

2023

## Leadership Strategies for Modeling Ethical Behavior in the Real Estate Industry

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Lakecia Ann Reddrick

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Leadership Strategies for Modeling Ethical Behavior in the Real Estate Industry

by

Lakecia Ann Reddick

MS, Walden University, 2017

BS, Kaplan University, 2012

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2023

## Abstract

Real estate brokers face challenges in cultivating and supporting the ethical conduct of their agents. Developing ethical behavior and decision-making is crucial as it directly impacts the trust, satisfaction, and protection of clients, buyers, sellers, and other stakeholders in the real estate industry. Grounded in the theories of emotional intelligence and servant leadership, this qualitative multiple-case study aimed to explore strategies real estate brokers used in modeling ethical behavior and decision-making for their agents to influence performance and profitability positively. The participants were nine real estate brokers who modeled the ethical behavior and decision-making their agents must practice to impact performance and profitability positively. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and a review of organizational documents. Through thematic analysis, four themes emerged: (a) mentor-mentee relationship, (b) leadership communication, (c) leadership support, and (d) use of technology as a tool. Key recommendations for real estate brokers are to communicate clear expectations for ethical behavior to their agents and create an environment that encourages open dialogue. The implications for positive social change include the potential for real estate brokerage firms to drive community development, increase transactions that contribute to local tax revenue, and support local charities within the community.

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## Dedication

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are possible, I express my deepest love and gratitude. I am grateful to my son, DeVahn V. Reddrick, for his love, unwavering belief in my abilities, and constant encouragement. To my parents, Deborah A. Gibson and Provine C. Reddrick, Sr., especially, I want to express my deepest gratitude and love for your immense impact on my life. During your time of marriage, without your watchful eyes, protection, love, support, and sacrifices, I would not be where I am today. Thank you, Mom, for showing me a good example of strength and perseverance in my life while I was young. I am forever grateful for your love, sacrifices, and unwavering belief in me.

To my beloved biological and spiritual family, your unwavering love, prayers, patience, and support have been instrumental in my academic journey. Your presence, encouragement, and insightful discussions have brought immense meaning and joy to this pursuit. I am grateful for your unwavering belief in me, which has been a driving force in overcoming challenges and achieving my goals.

Last, I dedicate this work to everyone who participated in this study, generously sharing their time, experiences, and perspectives. Your contributions have enriched this research and have the potential to bring about positive change in the field.

## Acknowledgments

I thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for helping me throughout this journey.

I sincerely appreciate my chair, Dr. Olivia Herriford, for her invaluable guidance, expertise, and mentorship throughout this research endeavor. Your dedication and commitment to my growth as a scholar have shaped me into the researcher I am today. I would also like to thank my second committee member, Dr. Deborah Nattress, for her kindness, thoroughness, and flexibility in working with me during tight deadlines. Both of your support has been instrumental in my success. Last but not least, I am deeply grateful to Dr. Judy Blando for her invaluable contributions. Her insights and expertise significantly enriched this research endeavor.

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Finally, I acknowledge the academic community, research participants, and all those who have contributed to advancing knowledge in the real estate field. Your collective efforts and contributions pave the way for progress and excellence in the industry.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

In Section 1, I provide a summary of the business problem and methods I used to explore the leadership strategies successful real estate brokers use to model ethical behavior for their real estate agents to increase performance and profitability. The composite conceptual framework for the study consists of servant leadership and emotional intelligence. A comprehensive literature review expands upon the conceptual framework and includes an analysis and synthesis of existing research related to the business problem.

### **Background of the Problem**

This study emphasizes the importance of integrity in the real estate industry and its connection to higher performance and profitability. The level of unethical behavior during the real estate market boom was evident from the 2008 bubble burst (Shoen, 2017). For instance, many banks and brokers lent money to borrowers without regard for their ability to repay (Randall et al., 2020; Thakor, 2015). Borrowers were encouraged to purchase homes with no or little down payment, which meant higher risks and default rates later (Randall et al., 2020; Thakor, 2015). In an era of social media influence and technological dependencies, real estate agents and brokers will want to cultivate and maintain an ethical relationship with their clients.

Since the housing market decline, there is a demand for better understanding of the factors that contribute to leadership's unethical and ethical decision making (Ferrell et al., 2021). The banking industry may have been the catalyst for the financial crisis, but

there are others who shared that responsibility. The real estate sector includes brokers, real estate agents, surveyors, appraisers, title companies, and attorneys all responsible for a part of property transactions. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 was enacted in response to unethical conduct that involved leadership at Enron, WorldCom, and other companies (Amir et al., 2019). For example, this regulation act protects the investors and consumers during financial transactions by requiring management transparency and stringent reporting requirements.

Real estate brokers (i.e., leaders) are responsible for overseeing the work duties of their real estate agents. The leadership style of real estate brokers can assist to determine the expected quality of performance that real estate agents provide to the public. Effective leadership skills can help to cultivate a work environment of trust and positivity that can increase performance and, therefore, profitability within the real estate industry (Sayyadi, 2019).

### **Problem and Purpose**

The specific business problem was that some real estate brokers lack strategies for modeling the ethical behavior and decision-making their real estate agents must practice to positively influence performance and profitability (Piazolo & Förster, 2019). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify the strategies real estate brokers use to model the ethical behavior and decision-making their real estate agents must practice to positively influence performance and profitability. The targeted population was real estate industry leaders, specifically brokers of three real estate

brokerage firms in the D.C. Metropolitan area (Maryland, D.C., and Virginia) who have led teams of successful, reputable real estate agents for at least 5 years.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population for this study was leaders of real estate brokerage firms. I used purposive sampling to select research study participants for a sample size of nine real estate brokerage leaders in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia metropolitan areas. The nine participants led teams of successful, reputable real estate agents with a minimum of 5 years of work experience as licensed brokers to meet the study's eligibility requirements. I recruited potential research participants from the National Association of Realtors member directory. Data sources for the study were semistructured interviews of participants and additional sources such as customer reviews, company blogs, social media channels, and organizational documents requested from participants.

### **Nature of the Study**

A researcher selects one of three types of methods for a study: qualitative, quantitative, or mixed (Saunders et al., 2015). Qualitative research is primarily exploratory and provides an understanding of the subject's underlying reasons and motivations of how things work (Park & Park, 2016). Qualitative inquiry is useful when looking for descriptive information and filling gaps in knowledge (Park & Park, 2016). For these reasons, the qualitative method was most appropriate for the study. Researchers use quantitative research to examine variables characteristics and relationships with numerical data through developing test statistics (Saunders et al., 2015). Since there are

no specified variables or hypothesized relationships in this study, quantitative research was not appropriate for the study. The mixed method is the integration of qualitative and quantitative research to analyze, merge, and connect qualitative and quantitative data (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). The advantage of using the qualitative method for my study was to enable focusing on the *what*, *how*, and *why* of the strategies and derivative processes the organization developed, which is not the focus of either quantitative or mixed methods.

A researcher can choose between several qualitative design approaches, including case study, phenomenology, ethnography, or narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative multiple case study was the design chosen for this study. When using a multiple case design, the cases studied depend on the research question and the reason for conducting the study (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018). Multiple case study requires the collection of multiple types of data from more than one source, which enables the researcher to obtain and understand why some participants interpret the same event differently (Mills et al., 2017).

Using a multiple case study design allows the researcher to compare the strategies some different real estate brokers use to affect the ethical behavior and decision-making of their real estate agents within their environments. Another type of design for qualitative research is ethnography, which focuses on populations' cultural patterns as opposed to individuals or groups (Dodgson, 2017). I chose not to explore the patterns of the population in this study; therefore, ethnography was not an appropriate design choice.



The phenomenology designs centers on the personal meanings of the research participants' lived experience (Webb & Welsh, 2019). Narrative design provides insights into human complexity from both social and personal lived experiences through participants' personal stories (Gertsen & Soderberg, 2011). Since I did not focus on the research problem from a strategic, rather than a lived experience perspective, neither the narrative or phenomenology design was appropriate for the study.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do real estate brokers use to model the ethical behavior and decision making their real estate agents must practice to positively influence performance and profitability?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What are some examples of the strategies you use to model ethical behavior for real estate agents?
2. What, if anything, have you changed about how you model ethical behavior and decision making to positively influence your real estate agents' performance?
3. How have you demonstrated ethical decision-making in your interactions with real estate agents?
4. What are some examples of how your demonstration of ethical decision making in your interactions with your agents has influenced their actions?

5. How, if at all, have changes in industry reputation influenced the leadership strategies you have used and, based upon your observations, the corresponding agents' performance?
6. Based upon your experiences, and organization's performance, how have the strategies you applied for modeling ethical behavior helped to increase profitability?
7. What additional information can you share about your strategies for modeling ethical behavior and decision making to influence the ethical behavior and decision making of your agents that we have not discussed during this interview?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Servant leadership and emotional intelligence were the composite conceptual frameworks chosen for the study. Greenleaf introduced the term “servant leadership” in the early 1970s (Spears, 1996). A servant leader is one who chooses first to serve, and as an outpouring of that desire, aspires to lead others (Heyler & Martin, 2018). Greenleaf did not produce the behavioral framework for servant leadership. Other leadership studies such as Russell and Stone's (2002) review found vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service of others, appreciation of others, pioneering, and modeling as attributes of a servant leader (Parris & Peachey, 2013). These attributes comprise a framework of personal values and characteristics applied by servant leaders in a business.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a strong antecedent to the attributes of servant leaders and their ideology (Barbuto et al., 2014). Daniel Goleman (2004) popularized the theory of emotional intelligence (EI) in 1995 by being the first to apply it to the business arena. Emotional intelligence refers to how well we handle ourselves and our emotions in relationships (Goleman, 2004). EI has the following four constructs: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman, 2004). EI is expected to be a fitting theory for the servant leader framework in this study for providing a practical model real estate brokers can use to positively influence the performance of their real estate agents. The composite conceptual frameworks of servant leadership and emotional intelligence will assist me in understanding the successful strategies used by brokers because together the concepts describe the moral, ethical, and leadership qualities of positive change within business. A real estate broker with a servant leadership style may be more likely to care about empowering and enabling his or her agents than abusing the power that comes with a position of authority.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Emotional intelligence:* The ability to manage one's emotions and empathize with others' emotions to positively influence behavior in relationships (Băeșu, 2018).

*Servant leader:* A leadership role that places emphasis on assisting others first in their personal development to build trust and accomplish organizational goals (van Dierendonck, 2011).

## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are aspects within a study the researcher considers as plausible but lack evidence and cannot be validated (Wargo, 2015). An assumption in this study was the participants will answer the interview questions honestly. A second assumption was most leaders (i.e., brokers) in the real estate industry have some familiarity with emotional intelligence and its influence on business leader performance. Another assumption was that brokers have regular interactions with their agents to positively influence their behavior. The assumption that participants would answer the interview questions honestly was supported, while the assumption that most leaders in the real estate industry have some familiarity with emotional intelligence and its influence on business leader performance was disproven. The assumption suggesting regular interactions between brokers and their agents to positively influence agent behavior was validated.

### **Limitations**

Limitations in a research study are the possible weaknesses within the study that are not in the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Research studies have limitations (i.e., weaknesses) that limit the availability of resources, or the type of methodology used (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). A limitation of this study was some brokers may not have the regular interactions with their agents necessary to be a positive influence on their behavior. Another limitation may be the broker's lack of formal

training during the span of their career to learn leadership strategies to assist them in positively influencing their agents' behavior. The limitation regarding the potential lack of regular interactions between brokers and their agents, which are necessary for a positive influence on agent behavior, was confirmed. The limitation on brokers' potential lack of formal training throughout their careers to acquire leadership strategies for effectively influencing their agents' behavior was also confirmed.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations refer to deliberately set boundaries by the researcher to support and accomplish the study's objectives (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This study did not seek to address the measure of personal traits a leader may possess. Doing so would require a quantitative analysis, which is not the research method chosen for this study. The only participants interviewed were the real estate brokers. Agents and other real estate professionals such as appraisers, lenders, or title insurance agents were mentioned, but fell outside the scope of this study's focus.

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study may provide real estate brokers with approaches to modeling agent behaviors that get results and enhance business reputation. A good leader will adapt his or her behavior to a follower's needs, personality, and abilities to effectively promote productivity towards organizational goals (Băeșu, 2018). The level of performance in an organization depends significantly on the leader's capacity to catalyze and channel emotions in a positive or negative direction (Issah, 2018).

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Real estate brokers are responsible for overseeing the sales and purchases negotiated by their agents for residential and commercial business transactions. The brokers and their agents can benefit from strategies to improve the quality and performance of the services provided to clients. These services include property listings, contract negotiations, determining market values, and other things that require a high level of client trust. Leaders influence followers' behavior, and poor leadership can lead to low morale, confusion, and a culture of mediocracy (Moore et al., 2019). Agents must perceive their brokers as good leaders to accept and follow their example (Panait & Bucinschi, 2018). The study findings may help brokers improve business practices by illustrating how modeling behaviors that increase trust between real estate agents and clients can result in higher agent and broker performance.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The potential contribution of the study's findings to positive change may result in improved broker performance, increased commissions, and increased tax revenues that enable funding state and federal health programs that support citizens in need. The findings may increase the public's trust of real estate agents and brokers through improved industry leadership vs. regulatory interventions (Lee, 2012). Higher quality of services provided by real estate agents and brokers may grow public confidence in the use of local agents, increasing the potential for them to give back to the community. For example, increased trust and business may provide local agents with more relational and

financial opportunities to sponsor and support the causes and initiatives of community-based organizations.

### **Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The purpose of this literature review is to expand upon the study's conceptual framework, a composite of servant leadership theory and emotional intelligence (EQ), and its applicability to ethical leadership in the real estate industry. The ability of an effective leader in the workplace to inspire and motivate employees to act is critical to the profitability of the organization. Goleman (2013) argued research has shown that various EQ components combined with various leadership styles result in a work environment that is both unique and positive. Data analysis of the 2018 U.S. Office of Personnel Management survey indicates that EQ correlates to various leadership models, and that leaders can enhance their effectiveness by developing their emotional intelligence skills (OPM, 2018). For example, Ed Bastien, CEO of Delta Airlines, demonstrated servant leadership when he announced he would take a 100% pay reduction for six months during the COVID-19 crisis (Fuhrmeister, 2020). A successful workplace leader combines equal parts serving and leading.

The financial crisis of 2007-2008 caused residential real estate brokerage firms to take a closer look at their leadership and sales strategies to mitigate negative influences on performance and profitability of real estate agents (Ngene et al., 2016; Piazzolo & Förster, 2019). In the real estate industry, a managing broker who supervises real estate agents may not be aware of his or her style of leadership. Leadership styles within the

workplace are essential, and the leader's type will determine the strategy used to model ethical behavior to positively influence real estate agents in the workplace. The broker's motivation for ensuring his or her real estate agent's success is to increase sales, growth, reputation, profits, and revenues.

The literature review is organized into themes, which include servant leadership and emotional intelligence, servant leadership, character of the servant leader, transformational leader compared to servant leader, transactional leadership, comparison of the different leadership styles, ethical leadership, emotional intelligence, emotional intelligence competencies, emotional intelligence in the workplace, the dark side of emotional intelligence, motivation theories, Maslow's motivational theory, self-determination theory, motivation in the workplace, agency theory on workplace motivation. The next section discusses topics of the research study that pertain to the phenomenon which are influence of agency theory within the real estate industry, agency theory as applied to the real estate industry, performance and profitability of businesses, ethics in the real estate industry, and impact of real estate agents' reputation on performance.

