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## Implementation of Developmental Feedback as a Performance Strategy in Small Businesses

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Angela Bradford

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  
2024

Abstract

Implementation of Developmental Feedback as a Performance Strategy in Small

Businesses

by

Angela Bradford

MBA, University of Phoenix, 2010

BS, Southern Arkansas University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2024

## Abstract

Some small business leaders (SBL) lack developmental feedback strategies to improve employee performance, impacting job satisfaction, engagement, and motivation, and impairing business sustainability. Grounded in the Herzberg two-factor theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore strategies SBLs used to enhance employee performance. Participants comprised five SBLs in Arkansas who implemented strategies to improve employee performance. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and reviews of publicly available organizational documents. Braun and Clark's approach and Yin's five-step process were used to conduct thematic analysis. Eight themes emerged: growth opportunities and staff potential; challenges, limitations, and mitigation; workplace culture, diversity, and environment conditions; workplace dynamics and relationships; communication; engagement, activation, and retention; performance and productivity; and leadership's impact on intrinsic constructs. A key recommendation is for leaders to create an environment that encourages open and constructive communication. The implications for positive social change include the potential to provide insights into employee evaluations and feedback, which may improve employee retention, motivation, and performance, hence, an overall improvement of the organization's productivity, leading to more job opportunities that will enhance the living standards in local communities.

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## Dedication

God...I am nothing without you. My most incredible honor is being a living sacrifice and vessel for your earthly works. As a change agent, I am able to use my blessings to pour into others. I understand that no one reaches the top solely on their merit. Therefore, I must first thank my mother, Annette Ireland, for her unconditional love, sacrifice, and support. Because of YOU, each of your children is a strong community pillar. My lovely and wonderful daughters, Adaja and Autumn, I thank you for being my constant inspiration and motivation. You have both been patient and understanding during this journey; I could not have done this without you! My best friends and siblings, Amanda, Anita, and Andrew, you are indeed my rock and support system. "WAWG". To my family, may we always be a source of inspiration and encouragement to all who know and love us.

This study is also dedicated to my angel brothers Gerald Burnett, Sr. and Cedric Swift. I can still feel your presence, and your energy comforts me. I miss you.

Last but not least, special thanks to the family of Mrs. Renita Thompson. Thank you for allowing me to continue her beautiful legacy. It is truly a pleasure and honor to carry and pass the torch she brightly lit.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small businesses aim to create a motivated and productive workforce, contributing to the organization's sustainability. Employee motivation may assist the organization in recruiting and retaining its workforce (Setiyani et al., 2019). Unsatisfied employees are less motivated to perform duties successfully and meet performance benchmarks (Alhassan & Greene, 2020). Furthermore, demotivated employees often feel that their contributions are undervalued by their supervisors (Al-Ali et al., 2019). Employee motivation is vital to reaching organizational goals (Andri & Za, 2020). When employees feel valued, they are motivated to improve productivity. Leaders should incorporate performance strategies that increase motivation and job satisfaction while reducing burnout (Kuswati, 2020). Burnout occurs due to a misalignment between employee duties, skills, and resources with the demands of the position (Goliroshan et al., 2021). A motivated workforce creates an organizational culture that encourages productivity, motivation, and job satisfaction, contributing to employee performance. In this study, I explored developmental feedback strategies that may assist small business leaders in aligning personal and organizational goals to enhance performance through motivation by encouraging honest and constructive feedback.

### **Background of the Problem**

Open communication between the supervisor and employee is an ongoing problem despite its importance to business productivity and employee engagement. The communication problem can be resolved by providing timely input and exploring

effective developmental feedback strategies. Employee motivation improves work quality and influences performance improvement (Andri & Za, 2020; Nabi et al., 2019). This performance enhancement may motivate employees to communicate innovative ideas through developmental feedback. The ability of a company to innovate is considered a significant factor in the company's success (Eggers et al., 2020). Understanding what motivates employees may assist the organization in recruiting and retaining a productive workforce. Organizations with unmotivated employees have higher turnover rates and lower productivity efforts (Deressa & Zeru, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative for an organization to recruit, hire, and retain a motivated workforce (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000). Open communication, such as developmental feedback, may motivate employees to contribute freely and honestly to resolving industry issues.

Innovation and creativity may help solve industry problems. Creativity is an essential organizational component that encourages innovation, industry survival, and increased profits (Cai et al., 2019). Hafeez et al. (2019) asserted that employee productivity and engagement were positively associated with the workplace environment. Innovative organizations produce new ideas and products that contribute to sustainability (Cheng et al., 2019). Organizations that promote a creative culture create a positive work environment, relationships, and knowledge transfer (Awang et al., 2019). In recent years, knowledge transfer has been a significant topic for researchers worldwide (Marchiori & Franco, 2020). Business leaders have an opportunity to explore leadership strategies to improve productivity and employee performance. Small business leaders may use this

study's findings to promote open communication, improve innovation, and enhance productivity by motivating the workforce to enhance employee performance.

### **Problem and Purpose**

Organizational leaders can improve employee performance by providing employees with necessary and desired feedback (K. Moon, 2019). Mahan et al. (2020) reported that 78% of employees resigned in 2019 for preventable reasons, including professional development and communication. The general business problem was that some small business leaders lacked developmental feedback strategies, which can negatively influence employee performance. The specific business problem was that some small business leaders lacked developmental feedback strategies to enhance employee performance.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the effective developmental feedback strategies used by leaders in small businesses that enhance employee performance. The implications for positive social change included the potential to provide knowledge to business leaders to grow and develop small businesses. This growth may help resolve job entry, retention, and employee performance by improving the health of local economies. The goal of the study was to equip the leaders of small businesses with insight regarding some benefits of implementing developmental feedback through (a) open communication, (b) employee motivation, and (c) knowledge transfer.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study consisted of small businesses located in central Arkansas, United States of America (USA), with fewer than 100 employees who successfully implemented developmental feedback strategies to enhance organizational performance. The participant eligibility requirements for this study were (a) implementing successful developmental feedback strategies, (b) being owners or employed as high-level leaders of a small business in central Arkansas, and (c) serving in a leadership role for more than three years. I used a non-probability purposive sampling and interviewed five small business leaders. The study's data sources were the interviews and public sources of information.

### **Nature of the Study**

The three research methods that may be used in a research study are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Hennink et al., 2020). I conducted this study using the qualitative research method to explore developmental feedback strategies that some business leaders implement to enhance employee performance. Researchers use qualitative methods to investigate in-depth concepts and simplify complexities in human behavior by gathering and interpreting data (Lanka et al., 2021) while gaining insights into people's reality (Riese, 2019). Hennink et al. (2020) confirmed that the qualitative approach allows an in-depth exploration of the research question when collecting data through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions. In the qualitative approach, researchers can observe, record, and review the changing attitudes on a

particular matter (Orel & Mayerhoffer, 2021). Qualitative research best suits real-life scenario description, studies describing real-life scenarios, phenomena interpretation, and generating theories (Plano Clark, 2019). In the quantitative method, researchers attain statistical results that can be consistently replicated (Sahin & Ozturk, 2019). Plano Clark (2019) asserted that quantitative research is best used to measure the magnitude and frequency of variables, assessing relationships and differences across groups and times. The quantitative method was inappropriate for this study because the objective was not to examine relationships and variable differences. Researchers use a mixed-method approach to answer questions that a single research method cannot achieve without providing a remedy to a philosophical and methodological difference in the other two research methods (Sahin & Ozturk, 2019). This study did not require a mixed-method approach because data from the qualitative research method was sufficient to answer the research question. The qualitative method was the best option since the study required an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon.

