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Strategies for Promoting Inclusion and Employee Engagement to Improve Remote Teams' Performance

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MBA, Devry University/Keller School of Management, 2019

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

\External factors such as the pandemic have forced organizational leaders to embrace flexible work structures. Differences in remote versus collocated workplaces escalate the importance for company leaders to uncover strategies to maintain employee engagement and performance. Grounded in the organizational support theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies leaders of remote, diverse teams with high engagement and inclusion use to achieve high team performance. Data were collected using semistructured interviews from a purposeful sampling of five nationally distributed managers. A thematic analysis uncovered three themes: flexible leadership behavior, fair execution of human resource policy and resource allocation, and collaborative work structures. Key recommendations for organizational leaders include (a) investing in training, (b) improving methods of communication, (c) equitably administering policy and resource allocation, and (c) offering program concepts and support for implementing collaborative work structures. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to build solid intercompany and civic relationships, policy awareness, and translate the elements of organizational justice to extend the company's impact externally to surrounding communities.

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Dedication

To God, my family, and loved ones who supported me, patiently participated, and sacrificed along the way in this journey. To my mother, Rita Richardson, for leading the charge for higher education attainment, my sister, Dr. Liana Richardson, who set the stage for doctoral level study, and my father, Bruce Richardson, Sr., for his weekly checks on my progress. To my sons, Bruce III, Joshua, Blake, Jonathan, Brent, Ethan, and Justin, thank you for representing a motivating factor for me to be a positive role model concerning educational pursuits. To my fraternity brothers, thanks for always providing words of encouragement and positive emotional support. This was a team effort.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Organizational leaders face challenges managing a growing racial and ethnic employee mix with diverse thinking, ideas, and concepts. Researchers have found diverse employee populations to be higher performing (Martins, 2020); therefore, leaders must determine the best method for harnessing diverse intellectual property to promote positive organizational gains and a competitive market position. Achieving diverse employee populations is the initial step that requires a complementary strategy for harnessing the benefits of the diverse workforce and creating value. Organizations committed to developing and implementing strategies to achieve an engaged and inclusive climate may provide a mechanism for developing long-term relationships with growing diverse workforces and increasing organizational performance.

Background of the Problem

Historically, much rhetoric has revolved around diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Many have considered the corporate diversity concept synonymous with affirmative action (AA) for much of its existence, the legal effort to ensure fair hiring practices and proper representation of various races and cultures (Murphy, 2018). As a result, most diversity initiatives were developed from AA efforts, challenging and delineating the requirement for building numerically diverse employee populations from the value of substantive diversity (Burns & Darity, 2019). Consequently, AA and diversity have experienced ongoing resistance or a failure to recognize their value and importance (Howard & Ulferts, 2020), causing employers to recognize the need to partner diversity initiatives with inclusive measures to maximize potentially positive outcomes (Murphy, 2018). Critical to diversity and inclusion initiative adoption is leaders owning campaigns as visionaries and strategists, defining the mission and its implementation (Martins, 2020). An opportunity remains for organizational leaders to increase their knowledge of practical approaches to enhancing employee inclusion, engagement, and developing a more inclusive organizational climate.

Identifying ways to increase organizational outcomes through employee engagement is valuable information to U.S. corporate leaders. The degree of employee engagement in the United States remains relatively low, and levels within teams are directly attributable to management behavior (Gallup, 2017). Whereas organizations have developed and implemented programs to address employee engagement, the effort may fall short in reaching and impacting remote teams. Managers of remote teams possess the potential to develop behaviors and practices that do not actively foster inclusion and engage available intellectual talent. With an ongoing increase in the demographic mix within the U.S. workforce, organizational leaders should seek to understand inclusive strategies for effectively engaging all employees, particularly those separated by distance.

Problem and Purpose

The specific business problem is that some remote team leaders lack strategies for improving employee engagement. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies leaders of remote, diverse teams with high engagement used to improve team performance. The target population was remote field managers of a nationally operating United States corporation possessing both collocated and remote workforces. The implications for positive social change include an increased understanding of behaviors and strategies that drive feelings of engagement and a perceived climate of inclusiveness. In addition, awareness of the benefits of certain behaviors and factors that foster engagement and an inclusive environment positively impacts how individuals interact, communicate, and develop relationships, enhancing partnerships among community leaders, organizations, and groups. Developing positive relationships with community groups and governmental agencies provides a vehicle for organizations to extend their impact beyond core stakeholders and benefit a larger audience of individuals in neighboring communities.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches each received consideration for this study. Researchers use qualitative research to derive a more profound understanding and explain quantitative research results by asking open-ended questions to probe and understand the surveyed populations' personal feelings, perceptions, and experiences (Maxwell, 2019). In this study, I aimed to explore strategies to address a specific problem that only opinion-generating questions can achieve since it involves perceptions of inclusion. Conversely, studies seeking to understand relationships between variables benefit from quantitative research's predictive capabilities (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). The quantitative methodology and mixed-methods approach, using survey measurement instruments as the primary source of data collection and quantitative methods for data analysis, were not appropriate for this study. Therefore, based on the desired outcome of providing a detailed meaning of responses, perceptions, and specific examples regarding inclusive strategies, this study's qualitative method was the proper selection.

Qualitative research explores the stated problem using a design such as ethnography, phenomenological, narrative, or case study (Cypress, 2018). Ethnography was not the chosen design as the focus of the study does not involve a group's culture or context of their interaction. The phenomenological method, gaining an understanding through participant's experiences (Qutoshi, 2018), was not appropriate because we explored a single case, not lived experiences of the selected participants. A narrative approach, data derived from storytelling, would not have allowed the proper framing of interviews for collecting relevant data supporting the research's goal (see Saunders et al., 2016). The case study design is appropriate for performing in-depth studies to understand real-life phenomena within various organizational settings (Pathiranage et al., 2020). A multicase study design facilitates analyzing data across multiple situations or institutions (Yin, 2018, p. 54); however, I was seeking to find established inclusive strategies used by remote team leaders within a sole subject organization. Therefore, a single case study design was appropriate for exploring the phenomenon within a single organization.

Research Question

What strategies do leaders of remote, diverse teams use to improve employee engagement?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies as a leader have you used to promote employee engagement and inclusion within your team?
2. How might human resources policies, practices, or leadership training support your strategy?

3. How might having the necessary tools and training for your team members support your strategy?
4. How might these factors (leadership behavior, HR practices, and fair resource allocation) shape employees' opinions regarding the organization?
5. Provide your thoughts on how employees' opinions regarding the organization may influence their engagement level.
6. Of the three factors mentioned (leadership behavior, HR practices, and fair resource allocation) provide your thoughts regarding which factor(s) has the most weight in helping to promote employee engagement and inclusion.
7. Provide your thoughts on how the importance or influence of these factors may differ in a remote work structure.
8. What influence might employee engagement and inclusion have on individual or team performance?
9. What else could you add to this discussion about strategies regarding the engagement and inclusion of your team members?

Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework was derived from organizational support theory (OST), introduced by Eisenberger and Hutchison in 1986. The underlying premise of OST is perceived organizational support (POS), an employee's perception regarding how the organization values their contribution or cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). OST suggests that an employee's view of leadership, human resources practices, organizational justice and POS as a combined unit drives positive behavioral outcomes (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Complementing elements such as inclusive leadership, workgroups, and practices help shape the organization's perceived inclusiveness and play a role in performance results (Shore et al., 2018). Leaders may use certain behaviors or highlight practices and resources to shape the employee-organization relationship promoting employee engagement. The increased engagement acts as a driver of other positive team performance outcomes.

Operational Definitions

Employee engagement: This is an emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization displayed in the amount of elective effort of employees in their job, representing their involvement, passion, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for work (Gupta & Shukla, 2018).

Employee inclusion: Employee inclusion represents an outcome of diversity practices geared towards ensuring fairness associated with marginalized groups by creating inclusive environments where individuals experience having an open voice and an ability to express themselves and their opinions, and fosters the integration of differences, values, personalities, and strengths (Buengeler et al., 2018).

Workforce diversity: A basic definition of workforce diversity is the distribution of differences among group members concerning typical attributes (Kim et al., 2021). It relates to the different characteristics of diversity, such as demographic, cultural, informational, organizational, and cognitive (Yadav & Lenka, 2020).

Workforce diversity management: Workforce diversity management focuses on managing diverse employee populations such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and identification, particularly from an American perspective (W. Li et al., 2020).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Fundamentally, research assumptions are problems, ideas, or stances throughout a study that are expected, considered reasonable, and generally accepted (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The emphasis of the study was on the importance of employee engagement possesses and the underlying primary assumption that maintaining solid engagement levels remains an important factor in organizational performance. The second assumption regarding the behaviors of study participants was that the interview participants would offer candid and truthful responses. Third, I assumed that the participant pool was representative of a population capable of providing valuable information concerning employee engagement and inclusion supporting strategies encouraging positive performance. Finally, researchers have conflicting opinions regarding the effectiveness and validity of engagement measurement tools (Khodakarami et al., 2018). Therefore, my last assumption was that interview questions effectively leverage information and other data and reports to offer an actual blueprint for their engagement strategies.

Limitations

Study limitations, an imposed restriction, relate to potential weaknesses typically out of the researcher's control and are closely connected with the selected research design, limits of the statistical model, funding, or other considerations (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Access to data and finding a willing participant pool within the defined parameters posed a potential challenge. Gaining approval through various steps can be extremely difficult, requiring researchers to follow specific guidelines (Saunders et al., 2016). I gained access to the selected population of interviewees and other information was obtained through gaining senior management and human resource leadership approval. Second, current corporate policy and protocols could have restricted the interview process to a virtual method. Third, a degree of subjectivity in defined performance metrics currently measured due to the specificity to the given division, industry, or alignment with corporate goals could have affected results. Lastly, experience as a remote team manager required a heightened awareness and management of personal biases in the interview and data analysis processes.

Delimitations

Unlike limitations, issues researchers address following study completion, delimitations define boundaries regarding items the study includes and excludes, resulting in a more manageable project and focus on the research question (Coker, 2022). There are consciously justified limitations established by authors concerning a study's theoretical background, objectives, research questions, and variables that inform findings (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This study included five leaders of remote service teams in a geographically defined market within a select division of a single organization. The selections were not limited to a specific region; instead, they occurred based on their team makeup and performance. These leaders of teams with diverse employee populations have individually achieved high engagement and inclusion scores while driving positive team performance. The study's participants provided a population of successful managers who may offer successful strategies for others to adopt, generating similar positive outcomes.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Employee engagement remains a challenge faced by organizations. Increasing diverse employee populations, especially remote workers, requires leaders to identify and implement new measures for maintaining employee engagement. This study might be significant in identifying management strategies for remote or virtual teams to enhance performance. Increasing diverse employee populations, especially remote workers, requires leaders to identify and implement new measures for maintaining employee engagement. This study may offer guidance regarding strategies to remote team leaders for improving employee engagement and increasing their contribution to positive team outcomes. The findings may provide an understanding and direction for companies regarding how inclusive leadership behavior, policies, and practices promote engagement within diverse, specifically remote, workforce populations.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include knowledge regarding inclusive leadership and techniques to foster an inclusive climate that engages diverse employee and community populations. As these inclusive behaviors extend beyond the walls of corporations, they can facilitate change by increasing the awareness and appreciation of individual differences and the uniqueness of various members. In addition, the changed behaviors can influence how corporate and community constituents treat each other, the relationships developed, and ongoing collaboration between the groups. Enhancing cooperation can result in activities leading to business development, improved social justice and relationships, employment and volunteer opportunities, and alliances that foster economic growth. The underlying advantage is an environment enhancing communication and removing the ceiling for opportunities to grow mutually beneficial partnerships.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In preparing the literature review section of a research study, I attempted to find, examine, and incorporate acceptable literature on evaluating relationships, strategies, and outcomes associated with interactions and exchange taking place within organizations. The goal of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies for promoting inclusion and employee engagement to improve remote teams' performance. I accomplished this by interviewing nationally dispersed team leading managers who have successfully achieved these objectives to understand their strategies. In addition, I used this literature review to explore research that produced findings supporting various aspects of the presented conceptual framework and strengthen its validity as the basis for strategy development.

To set a solid foundation for understanding and supporting a study's direction, researchers must perform an exhaustive review of related literature. In a literature review, researchers analyze and summarize pertinent articles or publications related to their study’s topic (Frederiksen et al., 2018). For example, research involving empirical tests, methods, or strategies for encouraging employee engagement and inclusion in a collocated environment might prove beneficial for managers operating in remote settings. Therefore, in this review, I included literature supporting the underlying premises contained in the conceptual framework.

Literature Review Search Strategy

The literature review strategy I used for this study centered around (a) POS, the core theory embedded in the conceptual framework; (b) secondary search terms related to factors shaping POS such as leadership, human resources practices, and fair resource allocation; and (c) tertiary terms regarding outcomes like engagement, inclusion, and performance. I included sources like journal articles, books, and industry reports in the review. Search for relevant literature involved a mix of accessing on library database directly through Walden University and Google Scholar. These resources enable access to online library databases like DOIJ.org, EBSCOhost, Emerald Insights, Frontiers, ProQuest Business and Economics, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, Taylor and Francis+NEJM, Harvard Business Review, and other helpful information sources. In addition, I often used Google Scholar to supplement efforts and enhance search capabilities beyond the Boolean search language required by the Walden library. Finally, I limited searched literature’s publication dates to those occurring from 2018 to the present, aligning with the 5 years from graduation window guideline set forth by Walden. Retrieved information falling outside this range relates primarily to seminal research studies, government statistics, and professional reports published by industry experts.

Ulrich's Periodicals Directory was the reference source I used to confirm the literature's peer review status, identified by the refereed symbol. Table 1 contains a categorical and date related breakdown of peer versus non-peer reviewed journals used for this study's literature review.

Table 1

Sources of Academic and Professional Literature

Sources	References published before 2018	References published in or after 2018	Total References
Peer-reviewed journals	14	167	181
Nonpeer-reviewed journals	2	18	20
Reports	1	1	2
Books	2	3	5
Magazine	0	1	1
Conference papers	0	3	3
Web Page	0	5	5
Total	19	198	217

Conceptual Framework: Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

The origins of employment relations can be described predominantly by four categories of the theories: Marxist, radical, pluralist, and unitarist. The broad nature of employment relations has created the need for cross-theory applications to address the various facets of the relationships existing among employees, customers, and the company (Doellgast et al., 2021). My theme of codependency, which aligned with the study's conceptual framework, suggested the need for a positive leadership-human resources-organization connection to the employee to produce desirable outcomes.

Therefore, a representative model incorporating these aspects, particularly focused on a remote workforce, remains central to study's research question.

An array of circumstances encountered in an organization may require multiple theories to explain the phenomenon sufficiently. Jabareen (2009) described a conceptual framework as a presentation of assumed relationship among critical factors or constructs that might include elements of multiple formal theories and concepts from prior research findings I used a POS model presented by Baran et al. (2012) as the basis for exploring factors comprising the relationship between employees and their employing organization. The concept originated from an umbrella of concepts such as organizational support, reciprocity, and various exchanges such as economic, social, and leader-member exchange (Shanock et al., 2019). The POS idea highlights the need for incorporating several theories or ideas into a central concept to help define the entire employee-organization association and various levels of exchange. Therefore, POS is a central mediating factor for numerous relationships and variables explained by other theories that take place in organizations.

Organizations are structured, legal entities established to conduct business but require leadership, management, and employees to render business objectives to the marketplace. Caesens et al. (2020) defined OST or POS as an employee's perception of their contribution's organizational value, the concern about their well-being, and job performance support through ongoing intentions to provide necessary resources. The POS concept derives from employees' natural tendency to assign human attributes to the organization and helps explain how an inanimate entity participates in a reciprocal relationship (Eisenberger et al., 2020). The insinuation is that characteristics associated with antecedents like leadership behaviors, human resources practices, and fair resource allocation policies can play an essential part in shaping an employee's perception and organizational relationship (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Through the combined employee view, organizations may influence specific categories of outcomes such as employee engagement, inclusion, and performance with perception shaping inputs to the organization's climate. Therefore, aligning leadership styles, human resources practices, and resource allocation policies with an organization’s strategic goals is crucial to achieving an environment positively perceived by employees and promoting desired outcomes.

Specific traits or actions related to organizational inputs such as leadership behaviors, human resources practice, and policy changes can influence employee behavioral outcomes by reshaping their perception of the organization. For example, Kurtessis et al. (2017) presented findings from a detailed analysis of inputs displaying perceived organizational support's connection to work commitment, employee engagement, inclusion, organizational citizenship behavior, retention, reduced conflict and stress, job satisfaction, and well-being. In addition, Baran et al. (2012) presented a link between specific types of leadership behavior, themed human resources practices, and fair decision making that affect employee work orientation, behavior, and well-being. Therefore, it appears POS can also connect specific characteristics of antecedents to categories of desired outcomes with the extent of outcomes aligning with the strength of the employee’s exchange ideology.

POS implies that an input's influence on perceptions of support likely corresponds to specific positive or negative outcomes. Though the 1,200 plus studies on POS have predominantly produced findings displaying its positive effects, there are emerging situations indicating potential negative consequences of POS (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2020). For example, varying levels of socioemotional needs of employees may produce dramatically different results concerning POS among an organization's workforce. In addition, organizations must remain mindful to avoid offering "too-much-of-a-good-thing" and exercising reasonable levels of support that maintain performance motivation (Xiaotao et al., 2018, p. 891). Like other strategic efforts enlisted by organizations, using models that position POS as a mediating mechanism requires monitoring and other re-enforcement efforts.

Additional research and further examination must occur; however, current research contains findings that leadership approaches are the primary factor in impacting employee behavioral factors through their perception of organizational support. In contrast, human resource practices and work condition adjustments appear more widespread, affecting employee work orientation, behavior, and feelings of well-being (A. V. Edwards & Marcus, 2018). The underlying suggestion relates to opportunities for the training and development of leadership skills to affect desired employee outcomes and workplace behaviors. The potential influence of policy changes also necessitates vital organizational considerations and suggests performing upfront analysis and strategic planning before executing proposed human resources practice changes or adjustments. Overall, organizational leaders should remain alert to the potential impact of certain leadership styles, policy adjustments, or other factors relating to equitable decision making causing a change in an employee’s perception of the organization’s support and concern for the employee’s well-being.

Conceptual Model: POS

The study's conceptual model, presented in Eisenberger et al. (2020), highlights antecedents of perceived organizational support like leadership style, human resource practices, and organizational justice that may shape employees' perception of the organization. The conceptual framework postulates that the leadership-human resource practices-organization blend works together and influences employee behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 2020). The appreciation and tolerance of differences or uniqueness potentially appeal to a broader, more diverse audience. The inclusive characteristics in the combined factors might produce positive results related to outcomes associated with organizationally inclusive climates. In addition, virtual or remote workforces represent a new diversity, requiring employers to enact processes and methods to maintain engagement levels (Shaik & Makhecha, 2019a). I used an adapted POS model as the conceptual basis for developing a guide for remote leaders to understand better the benefits of developing inclusive strategies to impact employee engagement positively. Therefore, a specific leadership style like inclusive leadership along with inclusive human resources and organizational policies pose an opportunity to appeal to a more diverse audience for impacting other outcomes such as performance.

The History and Development of the OST

The increased complexity of business operations resulted in heightened attention toward workforce behaviors causing researchers to focus on psychological aspects of employment relations. In the 1960s, Levinson introduced and progressed the idea of a *psychological contract*, describing the unwritten relationship of mutual employer-employee expectations (Kaur & Kaur, 2019). Levinson's concept acknowledged that parties entering relationships generally possess a particular outlook or objective for its outcome. Soares and Mosquera (2019) presented the psychological contract theory as an underlying premise for explaining employee behavioral responses to organizational changes. The suggestion is that employees establish their goals based on a projected type of relationship with the organization. Therefore, the individual-organization connection is based on anticipated reciprocity associated with their planned interaction.

Evaluating reciprocation occurs on various exchange levels and types of organizational interactions. For example, social exchange theory can be used to describe the behavioral interaction between individuals where a tangible or intangible exchange occurs under the premise of a positive reciprocation or return on the psychological investment (Sungu et al., 2019; Zoller & Muldoon, 2018). The argument is that relationships are based on individuals' selfish pursuit of benefits in their favor and are void of altruism, emotional connection, psychological aspects, or individuals at a loss. Therefore, a personal cost versus benefit analysis, incorporating all factors, appears to determine whether a person remains in certain relationships.

Though social exchange theory explains how individuals function in peer relationships, advances require a better understanding of the employee-organization exchange. Kurtessis et al. (2017) explored POS as a mechanism for explaining the social exchange and reciprocal relationship between employees and their employing organizations. The exchange relationship comprises an economic, social, and organizational viewpoint. The concept introduced by Eisenberger in 1986 provided a version of social exchange geared toward organizational commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS represents an employee's perception of the organizational value regarding their contribution and the level of care concerning their well-being (Ahmed et al., 2011). The two components of POS are (a) emphasis on employees' outcomes and performance and (b) concern for an employee's well-being and recognition of an employee's perception regarding degrees of organizational support. Therefore, a missing or heavily weighted variable could alter the overall perception of support provided by the organization.