The use of existing and relevant research presented from scholarly journals, empirical and theoretical research, and books is to emphasize the issue of real estate brokers and their agent's reputation through the lens of leadership, which can positively or negatively influence the industry's performance and profitability. The literature review is meant to assist the researcher in providing a way to highlight his or her own voice and



vision for the research project to add to the existing scholarly discourse in the field (Harris, 2020). ProQuest, Walden library database, Google Scholar, and a plethora of other resources were searched to gather relevant articles and books. Keywords and phrases for the searches included (a) *real estate industry and trust*, (b) *reputation and performance in the real estate industry*, (c) *homebuyers use of the internet*, (d) *customer relationship, real estate, and reputation*, (e) *emotional intelligence and servant leadership*, (f) *emotional intelligence and leadership in business*, (g) *leadership measurement*, (h) *trust attitude and customer loyalty*, (i) *real estate brokerage industry and sales ethics*, (j) *emotional intelligence and servant leadership style*, (k) *leadership and leadership styles*, (l) *emotional intelligence as an antecedent of servant leadership*, (m) *agency theory and independent contractor*, and (n) *principal-agent theory*. The majority of the 282 references are from 2018-2023, (81%) are peer-reviewed sources, (9%) seminal scholarly books, and (7%) government websites, and (3%) are references dated before 2018.

### **Application to Applied Business Problem**

The business phenomenon of this study is that the reputation of real estate industry professionals can negatively affect the industry's performance and profitability. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore the strategies real estate brokers use to model the ethical behavior and decision-making their real estate agents must practice to positively influence performance and profitability. This literature review is an exploration and analysis of existent research related to how business leaders apply the characteristics of servant leadership and emotional intelligence to model ethical

behaviors. The review includes an evaluation and comparison of three distinct types of leadership theories that scholars researched to explore the best leadership strategies for modeling ethical behavior. The following section is a thorough analysis of the servant leader, transformational leader, transactional leader, and emotional intelligence and its competencies in support of the theories.

### **Servant Leadership and Emotional Intelligence**

Goleman (2013) found that the most effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: they all have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence (p. 2). Servant leadership and emotional intelligence share characteristics that complement one another and are factors of high employee performance and job satisfaction (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018), which positively influences organizational profitability. Emotional intelligence has been identified as both theoretically and practically relevant to servant leadership (Barbuto et al., 2014).

### ***Servant Leadership***

Servant leadership is one of several styles of leadership applied across the private and public sectors of the economy, such as law, banking, healthcare, insurance, and real estate. Although research on the servant leadership style is not plenteous, Greenleaf (1979) introduced the importance of servant leadership and started the process of operationalizing its use in modern organizations. The servant leader dates back as far as 2000 years ago, with the most popular of examples being Jesus Christ in Christianity to the teachings of Confucius (Gandolfi et al., 2017; Murari & Mukherjee, 2021). Servant

leadership encourages trust, collaboration, empowerment, and ethical behavior to facilitate positive change in any environment (Heyler & Martin, 2018). Greenleaf described a servant leader as one with at least 10 characteristics that the leader uses to build community by committing to the growth of individuals. The ten characteristics are (a) listening, (b) awareness, (c) empathy, (d) persuasion, (e) conceptualization, (f) healing, (g) foresight, (h) stewardship, (i) commitment to the growth of people, and (j) building community.

The first of the 10 characteristics of a servant leader is listening. Often leaders missing this characteristic are more focused on communicating their vision than recognizing the challenges and needs of their followers tasked with achieving the organizational objective (Heyler & Martin, 2018). The ability of the servant leader to practice active listening promotes the building of trusting relationships through meaningful discussions and reflections (Black & La Venture, 2018; Dryburgh, 2020). Awareness and empathy are the next two qualities demonstrated by the servant leader. For example, the brokers in the real estate industry having awareness of their agents' weaknesses and strengths allows them to address any issues that may be a hindrance to sales performance. A person who understands the thought process of others and shares their feelings is an empathetic leader (Connors, 2020). A servant leader must also possess the confidence and ability to persuade others, which is the skill of convincing their followers to partner with their ideas, the fourth characteristic. The followers will typically

accept the idea as their own because they believe the leader's thinking is the best approach to accomplish the goal (Heyler & Martin, 2018).

The fifth characteristic is a leader with the potential to develop a vision from which they share with others to create an objective their followers can understand and become excited about (Greenleaf, 1979). Some may think healing, the sixth characteristic, has nothing to do with being a leader. Servant leaders recognize the cause behind handicaps amongst their followers and obstructions to meeting objectives as an opportunity to institute healing (Song, 2018). These types of observations in business are vital to implement organizational change and accomplish goals (Greenleaf, 1979). The seventh characteristic is the ability of leadership to have foresight in any situation, which serves as preparation for future challenges (Heyler & Martin, 2018). The more skilled leaders are in understanding the current situation and effectively predicting future outcomes, the more they can adapt and prepare for future obstacles.

Stewardship and commitment to the growth of others are two other qualities a servant leader possesses. Servant leaders assist their followers in these areas by encouraging them to expand upon positive attributes, while eradicating negative ones to mature and become accountable for their actions (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). The last characteristic is the servant leader's primary focus of serving others to assist in their growth while building a community of long-lasting relationships (Greenleaf, 1979). For this study, it is the building of a business community.

The term *servant* is interpreted as a negative connotation due to negative feelings or emotions associated with the word (Heyler & Martin, 2018). The word *servant* used in the context of leadership has enabled researchers to discover as many as 44 positive characteristics of the servant leader (Heyler & Martin, 2018). The characteristics of the servant leader's behavior can be summarized into six attributes (Heyler & Martin, 2018; van Dierendonck, 2011). Although Greenleaf suggested 10 characteristics of servant leaders upon a review by van Dierendonck proposed the characteristics can be condensed to six of the main servant-leader behaviors (Heyler & Martin, 2018). The first attribute of a servant leader is his or her example of humility. The humble leader provides followers with an example of a healthy balance between the desire to serve others without indulging in self-depreciation. The ability to lead and serve simultaneously is not an oxymoron as some may believe, but an advantage. For example, the focus of a servant leader on his or her followers' needs within a business setting aids in further development and accountability as a team to accomplish organizational objectives. Servant leadership theorists have deduced numerous servant leader characteristics such as humility, and the remaining five attributes of authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, providing direction, and stewardship, which overlap in many present-day depictions (Hurt & Heath, 2017).

### ***Character of the Servant Leader***

Servant leaders share a common decision, they chose to lead because it provides them with the opportunity to serve (Sun & Shang, 2019). A basic understanding of what it means to have character comes from the traits exhibited by others. Martin Luther King,

Jr. is one example of a servant leader. Martin Luther King, Jr., a civil rights activist, used his influence as a Baptist minister to persuade others to embrace his vision of equality (Dela Cruz, 2020). King's focus may have been on the Black community, but he was aware that to realize positive change, unity of all races and ethnicities in America was essential (Dela Cruz, 2020). Further, the servant as leader is revealed in the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. First, he is the servant of God, his followers, and second by death (Dela Cruz, 2020). Servant leaders consciously place their subordinates first, even if it entails self-denial (Sun & Shang, 2019).

Other character traits that are most recognized among servant leaders are listening, transparency, and honesty. The high standard required of a workplace leader is integrity, which you cannot have without trust (Băeșu, 2018). For instance, a leader's ability to be transparent by sharing feelings and listening to others' ideas demonstrates his or her awareness, empathy, and having nothing to hide, which builds trust (Sun & Shang, 2019; Tanno & Banner, 2018). Varela et al. (2019) posited "servant leadership is a type of supportive leadership that encourages employees' proactive work behavior" (p.187). According to Gašková (2020), "behaviors of the servant leader represent the core of the servant leadership" (p. 28). Based on Greenleaf's writings, Spears (1996) identified the 10 most popular characteristics of the servant leader. Later, he added care, compassion, integrity, and ethics as other traits developed by a servant leader (Stewart, 2012; Taylor et al., 2007; van de Bunt-Kokhuis & Sultan, 2012).

## **Transformational Leadership**

Leadership is the process of finding effective ways to motivate followers to accomplish common goals (Rabiul & Yean, 2021). The different leadership styles and their effectiveness depends on the leader's chosen style, character, industry-related experience, and the cultural environment. A leader's ability to adjust their style to a situation shows flexibility. Transformational leadership (TL) materialized in the late 1980 and emerged as an influential leadership style during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Bonsu & Twum-Danso, 2018). Transformational leadership focuses on encouraging followers to remain optimistic while decreasing their frustrations within the workplace (Rabiul & Yean, 2021). A transformative leader is typically one who can motivate and inspire the employees of a company to embrace organizational change that will position the organization for future success (Baba et al., 2021; Sondaite & Keidonaite, 2020).

The servant leader aims to place the follower's interest above his or her own, which can motivate followers to achieve a shared goal (Russell & Stone, 2002). Transformational leaders seek to motivate their followers by helping them to look beyond their own self-interest to accomplish organizational goals. Both leadership styles place importance on the emotional and intellectual development of followers, increasing willingness to achieve organizational goals. According to Rabiul and Yean (2021), "servant leaders pay more attention to ethical demands, thereby placing empowerment ahead of self and organizational interests" (p. 2). While the servant leader's approach is "individual before organization," it does not cause disruption within the organization, but

rather inspires followers to embrace the organization's goals (Gandolfi et al., 2017; Mäkikangas, 2018).

### **Transactional Leadership**

Burns (1978) was the first to introduce the difference between transformational and transactional leadership. Burns determined that a leader can be both transactional and transforming in his or her approach. Transformational leaders are quite different in their approach because the focus is to foster confidence in the employees to motivate them to complete tasks (Rabiul & Yean, 2021). Transactional leaders promise employees incentives such as tangible rewards for on time completion of organizational tasks (Saeed & Mughal, 2019). The motivating factor of the transactional leader for his or her employees is the reward and punishment system practiced (Besieux et al., 2018).

A deficiency of transactional leadership is the lack of interpersonal relationships between people (Brown et al., 2020; Saeed & Mughal, 2019). The commitment of a transaction-focused leader is on determining the needs of the organization, not its employees. The motivation of the transactional leader to be more responsive to their employees' needs is for the purpose of maintaining the level of inspiration to stay on task. Some employees prefer to follow transactional leaders because they offer rewards for the completion of tasks (Hansen & Pihl-Thingvad, 2019; Jacobs & Mafini, 2019). In contrast, others may prefer to follow transformational leaders because they increase confidence through interpersonal interaction which creates a common vision (Cluff & Colker, 2021; Gurieva, et al., 2017) and raises job satisfaction (Kammerhoff et al., 2019). Researchers



have found that both transformational leadership and servant leadership approaches are more effective when formulating strategies because the focus is on the employees' well-being in conjunction with achieving organizational goals and positively influencing employees' behavior (Haider & Mushtaq, 2017; Sayyadi, 2019).

### **Comparison of the Different Leadership Styles**

Transformational, transactional, and servant leadership styles all have a direct connection with work motivation and performance (Lee et al., 2022; Maamari & Majdalani, 2017; Widyaningsih & Arfiansyah, 2020). The style of servant leader differs from both transformational and transactional because it has a paradoxical leadership style of serving and leading others (Saleem et al., 2020). Servant leaders can help subordinates develop their sense of service and self-sufficiency simultaneously (Bauer et al., 2019), resulting in a higher level of work performed on the part of the employees (Saleem et al., 2020).

Based on the comparisons of the transactional, transformative, and servant leader styles with the motivational goals of the leader, a transactional leadership style may be suitable, but it may not be most effective. Management-by-exception, which seeks to eliminate errors before they occur by strict enforcement of the rules (Brown et al., 2020). Next, there is passive management, where managers do not monitor the employees but act when the behavior is counterproductive to organizational objectives (Brown et al., 2020). The management-by-exception method would not be as effective in the real estate industry because agents are engaged by brokerage firms as independent contractors and

strict enforcement of rules would be challenging. For example, a real estate agent as an independent contractor is not required to have set office hours which means less interaction and opportunity for the broker to influence the agent.

In contrast, transactional leaders focus on motivating employees to increase their performance by creating an incentive mechanism through which their efforts are either rewarded for high performance or punished for underperforming (Krén & Séllei, 2021; Nielsen et al., 2019). Transactional leadership is more commonplace than transformative and servant leadership (Brown et al., 2020; Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership is known for its exchange process, where leaders exploit the needs of the followers to meet the leaders' expectations. The transactional leader's motivation is task-based performance, while the transformational and servant leader is people-oriented. The focus of transactional business leaders is on the supervision, organization, and performance of their subordinates (Edi & Wardhani, 2019; Sitthiwarongchai et al., 2020). The nature of the servant leader's character suggests that individuals avoid their self-interest, because it is seen as an antidote to unethical behavior (Heyler & Martin, 2018; Tanno & Banner, 2018). Whereas an ethical leader will focus on setting up processes and making policies that will encourage ethical behavior (Kuenzi et al., 2020).

### **Ethical Leadership**

Ethics is comprised of a set of moral principles that help guide the activities of individuals or groups within the public or private sector (National Association of Realtors, n.d; Smith & Dubbink, 2011). Leadership is the ability to influence others to

both understand and agree with a vision of how and what needs to be done to accomplish a goal (Ouakouak et al., 2020). Servant leadership has been recognized as a leadership philosophy addressing the concerns of ethics (McMahon, 2012). Leaders who adopt an ethical leadership style are believed to exhibit high moral conduct to shape the ethical climate within the workplace (Ali et al., 2021; Ouakouak et al., 2020). For instance, ethical leaders help employees to accomplish organizational objectives by improving the individuals' perceived morality and contextual performance.

Moral and honest leaders foster good business conduct, encourage the execution of excellent tasks, make powerful decisions, and nurture corporate vision (Cesario & Chamble, 2017; Tripathy, 2019). Leaders who can show empathy and respect the concerns and rights of their followers are knowingly or unknowingly practicing self-awareness, while displaying ethical and emotional leadership styles (Ouakouak et al., 2020). Based on the comparison between transformational and servant leadership styles, the servant leader is considered an ethical leader (Ouakouak et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2011). According to Goleman, the most effective leaders have strong emotional intelligence (EI) (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018, p. 13).

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer first introduced the term *emotional intelligence* (EI) in a 1990 academic journal (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence assist individuals in using their feelings to motivate and plan for success. Salovey and Mayer defined emotional intelligence as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings

and emotions (p. 186).” The original concept is for individuals to rationalize and use emotions to enhance thought more effectively than others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Intelligence is defined as the aggregate global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with his or her environment (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Daniel Goleman (2004) popularized the concept in 1995 by noting five main categories of emotional intelligence that researchers can further explore.

Emotional Intelligence is comprised of the following five categories: (a) *self-awareness*, (b) *self-regulation*, (c) *motivation*, (d) *understanding others’ emotions*, and (e) *social skills* (Goleman, 2004). Self-awareness is not just recognizing your own emotions and the effect on others but having the confidence to know your limitations and capabilities. Self-regulation is about having self-control over our behavior, managing disruptive impulses, and maintaining standards of integrity and honesty. Motivation is the pursuit of goals with an unrelenting determination and consistency. Understanding the emotions of others and taking that understanding into account in how we treat people describes empathy. Social skills are using a combination of these components to manage relationships and build networks of like-minded individuals (Connors, 2020).

Emotional intelligence is a good antecedent of servant leadership (Barbuto et al., 2014; Lee, 2019). Although competing models of emotional intelligence exist, the basis of all EI models is the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ emotions to guide one’s actions (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). An analysis of the literature revealed common characteristics among emotional intelligence, servant leadership, and ethical leadership.

The characteristics of self-management, awareness, integrity, honesty, empathy, motivation, trust, and moral values are present in all three leadership styles. “Self-aware and self-regulating emotionally intelligent leaders help others develop personal autonomy” (Goleman, 1998a; Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). Autonomy among employees can promote employees’ engagement and commitment within an organization (Anderson & Anderson, 2017). For example, Southwest Airlines, founded in the U.S. in 1967, encourages and trains its organizational leaders to exhibit a servant’s heart, which has kept it a favorite among travelers today (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018, p.15).

Emotional intelligence has become an increasingly popular tool to measure effective leadership within business. The time of employers viewing emotions in the workplace as being disruptive has shifted to an opportunity to increase work performance (McLaughlin & Craig, 2019). For example, an employee who is an adequate worker may move to a role where his or her technical competencies and emotional abilities increase job satisfaction thereby increasing work performance. The broker of a real estate firm would benefit from recognizing both the emotional abilities and technical competencies of its real estate agents to motivate and increase productivity. Emotional intelligence skills assist leaders to improve their effectiveness through servant leadership traits by enhancing how they interact with others through empathy, social awareness, and communication (Tanno & Banner, 2018; Zappe et al., 2018).

