review board (IRB) of the educational institution of the researcher (Jach et al., 2020). Heeding the ethical principles for research involving human subjects, I did not begin my research until I had obtained approval from the IRB, organizational site, and participants.

I applied the member checking process to ensure the reliability and validity of the results and avoid researcher bias. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined member checking as a method to ensure that participants' data are trustworthy, creditable, accurate, and reliable by allowing them the opportunity to review their responses and confirm or adjust them as needed. Researchers should avoid the possibility of bias in their research as this could weaken the importance or relevance of the findings (Lash et al., 2021; Wouk et al., 2019). Bias can occur at any point of the research process, such as during the planning, data collection, analysis, or publication stages (Jach et al., 2020). I ensured member checking during and after each interview to provide participants with the opportunity to confirm and, if needed, correct my interpretations of their responses.

The importance of researching with an interview protocol in place cannot be understated (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The interview protocol is an essential part of the data collection process as it relates to the credibility, reliability, dependability, and validity of the participants' responses (Spry & Pich, 2021). The interview protocol needs a structure that other researchers can replicate when interviewing multiple participants (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The interview protocol (see Appendix A) for this study was structured and included introductions, a reiteration of the consent form, information about audio recording, interview questions, member checking, and a postinterview appreciation email. I used the same interview protocol with all participants to foster validity and credibility. To support an exploratory approach to the data collection process, I provided the same amount of time and asked the same questions to all participants. Afterward, participants could individually review their responses to confirm and, if needed, correct

my interpretation of their responses to ensure accuracy and provide additional information.

Participants

Researchers find it more manageable when conducting a case study and can use two or three cases to develop a research design (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Qualitative research requires a reduced sample size—a minimum of three—to produce enough data compared to quantitative research (Mosadeghrad & Afshari, 2021; Sabuhari et al., 2020; Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Quality participants should be well versed in the research topic and contribute responses that adequately address the research question (Cassell et al., 2018; Nkurunziza et al., 2018; Spry & Pich, 2021).

To ensure the selection of quality participants for this study, I implemented the qualifying standard that participants must be supervisors and currently serving in the U.S. federal government. The targeted population for this study consisted of at least three U.S. federal government performance leaders located in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. The Office of Personnel Management (2021b) stated that supervisors within federal government departments, agencies, administrations, and offices play a significant role in managing their employees. Participants had the position classification of a supervisor (Office of Personnel Management, 2021b) and professional experience designing, implementing, and modifying strategies to increase the productivity of U.S. federal government employees. Participants also needed to have experience working with labor unions.

I obtained IRB approval before engaging with participants. IRB approval helps a researcher to avoid the ethical risks associated with conducting research with human participants (Spry & Pich, 2021). After obtaining IRB approval, I communicated via email with the organization's senior official responsible for HR matters seeking permission to conduct my research using U.S. federal government participants. The communication contained the organizational consent letter and a copy of the proposal for this study. Upon acceptance from the organization's official, I reached out to connect with the key informant.

Gaining access to quality participants began with the snowball sampling method. The snowball sampling method utilizes the target population's knowledge, network, and experience of key information (Fernandez-Rio et al., 2021). The key informant for this study was a senior official in the organization. Through the key informant's established relationships, other quality participants were referred, prescreened, and a select few were chosen to participate in this study. If the referred participant declined to participate in the study or if enough participants were not selected for the study, then I returned to the key informant for additional referrals (see Fernandez-Rio et al., 2021; Goodman, 1961).

An advantage to using the snowball sampling method is utilizing the key informant in the target population to refer participants aligned with the research topic (Eland-Goosensen et al., 1997). The researcher should provide key informants with the characteristics and other eligibility requirements to ensure quality participant referral (Goodman, 1961). While using the snowball sampling method can provide access to and

a working relationship with participants, the eligibility criteria should guide the key informant's decision-making ability when making a referral.

I used the snowball sampling method to explore established relationships between the key informant and the referred participants. Using the key informant's networking relationship can positively impact the researcher's study efforts (Goodman, 1961). The key informant's working relationship with the referred participants served as a foundation for building a rapport and establishing trust. To enhance the referred participants' trust, they were provided detailed information through the consent form and prescreening questions, allowing them to decide on participation in the study. By implementing the member checking process, I further enhanced the participants' trust and cooperation by allowing them time to review and, if needed, correct my interpretation of their interview responses and provide additional information. As Jentoft and Olsen (2019) stated, ensuring that participants are comfortable can help the researcher to establish trust.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

A qualitative approach was the most appropriate method for addressing the research topic. The use of qualitative methodology helped me to develop a comprehensive understanding of process complexities without statistically analyzing numerical data (Carder & Rooney, 2018). Researchers use a qualitative research method to address the research question instead of using hypotheses only when the research data do not require numerical measurement and statistical analysis (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). Researchers use a qualitative research method to better understand the

relationship between participant responses using various data collection techniques and data analysis procedures to develop the conceptual framework of the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Khan et al., 2020; Saunders & Townsend, 2018). The qualitative research method was most appropriate for this study because there were unknown problems and possible solutions for addressing the lack of strategies to increase employee productivity. By conducting semistructured interviews and analyzing relevant documents, I was able to explore the research problem in depth. Applying a qualitative method could help the researcher better understand the research topic.

The quantitative research method is grounded in the statistical analysis of numerical data (Shet et al., 2019). Researchers use a quantitative research method to examine and better understand the relationship that connects the variables in the research via numerical measurement and analysis with statistical techniques (Adivar et al., 2019; Boz, 2018; Saunders & Townsend, 2018). The quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study because there were no numerical data to analyze statistically.

Researchers use mixed methods by combining qualitative analysis of participants' meanings and statistical analysis of numerical data (Kenny, 2018; Schoonenboom, 2019). Researchers use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies when neither method is sufficient alone to adequately address the research topic (Hou, 2021; Rotondo et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). The use of mixed methods was inappropriate because this study did not include statistically analyzed numerical data.

Research Design

A case study approach was appropriate for this research because the study's focus was on the real-life experiences of performance leaders trying to increase federal government employee productivity. A case study conducted within its real-life setting could benefit researchers by yielding data to provide insight into the study phenomenon. As Yin (2018) noted, researchers select a case study design to conduct in-depth research into the topic within its context in real-life settings to produce a better understanding of the phenomena. To explore the performance management strategies of the U.S. federal government, I collected data from at least three performance leaders as part of my case study research design. I explored the possibility of using narrative and ethnographic research designs before finding both inappropriate for this study.

A narrative research design approach includes prioritizing the chronology of the collected data (Carder & Rooney, 2018; Morioka & Nomura, 2021; Salter & Rhodes, 2018). A narrative approach was not appropriate for this study because the chronology of the collected data was not a priority for the research. Ethnographic research design focuses on living within the social world of a people or ethnic group (Androwis et al., 2018; Sahoo, 2019). Ethnographic research designs are based on the real-life experiences of those within the situation being studied (Sahoo, 2019). Saunders and Townsend (2018) stated that ethnography is appropriate for collecting data from a cultural perspective as a research design. An ethnographic research design was not appropriate because I did not focus solely on a particular ethnic group or people while living among the culture.

Gopalakrishnan et al. (2019) and Guest et al. (2020) discussed the importance of reaching data saturation in the study to validate the researcher's efforts to produce quality findings. Data saturation occurs when analyzing new data fails to yield new information or themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A lack of new information from data analysis confirms that data saturation has been achieved (Mbasera et al., 2018). To ensure that data saturation occurred in this study, I continued to utilize the snowball sampling method and member checking process while analyzing the data for commonalities until no new data was present.

Population and Sampling

Using the snowball sampling method, researchers can utilize the key informant's internal organizational networking skills and knowledge to access quality potential participants—access that could be unknown to outsiders of the organization (Goodman, 1961). Researchers using the snowball sampling method experience a quicker turnaround time to reach the desired sample size by utilizing the key informant's professional network (Ababneh, 2021; Eland-Goosensen et al., 1997). The snowball sampling method focuses on the initial participant—the key informant—referring quality participants for the study (Goodman, 1961).

Only one of the seven departments that I emailed to request their participation responded. The one responsive federal government department only responded due to the research having a point of contact within the department. I deduced from this experience that federal government departments are reluctant to participate in research when the persons making the entreaty are not part of their known network. For this reason, I

decided that the snowball sampling method, using the key informant's internal network, would be the most appropriate to gain participants' trust.

I used the snowball sampling method to identify quality U.S. federal government performance management leaders who could provide insight into successful employee productivity improvement strategies. A researcher using the snowball sampling method is likely to obtain a homogeneous sample; participants are similar in characteristics such as occupation or responsibility level within the hierarchy of an organization (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Ideally, selected participants would form a homogeneous sample, which would allow me to explore performance leader characteristics related to performance management within the U.S. federal government.

A case study approach to qualitative research can be based on two or three cases and is likely to be a more manageable research strategy (Saunders & Townsend, 2018; Yin, 2018). When determining the appropriate sample size in qualitative research, there are two considerations: whether the sample size is appropriate to reach data saturation and whether the sample size is sufficient to address the research question (Gopalakrishnan et al., 2019). The sample size for this study included interviewing at least three U.S. federal government performance management leaders.

Researchers achieve data saturation when new data provides little or no new insight (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Researchers using the snowball sampling method should continue to interview until data saturation occurs (Goodman, 1961). To ensure data saturation, I continued to interview quality U.S. federal government performance management leaders until the new data provided no new information.

Quality participants provide meaningful data that address the research topic. I used the snowball sampling method to select a quality key informant, begin the participant referral process, and reach data saturation. Qualitative researchers collect meaningful and rich data from quality participants during the interview process to achieve data saturation (Rehmani et al., 2020). Therefore, the key informant, and by extension, the referred participants, had to meet the criteria of being a current supervisor (Office of Personnel Management, 2021b) serving in the U.S. federal government. By selecting a case study design and qualitative methodology, an interview protocol was used that asked all participants the same questions to promote reliability, validity, credibility, and transferability and achieve data saturation.

Quality participants provide rich responses during the semistructured interview process, which improves the quality of the collected data (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). Carder and Rooney (2018) recommend that researchers ensure that participants are comfortable for the interview to allow natural, free-flowing responses. The snowball sampling method was used to interview U.S. federal government performance management leaders that meet the criteria to participate in this study and have experience implementing successful productivity improvement strategies. Obtaining consent and ensuring participants of the privacy measures taken in the research are essential to conducting an ethical study (Yin, 2018). Participants referred by the key informant were sent the consent form via email to participate in this study. Using audio-recording technology during the data collection process is more reliable and credible since the transcription is secure, transferable, and reliable (FitzPatrick, 2019). After obtaining each participant's consent, I assigned each

consent form an alphanumeric file name to enhance participant privacy. I informed the participants that the phone interviews may range from 45 to 60 minutes and would be audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of their responses.