Through the lens of POS there is insight beyond the behaviors and interactions between peers and superiors that address the relationship between the workforce and the organization. Conceptually, the combination of leadership behaviors, organizational policies, practices, and resource allocation fairness, under proper conditions, may complement an employee's social or management-related experiences, foster a positive workplace environment, and enhance performance outcomes (Baran et al., 2012). The three dimensions of exchange economic, organizational, and social shape the employer-employee relationship. For example, perceived organizational support has a significant connection to employee engagement, psychological safety, empowerment, and service orientation (de Souza Meira & Hancer, 2021; Kanwal et al., 2019). Various antecedents join with the organization to form a human-like entity that forms employees' perception of the organization's support and influences their at-work behaviors. Therefore, a conceptual model representing leadership, practices, justice, and organizational inputs within varying characteristics may possess the ability to deliver the broadest positive results.

Organizations can significantly benefit from understanding the impact of antecedents while generating a healthy and fruitful relationship with employees. In addition to typical work structures, more companies are developing strategies for connecting with remote or virtual employees at the same level as those collocated (Semuels, 2020). The growth of these different work structures and arrangements like virtual and remote work has increased the challenge for organizational leaders to develop strong and mutually beneficial relationships with their employees. Therefore, companies must ensure proper investment in employee relationship-building functions like leadership training, flexible work policies, and asset allocation programs to increase employee engagement, inclusion, and motivation. Through these initiatives, employees can establish a solid emotional connection and create an environment that encourages full participation, productivity, and performance.

Organizational Support Theory (OST)

The process of attempting to explain various organizational phenomena cannot be void of considering the impact of human inputs like leadership or the influence of policies and practices on results. In 1986, Eisenberger initiated seminal research to investigate and understand the outcomes associated with the organization-employee relationship. Through the development of OST from a social exchange perspective, the researcher addressed the employee-organization relationship, including particular antecedents such as leadership and human resource practices that may positively shape employees' perception of the organization and their commitment (Eisenberger et al., 1986). For example, Eisenberger et al.'s (2020) findings suggested that favorable treatment contributes to POS due to employee sentiment that the acting unit (leadership or human resources practices) embodies the organization. This employee view further supports a range of positive organizational outcomes like reduced absenteeism, increased job satisfaction, and organizational performance (Sun, 2019). Therefore, it appears conceptually possible for a particular style or trait associated with organizational leadership or human resources practices to have the ability to influence the organizational climate, thus impacting the employee's perception and beliefs regarding the extent to which organizations value their contributions and well-being.

The extent of outcomes generated through influencing POS aligns with the strength of the employee's exchange ideology. Eisenberger et al. (2020) further explored OST and examined empirical findings associating POS with specific outcomes. The researchers evaluated the impact of connected antecedents such as leadership style, human resources practices, and procedural fairness on employee perceptions of the organization offering a greater understanding of the reciprocal relationship. In the research's findings, a significant relationship exists between the inputs and specific organizational outcomes through levels of perceived organizational support that are not always positive (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2020). Therefore, the opportunity remains to understand further the intricacies embedded in the constructs related to POS. Overall, for this study, POS represents the most appropriate theory to serve as the nucleus for the presented conceptual framework and exploring relevant strategies for achieving engagement, inclusion, and performance outcomes in a remote environment.

Antecedents of POS

Several factors may influence the employee-employer relationship and shape employees’ opinions regarding the organization. Baran et al. (2012) advanced the evaluation of organizational support theory by identifying three primary categories for inputs potentially influencing POS and producing positive employee behavioral outcomes. The researchers posited that individually or a mix of leadership behaviors, human resources practices, and organizational justice are drivers of defining an employee’s perception of their value to the organization or care for their well-being. Therefore, an organization’s attempt to shape its work environment or generate certain outcomes may require antecedents possessing certain characteristics in addition to achieving an optimal mix of the three input factors.

Leadership Approaches. Various leadership approaches exist, each having similar or very different impacts on organizational outcomes. When accounting for the employee-organization relationship, the degree to which the leader's behavior embodies corporate values results in the employee viewing the two as a single unit (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Consequently, a leader’s behavior plays a significant role in shaping how employees perceive their organizations. Therefore, the leader-organization relationship is one of the defining factors of an employee's POS and is partly responsible for delivering particular outcomes.

Numerous theories developed and advanced by researchers over time describe leadership management style, decision making, and aspects influencing employee behavior; however, regardless of the leader’s particular style, the makeup of their employee interface remains a critical aspect of the relationship. For example, through leader-member exchange theory, researchers have characterized a dyadic employee-supervisor relationship, whereas information, resource allocation, mental and physical effort, and social support lead to increased performance and innovative work behavior (Hofmans et al., 2019; Javed et al., 2018; Mohamad et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is the implication that a subconscious bias and leaders tending towards personality preferences in their leadership behavior. Therefore, leaders must be mindful of efforts to partner their particular style with providing consistent and persistent connection opportunities for all, giving the "out-group" equal chances to further produce a cooperative environment among members.

Increased attention to understanding leadership thinking processes and their behaviors has expanded the number of theories attempting to explain the emergence of individuals as great leaders. The investigation of reasons for leaders' success and how they execute their roles has produced several formal theories attempting to address the phenomenon (Boogard, 2020; Buble et al., 2014). These theories have typically fallen into categories focused on traits and situational concerns. However, the emphasis has somewhat transitioned from focusing specifically on the leader-follower relationship to developing capabilities promoting collaboration, teamwork, and environments that maximize employee participation and utilization of intellectual capital.

Great man theory of leadership. There is an ongoing debate regarding the origins of leaders' capabilities and success. The great man theory derives from the belief that leaders are born with the necessary skills and traits like charisma, confidence, intelligence, and social skills, enabling their success (McCleskey, 2014). There is an underlying assumption that these individuals possess inherent abilities and not something they developed over time. The position also assumes that those lacking the skill set cannot change.

Trait theory of leadership. There are individuals born already possessing many of the traits assumed as the basis for great leaders. Trait theory supporters assume that individuals possessing particular personal qualities and behavioral traits of other successful leaders make them a better fit for leadership roles (Truninger et al., 2021; Wyatt & Silvester, 2018). However, though linked to successful leaders, traits like extroversion, self-confidence, and courage are not necessary for leadership success. Therefore, it is possible to encounter successful leaders who lack leadership traits and those who possess leadership traits yet remain in a follower's role.

Contingency theory of leadership. The constantly changing environments within organizations might create varying situations potentially requiring different leadership styles. Contingency leadership theories focus on leaders adapting to circumstances by exuding different leadership styles in their decision-making (Moreno-Gómez & Calleja-

Blanco, 2018). Finding the correct behavioral balance between behaviors to meet followers' needs and various situations is crucial to leadership effectiveness (Hofmans et al., 2019). Therefore, the leader must assess the number of variables, follower characteristics, and situational aspects to address the issue with the appropriate style or traits.

Situational theory of leadership. An organization's operational variables cause situations to differ, requiring certain adjustments to the leader's approach. Under the direction of situational theories, leaders are to take the best course of action and apply a rational response to specific circumstances based on a thorough assessment of variables (McCleskey, 2014; Mohiuddin & Mohteshamuddin, 2020; Popp & Hadwich, 2018). Leaders must apply different types of decision-making styles when called for by a particular situation. Therefore, once properly evaluating a situation, the leader must apply the relevant leadership decision-making approach.

Behavioral theory of leadership. An organization may invest in various programs for developing its leaders versus solely relying on identifying and correctly placing them. The creators of behavioral leadership theories postulate that individuals can lead to becoming great leaders through training and development (Vasilescu, 2019). A leader's behavior and actions arise as more important factors than their mental attributes or internal capabilities. Therefore, successful leadership abilities may be achievable through various lessons, learned processes, observation, and practice.

Participative theory of leadership. Leaders may diplomatically share authority with their teams by engaging them in the collaborative decision-making processes.

Leaders display a participative leadership style by exercising authority delegation to followers and involves employees in decision-making processes (Ali et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). In addition, soliciting team members' input in decisions may drive a more significant commitment to contribute to implementation, execution, and outcomes. While maintaining the authority over the decision and the ability to change it, fostering a participatory environment may support collective buy-in and drive more successful outcomes.

Transactional theory of leadership. Leaders may function with their entire focus on policy, practices, productivity, and performance. Transactional theories are task-oriented, focusing on structured behaviors, the supervisor’s role, performance management, and reward systems (Hoogeboom & Wilderom, 2019; Nielsen et al., 2019). For example, a manager may approach their role from a performance management perspective, whereas the manager-employee relationship leads towards a reward versus punishment system. Therefore, managers using this approach drive outcomes through a reward for success and reprimand for failure doctrine.

Relationship or transformational theory of leadership. Leaders may possess the ability to influence follower behaviors through developed relationships. Transformational leaders give individualized consideration to followers that inspires and motivates innovation, proactiveness, goal-orientation, empowerment, and informed risk-taking (Lin et al., 2019; Matin & Santosa, 2020). For example, a manager's skill at motivating and inspiring team members to work to their high potential, support others, cooperate, and effectively collaborate may positively impact the group’s overall performance. Therefore, leadership traits display high ethical and moral values that encourage trust among team members.

Motivation theory. Along with producing other positive outcomes related to an organization's workforce, managers must develop ways to motivate employees to increase output and profitability to achieve overall business goals. Through the premises of motivation theory, researchers can evaluate cognitive and emotional attitudes or actions that meet peoples' individual needs and drive them to pursue specific results (Ali et al., 2022; Bin, 2019; Pereira & Mohiya, 2021). For example, managers might use various strategies like offering incentives and rewards or meeting psychological needs by enabling employees to showcase talent, building confidence, and increasing their self-esteem. Therefore, managers should aim to learn the factors that specifically appeal to their team members and provide the best motivation.

Inclusive leadership. The emergence of vastly diverse marketplaces requires enhanced organizational abilities to adapt to address a broader range of demographic, cultural, generational, and behavioral differences. Inclusive leadership fosters a sense of belonging where people feel included, treated fairly and respectfully, and contributions valued (Bourke & Titus, 2020). Inclusive leadership is most effective when there is a visibly communicated commitment, humility, empathy, personal bias awareness, curiosity about others, cultural intelligence, and empowered collaboration (R. Gilbert, 2019). Therefore, a leader's ability to embrace inclusive characteristics supports creating a bond with diverse members such as employees, customers, and other stakeholders.

When an organizational leader's employee interaction promotes an effective relationship, it might encourage specific positive employee outcomes. Leader-member exchange and valued manager interaction were determined to positively correlate to POS and reduce turnover intention (Huang et al., 2021; Scanlan et al., 2018). The developed emotional relationships consisting of engagement, trust, and mutually beneficial exchange have employees feel a greater organizational attachment, less work withdrawal, and the desired employment continuance. Therefore, the manager-employee relationship contributes to developing support networks among staff and benefits organizational performance.

Employee engagement maintains significance in organizations due to its influence on numerous behavioral outcomes. Studies like Najeemdeen et al. (2018) have found a direct relationship between POS and work engagement, however there is an inconsistency in other research findings regarding the leadership-POS connection positively impacting engagement. Eviana et al. (2022) determined that leadership and POS only influences employee engagement when mediated by employee satisfaction. The results highlight the need for an additional variable to strengthen leaderships impact on employee engagement through POS. Ortiz-Isabeles and García-Avitia (2021) also discovered a weak relationship between POS and employee engagement suggesting the need for other mediating variables. For, example, Bonaiuto et al. (2022) discussed the mediating effect of organization identification between POS and work engagement. The basis of the idea derives from a social aspect where an employee's perceived identification derives from a combination of supervisor and peer support. Overall, broad findings by researchers point to the concept that employees may embrace multiple aspects in developing their POS.

In other studies, concerning POS, researchers have explored factors such as human resources, management practices, work climate, and perceived job requirements; however, leadership inclusion fostering independent thought had the most significant impact on performance when linked by POS. In recent research, Qi et al. (2019) discovered that inclusive leadership positively relates to innovative work behavior mediated by perceived organizational support. Inclusive leaders are self-accountable for improving diversity and inclusion while encouraging team connection by appreciating uniqueness, fair treatment, and respect, providing an environment amenable to employees to express their creativity. Therefore, as companies pursue increasing performance and achieving competitive advantage, there is empirical guidance regarding corporate leadership traits and behaviors that potentially influence employee behaviors positively.

Leaders with high moral standards and who display honesty within their interactions may foster environments where employees give extra effort in their at-work performance. Through employee POS, ethical leadership links to organizational citizenship behavior (Tan et al., 2019). Consistent and fairly distributed supervisor support also positively correlates with POS and organizational citizenship behavior (Dai et al., 2018). The relationship of ethical leadership to the organization and similar traits displayed in supportive management approaches such as justice, honesty, and value-driven decision-making promote voluntary extra-role participation (Tan et al., 2019).

Therefore, the ethics of leaders can influence employees' perception of organizational ethical standards.

Overall, the select group of studies displays a preliminary trend that leadership primarily impacts behavioral outcomes within the perceived organizational support conceptual model. The leader-follower and decision-making aspects of leadership make the role an essential factor in any discussion regarding organization phenomena. However, leaders without the requisite organizational support struggle with making a positive impact and influencing positive organizational outcomes (Ready, 2014). A solid leadership-organization partnership is critical to employee relationships and positive organizational results. Therefore, the leader-follower relationship may not be able to stand independently without the undergirding of organizational policies and practices to shape employee behaviors and drive successful outcomes.

Human Resources (HR) Practices. Leadership's role in developing effective programs addressing growing diverse workforces beyond mere program vision communicators supports human resource's efforts to increase employee engagement, inclusion, and, ultimately, organizational performance. For example, Buengeler et al. (2018) developed a theoretical framework for how leaders shape human resources diversity practices that impact employee engagement and inclusion, offering four leadership responses that shape the effects of diversity practices on employee inclusion: deletion, compartmentalization, aggregation, and integration. The Buengeler et al. study highlighted the importance of the partnership between leadership involvement with HR diversity policymakers and an employee-perceived inclusive environment. In addition, Pellecchia (2019) suggested that leaders (a) not limit defined programs to ensure they possess the intended bandwidth, (b) create a solid communication vehicle informing employees of available resources, (c) determine the practices offering the most significant beneficial returns, and (d) personally engage in councils and groups to expand their diversity, equity, and inclusion knowledge. These efforts by leaders may enable programs to affect the broadest employee audience positively. Therefore, proactively investing in well-defined programs possesses the opportunity to fuel an engaged, inclusive culture and enhance individual work, teamwork, and overall organizational performance; however, it requires tightly managing processes to generate desired outcomes.

Though often driven by the attitudes and decisions of leadership, human resource (HR) practices involve various operational factors and policies defining the relationship to the organization. Moore et al. (2020) emphasized that transitioning from a strictly performance-driven management HR style to one investing in people and team collaboration facilitates engagement and inclusion through behaviors displaying patience, empathy, improved personal understanding, collaborative communication and coaching, and authentic leadership relationships. The approach involves proactive actions by HR to enhance the workforce's capabilities and performance. HR practices such as fair resource allocation, individual benefits, performance management, training, and supervisor support relate to employees' perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., n.d.). Changes often drive employee sentiment, potentially affecting the relationship with the organization and work outcomes. Romani et al. (2019) cautioned organizations to closely evaluate the behaviors of HR professionals to ensure good intentions in actions designed to encourage openness and equity. HR policy changes that cross legitimate and fair decision-making lines may result in more harm than good. Therefore, HR representatives should consider the impact of practice changes on employees’ perception of their value to the organization and its degree of caring.

The impact of HR policy adjustments on employee behavior and engagement points to the importance for organizations to understanding variables affecting those outcomes. Studies using perceived organizational support to mediate HR practices and workplace performance outcomes display a solid relationship. HR practices and treatment deemed “fair” displayed a positive relationship to POS and engagement (Djatmiko et al., 2020; Shanock et al., 2019). A conceptual framework defining HR practices as employee appraisals, training, and satisfaction determine a positive connection with employee engagement through POS (Tarasawatpipat & Mekhum, 2020). From a business strategy perspective, when defining roles and aligning employees within organizational plans, the partnership between POS and leadership supports HR management in mitigating role conflict and ambiguity (Bush, 2020). HR practices that impact the employee-organization relationship through their perceived treatment or by encouraging the use of knowledge, skills, or competence relate directly to employee engagement levels. POS as a moderating factor to intangible assets such as human, social, and psychological capital also enhanced employee engagement and encouraged citizenship behavior (Tefera & Hunsaker, 2020). Furthermore, employees with feelings of organizational support give a more significant work effort in performing extra-role functions (Tefera & Hunsaker, 2020). Therefore, HR practices that enhance perceived organizational support may foster an increased emotional connection or engagement, resulting in improved productivity and performance.

HR groups can drive secondary support for initiatives through activities encouraging peer alignment, whereas individuals may develop strength of purpose by identifying with a specific characteristic, trait, or group. Social identity theory addresses social networks, intergroup relations, and emotions that produce collective behavior to achieve social harmony, change, trust, or conflict resolution (Arshad et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Raskovic & Takacs-Haynes, 2021). Individuals who become members of the “in-group” experience levels of positive re-enforcement from the distinctiveness of their identification. Li et al. (2019) identified the influence of HR identity-conscious programs on shaping employees' perception of the organization's commitment to employee engagement and inclusion, fostering an inclusive climate, increasing employee work commitment, and the workforce’s view of diversity management. Cenkci et al. (2019) determined that employee resource group (ERG) membership positively affects employee engagement and encourages vigor at work and feelings of connectedness. In addition, the ERGs foster workplace inclusion where employees feel respected, valued, and have a sense of belongingness. Therefore, socially identifying members may grow their status, gain from isolated knowledge exchange, and elevate their performance through the association.

Organizations further display support by installing measures to increase employee engagement through effective HR practice changes, which signals leadership’s willingness to support employees. HR practices are also positively associated with employees' sense of well-being through the lens of perceived organizational support (Edwards & Marcus, 2018). Practice changes that improve the employee-organization relationship by enhancing work-life balance or a positive mindset result in better employee well-being and reduced stress and strain. HR practices relate to POS and turnover intention (de la Torre-Ruiz et al., 2019; Scanlan et al., 2018). Feelings regarding the value of employee benefits packages and training programs impacted the POS which played a role in leave intentions and work withdrawal. Overall, adjustments to HR practices or work conditions appear to affect a broader array of model outcomes.

Organizational HR policymakers should recognize that implementing programs promoting the engagement and inclusion of diverse employee populations poses challenges like other change initiatives. In evaluating steps for initiating an inclusive workplace process, Hunter (2020) offered a guide to support establishing a solid starting point for organizations embarking on a diversity and inclusion mission. Critical to program success is creating a listening strategy with an environment for open discussion, feedback, and collaborative decision-making. Employee resource groups (ERGs) and "pulse" surveys are prime vehicles for facilitating employee exchange and solid feedback regarding feelings about the existing inclusive environment. In addition, organizational leaders and HR representatives must look inward to examine current values, norms, and practices to ensure their all-inclusiveness. Shore et al. (2018) developed an inclusion model to clarify current positions and offer guidance for progressing inclusion in leadership, workgroups, organizational practices, and climate. Finally, the concept of an inclusive organization is the underlying premise for defining a reliable method for measuring organizational engagement and inclusion and ways for empirically testing associations of variables and outcomes. Therefore, capturing and analyzing relevant data allows organizational leaders to identify gaps and problems and deliver a long-term measurement mechanism and methodology for empirically testing and understanding organizational performance outcomes that offer financial benefits from the investment.

Organizational Fairness or Justice. How an employee feels about the resources their employee provides to support or reward them for job performance can influence the employer-employee relationship. From an interpersonal perspective, researchers acknowledge resource theory as an exchange of tangible or intangible items, communication, information, service, and other things producing goodwill in the relationship (Mohanty & P, 2020). Effective distribution of resources signals an organization's willingness to support and encourage employee work performance. In addition, Cooper-Thomas et al. (2018) determined that resource theory offers support for identifying the resources likely to drive a particular outcome. The sentiment generated by fair resource exchange can support building a solid link between the employee and the organization, promote environments of trust and commitment, engagement, and potentially other positive behavioral outcomes. Therefore, along with other components fostering a positive employee-employer connection, actions or policies associated with resource exchanges may also contribute to the strength of the relationship.

Organizational fairness, involving the equitable exchange of "resources," is an additional factor that might influence an employee’s perception of organizational support. The rank order of acts of organizational justice include (a) procedural justice or fair decision-making process, (b) distributive justice, relating to fair resource allocation, (c) informational justice, concerning equal access to appropriate information, and (d) interpersonal justice, referring to dignity, fair treatment, and respect for others (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Whereas each factor may influence an employee's perception, procedural concerns that may include fairness in decisions regarding benefits, bonuses, and rewards tend to carry the most significant weight. Therefore, employees perceived organizational support might derive from feelings of equality in their treatment by managers and the impact of organizational policies.

Organizational justice may enhance employees’ POS, influence engagement, and improve other related outcomes. Markos and Martin (2019) determined the provision of necessary materials and tools supporting employees’ job performance is a prime predictor of engagement and productivity levels. Furthermore, an organization's procedural and distributive justice climate positively influences employee engagement through perceived organizational support (Zeidan & Itani, 2020). Fair and equitable distribution of resources and rewards can drive employee engagement. In long-term employee-employer exchanges, the effects of procedural justice on the POS can result in fluctuating views and employee commitment levels (Zhao et al., 2020). The justice-POS relationship may evolve and adjust with the nature of social exchange. Also, the connection between distributive justice and perceived organizational support influences individuals and group engagement (Sunyoto et al., 2021). The engagement produced in the group has an incremental effect on its performance. Employers that provide their workforce with the proper personal resources positively increase POS and work engagement (Ott et al., 2019). Therefore, organizational leadership can influence employee engagement levels by ensuring equitable access to tools and resources needed to perform their duties.