### ***Emotional Intelligence Competencies***

Leaders who demonstrate a high level of emotional intelligence become effective leaders (Fianko et al., 2020). Goleman (1998a) defined an “emotional competence” as a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance in the workplace (p.5). Emotional intelligence is a set of competencies that provides a person the ability to be aware of himself/herself, aware of others, and manages self and relationships (Goleman et al., 2017; Jacka, 2018). In Goleman’s emotional and social intelligence model of competencies there are four parts (a) *self-awareness*, (b) *self-management* (c) *social-awareness*, and (d) *relationship management* (Goleman et al., 2017). These emotional and social competencies complement the attributes of the servant leader. Both share some of the same characteristics such as awareness and empathy which demonstrates with social awareness (Bawany, 2017; Mullen et al., 2019).

The competencies of persuasion, listening, and commitment to the growth of others are part of the social skills component of emotional intelligence (Mullen et al., 2019). For example, a leader that shows the same level of respect for employee perspective extends empathy and reveals his or her social awareness. Empathy is not the same as sympathy where an individual tends to agree with another person’s perspective (Bawany, 2017). The test of a successful servant leader is to ask, do those that follow grow as individuals, become wiser, healthier, or servants themselves (Greenleaf, 2002)? Servant leaders do not seek fame, power, or wealth, but because they serve others first, it finds them (Tanno & Banner, 2018).

### *Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace*

In the workplace, empathy, an element of emotional intelligence, can provide a leader the ability to consider another's perspective when it conflicts with one's own. Empathy can produce higher morale and assist others in reaching their professional potential (Cui, 2021; Jain, 2018). Emotional intelligence in the workplace can be an asset for leadership. For example, motivated employees setting and accomplishing goals can improve performance, and thereby the productivity and profitability of the organization. A self-aware and emotionally intelligent manager who has good time management skills can finish the job ahead of schedule (Cui, 2021). For instance, the manager possesses the ability to practice self-control, stay calm in highly stressful situations, and to actively listen to his or her employees concerns and opinions which builds trust and displays the transparency and integrity of the manager (Băeșu, 2018). An emotionally intelligent leader practices relationship management to positively influence his or her relationship with employees so that the work he or she does become more personal and provides a sense of belonging (Eva et al., 2019; Miao et al., 2018; Widanti & Sumrahadi, 2020). All these practices help the leader to build trust with employees for optimal performance.

A leader in the workplace who recognizes his or her own thought processes, emotions, and biases can make more informed decisions. For example, leaders who utilize emotional intelligence in the workplace are better equipped at recognizing and avoiding internal biases to promote harmony and improve decision-making (Moon, 2021). The decision-making process does not have to be the sole responsibility of the

leader. For instance, the brokers in states that predominately classify real estate agents as independent contractors should consider including agents in some decision-making because they, too, have accountability to the brokerage firm. It is to the benefit of the real estate agents to apply emotional intelligence to self-regulate their own success.

Working without emotional intelligence can lead to an erroneous approach to leadership duties and increase stress levels within the workplace (Aravena, 2019; Eastman & Cooper, 2020). For example, a broker without empathy will find it challenging to show support or sensitivity to the dilemmas of his or her real estate agents. The inability as a leader to connect makes it difficult to cultivate trust between employers and employees and communicate effectively to work as a team to raise performance thereby increasing profits (Cain et al., 2018; Cui, 2021; Maamari & Majdalani, 2017). The fact that most real estate agents are considered independent contractors does not alter the need for a fiduciary relationship between the broker and the agent to work efficiently (Barrell, 2014).

### ***The Dark Side of Emotional Intelligence***

Emotional intelligence, EQ can be used to aid, motivate, protect, and advance oneself and others because it is morally neutral (Eastman & Cooper, 2020). In its opposite form, EQ can be used negatively to manipulate others for self-gain which is referred to as dark psychology (Davis et al., 2016; Eastman & Cooper, 2020). Dark psychology is the phenomenon whereby people use tactics of motivation, persuasion, manipulation, and coercion to achieve what they desire (Eastman & Cooper, 2020).



Within the dark side of psychology, is imperative for the individual to recognize whether they are a perpetrator or the victim of manipulation.

Emotional manipulation (EM) involves influencing an individual's behavior or feelings for self-interest (Hyde & Grieve, 2018). This type of behavior is so insidious that oftentimes the victims are unaware that the abuse or manipulation has occurred until afterwards. Covert emotional manipulation (CEM) is the most experienced type of manifestation of EM in the world of dark psychology (Eastman & Cooper, 2020). The point of this type of control is to avoid detection by its victim. During the financial crisis of 2007-2008, dishonest behavior was one of many factors which led to the crisis by financial and non-financial institutions (Adebambo et al., 2015; Shank, 2018; Shoen, 2017).

Individuals differ in their reasons and motivations to lie or cheat (Heck et al., 2018). According to Heck et al. (2018), "...research across various disciplines has addressed which situational factors and personality traits can account for dishonesty, both in isolation and with each other" (p. 356). If an individual operates from a self-interest model, he or she is more likely to value achievement over the welfare of others (Shank, 2018). For example, in the real estate industry, if brokers and their agents withheld private information from the public, then this may lead to corruption and cheating. This type of dishonest activity is unethical behavior (National Association of Realtors, n.d; Simha & Parboteeah, 2020).

## **Motivation Theories**

Leadership is the process of facilitating and influencing followers in achieving shared goals (Rabiul & Yean, 2021). Leadership plays a valuable role in determining organizational performance outcomes (Bayram & Zoubi, 2020). A servant leader is a style of leadership that believes caring more for followers' needs helps to motivate followers to participate in achieving organizational objectives. Understanding what motivates employees is important to the survival of an organization. The right employee motivation in an organization is necessary to achieve beneficial outcomes such as work engagement, performance, and job satisfaction. The emphasis placed by the servant leader on prioritizing the needs of the follower above the organization can influence followers to increase their engagement and performance to achieve professional satisfaction. A direct correlation exists between the leadership style and motivational method chosen (Nielsen et al., 2019). Leadership style ties into the tasks entrusted to the leader, explaining the how and the method of implementation (Băeșu, 2018). Motivation within an organization is known to energize and inspire employees' progress. Leaders can utilize several types of motivation to benefit both their followers and the organization.

Intrinsic and extrinsic are the most common types of motivation found in the workplace. Intrinsic refers to the motivation from within rather than an outside influence (Guillén et al., 2015). Extrinsic motivation is an outside influential source promising a reward for tasks accomplished or a threat of punishment for non-performance (Guillén et

al., 2015). Another type, affiliation motivation, is an individual's need to connect in relationship with a particular group, or an organization (Müller & Cañal-Bruland, 2020). For example, an individual motivated by affiliation is encouraged by connection with fellow employees outside of work. Achievement motivation involves the satisfaction an individual receives upon completing set life goals (Anderman, 2020). Lastly, expectancy theory of motivation is an individual's belief that if specific behaviors are increased, it will lead to an anticipated outcome (Lloyd & Mertens, 2018; Sherman, 2017). This type of motivation fosters a work environment that encourages goal-oriented employees. Most human behavior is directed by goals and needs (Maslow, 1954).

### ***Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory of Motivation***

In 1954, Maslow described the hierarchy of needs in motivation as involving a five-level model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels in a pyramid. The lower and basic needs in the hierarchy must be met before individuals can address higher needs (Maslow, 1954). The levels are physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs, in that order. The physiological level is mankind's basic need to survive, which includes the need for water, food, and shelter. Safety needs involve the desire for good health, personal security, property, and resources. Love and belonging are the level revealing human need for connection to others in either romantic or friendship relationships. The final need on Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualization which is the desire to become the best in life that one can achieve. The concept of this theory is if one

has a place to reside, food, and water then they will have the focus and motivation to move up to the next need of friendship, intimacy, and a sense of connection and so on.

Maslow later discovered his earlier versions (1943, 1954) of hierarchy of needs were incomplete. He found the need of self-actualization on his hierarchical list was a steppingstone to a more salient need he called self-transcendence (Rivera-Koltko, 2006). The later model including self-transcendence places the emphasis of human development at a transpersonal level, where the individual devotes themselves to callings or vocations beyond self-interest and ego (Rivera-Koltko, 2006). Maslow made a clear distinction between self-actualization and self-transcendence. Some scholars have concluded that Maslow never developed a sixth stage or final theory of self-actualization that stood alone, but rather that self-actualization is interwoven with self-transcendence (Daniels, 1982). Maslow (1993b) stated “I have recently found it more and more useful to differentiate between two kinds (or better, degrees) of self-actualizing people. It seems to me that I have found some degree of transcendence in many people other than self-actualizing ones” (p. 270). A good servant leader can ethically use the hierarchy of needs as motivation to help employees to advance up the levels (Varela et al., 2019). In the need’s theory, consequently, ethical norms are neither consistent, general, nor communicable, because needs vary depending on the individual (Acevedo, 2018). The self-transcendence part of the expanded version of Maslow’s taxonomy, particularly in motivation, has not been popularized.

### *Self-Determination Theory*

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro theory of human motivation which suggests that people can stimulate themselves and others to act when their needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy are fulfilled (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020; Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). Competence is an individual's desire to possess the abilities, talent, and knowledge they need to accomplish something effectively and successfully (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). Relatedness depends on an individual's ability to forge meaningful relationships with a sense of connectedness and belonging (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). Autonomy provides individuals the freedom in the workplace to make decisions and exert self-direction (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). Individuals that are more autonomous in their behaviors will more than likely continue the behavior and feel good overall (Martela & Pessi, 2018). For example, employees can decide when certain job duties will be completed if it is quality work and does not cause an adverse outcome to organizational objectives.

The theory of self-determination suggests that leaders and followers find work intrinsically motivating by responding to their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence in the workplace (Vidic et al., 2016, p. 9). In contrast, the public downfall and bad leadership of companies such as Enron, Blockbuster, and Compaq show that having at least one or two of these components met does not ensure organizational success. Today, ethical lapses in judgement continue to afflict some business leaders because of personal weakness and defective character (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). The

ethical component of servant leadership remains essential because of the moral ineptitude of many corporate leaders (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018; Sendjaya, 2015). The servant leader works to increase task performance by helping employees fulfill their psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Neubert et al., 2022; Vidic et al., 2016), which also increases job satisfaction (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). The servant leader fosters a nurturing environment of trust, care, and respect that builds and promotes unity in the workplace.

### ***Motivation in The Workplace***

The type of motivation experienced in the workplace determines the effort and behavior of an individual (Alhassan & Greene, 2020). Maslow's theory of self-actualization reveals there are motivators beyond our basic needs to help us reach our full potential. Maslow's basic needs theory reflects what most individuals want in a job; job security, feeling valued, macro management, and a sense of purpose (Alhassan & Greene, 2020). Organizational leaders choose to implement their methods of motivation differently. Some use tangible forms of motivation like monetary rewards, holidays, or gifts (Northouse, 2018; Smith, 2020). Whereas other forms of motivation are intangible. Examples of this are verbal or written praise of performance, or by celebrating of achievements (Northouse, 2018; Smith, 2020). Motivation implemented by leaders in any organization has the same goal of keeping their employees interested and productive in accomplishing organizational goals.

Servant leaders are seen as role models with the ability to influence employees to work with a servant attitude (Eva et al., 2019; Neubert et al., 2022; Ruiz-Palomino & Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2020). For example, a servant attitude in the workplace is exemplified by the employee that is not self-absorbed and does what is right even when inconvenient. For instance, having a servant attitude would mean employees have a mindset of selflessness and growth which keeps them motivated to achieve goals. The servant leader believes employees have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible work abilities which helps leaders to listen receptively to what is being said and unspoken (Spears, 1996) and lessens the chance for confusion or resistance to organizational goals (Fuioaga & Rusu, 2018). Leaders may improve employee motivation if they are aware of the potential factors that influence it (Campos-García & Zúñiga-Vicente, 2019).

### **Elements of Principal-Agent Relationships**

The motivation behind an employee's behavior can be influenced by the type of relationship he or she has with the employer (Campos-García & Zúñiga-Vicente, 2019; Vidic et al., 2016). In the real estate industry, most broker-agent relationships would be identified as principal-agent, not employer-employee. The principals of a real estate transaction can be the sellers, buyers, and the broker while the real estate agent has a responsibility as an agent to both the brokerage firm and clients (Arnold, 1992). The principal-agent relationship is an arrangement built on trust where one party legally appoints another to represent their interests (Baker et al., 2019). For this reason, it is imperative that all principals and agents in a real estate transaction understand the

principal-agent relationship so that it benefits all parties involved. This section of the literature review transitions from the conceptual framework to examine the influence a principal-agent relationship has in the real estate industry.

### **Agency Theory as Applied to Real Estate Industry**

Agency theory is a principle launched in economics by Jensen and Meckling in 1976, used to explain and resolve disputes within a principal-agent relationship (Lopes, 2016). The difference in priorities and interests between agents and principals is known as the principal-agent problem (Heyler & Martin, 2018). An agency is a fiduciary relationship between two parties in which one, the agent, represents the principal in the daily business operations (Heyler & Martin, 2018). The employee-employer relationship primarily does not exist in the real estate industry between real estate agents and their brokers. The principal in that setting is the broker who either owns or manages the firm that hires the real estate agent. In an agency relationship, the principal (i.e., broker) delegates responsibilities to the agent (i.e., real estate agent) and monitors his or her progress. Another example of a principal-agent relationship is seller or buyer as principals and the brokerage firm as the agent in service to meet the housing needs of its client. Conflicts of interest can arise when the interests of the agent and principal do not align. This scenario can cause irrevocable financial harm to the principal and can be considered a moral or ethical hazard.

In the real estate industry, a real estate agent may be tempted to occupy two roles simultaneously in which one, the real estate agent, is acting on behalf of the brokerage



firm, the principal. In contrast, the real estate agent may choose to behave as a principal in the real estate industry to be both an entrepreneur and an independent contractor. This behavior may be of concern if its focus is self-interest which would create an agency problem because the real estate agent may make decisions that can negatively affect the brokerage firm financially.

Real estate agents have more autonomy than employees, but the broker needs to make clear the relationship via a written contract (IRS, 2020). The contract may consist of any rules and regulations constructed around the expected behavior to avoid any conflict of interests between broker and agent. For instance, make it a brokerage firm policy to have an agreement outlining whether he or she is an employee or independent contractor for federal tax purposes before allowing work to begin. A broker has specific responsibilities to employees under U.S. Labor Laws. For example, the broker must offer fair pay and provide a safe work environment (FLSA, n.d.).

In contrast, as an independent contractor, the real estate agent may have office space elsewhere, and the pay must be based on sales commissions, not on the number of hours worked (Department of Labor, n.d.). An independent contractor is an individual that performs services that cannot be controlled by an employer (IRS, 2020). For instance, a real estate agent as an independent contractor can be forced to attend all sales meetings but is not required to schedule appointments and meet with clients at the instruction of the broker. As an employee, the broker controls the agent's hours worked

and appointments set. Beyond the examples shared, the agency relationship between broker and agent can be equally complex and beneficial.

### **Agency Theory Impact on Workplace Motivation**

A broker supervising real estate agents has the challenge of motivating his or her agents to perform. In the real estate industry, the relationship between broker and real estate agent can be either employee or independent contractor (FLSA, n.d.). In the United States, depending on the jurisdiction of the brokerage office and broker-agent relationship it can be an example of agency theory. The type of relationship that would recognize a real estate agent as an independent contractor is an agency relationship at its core (Solomon et al., 2021). Another example of an agency relationship is between entrepreneurs and society (Bendickson et al., 2016; Solomon & Hanson, 1983). In the D.C. metropolitan area, which consists of Maryland, District of Columbia, and Virginia, real estate brokerage firms choose to engage most real estate agents as independent contractors (Council Code of the District of Columbia, 2021; FLSA, n.d.; Virginia Misclassification of workers, Stat, 2018). In Virginia, new laws passed in 2020 that require a broker to classify an agent who is earning a wage automatically as an employee unless they can justify otherwise (Virginia Misclassification of workers, Stat, 2018).