Ethical Research

To ensure that this research was aligned with the ethical principles of protection for participants as stated in the *Belmont Report* (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979), I sought Walden University IRB approval. Upon approval from the Walden University IRB (approval no. 04-23-21-0729556), I presented each participant with a consent form and explained that completing the form and participation in the study was voluntary. Participants could decide about their participation in the study by providing all aspects of the research via the consent form (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Participants learned from the consent form that withdrawal from the study could occur at any time by contacting me via email and stating their desire to withdraw from the study (see Appendix C for the withdrawal form). Before scheduling the interviews, I reiterated the interview protocol (see Appendix A) for this study.

To ensure the organization's and participants' confidentiality, the researcher is responsible for concealing all identifying details (Barton et al., 2018; Spry & Pich, 2021). Identifying details should be kept anonymous by replacing participant and organizational names with generic names or number-associated titles (Soanes & Gibson, 2018). In this study, a generic name replaced the name of the U.S. federal government organization, and participants' identities were replaced with P1, P2, and so forth. The signed consent

forms and research data were electronically stored in a secured area on a password-protected personal computer (PC) to which only I will have access for 5 years. Five years after the publication of this manuscript, all consent forms, transcribed interviews, and all other associated research data will be destroyed. Participants did not receive any monetary gifts or other incentives to participate in this study.

Ensuring respect for all beneficence, justice, and participants is essential to align research with the principles of the *Belmont Report* (Earl, 2020). I sought permission via email from the organization's senior official responsible for HR to collect data from performance management leaders in the U.S. federal government before scheduling interviews with participants. Once I received permission to conduct the study, I sent an invitation email to the senior official in the organization to participate in this study as a key informant.

Data Collection Instruments

Researchers are often the most effective data collection instrument in qualitative research (Yin, 2018). The researcher's selection of the data collection instrument and techniques are essential to the data collection process (Carder & Rooney, 2018).

Researchers use a semistructured interview environment to ask open-ended questions that allow participants to freely discuss their responses (Jach et al., 2020). I served as the primary data collection instrument for this study. During the data collection process, I used semistructured interviews with performance management leaders, secondary data such as archival performance strategy plans, and reports used to triangulate the themes collected from the interviews.

The first technique used for the data collection process was audio-recorded phone interviews. The new knowledge could be discovered through the telephone as a form of effective communication that is a quality substitute to in-person communication (Rocha et al., 2021). I asked semistructured interview questions to performance management leaders during the data collection process. Semistructured interviews include asking open-ended questions prepared in advance and additional follow-up questions to explore the research topic (Wolcott & Lobczowski, 2021; Yin, 2018). The data collection process consisted of 11 semistructured interview questions aligned with the interview protocol (see Appendix A). I aligned the data collection process with interview protocol to establish a positive, ethical, and professional relationship with each participant to obtain quality data responses to the research question. The participant consent form required participants to confirm the acceptance of an audio-recorded interview for accuracy purposes.

The second data collection technique for this study consisted of secondary data. I requested secondary data from participants to support the data collected during the interview process. Company documents that researchers have obtained could assist in the triangulation of data to gain a better understanding of the interview data from a different perspective (Soanes & Gibson, 2018). Supporting documents from the U.S. federal government, such as nonsensitive strategic planning documents and reports, were used to help triangulate the themes in the data found during the interview process.

Member checking was used to ensure the reliability of the collected research data. During the member checking process, the participants receive a synthesis of their

interview responses to review, confirm their accuracy, and provide additional information, if applicable (Soanes & Gibson, 2018). Member checking occurs after the interview to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected and the quality of participant involvement in the data collection process (Carder & Rooney, 2018). Member checking occurred during and after the interviews to provide the participants with an opportunity to review, confirm, and, if needed, correct my interpretation of their interview responses to ensure reliability and to provide additional information.

I developed an interview protocol to ensure the interview's validity (see Appendix A). A well-designed interview protocol consists of notes to collect participant informed consent, including the member checking process and essential information for the research (Smith, 2020). There must be a systematic method of conducting interviews that explores the research topic and ensures ethical practices for each interview (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). To enhance the validity of the interview, I asked each participant the same interview questions (see Appendix B). I created an interview protocol as a reference guide to conduct the interviews in a semistructured and reliable method to ensure each participants' experiences were consistent. I used an audio recording application (app) to record the interviews, transcribed the interviews for review, and created the synthesis responses for member checking.

Data Collection Technique

Interviews are the primary sources of collected data in qualitative study research (Yin, 2018). Interviews, secondary data, and other related U.S. federal government performance reports as primary data sources supported participants' responses. This

study consisted of audio-recorded phone interviews aligned with the interview protocol for data collection. Researchers use semistructured interviews when asking prepared open-ended questions and allowing participants to discuss their responses instead of providing straightforward answers (Rocha et al., 2021). Data can come from multiple sources (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). I requested participants to provide supporting documents as secondary data and the data collected from the interviews to enhance data triangulation.

Phone interviews have the advantage of flexibility in time and location for the participant (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). Another advantage of a phone interview is that it is the ideal setting for audio recording and usually provides more accurate data when transcribed (Carder & Rooney, 2018). A disadvantage of this approach is the lack of visibility to note nonverbal cues (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). A second disadvantage of conducting phone interviews is the reliance on technology (FitzPatrick, 2019).

I collected secondary data such as written strategies, surveys, and reports related to employee productivity that the participants had provided in support of their responses and other associated U.S. federal government documents. Using secondary data in qualitative research has its disadvantages and advantages. Researchers use secondary data to triangulate data with the interviews during the data collection process (Martins & Nienaber, 2018). Additionally, researchers can better understand participants' responses through the background provided in the secondary data (FitzPatrick, 2019). The triangulation of secondary data assists the researcher in understanding the relationship between multiple sources. One disadvantage of using secondary data is the risk of

obtaining out-of-date information (Omukuti et al., 2021). Researchers must be aware of the risk of obtaining out-of-date secondary data or data that is no longer associated with active organization operations (Carder & Rooney, 2018).

Before data collection, Walden University IRB and the U.S. federal government approval was requested. After obtaining IRB approval, I did not conduct a pilot study; instead, I requested via email approval from the senior official for the organization on HR matters for conducting research. The researcher must contact the person within the organization who will serve as the key informant (Goodman, 1961). After obtaining research permission from the organization, I initiated communication with the senior official in the organization and requested their participation as the key informant for the study.

I informed the key informant of the participant criteria when making participant referrals before making initial contact with participants and stated that I would follow up with the participants to schedule interviews (Goodman, 1961). The key informant provided me with at least three participants that met the study criteria via email as part of the data collection process. Referral information should include the participant's name and at least one contact method (Omukuti et al., 2021). I initiated communication with the participants and followed up with them, providing more informed communication.

In using the snowball sampling method, the key informant is not a participant but serves as the starting point for the network map within the organization to obtain quality participants. The researcher could avoid the prescreening process by using the snowball sampling method because referred participants should meet the criteria provided to the

key informant (Goodman, 1961). I did not conduct prescreening for participants because I used the snowball sampling method; instead, I had more informed communication with the participants following the initial communication from the key informant.

After I contacted the participants, I followed up with them and provided more information about the data collection process via email. Researchers should provide information to participants during the initial communication so that the choice of participation is informed (Briggs, 1986). By reviewing the data collection plan with them, I ensured that the participants could decide about their participation in this study. Upon the participants' confirmation of their participation in the study and after receiving their signed consent forms, I worked with them to schedule a date and time that worked best to conduct the interview.

The researcher must follow the same interview protocol with each participant (Carder & Rooney, 2018). I ensured that the interview protocol correlates with each participant throughout the data collection process. Researchers must ensure the participant feels comfortable freely answering the interview questions (Martins & Nienaber, 2018). I contacted participants via phone during the predetermined scheduled interview time to collect data. At the beginning of each interview, I reiterated the interview recording for accuracy and data collection purposes. I briefly reviewed the informed consent information with the participants. Researchers should ask one question at a time, avoid emotional reactions to responses, maintain control over the interview, and monitor the interview time to ensure a timely interview schedule (FitzPatrick, 2019). I began the interviews by asking the first question and completing the final question.

During the interview, I monitored each reply to take longer than five minutes and notified the participant once the reply reached four minutes. Each participant had between 45 and 60 minutes to respond to all interview questions. After each interview, I discussed the member checking process with the participant.

Two or three cases are typically sufficient for a case study (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). I did not have to repeat the snowball sampling method, as the key informant provided sufficient qualified participants for this study. After the interviews were complete, I submitted the audio-recorded interview files to a transcription company to produce an accurate transcript of the participants' responses. After the transcripts were complete, I provided the participants with a document to review consisting of each question and my synthesis of the participants' responses. Member checking is the process of obtaining quality confirmation from the participants regarding the accuracy of the data collected (Motulsky, 2021; Silverman, 2020). Following member checking protocols, each participant received their respective synthesis responses for review, confirmed the responses were accurate, and, if applicable, provided corrective or additional information. Participants' confirmation of the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation demonstrates the study's validity (Omukuti et al., 2021). Upon receiving the participants' confirmation, I uploaded the synthesis responses to the NVivo data analysis software.

Data Organization Technique

I used simple data organization and record-keeping methods to achieve a quality study. I copied and pasted the transcribed audio recorded interviews into Microsoft Word documents and saved the file using a filename with a simple code assigned to each

participant. Microsoft Word and NVivo are simple and effective software tools for data organization (Richardson, 2014). I uploaded the data into the NVivo software to systematically organize and analyze the compiled interview data. Each participant was assigned a code, such as P1, P2, and so on, representing them in the study. By coding participants' names, the researcher can conceal their identities (Gibbs, 2012; Linneberg & Korsgaard, (2019); Uthayakumar et al., 2018). To comply with the ethical standards of research, I removed all participant identification before storing the data.

Protecting participant identity and data remained a priority for this study. The researcher is responsible for the safekeeping and concealment of participant data and identities and should destroy all research data 5 years after the publication of the study (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). I did not store any participant information on a big data cloud service such as Dropbox to reduce, if not eliminate, the potential of a security leak. Instead, I stored the research data on a password-protected USB device, including the audio files and transcribed interviews, in a fireproof safe to keep it for the required 5 years.