Fair resource allocation promotion increases POS and can offset certain negative employee traits. The three organizational justice types, (a) distributive, (b) procedural, and (c) interactional justice, encourage employee innovation that enhances POS and employees' affective commitment (Nazir et al., 2019). Organizational justice stimulates employees' affective commitment directly and through POS mediation. Perceived organizational support grows when organizational interaction is fair and just, increasing employees' sense of belongingness (Kyei-Poku, 2019). Interactional justice, consisting of equitable information and interpersonal exchange, supports employee emotional connections and feelings associated with "in-group" acceptance (Nazir et al., 2019). Perceptions of organizational justice are recognized even by external job candidates (Nikolaou & Georgiou, 2018). The experience related to interview outcomes displays fairness in decision-making. Therefore, fairness and justice in allocating organizational resources complement another aspect that shapes the workforce's perception of organizational support.

Organization justice, though not necessarily possessing a direct influence on organizational performance, may impact performance results through an increase in antecedents such as engagement, affective commitment, and work commitment. POS facilitates positive and significant connections between the dimensions of organizational justice and affective outcomes (Huntsman et al., 2020). Fair treatment, processes, and exchange produce positive employee behavioral outcomes, whereas the corresponding employee reciprocation rewards the organization with increased performance. POS also plays a prominent role in moderating the impact of organizational justice elements and dampening potentially adverse outcomes (Ramdeo et al., 2020). The strength of justice measures directly influencing specific outcomes may require a supporting variable for achieving desired results. LMX, procedural and distributive justice promote in-role and extra-role performance through perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 2019). Less engaged employees are willing to give more effort to the organization when met with a reciprocal enhancement to exchange relationships. Procedural justice, fair decision-making, and enhancing perceived organizational support significantly affect an employee's affective commitment (Tjahjono et al., 2020). Though the procedural justice-POS relationship does not have the same direct influence on job performance, the addition of the commitment variable does promote performance improvements. Alternatively, through perceived organizational support, procedural justice can correct deficiencies or deviations from appropriate employee behavior (Dar & Rahman, 2019). The combination provides confirmation that administered policies derive from a position of fairness. Therefore, the justice-POS relationship provides solid justification for positive employee behaviors and reciprocity in the organizational exchange.

Perceived Organizational Support Outcomes

Researcher examinations of factors influencing POS highlight how specific antecedents, through their relationship with perceived organizational support, may individually achieve specific outcomes. Buengeler et al. (2018) developed a theoretical framework for how leaders shape certain HR practices offering insights into the importance of teamwork between organizational leadership and HR policymakers. The overarching significance of leadership decision-making and behaviors on HR practices and resource allocation cannot be overlooked. Therefore, the evaluation of antecedents producing employee engagement, inclusion, and ultimately positive performance outcomes should be combined.

In the employee-employer relationship, influencing factors may weigh differently on the connection while still promoting the desired outcome. The direct POS-employee performance relationship has been determined inconclusive and generally requires the support of additional factors depending on the particular situation to drive positive performance outcomes (Harris & Kacmar, 2018). Varying employee motivation levels and individual needs may require comprehensive programs for achieving similar outcomes. Leaders can negatively affect the success of initiatives when limiting their view or scope (Pellecchia, 2019). Programs should make the broadest impact across all levels of the organization and its stakeholders. Consequently, there may not be a direct relationship of inputs through POS in increasing performance; however, it might occur when assisted by increases in employee engagement and inclusion.

Organizational programs meant to increase employee engagement and inclusion require a multi-pronged approach. Gilbert (2019) evaluated a multi-faceted diversity and inclusion program involving organizational leadership, HR, and external consultants providing a map and measurement processes for organizations to understand and increase diversity and inclusion. The benefits for organizations that embrace implementing solid program infrastructures can experience adjustments in management behavior, HR practices, and the overall organizational climate that impacts employees' perception of its inclusiveness while promoting engagement and performance. Gilbert and Hood (2020) presented strategies involving leadership, HR, and policy enactment to drive engagement, inclusion, and performance. Leaders should possess the necessary traits or develop the necessary abilities for fostering the associated work culture partnered with HR practices concerning compensation, benefits, and training. Therefore, defining and aligning the roles of leaders, HR practices, and fair resource allocation to the strategies fostering the desired results is a critical step.

Other studies have determined a broad set of positive workplace outcomes associated with employees' feelings of inclusion. Employees functioning in inclusive climates have a high degree of well-being and positive self-esteem regarding their status and often engage in voluntary efforts to display organizational citizenship behavior (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2021). Workers that feel included experience greater levels of job satisfaction (Ohunakin et al., 2019) and are more engaged in their work roles (Brimhall & Palinkas, 2020; Goswami & Goswami, 2018), and are far less of a turnover risk (Ohunakin et al., 2019). Workers who feel included display more reliability, punctuality, and loyalty, contributing to a sustainable competitive advantage (Moore et al., 2020). Inclusive climates promote employees' focus on self-performance and hard work, a willingness to perform, and commitment to increased productivity (Ohunakin et al., 2019). The inclusion acts as a driver of engagement that generates cost-effectiveness, efficiencies, increased profits, and overall business performance (R. Gilbert, 2019). Whereas organizations undoubtedly experience attractive positive organizational outcomes through inclusive measures, there does come a point where the organization may experience lost economies associated with employee response to inclusive approaches. Employee well-being, job satisfaction, and commitment initially increase due to the organization's installed inclusionary processes; however, they plateau and experience a decline once surpassing moderate levels (Xiaotao et al., 2018). Organizational team leaders must recognize there is a point where employee inclusion efforts may lose their momentum and effectiveness implying the need to refresh initiatives.

Conversely, continued marketplace competition stressed the employer-employee relationship concerning maintaining reasonable work/life balance. Improving an employee’s work/life balance can positively impact POS, job performance, affective commitment, deviant workplace behavior, turnover intention, and work stress (Medina & Prieto, 2022). Work/life balance represents a factor of growing importance as employees evaluate their opportunity costs due to excessive work commitments. Whereas remote workforces or flexible work structures are the norms for some organizations, for others, it has become a new alternative or benefit for employees. Therefore, a balance must occur where organizational leaders do not lose the strength of their authoritative position by engaging in numerous efforts to drive employee engagement by seeking an understanding of items producing the most significant results.

Organizational Exchange with Remote Workforces

There are numerous complexities engrained in the characteristics of teams. In contemporary organizations, managers should use new methods, structures, and approaches to address issues like the membership demographics, interdependencies, shared objectives and accountability, interaction dynamics, and interpersonal boundaries to improve team performance (Benishek & Lazzara, 2019). In addition, the growth of different work structures and arrangements like virtual and remote work has increased the challenge for organizations to develop strong and mutually beneficial relationships with their employees. Therefore, companies must ensure proper investment in employee relationship-building functions like (a) programs to increase employee retention, (b) initiatives driving motivation to increase productivity, (c) establishing a solid emotional connection, and (d) creating an environment that encourages full participation while limiting the detrimental impact of workplace conflict.

Organizational leaders can significantly benefit from actions generating and maintaining long-term healthy relationships with employees who remain happy, productive, and loyal. Necessary changes associated with events like the COVID-19 pandemic may dramatically affect the employer-employee relationship; however, the required organizational adjustments might provide valuable insights and management experience required for handling future crisis-oriented events. Consequently, organizations must increase their understanding of required practices concerning candid two-way communication, challenges due to altered or more flexible work structures, and the ongoing needs of their internal stakeholders (Nyberg et al., 2021). The resulting outcome, in times of crisis, organizations can quickly recognize and learn about potential gaps in the infrastructure governing the interaction with their employees. Therefore, it is beneficial for companies to use these times to proactively develop and test new methods for facilitating relationships with their members.

Remote work structures have long existed; however, the recent changes to the marketplace have experienced growth in various flexible work situations. For example, a recent survey revealed that 67% of employers had taken steps to enable workers who usually come into the office to work from home (Semuels, 2020). However, to retain and ensure the safety of their employees, organizations may have embraced remote work situations without having the necessary structure, practices, or resources to facilitate the transition effectively. For example, managing a remote team involves setting clear expectations, creating a culture guiding behavior, eliminating gaps in communication, implementing workflow processes and collaboration methods, and ensuring appropriate performance acknowledgment to maintain employee work motivation (Clement, 2020). Whereas organizational leaders have long orchestrated these factors in collocated environments, virtual and remote relationships may require different efforts, processes, or training. Consequently, the move to flexible work situations may require an exhaustive review of existing manager capabilities, policies, and resources to ensure the ability to maintain performance levels.

Leaders might significantly influence employee behavioral outcomes of the three antecedents (leadership, HR practices, and organizational justice) presented in the study’s conception model. In a collocated work environment, the combination of the transformational leadership style and perceived organizational support produce increased employee performance (Wahyu, 2019). On the other hand, managing in non-collocated structures might possess different factors than face-to-face situations. Therefore, leaders and organizations may have to change the style or communication methods to match specific conditions (Agustriyana et al., 2022). As the prime communicator and strategy implementer, the role of leaders remains a prominent factor in the success of remote team performance. The leader's role is to facilitate the employee-organization connection by supporting the team members' social and emotional needs (Sekhon & Srivastava, 2018). Accordingly, leaders must take specific actions to support their employees in the altered work structure, such as efforts to maintain the work culture and engagement. The process requires effectively communicating the situational changes, developing trust, upgrading tools and techniques for ongoing contact, promoting shared leadership, and monitoring employee strategic alignment with the overall organizational mission and culture (Kozlowski et al., 2021; Leonardelli, 2022; Newman & Ford, 2020). In remote work environments, a lack of realization of the differences in managing a team of dispersed members coupled with the absence or reduced direct contact with managers and leaders may lessen their ability to influence employee behaviors. Therefore, the importance of good HR practices and justice in resource allocations may increase to maintain or produce desired outcomes.

HR practice and policies must facilitate aspects of support for a geographically dispersed workforce. HR development should play a significant role in ensuring technical support, communication, escalated safety concerns, mental, emotional, and physical well-being, financial assistance, employee engagement and retention, rewards, and virtual communication policies (Sarmah & Chaudhuri, 2021). As the growth of diversity in workforces continues, HR must also maintain solid programs geared toward incorporating differences. Some argue that certain HR initiatives meant to enhance diversity within organizations can widen gaps in disadvantaged groups (Cooke et al., 2022). In other instances, the concern with equity and enhancing diversity and inclusion causes some to see it as an opportunity to open new avenues, creating a degree of deliberateness in organizational efforts through executive D&I program sponsorship and expanding hiring pools (Stone, 2021). Therefore, HR representatives should carefully evaluate workforce diversity-oriented programs to ensure meeting desired objectives.

It is critical to ensure the employees operating within a remote structure do not overextend themselves and maintain a typical structure. HR practitioners must ensure congruency between work expectations and the actual work environment to ensure work-life balance (Cooke et al., 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Facilitating relationship building and connections is also essential to the HR function. Providing online exchange or knowledge-sharing sites allows dispersed members to connect around common concepts, share new ideas, or engage in open discussion (Carlson & Ladell, 2021). The primary emphasis is for HR practitioners to create conditions the employees perceive as comparable to a collocated environment or, at minimum, produce similar employee behaviors and results. Therefore, HR representatives must maintain a pulse on factors generating the theme and perform as a solid supporting arm.

Organizational justice measures must ensure the management and execution of fair and equitable access to resources required by employees to perform their jobs effectively. A loss of access to resources can increase the pressure of job demands, negatively impacting employee well-being, behaviors, team relationships, and performance outcomes (Franken et al., 2021). Therefore, companies should develop and implement infrastructures and safeguards similar to onsite work. Addressing data security concerns to provide fair access to information is paramount (Anders, 2020; Palmore, 2020; Tankard, 2020). Remote employees who build their employer's trust may get rewarded with entrepreneurial freedom in crafting and performing their job. Input in decisions regarding variations in job functions or roles represents an additional crucial element offsetting adverse effects of potential work overload in remote workers (Ingusci et al., 2021; Mäkikangas et al., 2022).

Along with joint role development, organizations must work to simplify the employee-organization connection through technology. A segment of employees may have heightened anxiety regarding the need for technology to remain connected to their workplace (Prodanova & Kocarev, 2021). Overall, though specific needs may vary slightly, a component of remote worker performance derives from employers' investment in providing the necessary equipment and resources to perform their job. Therefore, in response to the link between satisfaction with job resources and employee behavior outcomes, organizations policymakers should carefully review and access the equity across collocated and remote units.

Engagement, Inclusion, and Performance in Remote Workforces

Maintaining respective levels of engagement and inclusion in remote workforces is a challenge many contemporary employers might face. In the present workplace, one-third of the employees always or very often work remotely, but two-thirds state a lack of engagement with their employer (Gallup, 2017). These statistics display the positives and negatives of being a remote worker, resulting in varying degrees of engagement. Work-centered employees, though expending more resources such as family time, thrive in remote work environments and experience increased work engagement (Gillet et al., 2021; Huyghebaert-Zouaghi et al., 2022). With employee engagement as a topic of ongoing debate and significance, it is crucial for organizations to determine the underlying sources. Koekemoer et al. (Koekemoer et al., 2021) determined that employee engagement derives from leadership behavior and overall team effectiveness.

Furthermore, a manager's mere recognition of remote work differences might also be a motivating factor. The idea of mindfulness, representing the attention or awareness of managers to the matter, can stimulate employee morale and engagement (Pattnaik & Jena, 2020). However, the reduced face-to-face manager-team member interface in remote workforces may require managers to use new approaches to driving employee engagement and inclusion. Organizations promoting health and wellness that effectively use various online communication channels, new empowering leadership practices, benefits, and supporting resources increase employee engagement (Anand & Acharya, 2021). However, managers must take the lead in building a solid team foundation and a collaborative culture in the overall landscape. They can successfully increase team engagement through scheduled individual and face-to-face group interaction, training, a customer-focused vision, and information-sharing cross-unit collaboration (S. Edwards, 2020). Remote workers continue to require an intermittent dose of interaction with peers and superiors to feed engagement levels. Therefore, for companies with substantial remote workforces, fostering an environment of engagement and inclusion is a priority requiring total organizational participation.

Whereas employee engagement represents an individual's emotional connection to the work or role performance, inclusion relates to their feelings of value, being respected, and belongingness to the team or group. Faced with more diverse employee populations, employers' human resources teams have recognized inclusion and inclusive work environments as a driver of engagement (Byrd, 2022). Organizations have invested in diversity and inclusion programs to support outcomes in their attempt to influence engagement gains. Many organizations now consider diversity and inclusion initiatives one of the cornerstones of their overall employee engagement and performance strategy (Bourke & van Berkel, 2017). Diverse employees increase in value when there is an underlying emphasis and effort on inclusion, further enhancing performance. Leaders must execute a two-fold approach, harvesting the benefits of diversity while cultivating the team's diversity belief in the value of fostering an inclusive climate and corresponding performance improvements (Leroy et al., 2021). Therefore, numerically focused diversity initiatives without corresponding efforts to effectively include the talent may not result in the organization achieving desired objectives.

Leaders and HR professionals must also remain mindful of the expanding layers of diversity within the workforce. Intersectionality describes how the broad makeup of a person's identity, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, and other factors, contributes to how they view situations or experiences (Song, 2021). Different occurrences or instances involving any of the hidden characteristics in their identity may appeal to any number of facets invisible to others. Overall, findings in various research highlight ever-changing complexities with the diversity and inclusion topic, particularly in remote settings, and the need to focus on understanding, capturing, and incorporating insights in employee engagement enhancement endeavors.

Regardless of a collocated or remote work environment, the ultimate objective of engagement and inclusion programs is to impact performance and other outcomes positively. Researchers have determined that remote work flexibility in various circumstances positively affects employee engagement (Toscano & Zappalà, 2021), job satisfaction (Davidescu et al., 2020), worker productivity (Giovanis, 2018), and overall organizational performance (Chatterjee et al., 2022). The results generally display a situational dependency on various mediating variables. The connection to performance does, however, strengthen with increased trust in the leader's communication (Newman et al., 2020). Conversely, not all leadership styles and traits effectively bridge remote work to improved performance. Though effective in the collocated arena, transformational leadership is less effective in improving dispersed team performance (Eisenberg et al., 2019). A particular leadership style may not appropriately address all situations. Therefore, organizations might benefit from helping leaders understand their particular style and offer training concerning the leadership traits that lead to certain employee behaviors.

Studies have occurred regarding the relationship between engagement, inclusion, and performance, but not in the context of a relationship to perceived organizational support or remote work situations. In a particular study researchers found a direct relationship between inclusion, employee engagement, and performance (Goswami & Goswami, 2018). The remaining question is whether the organizational leaders can successfully implement reasonable strategies producing enhanced inclusion and engagement. Therefore, it is vital to research and understand the strategies used by managers that incorporate leader styles, human resource practices, and administration of organization justice to shape perceived organizational support and positively influence these outcomes.

The Conceptual Framework and Remote Work

Organizational structures and business operations based solely on remote work situations that do not involve employees remaining in regular virtual contact have long existed. The best example is route-based businesses with employees who are mobile throughout the day without the requirement of reporting to a service depot to start and end the day to retrieve necessary vehicles or tools. However, any work environment with reduced or limited direct and peer interface may require innovative alternative strategies to achieve positive employee behavioral outcomes. Therefore, organizations and their managers must develop and implement methods for maintaining contact and frequent connections with team members.

Research regarding remote structures appears to have remained in the arena of others, also focusing on exchange, identity, engagement, or motivation theories. The lack of an explanation of the employee-employer relationship negates the impact of HR practices and organizational justice - Fair resource allocation ensures employees have what they need to perform their jobs on organizational outcomes. Whereas employees in collocated environments may require certain levels of organizational support to influence employee behaviors, the distance from the direct manager interface places more significant pressure on practice, policies, and job-related resources support work roles.

Researchers have determined that inputs influencing employees' POS play a critical role in their reciprocal actions. However, there is limited research evaluating phenomena associated with remote work situations that use organizational support theory or POS. A literature search and review has discovered that contemporary studies mainly applied adjustments to work structures in response to a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. There is an opportunity to explore strategies associated with generating performance outcomes in ongoing remote work environments.

Supporting Theories

Evaluating the broad range of organizational phenomena includes a segment that recognizes and investigates factors driving employee interactions and social behaviors. Various theories describe how an organization's employees identify, interact, relate, exchange, and perform (Wijesinghe, 2017). Workplace interactions might play a prominent role in employees' engagement, motivation, productivity, work commitment, and other potential outcomes. Therefore, understanding how these theories explain various levels of employee exchange supports organizational leadership in achieving relevant performance outcomes. The following is an analysis of various organizational employee exchange theories.

Social exchange theory

Employees within the organization interact on a variety of fronts. The social exchange theory describes the behavioral interaction between individuals where a tangible or intangible exchange occurs under the premise of a positive reciprocation or return on the psychological investment (Sungu et al., 2019; Zoller & Muldoon, 2018). The theory's central idea suggests that relationships are based on individuals’ selfish pursuit of benefits in their favor and are void of altruism, emotional connection, psychological aspects, or individuals at a loss. Therefore, a cost versus benefit analysis, incorporating all factors, appears to determine whether a person remains in the relationship. Whereas the theory explains peoples' motives in one-on-one relationships, it does not relate the mental weighing process to the employee-organization relationship.

Leader-member exchange theory (LMX)

There are numerous theories related to leadership management style, decision making, and influence on employee behavior. The leader-member exchange theory characterizes the dyadic employee-supervisor relationship, whereas information, resource allocation, mental and physical effort, and social support drive the relationship's quality (Hofmans et al., 2019; Javed et al., 2018; Mohamad et al., 2019). Theoretically, there exists a subconscious bias and leaders tending towards personality preferences in their leadership behavior. Therefore, leaders must be mindful of efforts to provide consistent and persistent connection opportunities for all, giving the “out-group” equal chances to produce a cooperative environment among members further. The concept leans heavily on the leadership role and negates the impact of human resources practices on employee decision-making and behaviors.

Social Identity Theory

Individuals may develop strength of purpose by identifying with a specific characteristic, trait, or group. Researchers use social identity theory to explain concepts like social networks, intergroup relations, and emotions that produce collective behavior to achieve social harmony, change, trust, or conflict resolution (Arshad et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Raskovic & Takacs-Haynes, 2021). Individuals who become members of the "*in-group*" experience levels of positive re-enforcement from the distinctiveness of their identification. Therefore, socially identifying members may grow their status, gain from isolated knowledge exchange, and elevate their performance through the association. Organizational leaders, through the lens of social identity theory, might gain insights regarding employee behaviors when feeling a part of a unified group, though not necessarily gaining an understanding of the connection to generating a positive perception of organizational support or outcomes.