Since the requirement of a broker to exercise supervision over his or her real estate agents under the Fair Labor Standards Act conflicts with one of the basic tenants of an independent contractor relationship, is challenging for a broker to both comply with labor laws and fulfill his or her supervisory duties under real estate state laws (FLSA,

n.d.). Most states have adopted some aspect of the California Supreme Court ABC test which ask the following (*Dynamex Operations West, Inc. v. Superior Court of Los Angeles, California Appellate Reports, Supreme Court of Appeals, 2018*):

1. Is the real estate agent free from the control and direction of the company in connection with the performance of the work?
2. Does real estate agent perform work outside the usual course of the company's business?
3. Is the real estate agent customarily engaged in an independently established trade, occupation, or business of the same nature as that involved in the work performed?

Absent a state law to the contrary, the familiar three-part IRS test is recognized (IRS, 2020):

1. The real estate agent must be a licensed real estate professional.
2. Substantially all the real estate agent's pay must be directly related to sales, not hours worked.
3. There must be a written contract stating that the real estate agent will not be treated as an employee for federal tax purposes.

A real estate broker will need to be creative with his or her method of motivation for agents that are not classified as employees. For example, supplying real estate agents with monthly progress sales reports and/or using an office display board to display agents' achievements may motivate and increase agent performance. Forms of motivation

such as providing healthcare, stock options, and title promotions cannot be used for independent contractors (Alhassan & Greene, 2020). According to Alhassan and Greene (2020), the rewards based on job performance should be given year-round, not just monthly or quarterly. Motivation drives employee performance and can negatively or positively effect company revenues.

### **Performance and Profitability in Businesses**

Businesses operate with a universal goal of earning profits (Widanti & Sumrahadi, 2020). Human resources, capital, assets, and leadership are all important elements required for the sustainability and success of an organization. The leader of an organization is the most essential because he or she decides how the elements such as capital, human resources, and assets will be managed to achieve the company's objectives (Galavotti, 2019; Kharis, 2015). Employees provide the human capital required for the success of an organization such as labor, experience, and skill set (Widyaningsih & Arfiansyah, 2020). An individual's experience and skill set can vary based on prior training, experience, or education. A company can enhance its employees' skill set and increase experience through investing in additional training and education for its employees. An educational institution may invest in providing its teachers with innovation training to increase interest for topics taught and willingness to learn as technology develops (Widyaningsih & Arfiansyah, 2020).

The profitability of an organization is one of its core measures to gauge performance (Widanti & Sumrahadi, 2020). A firm's profitability is traditionally

measured by capital in terms of the organizational income, return on asset which evaluates and measures the organization's efficiency, and profit margin showing the overall profitability (Tomic et al., 2018). The type of leader within the workplace is another factor contributing to increasing profits (Priyadharshini & Sudhahar, 2019). Leadership styles can be a determining factor in whether an organization experiences growth or profit loss. An internal issue that can also be a hindrance to an organization's profitability, such as the condition of the employer-employee relationship (Cinite & Duxbury, 2018). An effective organizational leader can oftentimes experience resistance to change because the desires or goals of the employer (principal) and employee (agent) conflict (Cinite & Duxbury, 2018; Ferreira et al., 2018; Heyler & Martin, 2018). The phenomenon is an agency problem which originates from agency theory.

### **Ethics and Decision-Making in the Real Estate Industry**

The real estate industry has evolved over the last decade as the result of the 2007-2008 financial crisis. The financial crisis has created information asymmetry within the real estate brokerage market, which implies the possibility of some real estate agents entertaining and implementing deceptive practices (Chen et al., 2020). The asymmetry of information about financial markets is the buyer or seller has more material knowledge than the other. In the real estate brokerage field, information asymmetry is the byproduct of sellers and homeowners having access to information that previously required the help of a real estate agent (Chen et al., 2020). For example, a buyer or homeowner looking to sell can now use the internet to access property values, conduct property searches, and

many have the option of taking virtual tours. First-time homebuyers know more about their interested property before they even speak to the real estate agent. Today, sellers may feel more confident about how to list and sell their property without the assistance of an agent.

The residential real estate market and reforms in the real estate brokerages continue as the industry is regulated. The level of accountability and responsibility real estate brokers and their real estate agents have in providing their clients the best representation during their transaction is essential to building trust and repeat customers (Ferreira et al., 2018; Patron & Roskelley, 2008). Real estate agents are faced with protecting the interests of their clients which at times requires making difficult decisions on behalf of clients and sometimes their interests may overlap. This kind of situation can create an opportunity for a real estate agent to struggle with making an ethical or unethical decision (Chen, et al., 2020). Real estate agents protect their reputation and potential for future business referrals by aggressively bargaining home sales for their clients (Patron & Roskelley, 2008). A client's ability to better understand the decision making and sales process of a real estate agent may lead to more transparency and recommendations to improve performance and quality of the services real estate agents provide to the public (Ferreira et al., 2018).

Controversy continues to mount around the methodology that can be used to evaluate service quality pertaining to real estate brokerage firms because of the difficulty in observing a broker's level of effort (Ferreira et al., 2018). Researchers have suggested

a qualitative decision-making approach, Decision Expert (DEX), that combines multiple criteria decision analysis (MCDA) with rule-based expert systems which was developed in the 1980s (Bohanec et al., 2013; Ferreira et al., 2018). The DEX methodology has a long history of technical, scientific, and practical contributions (Bohanec et al., 2013), but because of the complexity of DEX, a more user-friendly software version called DEXi was created and has proven to be useful.

### **Impact of Real Estate Agents Reputation on Performance**

Nguyen et al. (2020) found that ethical behavior can improve a firm's performance. The real estate brokerage industry can benefit from their real estate agents practicing ethical behavior which enhances their relationship and reputation with customers and the general public (Chen et al., 2020; Piazzolo & Förster, 2019). Trust influences the attitude of customers towards companies (Chen et al., 2020).

Trustworthiness between a real estate agent and his or her client does not guarantee a successful interaction, but is a prerequisite to it (Paesbrugge et al., 2020). Real estate agents have a responsibility to provide their clients with quality service to support the ability of the firm to thrive in a competitive environment (Paesbrugge et al., 2020).

Real estate agents assign different values to reputation (Shi & Tapia, 2016). Some real estate agents assign a higher value to his or her reputation because for them being a realtor is a long-term career choice. Although their counterparts may not value move-away sellers because they do not see them as an opportunity for repeat business. Loyal employees have a positive impact on the profitability of the organization (Widanti &

Sumrahadi, 2020). A real estate agent that makes decisions based upon self-interest and greed is not committed to the organization's success. In the real estate brokerage field, the broker's role is to positively influence the performance of their real estate agents.

### **Implementing Change in the Real Estate Industry**

The bust of the real estate housing bubble in the United States affected over half of the country (Kress & Turk, 2020). Some factors involved in the mortgage crisis were the rush to lend money to homeowners without regard to their ability to repay, some investors posing as subprime borrowers to receive lower interest rates, and the many unscrupulous real estate professionals (Wachter & Keys, 2018-present). The real estate industry is often under pressure to improve the value of its services because of a lack of ethical business conduct by some real estate professionals. For instance, real estate agents who lie to their clients make them feel cheated when the truth is revealed, which in turn, affects the broker's reputation (Lee, 2012; Piazzolo & Förster, 2019).

A strong reputation is necessary for any organization and works by increasing the trustworthiness of the services provided, which can also be used as a source of competitive advantage (Dowling & Moran, 2012; Hamzah & Shamsudin, 2020; Nyuur et al., 2019). It is highly probable that prospective clients would not want to hire a real estate agent who is disorganized and/or dishonest. With proper systems in place, an efficient real estate agent is not likely to overlook important tasks. Furthermore, a real estate agent that focuses on good communication and keeps his or her promises to clients builds trustworthiness and strengthens the relationship's reliability which positively



affects the reputation of the brokerage firm represented (i.e., Coldwell Banker Realty, Keller Williams Realty). Trust in any relationship, whether business or personal, is essential and a foundational element required to be successful (Terblanche & Heyns, 2020).

Servant leaders are governed by ethics and their belief that enabling others' success is the surest way to drive their company's success. A leader's work engagement provides employees with a role modeling resource that contributes to employee engagement (Zhao & Xie, 2020). Employee engagement is the emotional commitment a worker has to the organization and its goals (Watson et al., 2018). In a real estate brokerage firm, an example would be the real estate agent's level of commitment to the managing broker to meet the organizational goal of being profitable. The broker's challenge is finding an effective way to model ethical behavior their real estate agents must imitate to gain the trust of their clientele thereby increasing the organization's profits.

The agency problem is a contributing factor to this challenge because it highlights the potential conflict of interest between the managing broker, real estate agent, and the clients (i.e., sellers and buyers). Because most real estate agents are hired by a broker as independent contractors, they are principal to their interests and agent for managing the relationship with the broker, sellers, and buyers. The research presented in the literature review suggests that emotionally intelligent leaders that choose a servant leadership approach may have more success in influencing their followers to model their ethical

behavior. To better serve clients and implement positive change, there must be a clear understanding between broker and real estate agent of the expectations of the leader-subordinate relationship. A managing real estate broker expects that real estate agents conduct their business in an ethical manner. As an independent contractor, the real estate agent expects the broker to supply them with necessary support (i.e., training, education, integrated technology) because unethical behavior leads to bad reputations, which can negatively affect profitability for both real estate agents and brokers.

Leaders need both cognitive and interpersonal skills to be an effective leader (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000). An empathetic leader who actively listens to subordinates would be more likely to collaborate effectively to solve problems. The leadership style as servant is based on empathy, which is an attribute of emotional intelligence and demonstrated by the leader's ability to assess the emotions of others. A solid connection between servant leadership and emotional intelligence factors is the ability to appraise and express emotion, enhance cognitive processes and decision making, understand and analyze emotions, and the reflective regulation of emotion (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Servant leaders can influence and improve the performance of followers through their behavior (Varela et al., 2019). A real estate broker who is an emotionally intelligent servant leader would need to pay closer attention to how their behavior is perceived by salespeople (i.e., real estate agents), to have the desired effect on their performance to increase profitability.

### **Transition**

In Section 1, I furnished an overview of the study by providing an explanation of the business problem and purpose statement, nature of the study, research and interview questions, significance of the study, and conceptual framework. I further explained the contribution to business practice, implications for social change, and professional and academic literature. The literature review section of the study provided insight into how brokers in the real estate industry can lack the leadership strategies necessary to model ethical behavior and decision-making for their real estate agents. The breakdown of the literature review section was accomplished by discussing, analyzing, comparing, and synthesizing both conceptual framework and themes and phenomenon identified in the purpose statement.

Section 2 begins with a re-introduction of the purpose statement and description of my role in the research project and the participants of the research study. I will discuss the research design and method, data collection, population, and sampling, and the plan to maintain the ethical standards of the research. Section 3 will address the presentation of findings with application for professional practice. I will then reflect, make recommendations, and conclude with suggestions for further research in the field.

## Section 2: The Project

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies real estate brokers use to model the ethical behavior and decision-making their real estate agents must practice to positively influence performance and profitability. The targeted population was leaders of three real estate brokerage firms in the D.C. Metropolitan area, which consists of Maryland, D.C., and Virginia, who have led successful businesses for at least 5 years. The implication for positive social change is that improvement of the industry's business ethics and reputation may lead to increased charitable engagement between local real estate professionals and the communities they serve.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as a researcher was to conduct interviews; observe and monitor to reduce bias; gather relevant data; and analyze results. The researcher collects and analyzes data to recognize within the analysis when there is a finding to report. Because the researcher is the primary instrument used to collect and analyze the data, focus and interpretive thinking are vital skills to possess (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Another aspect of the role is the responsibility for presenting the findings in a concise and competent manner to provide the connections between the results of the analysis and existing theory and research (Fusch et al., 2018). A researcher can use experience and previous knowledge to aid in the construction of the themes and analysis of data. The study outcomes and the interpretation of findings are subject to the researcher's life experiences, thoughts, and

worldview (Karagiozis, 2018). As the researcher, it is my responsibility to find ways to avoid biases that may arise from my personal experience.

My professional background includes roles as a bankruptcy and real estate paralegal, loss mitigation specialist, and Maryland-licensed title producer and realtor for 15 years. These positions included having business affiliations with banks, appraisers, surveyors, attorneys, title examiners, and real estate brokers. The experience provided me the opportunity to witness both the effective and ineffective real estate brokerage practices during the years 1997-2012, which led up to the financial crisis of 2008. According to the *Belmont Report of Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research* (1978), three basic principles a researcher must adhere to are (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. The Belmont Report principles were used as a guide when conducting my research, especially since the integrity of the research depends on the integrity of the researcher.

Researchers can make errors that threaten the validity and the reliability of the study. Bias is a source of error. The basic disposition of humans is that everyone is capable of errors (Tamblyn et al., 2018). For instance, knowingly interpreting data to meet my expectations or asking a question in a way that may affect the participant's response is researcher bias. During the interview process, I used all the data obtained and continually re-evaluated the impressions and assumptions to ensure pre-existing assumptions were avoided. A strategy to reduce bias is practicing reflexivity, which is the ability to examine one's own beliefs, judgements, and practices to not influence the

research study during the data collection and analysis process (Johnson et al., 2020; Mackieson et al., 2019). For instance, I used a reflexive journal where I take detailed notes during interviews, including how I may have influenced the responses and interpreted interview data. Reflexivity helped me to recognize any of my prejudices and subjectivities. The discipline of journaling in qualitative research helps to ensure the rigor of the research process (Fusch et al., 2018).

The objective of an interview protocol is to guide the conduct of the interviews and enhance the reliability of the study (Abdel, 2019; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). An interview protocol can include the use of a script, research guided questions, and open-ended interview questions to prevent participants from providing pre-formatted statements (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Sivarajah et al., 2017). The protocol ensured I ask each participant the same initial and follow-up questions. With the aid of the interview protocol, I was prepared to follow up on each participant's response to questions in a consistent manner and inquire further for clarification, based on the rapport established.

### **Participants**

The participant criteria for the study required the selection of real estate brokers who have successfully utilized strategies to positively influence ethical behavior in their real estate agents. Participants were nine managing brokers from real estate brokerage firms in the states of Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia (D.C.). When choosing the participants for a study, researchers should consider their knowledge of the phenomenon and previous experience in that vocation (Yin, 2018). My strategy for

identifying participants was to utilize the National Association of Realtors member directory to contact potential candidates by phone. The first nine business leaders to respond to my call, show interest, and meet all qualifying criteria were invited to participate in the study via email (see Appendix A).

Initial contact with the participants through phone conversation was the first step in building rapport. I emailed a consent form to receive written permission and participants' intent to voluntarily join the research study. A strategy to build a good working relationship was to immediately explain my intentions and expectations for the study, while also allowing the participants to ask questions. The need for the participants to feel comfortable during the interview process is essential to receiving valid and candid information for the research study (Kravets, 2019). A researcher's ability to actively listen during conversation and understand the cultural and social contexts in which the participants live is necessary to encourage open communication (Brayda & Boyce, 2014; Roberts, 2020). The mutual respect and trust built through open communication between researcher and participants early in the process later serves as an opening for follow-up responses or clarification if needed.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed are the research methods researchers consider as approaches to conducting a study (Fusch et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2015; Yin, 2014). I chose a qualitative approach for this study. The purpose behind conducting this

type of study is to explore what strategies real estate brokers use to model ethical behavior and decision for their real estate agents to positively influence performance and profitability. Through the managing-brokers' experiences, the qualitative method allowed me to collect data on the *why* and *how* real estate brokers have chosen to model ethical behavior. A qualitative researcher explores the business problem and uses the interaction and information from the participants to gain insight into their opinions, values, beliefs, and intentions (Thiem, 2016; Yin, 2018). A qualitative study revealed strategies for how real estate brokers model the ethical behavior for their real estate agents, which could increase both reputation and revenues.