Data Analysis

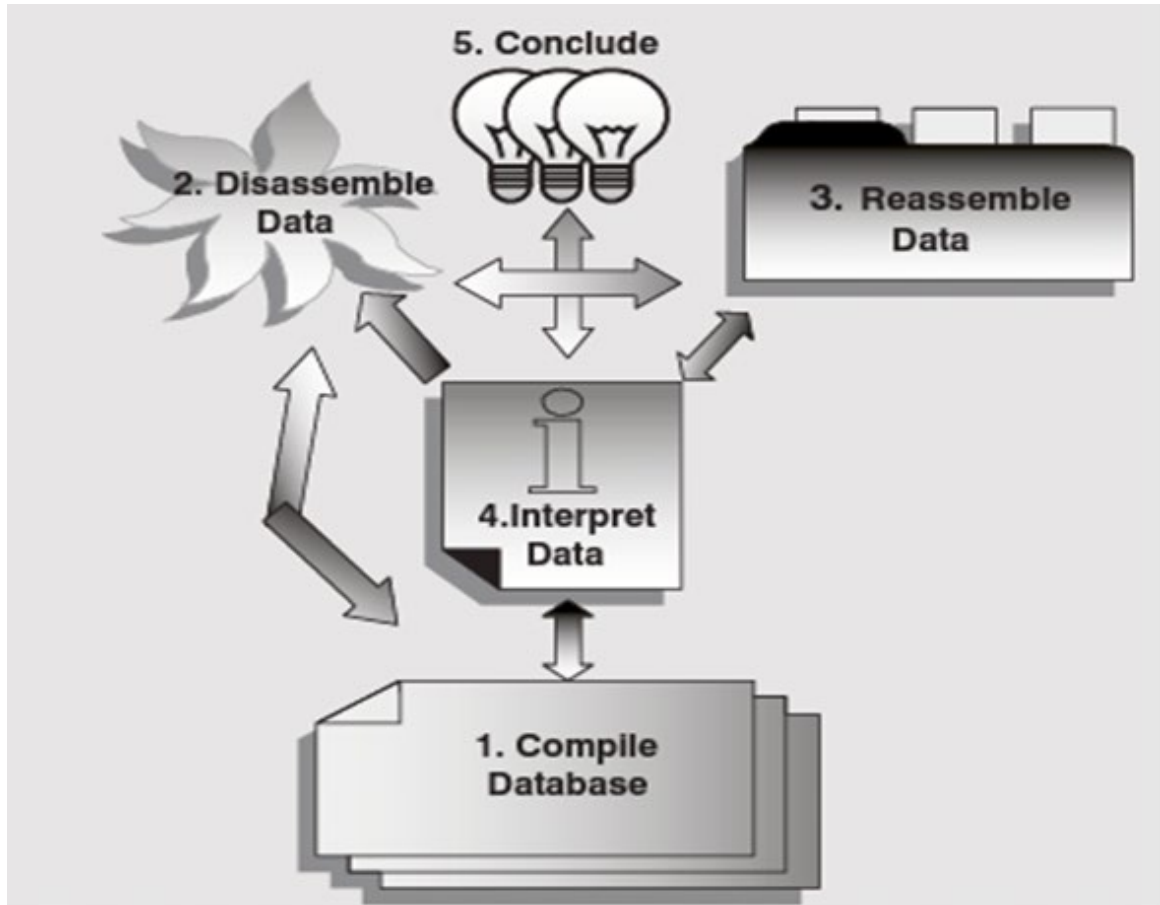
Case study research can use a small number of cases to discover replication and produce more evidence (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Data triangulation includes using multiple independent data sources to support comprehensive data, enhance understanding, and validate and confirm the findings (Flick, 2018). The versatility of data triangulation transverses research methodologies and designs (Yin, 2018). I used data triangulation throughout the data analysis process of this case study.

The data triangulation process included interviews as a primary data source and department documentation such as performance strategies, reports, and surveys as a secondary data source of data (Hope et al., 2019). The data collection process included the interview protocol (see Appendix A). After the initial data collection process was completed, the data analysis process began. The data analysis process allows the researcher to discover patterns and themes from the collected data that address the research question (Yin, 2018). The data analysis process establishes the relationship between the collected data and the responses to the open-ended questions (Guest et al., 2020).

I organized the collected data into general categories and then reviewed them to discover possible themes. I created a new category if the data did not fit into one of the previously created general categories generated during the thematic discovery process. I discovered themes throughout the data synthesis that multiple participants in various agencies within a single federal government department provided helped me to identify strategies that federal government performance leaders could implement to increase the federal government department's employees' productivity. The analysis process of this study included guidance from Yin's (2018) five-step data analysis method (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Five Phases of Analysis and Their Interactions



Note. From *Qualitative Research From Start to Finish* (p. 71), by R. K. Yin, 2010, The Guilford Press. Copyright 2010 by The Guilford Press.

Yin (2018) stated that the qualitative data analysis process has five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpretation, and providing a conclusion. The first step included data compiling, which reviewed the participant responses from the semistructured interviews and the secondary data found in the department documents and reports. Next was the data disassembling and coding process of the different themes into

smaller data groups. The process of disassembling data is the initial discovery of overarching data themes (Yin, 2018). Third, QSR International's NVivo 12 software reassembled the synthesis of participant responses and supportive documents to discover key themes and patterns. When discovering themes, I interpreted the data to explore the relationship between the themes and the TQM model, the conceptual framework for this study. The fourth step included interpreting the discovered themes and patterns in the data. If suitable, a new data category was created, and the process repeated steps one through four until data saturation occurred. For the final step, I developed a conclusion from the data and revealed all the themes. A comparison between the findings from this study and those from other studies on similar topics occurred to produce recommended topics for additional research.

QSR International's NVivo 12 was the selected software to load the transcribed Microsoft Word documents and use the software to organize the information. After the data upload into the data analysis software is successful, researchers should use a data coding process based on keywords and descriptions to disassemble the data into groups (Guest et al., 2020). When I completed coding the data, I used the QSR International NVivo 12 software functions to code the data by identifying themes and patterns in the synthesis of participant responses.

Computer and software programs are essential in qualitative research data analysis (Carder & Rooney, 2018). Efficient data analysis is essential to understanding how the data addresses the research topic and aligns with the existing literature on the topic (Flick, 2018). Data analysis software can be beneficial when researchers want to

identify codes and themes in research (Yin, 2018). I used the QSR International NVivo 12 software to assist in discovering the alignment between the collected data, existing literature, and the research question. Using NVivo helps researchers conduct a more detailed analysis of the collected data (Flick, 2018).

Researchers could use the conceptual framework to better understand the link between the selected methodology, existing literature on a topic, and the study findings (Carder & Rooney, 2018). My study's findings and conceptual framework were connected with the existing literature on the research topic. I interviewed participants until data saturation occurred.

Reliability and Validity

By discussing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, researchers demonstrate the reliability and validity of a qualitative study (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). This approach provides assurance that the findings can be trusted. To ensure reliability and validity, I used data triangulation and member checking.

Reliability

Reliability is when researchers can produce similar results by replicating the study (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Ensuring the reliability of the study requires the researcher to document all of the steps of the data collection process, data analysis, and data interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is the process of having the participants confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the interview responses while allowing for participant corrections as needed to ensure reliability and validity (Wouk et al., 2019). Member checking was used to enhance the reliability of the

findings and demonstrate the study's dependability. I provided the participants with my interview response interpretations before completing the data analysis. The participants then had the opportunity to review, confirm, and, if needed, correct my interpretation of the interview responses and provide additional information.

Validity

Research validity refers to the various measures used during research to confirm the accuracy of the study findings (Demir et al., 2021; Omukuti et al., 2021). Qualitative research must include three principles to ensure research validity: credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used various measures such as credibility, transferability, and confirmability to ensure the study's validity.

Researchers use credibility to ensure the study results are credible (Cassell et al., 2018; Sakarina, 2019). Member checking was used to achieve credibility in this study. Member checking is a process that provides participants with the researcher's interview response interpretations for confirmation of its accuracy and allows the participant to provide corrections and additional information (Cassell et al., 2018; Naidu & Prose, 2018).

I used member checking to ensure the accurate confirmability of the participant's responses. A researcher using member checking supports the legitimacy and confirmability of the findings (Candela, 2019; Naidu & Prose, 2018). Even with the advancements of technology, transcripts are not entirely accurate, and for this reason, they require participant confirmation to ensure accuracy (Spry & Pich, 2021). I used member checking during and after the interview process to providing participants an

opportunity to review, confirm, and, if needed, correct my interpretation of the interview responses for confirmability and provide additional information.

Transferability is when findings from a study apply to other situations (Nkurunziza et al., 2018). The limitation of the research is that studies cannot include all possible settings, participants, and concepts, so it is necessary to apply the results from similar situations (Saravia-Ramos et al., 2021). I established transferability in this study by sharing the results after the study was completed, approved, and published. Publishing the study should provide future researchers with findings that can transfer to other settings and participants.

To ensure that the study results can be used in connection with other similar studies, researchers use transferability (Saravia-Ramos et al., 2021). I used the interview protocol to achieve transferability in this study (see Appendix A). The interview protocol provides the context of the research topic to help others determine the transferability of the findings to another study (Saunders & Townsend, 2018).

Confirmability is when researchers confirm that the results are due to the contribution from the participants and not researcher bias (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019; Sabuhari et al., 2020). Researchers can ensure confirmability by providing details about the data analysis process and any assumptions made during the analysis process (Mosadeghrad & Afshari, 2021). I ensured confirmability via bias management.