Engagement theory

Organizations might employ strategies to encourage, support, and stimulate employees, with the desire to achieve positive results and return on their human capital investment. When companies are successful in their employee relations effort produce engaged organizational members who possess not only a physical, but a cognitive and emotional connection to their work and performances (Haas et al., 2021). Companies successful in fostering the connecting may experience increased creativity, innovation, job satisfaction, loyalty, motivation, and work commitment with less employee turnover that results in higher customer satisfaction, productivity, and profitability. Therefore, a workplace structured by a clear vision, defined objectives, and continuous improvement generates optimism towards successful goal achievement. Theorists such as Maslow, Hertzberg, and Vroom have investigated various elements of engagement, however each overlooked the influence of corporate policies, practices, or resource allocation fairness in their review.

Motivation theory

Along with producing other positive outcomes related to an organization's workforce, managers must develop ways to motivate employees to increase output and profitability to achieve overall business goals. Researchers and practitioners can use motivation theory to evaluate cognitive and emotional attitudes or actions that meet peoples' individual needs and drive them to pursue specific results (Ali et al., 2022; Bin, 2019; Pereira & Mohiya, 2021). For example, managers might use various strategies like offering incentives and rewards or meeting psychological needs by enabling employees to showcase talent, building confidence, and increasing their self-esteem. Therefore, managers must aim to learn the factors that specifically appeal to their team members and provide the best motivation. There is an emphasis on the manager's role concerning employee motivation that produces specific positive outcomes however disregards the potential countering effects of organizational practices or policies that degrade work commitment and vigor.

Inclusion theory

Successful organizations may aggressively invest in identifying and hiring top talent, however without leaders, managers, and other employees fostering an environment of inclusion, their skills and capabilities may go to waste. Researchers have defined inclusion theory as the traits of leaders and the environments they create like self-awareness of bias, having a voice, appreciation of differences, open communication and dialogue, knowledge sharing, and cultural intelligence (Brimhall & Palinkas, 2020; Fujimoto et al., 2019). These factors might help enhance cooperation, collaboration, and incorporation of skills, ideas, and innovation found to produce significantly greater team and organizational performance outcomes. Therefore, acquiring diverse talent is only one variable of the equation and requires organizational efforts involving leaders and human resources practices to maximize.

Performance theory

To achieve defined objectives, market success, and competitive advantage, organizations must attract and further develop high performing employees. Dimensions of high level individual employee performance include work quantity and quality, job mastery, timely work completion, and cooperation (Mahmood et al., 2019; Purwadi et al., 2020). Whereas performance is often rewarded financially, employees experience other positive psychological benefits related to self-esteem or pride. Therefore, promoting employee performance may involve a mix of leadership recognition, organizational policy, and more personalized drivers.

Though offering valuable insight into behaviors and interactions between peers and superiors, these theories do not address the relationship between the workforce and the organization. For example, perceived organizational support has a significant connection to employee engagement, psychological safety, empowerment, and service orientation (de Souza Meira & Hancer, 2021; Kanwal et al., 2019). In addition, organizational policies, practices, and resource allocation fairness may complement an employee's social or management-related experiences and foster positive workplace environments and performance outcomes. Therefore, a conceptual combination of social exchange, leadership, and organizational mechanisms may possess the ability to deliver the broadest positive results.

Contrasting Theory

Subtle and variable factors influence the employee's perception of their work and employer affiliation. Adams' equity theory or equity theory of motivation, first developed by John Stacey Adams in 1963, supports the idea that employee motivation occurs when achieving an equitable relationship with their organization concerning benefits or rewards versus their work effort (Kokkoniemi & Isomöttönen, 2020). Consequently, it is essential to acknowledge institutional influences on employee performance as an alternative to explanations offered by management, leadership, or exchange theories. There is also support for conceptual frameworks including an organization's role in employee behavioral findings. Though explaining outcomes produced by a fairly balanced employee-employer relationship, Adams' theory does not address the influence of the leadership-human resources-organization connection on achieving positive employee behavior outputs.

A Review of Organizational and Management Theories

A broad array of business-oriented theories exists related to the structures, operational issues, employee interactions, and behaviors taking place within organizations. Though related, organizational and management theories are not necessarily the same. Organizational theory offers a path for evaluating organizational structures, how they work, their performance, and how their employees and teams behave (Baum & Haveman, 2020). Alternatively, management theory deriving its base from organizational theory possesses certain assumptions and allowances regarding elements of human behavior, not organic to organizational theories (Gümüsay & Amis, 2021; Martinez et al., 2021). Each view might play a role in addressing individual aspects of organizational facets; however, they do not necessarily offer a guide for interaction between the company, management, and employees thus producing positive outcomes. Furthermore, a thorough explanation of a certain phenomenon, interactions, or behaviors may require developing models or frameworks involving the support of multiple theories.

Acknowledging the potential need for a convergence or combination of theories within a conceptual framework to sufficiently explain a particular phenomenon, it is important to review theories explaining organizational structures and management methods. The following sample of theories provide a historical base for understanding and evaluating organizational matters. In addition, the theories represent the component of a conceptual model that might explain the role of organizational and management practices in influencing employee behaviors and achieving desired performance outcomes like employee engagement, productivity, or work commitment.

Classical or Traditional Theory

The classical theory focuses on the formal organizational structures while relegating the human aspect to those responsible for personnel concerns (Kong, 2021). Central to the focus is determining the best way of dividing, grouping, and coordinating tasks. The attention extends to the manager-staff relationship, ensuring clearly defined roles and authority. Methods and protocols are clearly defined and communicated. However, the theory may be lacking due to over-emphasizing the importance of formal structures and oversight of the workforce. In addition, the theory's limited purview does not account for many organizational interactions and their impact on outcomes.

Decision-Making Theory

Decisions with varying degrees of importance occur at the different organizational levels. Alexander et al. (2018) acknowledged the decision-making approach as the existence and necessity of appropriate organizational hierarchies. Furthermore, it supports the idea that corporate structure design should reflect the operational points requiring decisions by those having the proper knowledge and authority. Therefore, operational efficiency, supported by a hierarchical structure, enables efficient decision-making.

Weber’s Ideal of Bureaucracy

Weber considers organizations a part of a social system and bureaucracy, an essential and valuable element of organizational functioning. Bureaucracy ensures proper rules and procedures regulating employee behavior, fosters organizational stability, and delivers desired results through a sound hierarchical structure complementing behavior and human resource studies (Ashikali et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2019). In addition, systematically slowing decisions and processes may have an underlying positive effect on outcomes. Therefore, as long as not operationally crippling, a reasonable level of bureaucratic controls is a solid foundation for an organization's operational success.

Systems Approach

The system approach's developer views organizations as an overall system of interacting variables. The approach attempted to stress the need to reject isolated problem solving but considering all individuals and interdependent components as a single unit (Arnold & Wade, 2015; Tebekin, 2018). The unified whole working for a common goal consists of the organization, people, technology, formal structure, physical setting, and environment. The focus on a central outcome allows the identification of critical variables, constraints, their interaction with one another, and the impact of individual changes on other elements.

Open systems theory

In addition to internal exchanges, organizations also engage in various external interactions. Open systems theorist argue that organizations must acknowledge the impact of environmental influences to support effective leadership strategy development addressing the concerns (Hitt et al., 2020; Small et al., 2022). Specific factors may include corporate vendors or distributors, marketplace competition, and government institutions defining production standards and regulations. Conversely, general factors involve four primary aspects occurring due to the organization's geographic location, such as economic conditions, cultural values, education systems, and legal considerations.

Modern Theory

The organizational theory includes multiple management development approaches. These notions have internal and external people and interpersonal interactions between the organization’s members (Kovalenko, 2020). An organization must operate in an open-ended, organic system while remaining adaptable and flexible to change (Vlados, 2013). Valuable insights and other information support decision-making while maintaining efforts associated with employee satisfaction and happiness. Therefore, decisions regarding programs geared to employee productivity and professional development require an in-depth knowledge of their behaviors.

Contingency Theory

There is not necessarily an optimal way to organize, lead or make decisions in a company. In contingency theory, the ideal organization, leadership, or decision-making style is situational and relies on various internal and external factors where practical solutions to situations evolve (Muafi & Marfuatun, 2021). The theorist addresses management's structural elements enabling a formal and informal organizational system to tackle various unforeseen circumstances like technical, administrative, and environmental concerns (Sridharan, 2020). Overall, contingency theory offers guidance regarding the need for structures and practices to address organizational issues based on the specific situation.

Scientific Management Theory

There are elements of productivity or output that may escalate the importance of an organization's ground-level employees to concentrate solely on job performance. Scientific management aims to establish the best task-performing process, motivating, selecting, and training employees (Kong, 2021). The core concept contended more significant work efficiency and increased production occur through a work specialization principle. However, researchers later discovered that specialized workforces are ineffective in enabling employees to maximize productivity.

Motivation Theory

Motivation theory's creator addresses management motivation and drivers for organizational members to pursue professional goals through an accurate and productive performance of job functions. To improve employee support, managers' pursuit of plans to increase company productivity, production, and profits should also entail thoroughly understanding employees' behavioral patterns and preferences (Lee, 2019, 2020). In addition, managers may consider underlying factors impacting employees' feelings and experiences to develop effective strategies. Therefore, managers need to consider monetary and non-monetary motivational provisions to support identifying inner talents supporting positive outcomes.

Hawthorne Study

The outcomes of the study provided a basis for team-building research. It suggested that motivation for employee work completion consists of social, psychological, and economic needs (Mannevuo, 2018). In addition, the researchers determined a connection between coworker relationships and productivity (Zoller &

Muldoon, 2018). Specifically, team membership, garnering teammate support, and developing a sense of responsibility to peers maintain relationships and friendships while motivating positive changes in employee performance and increasing worker satisfaction. Overall, the outcomes researchers coined the "Hawthorne Effect" as a term to describe management oversight and improved productivity as managers expressed interest and concern for employees' work and were willing to make beneficial changes to the system, enhancing worker well-being.

Human Relations or Neo-Classical Theory

Organizational managers must consider factors beyond job descriptions and acknowledge employee behavior's influences. Omodan et al. (2020) discussed the classical point of view as only focusing on necessary tasks versus the human relations approach that appreciates the employee's experience during task performance and understanding human factors. On the other hand, manager through the neo-classical theory lens place importance on considering employees and their behavior when designing an organization structure (Muñoz-Pascual & Galende, 2020). Therefore, the human relations premise holds that recognizing the employee as a human being may surpass the influence of monetary incentives or other privileges.

Theory X and Y

Various management styles may guide perceptions and influence team member motivations differently. For example, theory X relates to authoritarian managers who assume employees are lazy or dislike their work, whereas theory Y managers believe employees are responsible, committed, and self-motivated (Daneshfard & Rad, 2020).

The former might require micromanagement, but the latter represents a participative management style fostering a more collaborative work environment. Organizations that meet strictly defined objections may rely on theory X. Conversely, more nimble and innovative environments may tend toward theory Y involving employees in the decision-making process and encouraging creativity.

Administrative Theory

Ensuring the broadest impact to organization outcomes may involve cohesive approaches to many aspects of organizations and management. The administrative theory, a management-oriented theory, set the foundation for a new administrative science relating to properly understanding management while providing directions or principles promoting organizational innovation, productivity, and social effectiveness by linking theory to practices (Hatchuel & Segrestin, 2019; Zang & Wang, 2018). Therefore, the broad nature of the theory offers a wider lens for evaluating numerous elements of corporations, their workforces, and relevant social environments.

As previously highlighted, while covering various topics concerning organizations and management, the theories discussed do not necessarily offer a guide for a corporate-human connection that supports generating positive organizational outcomes. Theories such as classic, decision-making, and bureaucracy offer direction geared towards organizational structures for dividing functional areas, decision-making, and company controls. Other approaches like the systems, open systems, and modern theory address the need for all-encompassing, synergistic systems but fall short of qualifying the influence on employee behaviors and organizational performance. Contingency theory emphasizes the need for flexibility in management decisions based on the situation. The following set of theories, (a) scientific management, (b) motivation, (c) Hawthorne studies, (d) human relations, and e) theories X and Y address factors related to task completion, performance management and monitoring, and employee well-being, yet fail to link actions beyond the manager to the organization. Lastly, administrative theory, the broadest of those covered, addresses multiple organizational facets but offers no direction for developing cohesiveness among them.

These organizational and management theories may offer a basis for our evaluation; however, others relate to the workforce within the institutions. Workforce-related theories might help researchers describe or evaluate phenomena concerning behaviors such as their exchange among peers or with leaders, engagement, identity alignment, performance, and perceptions of the organization. Leadership theories help researchers explain how certain traits, characteristics, or behaviors influence the employee population. In addition, human resource practices have also displayed an influence of organizational outcomes. Overall, one theory may not provide an appropriate explanation for given circumstances nor offer a common thread among all aspects affecting an organization and its employees. Further explaining the interacting components and theories may involve modeling the relationship for better discussing the concept.

Transition

Section 1 began with a historical perspective of diversity and inclusion, an overview of challenges faced by leaders regarding engagement and inclusion, and the necessity for progressive strategies promoting employee engagement and inclusion. I followed the introduction and background discussion with a general business problem, a specific business problem, and the study's purpose. My direction of using a qualitative single case study allowed for an exploration of premises stated in the conceptual framework while accounting for assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. These factors each support the potential significance of the study and its contribution to positive social change. The research aims to provide leaders with implementable strategies to foster engagement and inclusion in diversely populated remote teams and produce increased performance. The exhaustive professional and academic literature review supports the research topic, theoretical concepts, and relevant construct. The literature review presents Organizational Support Theory (OST) and Perceived Organizational Support (POS) as the central premise by stating the necessity for a cohesive relationship between the leadership and organization that form a unit shaping employees' perceptions, encouraging engagement, inclusion, and positive performance outcomes. I also presented different leadership theories to display their relationship to the conceptual framework and support of outcomes. Section 2 restates the case study's purpose statement, describes the researcher's role, thoroughly details the plan for accessing study participants, and details the methodology and research design. The study continues with an extended discussion of population sampling, ethical considerations, data collection instruments, and techniques. The final sections include data organization processes and analysis, and the reliability and validity of the data collection instruments.

Section 2: The Project

This section is focused on the study’s design and intent. I restate the purpose statement to remind the reader of the reason for the research. I follow the purpose statement with a description of the role played by the researcher in completing this phase of the study. I provide criteria for the purposeful sampling of participants. I expand the discussion of the research method and design subtopic by evaluating others not selected as appropriate for achieving the study's end. I then provide a detailed description of the process for selecting the participant pool in the population and sampling section. In the ethical research section, information regarding the requirements met to ensure the study engaged ethical research practices is included. The emphasis of the study’s sections then transitioned to data collection instruments, techniques, organization, and analysis. These categories contain details of instruments and tools used to capture necessary data, the step-by-step data collection methods I used, how I organized and stored the data, and processes associated with the data analysis portion of the research. Trailing data analysis subtopics are procedures for ensuring the research’s reliability and validity. The section closes with a summary and transition statement to Section 3.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies leaders of remote, diverse teams with high engagement used to improve team performance. The target population was comprised of remote field managers of a nationally operating United States corporation possessing both collocated and remote workforces. The implications for positive social change include increased understanding of behaviors and strategies that drive feelings of engagement and a perceived climate of inclusiveness. In addition, awareness of the benefits of certain behaviors and factors that foster engagement and an inclusive environment positively impacts how individuals interact, communicate, and develop relationships, enhancing partnerships among community leaders, organizations, and groups.

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher is the coordinator and conductor of the associated steps and functions throughout a study's completion. Particularly in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument who plays a prominent role in the research process and engages an extensive interface with participants (Soh et al., 2020). I participated in all facets of conducting this study, including participant identification, recruitment, selection, data collection, data analysis, and presenting findings while ensuring ethical practices, reliability, and validity. The study occurred according to defined methods and design that, through an unbiased assessment, was deemed the best fit for this type of inquiry.

To ensure functioning as a solid data collection instrument, researchers should prioritize efforts to maintain the integrity of responses. An impartial interviewer, emotionally distanced from the studied phenomenon, may experience higher degrees of openness from participants and avoid leading or steering responses (Karagiozis, 2018). I have functioned as a manager of remote teams on a local and regional level for seven years at the subject organization in this study. I have sparingly interfaced with participants at national, divisional events, however no formal authority, reporting lines, or professional relationship exists. I had also not engaged in any form of communication regarding this study's subject matter with any of the interviewees prior to their participation. Reflexivity supports avoiding the influences of the presuppositions, biases, and assumptions and ensures consistency in the interview process (Mackieson et al., 2019). Having worked in a like role as a peer to the study participants, I sought to reduce personal bias in the interview process. Therefore, I focused on managing assumptions and expectations based on personal experiences when interviewing case study participants.

An essential element of conducting research relates to the rights of all study participants. Before executing any step associated with the participant handling portion of the research project, I took steps to increase personal knowledge and completed training offerings for safeguarding and warranting participant's privacy. In accordance with standards established by the National Institute of Health, organizations such as Protecting Human Research Participants, Inc. (PHRP, 2022) provided thorough training for new and novice researchers, offering a solid foundation for participant handling. The training entailed a comprehensive examination of the Belmont Report, a document providing a summary of ethical principles governing research involving human participants. The primary guiding principles included (a) respect for persons, relating to participants maintaining the choice of how and when they will take part in a research project; (b) beneficence, the responsibility of researchers to keep participants free from harm, and (c) justice, representing equitable treatment or benefits to participating parties. Researchers conducting research involving human subjects use these principles as a framework for addressing ethical issues that may arise. Efforts to increase knowledge associated with this aspect of research enhanced the comfort level of participants and reduced concerns regarding the sharing of their responses or identities.

The primary direction presented in the completed participant handling training was that the selection process should occur only after receiving the required approvals. The institutional review board (IRB) provides guidelines and requirements for research and regulates the review and approval for proposed research projects (Slovin & Semenec, 2019). According to these guidelines, I developed, reviewed, and submitted a plan for IRB approval, including approval steps for access and solicitation of potential participants and issues surrounding the study's authorship. Overall, of the utmost importance and a key aspect of the respect for persons principle, I ensured all participants signed the required consent form before any interviews occurred.

The approvals to access participants from the subject organization and the IRB approval earmark the ability to begin the interview process. Following a defined interview guide allowed initiating interviews with a mapped plan for questioning, zeroing in on important aspects generating detailed responses, and effectively closing the interview process. Using an established and tested outline like the 4-step Interview Protocol Refinement Framework (IPR) provides a reliable tool for improving interview reliability and validity protocols (Roberts, 2020; Yeong et al., 2018). I applied the framework to confirm interview and research question's alignment, create inquiry-based two-way dialogue, and receive feedback on interview procedures (see Appendix). Defining intended procedures for conducting interviews allowed making appropriate adjustments, addressing gaps, and ensuring the ability to gather deliberate answers concerning the research objectives. The structured process provided a valuable guide and, as the data collection instrument, served in improving my performance while conducting interviews.

Interview participants may also provide researchers with valuable information through nonverbal responses. Observing participants provided an opportunity to collect data regarding facial expressions, body language, or voice inflections associated with specific responses enhancing the study's rigor and validity (Hayashi et al., 2019). Notating nonverbal factors may support verbal data collection through a participant's display of comfort levels with the discussed topic. Overall, thoroughly capturing all aspects of participant responses supported proper characterization of their meaning and enhanced findings through inclusion of supporting relevant details.

Participants

After gaining relevant approvals, the research process proceeded with participant identification and selection. Qualitative research requires participants to possess knowledge of the topic and be capable of offering advice effectively addressing the research problem or question (Staller, 2021). My research design required access to interviewing six remote team leaders (a manager of a geographically defined market consisting of field supervisors and service associates) located in the U.S. division of a global service organization who achieved scores higher than the divisional score in employee engagement and inclusion measured by the corporate bi-annual engagement survey. The study's participant population was bound to this select group based on (a) leading a team of demographically diverse employees, (b) having received high scores in employee engagement and inclusion in the most recent biannual corporate engagement survey, and (c) having a year-to-date team market performance ranking in the top 35% as measured by the corporate monthly performance tracker. I restricted the study's participant population to this select group based on their importance in delivering information associated with the research. Also, the selected sampling of the participants offered an ability to explore the central research problem through personal interviews, questionnaires, market performance metrics, and other survey results associated with engagement and inclusion to deliver desired insights.

An additional challenge to identifying capable participants within defined parameters was gaining approval for access. Researchers may encounter significant barriers in gaining access to the study participants through various levels of approval from gatekeepers such as the human resources and legal departments, the organization's senior leadership, and company policy (Reid et al., 2018). For example, this study required me to gain access through approvals from corporate leadership, human resources, and the head of the organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) group. Working on my behalf was the interest each of these groups had in the study's findings. The results benefit the DE&I team by providing information supporting strategy development to complement or supplement findings derived from biannually conducted corporate engagement and inclusion surveys. In addition, potential strategies derived from the results offer direction for training programs benefiting the performance of a broader management population. Consequently, achieving the approval hinged on decision makers’ comfort levels concerning the protection and anonymity of participants and the company's name.

After completing the approval process and receiving a general pool of candidates, the focus shifted to canvassing the list and gaining a commitment from the desired number of participants, reviewing their profiles to ensure they meet minimum requirements, and establishing rapport to support the interview process. Researchers can enhance the interview process by gaining familiarity and developing rapport among study participants (Guillemin et al., 2018; Mozersky et al., 2020). I established an open dialogue with participants to understand concerns, answer questions, and gain their commitment to participating in a recorded session. The goal of building a solid relationship with the study participants was to create an environment of comfort and openness where the researcher can extract valuable insights into the research question.