Researchers apply quantitative methodology using statistical methods to analyze variables, relationships, correlations, and hypotheses to obtain and measure research data (Beach, 2018; Fusch et al., 2018; Taylor & Hignett, 2014). The mixed method approach is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods to address research questions and test hypotheses within a study (Guetterman et al., 2015; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The qualitative evidence augments the statistical evidence to allow for a greater understanding of the data analyzed (Guetterman et al., 2015). The mixed method advantage is the ability to use numerical data to add precision to words or narratives, but combining quantitative and qualitative research can make a study time consuming and more costly to conduct. The use of quantitative or mixed method were impractical for my exploration of effective leadership strategies in real estate brokerage



firms because my intent was not to collect statistical evidence, examine the relationship between variables, or test a hypothesis.

### **Research Design**

When selecting a design for qualitative research, researchers may consider ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, or case study (Tomaszewski, et al., 2020). After reviewing these options, I chose a multiple case study design for the study. The multiple case study design is appropriate when researching phenomena existing within organizations and the role and setting of leadership in those organizations (Yin, 2018). A qualitative multiple case study was the most appropriate for my research design because I conducted an exploration of the leadership strategies real estate brokers from multiple firms used in modeling ethical behavior for their real estate agents.

Ethnographic researchers observe participants, behaviors, and cultural phenomenon in their own cultural setting (i.e., groups or communities), which can be time consuming (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). The ethnographic research design was not appropriate or practical for this study because the practices of individuals, groups, and communities are not the focal point of this study. Phenomenological research is the study of participants' lived experiences through the lens of the phenomenon, rather than participants freely sharing their experience (Gauntlett et al., 2017; Tomaszewski, et al., 2020). The phenomenological approach was not appropriate because my goal was not to understand the subjective, lived experiences and perspectives of participants, but to learn about their leadership strategies. A narrative approach was considered, but its focus is on

researchers collecting data about life stories and discussing the meaning of personal experiences. The focus of this study is on specific experiences, behaviors, and actions to understand the leadership strategies of brokers not with participants' human experience or inquiry that produces data in narrative form.

Data saturation is dependent on the topic, purpose, and data collection and analysis methods of a study (Fusch et al., 2018). A researcher can ensure data saturation when rich descriptive data, which are intricate and detailed information, are collected (Hennink et al., 2017). A multiple case study design allowed me to add to the number of participants until no new information emerged. Saturation is reached when additional interviews do not add further information to the study (Fofana et al., 2020; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study was real estate brokers from the tri-state area of Maryland, D.C., and Virginia who had successfully implemented leadership strategies to model ethical behavior for their real estate agents. With a multiple case design, it is difficult to decide on an exact number of participants because of the depth of information that the participants may provide (Sim et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2019). A sample size as small as six participants can reach data saturation (Chai et al., 2021). The richer the data collected from each participant, the fewer participants are needed (Morse, 2000; Vasileiou et al., 2018).

For this study, I used purposive sampling, which is an efficient form of finding and selecting participants. Purposeful sampling is the technique to obtain a representative subset of a larger population to serve a specific purpose (Andrade, 2021; Suri, 2011). Purposeful sampling allowed me to choose participants based on the criteria outlined in my study. The participation criteria included a minimum of 5 years' work experience as a licensed broker along with meeting the population requirement. Using purposeful sampling ensured the brokers selected had the comprehensive insight to effectively answer the research question.

The sample included three brokers from three different brokerage firms for a total of nine participants. A plethora of articles and books that provide guidance on sample size, suggesting as few as 5 and up to 50 participants as adequate to reach data saturation (Dworkin, 2012; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). I chose nine brokers as the target number because the participants for this study are homogeneous and can serve as a representative group of the larger real estate community. Having many participants in a study can be overwhelming, causing a quick depletion of resources or increasing the risk of errors (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). My goal was to collect rich data because the richer the data, the fewer participants are needed. Data saturation is reached when no new information is revealed through the interviews and data analysis processes (Bijani et al., 2021; Fusch et al., 2018). If more participants are required to reach data saturation, purposeful sampling allowed me to add them.

The setting for the interviews was either virtual or in person at a location where the participants were comfortable and not easily distracted. Virtual choices can be Microsoft Teams or Zoom meetings. As noted above, I contacted potential participants by phone to determine interest and confirm they met the participation criteria, at which time, I determined their preference for the interview setting.

### **Ethical Research**

Ethics in research enhance ethical practices and behaviors, which safeguards compliance requirements and the reliability of the study (Hamid & Widjaja, 2019; Sivasubramanian et al., 2021). To maintain ethical standards and professionalism, the Walden University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the request for collected data (approval number 10-07-22-0643291) for this study. The ability to demonstrate and apply ethical standards in research was imperative when protecting the participants of a study. Informed consent is an essential part of ethical research and outlines both the purpose and risk involved (Grady, 2015; Regmi et al., 2017). The use of a consent form is more than an agreement between parties, it is a process. I used a consent form (see Appendix B) to confirm my identity, contact information, the role of the participants, the study objective, and how the results of the study would be used.

A phone conversation with potential participants allowed me to explain my intentions and expectations in relation to the study, while also allowing the participants to ask questions. Next, I emailed the consent form (see Appendix B) to extend an invitation to join the research study. All nine participants responded and agreed to participate in the

study. IRB procedures specify that research participation is voluntary to avoid participants feeling coerced into participating (Connelly, 2014). The consent form included statements regarding voluntary participation without incentives and a participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time. No incentives were offered to ensure participants were motivated by genuine interest and not influenced by financial rewards. Participants may opt out of the study by either a phone call or sending an email. Upon receiving a participant's request to withdraw, they will no longer be a part of the study. Any data collected from participants who opt out of the research study would be immediately destroyed. Notably, no participants chose to opt out of the study. All participants who initially agreed to participate remained actively involved throughout the entire duration of the study.

The consent form explains how I protected the participants' privacy. The privacy of participants and their ethical protection limits any risks of misuse of any information provided by the participants (Zhang & Liu, 2019). A coding system with a letter and number combination (e.g., P1B1, P2B2) was assigned to each participant as their identifier throughout the study for the purpose of confidentiality. I ensured the ethical protection of participants throughout the research process by following the recommendations of the Belmont Report and obtaining Walden Institutional Review Board approval of the plan.

The data, including printed pages and documents from the participants' websites and my personal research journal, were locked, and stored in a secure location. All

digitalized data from each participant were stored on a secured hard drive and an external USB drive. I will securely store all data for 5 years to protect the confidentiality of participants. After 5 years, all documents will be destroyed by shredding and the digitized data will be permanently erased from hard and thumb drives.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing research data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). As the primary instrument, researchers can enhance the study because they can generate a thorough understanding of the phenomenon with the help of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The six approaches for collecting research data are as follows: (a) interviewing, (b) analyzing records, (c) administering surveys, (d) researching archived documents and media, (e) personal observation of participants, and (f) using physical objects (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). I used semistructured interviews asking open-ended questions that generate detailed data and provide the flexibility for participants to bring their own personality and perspective to the discussion, which explored leadership strategies to model ethical behavior. A comprehensive search was conducted to acquire various forms of secondary documentation, including customer reviews, company blogs, Facebook reviews, and Yelp reviews. The participants' websites provided the study's most relevant and reliable secondary information. In contrast, alternative sources such as Facebook and Yelp reviews failed to produce valuable data, and none of the websites featured a company blog. I requested participants provide corporate documentation such as

Standard Operating Procedures and training policies. The participants expressed their concerns and were uncomfortable supplying those specific documents. The customer reviews, company value statements, and transparency statements from the brokerage's website provided relevant secondary data.

During the interviews, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix C). The interview protocol serves to guide the conduct of the interviews and enhance the reliability of the study (Abdel, 2019; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). An interview protocol can include the use of a script, research guided questions, and open-ended interview questions (see Appendix D) to prevent participants from providing pre-formatted statements (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Sivarajah et al., 2017). I utilized open-ended interview questions, guided by the protocol, and the interviews were approximately 30 minutes in duration.

In following the interview protocol, I informed each of the participants about the member checking process. Member checking is the technique that the researcher uses to help improve accuracy, credibility, reliability, and validity of a study (Brear, 2019). The participants reviewed a summary of my interpretations of their responses to provide the opportunity to confirm accuracy and provide further insights. Member checking also allowed me to mitigate bias, continue to build trust with participants, and ensure the reliability and validity of results.

### **Data Collection Technique**

I conducted semistructured interviews using Zoom and Microsoft Teams videoconferencing, whichever was convenient for the participants and recorded the interviews to create a record of participants' responses. I used Zoom to interview four participants and Microsoft Teams to interview five participants. The interviews were recorded to create a record of participants' responses. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with a consent form that included a statement emphasizing voluntary participation without any incentives. Participants were not offered any incentives to ensure that their motivation stemmed from genuine interest. The choice to use videoconferencing to conduct the interview gave me the ability to observe non-verbal cues and provided the opportunity to observe participants' reactions for a deeper understanding of the responses. The disadvantage to using videoconferencing is the possibility of technical problems. For this study, there were no technical difficulties encountered during the interview process.

During the interview process, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix C) to support the integrity of the interviews and guide me through the process. Using a protocol, I introduced myself at the beginning of each interview, shared the study's purpose and participant details, and answered any related questions before moving to interview questions. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes in duration, with an additional 15-minute window available depending on responses, to allow for follow-up questions. I took detailed notes during the interviews using a research journal to help



review and transcribe my journal notes to verify accuracy. The notes served as a primary source of data and provided a reliable record for later analysis.

Researchers can use data collection and analysis techniques to ensure the reliability, validity, and quality of a study (Wiseman et al., 2019). I enhanced the reliability and validity of my research study by using triangulation and member checking. Member checking is a tool to strengthen the trustworthiness of the research results (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I provided each participant with a summary of their responses via email to review the accuracy of my interpretations. This triangulation of data from both interviews and relevant secondary documentation is crucial in ensuring the validity of the study findings. Triangulation helps mitigate potential biases or limitations that may arise from relying solely on one data source, providing a more comprehensive and well-rounded analysis of the research topic.

### **Data Organization Technique**

A researcher's ability to keep track of collected data is essential for exploring and understanding a research study. Yin (2018) determined that using a data organization method enhances readers' understanding of how the researcher concluded the findings. I used NVivo 12 software to store all source data. I transcribed all Zoom or Microsoft Teams recordings into a Microsoft Word document to upload the textual data into the NVivo software. Researchers use NVivo to organize data and assist in the data analysis process (Paulus et al., 2017). NVivo software allows storing and managing a wide range of source data such as research notes, interview scripts, company social media content,

video recordings of participants' interviews, etc. The software is designed to organize data into file folders, and then codes are assigned to manage the material into broad topic areas to recognize emerging themes. The NVivo software enabled me to separate each interview into a separate folder. NVivo allowed me to add links to documents and notes from my research journals to each participant. The proper use of NVivo ensured that the correct information was analyzed and that the findings were reliable.

I organized my data by creating individual paper and electronic file folders to support data organization. I have securely stored all research documents in a locked file cabinet to further protect the confidentiality of participants. Participants' names were coded as a combination of P1, P2, P3, and the broker organizations, B1, B2, B3, etc. For example, one participant label was P1B1, protecting participants and their organizations' confidentiality. Five years after completing this study, I plan to shred documents and digitized data will be erased permanently from the hard drive and thumb drives.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research systematically searches and arranges the interview data, observation notes, or other non-textual materials that the researcher accumulates to increase the understanding of the phenomenon (Wong, 2008). Data analysis has primary and secondary sources of data (Prada-Ramallal et al., 2017; Rabinovich & Cheon, 2011). I analyzed both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data included summaries of each participant's interview responses and my personal research journal. The personal research journal was a valuable resource,

providing a deeper understanding of the researched topic, and capturing emerging themes and key patterns. The secondary data sources included customer reviews and company values and transparency statements from the brokerage's website. Customer reviews provided valuable external perspectives, shedding light on the effectiveness of the studied relationships, and revealing important themes. I used an integrated approach to data analysis, a combination of inductive and deductive coding methods. Deductive analysis helps the researcher organize the data and focus on the research question to choose the relevant data necessary for analysis (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021). Inductive analysis is a process of thoroughly reading the data to allow the recognition and emergence of themes and codes (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021; Theophilus, 2018). The integrated approach reveals a total perspective of the explored phenomenon (Theophilus, 2018).

I used methodological triangulation to analyze and confirm the validity of the data. Methodological triangulation refers to using more than one approach to investigate a research problem to strengthen confidence in the final research findings (Fusch et al., 2018; Fusch & Ness, 2015). The objective of triangulation is to enhance and demonstrate the reliability of research (Yin, 2018). A systematic approach to the data analysis process includes gathering all necessary data, disassembling, reassembling, and arraying, interpreting, and concluding (Maher et al., 2018). The first step in the data analysis process was to compile the data from all the collective sources. For example, primary data entailed the summaries of each participant's interview responses, video-conference recordings, personal research journal, and secondary data (i.e., customer reviews,

company website) information that others have gathered for their purposes. The second step in the data analysis process was disassembling the data in search of commonalities and differences to allow for coding (Maher et al., 2018). I noted any similarities and assigned labels to create meaningful groupings. The iterative process of searching for commonalities was critical to generating a rich interpretive analysis.

The third step in the data analysis process was reassembling the data into segments with related codes to identify themes. I used NVivo to code the interview interpretations verified by the member checking process. Having participants member check the summarized interviews ensured accuracy and validity and reduced researcher bias, and none of the participants requested revisions to their summary. Participants agreed that the summaries confirmed their responses. The Nvivo software sorted through substantial amounts of data, keeping track of the data analysis process through queries and cross-comparison features (Alam, 2020). NVivo allowed the user to save notes about the research as themes emerged within the system.

The fourth and fifth steps in the data analysis process are the interpretation and conclusion stages. I reviewed the themes and information generated by the NVivo software to interpret the data and draw conclusions. Upon completing the data analysis process, the themes linked to the study's conceptual framework and literature review. I conducted searches for newly published studies on the phenomena and checked for recurring themes and key correlations to validate the findings of this study.

## **Reliability and Validity**

### **Reliability**

Reliability of research is referred to as dependability (Coleman, 2022). A variety of methods were applied to ensure both reliability and dependability of the research data and finding. A reliable research study utilizes multiple data collection sources (Yin, 2018). The use of various sources of evidence strengthens case study data when there are converging lines of inquiry (Fusch & Ness, 2015). By combining methods, a researcher can lessen deficiencies and biases that may arise from single methodologies. I used member checking and methodological triangulation to ensure the consistency and dependability of the study. Researchers can implement member checking by allowing the participants to review and correct the interviewer's interpretation of their responses. Methodological triangulation is achieved by using more than one method to collect the data. I used semistructured interviews and documents as my data collection sources. To increase the dependability of my research study, I took notes in my personal research journal describing my steps of data collection and analysis.

### **Validity**

Validity is associated with integrity (Noble & Smith, 2015). In qualitative studies, validity refers to the research findings, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. While no method can ensure validity, there are ways to reduce validity threats and increase the credibility of research findings (Coleman, 2022). Credibility is the method that involves examining data findings to assess if the analysis and results of the research

study are accurate to the intended purpose of the study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Researchers can enhance credibility by member checking, data triangulation, observation of participants, or using an interview protocol (Yin, 2018). I asked my research participants to review a summary of their interview responses to verify that my interpretation of their responses was accurate. As the researcher, I made no revisions based on their feedback.

Using semistructured interviews and document analysis ensured the compilation of all-inclusive data to answer the research question. The rapport with participants starts during the initial phone contact, when I informed members about the study and received their consent to participate. The interview protocol serves as a guide for conducting the interviews ensuring alignment between interview questions and the research question. The study used open-ended questions, and the script was the same for all participants. Using audio or video recording devices rather than notes allows for scrutinizing the raw data (Coleman, 2022) ensuring credibility and dependability.