Data saturation is the process of continuing with the data collection process until no new information can be discovered (Cassell et al., 2018). Uthayakumar et al. (2018) suggested that researchers continue the data collection process until they achieve data

saturation. Using methodological data triangulation as part of the case study allows researchers to achieve data saturation with fewer participants than other methods (Ye et al., 2019). To achieve data saturation, I continued to interview federal government department performance leaders until the information produced no new themes or patterns. I cross-checked the information obtained from participants during the interviews with the data collected through supporting documents to discover and verify themes and patterns.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I reviewed the role of the researcher, the study participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, analysis, instruments, techniques, reliability, and validity. Section 3 will present the research study findings and clearly articulate the application of the results to business practice. Section 3 will include a description of the application to the professional practice, implications for social change, and a presentation of the findings in this doctoral study. Section 3 will also contain the recommendations for prompt actions and further research and an in-depth narrative regarding my experience throughout in the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree at Walden University. Section 3 will conclude with a final summary and conclusion of the research findings.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

In Section 3, I present the study's findings. In addition, I discuss the potential applications to the business industry and the possible implications for social change. This section also includes the potential applications for performance leaders and suggests areas where additional research could be needed. Last, I reflect on the experience of completing this research and conclude with an explanation of the value of implementing strategies to increase federal government department employee productivity.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify strategies that successful performance leaders have used to increase the productivity of federal government employees. To explore the effective strategies used to increase the productivity of federal government employees, I interviewed three certified SES performance leaders with at least 2 years of successful experience managing federal government employees' performances. An SES is a senior-level certification from the federal government that the employees' capabilities, skills, experiences, training, and abilities meet the qualifications of an executive-level performance leader (Office of Personnel Management, 2021c). In addition to the semistructured interviews, I also collected and reviewed secondary data from a combination of the federal government department and publicly accessible documents such as Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey 2020 (Office of Personnel Management, 2020), Federal Government Report 2020 (American Customer Satisfaction Index, 2021), and Retrospective Review Rules (Administrative Conference of the United States, n.d.).

I used snowball sampling to recruit participants. Using this technique, I selected a key informant within a U.S. federal government department to provide a participant recommendation. That participant provided another recommendation, and so on. Each potential participant received an email to introduce the study and invite their participation; I also supplied an informed consent form, which each participant signed before participating in the interview. All interviews took place over the phone, and the participants were asked whether they had privacy and the ability to speak freely. I asked nine interview questions to explore participants' experience successfully managing strategies as a certified SES performance leader to increase the productivity of federal government employees (see Appendix B).

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to answer the research question, What strategies do performance leaders within a given department of the federal government use to increase employee productivity? To explore this question, I conducted three interviews with performance management leaders from a department of the U.S. federal government. Each participant who was recommended had more than 2 years of experience as a certified SES performance leader and demonstrated through performance track records that they successfully managed strategies to increase the productivity of federal government employees. To collect data, I asked open-ended interviews and then transcribed the responses; I also reviewed available internet documents (Survey's, Reports, and Guidelines) to triangulate and analyze results. After completing the member-checking phase, I uploaded the transcripts into NVivo 12 to complete the coding

and data analysis process and identify the major themes. I used codes to identify each participant (P1, P2, and P3).

Thematic Data Analysis

Next, I will provide a brief description of the qualitative thematic data analysis strategies used in my research. Upon collecting the primary data from the semistructured interviews, I had each interview transcribed by a confidential professional transcription service into a Microsoft Word document. I interpreted each of the participant's responses to the interview questions and drafted a synopsis. The member checking process was completed via email with a copy of the interview synopsis and questions sent to the respective participants. Participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of my interpretation. I instructed the participants to contact me with any changes to their interview responses. Participants made minor changes to the interpreted responses to more align with their experience.

After the participants confirmed the accuracy of the interview response synopses, I uploaded the transcripts into NVivo software. NVivo was used to process data organization and thematic analysis. Through combined thematic inductive analysis strategies (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018), I labeled, organized, and interpreted themes across the data sets. I conducted the thematic analysis in six stages: familiarization with the data, initial coding, discovery of themes, review of potential themes, confirmation through confirmation and coding of themes, and generation of a recommendation and conclusion (see Braun et al., 2019; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Reviewing the Data

First, I reviewed each of the interview transcripts to become familiar with the data. During my review, I took note on my laptop of the common or frequent use of words, terms, and strategies, such as strategies that improved employee productivity included employee feedback. After reviewing the interview transcripts and confirming my familiarity with the data, I started the preliminary coding process. Throughout this process, I applied codes to the responses and reread the interview transcripts to ensure that the codes were applied appropriately.

Organizing the Data

To organize the classifying responses into easily organizable groups, I conducted the first round of coding. For example, when performance leaders stated that they included employee feedback throughout the retrospective review process, those responses were coded so that patterns within the frequency of process improvement could be identified. Similarly, keywords or phrases were coded in a different manner to support additional organization in the subsection stages of coding. For example, responses that highlighted feedback, follow-up meetings, and reviews were each coded so that in other stages of analysis, similarly related coding groups could be reflective of a broader pattern (retrospective review) and could be easier to identify.

Coding Preliminary Data

After completing the preliminary coding stage, I reviewed the identified coding groups, searching for themes and patterns. The data review was conducted through the lens of TQM (Deming, 1986) to identify what variables of leader and employee

interactions resulting in an increase in employee productivity according to the participants. Similar coding groups were combined or reorganized when and where appropriate; it was at this time that I noticed the formation of the initial themes from the data. For example, responses that include “employee involvement,” “employee participation,” and “employee inclusion” were grouped into the theme of employee engagement.

Confirming Data Review

Upon the completion of my review and reorganization of the coding groups into themes, I reviewed the coding groups and responses again to confirm the themes accurately represented the patterns within the three interview responses. After all the codes were organized and clearly defined, I reviewed the interview transcripts again and cross-referenced them with the themes to finalize that all key themes had been identified within the data and accurately reflected the participant’s responses. The codes and the resulting themes are shown in Table 1. These themes, resulting from a detailed review of the data through multiple stages of coding, review, and confirmation through the TQM lens, are described and supported by the data in the sections that follow.

Table 1

Data Analysis Codes and Themes

Theme and subtheme	No. of participants	No. of data excerpts
Theme 1: Employee Engagement	3	9
Employee involvement	1	3
Employee participation	1	3
Employee inclusion	1	3

Theme 2: Adoption of New Performance Philosophies	3	7
Modernize philosophy	1	2
Advanced planning strategies	1	2
Creative adjustments	1	3
Theme 3. Changes in Management	3	6
Leader's impact	1	2
Quality leaders	2	4
Theme 4. Continuous Purpose and Process Improvement	3	4
Processes will not improve themselves	1	1
Lack of process	2	3

Emergent Themes

Through qualitative thematic data analysis, I identified four themes that were relevant to the research question, which was, What strategies do performance leaders within a given department of the federal government use to increase employee productivity? The themes encompassed strategies to increase employee productivity through improved performance management. They responded to the core principles of the TQM model Deming (1981) proposed. In this case, the emphasis was on the process improvement phases and employee engagement by including frontline employee feedback. The four themes are (a) employee engagement, (b) adaptable philosophies, (c) changes in management, and (d) continuous process improvement.

Theme 1: Employee Engagement

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was the importance of employee engagement. Findings in the present study indicated that the process of

improving performance management requires positive employee engagement to produce quality employee feedback. This finding concurs with Deming (1981) and Mahmud et al. (2019) in relation to TQM, the theoretical framework in this study. The theme of employee engagement aligns with TQM's construct. According to Deming, leaders can use employee feedback to form a more insightful perspective to develop a successful process improvement strategy. P3 stated that, "leaders need to involve all employee feedback in developing and improving productivity improvement strategies to ensure the efficiency of the process." The participants indicated that it is essential to have a mechanism for effective employee feedback so that leaders can better understand the challenges, resources needed, limitations, or unrealistic goals associated with various tasks and assignments. P2 expressed that "leaders should not blindly assign tasks; instead, they must provide their employees with opportunities to discuss the assignments and obtain background context, and they should open the strategy development process to a discussion platform instead of a command platform."

De Azevedo et al. (2021) stated that leaders must understand the quality of input from employee engagement, as it is the foundational support for the improvement process, and the lack of a robust employee-leader relationship will negatively impact the creation of a performance management strategy. The findings for this study reinforce that leaders who wish to obtain an understanding of the quality of input from employees should improve the communication in the leader-employee relationship. P2 expressed that "the communication between leaders and employees is essential to producing an effective performance management strategy that successfully increases employee productivity." P1

stated that “the success in developing, implementing, and improving performance management strategies would not have been successful if not for a supported leader-employee relationship framework that provided leaders with valuable process feedback.”

The participants agreed that the benefits of a solid leader-employee relationship include quality feedback that could be used to improve the process and employee performance. P3 emphasized that the TQM model of feedback from employees is essential to leaders better understanding the areas of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for improvement, and possible threats of failure throughout the various stages of a process. When asked what strategies successfully helped to increase the productivity of employees, P2 replied,

Ensure that employees are engaged. I don't want to assign an assignment by looking at the workload. I ensure that they have conversations where they see the root of the assignment to provide more input and ideas to get the work done. I have seen that in the past when you just direct and assign without putting it in context, it's usually not returned with quality. So, allowing staff to discuss the assignment, review the assignment, or get context from background information as to where the assignment is coming from and why it's needed does provide an opportunity for them to be more engaged.

Deming (1981) stated that quality control could not be managed without input from all employees involved in production. The findings in the present study confirmed that of Deming, as when P2 expressed the importance of quality management when engaging with employees to obtain their perspective on the task in stating, “the importance of quality management when engaging with employees to obtain their

perspective on the tasks is paramount to process improvement.” P1 stated that, “when leadership obtains feedback directly from the frontline employee, this provides leadership with the perspective and insight needed to ensure success by providing needed assignment support.” Schleicher et al. (2019) stated that successful leaders need to include the frontline feedback from all employees throughout the monitoring, development, adjustment, and improvement process of the process's lifecycle.

Deming (1981) stated that for the management of quality control, it is essential for leaders to support employees with all resources needed to accomplish assigned tasks. P1 expressed that, “it’s essential to have an ongoing mechanism to involve all employees in developing quality management and to supply them with the tools to accomplish the task.” This consistent involvement between leadership and employees provides an understanding of possible issues with quality control, such as if the issue is internal or external based, lack of resource quality, unrealistic goals, or other constraints. Sahoo (2019) and Karami et al. (2021) discussed that including all employees in the decision-making process provides a valuable opportunity for leaders to obtain information from the employees who perform the work about ways of improving quality control. P2 highlighted that, “employee engagement is essential to creating a work environment where all employees feel valued, included, and invested in the success of assignments and developing quality control and process improvement.” Ye et al. (2019) stated that having an open communication system between employees and leaders was critical in developing productivity and quality control improvement strategies.

P1 stated that leaders could not solely rely on performance appraisals as these are just summaries of the employee's annual dealings. Deming (1981) expressed that performance appraisals are a deadly disease damaging employee engagement because they force their experience into categories that may not adequately fit. Weiss and Merrigan (2021) recommended making the employees a part of the process to reform performance appraisals to identify possible problems with the strategy. P1 stated that, "leaders could not have a one-size-fits-all approach to better understanding the employee's experience." Thus, they should seek various methods of encouraging, promoting, and supporting leaders to engage with their employees more throughout the year and not just during the annual review period.