To address the research question in this qualitative research method, the specific research design for this study was a multiple case study design. A researcher conducts case studies to explain, describe, or explore a phenomenon by analyzing sources of evidence such as interviews, documentation, archival records, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts (Alpi & Evans, 2019). A case study is one of the most extensively used qualitative research strategies (Priya, 2021). A multiple case study is used when a researcher attempts to replicate and reproduce results (Tomaszewski



et al., 2020). In multiple research designs, researchers can study subjects from different entities by conducting interviews to research a phenomenon while focusing on in-depth problems (Yin, 2018). The researcher performs cross-case analysis by analyzing multiple cases within the study (Sneed et al., 2020). I considered alternative research designs: ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry. The ethnographic design is used to observe the culture of a specific group (Saunders et al., 2019). An ethnographic study was not appropriate because this study required an exploration of a business problem instead of a cultural observation. The phenomenological approach is used to study the lived experiences of people who engaged in a common phenomenon (Pathirange et al., 2020). The phenomenological design was rejected because this research did not explore the lived experiences of individuals. The narrative design allows the researcher to communicate an experience of a phenomenon that has impacted a person or situation (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019). The storytelling design would not answer this study's research question. Therefore, the multiple case study design was most appropriate for this research because it provided a structure for comparing and contrasting the cases when findings were synthesized without having restrictions, as the other designs would require.

### **Research Question**

What developmental feedback strategies do leaders of small businesses in Arkansas use to enhance employee performance?

## **Interview Questions**

I used the following interview questions as probing questions in the semi-structured interviews. I followed the interview protocol to conduct the interviews and cover the time allocation (see Appendix).

1. What strategies do you use to encourage developmental feedback?
2. What tools do you use to enhance employee feedback?
3. What criteria are used to create employee developmental benchmarks and incentives?
4. What challenges have you witnessed while implementing developmental feedback?
5. How do you ensure developmental feedback aligns with the organization's goals and mission?
6. What exit interview information do you use to enhance and implement developmental feedback as an employee performance strategy?
7. How do you determine the effectiveness of the strategies implemented?
8. How do you communicate developmental feedback to your employees?
9. What additional information would you like to include regarding developmental feedback related to employee performance?

## **Conceptual Framework**

High-quality research requires a critical analysis and justification of the study's framework (Steils, 2021). The conceptual framework helps define and justify the research

question by providing a logical and convincing argument (C. Johnson, 2020). The theory that grounded this study was the Herzberg two-factor theory. Herzberg et al. developed the Herzberg two-factor theory in 1959 to explore and understand employee satisfaction factors by separating job satisfaction into two independent constructs: hygiene (extrinsic) and motivation (intrinsic) factors. The Herzberg two-factor theory applied to this research because it outlined factors that directly influence employees' behavior, engagement, and motivation.

Motivation positively impacts an employee's work performance. The hygiene factors described in Herzberg two-factor theory are associated with the job environment such as work conditions, salary, and benefits (Lamb & Ogle, 2019). According to Herzberg et al. (1959), hygiene factors do not contribute to job satisfaction but are necessary to avoid employee dissatisfaction, while motivational factors directly impact job satisfaction. Motivational factors focus more on professional development, decision-making, advancement, and recognition, thus contributing to job satisfaction (Shannon, 2019). Motivated employees are more confident to work independently and innovatively, take ownership of their position, and perform above expectations (Minai et al., 2020). I decided to use Herzberg two-factor theory for this research to explore and better comprehend small business leaders' relationships with employees in effective developmental feedback strategies to enhance performance.

## **Operational Definitions**

*Developmental feedback:* An informative feedback method focusing on employee growth instead of benchmarks (Zhang et al., 2019).

*Employee motivation:* Employee motivation is the driver that encourages individuals to work towards organizational goals (Dartey-Baah & Addo, 2019).

*Job analysis:* Job analysis is the systemic process of collecting and analyzing data regarding a job (Lohman, 2020).

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

Researchers must be mindful of factors that may negatively impact the quality of their study; hence, they should establish credibility and clarify the content to avoid any uncertainty. The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations I encountered in planning this study are described below.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are thoughts assumed to be true without factual evidence (FitzPatrick, 2019). In this multiple case study, I identified three assumptions. The first assumption was that all my participants would answer the interview questions truthfully. The second assumption was that each participant had adequate knowledge and experience to answer each question. Finally, the third assumption was that the number of participants would help me achieve data saturation.

**Limitations**

Limitations are a potential weakness of a study outside of the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). I identified two limitations in this study. The first limitation was that participant bias may potentially impact the interview response. The second limitation was that the number of participants may not represent all small business practices within the scope of the study.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are the boundaries or limits of a study set by the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Alpi and Evans (2019) asserted that qualitative delimitation is a term regarding setting the boundaries to scope the study beneficially. The delimitation identified outside of the boundary and scope of this research was related to demographics. This study was limited to the state of Arkansas.

**Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study could be significant for small business leaders who use the outcomes to develop developmental feedback strategies that enhance employee performance efforts. Some employees leave an organization feeling they need to be more valued, understood, listened to, properly assessed, or acknowledged (Chakravarti & Chakraborty, 2020). Business leaders who lack communication outlets lose money and knowledge by losing undervalued employees who could have invested their talents to improve the organizational culture and business processes. Olsson et al. (2019) explained that employees' creativity is essential for their performance, and Cheng et al. (2019)

determined that managers have a role in enhancing employees' creativity. Retaining employees is more cost-effective than recruiting and hiring new employees (Wilson, 2020). Open communication may allow employees to disclose creative solutions to industry issues and state their personal needs. Employees are motivated when their needs are met (Andri & Za, 2020). According to a study conducted by Girdwichai and Sriviboon (2020), there is a correlation between employee motivation and performance. The implications for positive social change from the results of this study include an opportunity for the growth and development of small businesses. This growth may create an innovative approach to resolving job entry and creation issues directly impacting local communities by improving community character, helping the local economy thrive, and increasing revenue for community improvement.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Developmental feedback may improve communication between the supervisor and employee, resulting in better organizational goal alignment, employee performance, motivation for innovation and creativity, and a better work environment for all parties. To improve innovation, mature and well-established businesses require employee participation to obtain new ideas that lead to practical solutions (Azevedo et al., 2021). Developmental feedback is a strategic tool that provides employees with specific information to encourage learning through professional development and job improvement (J. Zhou, 2003). Most employees prefer a manager-employee interaction based on an open exchange of information about organizational objectives, plans, and

strategies through informational employee feedback (Mazzei et al., 2019). Businesses must create an organizational culture that encourages employees to try their best without fearing failure (J. L. Johnson et al., 2020). Developmental feedback may assist the organization in addressing employee work performance issues by encouraging open communication in a non-threatening manner.