Transferability in research is the degree to which the results/findings of the study can transfer to other contexts or settings with other participants (Leung, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). A researcher can achieve transferability using purposive sampling, which involves selecting individuals or groups with specific knowledge and training on the phenomenon under study. (Andrade, 2021; Palinkas et al., 2015). I used purposeful sampling to select study participants. Another common strategy for enhancing transferability is providing thick data descriptions and robust data (Cypress, 2017; Maher

et al., 2018). The selection of participants with varying viewpoints will also assist researchers in avoiding bias (Yin, 2018). By providing step-by-step information about the methods and findings of the study, other researchers can determine if and how the results of my research are applicable. Researchers can assess whether my research is relevant for future research.

Confirmability is another measure for testing the validity of qualitative research. Confirmability is how other researchers can confirm the findings of a qualitative research study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The strategies I used to safeguard confirmability are methodological triangulation and member checking. The methodological triangulation process is applicable for comparing data, disclosing any researcher biases, and reviewing responses from multiple interviews to establish study confirmability (O'Reilly & Marx, 2011). Kekeya (2021) stated the researcher also communicates the findings of the study to the participants to verify the meanings interpreted and confirm the data. The use of triangulation combines both subjective and objective information and enhances confirmability (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014).

Data saturation is a concept used by researchers to test whether they have collected sufficient research data. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), a researcher reaches data saturation when no new themes or codes emerge from the data. Data saturation is using multiple data sources, including choosing individuals that can provide information-rich interviews. I used semistructured, open-ended questions that will not influence the participants. To reach data saturation, a researcher should also use interview

questions that apply to different participants and mitigate personal bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021). I used methodological triangulation to reach data saturation by collecting data from interviews and document reviews. I ceased collecting data when I gathered enough information until no other themes emerged.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 includes the discussion of the study plan, my role as a researcher, participants, research method, research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity. I explain the elements and processes of the case study protocol, informed consent, semistructured interviews, reflexive journal, triangulation, and member checking. In Section 3, I present the findings, the application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for actions, and further study.



### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The objective of this qualitative study was to identify the strategies real estate brokers use when modeling the ethical behavior and decision-making their real estate agents must practice to positively influence performance and profitability. The geographical location of this study was the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The participants were nine licensed real estate brokers with at least five years of experience each in that role identified by pseudonyms. The findings of this study identified the following four themes that real estate brokers use to model ethical behavior and decision-making for their real estate agents: (a) mentor and mentee relationship, (b) leadership communication skills, (c) leadership support, and (d) use of technology as a tool.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The research question for this study was as follows: What strategies do real estate brokers use to model ethical behavior and decision-making their real estate agents must practice to positively influence performance and profitability? Aligning the overarching research question and data analysis, four themes emerged: mentor and mentee relationship, leadership communication skills, leadership support, and use of technology as a tool.

**Table 1***Frequency of Themes Mentioned by Participants*

Theme	# Participants mentioning the term
Mentor-Mentee Relationship	7
Leadership Communication Skills	9
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**Theme 1: Mentor-Mentee Relationship**

The first theme that emerged was mentor-mentee relationship. A mentor is often described in the business arena as a trusted professional assisting another professional in navigating a career (Hussey & Campbell-Meier, 2021). A mentor can be more than a manager, but also part teacher, part parent, part friend, with the proportions differing from mentor to mentor (Suryanti et al., 2023). Most of the participants interviewed expressed the importance of their role as a mentor to their real estate agents. P1B1, P3B3, P4B4, P5B5, and P7B7 each suggested that being seen as both manager and mentor helps build rapport faster and nurtures a notion of a shared vision. Mentoring activities require shared values, beliefs, and life goals (Suryanti et al., 2023). As an example, P4B4 and P8B8 shared similar experiences of how they noticed the mentoring of their real estate agents created a bond that motivated those agents to ask for help in situations where most would make an unfortunate decision based on pride and/or self-interest. With a working relationship of this kind, the real estate broker as a mentor can identify behavior patterns from their real estate agents (i.e., thinking and decision-making) that may increase the ethical risk to the organization.

P5B5 stated,

I believe my mentor-mentee relationship allows me to have more influence over the actions of my real estate agents when they are not in my presence. For this and multiple reasons, as a mentor, we see our role mainly as empowering mentees to ultimate success.

In addition, P5B5's website had an "About" page. The "about" page on a real estate broker's website can provide information about their background, experience, and insight into their values. This broker's website revealed what motivates the broker and what types of clientele they service. The elements of the study's findings also suggest that the principal-agent and mentor-mentee relationships complement each other in the real estate industry. Mentor-mentee and principal-agent types of relationships can help clarify roles and responsibilities, enhance knowledge transfer, build trust, and improve accountability. The agent (i.e., real estate agents) can provide insights and knowledge to the principal (i.e., broker), while the mentor can help the mentee develop skills and knowledge. The mentor-mentee relationship is built on trust (Zachary & Fain, 2022), while the principal-agent is based on a contractual agreement (Eisenhardt, 1989); both need to have effective collaboration to be successful. P1B1, P4B4, P6B6, P7B7, and P8B8 indicated that effective relationships between real estate agents and brokers can improve both the agent's performance and the brokerage firm's profitability. Participants noted that a motivated mentee can benefit from guidance and support from their mentor, leading to

better outcomes. Thus, the real estate agents' motivation was found to be a key factor in the success of mentor-mentee relationships in the real estate industry.

The secondary documentation of customer reviews, company value statements, and transparency statements played a significant role in developing the theme of the mentor-mentee relationship for this research study's findings. The reviews revealed overall satisfaction with the positive service experience real estate agents were providing to the customers. The positive feedback from the customers showcased the effort real estate brokers put into modeling ethical behavior by effectively mentoring their real estate agents. The below review is from P4B4's website. The customer review stated the following.

Throughout the entire home-buying process, [agent's name omitted] consistently demonstrated integrity, transparency, and a genuine concern for our best interests. He always made sure to provide us with all the necessary information, including potential drawbacks or risks associated with specific properties for sale.

The company value and transparency statements emphasize the significance of open communication, collaboration, and accountability within the organization. An example of a value statement is, "We believe in fostering open communication, collaboration, and accountability to create a positive and supportive work environment for our real estate agents." By examining these statements, deeper insights were gained

into how mentors and mentees build trust and the importance of effective collaboration for achieving successful outcomes.

### ***Relevance to the Literature***

There is a direct link between the first theme of the mentor-mentee relationship and the literature review describing affiliation motivation method, self-determination theory, and principal-agent theory. Affiliation motivation is an individual's need to connect with others (Müller & Cañal-Bruland, 2020). The idea of self-determination suggests that leaders and followers find work motivating by responding to their needs for autonomy and relatedness (Forner et al., 2021). Relatedness refers to the need to feel connected to or cared for by other individuals, which promotes the quality of one's motivation (Firzly et al., 2022). In the workplace, the type of motivation experienced can determine the efforts and behaviors of the individuals. This type of leader (i.e., mentor) can also contribute to the individual's performance and increase organizational profits (Priyadharshini & Sudhahar, 2019).

The principal-agent relationship is built on trust, where the principal contractually appoints the agent to represent their interest (Arnold, 1992). Because of the nature of their business, the real estate broker and real estate agent's relationship can be classified more as a principal-agent than an employer-employee relationship. Real estate agents are independent contractors responsible for the growth of their business and that of the real estate brokerage firm, which always makes them both principal and agent. Since the

mentor-mentee relationship focuses on the growth and mutual respect between them, a real estate agent as agent is less likely to succumb to their own self-interest.

### ***Relevance to the Conceptual Framework***

Theme 1, the mentor-mentee relationship, aligns with the servant leadership theory. The foundation of this theory is that servant leaders are servants of their followers to gain their confidence and motivate them to perform. Defining the term “mentoring” has become challenging as traditional mentoring loses traction, but the literature indicates that alternative mentoring theories are emerging (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). In terms of mentoring, some think of an older, more experienced person guiding a younger person. In the real estate industry, a broker needs to be licensed and experienced, but they can be younger than some of the real estate agents they lead.

Traditional and modern mentorship have the same objectives, which are to enhance the interpersonal skills and professional development of mentees. Traditional mentoring is typically conducted in-person, with fewer interruptions and less reliance on technology. A modern example would be reverse mentoring, a new form of mentoring used in organizations to develop employees and expand their opportunities (Cain et al., 2022; Chen, 2013). Reverse mentoring is used in both private and public sector organizations and involves pairing a junior employee with a senior employee to facilitate mutual learning, irrespective of differences in seniority or culture (Cain et al., 2022).

Servant leadership is associated with several mentoring competencies including communication, professional development, and self-awareness (Hastings & Sunderman,

2020; Sims et al., 2021). Communication competence considers the mentor's interpersonal communication skills and self-awareness that make knowledge and skills transferable (Hamer et al., 2019). Servant leaders are effective communicators who can communicate with their followers with empathy and compassion (Dryburgh, 2020; Sims et al., 2021). Listening to understand mentee issues and concerns helps foster trust within the mentor-mentee relationship. Professional development competency is to help the mentee expand his or her knowledge within a chosen career and, over time, be independent of their mentor (Hamer et al., 2019). The professional development of the mentee will depend on the amount of time devoted by the mentor, and the number of contacts initiated by the mentor is positively related to the mentee's willingness to share leadership problems with a mentor (Hastings & Sunderman, 2020).

Leaders apply their mentoring competencies to support individuals in their personal and professional growth, helping them to mature into the people they aspire to become. As individuals become servant leaders, their skills to identify and address the needs of others increase, and these leaders will demonstrate the required interpersonal skills of mentors. (Frontier Nursing University Quarterly Bulletin, 2022, p. 11).

Mentoring relationships helps develop the mentee's ability to acquire knowledge, skills, and self-confidence to become a better student, employee, or organizational leader (Hastings & Sunderman, 2020). A mentoring relationship is considered unsuccessful when there is poor communication, a lack of commitment, conflicts in personality or interests, the mentor's inexperience, and perceived or actual competition (Suryanti et al.,

2023). A quote attributed to Aristotle is, “He who cannot be a good follower cannot be a good leader.”

## **Theme 2: Leadership Communication**

The second theme drawn from the analysis was leadership communication. Leadership communication is an individual’s ability to articulate a shared vision in a way that unites and motivates others to follow through in implementing that vision (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017; Newman et al., 2020). Five out of the nine participants (e.g., P1B1, P5B5, P6B6, P7B7, P8B8) often referred to their need to recognize their real estate agents’ soft skills. The consensus among participants was that their soft skills, such as active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution, can complement their leadership communication in several ways. Effective leadership communication involves conveying information, building relationships, establishing trust, and inspiring and motivating team members (Cohee & Voorhies, 2021). Soft skills can enhance these aspects of communication by helping leaders better understand and connect with their team members (Houda et al., 2022). For example, active listening can help leaders better understand their team members’ needs and concerns, which can inform their communication and decision-making.

All participants agreed that using various soft skills and communication was critical to staying connected with their real estate agents before and during real estate transactions. P8B8 shared a method they call the 555 Rule, which encourages real estate agents to sharpen their communication skills daily by committing to sending five



handwritten notes to clients, five emails, and engaging in five productive conversations with clients. P8B8 stated,

The handwritten notes and exchanges are considered effective if they return a client's call, follow up on leads, and provide the broker updates on active leads. Active leads are those real estate transactions (e.g., seller or buyer) the real estate agents anticipate will close.

Both P3B3 and P9B9 mentioned they understood the importance of engaging in clear and transparent communication with their real estate agents to influence service performance by providing them with well-balanced and timely feedback on their activities, whether positive or negative. This type of interaction is typically conducted at one-on-one or monthly group meetings. Both brokers agree that because of improved communication, they have witnessed an increase in their agents' performance and business profitability.

The brokers further emphasized that consistent communication and interaction with their real estate agents provided valuable business intelligence and improved employee experience. Although P6B6 and P1B1 shared an opposing perspective that suggested leadership communication should be reserved for important updates or significant changes, they noted too much communication between leader and subordinates could diminish the leadership's importance and impact.

During the follow-up interview, a response to this opposing perspective was sought from the remaining participants. The collective response of P2B2, P3B3, P4B4,

P5B5, P7B7, P8B8, and P9B9 was that although this opposing viewpoint may be valid in certain situations, it is paramount to acknowledge that effective communication is a fundamental component of effective leadership. Leaders who communicate openly, frequently, and transparently can foster trust, alignment, and engagement among their team members, resulting in enhanced performance and better outcomes (Erickson, 2021). The literature suggests that effective leadership communication and servant leadership share similar attributes and behaviors.

The inclusion of secondary documentation, specifically customer reviews, further enhanced the exploration of the theme of leadership communication by shedding light on the participants' awareness of the significance of soft skills in effective leadership communication. These reviews provided valuable insights into how participants recognized the importance of active listening, empathy, and conflict-resolution skills in their leadership communication practices. For instance, the participants' examples and perspectives shared during the interviews highlighted the critical role of communication in establishing and maintaining connections with real estate agents, delivering feedback, and enhancing performance. During the interviews, P3B3 shared their perspective on the vital role of communication in establishing connections, delivering feedback, and enhancing performance with real estate agents. They emphasized that regular check-ins, active listening, and timely feedback fostered a solid trust-based relationship, improving team performance. The comparison between the research journal notes and the interview response summary confirmed the significance of communication for the participants

within the real estate industry. The collective response from the participants strongly affirmed that effective communication is an essential element of successful leadership, fostering trust, alignment, and engagement among team members.

### ***Relevance to the Literature***

The skill set required for leadership communication is similar to attributes and behaviors of the servant leader. Leader communication and servant leader empathy both highlight the importance of listening, awareness, and commitment to the growth and success of followers in encouraging proactive work behavior (Newman et al., 2020; Sun & Shang, 2019; Varela et al., 2019). In both personal and professional development, the attributes, work habits, and personality traits that are easily recognizable are commonly referred to as soft skills (Houda et al., 2022; Saranya & Guduru, 2022).

Leaders in business should identify the specific soft skills that are important for the success of their employees and organization. Soft skills include oral and written communication skills, decision-making, teamwork, ethical judgement, leadership, interpersonal relationships, and willingness to learn (Guerra-Báez, 2019; Lemos & Brunstein, 2023). The results of this study revealed that soft skills as a competence goes beyond technical skills unique to the profession, having more impact on organizational productivity. Soft skills also require interpersonal skills that contribute to personal success, employability, and professional growth (Lemos & Brunstein, 2023).

### ***Relevance to the Conceptual Framework***

Emotional intelligence is a strong antecedent to the attributes of a servant leader (Barbuto et al., 2014; Lee, 2019; Miao et al., 2021). Leadership style and communication skills are linked to emotional intelligence, which means that individuals with better leadership and communications skills have a higher level of emotional intelligence (Rauf et al., 2020). A more thorough analysis of the literature and themes revealed that servant leadership, emotional intelligence, leadership communication skills, and transparency share common characteristics. There are many definitions of leadership communication because it is a multidisciplinary field with participation from individuals of various cultural backgrounds (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). Leadership communication can involve effective writing and speaking, emotional intelligence, and intercultural communication skills for the use of situations such as conducting meetings, contract negotiation, functioning effectively in organizations, and handling internal and external relations (Barrett, 2013). During the COVID pandemic, many brokers in the real estate industry were forced to abandon the status quo and seek more effective ways to communicate with their employees both internally and externally, leading to an increased need for transparency. Transparency in leadership, especially in times of financial difficulty (e.g., the financial crisis of 2008), helps to maintain trust, as leaders must be transparent in how information is gathered and decisions are made (Crumpton, 2011; Erickson, 2021). Understanding human behavior in organizations requires the incorporation of ethical decision-making (Diaz et al., 2022). Transparency in

communications within an organization also builds trust, motivates employees, aligns employees with the organization's performance objectives, and encourages proactive performance (Ibrahim & Samar, 2022).