The participation of the selected group followed the study’s defined selection protocols and guidelines (see Appendix). A critical item in the requirement for each of the study’s participants is to sign a standard consent form outlining the purpose of the study and warranting confidentiality (Pathiranage et al., 2020). To warrant the terms of anonymity, I developed a numeric coding system identifying each participant and the subject organization, linking them to signed consent forms. Therefore, with no mention of the organization's name or parties responsible for approving the study, the only reference to participants was a number used to organize data.

A semistructured interview with open-ended questions enables the researcher to gain valuable information from the participant's knowledge and experience (McGrath et al., 2019). Maintaining control of the interview and keeping participants focused on the responses to questions without restricting answers requires the interviewer to maintain a particular aspect of power (Råheim et al., 2016). I scheduled interviews for a maximum of 50 minutes, believing that it offered ample time to conduct 40-minute interviews and 10 minutes for follow-up questions. Social requirements for social distancing have escalated researchers' use of various virtual communication platforms such as Zoom, Webex, Skype, and several others (Lobe et al., 2020). Requirements set by human resources concerning in-person visits required virtual interviews as an element of the process for gaining participant access. Fortunately, performing the interviews in a virtual setting allowed my observation to occur more effectively without booking or scheduling a unique facility.

Researchers should invest the appropriate time and effort in interview preparation to reduce the possibility of personal bias’s influence in process. Following defined protocols and enhancing qualitative research skills helps the interview environment maintain an open stance and one of discovery (Roberts, 2020). I encouraged participants to openly share their thoughts and opinions without scrutiny to support the selected pool remaining intact through the study's completion. Consequently, the interviews did not begin until receiving a firm commitment from the entire participant pool, enabling a continuous flow of information from participants within a controlled time frame, thus limiting other potential influences on responses.

Research Method and Design

Both quantitative and qualitative researchers need to perform research according to a clear methodological path. Along the path, quantitative researchers perform a thorough analysis of data or exhaustive investigation of real-world events, assuming that findings relate to the central question and hypotheses (Yin, 2018). The effort focuses on understanding the relationships between input and dependent variables in a quantitative setting. Whereas, in qualitative projects, the goal is to highlight decisions, understand the researcher’s choice, how they were implemented and executed, and what occurred or the outcome of those decisions. Therefore, the following detailed review of other methods and designs evaluated their appropriateness for this study and justified those selected.

Research Method

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches each received consideration for this study. Researchers use qualitative research to derive a more profound understanding and explain quantitative research results by asking open-ended questions to probe and understand the surveyed populations' personal feelings, perceptions, and experiences (Maxwell, 2019). Through the interview process, qualitative research offers a path to multiple realities related to the phenomenon experienced by an individual, group, or organization. I explored strategies to address a specific problem that only opinion-generating questions could achieve since it involves perceptions regarding the best strategies for achieving engagement and inclusion. Conversely, studies seeking to determine relationships between variables benefit from quantitative research's numerical analysis, correlation discovery, and predictive capabilities (Haviz & Maris, 2018). The analysis may use random sampling, surveys, questionnaires, direct observation, or measures of gathering information to test hypotheses, measure frequency, and draw a relationship between variables (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). As a result, a quantitative analysis might be considered more rigorous than its qualitative counterpart (Mackieson et al., 2019). The *concurrent protocol analysis*, the process of verbalizing thoughts during task performance like qualitative research, provides a verbalization of experience not offered in quantitative investigations (Langley & Meziani, 2020). Though using quantitative scores in the participant sampling process, I did not use a quantitative method to analyze collected data. Therefore, a qualitative versus quantitative method was appropriate for this study.

There are situations where researchers engage multiple processes to investigate a situation by using dual approaches. Mixed method research use both quantitative and qualitative methods requiring a researcher skilled in both approaches (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). The studies require a dual validation from both methodologies, likely resulting in an extended completion time and costs. Also, the approach requires a significant sample size for the quantitative aspect of the study. Like the quantitative methodology, the mixed-methods approach uses survey measurement instruments as the primary source of data collection and mathematical methods for data analysis that are inappropriate for this study (Creswell, 2014). As previously stated, while I used multiple methods to collect data, the analysis techniques for this study did not require a quantitative approach rendering a mixed method approach inappropriate.

In summary, quantitative and mixed methods approaches use processes not required to achieve the desired outcome for this study. For example, qualitative research methods aim to suggest strategies, best practices, and other confirmed successful techniques (Roberts, 2020). On the other hand, the desired outcome for interview participants was to provide a detailed meaning of verbalized thoughts, responses, perceptions, and specific examples regarding engagement and inclusive strategies. Therefore, while acknowledging data saturation as a core requirement, I chose to proceed with the evaluation of the research question using a qualitative approach.

Research Design

A study's method may help define how a researcher approaches their evaluation of a phenomenon; however, the design provides the map or direction. A research's design is essentially a blueprint for developing responses to research questions, identifying and collecting relevant data, and analyzing results (Yin, 2018, p. 26). Qualitative research explores the stated problem using various designs such as ethnography, phenomenological, narrative, or case study (Cypress, 2018). I aimed to explore remote team leaders' real-world experiences and actions in a service arena. Therefore, a particular design approach offered the best fit for delivering valuable insights and results.

There are instances where the researcher desires to evaluate the sample population of a specific group's culture within their natural settings (Pathiranage et al., 2020). Ethnographic researchers use close personal contact and observation to investigate and understand the nature of people's interactions (Cypress, 2018). Like other designs, the ethnographic approach may incorporate other forms of qualitative information; however, the methodology is limited to a single culture-sharing group. For this reason, I did not choose ethnography design as the focus of the study did not involve a group's culture or the context of their interaction.

Phenomenology involves understanding a participant's experiences lived experience (Pathiranage et al., 2020). Researchers gain insights through an interviewee’s perception of a particular occurrence (Qutoshi, 2018). The responses may possess various degrees of subjectivity and personal interpretation. Thus, this method seemingly leans towards descriptions versus a potential explanation or evaluation, which was inappropriate as I attempted to understand a strategy based on factual circumstances. Therefore, based on careful attention to methods and procedures increasing the trustworthiness of findings, I did not feel the partiality within the phenomenology design was appropriate for this study.

Researchers can capture interview data by exploring the life and history of an individual (Pathiranage et al., 2020). A narrative approach derives data from storytelling, the interviewee’s description or story of a lived event (Cypress, 2018). The design, however, would not have allowed the proper framing of interviews for collecting relevant data supporting the research’s goal. Therefore, the approach only using an individual’s first-person account was not appropriate to effectively explore this study’s phenomenon.

The case study approach offered the ability to view the phenomenon from multiple viewpoints and achieve data saturation, a critical aspect of qualitative research (Yin, 2018, p. 14). The case study design is appropriate for in-depth studies to understand real-life phenomena within various organizational settings (Pathiranage et al., 2020). A case study enables a broad structure for reviewing the research question through a logical design, techniques for collecting data, and data analysis procedures (Yin, 2018, p. 16). Methodological triangulation, using multiple data collection methods like direct observation, corporate reports, and direct interviews, supports achieving the necessary saturation and enhances confidence in the findings (Al-Ababneh, 2020). The evaluation characteristics, structure, and ability to incorporate multi-source data increase the reliability and validity of findings. Therefore, the case study design was an appropriate choice; however, an evaluation of the single case or multicase study design ensued.

Instances may occur where researchers desire to investigate a specific phenomenon across multiple institutions. A multicase study design facilitates exploring factors or differences between multiple cases (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Having case results from multiple situations can limit the criticism and skepticism of results while, depending on the research’s direction, offering the possibility for replication. However, the rarity of a specific situation may prohibit the ability of the researcher to perform in somewhat homogeneous environments.

In my study, I aimed to establish engagement and inclusive strategies remote team leaders used to influence performance within a sole subject organization. A significant, rare, ordinary, indicative, or longitudinal case represents the rationale behind using the single case study method (Yin, 2018, p. 49). In addition, the required candidate pool, organization type, and industry dramatically limit the ability to access a requisite pool from other institutions. Therefore, I determined that a single case study design was appropriate for exploring the expressly stated phenomenon within a single organization.

When using a single case study design, the potentially limited pool of viable interview candidates may impact the ability to achieve data saturation. Researchers achieve data saturation when (a) uncovering ample information for replicating the study, (b) exhausting the ability to gain new additional information, and (c) more coding is not viable (Morse, 2015). Data saturation signifies an adequate sampling of interview participants capable of providing broad information and content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I achieved data saturation by continuing data collection until a point of no new data discovery or themes contained in responses. Consequently, achieving data saturation at the fifth of six planned interviews did not require additional selections and participant screening from the initial candidate pool. I had assembled a sufficiently sized pool of potential candidates to complete the study's data collection process.

Furthermore, I confirmed an exhaustive evaluation by incorporating external data sources. The connection between data saturation and data triangulation adds relevance to reviewing information from sources other than interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used methodology triangulation to combine relevant company documents, reports, and online information to support achieving data saturation and enhance the validity of findings. Information outlined in the company sources aligned with themes captured from participant interviews and further validated the finding's trustworthiness.

Population and Sampling

The population targeted for the study was market-level managers of teams of remote service associates from a single division of a global enterprise operating in the industrial products and chemical sector. This management level offered selection from a broad pool of potential candidates according to defined selection criteria. The criterion for selection was those managers of high-performing, diversely populated teams with high engagement and inclusion scores. Minimum requirements are (a) 5 years in the market manager role, (b) a team of 20 or more, (c) a revenue standard, and (d) the team's/manager's prolonged performance. This segment of the organization's workforce provided a pool of potential participants who could offer a solution to the central research question based on their personal experiences and success.

The qualitative aspect of the study reduces the need for sample randomness, whereas it required participants with the knowledge to inform the results. A purposeful sampling allows the researcher to enhance data collection by focusing on the most information-rich or broadly experienced candidate pool capable of providing necessary information (Staller, 2021). I used multiple steps in the sampling process. A two-stage approach involving numerical scores against metrics and qualitative descriptors supports deriving the most appropriate candidate pool (Yin, 2018, p. 106). For the quantitative portion, I relied on the studied organization's Human Resources group to provide an initial list of participant candidates through filtered data obtained through corporate surveys, reports tracking key performance metrics, and the team's demographic data. This initial stage provided a potential candidate pool comprising remote team managers meeting the previously stated criteria regarding team diversity, inclusion and engagement levels, and performance. The second, qualitative step involves using various measures to contact candidates from the subgroup and determining interest in participating in the study. In this phase, I provided candidates with introductory documents describing the study, the interview process, specifics of their participation, and answered questions.

Recruiting a good pool of candidates helped ensure the ability to meet the requirements of the study's design, collect necessary data, and solidify the continuity of the research project's completion. The qualitative case study design allows for a smaller participant number (Cypress, 2018). Therefore, I used a subset of five participants of the recruited population to conduct this study. It is important to note that my earlier performance in the same role as the participants made potential personal biases a significant concern. However, while embracing viable efforts to enhance the study's reliability and validity, I did not purposely negate participation from prior associations other than those currently within my chain of authority.

The interview process involved open-ended questions and note taking regarding observations such as comfort level, body language, facial expression, or conflicting responses. The open-ended interview questions should provide vast information from participant responses and perfect data saturation (Roberts, 2020). Ensuring a solid interview structure and consistency in the question answering process supported achieving data saturation. Prior to interviewing selected participants, I tested the scripted research questions among colleagues to evaluate their ability to derive rich and descriptive interview responses.

Ethical Research

Each research inquiry may come with its own set of specific ethical issues. Inquiries are unlikely to avoid ethical concerns requiring a high degree of flexibility, making proactive adjustments, and remaining deliberate about intent. Researchers are giving proper attention to the need for addressing ethical concerns in research by providing a solid set of guidelines for researchers to follow (Gelling, 2020; Yu, 2020). The guidelines, training, and other exercises aid their performance in this arena. Before engaging participants in the data collection process, I completed participant handling training offered by Protecting Human Research Participants, Inc., specifically applying to the processes engaged in this study. The training helped ensure the appropriate handling of study participants.

Contractual obligations between the researcher and the participant solidified and memorialized the agreed-upon behavior of all parties. Informed consent includes elements like disclosure, comprehension, competence, voluntariness, and the right to withdraw (Jacob & Foth, 2019; Yu, 2020). Researchers should ensure participants have ample information regarding the study’s purpose, procedures, the benefits of findings, risk, and the ability to withdraw at any time. In addition, they should also confirm the participant’s comprehension capabilities. Lastly, they must seek voluntary consent from participants free of coercion, pressure, or excessive influence. The written participant agreement provided term details, conditions, rules of engagement, the confidentiality of all participants, the approval to move forward with the interview process, and the ability to withdraw without penalty. If withdrawals had occurred, I would have performed the same process to select original participants to find an appropriate replacement. Interviews would not have halted during the replacement search however may have impacted the interview schedule.

Data collection commenced only after Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The approval number is 01-17-23-1051744 and expires on January 16, 2024. I functioned according to approval rules and gave special attention to protecting participants and other sensitive information. Per contractual guidelines, collected data is void of identifiers such as the company's names, participants' names playing a role in any aspect of the study, and information enabling the identification of the company or participants. A significant component of maintaining participant anonymity is protecting data through effectively managed safe storage procedures (Surmiak, 2018). Safe data storage requirements outlive the period of conducting the study. Therefore, I provided more comprehensive security for data on a storage device that protects the confidentiality and safety of the company, division, Human Resources representatives, approving leadership, and participants. I must retain and safely store researcher-participant agreements, soft copies of interview and company data, and all hard or printed documents for the required 5 years. After 5 years, I shall destroy all stored data, paper documents, audio and video recordings, and records or evidence in any other form as a final safety measure for all involved.

Data Collection Instruments

Human involvement brings certain elements and characteristics to the data collection effort not offered by other methods. The researcher, through participant interviews, is the primary data collection instrument in conducting qualitative studies (Yin, 2018). Interviewing poses significant challenges regarding rigor and bias management (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Therefore, the researcher is responsible for ensuring the interview process's effectiveness as a sound data collection instrument.

Researchers may enhance the effectiveness of a data collection instrument through a defined structured interview process. Incorporating established and tested interview practices like (a) reflecting on previous experience, (b) extensively interview preparation, (c) acknowledging power dynamics in the interviewer-participant relationship, (d) remaining highly attentive to the language and verbal cues, and (e) enlisting ongoing evaluation of the entire interview process supports interview success (McGrath et al., 2019). In this study, I used 9 open-ended questions as the nucleus of the data collection effort. The semistructured nature of the interview provided solid interview-participant two-way interaction through secondary and follow-up questions to clarify the meaning of specific responses. Therefore, data received from interviews established a solid base for further analyzing the central research question.

Researchers may engage various other sources for collecting data. Qualitative analysis may include other information like (a) company documentation, (b) direct observation, (c) archived records, (d) participant observation, (e) interviews, and (f) physical artifacts (Cypress, 2018). For example, the interviews in this study received support from observational notations and recording other aspects of the interview period. In addition to interviews, I investigated other data sources that offer supporting information to participant responses. The multi-source data triangulation process helps ensure data saturation and an exhaustive investigation of the phenomenon (Mackieson et al., 2019). Sources such as corporate survey results, reports, performance-related documents, published organizational goals, training, and Human Resource practices and procedures helped fill the gaps and shape insights. Therefore, researchers must ensure the trustworthiness of data inputs to their study and the rigorous pursuit of available information that supports findings remains a key focus.

Though multi-source data saturation is a primary concern, the researcher must not lose focus on answering the primary research question. Research should define and use a standard set of guidelines for conducting the study's interviews framing the interview process and generating desired information (Roberts, 2020). The structure used offered a consistent process that may generate more valid, reliable, and trustworthy results. Therefore, along with receiving IRB approval prior to conducting an interview, I followed a standard blueprint when executing the interview process.

The goal of the interview structure should involve a mechanism for confirming the accuracy of the data collected. Member checking involves reviewing captured data to confirm the information was captured and translated correctly (Yeong et al., 2018). After completing interviews and transcription, I used member checking to allow participants to review the information and make any necessary changes before advancing the study. The verification process supported the following stages of the study, added a degree of trustworthiness that findings reflect the exact information provided by the study participants, and added credibility to the data collection instrument.

Data Collection Technique

Qualitative researchers may use various methods to capture information relevant to their study. For example, data collected for this study was through semistructured interviews, corporate published information, bi-annual company survey results, team performance reports displaying metrics aligned with desired organizational outcomes, and documented programs associated with employee diversity, engagement, and inclusion. I used a combination of researcher-collected and company-provided information sources to thoroughly review data to identify successful strategies for driving employee engagement and inclusion to increase performance. Therefore, it was imperative to establish a solid upfront plan for information gathering.

The most critical data collection instrument was the face-to-face interviews emphasizing the interviewer's role in fostering trust among participants, which led to more openness and transparency in responses through their comfort level in speaking freely. The trust factor, coupled with open-ended questions, allows for an arena for sharing views and opinions where participants can provide a complete experience associated with the subject phenomenon (McGrath et al., 2019; Råheim et al., 2016). A companion to a comfortable participant environment was research questions capable of extracting necessary information. Practical interview questions are specifically structured to produce participant responses offering valuable insights regarding the central research question (McGrath et al., 2019; Roberts, 2020). In preparation for the interview process, I created an interview guide derived from previously defined protocols to enhance the function's structure and consistency by using a proper mix of question types to funnel and narrow responses to offer meaningful answers. Though not engaging in a mock study, I tested interview questions to determine their effectiveness in gaining valuable insights. Overall, setting the stage for an effective interview process supported steps in conducting final interviews.

Correctly capturing the data provided in interviews is crucial to the research's outcome and success. Therefore, it is essential to use appropriate tools for capturing these views on audio, video, or other efficient transcription methods (Lobe et al., 2020). In particular, the video capture enables notating facial expressions, body language, voice inflection, pauses, or other relevant reactions to questions and topics (Chenail, 2011). In the agreement to participate, I required selected participants to allow capturing interviews via audio, visual, written, and other formats deemed necessary. Capturing interviews, via audio and video, required translating the information into a soft, editable document. Interview transcription is a process that requires capturing verbal responses in necessary detail to ensure the validity of responses (Hayashi et al., 2019). Dictation tools that convert verbal responses to text support the work of researchers in ensuring a match of recorded verbal participant responses and the transcription. Therefore, I captured audio and video versions of the interviews via Microsoft Teams and used the application’s dictation and transcribing capabilities.

Transcribed interviews are the foundation for qualitative researcher’s data analysis. The transcribed interviews were converted to a Microsoft Word document for review, editing, and coding. Interview transcript review, associated with respondent validation, might enhance the correctness, quality and interviewee confidence in data collected from the interview process (Rowlands, 2021). I provided an opportunity for participants to review the transcribed documents to verify correctly captured responses.

The review process supported producing a document that firmly represents a replica of the participants' responses while enhancing the study's reliability and validity.

A researcher's skills and performance are critical to the effectiveness of the interview process. Effectively facilitating participants by providing detailed responses and experiences may involve a mix of open-ended and follow-up questions to gain clarity (McGrath et al., 2019; Roberts, 2020). Each interview was scheduled for 50 minutes to complete. The allotted time enabled me to confirm that recording tools are working effectively, take detailed notes, and allowed the respondent time to answer questions thoroughly. I exercised care by pausing before moving through questions and worked hard to avoid any personal action that might skew the participant's response. I also refrained from questions encouraging off-topic responses; however, did not restrict participants' ability to engage in in-depth discussions of opinions or views.

Interviews represented the primary source of data collection; however, other supporting information may strengthen and further substantiate captured data. Methods triangulation involves including different methods and forms of data to achieve a dense description, converging on meaning, and exploring multiple aspects of a phenomenon (Hayashi et al., 2019). Another support for face-to-face interview data was delivered through reviewing company reports, understanding established key performance indicators (KPIs), and published reports displaying performance against established metrics. By evaluating all available data thus surrounding the topic, the researcher can achieve data triangulation and saturation and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I reviewed other data sources to ensure methodology triangulation and incorporated other relevant company documents, reports, or online information to achieve data saturation. Consequently, it was also critical to validate the accuracy of incorporated instruments and data sources in the investigation, thus enhancing the research’s quality and to thoroughly investigate the researched phenomenon.

Substantiating interview data collection techniques was essential to increasing the research's reliability and validity. Therefore, I enlisted measures to standardize methods to drive consistency and maintain defined processes for the study's duration to enhance the research's replicability and rigor (Hayashi et al., 2019). After completing and transcribing interviews, member checking via follow-up interviews validated responses and increased the reliability of collected views. In addition, once coding and developing themes, I shared summaries for member checking with select participants to confirm the interpretation of responses and ensured their authenticity.

Data Organization Technique

In evaluating and planning the process of collecting, documenting, transcribing, and confirming interviews and information from multiple data sources, qualitative researchers must give upfront attention to plans for organizing various collected data. Sound data organization methods ease data access and tracking aiding its review and analysis (Pathiranage et al., 2020). The effort may involve incorporating various data collection and storage tools beyond the abilities of the researcher. For example, researchers might consider electronic folders, software, soft copies of data, or other methods to capture, track, and organize qualitative data (Pathiranage et al., 2020). Various tools provide the ability to collect, categorize, sort, and filter interview responses, observer notes, recordings, videos, and related documents. In addition, the soft versions of the transcribed data provide import capabilities to various qualitative data coding software offerings allowing for efficient theme development (O'Kane et al., 2021). I used a variety of tools to collect, organize, and securely store data. These tools enhanced data access and transfer efficiency, participant protection, and confidentiality through password protection and data encryption capabilities.