Developmental feedback allows employees to communicate their concerns, ideas, and opinions regarding their position without fear of retaliation. Mazzei et al. (2019) asserted that employee communication will enable individuals to exchange information, meanings, and emotions that help establish relationships, organizational culture, decision-making opportunities, and the facilitation of most organizational activities. This type of exchange opens the sharing of professional reservations and a proactive engagement in conflict resolution (Van Gramberg et al., 2020). Employees prefer feedback and recognition for their contributions instead of commands (Mok & Leong, 2021). Recognition satisfies the psychological needs of employees, and it can also be used as an organizational and human resource management tool (N. E. Masri & Suliman, 2019). Implementing developmental feedback may provide a communication channel for the supervisor to receive innovative ideas for business problems while recognizing employee accomplishments. Inclusive leadership encourages thoughtfulness, recognition, and employment growth by acknowledging employees and developmental feedback (Fang et al., 2021). The potential for communication improvement between supervisors and employees results in better organizational goal alignment and employee performance,

increasing motivation for innovation and creativity, and creating a better work environment.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Implementing this study's findings may imply positive social change, including providing insights into employee evaluations and feedback, which may improve employee retention, motivation, and performance, hence, an overall improvement of the organization's productivity and a more considerable economic impact. An empowered, engaged, and motivated workforce improves employee performance and increases the organization's competitive advantage (Masri & Suliman, 2019). Such findings may also promote the growth and development of small businesses, which could potentially support the health of local economies. As a result, this growth may create an innovative approach to resolving job entry and creation issues that directly impact local communities by improving community character, helping the local economy thrive, and increasing revenue for community improvement.

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

In this professional and academic literature review, I synthesized the evidence explaining the conceptual framework, its constructs, and its applicability in business. At the same time, I discussed supporting evidence for the research question. A literature review is intended to synthesize research findings to answer a particular research question (Snyder, 2019). J. L. Johnson et al. (2020) asserted that generating and refining a qualitative research question demands an in-depth literature review. A literature review



allows a researcher to map, analyze, and synthesize relevant data (Patriotta, 2020). Therefore, this literature review will focus on published academic and professional literature that will offer credible information about the research topic. McGinley et al. (2021) revealed that studies older than five years may not be relevant to the *current state* of the literature. For this purpose, at least 85% of my chosen articles are current. I have searched peer-reviewed articles, seminal work, and recent research to present the conceptual framework and explore successful developments of feedback strategies that improved employees' performance. The databases I used included ProQuest, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Thoreau, and EBSCO. I used the following keywords to conduct my search: *developmental feedback, employee performance evaluations, productivity, Herzberg two-factor theory, employee motivation, succession planning, strategic planning, and job satisfaction*. The goal was to analyze, synthesize, and compare numerous credible pieces of information to address the research topic. The organization of the literature review is in the following order: (a) motivation theory, (b) small business, (c) strategic planning, (d) sustainability, (e) succession planning, (f) job descriptions, (g) assessments, (h) organization change, and (i) developmental feedback.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Employee and job satisfaction have been the research focus over the past decade. Employee satisfaction is vital for organizations (Hauret et al., 2022). The relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance has been the source of many studies in human resource management (Romasanta, 2021). Stewart and Wiener (2021) defined

it as employees' response to their work environment and conditions. Numerous context-based theories have focused on the different reasons for employee job satisfaction. Employee job satisfaction is one of the main elements of thriving organizations and can enhance employee productivity (Maleka et al., 2020). Riyanto et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of job satisfaction on workplace behavior. He argued that some job satisfaction benefits include maximum employee productivity and high profitability. Romasanta (2021) asserted that job satisfaction impacts organizational performance while indicating how a business operates because of its direct impact on employee behavior. Employees' behavior and productivity are directly related to their motivation levels, affecting their satisfaction.

Many companies need to pay more attention to the importance of employee motivation. Tudor and Petre (2021) explained that employee motivation is a significant influencer of employee satisfaction, including the professional development of core competencies, the leadership style of operation, workplace security, compensation, flexibility, and organizational culture. Riyanto et al. (2021) asserted that organizational motivation is the impulse of an employee's demand of action toward a specific goal. Generally speaking, business leaders are tasked with understanding the role of employee motivation and satisfaction to obtain insight into employee performance strategies. This newly gathered understanding will help business leaders develop strategies to improve organizational efficiency and productivity while focusing on employee motivation and satisfaction.

### ***Herzberg's Motivational-Hygiene: A Two-Factor Theory***

Business leaders should address employees' physiological and emotional needs and cultivate a comfortable organizational environment. Herzberg motivational-hygiene, or two-factor theory of motivation, can be used to examine and better understand employee behavior within an organization (Herzberg et al., 1959). Fredrick Herzberg was an American psychologist who explored the influence of fourteen factors on job satisfaction and dissatisfaction through interview techniques involving critical incident analysis; as a result, two clusters of data were produced and analyzed (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005). Herzberg et al. separated job satisfaction, job determinants, and job performance into hygiene factors (extrinsic) and motivation factors (intrinsic). According to Herzberg, the two categories impact motivation differently and are complementary. The two-factor theory may help business leaders initiate the process of employee achievement recognition and empowerment by allowing individuals to enhance their experiences (Lamb & Ogle, 2019). Findings of the Herzberg two-factor theory confirm that motivation factors are the source of employee satisfaction (Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). Therefore, job satisfaction may be the precondition to positive employee performance.

**Hygiene Factors: Extrinsic Motivation:** Hygiene factors are extrinsic and focus on the external elements of employment. The hygiene factors are the physiological requirements to achieve motivation in the company (Romasanta, 2021). These factors refer to the basic standards of a job that do not increase satisfaction but can contribute to

dissatisfaction if not present (Bhatt et al., 2022; Tichaawa & Idahosa, 2020). According to Boe (1970), hygiene factors contribute more to the organization's reputation than addressing employee attitudes. Admittedly, hygiene factors do not contribute to job satisfaction but will cause dissatisfaction if absent.

Herzberg et al. (1959) stated that extrinsic motivation occurs when employees are encouraged to perform duties based on the desire for positive results or to avoid negative consequences. Extrinsic factors include organizational policies, compensation, working conditions, organizational culture, benefits, and job security (Tudor & Petre, 2021). Employee performance management is also considered extrinsic (Maleka et al., 2020). Subsequently, extrinsic factors appease employees rather than dissatisfy them (Romasanta, 2021). In addition, Boe (1970) indicated that hygiene factors are primarily associated with job dissatisfaction because they focus on the employees' needs to create an unpleasant environment. They are unrelated to the employee's duties and do not contribute to job satisfaction (Lamb & Ogle, 2019). In essence, hygiene factors are the elements that decrease job dissatisfaction. They are the basic expectation of employees and do not contribute toward job satisfaction. The improvement of hygiene factors may assist the organization in lowering the risk of dissatisfaction.

**Motivational Factors: Intrinsic:** Herzberg's motivation factors are intrinsic and focus on the internal elements of an employee. *Motivation* is the ability to impact employee behavior through stimulation and affirmation Bastari et al. (2020) and is considered the moving force that encourages employees to perform (Sobaih & Hasanein,

2020). Employees' belief in their capacity is a psychological component of employee motivation (Moreira-Fontan et al., 2019). Business leaders must consider the psychological impact of organizational culture and values on the employee and the establishment (Parmar et al., 2019). Thus, Boe (1970) indicated that Herzberg's motivation factors provide psychological stimulation to employees based on what impacts their internal requirements. Intrinsic motivational factors include professional development, personal growth opportunities, employee recognition, quality of work, decision-making authority, and satisfaction from work engagement (Shannon, 2019). Extrinsic motivation is not superior to intrinsic motivation but focuses more on the individual's well-being, productivity, and creativity (Pradenas et al., 2021). Demotivation can have a damaging effect on the organization. Demotivation factors may include unhealthy organizational relationships, unacceptable work conditions, lack of communication, and poor administrative policies (Momade & Hainin, 2019). Establishing positive organizational relationships will encourage employees to contribute ideas while impacting turnover intentions (Ainer et al., 2019). An employee's essential requirement is job satisfaction; a satisfied employee will generally outperform an unsatisfied worker (Bhatt et al., 2022). Motivation factors contribute to employee satisfaction by focusing on the individual's internal needs. Intrinsic motivation occurs when an employee is motivated to perform a task because it is enjoyable and not because of the outcome's repercussions.