### **Theme 3: Leadership Support**

The third theme from the analysis was how leaders demonstrated support of their followers in the workplace. How leaders provide support depends on their leadership style (Jabeen et al., 2020; Zada et al., 2022). Leadership can be defined as the capacity of an individual or a group to inspire, empower, and create a plan of action that enables others to achieve their personal or organizational objectives (Ngoc Khuong & Thanh Tung, 2023; Northouse, 2021; Tan et al., 2022). Motivation is what makes individuals persevere to achieve that goal (Asher-Slimak et al., 2023; Connors, 2020). P3B3 noted "the most important way to support real estate agents is by providing training and development opportunities." P3B3 further explained that by investing in their agents' skills and knowledge, they can help them succeed in the long term. This is the reason why they regularly provide in-person training sessions, online courses, and mentorship opportunities to their agents. In contrast, P6B6 said,

That emotional support is the most important way to support real estate agents. By being understanding and empathetic towards their personal and professional challenges. I regularly check in with my real estate agents to see how they are doing, reminding them of the organization's resources for managing stress, and encouraging them to take breaks when needed.

Effective leadership support is important for real estate agents' success and job performance, as demonstrated by the findings of recent studies in the field (Lee et al., 2022). For example, P1B1, P4B4, P6B6, P7B7, P8B8, P9B9 shared that they provide extensive training and development programs for their agents. This process includes a comprehensive onboarding process, ongoing training on sales and marketing techniques, and access to online training modules and resources. The participants also offer coaching and mentoring programs to help their agents achieve their goals. Some of the brokers in this study expressed that some of their agents are members of The National Association of Realtors (NAR), a professional organization for real estate agents that provides a range of training and development resources for their members (National Association of Realtors, n.d.). The membership includes online courses, webinars, and workshops on negotiation skills, marketing strategies, and legal and ethical issues.

The company information sections of the participants' websites contained a transparency statement outlining the level of support they intend to provide for their real estate agents. The transparency statement confirmed this commitment to support. The brokers revealed that real estate agents provided feedback indicating that they felt more motivated when working with brokers who offered support. This support assisted them in marketing their services and finding additional resources to expand their businesses, resulting in increased profits for the brokerage firms. Participants shared some of their motivational practices. P2B2 stated,

You know, I support my real estate agents by teaching them that motivation is more than their know-how, but the need to always stay seeking something internal that keeps them focused on achieving their goals. I and the other managers in my office try to lead by example the right behavior that we expect our agents to follow in hopes of motivating them beyond their efforts. Once a week, I shamelessly award a gift certificate and announce the agent that turned in the most sales contracts to help motivate the other agents.

Similarly, P4B4 said,

As a leader, one thing I try to recall is my time as an agent and how challenging it was, so I take all new real estate agents out on what I call shadow days to watch how I speak and listen to clients to understand their needs. Afterwards, we have a nice lunch and address what they have learned or if there are any concerns. My belief is this will let the real estate agents know that I am a broker that will do what is necessary to support them and it may also build their confidence.

A leader's style and emotional intelligence can significantly impact their employees' support and motivation (Miao et al., 2021). Autocratic leadership, for example, is characterized by a top-down approach where decisions are made by the leader alone. This style can make employees feel disempowered and unsupported (Fiaz et al., 2017). In contrast, a more democratic leadership style that encourages employee

participation and input can create a more supportive work environment where employees feel valued and engaged. The servant leader has a more democratic style of leadership because the servant leader emphasizes collaboration and open communication between the leader and their followers and encourages participation and input from all team members. P1B1, P3B3, and P6B6 encouraged collaboration between agents and fostered an environment of open communication by creating opportunities for agents to work together, share ideas, and support each other. This strategy can include team-building activities, regular meetings, and open-door policies.

It is essential to comprehend the levels of emotional intelligence in leadership, as it can significantly impact the motivation and support of employees (Eastman & Cooper, 2020). The high and low level of emotional intelligence is evident from the autocratic and democratic leadership styles, where the former can lead to employee disempowerment. At the same time, the latter can create an environment of empowerment and engagement. Based on the primary and secondary research findings, all participants possessed high emotional intelligence to model ethical behavior and motivate their real estate agents to perform successfully. Although emotional intelligence is generally acknowledged as an important attribute of leadership, some argue that it is insufficient on its own. The participants maintain that a leader must also have other qualities like a clear vision, strong drive, and the ability to inspire and motivate others (P2B2, P3B3, P5B5, P6B6, P7B7, P8B8, P9B9). There are differing opinions among business leaders on whether emotional intelligence is essential for effective leadership, with some considering it a



critical component of successful leadership, especially in the modern, intricate, and fast-changing business landscape of today (Margheritti et al., 2023).

The secondary documentation added valuable insights into how leaders demonstrated support for their followers in the workplace. For example, customer reviews shed light on the participants' recognition of the importance of providing training and development opportunities for real estate agents (as mentioned by P3B3) and offering emotional support and understanding (as mentioned by P6B6). These examples highlighted the critical role of communication and support in establishing and maintaining connections with real estate agents, delivering feedback, and enhancing performance.

The comparison between my research journal notes and the interview responses confirmed the significance of communication and support for the participants in the real estate industry. In my research journal, I documented my observations during the interview process, noting how the participants actively utilized listening techniques such as paraphrasing and summarizing their responses. These observations suggest that real estate brokers prioritize clear and concise communication with their agents to improve their performance. The brokers' active use of these techniques demonstrated their commitment to fostering effective communication, promoting understanding, and providing support to their agents. The participants' practices, such as extensive training and development programs, mentoring initiatives, and the availability of resources through professional organizations like the National Association of Realtors, further

supported the importance of leadership support in real estate agents' success and job performance. The participants' transparency statements on their company websites also reinforced their commitment to supporting their real estate agents, confirmed by agents' feedback to their brokers, indicating increased motivation. Participants showcased their dedication to supporting and motivating all team members by sharing motivational practices, such as recognizing top performers and organizing shadow days for new real estate agents.

### ***Relevance to the Literature***

The theme of leadership support aligns with the literature on emotional intelligence. Specifically, effective leadership support, coupled with the right leadership style and motivation components, can enhance emotional intelligence within a team or organization. Both leadership support and emotional intelligence (EI) are related to interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Leaders who support their employees are more likely to build strong relationships with them, leading to increased trust, motivation, and job satisfaction (Ouakouak et al., 2020). Real estate agents who feel motivated and supported by their brokers are more likely to be satisfied and stay with their organization for longer periods of time. This is particularly important in the real estate industry, where turnover rates can be high, and retaining skilled employees is essential for the success of the organization (Bilqees et al., 2022).

Leadership style plays a crucial role in shaping the workplace culture and influencing the overall success of an organization. As such, servant leadership is an

approach that prioritizes the needs of the team or organization over the leader's own interests, which demonstrates the behavior of a supportive leader. Leadership support is primarily focused on the leader's behaviors and actions towards their employees (Zainab et al., 2022), whereas emotional intelligence is more focused on the individual's ability to understand and manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018). For example, if a real estate agent is struggling with a personal issue, the broker could offer support and guidance to help the agent manage their workload and prioritize tasks. The broker could also demonstrate empathy and understanding by acknowledging the agent's feelings and offering encouragement. As a result, the broker's leadership support and emotional intelligence can work together to cultivate a positive and supportive work environment, build strong interpersonal relationships, and improve communication within the team. A supportive work environment can lead to enhanced productivity, greater job satisfaction, and overall success for the real estate organization. By providing opportunities for personal and professional development, leaders can help employees to develop their emotional intelligence skills, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and social awareness.

### ***Relevance to the Conceptual Framework***

Theme 3, leadership support, aligns with both emotional intelligence and servant leadership. It is important for leaders to recognize low or high emotional intelligence (EQ) as it can negatively or positively impact employee motivation (Eastman & Cooper, 2020), directly affecting performance. A real estate broker's EQ can determine their

approach to leadership duties (i.e., supportive strategies) such as promoting an open-door policy, having empathy, or providing mentoring.

Individuals develop low or high emotional intelligence for many reasons. For instance, a low EQ individual may have had a difficult upbringing with inconsistent family support and depression, which may be the reverse for the individual with high EQ.

In the workplace, individuals with low emotional intelligence may struggle with conflict resolution and maintaining relationships (Kundi & Badar, 2021; Kundi et al., 2023). This struggle may be due to the lack of emotional support received in their childhood (Goleman, 1996; Friedony et al., 2021). A leader with high EQ could help such an employee with low EQ by creating a positive environment and providing guidance in those situations to assist employees (i.e., followers) in navigating difficult conversations and resolving conflicts effectively (Oliver, 2020; Zysberg & Raz, 2019). Leaders with high EQ will maintain a good rapport with followers by being active listeners and communicators and having clarity for organizational objectives (Goleman, 1998b). In contrast, a leader with low EQ disrupts the communicative and decision-making process, which can lead to misconceptions about the organization's objectives (Eastman & Cooper, 2020; Zysberg & Raz, 2019) and lower morale (Moore et al., 2019).

Servant leaders can effectively motivate employees and increase morale by showing empathy and understanding, empowering them, providing coaching and development opportunities, fostering collaboration and teamwork, and recognizing and appreciating their contributions (Cui, 2021; Varela et al., 2019). Servant leaders often act

as “organizational stewards” who can provide meaningful support for employees’ basic psychological needs of relatedness and autonomy to promote motivation (Varela et al., 2019). By prioritizing the well-being and development of their team members, servant leaders create a culture of trust and collaboration that empowers individuals to maximize their abilities.

The price of emotional ineptitude in business causes high turnover, unaccomplished objectives, and loss of revenue and relationships (Goleman, 1998b). These kinds of behaviors can happen in both business and personal lives. Emotional ineptitude refers to a lack of emotional awareness and the ability to effectively manage emotions in oneself and others (Goleman, 1998b). Servant leaders, with their focus on employee needs and creating a positive work environment, can lead to higher levels of employee retention and productivity (Cui, 2021; Malik et al., 2022), which can contribute to the overall success of the organization.

#### **Theme 4: Use of Technology as a Tool**

The fourth theme of the study found that utilizing technology as a tool for leadership can also align with the principles of servant leadership. The transformation of the real estate industry has been substantial, with technology playing a vital part in this evolution. The implementation of digital transformation is a disruptive procedure that affects the entire organization and leads to the emergence of novel working methods (Lopez-Vega & Moodysson, 2023). Notably, technology continues to evolve at a rapid pace, with new innovations constantly emerging. Real estate professionals must stay

current with the latest trends and advancements to remain competitive in the real estate industry and meet the changing needs of their clients.

Seven out of the nine participants shared their belief in the importance of digital transformation in the real estate industry. The real estate brokers recognized that implementing new technology would require significant organizational changes, which could be problematic for their real estate agents. The brokers encouraged their agents to share their concerns and ideas, and they listened carefully to their feedback regarding how they felt about technology. The brokers said they also made sure to stay current on the latest advances in digital technology relevant to their industry. To provide an example, some brokers have mentioned that they gained a comprehensive understanding of the capabilities of new tools like Google Duo, WhatsApp, and other industry-relevant software by attending seminars, reading articles, and seeking advice from experts. They also learned how to incorporate these tools into their business.

Leaders who demonstrate humility are open to learning from others and acknowledge their limitations (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rowatt, 2023). This receptive mindset is beneficial during technology transformation allowing them to be more open to new ideas and approaches. Several of the participants felt that their use of technology assisted their real estate agents in working more effectively to serve their clients and achieve their goals (P1B1, P3B3, P5B5, P8B8, P9B9). P7B7 mentioned,

I have concerns about the overreliance of society on technology, although I personally use it for schedule management. As a real estate broker, I am

uncertain about where technology is headed. Recently, one of my agents pressured a client to take a picture for social media promotion, and I had to address the issue. I worry that people are disregarding others' emotions and privacy in their use of technology. It seems that many millennials believe they have a right to use technology without considering its impact on others. P6B6 insists, I believe that technology plays a crucial role in the success of today's real estate agents. For years, I have been using various gadgets to simplify my daily tasks, and I encourage my agents to do the same. In my opinion, the real estate industry is ripe for innovation and disruption through the use of technology. At our office, we use customer relationship management and project management software to stay competitive, we make use of regulatory compliance software to stay current with the latest laws, regulations, and best practices related to real estate transactions.

Finally, all participants shared a common challenge in transitioning seasoned real estate agents to the new technological software and devices, while leveraging the tech-savvy skills of younger digital-native real estate agents within the industry. The examination of secondary documentation, including customer reviews, company value statements, and transparency statements, yielded little insight into the development of the theme, highlighting the use of technology as a tool in the real estate industry.

### *Relevance to the Literature*

The use of technology as a tool has become a driving force in enhancing the success and efficiency of businesses across various industries. Specifically, Theme 4, which emphasizes the use of technology as a tool, can be aligned with the principles of servant leadership to create a powerful approach for the real estate industry. For instance, real estate leaders can leverage communication tools such as messaging apps, customer relationship management, and project management applications to stay connected with their agents or clients, even when working remotely. By using social media messaging apps, leaders can fulfill consumers' changing communication preferences while promoting their business goals. Social media presence also takes leaders to new heights of popularity.

Artificial Intelligence, which is a branch of computer science that aims to create intelligent machines that can perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, can be a valuable tool (Mohd, 2019). In fact, AI technology has become increasingly popular in the industry and is often referred to as "PropTech". PropTech utilizes advanced technologies such as AI to streamline real estate operations, enhance data analysis and decision-making, and improve customer experience (Starr et al., 2021). For example, chatbots, which are automated computer programs designed to simulate conversation with human users, can be used as a tool to help real estate agents respond to customer inquiries promptly, thus reducing response times.



### ***Relevance to the Conceptual Framework***

Technology used as a tool by leadership has a strong connection with both the principles of servant leadership and emotional intelligence. The servant leader, as a model for ethical behavior, can use technology to assist by using social media and software like project management software, knowledge management systems, and workflow automation tools can enable team members to work independently and make informed decisions, which can boost their confidence and job satisfaction. Similarly, emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and those of others, and it is associated with effective leadership. Both servant leadership and emotional intelligence, which are crucial aspects of effective leadership, share a common emphasis on cultivating positive relationships with team members and facilitating their personal growth and development.

Real estate brokers can support the personal growth and development of their agents by utilizing customer relationship management tools to identify strengths and weaknesses and provide targeted training. The brokers can also promote their agents' successes through social media, which enhances their personal brand, boosts confidence and sense of belonging within the brokerage, and attracts new clients. In summary, technology provides tools and platforms that enable effective communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing among leaders, team members, and clients, regardless of their physical location (Cecchi et al., 2022). Using technology to support servant leadership, leaders can create a more inclusive and collaborative work

environment that fosters teamwork, builds trust, enhances overall team performance, and provides clients with a more personalized and satisfying experience.

### **Application to Professional Practice**

This qualitative multiple case study aims to explore the strategies employed by successful real estate brokers to improve the performance and profitability of their agents through modeling ethical behavior. The study's findings on leadership support, leadership communication, mentor-mentee relationships, and the use of technology to promote ethical behavior and decision-making are highly applicable to the real estate industry's professional practice. Leadership support and effective communication are essential in any professional practice, including real estate (Cohee & Voorhies, 2021). Leadership communication encompasses information sharing, relationship building, trust establishment, and team motivation (Cohee & Voorhies, 2021). Integrating soft skills, like active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution, can aid leaders in comprehending and relating to their team members more effectively. The real estate brokers interviewed, for example, recognized the importance of soft skills and communication in staying connected with their agents and improving their performance. Real estate brokers can ensure their agents understand and follow ethical standards and best practices by offering resources such as the latest technology, guidance, and clear communication. Similarly, mentor-mentee relationships can benefit real estate agents in learning how to navigate the complexities of the real estate industry and ensure that ethical behavior and decision-making are prioritized. Through this relationship, the mentee can learn essential skills and

gain knowledge that will help them succeed in their professional practice because their mentor has already traveled the path of being a real estate agent.

Using technology as a tool is also highly beneficial in the professional practice of business in the real estate industry. Technology can help real estate agents track and document their transactions using electronic document management systems, ensuring that all necessary paperwork is properly completed, signed, and stored in a secure and easily accessible format. Real estate brokerage firms may use regulatory compliance software to ensure they stay current with the latest laws and regulations governing the industry, which helps them adhere to ethical standards and implement best practices.