In addition to engaging tools for executing the research, there is a defined structure for cataloging and identifying stored data. Researchers can use unique identification numbers to maintain the anonymity of studied organizations and participants (Pathiranage et al., 2020). I did not mention the subject organization's name, referring to it as the multi-national corporation (MNC). I also referred to the participating managers one through six as MGR1 to MGR5. Each interview received a software-generated date, timestamp, and record of duration. I stored transcribed data in redundant locations such as a password-encrypted hard drive, a secure cloud-based drive, and all hard copies of data in a secured filing cabinet where they will remain for 5 years.

Overall, I extended special care to following established data organization practices restricting the ability to identify any party having contributed to or participated in the study. Researchers should use data protection techniques that safeguard anonymity, by removing identifiers, using pseudonyms, and other process for hiding the data-participant relationship (Surmiak, 2018). In addition to the forementioned process to conceal participant identities, I securely stored data and all related study documentation for 5 years. I also implemented a schedule for performing an annual audit on the data's location to ensure ongoing security measures and certify its ongoing safety. Following the 5th anniversary, I must destroy all data and documentation associated with the study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers might use numerous data sources to sufficiently evaluate a particular phenomenon. Methods triangulation in research uses multiple methods of data collection and analysis (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The correlation process may include people, research findings, theoretical conclusions, and data collection methods. The facilitation of data saturation, an exhaustive effort enabling other researchers to perform like studies, establishes a solid base of information for researchers to build.

The primary data source, interviews, requires transcribing the information to a format researchers can effectively analyze and evaluate. The transcription process has multiple stages (a) correctly capturing the information provided, (b) thoroughly translating data to transcribed documents, and (c) confirming the transcribed data through participant verification. I operated within this practical structure to safeguard the information provided by participants to address the research question. Therefore, I recognized the significance of developing and implementing a solid plan for generating a document to feed the coding and theme development phase.

After capturing and transcribing interview information, researchers should invest in gaining familiarity with the data. The initial part of the data analysis process involves thoroughly reading the translated document of each interview to gain a sense of shared ideas, concepts, or similarities in responses across the participants (Creswell, 2014). At this stage, I performed a line-item review to identify any issues with the transcription for correctness, gaps, and beginning concepts contained in the data. Ultimately, my process of verifying contents ensured a correct transcribed document offering a solid base for the remaining phases of the data analysis process.

Once data verification is complete, the researcher narrows identified concepts into themes and category coding-like ideas. The underlying coding function entails assessing a reasonable segment of captured respondent data such as a word, paragraph, or page and assigning it with a summarizing label or phrase (Clark & Vealé, 2018; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Common responses appear when analyzing the codes, allowing grouping them into a smaller set of notions. The noted subsets provide the path to categorizing the ideas into derived themes and enabling an overall evaluation of findings. I used an Excel spreadsheet to log themes, group ideas and concepts, and find insights and meaning in the data. The process was replicated across all interview transcripts cataloging common coded response concepts and consolidating them into a narrow set of themes representing the entire interview participant population. Excel provided the mechanism to sort coded responses across interviews assigned to a specific theme offering consolidation process for drafting the analysis.

A researcher's familiarity with a studied environment or phenomenon poses a challenge associated with potential bias in the coding process and inappropriate assumptions regarding discovered themes. Maintaining an unbiased lens and pure assessment of transcript data in the coding process is the primary driver for naturally narrowing the focus towards answering the central research question while avoiding external influences (Clark & Vealé, 2018). A repetitive process may help to affirm nonpartiality in assessing concepts, themes, and meaning to reduce personal bias in shaping the interpretation of responses (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Roger et al., 2018). I engaged a secondary coder to perform a duplicate effort to verify codes and potentially offset the bias. Overall, a duplicate coding exercise provided a confirming measure for stabilizing my analysis and improving the study’s reliability. Consequently, the process provided additional support for theme determination and increased the trustworthiness of my decisions and strengthened the study’s findings.

Following the procedures for identifying central themes in the data, researchers narrow the notions into categories more closely, explaining the participants' experiences. The themes connect responses to the research question and deliver necessary support for the resulting assessment (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). I pursued determining the strategic combination of leveraging leadership behavior and HR practices to create an employee experience that drives performance through engagement and inclusion. Therefore, the desired outcome of the coding process was identfiying themes supporting an answer to the central question, the conceptual framework, and offering strategies associated with leadership, policies, practices, and other organizational support responsible for jointly driving engagement and inclusion and leading to increased performance.

In addition to a personal evaluation and interpretation of interview responses, there are other methods for validating interpretations through actual reviews by the participants. The member checking process allows the participants to review interview summaries to confirm the researcher's interpretation of their responses (Guillemin et al., 2018; Houghton et al., 2013; Råheim et al., 2016). Though allowing participants to review and challenge my interpretation has questionable value, I took measures in the summarizing process to allow volunteering participants to review responses and offer feedback relating to my interpretation of interview responses. Overall, using the strategy of member checking summaries, a synthesis of interview responses based on the researcher's interpretation, may not offer the desired benefits of others like secondary coders in strengthening the study's reliability or validity.

Reliability and Validity

When evaluating the quality of research, its reliability and validity are critical factors for the researcher to consider. Researchers enhance a study's trustworthiness through high levels of rigor in their investigation of the phenomenon (Houghton et al., 2013; Mackieson et al., 2019). Rigor in research helps ensure an exhaustive investigation of the research problem enhancing its quality and the general application of findings. Procedures associated with rigor in research involve: 1) prolonged engagement, persistent observation, detailed description, 2) negative case analysis, 3) peer review and debriefing, 4) developing coding systems, 5) clarifying research bias, 6) member checking, 7) data triangulation, and 8) external audits (Morse, 2015). These methods used to enhance reliability and validity support increasing the trustworthiness of research. Therefore, the researcher enhances its quality by incorporating verification measures in each study stage.

Reliability

Researcher techniques, care, and vigor contribute to the reliability of study results. Research's reliability describes the degree to which findings maintain consistency over time while correctly reflecting the views of the entire population, relating to the ability of other researchers to reproduce findings in other settings (Carminati, 2018). I implemented processes in each research stage to aid its future replication. Overall, the processual approach to the qualitative study assisted in maintaining consistency and enabled other researchers to execute and validate methods to generate like and dependable outcomes.

Dependability

To aid in the replication abilities, researchers should offer a blueprint for incorporating specific protocols to provide a path for the reproduction and dependability of findings. The dependability of a study occurs when the researcher provides enough detail for replication, like clear descriptions of used criteria (Campbell et al., 2020; O'Kane et al., 2021). Well-defined methods offer structured models for future researchers to follow. A thorough set of protocols can increase a study's reliability (Yin, 2018). Starting with participant selection and interview, I incorporated defined protocols to preserve consistency throughout the research project. Establishing a plan, a robust set of interview questions, and a solid strategy for performing interviews is key to producing reliable results (Roberts, 2020). Also, along with interview transcription, I defined and executed a solid plan for incorporating various other data types and sources. The researcher's utilization of previously described methods, such as data triangulation, positively impacts reliability (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Additional measures like double-checking the researcher's relationship coding may boost the study’s reliability through an inter-coder reliability test where two researchers draw on reflexivity bringing distinct perspectives to the coding process and potentially increasing the strength of themes and concepts (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). I engaged supplemental measures such as transcript validation, member checking, and a duplicate coder to confirm identified themes in the coding process, alleviate bias-related concerns, and confirm convergence on the central research question. In summary, each of these measures relates to creating, guiding, and double-checking research work to undergird the reliability of findings while providing a blueprint for other researchers to follow in executing a quality project.

Validity

Unlike the straightforward approaches in quantitative studies, achieving certain levels of validity in qualitative research may require multiple processes and tests. Validity in qualitative analysis is the extent to which the study's implications are substantiated, correctly characterized, and legitimize the phenomenon (Hayashi et al., 2019). The diverse methods and techniques in qualitative research produce challenges suggesting that adopting a sound procedural approach is beneficial. I validated results from multiple perspectives to strengthen findings and increase the quality of research and trustworthiness. Therefore, like other study components requiring multi-faceted approaches, producing valid results entailed a similar strategy.

Offering a transparent description of methods supports researchers in delivering an accurate and trustworthy representation of the study. The emphasis on qualitative research trustworthiness has resulted in a transition of terminology regarding rigor, reliability, validity, and generalizability to credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Carminati, 2018; FitzPatrick, 2019; Morse, 2015). I incorporated measures facilitating the research's general applicability, replicability, external validity, and soundness through triangulation, overlapping methods, and other audit types. These efforts served to enhance the trustworthiness of findings and the quality of research.

Credibility

Research credibility represents opinions regarding the degree of accuracy of conclusions taken from collected data. Actions like prolonged engagement, persistent observation, data triangulation, and member checks support the study's credibility (Dodgson, 2019). Researchers may use one or more methods to build confidence in the data and its interpretation. As previously highlighted, I integrated several of these processes into the data analysis phase of the study.

Confirmability

A study displays confirmability when its findings can be confirmed by other researchers objectively evaluating similar concerns. Confirmability exists when a study shows consistency, a lack of bias in data analysis, detailed rationale for inclusion and exclusion decisions, and a clear audit trail for actions taken (Campbell et al., 2020; Houghton et al., 2013; O'Kane et al., 2021). Efforts to clearly define processes associated with collecting and double-checking data offer a task stream for others to follow to confirm outcomes. I identified and followed defined boundaries associated with this study to enhance the ability to confirm its results.

Transferability

In qualitative research, transferable is the ability to apply the findings beyond the parameters of the core project to other similar constructs or situations. A study's transferability addresses the ability to assess findings regarding other contexts by identifying specific criteria or demographics and defined boundaries (Campbell et al., 2020; Coker, 2022; Hayashi et al., 2019; O'Kane et al., 2021). Defining and executing solid research procedures might enable a path to evaluating other similar situations. I ensured the study's execution remained within stated boundaries and followed stated criteria offering direction to other researchers concerning applicability of used standards to future research.

Data Saturation

Data saturation represents another method supporting the quality of research and its content. A researcher achieves data saturation when they have (a) found enough information to reproduce the study, (b) exhausted the ability to obtain new information, and (c) identified all themes or codes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Failure to achieve data saturation may negatively affect the validity of study outcomes. However, researchers must temper their saturation efforts to not detract from other quality measures in qualitative research, such as credibility, diversity, conformability, trustworthiness, and reliability (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). I controlled the potential conflict by managing the balance between an exhaustive investigation of the phenomenon through available data sources and remaining confined to established boundaries. Furthermore, researchers add credibility to their data collection and saturation efforts by providing a thorough review and evaluation of the process used in the study (Karagiozis, 2018). I provided detailed strategies, justification, and the benefits of their use to provide additional confidence associated with the derived findings. Overall, I took responsibility for incorporating valuable information that positively contributed to results while not clouding the process and diminishing the findings' strength.

Transition and Summary

This section provided information regarding specific actions taken to conduct the research. The restatement of the study’s purpose explains the researcher’s importance, role, methods, and actions in executing the research. The subtopic that thoroughly describes the general population of potential participants, the selection process, and the selected sample’s significance offered assurances of the researcher's ability to derive valuable insights into the research question. The research method and design subtopic provided an extended discussion and justification for the qualitative single case study selection. The population and sampling section highlighted the purposeful effort concerning identifying and narrowing the participant pool. An evaluation of proposed practices to ensure ethical research marked the transition to sections associated with data collection. The collection subtopics started with data collection instruments and then continued with techniques, organization, and plans for its analysis. The closing sections described procedures used by the researcher to enhance reliability and validity throughout the study's conduction. Finally, in section 3 I presented my data analysis summary and the study’s findings.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The differences in remote versus collocated work environments make strategies for influencing employee engagement a topic of particular interest. It is extremely important for leaders of companies to uncover clear strategies for how to increase the effect of inputs on positively shaping POS and increasing employee engagement and performance. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies leaders of remote, diverse teams with high engagement used to improve team performance. Leaders develop conducive organizational climates creating positive employee perceptions directly affecting engagement levels (Eviana et al., 2022). On the other hand, managers separated from their employees by distance resulting in limited face-to-face contact, may possess a diminished ability to influence the employee's perception of the organization and employee engagement. A supportive human resource strategy deemed voluntary positively impacts POS and engagement (Shanock et al., 2019). In addition, organizational elements of job resources help employees achieve their work objectives and influence POS encouraging growth, development, and work engagement (Ott et al., 2019). Whereas each of these elements may individually influence POS and employee behavioral outcomes, reducing a remote leader's influence may alter employee behavioral outcomes. Therefore, the optimal strategy for promoting positive POS and employee engagement and making the most significant impact in remote workforces may require incorporating all aspects.

I explored strategies by interviewing five remote field managers of a nationally operating U.S. corporation possessing both collocated and remote workforces. The interviewees participated voluntarily and were selected from a purposeful sampling of managers with the expertise and knowledge to inform the study's results sufficiently. Participants agreed to participate by responding to an email invitation acknowledging consent and returning a signed consent form. The interviews, executed via Microsoft Teams, consisted of nine open-ended questions seeking responses and explaining strategies to promote employee engagement. I also used follow-up questions and prompts to encourage participants to share broad descriptions of their approach. I allowed 3 business days for participants to review their transcripts and validate their interview responses. Following transcript validation, I coded documents by identifying concepts and themes and summarized the findings. Codes were validated by a secondary review. To enhance the reliability and validity of collected data, I incorporated member checking, allowing participants to review interview summaries to confirm my interpretations of responses. The findings determined that participants concurred that positive employee engagement increases performance and particular strategies can influence these outcomes. Strategies remote leaders used to drive positive employee engagement included (a) an adaptive leadership style; (b) fairly facilitating human resources policies, practices, and resource allocation; and (c) the use of collaborative work structures. These qualitative aspects align with prior studies on the importance of shaping perceived organizational support resulting in increased employee engagement and performance. The following section contains a detailed discussion of the findings and my analysis.

Presentation of the Findings

The study's central question was what strategies leaders of remote, diverse teams used to improve employee engagement. I used Microsoft Teams to conduct semistructured interviews to capture data for the study and facilitate national coverage. The participant pool involved a purposeful sampling of managers of diverse teams who have succeeded in engagement and inclusion, resulting in high team performance. To support the information captured and documented from interviews, I also reviewed company information regarding manager training, corporate leadership and coaching model components, and other practices regarding engagement and inclusion. I ensured the confidentiality of participants by assigning each manager codes P1 through P5. I achieved data saturation after four interviews and completed a fifth to validate the introduction of no additional concepts. The initial step of the data analysis process involved thoroughly reading interview transcripts to identify and notate shared ideas, concepts, or similarities in participant responses. Yin (2018) described the procedure of working data from the ground up, where the initial list provides the researcher with a list of concepts to consolidate ideas into a smaller set of like responses. I assigned responses to particular codes and consolidated common responses into a smaller set of notions. Three primary themes supporting strategy emerged during the data analysis (a) leadership behavior; (b) fairly facilitating human resources policy, practices, and resource allocation; and (c) the use of various collaborative work structures. The themes linked back to the central research question and delivered necessary evidence to support the ability to arrive at certain conclusions.

Theme 1: Leadership Behavior

The primary theme contained two subthemes: the need for an adaptive leadership style and flexible communication methods. The responses of all participants suggested that leaders must adopt different leadership styles enabling individualized relationships and communication with their team members. Regarding the need for an adaptive leadership style, P1, P2, P3, and P5 all agreed that managers must take an individualized approach to interface with their associates. P2 stated, “just because my management style is one way, it does not mean that it is the best way across the board.” P2, P4, and P5 explained that they use an assortment of styles when interfacing and communicating with various team members. P1, P2, and P5 highlighted the significance of understanding and engaging the differences across various team members. P2 stated, "making sure that every individual is treated differently -because they are individuals.” Participants described this level of detail in communication as paving the way to giving associates a name and face and not just being a ghost. P3 and P5 highlighted the importance of giving “a voice” to all associates. Lastly, regarding the need for an adaptive leadership style, P2 stated the relevance of empowering team members in their jobs.

The second subtheme was related to communication with associates. All participants agreed that remote leadership has different communication requirements and provides managers with unique challenges. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 emphasized that manager contact must be purposeful and more present with their employees through regular, consistent, and deliberate communication. P1 stated, most importantly, being “available for them in the times that they need.” P5 emphasized the importance of an “open door” policy. Participants expounded that more deliberate and regular communication supports developing a joint mission, emphasizing, and focusing on common goals and a shared vision. P1 and P3 expressly referred to achieving these common objectives as accomplishing “buy-in.” All five participants also highlighted that a significant component of achieving the buy-in is developing personal, individualized relationships and building a solid rapport with each team member. P1 highlighted it as "treating everybody fair and getting to know his team.” P3 explained that he makes contact and communication purely to engage in more personal conversations with associates instead of just work-related ones. P4 stated, "I try to learn about their families, hobbies, aspirations, and what makes them tick." P5 described it as extending beyond a “surface relationship” and “knowing the names of their wife and kids” while maintaining a proper personal-professional balance. P1, P3, and P5 all underscored that developing the relationship enhanced and allowed for open communication, giving constructive criticism, receiving feedback from the team, and creating an environment where associates could share their thoughts. P2, P3, and P5 agreed that open communication where constructive feedback and coaching could occur enabled solid performance-enhancing efforts where public recognition could drive results. P4 explained that you can also drive team engagement through non-business-focused team events – "more of a pleasure thing." Overall, due to vital role that leadership behaviors and communication play in driving employee engagement, leaders must find an appropriate mix and balance to maximize the effectiveness of their manager-employee interaction.

Theme 2: Fairly Facilitating Human Resource (HR) Policy, Practices, and Resource Allocation

Participant responses suggested that managers must bring to light the value and awareness of what is happening behind the scenes with human resource policies, practices, and the organization's commitment to providing associates with the tools and resources they need. P5 referred to the position as being “the middle guy.” Furthermore, participant responses suggested that highlighting items provided by HR support and the organization shows a commitment to the employees' success. P1 stated, "The organization is personified through you as a leader.” P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 stated similar comments that HR related policies and practices serve as a solid behavior guideline, and the HR team functions as a professional support structure for managers' interface with their associates. Though participants did not acknowledge HR policies and practices as direct drivers of engagement, they did realize the structure provided through that portion of the organization enabled them to create an environment of fairness where associates could experience equitable, fair treatment. P2 stated, “HR policies provide a baseline for ensuring everybody is treated fair and equally.” P3 explained that the tone set by the organization in HR strengthens the strategies he has in place. P5 described it as a “common sense” factor ensuring individuals are “treated with respect and the right way.” Participants also acknowledged that the support of HR provides a framework for ensuring performance. P5 highlighted that a lack of timely, equitable, and fair performance management is a "killer of engagement." Therefore, it is critical for leaders to possess knowledge of policies and available resources enabling them to execute their role delivering fairness and equity to all team members.

Conversely, fair resource allocation plays a much more prominent role in supporting engagement strategies. Participants stressed the extreme importance of employees operating in a remote environment to have the necessary tools and resources at hand to do the job. For example, P3 stated that having the necessary tools in a remote environment is "critical more so than if we were in a typical office setting or a brick-and-mortar building.” In addition, P3 stated,

> I consider my team a primary customer, and I want to deliver the same first-class experience as my external customers. Readily providing them with the resources they require to be more efficient and effective when performing their jobs is the way to do that.

The sentiment expressed by P3 highlights the importance of managers placing the needs of their team members as a top priority. Overall, managers serving their employees to same extent they would a customer displays the degree of care for the employee’s success that may be reciprocated in their engagement level and performance.

Participants acknowledged that managers remain in the driver's seat of ensuring associates have what they need starting with understanding the employee's perceived need, whether training, tools, or other resources. P2 stated, “you can achieve engagement and build a team when everyone gets an equal shake.” P2 and P5 pointed back to communication as a component of the fair allocation of resources and giving employees the tools they need to do their jobs effectively. P2 stated, “once we understand an employee needs a tool to do their job more effectively or efficiently, we will give it to you." Providing necessary tools enabling them to perform their job functions more effectively drives positive sentiments that might lead to other positive outcomes. P3 identified resource allocation fairness as a "builder of trust between the employee, the manager, and the organization." P3, P4, and P5 offered various descriptions of how fair resource allocation displays an organizational commitment to team members. P2 stated, "when knowing we [managers] have the support of the organization, we are better capable of displaying the organizational leaders' commitment to its people." P3 described the organization's commitment as "putting their money where their mouth is," and acting as well as speaking and showing that an employee's voice is heard regarding tools and resources assisting their work. P3, P4, and P5 also provided examples of how the company's commitment may translate to an associate's feeling that the organization cares about his success. P3 stated, "it is one way to make them feel valued." P5 expressed it as a display of "senior leadership caring." P3, P4, and P5 explained that employees possessing the necessary training and the required equipment drive their morale through feeling supported in their job function. P5 stated, "I think the path to engagement falls squarely on the shoulders of the managers and leaders of the organization." Overall, elements of organizational justice cannot be overlooked regarding their role in promoting employee engagement. However, the leader's execution of these elements represents a significant factor in influencing employee perceptions of fair and equitable treatment,

Theme 3: Collaborative Work Structures

Teams covering large geographic areas may benefit from implementing creative work structures for how the team functions that enhance communication, responsiveness, skills development, and knowledge sharing. Participants unanimously agreed that driving engagement tends to be a two-pronged approach: (a) driven in the one-on-one relationship between the manager and the employee, and (b) through the employee's interface with team members spotlighting the importance of managers developing a team culture of engagement and inclusion within their group. The group exchange offered an opportunity for mutual learning, accountability, success, and emotional attachment.