Employee performance and job satisfaction concerns are associated with motivation. Old and recent research recognized motivation as a critical factor in determining workforce behavior (Shannon, 2019). A motivated workforce will perform more effectively than a less motivated one; hence, managers should comprehend employee needs and motives (Bhatt et al., 2022). Motivational characteristics are elements intended to inspire employees to perform better (Hattrup et al., 2020). Unfortunately, employees may avoid performing tasks to the best of their ability when they lack motivation (Meyer et al., 2019). Motivational elements vary, but they are not only related to job satisfaction or inspiring factors affecting employees' performance.

Motivational factors can take the form of multiple components, which is not a new concept. Boe (1970) stated that achievement, recognition, and responsibility are commonly mentioned as motivation and psychological growth factors, while company policy, administration, and supervision are the leading causes of job dissatisfaction. Motivation is a critical element of performance satisfaction that directly impacts employee efficiency (Meesook et al., 2022) and job performance (Romasanta, 2021). Job dissatisfaction can increase with motivators and hygiene factors if the necessary conditions are absent (Herzberg et al., 1959). Therefore, motivational factors increase employee job satisfaction and serve the need for growth and self-actualization, while the absence of these factors may increase dissatisfaction.

## **Opposing Theories**

Employee motivation has been intensively researched and is directly related to employee performance and motivation, but some theorists disagree. Tudor and Petre (2021) argued that Herzberg's two-factor motivation-hygiene theory is one of the most relevant theories regarding employee motivation. C. Sharma et al. (2022) agreed that the human resource department manages employee motivation, ability, and opportunities through policies to increase performance and commitment. From a methodological standpoint, some argue that Herzberg's hygiene motivation theory is constrained, and results vary when different data collections and methods are used (French et al., 1973). According to Hitka et al. (2019), employees may not be motivated by the same factors. Depending on the individual, some hygiene factors can serve as motivation factors (G. Gardner, 1977). Balanescu (2019) found that employee satisfaction might become a source of motivation. Job satisfaction can be an input for motivation, which can become a reason for satisfaction, a positive cycle to attain. Chand et al. (2019) asserted that intrinsic rewards are enjoyment, satisfaction, and achievement, while some other factors are extrinsic. Factors contributing to extrinsic motivation may be financial or non-financial rewards, including recognition and promotion. Balanescu reported that some view motivation and satisfaction as a cause and effect instead of separate factors, which contradicts Herzberg's two-factor theory. For instance, Thant and Chang (2021) identified determinants of job satisfaction, which can be broken into three categories: personal factors, internal organizational factors, and external environmental factors.

Herzberg separated employee behavior into two main categories. However, other theorists argued that factors in the two categories overlap and may be divided into more categories.

Herzberg's two-factor theory, also known as the motivation-hygiene theory, will serve as the conceptual framework for this study because it allows employee behavior to be explored and understood in depth (Herzberg et al., 1959). Daniel (2019) stated that the framework will play a significant role in the study's trust, auditability, credibility, and transferability. Herzberg's two-factor theory helps understand organizational behavior (Pradenas et al., 2021). Employees are valuable assets; hence, leaders are responsible for understanding factors leading to motivation and job satisfaction (Riyanto et al., 2021). Riyanto et al. (2021) explained that obtaining and maintaining good employee performance may be difficult, but employee performance can improve when the organization intentionally engages in motivation and job satisfaction. Therefore, Herzberg's two-factor theory is the most applicable for this research to understand developmental feedback strategies to enhance employee performance in small businesses.

### **Crucial Elements for Developmental Feedback Strategies**

#### ***Small Businesses***

Small businesses are vital to local communities but often lack resources compared to larger establishments. According to a report by the World Bank (2019), 90% of all businesses are considered small businesses employing more than half of the world's workforce. Therefore, small businesses are the foundation of a nation's wealth,



contributing to 60% of some countries' gross domestic product (Mahi & Thani, 2020; World Bank, 2019). Mahi and Thani (2020) reported that small and medium businesses contribute to 97% of the world's economy. Small businesses greatly revitalize local communities and reduce poverty (Gilboa et al., 2019; Prasastyoga et al., 2021), proving to serve as the driving force for local economic growth (Hernita et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurship challenges should be explored to improve and maintain performance.

Small organization leaders should attempt to reduce employee turnover to minimize costs and increase performance (Andrews & Mohammed, 2020). Sometimes, small businesses lack the resources, competencies, and knowledge to produce innovative results (Eggers et al., 2020). Eggers et al. (2020) asserted that innovation ability is a major factor in companies' success. As a result, small businesses are disadvantaged compared to larger establishments because of limited resources (Rehman & Anwar, 2019). Small businesses with less than 500 employees take an enormous hit regarding revenue, supply chain disruptions, and employee layoffs (Paustian et al., 2022). Even though small businesses do encounter challenges, they stimulate employment creation, decrease poverty, and improve economic development (Hernita et al., 2021; Rudyk, 2020). Maurer et al. (2002) explained that a manager's effectiveness is partially a result of their potential to work with and through others. Small businesses are an essential component of developed economic systems, without which a country's society and economy cannot successfully operate and develop (Sokolinskaya et al., 2019). Based on the data, small businesses are

vital to local economies. Even though they stimulate local communities, they often lack resources compared to larger companies.

Business failure can be attributed to internal and external factors. Small and medium enterprises have limited resources compared to their counterparts' impact training, putting the investment in human capital in short supply (Kortsch et al., 2019). The U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2015 indicated that approximately \$60.6 million is spent annually on turnover events such as advertisement, candidate recruitment, and new hire training (Andrews & Mohammed, 2020), while McManus and Mosca (2015) reported an estimated \$11 billion is spent annually in the United States. Employees should be proactive and take responsibility for their professional development initiatives instead of passively waiting for the organization to assess, organize, and offer development (Dachner et al., 2021). Even though small businesses contribute to local economies, they face challenges that may impact them more severely than larger institutions. As a result, leaders must understand the internal, external, and motivational factors that influence small businesses; this includes barriers encountered during the startup phase and each developmental phase of the business (M. K. Sharma & Sharma, 2020). Productive business strategy critically influences small businesses (Rehman & Anwar, 2019). Organizations should monitor employee performance to ensure that work activities align with the company's strategy, vision, mission, and value to support organizational goals (Nikolic et al., 2020). By proactively assessing internal and external factors, business leaders can create organizational strategies even with limited resources.

Small businesses may gain an advantage by creating a vision and strategizing for the future to overcome internal and external challenges proactively.

### ***Strategic Planning***

In small businesses, leadership strategy is the most critical factor influencing performance. In a constantly evolving environment and industry competition, businesses need to be able to administer survival strategies such as employee engagement to enhance employee performance (Riyanto et al., 2021). Strategic planning is one of the most effective methods for preparing for increasing future demands. A strategic business plan must include a talent-management component with human resource policies and procedures that the organization's leaders agree to implement (Preziosi, 2008). An organizational and strategic plan can assist leaders in successfully navigating business operations (Vilmos, 2020). The human resources department is essential regardless of the organization's size (Staneci et al., 2020). Strategic planning may help the human resources department align organizational goals and objectives with the mission.