P3 discussed that, as part of TQM, employee engagement is a perspective that leaders require to be effective in developing quality control strategies and would be remiss if they ignored employee feedback. Employee engagement also builds a rapport with leaders that enhances the communication and relationship of the employee-leader relationship. One benefit of employee engagement is that it makes the employee feel valued and includes the unique frontline perspective. Ismail et al. (2019) noted that communication regarding employee engagement is essential to the success of any performance management strategy, as the employees' perceptions offer unique contributions to the development of a strategy, its implementation, and its improvement. P3 added that, "modifying their division's organizational chart to further strengthen the communication between leaders and frontline employees, ensuring that frontline employees had a direct communicational pathway to their leaders and one that bypassed

lower-level management.” The response from P3 aligns with Deming’s (1981) TQM framework that highlights the importance leaders obtaining direct feedback from frontline employees and avoiding the dilution from lower level management. Leaders are responsible for changing the workplace culture to ensure that certain levels of management do not dilute the experience and information from the frontline employees and that employee engagement helps foster a sense of employee value (Beerepoot et al., 2019). P3 stated that, “sometimes leaders could be single perspective-minded and blinded to the completion challenges facing the employees assigned to perform the task.” The literature and the response from P3 also align with Deming’s (1981) TQM model that supports direct feedback from frontline employees provides leaders with quality real-life experiences to improve the process and increase employee productivity. Supporting employee engagement will provide insight to better understand the challenges and better plan for the solutions.

Donate et al. (2020) expressed that an employee's viewpoint is a valuable tool that allows leaders to review past obstacles, discover what worked what did not, and find possible approaches for the next time. P3 stated that, “With the flexibility of quality control, there are various ways of obtaining employee feedback, which is critical to solidify confidence in supporting an employee engagement workplace environment; (1) anonymous process, (2) face-to-face, or (3) a combination of other methods.” In either case, leaders need to have an established channel for two-way communication with their employees (P1). P2 explained that,

Reviewing input from employee feedback consists of several steps called Retrospective Review: 1) the overview – a review of what went well, what the employees liked, and what they disliked; 2) the wish – after reviewing the process in full, taking note of things that could have been done more efficiently; 3) the manifestation – taking the aspects of “the wish” step further by developing and implementing a plan to support the transition from theory to reality.

The methods of the model for the Retrospective Review of Agency Rules (Administrative Conference of the United States, n.d.) align with Deming’s (1981) TQM model for supporting employee engagement to obtain feedback in the improvement of quality control. The alignment is due to the participants altering the Respective Review of Agency Rules (Administrative Conference of the United States, n.d.) from a program-centered process to a human-centered process. This alteration aligns with Deming’s (1981) human-based TQM model. The use of employee feedback is essential in creating improved performance management strategies and building a constant process of improvement (Shuaib & He, 2021).

In supporting the use of employee feedback, employee engagement is essential to Deming’s (1981) TQM model for improving performance management strategies to increase productivity (Caniëls et al., 2018). Through analyzing the participant’s responses, the data aligns with Deming’s TQM model that the inclusion of employees throughout the process development stages of quality control strategies creates an effective system that increases employee productivity (Deming, 1981). P2 expressed the need to solicit employee input to uncover their needs in completing the work with the

highest level of productivity and quality, and without this information, leaders are at a loss on meeting productivity goals.

Deming's (1981) TQM model highlights the importance of employee engagement during the quality control improvement process. The findings indicated that all participants shared experiences supporting the need for employee engagement that resulted in increased successes, a higher sense of employee self-value, and utilization of resources through effective performance management strategies. The participating performance management leaders also shared their experiences that employee engagement increased employee morale, improved the employee's pride in their workmanship, increased productivity, and ultimately improved production quality. The findings of the importance and value of employee engagement aligned with the literature review of Kahn's (1990) employee engagement concepts, and also aligned with the results of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey 2020 (Office of Personnel Management, 2020) and Federal Government Report 2020 (American Customer Satisfaction Index, 2021) on the shared assessment of employee engagement from an employee's perspective. Furthermore, the findings also indicated that leaders need to value and include the insight of frontline employees as a measure of quality control and process improvement. Consequently, the findings were aligned with TQM in regard to employee engagement.

Theme 2: Adoption of New Performance Philosophies

The second theme was that adopting new performance philosophies is essential to effective productivity improvement strategies. Mas'udin and Kamara (2018) stated that

performance management leaders who included different philosophies during the strategy creation process were more likely to produce successful strategies to improve employee performance. The literature of Mas'udin and Kamara (2018) align with the findings from this study as the need for leaders to assess and adopt new performance philosophies could be essential to employees meeting productivity goals and challenges. P3 stated that, "when adopting new performance ideas and strategies keep in mind that defined identifiers are essential to guiding the assessment of the new idea and strategy to improve employee performance." Gilbert (1978) identified six components for improving employee performance: incentives, resources, knowledge, capacity, information, and motives. P2 expressed that there should also be process improvement identifiers in place to show when the current process needs replacement. The literature of Gilbert (1978) and P2 align with Deming's (1981) TQM model of P1 stated,

Successful leaders have to adopt new philosophies to overcome new obstacles.

Some obstacles can be so great that you can't achieve the increase in productivity and, as a result, to have to change your original method of accomplishing the goal and recognize that you don't have the resources, the tools, the techniques, the training, the whatever you need to continue on the same path.

Deming (1981) stated that leaders must be cognizant of new challenges and actively and appropriately respond to them by adopting new philosophies to achieve or remain successful. P1 further explained that it is essential for leaders to have identifiers for when new strategies on improving employee performance are needed. P2 expressed that "being open-minded by adopting new philosophies is essential to process

improvement.” It could greatly benefit organizations because it allows leaders to adjust the pathway towards success by creating and improving a constant purpose towards process improvement by addressing new challenges. Al-Shourah and al-Shourah (2020) explained that leaders must be flexible and open-minded to include new philosophies to overcome new challenges. P3 stated that federal government leaders should use the most up-to-date Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey 2020 (Office of Personnel Management, 2020) to truly understand the challenges facing employees and causing them to not be successful in completing their tasks.

The participant responses showed experience-based support for Deming’s (1981) TQM model related to the need for leaders to adopt new performance philosophies to overcome new challenges that can cause employees to fail in meeting productivity goals. Rahim et al. (2018) stated that an organization’s ability to adjust its performance management strategies by adopting new philosophies is critical to overcoming various process challenges. P3 shared,

There was a time we needed to organize our projects better. So, we adopted a method called Portfolio Management governance. This method allowed other leaders and me the understanding and guidance to identify every project, required resources, prioritization, and control of the programs and projects as they align with the strategic goals and capacity to be productive. Portfolio Management governance helped us evaluate the various processes and identify employee productivity stressors and other risk factors. Using this method, other leaders and I obtained a more detailed understanding of the projects' strengths, Weaknesses,

Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT analysis). Thus, we were able to develop better strategies to increase employee productivity.

Lappalainen et al. (2019) stated that leaders need to continuously assess processes to identify when that process has been antiquated and needs to be replaced. P2 expressed that, “adopting a retrospective review philosophy as a perception tool helped leaders review previous obstacles, find out what worked, what didn’t work, and a possible approach next time.” Leaders that resisted the adjustments needed to overcome new challenges in quality control and productivity have a higher rate of failure than those that adapt by adopting new philosophies (P2). Findings from the participants in this study indicated the ability of a leader to know when to adapt to new challenges and adjust the current process by adopting new philosophies and effectively implementing them is essential to being successful.

An organization’s acceptance of adopting new philosophies to overcome the challenges of performance management will positively impact its employees and the quality of production (Rollins et al., 2021). Similarly, P3 explained that “promoting employee inclusion between leaders and employees helps performance management leaders overcome various challenges by collecting information on issues and creating solutions to reach their productivity goals.” The performance management processes must include adopting new methods of addressing challenges to improve the quality of the strategies and increase their success rates (Bhaskar, 2020). The participant's responses align with Bhaskar’s (2020) concept that successful leaders can adopt new philosophies to assess the effectiveness of current strategies, adjust set goals, and meet various new

challenges. To provide an in-depth analysis of this topic, I conducted data analysis on empowering employees, to outline further the strategies performance leaders in the federal government use to increase employee productivity.

Researchers (Al-Saffar & Obeidat, 2020; Marin & Tudoran, 2019) found that involving employees in several phases of strategy development produced higher productivity. P1 stated that “performance management leaders need to empower their employees in several ways: involving them in the different phases of strategy development, consulting them on work and task assignments, and promoting a human-centered process structure.” Obtaining employee support for strategies requires building trust and providing employees with satisfying information and power in the direction of the strategy (Mohaghar & Atashin, 2019). P2 expressed the need for successful leaders to build trust with employees by enclosing all of the task information and allowing them to have a level of control in how the strategy to accomplish the task is developed. Mas’udin and Kamara (2018) stated that performance management leaders who included different philosophies during the strategy creation process were more likely to produce successful strategies. P3 explained that “successful experience has shown that when leaders empower employees to help build a strategy and the processes within, employees have expressed their investment in the production.” Research (Carder & Rooney, 2018; Deming, 1981) stated that through implementing the TQM model, an employee that takes pride in their workmanship would produce a better quality product and increase their level of productivity. Successful leaders who support and promote employee empowerment have mutually beneficial since employees feel more valued and personally

invested in the process improvement solution. Leaders obtain vital knowledge of strategic factors that improve their success rate and make gaining support easier.

Studies (Gilbert, 1978; Peljhan & Marc, 2018; Sanjaya & Mayola, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020) indicated that successful leaders benefited from building the concept of empowering employees into the work environment. Sugianingrat et al. (2019) stated that support for employee inclusion helps explore possible productivity strategy improvement areas. Deming (1981) believed that employee empowerment would lead to employees having more pride in the workmanship of quality products. Tejaningrum (2020) suggested that employees can offer a wealth of knowledge regarding the support needed to produce higher quality work, boost confidence, and increase productivity. The following statement from P2 aligns with Tejaningrum (2020),

A human-centered design for strategies considers the employee's experience, goals, skills, and how those attributes are applied to the performance process to accomplish the set goals. Empowering employees will provide successful leaders with the best communication channel for soliciting quality data collection for strategy development.