Though teams have a manager at the helm with two to four supporting field supervisors, often the work requires a more empowered environment with overall shared leadership not limited to managers. P2, P3, and P5 each described needing a team supporting mechanism like employing measures involving shared leadership or an environment of empowerment. P4 described a "relaxed environment that empowers tenured associates to assume leadership roles." P2 has implemented a structure where, regardless of formal team alignments, manager contact information is shared with all team members who then have open access to any manager they feel can support them. P3 stated, "an employee may feel more comfortable talking to one manager and not another so sometimes to accomplish what we need we must put our egos aside." A team member's ability to request and receive support from the manager or teammate making them feel most comfortable may provide an arena for open communication, expressing concerns, and learning.

Participants all accepted the idea that due to an array of experiences existing across units and ongoing geographical challenges, often in-field training occurs through exercises fostering knowledge sharing. P2 stated, "protocols are learned in the classroom during training and designed to guide us; executing the actual procedure is learned, improved upon, and perfected over time by doing the job alongside others.” P2, P3, P4, and P5 each discussed using opportunities requiring group or team effort to grow knowledge among associates by ensuring the group has an appropriate mix of experienced and new associates. P4 explained that group settings offer opportunities to “share ideas back and forth.” To encourage interaction, P3 stated, “I try to involve the team or multiple members in functions as much as possible.” P2, P3, P4, and P5 also stated that this is practical one-on-one, facilitating less experienced associates to receive more detailed in-field/hands-on/live training through various mentor programs partnering them with a high-performing tenured associate. P2 stated, "if all my senior guys left, they would take a lot of valuable experience and information." Participant responses highlighted the importance of interface and collaboration to promote knowledge sharing and skills development.

Participants explained that newer associates are less experienced or knowledgeable of more difficult tasks when not having performed them requires someone capable of teaching or explaining a situation. P2 stated, “associates cannot necessarily perform tasks or services that they have not experienced or seen.” P2 and P3 recommended developing and establishing *subject matter experts*, someone beyond their core management team to contact when needing support or understanding how to perform a particular task. P3 also used the more experienced members in a peer relationship role by delegating specific tasks to them for execution across the team to serve as an enhancer of peer-to-peer collaboration and development for high-potential associates.

Overall, P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 agreed that the manager alone is not the only driver of engagement and inclusion within the team; they must instill a sentiment and culture of engagement and inclusion within the team for peer reinforcement to occur that promotes the sentiment. P3 stated, “the team receives things differently when it is not always the manager driving them to achieve business objectives.” P4 stated, “when achieving buy-in to a certain culture, members also look out for how the team can succeed.” P5 called it “a culture of engagement and inclusion” pervasive in the team. Participants described the “culture” as secondary support from the internal team fueled by fruitful knowledge exchange, collaboration, teamwork, and personal connection -back to the original term buy-in.

Lastly, though all participants acknowledged that leadership behaviors were the most prominent factor required in fostering engagement among employees of remote teams, a mix of all three variables (leadership behaviors, HR policies, and fair resource allocation) is critical. P5 stated, “leadership behavior is an umbrella to all three factors, whereas a remote environment is an entirely different beast.” P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 agreed the three factors (leadership behavior, HR policies and practices, and fair resource allocation) are highly instrumental in shaping the perception of the organization. Participants agreed that an employee’s perception of the organization encourages their engagement, an emotional attachment that further results in their work commitment and performance. Their engagement, representing their happiness, results in greater participation, connection, and improves work-related outcomes. P5 stated, "engaged employees are happy employees, and happy employees do their job. P3 stated, "at the end of the day, good inclusion and good engagement equals good performance." These participant responses regarding the three elements of (a) leadership behavior; (b) human resource policy and allocation of resources; and (c) empowered, collaborative structures, offered valuable insight related to the research question regarding strategies used to drive employee engagement in a remote environment.

Thematic Relevance to the Literature

The data analysis in this study uncovered three themes supporting a manager's employee engagement strategy: (a) leadership behavior; (b) fairly facilitating HR policy, practices, and resource allocation; and (c) the use of collaborative work structures. Individually, these themes are relevant in the current literature concerning their influence on perceived organizational support resulting in positive employee engagement. The study's five participants offered responses explaining using the three elements in personal strategies to drive employee engagement and improve performance. The participant responses described concepts involving adaptive leadership styles, various forms of leader-member exchange, human resources practices, fair resource allocation, team-member interaction, and group dynamics.

Theme 1

The participant's descriptions of leadership behaviors highlighted two primary concepts, an adaptive leadership style and communication practices. Research has determined that POS alone, without a supporting factor such as a leadership influence, does not directly affect employee engagement. The impact of specific antecedents highlights evidence that the leadership-POS relationship jointly positively influences employee engagement (Eviana et al., 2022). The relationship between leadership behaviors and the organization's support is direct to work engagement and a positive route to performance factors (Koekemoer et al., 2021). Research highlights the value of the influence of leaders on employee perceptions of the organization. The findings imply that managers situationally adjusting leadership styles may produce different outcomes concerning shaping employees' perceptions of organizational support.

The need for an adaptive leadership style highlighted the benefit of a manager's individualized approach to interaction with different team members. Managers can adjust their leadership style to align behaviors with the situation or the associate's personality (Boogard, 2020). There is a high degree of success when applying leadership theories, principles, and styles correctly throughout organizations and teams (Vasilescu, 2019). For example, research suggests that a transformational leadership style supporting POS positively affects employee performance (Wahyu, 2019). By adjusting their leadership approach to align with the specific situation, managers can increase their effectiveness in driving desired results. Therefore, leaders may benefit from gaining familiarity with various leadership styles, their influences, and the outcomes they generate.

Leader-member exchange displaying fair and equitable treatment may positively influence employee behavioral outcomes. Intentional and fair interaction stimulates POS, increasing a sense of belongingness, perceived value, and emotional connection (Kyei-

Poku, 2019). Organizational leaders leverage diversity by fostering an inclusive culture where the enhanced collaboration produces an employer-employee connection maximizing full participation and contribution (Shore et al., 2018). Inclusive leadership is an intervening mechanism of leader-member exchange and extends beyond economic factors involving mutual support, commitment, loyalty, and strong emotional connection (Javed et al., 2018). Therefore, leaders that equitably embrace all team members can drive a positive individual commitment, joint care, and productive teamwork.

Managers should be flexible in their exchange and dealing with certain situations. Situational leadership theory suggests that managers understand situations before responding with the appropriate measures versus applying a sole action across the board (McCleskey, 2014). Leadership contingency theory highlights the dependency of leader success on the ability to apply the appropriate style addressing the specific situation (Popp & Hadwich, 2018). In addition, leadership rank and various formal and informal authority types may require different styles (Buble et al., 2014). Benefits derive from managers who develop relationships with associates beyond those focusing strictly on business outcomes. An inclusive management leadership style focuses on understanding motivations, investing in people, and balancing teams (Moore et al., 2020). Employees in organizations that have achieved an inclusive climate readily recognize their efforts and reciprocate with higher degrees of affective commitment (Y. Li et al., 2019). Overall, all participants described how depending on which employee they were interacting with, they matched the employee interface with an appropriate style or behavior. These methods coincided with findings in recent articles suggesting that employees need respect as individuals and have an equal voice regarding their opinions. Having a voice creates an arena where employees develop feelings of inclusion and an appreciation for their thoughts, opinions, and efforts.

The participants also emphasized the need for increased levels of communication. All participants in my study unanimously agreed that remote environments require various types of more consistent communication. Recognizing the significance of effective leader-member communication, researchers developed a measurement instrument, Perceived Effectiveness of the Leader's Communication, incorporating and measuring essential factors such as communication frequency, predictability, responsiveness, clarity, and the mode (Newman et al., 2020). My study's participants described how they have engaged in consistent and candid open two-way communication with their teams. The communication displayed their availability and support, enhanced the relationships, and improved team assimilation. These relationships involved achieving psychological safety or the ability to share opinions and views with others, work group participation, access to necessary information and resources, belongingness, feelings of respect, and being a valued member of the group and organization (Shore et al., 2018). The necessary communication content is a mix of personal and professional attempting to foster a personal relationship and understand the employee's emotional needs. Leaders who are effective listeners and strive to understand the differences among team members establish corporate allies by engaging diverse employees (Hunter, 2020). Practicing mindfulness when communicating with team members displays an awareness of the individual's behaviors, emotions, and potentially external influencing factors

(Pattnaik & Jena, 2020). Developing cultural intelligence and trust levels through formal and informal communications drives employee engagement in remote/virtual teams (Shaik & Makhecha, 2019b). Participants emphasized the importance of developing a solid personal relationship and achieving buy-in or an emotional connection to the team. The primary importance of the professional message was its consistency in re-enforcing the team's mission, vision, and joint objectives.

Theme 2

Fairly facilitating HR policy, practices, and fair resource allocation though potentially considered indirect influence also aligns with the literature concerning employee engagement. Participants unanimously agreed that HR policies provide a solid guideline and structure for them to operate by providing a foundation of fairness in how they interact and manage their team; however, they highlighted the significance of their role in communication and administration. POS mediates human resources practices positively, influencing employee engagement (Djatmiko et al., 2020). On the other hand, outcomes of HR practices heavily rely on leadership alignment and communication (Buengeler et al., 2018). Findings in the literature have determined a relationship between HR policies and employee engagement and consider it one of the primary factors in shaping an employee's opinion of the organization. This study's participants acknowledged that policies do not operate solely on their own and are developed, communicated, and administered by organizational leadership. Therefore, the success or failure of the leaders, the "middleman," to effectively support, communicate, and implement policy was a crucial determiner of the outcome of practices.

Fair resource allocation or elements of organizational justice such as information sharing, provision of tools and equipment, and respectful exchange displays a level of organizational commitment. Participants' responses confirmed the significance of their responsibilities in ensuring fair resource allocation, defining it as “critical” to achieving positive employee engagement. Managers that foster a positive perception of the organization affect employee work commitment, performance, and job satisfaction by enhancing the reciprocal employer-employee relationship of mutual investment (Sungu et al., 2019). In addition, organizational justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional justice) influences POS encouraging innovative work behavior and employees’ affective commitment (Nazir et al., 2019). More specifically, research has determined that POS generated by positive opinions of distributive justice is a predictor of group employee engagement levels (Sunyoto et al., 2021). Furthermore, procedural justice and POS significantly impact affective commitment to good job performance (Tjahjono et al., 2020). Finally, the combination of distributive and procedural justice and POS is a driver of engagement and extra-role performance where employees extend themselves beyond their core role due to opinions of being treated with favorable treatment by managers and the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2019). Overall, researchers have found a strong connection between employees’ perceived organizational fairness and work behaviors.

Leaders exercising fair treatment and resource allocation procedures can generate positive outcomes through employee perceptions of good treatment reciprocated in their efforts to benefit the organization (Huntsman et al., 2020). Due to the potential influence on employee perceptions, HR representatives should exercise extreme care when implementing changes to avoid disrupting a positive organization-employee exchange relationship (Zhao et al., 2020). Participants agreed that emphasis on providing teams with the necessary resources to perform their job displayed a commitment to their functioning at their highest potential, enhancing work-life balance and resulting in increased compensation. Also, partnering the resources and tools with attainable goals and a fair reward system furthered team members’ trust in their manager's intentions and drove enthusiasm toward work, additional focus, and creativity.

Theme 3

Creating collaborative work structures that grow individual awareness and supports teamwork and member exchange through a cooperative environment promotes team interaction, knowledge sharing, skills growth encouraged, and a broadening of perspectives. Manager practicing inclusive behaviors that influence individual and team relationships has significantly favorable effects on perceived organizational support and employee innovative work behavior (Qi et al., 2019). Influential leaders who create inclusive environments foster relationships where employees feel psychologically safe, empowered, and possess a solid work group identification (Shore & Chung, 2021). These managers of remote teams have successfully broken down silos and promoted collaboration, information sharing, and an arena for relaxed social interaction (S. Edwards, 2020). Hawthorne's studies illustrated outcomes of spontaneous collaboration where team members develop strong feelings of affiliation, trust through interactions, and a mutual dependence (Zoller & Muldoon, 2018). Also, technological mechanisms like virtual communities of practice (VCoPs) foster learning and knowledge sharing between employees, increasing participant engagement (Haas et al., 2021). Participants discussed utilizing all potential opportunities for team members to learn from each other, supporting individual employee development, engagement, and teamwork. Overall, the relationships established stimulate creativity, facilitate the exchange of expertise, and promote knowledge increases, resulting in increased team capacity and performance.

Managers may enhance team development through task and authority delegation and empowerment practices. Practicing a participative leadership approach involving subordinate team members in managing and decision-making boost employees' sense of ownership and promotes the integration of personal and organizational goals (Wang et al., 2022). Inclusive team climates enable a participative or democratic leadership style to maximize group and organization orientation (Ali et al., 2022). Leaders practicing and implementing an empowered structure influence work engagement (Arshad et al., 2021). The leadership behavior's impact on perceived organizational effects psychological empowerment drives work engagement and service-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (Meira & Hancer, 2021). Participants emphasized the importance of their team's ability to achieve an empowered work structure based on its support of the geographically distanced nature of remote teams. Overall, managers experiencing growing diversity within their teams have taken it upon themselves to create an environment of awareness and inclusiveness where everyone's contribution is valued, and differences are appreciated. Through team projects and selective partnering, they have enhanced team collaboration to forge more interfaces among diverse individuals. Creating a familiarity and comfort level among team members has driven understanding and tolerance of differences fostering an acknowledgment, incorporation of diverse perspectives, and integrated decision-making.

Relevance to the Conceptual Framework

Derived from social exchange theory, Eisenberger's organization support theory (OST) provided the basis for this study's conceptual framework. Whereas researchers have developed numerous theories to evaluate various types of peer-peer employee exchange, the emphasis of OST is to explain the employer-employee relationship. The underlying premise of OST is perceived organizational support (POS), is essentially an employee's perception of how the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being, influencing their work behaviors. Eisenberger (2020) presented and discussed an adapted model with specific antecedents (leadership, human resource policies and procedures, and fair resource allocation) as influencers of employee perceptions of the organization and generators of behavioral outcomes like engagement, work commitment, retention, performance, and job satisfaction. The relevance of the adapted model is that it suggests that employees do not necessarily delineate or separate these inputs from the organization itself and consider them, more specifically the organization and its leadership, a unit when developing their perceptions. The capability of these variables to support shaping the POS highlights the importance of their influence. In addition, the presence of potential influencers insinuates having the opportunity to develop and implement strategy through these aspects to stimulate a positive perception of the organization and produce desired outcomes such as employee engagement and performance. The findings of this study offer an understanding of manager strategies used to influence the flow of relationships in the OST-adapted model.

An essential characteristic of the participants in this study was that they (the manager) and their team members operate in a remote environment separated by distance. Acknowledging a potential difference from collocated environments, the themes identified in the data aligned with input variables discussed by Eisenberger. Though requiring a different frequency, structure, or type of collaboration, leaders confirmed their ability to use these factors in strategies to influence employees' perceptions of the organization positively. First, participants provided specifics regarding behavioral strategies influencing employee perceptions of the organization. Secondly, participants also highlighted their role in facilitating the other two factors, human resources policies and the fair allocation of resources. Lastly, though a derivative of leadership behavior, participants described the need for efforts promoting positive peer exchange. All participants ultimately agreed that effectively maximizing and driving positive employee engagement requires combining these strategies with leadership as the apparent driver. Furthermore, all agreed that achieving engagement through a positive perception of the organization's support would improve performance.

All participants recognized their roles and the factors influencing the employer and employee relationship. All participants acknowledged the need for all three factors (leadership behavior, human resources policy, and fair resource allocation) but considered managers the umbrella and the stewards of all aspects concerning the employee-organization relationship. P3 stated, "leaders set the foundation for everything else, and everything else is built from there.” P1 stated, “we (managers) are their voice to the organization and their representative.” P5 explained, “the responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of the organization's leaders to provide a path to engagement. I am the middleman. The situation is essentially the umbrella of all things.” Participants described efforts they made in some cases differed from managers operating in a collocated environment whereas aspects of their leadership behavior, communication requirements, and need for a collaborative environment escalated. All participants described the remote environment as “more challenging” with a need to adjust organizational and HR practices accordingly.

Aspects of leader-member exchange, like communication and interaction, may influence levels of employee engagement. All participants' strategies highlighted the importance of developing individualized relationships with team associates allowing them to understand and embrace differences. Recognizing the differences and diversity within their teams highlighted the need to adapt their behaviors, communication styles, and opinions to embrace the masses versus a select few. P3 explained,

> Treat every individual as such -as an individual. Just because my management style is one way, it does not mean it is the best way across the board. I also have to understand that there has to be different leadership styles. So, I can not only say the same thing across the board and have the same tone with everybody. I have to use different tones and different conversations with individuals because you acknowledge that - they are a person.

The participants agreed that assuming different leadership behaviors encouraged a more personal and meaningful connection with individual employees. Whereas the need for positive communication practices is significant in any setting, participants emphasized a strategy that included escalated requirements for remote teams separated by distance. P1 through 5 agreed that there is a greater requirement for consistent and frequent communication. All participants further acknowledged that increased levels of communication enabled re-enforcing the vision and rallying members around team objectives.

P1 through P5 emphasized the need for consistent meaningful contact between the manager and the employee. All participants expressed that communication has greater importance in the remote environment, whereas regular contact and communication occurred not only for professional concerns but also to develop a personal relationship understanding and connection with the employee. P4 stated, “Getting to know them, getting to know a little bit about their families, a little bit about their hobbies, and aspirations. What do they want to do? What drives them? Those are the things that I feel are important." The personal relationship paved the way to "buy-in, feedback, open two-way communication, and an environment where everyone has a voice.” P3 explained, “You have to achieve buy-in, so I try to do as many things as I can to promote buy-in because I think that when your team believes in what you are doing, you have that shared goal.” Open communication also reinforced common goals and objectives and promoted an environment where everybody worked off a shared vision.

Human resource policy and practice changes may impact employee engagement levels. All participants incorporated HR policies and practices into their strategy for influencing the perception of the organization by effectively utilizing and communicating HR policies and practices in their interaction with employees. P2 stated, "HR policy and practices communication fall on the managers." All participants described HR as a support structure developing and providing guidelines enabling the equitable handling of associates. P1 stated, “HR can support my strategy by staying within the guidelines and ensuring that I am treating everybody the same and that there is no favoritism amongst the staff. Treat everybody fairly.” P3 stated, “HR sets the tone for how the organization should be run.” P3 further described HR practices as a behind-the-scenes function and not prevalent in shaping the perception of the organization; however, at the forefront acknowledged, “actively using HR guidelines in strategy for interfacing with team members due to policy’s ability to level set things.”

Fair resource allocation offered a more robust component to strategies influencing the employee’s perception of the organization. All participants concurred that providing employees with the tools and resources they need to do their job significantly impacts employees' perception of the organization's support. P3, regarding having the necessary job resources, stated, “It sets you up for success and allows you to accomplish that goal that you are trying to accomplish.” In addition, P1 stated,

> Giving them the tools helps them make their job easier and supports what they are doing. It drives a lot of engagement because they have everything needed to do their job when they do not have the tools, making their jobs more difficult.

Leaders are responsible for getting their employees what they need to do their job effectively and recognize the outcomes and responses associated with doing so. Participants cited several outcomes of fair resource allocation like “building trust," "increasing morale," "displaying an organizational commitment," and "the perception that the organization cares about their success.” P1 further described the organization caring as a concern for employees having a positive well-being and work-life balance. This theme contained a combination of commitments from the organization and the manager. The manager must maintain open communication with associates to understand and be responsive to resource needs; however, the organization must have a dual commitment to provide managers and team members with what they need. The two work jointly in their influence on perceived organizational support and employee engagement.

A third theme that appeared to be an extension of leadership behaviors enabled the availability of a "manager presence” in more than a sole location at a single time. In certain instances, a manager's inability to effectively maintain face-to-face contact with team members mandate leaders to respond innovatively to provide the necessary support. Managers of teams separated by distance may have to implement creative work structures offering similar support as collocated environments. All participants acknowledged a requirement for using different exchange methods in a remote versus collocated workplace. P2 stated, "you do not have a water cooler." P3 stated, "working remotely has a unique set of challenges, so we as leaders have to figure out ways around that.” P1 explained,

> that being a remote worker is sometimes like being out on a desert island and reaching out for help, and nobody answers that line. You are out there alone. So remote situations are much more complex than when you are around coworkers on a day-to-day basis and have access to a leader. Having somebody that can help you through a difficult situation is highly important and is needed in a remote work situation.