Strategic alignment is the relationship between organizational goals and employee and departmental objectives. Employees who receive excessive loads or duties that do not align with their position experience stress (Dewi et al., 2020). The human resource department is a major contributor in supporting and helping meet organizational and strategic goals (Chakraborty & Biswas, 2019). Riyanto et al. (2021) asserted that human resource management should align company policies and practices to organizational

strategy and employee expectations. Alignment with the mission benefits both the organization and its individuals.

Organizational performance is enhanced when organizational and individual goals align. Human resource management's responsibilities include developing and improving employee performance and aligning activities with organizational goals, visions, and missions (Al-Surmi et al., 2019; Rezaeian et al., 2019; C. Sharma et al., 2022). For over 30 years, strategic human resource management has been a significant topic in human resources (Cooke et al., 2021). Ozkeser (2019) asserted that human resource management is a strategic, all-inclusive, and internal focus of organizational functions to establish employee satisfaction, motivation, and high performance. Business strategies and human resource functions financially impact organizations (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021). Staneci et al. (2020) discussed that human resources help resolve internal and external obstacles, identify solutions to organizational issues, locate candidates for employment, motivate and increase productivity, and develop strategies. Ehrnrooth et al. (2021) explained that recruitment, selection, and professional development enhance the organization by shaping employees' skills and increasing their confidence. Ozkeser emphasized that employees are the most important resource to assist the organization in reaching its goals, according to human resources management. Therefore, human resource management may be used to achieve the organization's vision and mission.

A strong human resources department empowers an organization. Chinyamurindi et al. (2021) asserted that the role of human resources is critical when arbitrating business

strategy and financial performance. Leaders cannot easily implement successful strategies when a small business lacks an effective human resources department (Chinyamurindi et al., 2021). The alignment of organizational and individual goals to employee performance is critical to employee work performance. Achieving common goals while decreasing stress may help improve productivity and position the organization in a favorable market position.

Strategic human resource management has become an important and valuable topic in human resources. However, the human resources department often engages in the personnel issues of strategic planning instead of being present during the developmental stage (Labeledz & Lee, 2011). The human resources department plays a crucial role in assisting the organization in meeting business and strategic goals while improving employees' well-being and increasing their performance (Chakraborty & Biswas, 2019). Long and Ismail (2012) confirmed that human resources departments are most effective when they are included in leadership teams and involved in business priorities instead of solely on personnel-related challenges. When organizations have their human resources department in the strategic planning phase, they can assist in establishing business priorities with fewer complications.

Industry competition requires organizations to reconsider normal methods of operations and explore creative solutions to overcome challenges. Companies often face industry competition to retain their workforce (Dineen & Allen, 2016). As a result, some organizations establish organizational strategies for developing their businesses to adapt

to the challenges by becoming more secure and surviving in competitive situations (Meesook et al., 2022). Innovation is the force for withstanding competition (Juhro & Aulia, 2019) when ideas are used collectively to benefit the organization (Dziallas & Blind, 2019). Organizations should consider innovative ideas and methods to overcome challenges to industry problems.

Creativity and innovation contribute to business success. Some consider creativity the foundation for innovation (Chege & Wang, 2020; Gomes et al., 2021). Creativity and innovation are the foundation of an organization's competitive advantage (Acar et al., 2019). In particular, creativity and innovation can result from organizational strategic planning (Macke & Genari, 2019). Strategic management attempts to position the organization in a favorable situation to accomplish goals most effectively and timely (Arulrajah & Opatha, 2016). Workplace creativity can be simple suggestions related to a task or innovative ideas that help promote the organization's services and products that require organizational change (Lee & Kim, 2021). Leaders encouraging creativity and innovation are viewed as more open-minded, emotionally stable, task-oriented, and team players (Lei et al., 2020; Rawashdeh et al., 2021). Problem-solving skills, management styles, and organization systems have been positively correlated to workplace creativity (C. S. Tan et al., 2019). Organizations should strategically create innovative and creative solutions to ongoing problems. By encouraging innovation and creativity during strategic planning, organizations may identify solutions to industry issues, creating a competitive advantage.

Including human resources strategies to strengthen the responses to demands and obstacles enhances the organization's strategy. Leadership plays a prominent role in formulating and implementing organizational strategies (M. Masri, 2020), and adding the human resources plan is necessary to adapt to changes, threats, and demands (Vardarlier, 2016). Leaders must be aware and prepared to adapt to unforeseen challenges that may create uncertainty and threaten the organization's performance and viability (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Creating new solutions to ongoing challenges may assist the organization in overcoming obstacles and threats. Organizations must be able to identify and understand those threats by incorporating mechanisms and techniques for survival and growth.

### ***SWOT Analysis***

In a constantly developing market, organizations should monitor their position through assessments to help identify strengths and weaknesses. A SWOT analysis is often used during the strategic planning and management phase (Penchev, 2021), but it was created to evaluate organizational activity (Abdel-Basset et al., 2018). The primary purpose of conducting a SWOT analysis is to assist the organization in identifying organization strengths (S), improving weaknesses (W), exploring opportunities (O), and countering industry threats (T) (Granulo & Tanovic, 2020). Generally, an organization's strengths and opportunities are compared to its weaknesses and threats (Granulo & Tanovic, 2020). The strategic management process will help generate and execute goals by aligning internal strengths and weaknesses with external opportunities and threats to

gain a competitive advantage (Parameswaran, 2020). The strengths and weaknesses in a SWOT analysis are derived from internal factors, while external environmental controls determine the opportunities and threats. A SWOT analysis may assist leaders in creating internal adjustments that are better suited for organizational improvement.

A SWOT analysis can help leaders with process improvement and operational planning. *Operation planning* is an in-depth analysis outlining daily organizational objectives, while *process improvement* is a tool used in identifying, analyzing, and improving current processes to meet goals and objectives related to employee performance and productivity (Dror, 2019). According to Planton (2018), the first objective of conducting a SWOT analysis is to help define organizational objectives that decision-makers will accept. The SWOT analysis is considered the most beneficial tool used by human resource development to assist leaders in understanding their organization (Rezaeian et al., 2019). A job analysis helps obtain critical information that may be used to select new talent and evaluate current employees (Lohman, 2020). Ozkeser (2019) asserted that business analysis is the cornerstone of human resource management, allowing the recruitment of individuals that best match the organization's demands. SWOT analysis is a helpful tool that equips leaders to understand internal organizational concerns better and address areas for improvement. A SWOT analysis may reveal shortcomings related to communication strategies, employee performance needs, and evaluation techniques.



### *Internal Improvements for Sustainability*

Appropriate sustainability strategies are critical for organizational growth. Due to the constant environmental changes that require adjustments to remain vital, human resources researchers depend on strategically oriented methods based on future demands (Lohman, 2020). Therefore, some organizations create strategies to develop their business and achieve strength for generating growth and security to survive competitive situations (Meesook et al., 2022). Employee recruitment and hiring a competent workforce may ensure the company's sustainability with the proper growth objectives. To sustain successful growth, leaders must start by identifying essential requirements to help them improve their operations and then recruit the right employees to perform the specified duties.