The study's findings also suggest that transparency and technology can promote ethical behavior, streamline transactions, and enhance communication in the real estate industry. By prioritizing transparency and leveraging technology, brokers and agents can demonstrate their commitment to ethical business practices and help gain trust in the real estate industry. This strategy can lead to improved communication and collaboration between all stakeholders involved in the industry, which can ultimately enhance the overall functioning of the industry. A transparent approach also establishes trust with clients, ultimately leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty, which promotes ethical standards and best practices.

The ability of business leaders to become more transparent can lead directly to more empowered, high-performing employees who are confident that they can handle any situation that arises. This study has the potential to benefit real estate brokers looking

to develop strategies for their agents to demonstrate ethical behavior and decision-making, based on successful implementation by others in the industry. By considering these findings and applying them to their businesses, real estate brokers can help their agents make more informed decisions, create a more diverse and engaged workforce, adapt to technological changes, and promote sustainability, ultimately leading to improved business practices and outcomes within the real estate industry.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The research findings indicate that mentor-mentee relationships, leadership support, effective leadership communication, and suitable technology can empower individuals to drive social change. Real estate brokers can develop their real estate agents' skills and knowledge through guidance and support, inspiring them to become effective change agents in their communities. In addition, brokers can foster a culture of inclusivity, promote diversity, and facilitate effective communication to ensure that everyone is working towards the same goals, which builds better working relationships and demonstrates unity within the community. Furthermore, no matter the distances between individuals and organizations, technology can increase access to information, connect them, and facilitate sharing of best practices for social change.

Application of the study's results to enhance business performance and effective processes may have social impact within the housing community. The presence of stable real estate brokerage firms can contribute to the well-being of individuals, foster community development and promote cultural growth, leading to improved profitability

for the firms and the communities they serve (Sayyadi, 2019). For example, the taxes received from the real estate industry can help fund safer, more attractive sidewalks, safety patrols, community organizing work, and infrastructure improvements, and these taxes can make investing in communities more attractive to companies who otherwise may not consider investing in them. Real estate brokerage firms that actively participate in community development projects, such as supporting local charities or sponsoring community events, not only foster a sense of pride and belonging among the residents and other community businesses but also help to preserve the cultural heritage of a community by promoting the development of historic properties or advocating for the protection of cultural landmarks. The active role of real estate brokerage firms and their agents in supporting community development projects and advocacy for inclusivity and cultural preservation ultimately leads to positive social impacts such as improved well-being and a high standard of living for community members.

### **Recommendation for Action**

After conducting an in-depth qualitative analysis of the research data, four key findings emerged that may have significant implications for future action. This section offers actionable recommendations based on these findings. By implementing these recommendations, it is reasonable to expect meaningful improvements in the areas of mentee-mentor relationships, leadership communication, leadership support, and the use of technology in the real estate industry.

The study identified several actions real estate brokers can take to model ethical behavior and decision-making for their agents. The study found that real estate agents who provided solid leadership support were effective. To model ethical behavior and decision-making, brokers should provide their agents with the necessary resources, training, and guidance to make ethical decisions. They should also communicate regularly, provide constructive feedback, foster open communication to build trust and promote collaboration, and establish mentorship programs. By taking these steps, real estate brokers can create a culture of ethical behavior and decision-making.

Implementing the recommended actions to model ethical behavior and decision-making for real estate agents may pose challenges and obstacles for brokers. The primary obstacle is resistance to change from agents accustomed to old ways of doing things. To overcome this, brokers can provide training and communicate the benefits of the new practices to encourage buy-in, which refers to the process of obtaining agreement, support, or commitment from stakeholders, employees, or team members for a particular decision or initiative. Another challenge is the lack of necessary resources, such as funding and expertise, to provide training and mentorship programs. Brokers can partner with industry associations or seek government funding to support these initiatives. Time constraints can also be challenging, but brokers can prioritize the most important actions and delegate tasks to other staff members. Finally, implementing these actions may involve seeking experts for some areas at a cost, but brokers can budget for these expenses and seek cost-effective solutions. Real estate brokers can establish ethical codes

of conduct and policies to guide ethical decision-making and behavior among their agents. By taking these recommended actions, real estate brokers can model ethical behavior and decision-making for their agents, build a reputation as trustworthy professionals, and create a culture of ethics within their organizations.

As a researcher, disseminating the research results is an essential part of the research process. It is important to ensure that the findings reach a wider audience and can be used to inform further research, policy decisions, and practical applications. One common approach is to publish in peer-reviewed journals, which can give my research credibility and reach a wider audience of researchers and practitioners in my field. Another effective method is to present the research at real estate industry events or conferences, which allows me to receive feedback from other researchers or real estate professionals.

I may also create a website or blog to share the research with a broader audience. The website and internet in general are platforms that provide opportunities to post summaries of the research findings, links to my publications, and other resources related to my work. If the research has practical applications, I will create training materials such as videos, webinars, and written guides to help others implement the findings. Social media platforms like LinkedIn and ResearchGate can also be used to promote the research and reach a wider audience. By sharing links to my publications, conference presentations, and training materials, I can increase the visibility of the research. Lastly,

collaborating with other researchers in the field can help me reach a broader audience and disseminate the findings more effectively.

### **Recommendation for Further Research**

There were two limitations identified during the development of this study. Some brokers may not have regular interactions with their agents to positively influence their behavior. Other brokers may lack formal training to learn leadership strategies to positively influence their agents.

The study's findings have revealed further investigation may be required to address these limitations. Future research on the limitations of brokers' abilities to positively influence their agents' behavior could be improved by (a) increasing the sample size of brokers to ensure a representative range of experiences and interactions with their agents, (b) conducting surveys or interviews to assess the level of leadership training received by brokers, and (c) using qualitative methods to explore perspectives on effective leadership strategies and behavior change.

The lack of formal training for brokers to learn leadership strategies can be a potential limitation in positively influencing their agents' behavior. Future research can focus on examining the effectiveness of leadership training programs for brokers. The research can compare the behavior and performance of agents whose brokers have undergone leadership training with those whose brokers have not. Researchers can also investigate the specific types of leadership strategies that brokers need to learn to be effective in positively influencing their agents' behavior. The research can explore the



most appropriate delivery methods for providing leadership training to brokers, such as online courses, workshops, or mentoring programs. The findings of such research can help in the development of effective leadership training programs for brokers, which can ultimately lead to improved performance and job satisfaction for agents.

The research could be extended to a study that explores the role of technology in facilitating positive interactions and influence between brokers and their agents. I also recommend examining the adoption of technology by older brokers in comparison to tech-savvy younger real estate agents who are comfortable using the technology.

### **Reflections**

Throughout my doctoral journey, my knowledge and perspective of the real estate industry grew, specifically the relationship between real estate brokers and their real estate agents. I learned about some of my strengths and limitations on the road to becoming a researcher and independent scholar. As a researcher, I found conducting this qualitative study on leadership strategies for modeling ethical behavior in the real estate industry to be a rewarding and informative experience. Throughout the study, I interviewed several leaders within the industry and gained valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with ethical behavior.

As someone who has worked in the real estate industry and legal field for a considerable amount of time, I was conscious of the importance and possible effects of my presence on the participants and the situation. As an industry insider, I was concerned that participants might be hesitant to provide honest feedback, or worse yet, try to tell me

what I wanted to hear. Through self-reflection and conscious effort, I worked to remain objective and minimize any potential biases or influences. I challenged some of my preconceived notions and noticed that the participants shared common concerns, goals, and practices related to modeling ethical behavior in the real estate industry by carefully listening to them and taking their feedback seriously.

One significant change to my thinking after completing the study was the importance of ongoing education and training in promoting ethical behavior. I understood the importance of education, but initially believed that leadership and emotional intelligence alone could set the tone for ethical behavior in the industry. However, through the study's findings, I realized that all industry members, brokers, and real estate agents must possess strong leadership traits, emotional intelligence and the necessary education and skills to make collective ethical decisions. During the interviews, I was able to remain objective and learned valuable insights from the participants. These insights were important in identifying effective strategies for modeling ethical behavior and can serve as a foundation for future research and development in the real estate industry. The experience allowed me to challenge my assumptions, expand my thinking, and recognize the importance of ongoing education and training in promoting ethical behavior in the real estate industry.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore a research gap in the strategies employed by real estate brokers to model ethical behavior and decision-making among their real estate agents, with the goal of enhancing performance and profitability in the industry. One key finding was the vital role of leadership in setting the standard for ethical behavior. Effective leaders lead by example and exhibit ethical behavior through their actions, demonstrating transparency, honesty, and accountability in all aspects of their work while prioritizing their employees' needs over their own. The study highlighted the significance of communication in promoting ethical behavior within the industry. Leaders need to communicate their expectations for ethical behavior and create an environment that encourages employees to report any unethical practices they may observe.

The findings of this study highlight the crucial role of being a leader with a moral compass in the real estate industry. Real estate brokers and agents play a critical role in property transactions, and their ethical behavior impacts not only their own performance and profitability but also the broader industry's reputation and the lives of their clients. Real estate brokers who use servant leadership and emotional intelligence as guiding principles can successfully model ethical behavior for their agents and promote a culture of trust and respect within the industry.

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## Appendix A: Email Invitation

**Subject:** Invitation to participate in a research project on the leadership strategies modeled by real estate brokers to positively influence their real estate agents.

(date)

Hello,

My name is Lakecia A. Reddrick and I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Management and Human Potential department) at Walden University. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Dr. Olivia Herriford.

I am writing to you today to invite you to participate in a study entitled “Leadership Strategies for Modeling Ethical Behavior in the Real Estate Industry”. This study aims to identify the strategies real estate brokers use to model the ethical behavior and decision-making their real estate agents must practice to positively influence performance and profitability. The qualifying nine participants will be licensed real estate broker with 5 years minimum of successfully managing real estate agents.

This study involves one video-conferencing 30-45 minute interview that will take place via videoconferencing using either Zoom or Microsoft Teams. With your consent, interviews will be video-recorded. Once the recording has been transcribed and verified, the (audio/video) recording will be destroyed.

This will be done by keeping all responses (anonymous/anonymized) and allowing you to request that certain responses not be included in the final project.



You will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason, up until (insert date or time after the interview). If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be destroyed.

There will be no compensation given to any participants to protect the integrity of the research.

All research data, including video-recordings and any notes, etc. will be encrypted/password-protected. Any hard copies of data including (any handwritten notes or USB keys, etc.) will be kept in a locked cabinet at my private resident. Research data will only be accessible by the researcher.

This research has been cleared by Walden University Research Ethics Board.

Should you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact the REB Chair, Walden University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone: ext. or by email). For all other questions about the study, please contact the researcher.

If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions about the research, please contact me at (phone number) or (Walden University email address).

Sincerely,

Lakecia A. Reddrick

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### **TITLE OF THE STUDY**

Leadership Strategies for Modeling Ethical Behavior in the Real Estate Industry

### **RESEARCHER INFORMATION**

Lakecia Reddick



### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore the strategies real estate brokers use to model the ethical behavior and decision-making their real estate agents must practice to positively influence performance and profitability. The targeted population is leaders of three real estate brokerage firms in the D.C. Metropolitan area, which consists of Maryland, D.C., and Virginia, who have led teams of successful, reputable real estate agents for at least 5 years.

### **STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a 30-45-minute interview, answering a short series of open-ended questions.
- Participate in a 30 minute follow up discussion to verify the researcher's interpretation of your interview responses.

Sample questions:

1. What are some examples of the strategies you use to model ethical behavior for your real estate agents?
2. What, if anything, have you changed in how you model ethical behavior and decision making to positively influence your real estate agents' performance?

### **RISKS**

Minimal risk. You may decline to answer any or all questions. At any time during the interview, you may terminate your involvement if there are any feelings of discomfort.

## **BENEFITS**

The benefit of this study may help real estate brokers within the real estate industry understand the importance of modeling ethical behavior that will positively influence their agents thereby enhancing service quality.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your responses in the interview will be confidential. There will be no identifying information presented in the findings of the study. All information will be coded for the purpose of confidentiality. Your personal information will never be shared or used for anything other than the intended purpose of this study. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code name/letter and number combination for participants and their organizations that will be used in all research journaling and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information on a USB drive in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.
- 5 years after completion of the study, materials will be discarded and deleted.

## **COMPENSATION**

There will be no payments or gifts for participating in the study.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Investigator, please contact the Institutional Review Board at (800) 925-3368 ext. 312-1210.

## **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. If you decide to take part in this study, please reply to this email; 'I consent.' Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

## **CONSENT**

I have read and understand the provided information within this document, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Please keep a copy of this document for your records.

Researcher's Printed Name	Signature	Date
Lakecia A. Reddrick	<i>Lakecia A. Reddrick</i>	

Participant's Printed Name	Signature	Date

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Leadership Strategies for Modeling Ethical Behavior in the Real Estate Industry		
Date, time, and location of the interview		
Interviewee/Participant ID		
Step 1	Introduction	Introduce myself and thank the participant for taking part in the study.
Step 2	Purpose	Identify the leadership strategies used by real estate brokers to model ethical behavior for their agents to positively increase service quality performance and profitability.
Step 3	Description of why the interviewee is participating	<p>Explain the participant is selected based on their qualifications and experience with being a real estate broker that successfully increased their organization's performance and profitability by modeling ethical behavior for their agents.</p> <p>The information they provide will be beneficial in answering the research question and partially fulfilling my Doctor of Business Administration degree requirements.</p>
Step 4	Description of the benefit of participation	Explain that participant's findings will provide the real estate industry leaders the strategies to improve their performance (i.e., service quality) and profitability.
Step 5	Ethics	Ethical standards will be maintained before, during, and after the interview.
Step 6	Confidentiality	Inform participants that all information will be recorded and stored without

		<p>identifying material to ensure confidentiality.</p> <p>All electronic copies will be password protected on my personal device. Hard copies will remain in a locked filing cabinet in my home office for 5 years after the approval of the study. I will destroy all data 5 years after approval of the study.</p>
Step 7	Participant questions	Do you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or the interview process we have just discussed?
Step 8	Interview transition	Identify the transition into the interview questions using a semi-structured approach.
Step 9	Conduct the interview while taking note of body language and verbal cues. Ask probing and additional questions as necessary throughout the open discussion.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are some examples of the strategies you use to model ethical behavior for your real estate agents?</li> <li>2. What, if anything, have you changed in how you model ethical behavior and decision making to positively influence your real estate agents' performance?</li> <li>3. How have you demonstrated ethical decision-making in your interactions with your real estate agents?</li> <li>4. What are some examples of how your demonstration of ethical decision making in your interactions with your agents has influenced their actions?</li> <li>5. How, if at all, have changes in industry reputation influenced the leadership strategies you have used and, based upon your observations, the corresponding agents' performance?</li> <li>6. Based upon your experiences, and organization's performance, how have</li> </ol>

		<p>the strategies you applied for modeling ethical behavior helped to increase profitability?</p> <p>7. What additional information can you share about your strategies for modeling ethical behavior and decision making to influence the ethical behavior and decision making of your agents that we have not discussed during this interview?</p>
Step 10	Closing	Thank the participant for their time and ask if follow-up discussions, or questions are acceptable.

**Please type either "I consent or No consent" \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_**

**Researcher Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_**

## Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. What are some examples of the strategies you use to model ethical behavior for your real estate agents?
2. What, if anything, have you changed in how you model ethical behavior and decision making to positively influence your real estate agents' performance?
3. How have you demonstrated ethical decision-making in your interactions with your real estate agents?
4. What are some examples of how your demonstration of ethical decision making in your interactions with your agents has influenced their actions?
5. How, if at all, have changes in industry reputation influenced the leadership strategies you have used and, based upon your observations, the corresponding agents' performance?
6. Based upon your experiences, and organization's performance, how have the strategies you applied for modeling ethical behavior helped to increase profitability?
7. What additional information can you share about your strategies for modeling ethical behavior and decision making to influence the ethical behavior and decision making of your agents that we have not discussed during this interview?