As a solution, participants presented various potential solutions that extended coverage across geographies and helped overcome the distance challenges. Participants 2 and 3 described shared leadership situations allowing team members to work beyond formal reporting lines and access any “available” manager or one that they might be “more comfortable” approaching. P2 stated,

> I understand that I am not the best individual for everything, and it is not my job to have all the answers. However, I do have leaders with other answers and experiences that contribute to our (the market’s) leadership style. So, if I have somebody else who is an expert or some subject matter expert, I will rely on them.

Other participants created similar environments of mutual exchange, collaboration, and support. P3 used peer mentoring to promote positive knowledge exchange stating, “I have the team work together as often as possible.” P2 explained that associates could not learn to perform tasks they had not seen. Collaborative structures enable newer associates to receive the support needed and additional training to grow their knowledge base and enhance their ability to do their job and be successful.

Participants emphasized that fostering teamwork and achieving a culture where team members develop personal relationships, mutual caring, and support each other complements the manager's one-on-one efforts to create an emotional connection. The presence and collaboration of the field managers and the associate's team supplemented potential voids in the one-on-one exchange between team leaders and members.

Triangulation of Data

I used methodological triangulation to understand strategies managers of diverse remote teams used to drive employee engagement and increased performance. Cypress (2018) discussed triangulation as a way to gain "a broader understanding of the phenomenon under investigation." Using different data collection sources helps confirm the data and ensure the evaluation is complete (Houghton et al., 2013). I used multiple steps and data sources to evaluate the research question incorporating different data collection approaches within the qualitative method. Including multiple data sources provided a way to validate and confirm information received in my collection efforts.

There were multiple steps in my data collection process. Purposeful sampling supports framing the research question and increases rigor and transparency while limiting results bias (Mackieson et al., 2019). First, I acquired data from the subject organization enabling a pool of candidates representing a purposeful sampling of managers of diverse teams who had achieved high levels of engagement, inclusion, and team performance. The candidate group was determined as the most appropriate for understanding strategy based on their experience, performance, and potential knowledge of the problem. I then conducted 5 semistructured interviews asking open-ended and appropriate follow-up questions to gain clarity and a detailed understanding of responses. Within 24 hours of the interview's completion, I provided participants with a copy of each transcript, allowing them to validate their responses. Once confirming responses, I coded all transcripts highlighting concepts later consolidated into three primary themes. An independent review of coded transcripts confirmed and identified no additional themes. Finally, I summarized my interpretation of the themes and associated response and performed member checking by allowing participants to review and verify the accuracy of my findings.

I engaged in an additional step in the data collection process to confirm the strategies and behaviors presented. I reviewed published organizational programs and training geared toward developing managers' communication and other aspects of their interaction with team members. I also reviewed company expectations for employee and manager conduct. Reviewing these documents allowed me to have an increased understanding of participant responses and confirmed interpreted themes. Finally, methodological triangulation provided me with additional relevant information concluding an exhaustive review and understanding of the remote manager's strategies.

Support information reviewed included:

- The curriculum for the *Emerging Leaders* course
- The curriculum for the *Manager Business Acumen* course
- The curriculum for the *Leadership Essentials* course
- The curriculum for the *Leader-Coach* course
- The content for the *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* training

- Review of recommended Workday and LinkedIn training modules related to leadership.
- The content in the corporate *Leadership Model* and *Coaching Model*

Comparing the information regarding training and published management guidelines created a greater understanding of the concepts presented, discussed, and emphasized in participant responses. The elements of *Leadership and Coaching Models* paralleled the participants' leadership behavior and communication strategies. Both models tend towards frameworks encouraging positive exchange between the manager and the employee. Whether the participants realized it or not, it became evident that they may have subconsciously incorporated the premises of the models into their leadership behavior. Overall, the validated interpretations of responses from the participants drawn from the purposeful sampling of high-performing managers and information regarding corporate leadership behaviors, coaching, and training offer strategies for increasing engagement and performance in remote teams.

Applications to Professional Practice

This single case qualitative study aimed to identify and understand strategies that leaders of diverse remote teams used to drive engagement and inclusion, increasing individual and team performance. My data analysis discovered three themes: adaptive leadership behaviors, effective facilitation of human resource policies and practices, fair resource allocation, and supporting collaborative work structures. The participants thoroughly described strategies involving these three elements that have supported high levels of employee engagement and performance within their teams.

Regarding the first theme, leadership behaviors, participants discussed the importance of exchange, the necessity to develop an individualized relationship with their team members and incorporating personal elements. Managers can better tailor their messaging and support by gaining a deeper understanding of their motivators and personal goals, increasing the employee's emotional connection and buy-in to team objectives. Developing these relationships may require leaders to adjust their behaviors to create an effective exchange by recognizing the individuality and differences among team members. Boogard (2020) described individual leadership styles are not a one size fits all approach but a situational matter where leaders must adapt behaviors to align with circumstances. The participants recognized that they needed to adjust their leadership style to align with the situation to be most effective in these efforts. Therefore, managers must know the various leadership styles as a foundation for incorporating differing elements and improving.

Participants also highlighted the differing requirements for communication in a remote workforce. Newman et al. (2020) found that leaders' perceived communication effectiveness in virtual settings positively influences trust and team performance. Participants stated the need for consistent and more regular communication with team members. Professional content focused on reinforcing central concepts like the team vision and rallying members towards a common goal. On the other hand, personal content generally involves conversations to get to know the team members better and understand their core motivation. In either case, the communication effort centered on achieving group buy-in, goals, and other desired outcomes. Personal communication and relationships enabled managers to increase their cultural intelligence and understanding of team members' differences. Understanding the differences encourages inclusion and participation by all members.

The second theme involved effectively facilitating human resource policy and practices and fair resource allocation. Bush (2020) asserted that leaders initiating structure provides a reliable source of information and insight regarding expected work behaviors and job roles. In addition, leader consideration displays caring, concern for well-being, appreciation, and a willingness to provide various needed support. Participants agreed that HR policies and practices merely provide a structured guideline and baseline for behaviors associated with employee interaction. However, the standardization of rules from a strategic standpoint enabled them to administer policy dealing with their employees fairly. Therefore, managers effective in communicating policies and practices and human resources programs enhanced the relationship with their team members and perceived fair treatment resulting in increased employee engagement, work commitment, and performance.

The second subtheme involved the fair allocation of resources included a component of organizational justice. Employees need to perceive organizational support through their manager, who provides them with the necessary tools, equipment, and development to be more effective in their job. Organizational justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) components positively influence employees' perception of organizational support and the work culture and promote employee reciprocation (Nazir et al., 2019). Participants described the critical nature of providing employees with necessary resources, particularly making them more accessible in a remote environment. Ensuring that team members have the resources they need to perform their job responsibilities displays an organizational commitment to their success, helps build trust and morale, and promotes positive employee work behaviors.

The third theme, building collaborative work structures, supports the distanced relationship between the lead manager and associates as a supplement for reduced face-to-face interaction. A participative leadership approach distributes authority to team members and delegates manager tasks to subordinates involving them in decision-making, strategy development, and issue resolution (Ali et al., 2022). Participants all acknowledged the difficulty and challenges of remote and distanced workforces. To offset their potential lack of presence, they have learned to rely on creative work structures providing more field manager-level interaction and peer-to-peer interface. The structures involve components like shared leadership, overlooking formal reporting lines, and allowing associates to communicate with any manager available or the one they are most comfortable with addressing their concerns. Secondly, teams identified subject matter experts enabling associates seeking knowledge to contact the team member most capable of supporting their efforts or knowledgeable response. Third, creating mentor partnerships encourages an environment where people of potentially different backgrounds interface for knowledge sharing and supporting incremental personal relationship growth. Fourth, generating as much team interaction as possible surrounding professional objectives fostered knowledge sharing and cultural intelligence growth among members. Lastly, creating an engaged and inclusive team culture encouraging peer-to-peer involvement and participation compliments and supplements management's efforts. Overall, the strategy of driving positive engagement and performance becomes a two-pronged approach, including leaders-member exchange and group-member exchange within the team.

Implications for Social Change

The study's findings may positively contribute to social change by promoting enhanced open communication, relationship building, policy awareness, and equitable distribution of resources that extend the company's impact externally to surrounding communities. Inputs that impact perceived organizational support may positively influence employee behaviors and the company's performance outcomes. By uncovering strategies for fostering engagement and inclusion within the corporation, the study's results offer a framework for encouraging behaviors with outside groups. These behaviors directly relate to work commitment levels and how they communicate with customers, stakeholders, and other community partners. Whereas employees receive an enhanced emotional benefit from their community involvement and support, the organization experiences a more considerable impact on business growth and profitability.

Prospering businesses are more likely to partner positively with communities through job creation, development opportunities, and community organization support. Local volunteer opportunities offer employees hands-on participation and are another method for increasing employee satisfaction and engagement. In addition, the work with organizations needing financial support and other resources develops a purpose by displaying corporate social responsibility.

Service organizations, heavily invested in individual employee performance, rely on emotionally engaged associates with high levels of work commitment to maintain customer retention levels. This commitment level of excellence displayed by employees sends an additional positive message to communities regarding the importance of having the opportunity to service them. Leaders who are effective listeners and strive to understand the differences among team members establish corporate allies by engaging diverse employees (Brimhall & Saastamoinen, 2020). Extending the conversation to external community groups provides additional perspectives and insights affecting marginalized groups (Hunter, 2020). Though the subject organization was not identified, it sponsors annual giving programs, actively develops community organization partnerships, and supports events offering opportunities for employee volunteerism.

Lastly, the commitment to community development and positive social change is displayed at the highest levels of the organization through ongoing communication regarding the stance against social injustices occurring in communities served. When situations occur across the globe that may emotionally impact specific employee populations and may require a broader sensitivity, the organization provides open forums for discussion and feedback. These actions plant seeds within individuals and the organization that promotes increased interaction, relationship development, and institutional partnerships resulting in programs and resources supporting community growth and sustainability.

Recommendations for Action

Employee engagement remains a critical concern for organizations; however, many managers need support in developing more precise strategies for addressing the issue. The insights derived from the findings of this study might provide strategies and highlight a direction for increasing employee engagement in remote teams. Based on the previously outlined themes found in the data, I recommend organizations invest in initiatives in three primary areas. First, organizations should perform individual evaluations of manager leadership styles and grow an understanding of alternate styles and their outcomes. Second, organizations should ensure practical training for communicating and effectively administering human resource practices and policies, and elements of organizational justice. Lastly, organizations should conduct training and provide organizational policy support on creating and implementing collaborative work structures and understanding their benefits. Installing and utilizing these strategies across the management population offers a systematic approach to increasing employee engagement and performance within organizations.

First, the organization should enhance leadership training programs to have managers be more cognizant of various leadership styles, leadership behaviors, the reasons for their use, and the potential outcomes associated with their application. When properly aligned, there is a strong connection between leadership styles and employee behaviors that ultimately drive performance (Agustriyana et al., 2022). The link between these factors suggests broadening managers' knowledge concerning leadership and enhancing their ability to apply appropriate leadership styles to different situations or team member personalities. In addition to understanding the benefits and methods for aligning leadership behaviors, managers must continue to improve their communication skills, especially in remote teams. Researchers have determined that in geographically dispersed teams, leadership and communication styles combine to influence performance (Eisenberg et al., 2019). Growing manager capabilities include methods for developing balanced professional-personal relationships, fostering more open and candid communication, generating an environment of feedback, and giving every employee a voice. Participant interviews described positive outcomes for creating individual relationships and maintaining positive communication with their teams.

Second, human resource policies and practices must maintain positive strides made by managers. Per the description provided by participants, they must not serve as a disruption but must function as a baseline for fair and equitable treatment. As a result of the pandemic, more than 75% of companies have redefined their employee engagement strategy in response to growth in remote and virtual work relationships (Sarmah & Chaudhuri, 2021). The practice adjustments of typically collocated work structures highlight the need for differences in remote workforces. HR managers should design and implement policies and practices that draw and connect employees to organizations. More than merely developing and implementing attractive policies related to compensation, medical benefits, training, employee support, and resource groups is required. HR should support managers with transparency, detailed information, and training to communicate policies, practices, and any occurring adjustments effectively.

Organizations should commit to an appropriate and fair allocation of resources that associates need to enhance their productivity and ability to perform their work tasks safely. The fair execution of organizational justice, including information justice, procedural justice, and resource justice, displays an organization's commitment to equitable treatment of all employees and drives work commitment, trust, and engagement (Zhao et al., 2020). Employees are more engaged with their work when they have the tools and training to perform their work more effectively and efficiently. The perception of everyone getting equal treatment and having the same opportunity to perform at their best produces harmony among team members, an inclusive climate, and mutual support, boosting team performance. Therefore, organizational leaders should support field managers with responsiveness to resource needs and administer positive organizational justice, displaying equity and a willingness to support successful performance.

Lastly, the organization must provide training and a better understanding of the various collaborative work structures and benefits of knowledge sharing. Employees and organizations gain from knowledge sharing, mainly when the company implements measures to support initiatives (Pereira & Mohiya, 2021). Participants outlined the importance of having supervisors and team member participation in market-level decision-making and supporting other complex functions. Teams benefited from an increased understanding of executing in empowered environments that solicits greater field-level employee involvement in strategy and managerial tasks. All participants described the implementation of situations creating interaction and mutual knowledge exchange. Organizational policies and practices could support these efforts through tangible rewards for mentor programs, the achievement of expert-level competencies, engaging in coaching and teaching exercises, and supporting general group events fostering a climate of engagement. These efforts build greater knowledge capacities within the team, drive engagement in newer associates, increase confidence in their work and retention, re-enforce buy-in and teamwork, and influence team performance.

Following the study's final institutional approval, participants, volunteers, and organizational representatives will receive a copy of my study to view the results and recommendations. I will complement the complete study with a detailed outline and executive summary of findings to simplify access to pertinent information. I also intend to appropriately expand the presentation used to defend my research for use in various corporate and other organizational settings. The information may provide a solid foundation for leadership/ management training and can be offered in other multimedia formats for presentation in various environments, such as corporate online training, events, or conferences. Also, writing a peer-reviewed article will contribute to the body of research regarding employee engagement in remote workforces. Finally, individuals seeking related findings and the types of information contained in the study will have access to the Walden University ScholarWorks database.

Recommendations for Further Research

I selected a research direction based on a review of existing literature and identified a perceived gap related to employee engagement in remote workforces. Most current research on remote engagement in remote workforces is related to organizational responses to the COVID-19 crisis versus those that operate remotely as a norm. Other literature centered around virtual technology-based workgroups versus service-oriented roles. Though addressing a new arena of remote work, specific limitations existed in the research and allowed an opportunity for additional review and analysis.

First, I performed a single case study in a service-related industry. An opportunity exists to perform a multi-case evaluation across multiple organizations operating similarly in the same industry or those operating in other service-related trades. A second limitation was using specific metrics related to the demographic mix, engagement scores, and team performance ranking against other managers to assemble a purposeful sampling of potential interview participants. A degree of subjectivity may exist in measured metrics due to their specificity to the given division, industry, or alignment with corporate goals. The opportunity exists for researchers to develop a more standardized approach to identifying and selecting participant "subject matter experts." A third limitation pertained to potential researcher bias. Due to my experience as a remote team manager, I had a personal challenge in managing biases and avoiding preconceived notions. I executed measures such as member checking and secondary validation of theme coding to limit the effects and enhance the reliability of study results. However, for future research, I suggest using someone less familiar with this study's particular work environment to conduct interviews and limit the potential for leading questions.

Though offering a view into the arena and challenges associated with permanent remote workforces, the research sheds light on the opportunity for future research that may expand or further support the findings. For example, researchers could perform a similar study utilizing collocated managers as knowledgeable participants. Also, this qualitative study identified strategies based on variables identified in a conceptual, quantitative model. There is the opportunity to empirically analyze the variables identified in the model to determine whether findings support or refute the identified strategy themes. Also, a valuable addition to a quantitative examination is the work structure (collocated versus remote) as a moderating variable. The conceptual model also enables examining or evaluating other influencers of POS as inputs and other outcomes such as productivity, retention, or various types of organizational citizenship behavior.

Reflections

People often highlight the importance of solid action plans for efficiently accomplishing goals. Due to the highly independent nature of completing a doctorate, sound planning is critical to a student's success. Early coursework concerning time management provided sound guidance, but conversations with other Walden graduates helped further set the tone. Early in the program, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to interface with Dr. Stanley, one of the original DBA graduates. He gave me sound advice that ultimately became the cornerstone of actions during the journey. He told me to absolutely (a) be aggressive with time frames for completing the program, (b) to read everything! -to do all the reading to gain an exhaustive understanding of the planned research topic, and (c) never to stop writing! -whether relevant to my core interest, it offers practice and support in improving my writing abilities. In short, Dr. Stanley emphasized that success required putting in the time and work.

Another piece of valuable advice came from a Student Success Advisor who suggested completing the residencies required for graduation as early as possible.

Following their guidance, I enrolled and completed the first of two residencies in the first six weeks of the program and the second at the next earliest allowed date. The experience provided information early on that enhanced my efficiency and how I pursued the program's completion. By the end of the first 8-week session, I had developed a good problem statement draft that served as the basis for my final study. Having a solid direction for proposed research at such an early stage allowed me to confine journal articles reviewed and assignments towards information supporting my final doctoral study. The method enabled avoiding duplicating efforts when thoroughly researching the core concept and helped me zero in on my final study's topics.

As described in methods to support controlling bias associated with any preconceived notions, I validated coding through a secondary review to ensure the identification of similar concepts and themes. In addition, member checking enabled participants to confirm the appropriate interpretation of themes and contents in their responses. During the interview process, I did my best to ask open-ended questions enabling broad responses with complete details and explanations. I also asked appropriate follow-up questions to continue the discussion; however, I placed significant focus and refrained from leading questions or insinuating specific ideas. The process mandated closing my mouth and opening my ears to allow uninterrupted responses while remaining an active listener. Though familiar with the studied remote work environment and some of the challenges described, by ensuring I allowed the participants to take the conversation in their desired direction, an unanticipated third strategy theme emerged (implementing collaborative work structures).

As somewhat of a loner, regimen and very effective in working individually, I discovered and gained an appreciation for student interaction. Receiving stories from peer students in the same battle, facing similar challenges, and reaching comparable milestones provided ongoing encouragement and support for my efforts. Just a friendly “congratulations” added the necessary fuel to keep me going. Ultimately, the open communication, feedback, and relationship developed with my committee chair and other members served as lifelines for reaching the final destination. The relationship with my chair will likely survive graduation and result in a lifelong friendship.

Finally, the information reviewed, journal articles read, and analysis performed have significantly enhanced my critical thinking skills and knowledge base, offering a theoretical foundation for strategy development. As I have pursued completing the doctoral journey, I have readily used new knowledge in my professional life. However, I look forward to the next level and capitalizing on my research findings by incorporating participants' strategies and recommendations into daily work. I also plan to support other leaders in their efforts to grow their specific business operations by helping them improve employee engagement results and increase their team’s performance.

Conclusion

This qualitative single case study explored the strategies leaders of diverse teams with high engagement, and inclusion scores used to achieve high team performance. The central research question was: What strategies do leaders of remote, diverse teams use to foster employee engagement? Semistructured interviews of five nationally dispersed managers of remote teams offering descriptions of their particular strategies delivered the study's primary data source. Member checking validated the interpretation of responses before incorporating other data sources. The three strategy themes discovered align with the premises of Organizational Support Theory (OST) or Perceived Organizational Support (POS) as a mediating factor for antecedents producing outcomes detailed in the conceptual framework.

Promoting employee engagement remains a paramount concern for organizational leaders, and geographically distanced workforces only exacerbated the complexity. Findings in research indicate a strong connection between positive employee engagement and team performance. Research suggests that organizations can influence employee engagement through leadership behaviors, human resource practices, and organizational justice that shape employees' perceptions of organizational support. Leaders of diverse, remote teams seeking to increase employee engagement must understand concepts and remain intentional in their strategic efforts. This study’s findings revealed that (a) situational and inclusive leadership styles, (b) effective leadership facilitation of human resource policies and organization justice, and (c) implementing collaborative work structures increase employee engagement and performance. Managers of diverse remote teams utilizing these strategies may increase individual and group engagement resulting in more effective communication, relationship development, displaying fairness, fostering perceptions of organizational commitment, leader-follow interaction, and an inclusive and engaged team climate.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Procedures

- I will contact participants prior to meetings to check for questions, reconfirm the interview time, and ensure their access to a quiet, private location.
- Interviews will be conducted Via Microsoft Teams or Zoom
- Each interview will be 45 to 50 minutes in length.
- I will use the following checklist as a script to open and close the interview.
    - I will restate for confirmation the receipt of the participant's informed consent form and thank them for volunteering.
    - I will request permission from the participant to record the interview.
        - I will state the following reasoning: "Recording will aid in my ability to listen while having responses correctly captured. It will also aid in more quickly and efficiently transcribing the data. I will deliver a transcribed document for their review in 3 business days to allow for confirming the wording in their responses. It is important to turn the transcription around fast for their response to hopefully remain fresh in their mind."
    - I will present eight interview questions and follow up with some probing questions as needed.
        - I intend to start with questions considered easier to answer.
        - Once establishing a comfort level, begin to ask questions requiring more involved responses.
        - I will use a mix of open-ended and follow-up questions geared towards informing the research, prompting participants accordingly to expand on responses.
- I will enter interviews with an open-minded approach, prepared to make any necessary adjustments.