The participants in this study agreed that leaders and employees could benefit from work environments supported by an employee empowering concept to boost employee confidence, increase workmanship pride, encourage employee investment in improved product quality, and increase productivity.

Allowing employees to work in their way, share their experiences, and be heard by leaders can promote their sense of self-worth, empowerment and produce a higher

quality of employee performance (Gilbert, 1978; Sandhya & Sulphrey, 2020). Zhang et al. (2020) stated that empowering employees to work in their way builds a rapport with leaders and confidence. P3 stated,

When empowering employees to complete work, allow them the flexibility to complete work in their way. When this happened, we experienced an increase in goals being met. My employees reported an increased sense of self-value, an improved desire for quality, and a willingness to go beyond the basic requirements. We hire these employees for their professional skills, and they work better when left to apply those skills in their way.

P2 mentioned that allowing employees to complete work in their way made production quality higher, and their morale improved. Bhaskar (2020) and Peljhan and Marc (2018) similarly stated that leaders should empower employees by making decisions to build independent employees. Deming (1981) stated that micromanaging employees will kill the project's drive, and leaders should allow employees to apply their professional skills to accomplish the work. Furthermore, the participants agreed with Deming's (1981) TQM concept, regarding the benefits of empowering employees to complete the work independently, allows employees to obtain frontline experience when completing the work.

P2 stated that for performance management strategies to be successful, there must be a human-centered business structure to promote and support employee engagement. Employee performance strategies that focus on supporting employee empowerment have a better success rate than goal-centered ones (Gilbert, 1978; Tsareva & Tyugaev, 2020).

P3 expressed the importance of allowing frontline employees to apply their frontline experience to complete a task. Ali et al. (2020) found that leaders who empowered employees to work independently to complete a task experienced more productivity and a higher rate of goals being met. P1 expressed that “investing in a human-centered work environment empowers employees and benefits leaders as it provides the initial buy-in and insight from the employees.” Al-Dhaafri and Alosani (2020) noted that employees' work environment is the foundation for any organizational strategy. Leaders need to support a human-centered work environment by listening to the employees and implementing their needs to bring out the best quality in productivity.

Deming's (1981) TQM model supports the importance of putting productivity power in the hands of the employees and adopting new philosophies as a method of continuous process improvement. Findings indicated that the participating performance management leaders demonstrated their preference for supporting a work environment that promotes employee engagement. By including employees in the decision-making process of strategy development, implementation, and improvement, leaders obtain unique insight into the frontline employee's experience working within the process. Findings also indicated that the inclusion of the frontline employee's experience helps craft process improvement strategies with leaders that increase the rate of success and obtain employee support. The frontline employee's experience provides leaders with knowledge and information; two of the six components Gilbert (1978) identified as essential for performance improvement. By encouraging employee empowerment,

leaders aim to increase the employee's morale, confidence, and personal investment into the craftsmanship of a quality product.

Deming's (1981) TQM model highlights the need for leaders to adopt new philosophies to meet new challenges. The findings confirmed that all participants provided experiences supporting the need for the adoption of new philosophies, a reassessment of current philosophies to indicate when improvements are needed and making the necessary changes to meet new challenges through improved performance management strategies. The participating performance management leaders also shared their experiences that adopting new philosophies improved the response time of adapting to changes and challenges, increased the utilization of resources as the time for using antiquated philosophies were reduced, improved efficiency with process management, increased productivity, and ultimately improved production quality. The findings of the necessity and benefits of adopting new philosophies aligned with the literature review of Gilbert's (1978) behavioral engineer model and six point concept for improving performance, and also aligned with the results of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey 2020 (Office of Personnel Management, 2020) and Federal Government Report 2020 (American Customer Satisfaction Index, 2021) on the shared assessment of the confidence and adjustability of leaders from an employee's perspective. Furthermore, the findings also indicated that leaders need to assess current and new performance philosophies to determine the needed change and the pathway to achieving that change to increase employee productivity and improve employee performance. Consequently, the findings were aligned with TQM in regard to adopting new philosophies.

Theme 3: Changes in Management

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis is that changes in management are essential for leaders to obtain strategy support from an organization and its employees. Deming (1981) suggested that organizations institute leaders who create a management system that allows and supports employees during changes in management systems. P2 confirmed Deming's Findings in stating that, "having quality leaders during changes in management is essential to the success of the transitional process and the implementation of improved performance management strategies." Ye et al. (2019) stated that during transitions within an organization, employees need the guidance and support of capable leaders. P1 agreed and further stated that employees usually fear the unknown in management when leaders lack information and support from leaders. The absence of leaders' information, support, or resources drives employee fear (Donate et al., 2020). P3 agreed with Donate et al. (2020) and mentioned that "addressing employee fears early on any level requires a robust employee-leader relationship." Kulenović et al. (2021) observed that during phases of strategy transition, the increase of employee resistance and fear is preventable but requires influential leaders who have quality employee-leader rapport and can offer guidance. The participants agreed that leaders can resolve employee fears about changes in management by addressing the fears and concerns through a quality employee-leader relationship.

Including employees in the change management strategy process will reduce, if not eliminate, employee fears, as they will better understand how the changes will impact them as individuals (Ferdinandus, 2020; Park & Park, 2019). P2 explained, "leaders have

a more significant impact on the management of processes than employees. Hence, they are responsible for implementing quality change management strategies that continue the quality level of employee productivity.” P3 expressed that the earlier and more information leaders provide to employees about the change in management, the more they are at ease. Rehmani et al. (2020) and Yadav et al. (2020) found that excluding employees from the planning phase discussions of change of management negatively impacts the performance successes and achievements. P1 stated that, “another prominent obstacle leaders would experience with implementing change is employee fear caused possible employment termination.” The participants agreed that the more information leaders give employees earlier on about any change in management, the more their fears subside, and the more likely employees are to support the change.

Karamouz et al. (2020) argued that leaders must effectively approach obstacles associated with changes in management, such as possible termination, using the employee-leader relationship to communicate as much information about the change as possible to reduce fears. P1 expressed that if an employee is focused on possible termination, the quality of their work will decline. The anxiety regarding organizational changes will undoubtedly bring about the fear of employment termination (Hsu, 2019). P3 explained that when an employee fears termination, they have express feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and panic. P2 stated, “that employees fearing possible termination communicated a feeling of betrayal by leaders to protect them after all the time they put into helping the organization reach its goals.” Employees focused on the penalties of management changes, or failure cannot effectively focus on achieving the

organizational goals (Deming, 1981). Findings in this study and in the previous literature indicated that leaders' involving employees in developing the change is strongly associated with employee buy-in, support, and quality resources to ease the transition while addressing the frontline employees' termination concerns.

P3 confirmed the importance of the employee-leader relationship when best addressing the frontline employees' perspectives on possible termination. Busu (2019) stated that excluding the frontline employees' perspectives in the early stages of changes in management planning is problematic. P1 reveals that employees that fear termination drive employees to consider proactively leaving the organization. P2 expressed that excluding employees from the change management planning phases would eventually become problematic for leaders in implementing the changes. Androwis et al. (2018) and Pambreni et al. (2019) stated that leaders sometimes ignore employees' perspectives and undervalue the need for frontline employee feedback during the changes in management strategy processes. P3 stated that, "employee buy-in is essential to the success of the changes in management strategy, as it confirms the employees' trust in the leaders' abilities to support, address, and resolve the employees' fears and concerns." Diamantidis and Chatzoglou (2018) found that promoting and supporting a robust employee-leader relationship improves the quality of employee engagement and the quality of trust in leaders. Employees will not perform at quality production levels if they feel powerless before the changes and will experience the impact of those changes (Deming, 1981).

Findings indicated that based on participant responses, employees should not feel powerless during the changes in management planning phases. Their input provides a

unique perspective and helps ease possible anxieties and tensions associated with change and possible termination. Participants stated that successful leaders need to address the needs of the employees to strengthen the processes within strategies. Findings also indicated that change is inevitable based on supportive research, and leaders need to position employees in the best possible position to ensure employee support and input. Deming (1981) defined change in management as they transition from one management system to another. The participants shared their recommendations that demonstrate successful leaders focus on supporting their employees and utilizing resources to meet deadlines and achieve quality results.

Deming's (1981) TQM model highlights the need for change in management. The findings confirmed that all participants shared support for change in management, an effectiveness review of current management systems, and the adjustments needed to meet new challenges through improved performance management strategies. The participating performance management leaders also shared their experiences that installing change in management improved the utilization of resources, reduced the response time of addressing changes and challenges, improved the process of assessing current management system, improved efficiency with process management, enhanced the quality of management, increased productivity, and ultimately improved production quality. The findings of the essential value and benefits of change in management aligned with the literature review of Northouse (2016) for improving leader and management performance, and aligned with the results of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey 2020 (Office of Personnel Management, 2020) and Federal Government Report 2020

(American Customer Satisfaction Index, 2021) on the shared assessment of the confidence and adjustability of leaders from an employee's perspective. Furthermore, the findings also indicated that leaders should assess current and new changes in management to determine the needed change and the pathway to achieving that change to increase employee productivity and improve employee performance. Consequently, the findings were aligned with TQM regarding change in management.

Theme 4: Continuous Purpose and Process Improvement

The fourth theme that emerged from the data analysis was that leaders must create a mechanism for continuous process improvement to succeed in meeting productivity goals. Deming (1981) describes the constancy of purpose as a philosophy of thinking and setting long-term goals and how those goals will achieve success within the organization's system. P1 expressed that:

Leaders are responsible for setting organizational goals and plotting the path toward success. Leaders need to input a continuous purpose to improve processes with this responsibility. Processes will not automatically improve themselves. So, leaders are needed to support a continuous purpose and the path forward on process improvement.

Deming (1981) stated that leaders need to create a constancy of purpose and a process improvement factor into their strategies. Ali et al. (2020) found that strategies that lack purpose and process improvement constancy have a shorter strategy lifespan and a smaller chance for success. P2 explained that constancy of purpose is the implanted motivation of improving the process. An organization's processes will not automatically

improve and require leaders to inject motivation and support toward continuous improvement.

Deming (1981) focused on continuous process improvement and creating vigorous self-improvement methods for employees and leaders. P3 stated that, “successful leaders support a foundation of employee improvement if a process is ever improved.” Mohaghar and Atashin (2019) found that embedding continuous process improvements in performance management strategies as a standard is required for an organization to strive toward higher quality production. P2 expressed that there must be a human-centered focus for employee improvement to impact the process.