Prioritizing aligning projects with organizational objectives may assist leaders in determining daily tasks and duties that contribute towards sustainability. Sustainable leadership requires leaders to manage priorities and human behavior, which may improve small business outcomes (Burawat, 2019; Neebe, 2020). Many organizations prioritize talent management as a competitive advantage by providing strategic opportunities and creating value (Sparrow, 2019). Beneficial talent management system creation is crucial because of its effect on employee engagement, commitment to the organization, and employee performance (Masri & Suliman, 2019). Prioritization framework development may guarantee that the organization can afford funding projects that align with strategic objectives and serve as a translation of objectives contributing toward organizational

development (DePalmer et al., 2021). Sustainable leadership assists leadership in aligning organizational goals with employee duties.

Sustainability is critical to growth, performance, and profitability in small businesses. Strengthening the capacity and competence of human resources is critical to small businesses' sustainability and impact on performance (Hernita et al., 2021). Some businesses are unsuccessful because of poor planning, which can negatively impact profitability, growth, and sustainability (Hsu & Chang, 2021). Lim and Teoh (2021) associated business success with the size of the company and profit growth. In conclusion, sustainability is critical to growth, performance, and profitability in small businesses. Small business leaders must proactively plan to address future obstacles and improve performance.

### ***Succession Planning***

Leaders may use succession planning to avoid losing valuable employees. One of the major focuses of human resources is succession planning, which identifies criteria for future talent requirements and leadership roles to maintain operations (Basu, 2019). Basu asserted that historically, organizations make the mistake of replacing employees instead of developing them. Organizations should recruit or promote individuals who can successfully perform the organization's operational duties (Conzelmann, 2020). Organizations can use succession planning to develop employees for future leadership demands instead of solely recruiting externally.

Succession planning proactively searches for potential leaders from within for future leadership demands. Proactive operation allows the organization to anticipate future demands (Eggers et al., 2020). Organizations should prepare and equip themselves for the departure of key personnel due to retirement, resignation, or unforeseen circumstances to avoid a disruption of operations (Khan & Aziz, 2020). *Succession planning* is developing future organizational leaders and encouraging employees to participate in learning and development opportunities (Mahmood et al., (2019). Strong succession planning is the only way to reduce the impact of leadership exiting the organization by identifying and fostering the next leadership generation through mentorship and professional development (Basu, 2019; LaCross et al., 2019; Ritchie, 2020). Therefore, organizations recruit and promote employees who can successfully lead operations (Conzelmann, 2020). Effective succession planning includes recruitment, professional development, mentorship, and access to leadership experiences and responsibilities (Beasley & Ard, 2021). Effective succession planning will guarantee employee professional development and enhance career advancement and promotions to sustain the institution.

A healthy business depends on leadership's strength. Leadership development and succession planning are instrumental in the sustainability of viable and effective leaders in health businesses (Fuentes, 2020). According to Khumalo and Harris (2008), succession planning is an effective leadership pipeline to fill future positions by focusing on performance, continuous flow, understanding the pipeline process, and executing short-

term and long-term organizational goals. *Talent* is an intangible capital that adds value to an organization, while talent management strategically identifies outperforming employees who can potentially acquire future positions (De La Calle-Duran et al., 2021). Skills development through succession planning allows an employee to become qualified to tackle and address future organizational challenges by providing a continuous flow of operation.

### ***Job Description and Performance Expectation Alignment***

The job description can be used as a basic standard for recruiting employees, interviewing candidates for employment, and evaluating benchmarks. There is a direct correlation between employee turnover and hiring mistakes resulting in costs associated with employee turnover, such as severance pay, leave accrual payouts, and advertisement purchases, as well as time and money spent on applicant screening, interviewing, and professional development (Graham-Leviss, 2012). Retaining current employees is cheaper than recruiting expenses. When employees are strategically selected, developed, monitored, rewarded, and promoted for a position, they can assist the organization in executing its mission (C. Sharma et al., 2022). Successful organizations can retain their staff while recruiting the best candidates for their company (Albert, 2019). Before recruitment, human resources can create and align job descriptions to future organizational goals and strategic plans to build a layout of realistic expectations. A job description provides employees with employment expectations, the scope of the position, and priorities within the list of responsibilities (Schambers, 2015). Job descriptions are

continuously updated to reflect present and future organizational demands and identify the competencies and skills required for effective position performance.

The job description should align with the organization's mission and goal identified in the strategic plan. Organizations can improve work performance quality by providing long-term organizational visions while aligning performance indicators to the employee's personal goals and key success factors from the organizational strategy (Nikolic et al., 2020). For instance, a job analysis can assist leaders with changing, eliminating, or restructuring workflow processes to meet new demands (Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2013). The job description helps the employer outline and specify the duties of the position, and the main purpose is to clarify the employee's obligation by creating performance benchmarks and performance evaluation criteria (Vološevici, 2022). The job description and strategic plan alignment are critical for employee assessments. It provides the leader and employee with the standards and expectations of the position by highlighting benchmarks. A job description may improve employee performance when aligned with the organization's mission and goals.

### ***Performance Appraisals***

Assessments may be used to review employee performance history to determine if organizational expectations are met while identifying areas for improvement. Employee performance is determined by the ability to perform designated duties (Al-Bahri & Othman, 2019). An effective appraisal system will assist management in analyzing employee contributions toward organizational growth (C. Sharma et al., 2022).

Generally, assessments determine an employee's value to the organization by attempting to identify their weaknesses for performance improvement while recognizing their strengths (Chopra, 2017). Assessments aim to eliminate deficiencies and reward employee success (Ozkeser, 2019). Focusing on employee assessments may contribute to understanding employee trust (Holtz et al., 2020). Communication strategies and performance assessment resources are necessary to guarantee an understanding of the job's expectations between the employer and the employee (de Menezes & Escrig, 2019). Therefore, the evaluation method impacts employee achievement and motivation (Al-Jedaia & Mehrez, 2020). Employees may be motivated to improve their work quality when appraisals are used to recognize and reward performance efforts (Cainarca et al., 2019). Rewarding employees is critical in creating a positive work environment, motivating employees to improve job performance, and decreasing retention (Koo et al., 2020). Organizations effectively assess employee motivation, commitment, and job performance to reduce turnover, ensuring that each aligns with the company's mission and strategy (Masri & Suliman, 2019). Assessments mutually benefit the employer and employee and help them understand individual contributions to the organization by identifying areas for improvement and employee strengths.

Supervisors use evaluations to communicate their assessment of the employee's job performance based on expectations outlined in job descriptions. The main elements for employee evaluation are work duties, skills, desire to work, job performance, and willingness to innovate (Masri & Suliman, 2019). Employers must incorporate tools and

performance indicators to evaluate employee contributions (Meesook et al., 2022). Employment performance improvement is detrimental to the success and sustainability of the organization (de Jonge & Peeters, 2019). Motivated employees can refine their performance with developed and improved goals (Belrhiti et al., 2020). Some scholars have associated communication satisfaction with job satisfaction, productivity, employee performance, and job commitment (He & Li, 2021). An employee who feels unfairly treated in the appraisal process is disappointed and has reduced productivity (Mahmood et al., 2019). As Volosevici (2022) described, the *evaluation process* is the negotiation between the employee and the employer. Evaluations may help motivate employees if they believe the assessment to be fair with clear and attainable benchmarks.