Creating a purpose-driven improvement system utilizes an organization’s resources by implementing review processes to ensure maximum efficiency (Deming, 1981). P2 expressed a perception that confirmed this finding of Deming (1981) in stating that, “a human-centered design structure for continuous process improvement relies on feedback from employees as the best data collection method.” Successful leaders support the needs of their employees to improve the process. The response from the participants supports Deming’s (1981) TQM concept that leaders must adopt new productivity philosophies throughout the lifespan of a process that can overcome challenges and advance the productivity goals from a continuous improvement perspective. All participants expressed that successful leaders need to support employee improvement to impact the process and ensure success. Further analysis of this theme revealed the sub-theme of long-term planning.

Villalobos et al. (2020) stated that the frontline employee perspective provides leaders with the tools to adjust deadlines, improve their processes, train, gather funding, and meet other aspects of the assignment to ensure success in the long term. P1 described that, “an organization’s productivity goals as the leader’s responsibility for setting the vision and the pathway to accomplish the goal in the short and long terms.” Visions are long-term plans that leaders must establish, support, and improve (Bhaskar, 2020). P3 stated that the process of establishing a vision, or a productivity goal includes components such as a development plan, an assessment of employee capabilities, outlining the method to measure productivity, resources, and a plan to implement the vision. Deming (1981) expressed many approaches to developing long-term plans for an organization, but the best approach is to go through the process as a team. The inclusion of various perspectives supports quality results, including solution vetting by a collective (Dyer et al., 2017).

The participants expressed that leaders must include several factors to develop a long-term plan in their decision-making processes; the overall organizational vision, the mission, the regional culture, workplace culture, risks, and the available resources to accomplish the envisioned long-term plan. The participants expression aligns with Deming’s (1981) TQM model as it highlights the importance of creating support for a continuous purpose within a leader’s long-term plan. The findings from this study confirmed Deming’s (1981) TQM concept of bringing frontline employees to the table provides leaders with a unique perspective through the insight and feedback employees give on completing work in the best manner, the possible risks or obstacles, necessary

resources, and how best to accomplish the work and meet productivity goals. The findings in this study and in the previous literature align with Deming's (1981) TQM concept of including employees in long-term planning ensures that leaders can confirm the employee has a thorough understanding of the tasks, assignments, and work to be completed.

Leaders cannot have the perspective of the frontline employee, who has a deeper understanding of the work to be completed and the pathway to meet the goals (Sabuhari et al., 2020). Without including frontline employees, long-term planning brainstorming sessions are problematic because leaders lack the complete work process perspective and understanding. Wijayanti et al. (2020) stated that sometimes leaders have their blinders developing long-term plans. Leaders that continue to operate in the long-term planning phases without insight from employees decrease, even eliminate, their chances of meeting goals. Deming (1981) stated that leaders must adopt a philosophy to identify obstacles of long-term planning using the employee's unique perspective; they serve as the subject matter expert on completing the work.

Leaders must document the requirements to accomplish the goals and adjust the goals if needed to accomplish long-term goals (Deming, 1981). P2 recommended that, "leaders include short-term planning but not focus too much on it because short-term goals are temporary, and long-term goals are permanent." P1 explained:

Portfolio management governance is one helpful tool that can help uncover the resources employees need to meet long-term productivity goals. This tool is a method of categorization based on work themes, prioritization based on the

available resources, and control over the organization's processes in alignment with the organization's goals and its capacity to deliver or succeed. With portfolio management governance, leaders can define the required resources, prioritize the steps, and oversee the programs and projects to align with the strategic goals and productive capacities. Through implementing this tool, leaders can plan, implement, execute, adjust, and improve short and long-term goals to ensure success. However, this model is useless if leaders do not have the necessary perspective and understanding to know how all the internal offices in the process operate. Once leaders gain a complete perspective of the tasks, portfolio management governance can help them evaluate the process, identify employee productivity stressors, and succeed at short and long-term goals.

The work environment set in place by leaders to accomplish long-term goals should produce employees who have a passion for the work rather than employees who only comply with obligations (P3). P2 stated that, "the employees who perform the tasks and complete the assignments are the subject matter experts and should be included in any retrospective process reviews to enhance the work environment, productivity goals, long-term planning, and adjustments."

Creating a purpose-driven improvement system on a long-term basis is about consistently utilizing an organization's resources by implementing review processes to ensure maximum efficiency (Deming, 1981). The participants agreed that focusing on continuous improvement creates a constancy of purpose as a long-term strategy to increase productivity instead of a short-term strategy that could waste resources. To

ensure that leaders meet the employee's needs, leaders must constantly aim toward improvement on a long-term basis (Deming, 1981; Tortorella et al., 2020). Participants agreed that to reach a point of continuous improvement and increase the quality of the outcome; leaders must ensure their employees have the resources, tools, and training to be successful. However, to do so, leaders must consider the short-term issues, advocate for the resources to address those issues, and move past the issues adequately to accomplish the long-term productivity goals.

Being open-minded to adopting new philosophies is also essential to the success of process improvement and the execution of long-term planning (Maswadeh & Al Zumot, 2021). P3 expressed that the process review philosophy greatly benefits an organization's long-term plans. It allows leaders to adjust the pathway to success by creating and improving a constant purpose towards process improvement (P3). P2 shared that involving employees in developing performance management strategies to improve productivity through a process review is essential to the leaders' long-term planning processes for purpose-driven improvement.

In Deming's (1981) 14-points of quality management, he outlined the first point (creating constancy of purpose toward improvement) and the thirteenth point (establishing a system of self-improvement). Findings indicated that throughout this theme and sub-theme, the two points intertwine and show the connectedness Deming (1981) explained exists amongst the 14-points of quality management. The participant's responses align with the mindset that an organization will not achieve its process improvement goals without the ongoing retrospective review input.

Participant responses also indicated that long-term plans could not succeed without continuous retrospective process reviews to improve the process throughout its lifespan. The findings in this study confirmed that successful leaders utilize most organizational resources for long-term plans and a smaller portion of resources for short-term plans. Findings further indicated what performance management strategies leaders use to increase employee productivity, and Deming's (1981) TQM model aligns in practice, application, and results. Thus, this study's results support the appropriateness of the TQM model for this current study and expand on the application of the TQM model to include performance management leaders within the federal government, which Deming did not initially include within the scope of the model.

Deming's (1981) TQM model highlights the need for continuous purpose and process improvement. The findings confirmed that all participants support continuous process and process improvement, engaging leaders, and frontline employees to identify possible areas of improvement, the development of methods to create improved processes, the goal of continuously improving the quality of the product and the efficiency of the production, and the adjustments needed to meet new challenges through improved performance management strategies. The participating also shared their experiences that having a continuous purpose and process improvement enhances the utilization of resources, reduced the response time of addressing changes and challenges, improved the process of assessing current processes, improved efficiency with process management, enhanced the quality of process, increased productivity, and ultimately improved production quality. The findings of the value and benefits of continuous

purpose and process improvement aligned with the literature review of Davenport (1993) for the importance of a continuous purpose and process improvement in performance management, and also aligned with the results of the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey 2020 (Office of Personnel Management, 2020) and Federal Government Report 2020 (American Customer Satisfaction Index, 2021) on the shared assessment of the confidence and adjustability of leaders from an employee's perspective. Furthermore, the findings also indicated that leaders need to install a continuous purpose and process improvement to consistently achieve the change to increase employee productivity and improve employee performance. Consequently, the findings were aligned with TQM regarding continuous purpose and process improvement.

Applications to Professional Practice

The application to professional practice is foundationally the increased inclusion and interaction between leaders and frontline employees to positively impact of the performance management strategies associated with productivity. In addition to the conceptual implications described above, this study directly applies to the performance strategies of the federal government. The success of organizations reaching their set goals is largely dependent on implementing the principles of TQM. Consequently, the failure of organizations to achieve set goals is due to the leaders not effectively assessing, modifying, and transitioning current processes towards the implementation of improved processes. Ineffective processes have no place in an organization focused on achieving its goals. Leaders substantially impact the effectiveness of organizational processes used to accomplish productivity goals. If leaders can improve the quality of a process, they

effectively improve the employee's productivity and improve the organization's chances of achieving set goals. The impact of a leader's decision to implement or maintain a specific performance strategy is paramount to the employee's ability to be productive. Based on the findings of this study and due to the specific goals of a performance management leader's organization, the customization of the performance management strategy is essential to meeting the set goals.

The first application to professional practice is that engaging with employees by including their frontline feedback during the various process improvement phases (Theme 1). By prioritizing frontline employee feedback through weekly or monthly engagement, leaders can obtain quality insight into assessing, developing, improving, and implementing successful performance strategies. The findings from this study mirror that of other research (Deming, 1981; Eldor, 2018; Putra & Maarif, 2019) and support the recommendation that employee engagement implementation is a core structure in the process improvement of performance strategies. Even though the participants in this study used employee engagement to improve performance strategies, employee engagement to obtain frontline feedback for process improvement is not an essential principle of federal government performance management training for leaders. Employee engagement is essential for ensuring frontline employee feedback inclusion in improving performance strategies. Performance leaders benefit from the inclusion of employee engagement.

The second application to professional practice is that the inclusion of adaptable philosophies to ensure the performance strategy meets the needs of the set goals (Theme

2). In promoting such traits, leaders utilize adaptable philosophies, in which they support the consideration and inclusion of new solutions to meet new performance challenges. Participants noted that they focused on a human-center perspective to understand the employee and the challenges they faced in meeting productivity and performance goals. These new and innovative solutions are needed to meet the ever-changing challenges of employee performance. Leaders benefit from adapting to new philosophies to meet employees' needs and overcome new challenges.

The third application to professional practice is that an effective change in management during the transition from a current process to implementing a new process (Theme 3). Change in management guided leaders to employees on the transition process through strategic implementation. In doing so, and in combination with frontline employee feedback, change in management works through the employee-leader relationship. During the transitional process of change in management, the existing multiple layered processes must be supported, alternated, or replaced sufficiently not to disrupt the organization's established operations and progress. The findings from this study confirmed that a positive employee-leader relationship often increased employee innovation, motivation, and productivity. Leaders benefit from effective change in management strategies as it builds support from employees for the design, implementation, and improvement of the performance management strategy. Thus, increasing the chance the strategy will successfully meet the organizational goals.