Performance appraisals are vital and constant elements in a highly functioning organization. Employee performance evaluations fulfill the organization's practical, legal, and strategic purposes for the organization (Noe et al., 2012). They are traditionally conducted annually to monitor the employee's progress within a specific timeframe. Evaluations are data-dependent documents that are objectively used to collect data, analyze results, create an action plan or future improvements, and re-collect for informational feedback (Kroll, 2015). Overall, individual performance evaluations are related directly or indirectly to the organization's economic performance (Jibai & Hammoud, 2020). Leaders use assessments to obtain and analyze the organization's operation data. The human element is dominant in the evaluations with individual anchors and drivers.

Data collected from evaluations may be used for professional development initiatives. Effective professional development may reduce employee turnover (Ju & Li, 2019). Professional development may also increase individual and organizational productivity (Ozkeser, 2019). Ju and Li (2019) asserted that when organizations fail to offer professional development opportunities to their workforce, they push their career-focused individuals to depart and explore organizations that provide training options. Employee performance evaluations may provide specific analytical data that allows the organization to monitor productivity and improve performance through professional development opportunities.

Exit interviews are a valuable communication tool that may provide organizational insight and retention monitoring. Employee retention is necessary because of the high cost associated with turnover (Ayola et al., 2019). An *exit interview* is a discussion between a departing employee and their supervisor (Johns & Gorrick, 2016). Employees often leave the organization taking with them valuable information, including areas in need of improvement. Employee turnover rates are an indicator of the development and nourishment of the organization (Ainer et al., 2019). According to Mahan et al. (2020), 78% of employees who left their jobs in 2019 were for preventable reasons. Unfortunately, some reasons for employee turnover are the need for more support from supervisors and staff, low empowerment, and stress (Scanlan & Still, 2019). Former employees' feedback is valuable information that helps understand potential warnings of emerging regulatory, compliance, ethical, or legal issues to be addressed



(Kusserow, 2020). Internal factors may impact turnover efforts. Therefore, reviewing data collected from exit interviews may assist leaders in understanding preventative measures to reduce turnover intentions.

### ***360-Degree Evaluations***

Leaders use different types of assessments and feedback methods to evaluate and communicate employee performance. *Performance feedback* is a communication tool generally provided by a supervisor addressing behavior and job-related information (M. Alam & Latham, S. D., 2020). Often, the workplace has managers in supervisory and administration roles that can unintentionally lead to a neglectful environment where administrative tasks supersede employee performance monitoring (Chae et al., 2020). Numerous traditional and innovative performance management tools can assess an employee's productivity. The 360-degree appraisal offers an alternative to conventional top-down assessments, which can be inconsistent; formal top-down appraisals focus on employees meeting the expectations of their supervisor, while upward appraisals, such as 360-degree appraisals, have a component that allows the employee to evaluate their supervisors as well (Waldman & Bowen, 1998). 360-degree appraisals consider different perspectives and sources of information to obtain a comprehensive view of organizational processes compared to traditional evaluation methods. One purpose of 360-degree feedback is to improve the supervisor's self-awareness by comparing their self-rating to the ratings of others (Maurer et al., 2002). The 360-degree appraisal allows the employee and other individuals to contribute to the employee's work assessment. Instead of a linear

performance rating solely performed by the supervisor, numerous individuals associated with the organization, including the employee, offer their perspective of the employee's performance, resulting in an in-depth view of the assessment.

The 360-degree appraisal increases focus and involvement while decreasing discrimination and biases in the workplace. The 360-degree appraisal considers the organization and the employee's self-assessment (Saxena, 2015). Since 1980, 360-degree appraisals have been used to assess company processes and competencies in different settings (Gonzalez-Gil et al., 2020). In 2002, 90% of all Fortune 500 companies adopted the 360-degree collection tool to obtain feedback from internal and external individuals who observe or are affected by the employee, such as a subordinate, peer, supervisor, supplier, customer, and stakeholder (Chopra, 2017). Researchers agree that this type of assessment can be beneficial because it may help human resources fully understand the employee's work performance through feedback, even though the process may be lengthy.

### ***Pay-for-Performance Incentive***

Some companies attempt to use financial programs to influence employee behavior positively. According to Conzelmann (2020), organizational leaders lack formal processes to reward and recognize employee work accomplishments and recognition, which should be included in organizational staff decisions for continuous operation and attainment of the company's mission, vision, and succession protocol. Cainarca et al. (2019) asserted that some employees may be motivated depending on their performance

and merits, such as monetary incentives. According to Lachheb et al. (2019), employee compensation and benefits should be incorporated into a reward system linked to performance. *Pay-for-performance* is a popular measurement incentive that rewards quality work financially (Aryankhesal et al., 2012). Zaresani and Scott (2021) stated that some pay-for-performance programs are poorly designed regarding insufficient incentives, unintended consequences, unclear goals, multi-tasking concerns, and external validity; the scheme is voluntary or poorly evaluated when considering its study designs and reporting. Human resources mainly design reward systems within organizations to improve performance, reach organizational demands, and decrease financial expenses (Abdin et al., 2019). Even though some organizations benefit from using pay-for-performance incentives, some pay-for-performance programs are poorly designed.

Pay-for-performance programs may improve productivity, but there are long-term concerns. Some of the incentive-based program's disadvantages include envy, unethical behavior, decreased motivation and creativity, and short-term decision-making (He & Li, 2021). Therefore, an employer must understand that rewards alone will not improve productivity (Hafeez et al., 2019). Additionally, when employees believe there is an imbalance between rewards and efforts, they may grow stressed by negative motions (Li et al., 2021). Some employees may feel pressure to work outside their natural norm, negatively impacting their enjoyment and duty performance (Kuvaas et al., 2020). Hauret et al. (2022) indicated that performance-related pay can contribute to job strain, accidents, or absenteeism. Consequently, money does not motivate employees (Bassett-

Jones & Lloyd, 2005). Pay-for-performance incentive programs may create a positive and hostile work environment that may decrease employee motivation and productivity in the long term.

### ***Industry Branding as a Recruitment Tool***

Recruitment, activation, and retention of skilled workforces are challenging in every industry. Organizations often face competition to attract and retain a skilled workforce (Dineen & Allen, 2016). As a result, businesses sometimes alter or attempt to improve their company image to attract employees (Van Hoyer et al., 2013). Barney (2001) and Zorn et al. (2014) suggested that a company's reputation is critical to understanding the competitive advantage through the influence of high-performance human resources practices on organizational performance. According to Min et al. (2020), a strong organizational identity improves employee performance and job satisfaction, increases collaborative engagement, lowers employee turnover, and decreases absenteeism. Employment branding can generally be a name, word, symbol, or organizational design created to differentiate itself from its competitors (Jonsen et al., 2021). Some customers base their purchasing decisions on the brand value, not only on their interest in the product (Aji et al., 2020). Branding often creates a competitive advantage through the establishment's reputation. A positive organizational culture may serve as a branding tool for individuals searching for employment and customers that support based on the positive reputations of establishments.

Employment branding can help improve a company's reputation by appearing favorable in the market. By identifying the offerings of one employer and differentiating, employment branding allows employees to recognize the offerings compared to competing employers (T. M. Gardner et al., 2011). Employment branding derives from the concept that employment candidates desire to be associated with an employer consistent with the individual's idea of what is considered distinctive and essential about the organization (Dineen & Allen, 2016). Open and honest communication is essential during the onboarding stage because of the ability to create a culture that promotes negative and positive feedback as a positive contribution to the organization (C. Johnson, 2020). Organizations may attract employees by branding themselves and presenting an appealing image as an establishment that promotes employee voice as part of the culture and value system.