Finally, the fourth application to professional practice is that the installment of continuous process improvement measures to ensure routine process assessment for

relevance and effectiveness in accomplishing the set goals (Theme 4). It is difficult for leaders to justify using the same performance strategy while failing to address the new challenges. Participants stated that they had embedded continuous process improvement to ensure the performance strategy is successful, efficient, and relevant in accomplishing the organizational goals. By doing this, performance leaders and employees could better justify and support current performance strategies. Performance leaders support effective process strategies, adjust as needed to address the challenges, and accomplish the organizational goals. Performance leaders support process strategies that fail to overcome the performance challenges impeding the organization from accomplishing its goals. Performance leaders need to imbed continuous process improvement as a core principle into their performance strategy. This inclusion implements a looping process that assesses and adjusts the performance strategy through leader review to ensure it meets the organization's needs to accomplish the set goals. Leaders benefit from the inclusion of continuous process improvement as it positions the process at the height of effective productivity and utilization of resources.

Implications for Social Change

In addition to the conceptual and practical implications, the results from this study have implications for social change. Leaders in performance management interested in process improvement strategies and productivity growth can use the information provided by this study for guidance in the future. If leaders can improve the quality of a process, they effectively improve the employee's productivity and improve the organization's chances of achieving set goals (Deming, 1981).

Similarly, this study established the results that could help improve performance management initiatives in the future. Future performance leaders could reduce ineffective strategies and utilize resources for employee and organizational growth (Ye et al., 2019). As participants of this study have implemented, performance leaders could establish TQM principles into the various phases of the performance strategy. Implementing TQM principles would not only establish but utilize the existing employee-leader relationship. Leaders can use this relationship to produce quality frontline feedback to ensure that future processes effectively accomplish their goals through implementation. “

Leaders could use the findings from this study to promote social change for frontline employees. The participants expressed that having an employee-leader relationship provided clear communication to leaders, included frontline employees in the problem solving and strategy implementation phases, and made an effort from employees associated with employees feeling more optimistic about their leader and satisfied with their contribution to the success of the organization. Participants stated a direct connection between employee growth, productivity growth, and organizational growth. As a result, it would benefit performance leaders to support frontline employees to grow personally and professionally. The participants emphasized that while this effort would positively impact the organization, it would also positively impact the employee, who would benefit from the improved performance through the annual performance rating. An improved performance rating increases the employee's opportunity for professional growth, performance rating bonuses, and the potential to qualify for a high salary position, improving their living standard. Organizational production and employee

retention are likely to increase because of the improved performance. The improved performance would also positively impact the employee's economic stability, impacting their community's economy.

Recommendations for Action

This study's findings have implications for change and recommendations for future action. Based on the discovered themes of this study and secondary data collected, the following recommendations for action are provided to help performance management leaders improve the productivity of employees. These recommended actions below are for the benefit of a summarized understanding.

Support Employee Engagement

Performance management leaders supporting employee engagement contributes to increased employee productivity and organizational growth, performance leaders in the federal government should strive to establish employee engagement through their performance management practices. Employee engagement should be a staple of strategies to provide frontline employee insight during processes' development, implementation, and improvement stages. Leaders should also implement or continue to support quality employee-leader relationships to strengthen employee engagement.

Applying TQM principles as a standard in performance strategies; including employee engagement during the development, implementation, and improvement phases – helps leaders establish successful performance strategic plans and improve overall performance. Hence federal government performance leaders should promote employee

engagement by supporting healthy employee-leader relationships. Successful leaders support, encourage, and promote direct communication between leaders and employees.

Adopt New Philosophies to Assess the Effectiveness of Current Strategies and Overcome Challenges

As a method of overcoming new challenges, leaders should adopt new philosophies to assess the effectiveness of current strategies and determine when process improvement is needed. Leaders need to involve employees in the strategy development, implementation, and improvement phases to ensure quality while vetting new philosophies before adopting them. While adopting any new philosophy, leaders need to encourage employee empowerment to increase the employee's morale, confidence, and the craftsmanship of a quality product. Empowering employees can build support from employees throughout the various strategic planning phases. Furthermore, employee empowerment also improves the quality of employee-leader relationships and thus improves the feedback from frontline employees.

Include Employees in the Early Stages of Change Management and Support Their Needs

The benefits of including employees in the early stages of change in management to obtain quality feedback from a frontline perspective. Successful leaders obtain employee support for change in management transitional strategies by including employees throughout the development, implementation, and improvement stages of the change management process. To reduce or eliminate the fear of termination and build up employee support, leaders must address employees' fears, concerns, and needs during the

change in management process. Leaders need to ensure that employees are not working from fear but a place of pride in their craftsmanship.

Require Continuous Reviews in All Strategy Processes to Promote Continuous Purpose-Driven Process Improvement

Successful leaders require continuous reviews in the later stages of all strategy processes to promote a continuous purpose-driven process improvement. During the strategy review process, encourage and include frontline employees in the efficiency assessment of the strategy to ensure quality utilization of resources. The responsibility of an organization's long-term planning is on the leader. The leader needs to ensure most of the resources are available to support long-term plans, and a minority of the resources are available to support short-term plans.

Recommendations for Further Research

The limitations associated with this study created multiple topics for future research. First, there were a few limitations regarding the scope of this study. Findings may not be transferable to the state or local governments located within and outside the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Further researchers could complete similar studies in state and local government performance management leaders within and outside the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Future researchers may also want to consider broadening the research to leaders within various government departments to understand better how, if at all, organizational goals impact performance management leaders' strategy development to increase employee productivity.

Using a quantitative research methodology and a survey data collection tool, future research could have different results from a larger sample size. However, a quantitative study using validated survey instrument and a sufficiently large, random sample, could yield objective, generalizable confirmation or disconfirmation of the findings in your study. A quantitative method research path could enable the researcher to present a broader understanding of the patterns related to performance management leaders' strategies, limitations, and experiences. For example, future research could study how many leaders have experienced particular issues or why specific strategies are utilized in their organization by gathering data from a larger sample using the quantitative survey collection tool. This quantitative data could provide supplemental findings for qualitative research by identifying if the strategies and limitations discovered through qualitative research are similar among various performance management leaders.

An additional research perspective to expand the study could include comparing state to local (county and city) government performance management leaders and how they apply Deming's TQM model to increase employee productivity. Including state and local leader experiences and perceptions could help grow the understanding of performance management leaders on various levels of government and their strategies to improve employee performance. Future research could obtain insight into the state and local leader perspectives directly by inquiring how state and local visions and missions impact applying the TQM model into performance management strategies.

Reflections

My doctoral research allowed me to enhance my professional understanding and work as a scholar. In that capacity, it was personally and professionally satisfying to work with the participants from the federal government who shared their insights and experiences as federal government executives. I also learned that the TQM model that Deming (1981) recommends could help performance leaders in the federal government improve the quality of employee performance, assess the effectiveness of strategies, identify opportunities for improvement, and enhance the employee-leader relationship to help the organization achieve its goals. Perhaps the most important personal lesson was the reminder that our goal is to understand others' unique perspectives through the quality relationships we form.

During this research, my determination to remove personal biases kept me focused on recording, analyzing, formulating, and presenting only validated information. This approach helped me discover that performance leaders affect employees, other performance leaders, and the public. In the future, I look forward to opportunities to continue to help federal government performance leaders improve their employees' productivity and enhance the quality of service the government provides to the public. Finally, the journey of completing my qualitative case study helped me understand that using the principles of the TQM model can help federal government performance leaders improve their employees' workplace environments and office culture to ultimately improve the quality of service the government provides to the public.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single-case study was to explore the strategies performance leaders in each department of the federal government use to increase employee productivity. In seeking insight into performance management strategies used by leaders in the federal government to increase employee productivity, the findings in this study confirmed that promoting and supporting employee engagement and quality employee-leader relationships served to benefit leaders. It was further discovered in the findings of this study that some of these benefits consisted of quality employee feedback, employee insight during the various stages of strategy management, increased interest, and pride from employees in meeting goals, and the utilization of resources. The findings also revealed that these benefits contributed to improved performance and increased employee productivity.

Understanding performance management strategies used by performance management leaders in the federal government to increase employee productivity is essential for the federal government to continue to provide services to the public. Unlike private organizations, the federal government is not profit-driven, but it has a moral obligation to the public. Although more research is needed to understand further the strategies the federal government performance leaders use to increase employee productivity, this study has provided insight into the experiences and perceptions of federal government leaders with performance management strategies. The results generated from the completion of this study are a critical first step to fully understanding

how federal government leaders can best manage performance strategies to increase employee productivity.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Introduce self to the participant(s).
2. Present the consent form via email, review content, and answer any questions or concerns from the participant(s).
3. Call the participant at the arranged date and time with the audio-recording device active.
4. Reiterate that the call is being audio-recorded for accuracy and data collection.
5. Review the informed consent, study information, and confirm that the participant feels comfortable to speak freely, at a reasonable volume, uninterrupted, and believes themselves to be completely private.
6. Begin the interview with question #1; follow through with the final question.
7. Follow up with additional questions if the responses are perceived as brief or not interpreted as responsive.
8. Request the participant(s) provide supportive data (the annual department performance management report, inter-agency/office performance management report, or performance management strategy plan documentation) via emailed link or documentation.
9. End the interview sequence; discuss the response synthesis review and member checking process with the participant(s).
10. Thank the participant(s) for their participation in the study. Reiterate and confirm the contact number and email address to schedule the follow-up member checking and for additional questions or concerns from the participant(s).

11. End protocol.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to increase your department's employees' productivity?
2. What strategies does your department use to provide the necessary resources to increase employee productivity?
3. How does your department assess the effectiveness of its strategies for increasing employee productivity?
4. What, if any, methods of evaluation are used to identify employee productivity stressors?
5. In what ways, if any, is employee feedback considered in the development or improvement of strategies to increase employee productivity?
6. How does your department measure employees' productivity?
7. What productivity strategies work to address obstacles when implementing strategies to increase employees' productivity?
8. How would your office address obstacles to implementing strategies for increasing your employees' productivity?
9. What else would you like to share regarding strategies used to increase employees' productivity?

Appendix C: Withdrawal Form

You have indicated that you would like to withdraw from the study. You have the right to withdraw fully from this study at any time, and you do not have to provide a reason. Information collected before the signing of this documentation may be used in the study. The information collected before a withdrawal will be coded with a series of letters and numbers to hide your identity. By signing this form, you agree that you have reviewed this form and understand the conditions stated within.

I withdraw my consent for participation in this study in accordance with the withdrawal option in the above statement.

Researcher Signature: _____

Date: _____