Employees desire to work in an environment that encourages open communication and personal growth. Open and honest communication is essential in establishing organizational culture, encouraging employee communication, and instilling that positive and negative feedback should be considered constructive and offered for improvement purposes (C. Johnson, 2020). In traditional evaluations, the supervisor provides feedback regarding their subordinate's performance (R. E. Roberts, 2020). Employees may not always feel heard and supported. Organizations that engage their workforce gain a positive reputation and position in the market, gaining a solid competitive advantage (Lampaki & Papadakis, 2018). If the organization is not

supportive, employees are less motivated to perform to the best of their abilities; organizational communication can help improve employee performance (Lantara, 2019). Therefore, researchers agreed that organizations that lack open communication should consider implementing a more practical approach to strengthen the relationship between the leader and the employee.

### ***Organization Change***

Organizations may consider structural and operational readjustments to meet their strategic goals and objectives. Organizational structuring, strategy change, organizational culture, and perception towards change may impact the transition (Aduku et al., 2021). Managers should be aware of the slow change management process when implementing organizational changes (Asai & Koonce, 2001). Like other departments, human resources may change its processes based on new trends, positively impacting the workforce (Lusnakova et al., 2020). Human resources leaders use training activities to assist employees in adapting to new environments and conditions and improve decision-making and problem-solving capabilities (Ozkeser, 2019). Therefore, multiple researchers agree that leaders should carefully develop an implementation plan with significant organizational changes.

Multiple internal and external factors affect the organizational development. These factors include knowledge and experience, employee creativity and innovation, flexibility, professional development, motivation, and satisfaction (Lusnakova et al., 2020). As change agents, human resources can smoothly introduce changes using their

knowledge of employees and essential change-management techniques to minimize expenses (Long & Ismail, 2012). Organizational change may benefit organizations. In contrast, change may be a timely and costly process. Human resources may assist the organization in navigating during times of uncertainty.

Organizations need an assessment that benefits the company and the individual. Organizations have the opportunity to create a formal assessment that benefits individuals by improving professional development and employee recognition (Chmielewska et al., 2020). Traditional performance reviews can be stressful for both the supervisor and the employee. Still, minor adjustments such as understanding, coaching, and recognition can be implemented to improve the discussion for both parties (C. Johnson, 2020). Managers influence employees through motivation by communicating and providing feedback while preserving their employees' work-life balance (Lusnakova et al., 2020). Traditional performance reviews may create discomfort for the leader and employee. Therefore, a calmer process may help improve the review process and motivate employees.

Organizations must consider adjusting their employee evaluation method to ensure that the supervisor's and employee's interests are addressed fairly. Organizations should consider creating a safe culture where employees are not afraid to fail but are encouraged to apply themselves to achieve their best possible results (C. Johnson, 2020). A safe culture also fosters trust between the supervisor and the employee. According to Guo et al. (2020), employees may become loyal to their supervisor when trust has been established. Trust and fairness are the keys to building a positive organizational culture

throughout the establishment, building confidence, and empowering individuals to serve organizational interests (Masri & Suliman, 2019). C. Johnson (2020) asserted that supervisors can motivate, encourage, and create rapport and open communication by creating a dialogue regarding their career challenges, sharing how they overcame them, and asking for assistance when necessary. Creating a positive organizational culture may improve employee performance and trust. Trust between the leader and employee will facilitate sharing the evaluation's outcomes, which will be better received.

When employees believe the organization is investing in their future goals, their chances of leaving it may decrease. Human resources managers are responsible for hiring people, managing employee performance, overseeing salaries and benefits, and professional development. They seek innovative, creative, and effective methods to problem-solve and maintain the environment (Azizi et al., 2021). A critical element of performance evaluations is determining the factors that may increase positive reactions, which motivate performance improvement (Selvarajan & Cloninger, 2012). Motivation is the driving force behind employee action to achieve organizational goals; the human resource department is the most important in influencing employee motivation (Alexandru, 2019). Researchers recommend implementing a communication channel that allows all employees to contribute ideas and suggestions instead of the traditional appraisal system where the leader provides the majority of the feedback.



## **Evaluation versus Developmental Feedback**

Employment evaluations allow the employer to perform a workplace assessment. The evaluation process can be stressful for the supervisor and employee (C. Johnson, 2020). Jug et al. (2019) defined *evaluations* as a formal summative assessment of past cumulative performance, an intrinsic part of an employee's official record used to judge performance according to the competency set in the job description. Subsequently, Jug et al. (2019) observed that the language used in evaluations is judgmental, using adjectives and verbs to support findings. Organizations must provide a culture that promotes employee voice and is open to an inclusive environment because employees desire to be heard, acknowledged, valued, appreciated, trusted, and provided with feedback and effective communication (Chakravarti & Chakraborty, 2020). Leadership style can influence motivation and engagement within the organization (Al-Bahri & Othman, 2019). C. Johnson (2020) suggested that simple changes such as understanding, coaching, and recognition may improve the evaluation process for both the supervisor and the employee. Therefore, an employee's voice benefits the organization by allowing that individual to communicate on critical matters, resulting in the employee feeling listened to and valued.

All leaders seek a skilled workforce. To attract qualified and competent staff, company leaders may create a positive work relationship by encouraging employees to participate in the decision-making and transfer of valuable knowledge, communicating directly with employees by ensuring that their needs are being considered, understanding

what motivates them (C. Johnson, 2020; Lusnakova et al., 2020). According to the person-environment fit theory, individuals are more likely to experience job satisfaction when an organization supplies their wants and desires while allowing their abilities to meet the job's demands (Daniels & de Jonge, 2010). The two-factor theory also supports the idea that an employee's desire to feel appreciated contributes to job satisfaction. Communication is more than sending information; it also involves ideation, encoding, transmission, decoding, and feedback, which is critical in assisting the receiver in understanding the sender's intended points (Chakravarti & Chakraborty, 2020). At times, the feedback portion of communication is overlooked. Therefore, improving internal communication between the supervisor and employee may assist small businesses in gaining a competitive advantage by generating innovative and creative solutions to industry problems. As a result, internal communication may also increase job satisfaction and the understanding of employee motivation.

Developmental feedback differs from evaluations. *Feedback* is an informal and descriptive assessment promptly provided for future improvement during a learning opportunity or immediately after a task is completed (Jug et al., 2019). Constructive and positive feedback and recognition may enhance employee performance and engagement (Masri & Suliman, 2019). The language used during feedback should be descriptive, deliberate, and constructive by incorporating specific nouns and verbs to avoid a judgmental tone (Jug et al., 2019). Jug et al. also stated that developmental feedback allows the dialogue to be non-threatening and offers an opportunity to establish positive

interaction, which fosters a learning environment. Supervisor developmental feedback is informative, valuable, and future-oriented because it focuses on growth instead of benchmark failures while attempting to build a positive environment where employees are not afraid of accidentally making mistakes (Zhang et al., 2019). Developmental feedback may benefit both the organization and the employee by providing constructive feedback through open, informal communication.

Developmental feedback promotes genuine care for an employee and builds a rapport that creates psychological safety; the belief of being treated and heard fairly has been established as a critical motivator of employee voice (Zhang et al., 2019).

Traditionally, performance assessments are provided through a formal meeting to review an individual's past accomplishments and performance gaps, acknowledge strengths, identify areas needing improvement, and create a developmental action plan (M. Alam & Singh, P., 2021). Zhang et al. (2019) defined *rapport* as a positive feeling and process in a relationship between the supervisor and employee. One goal of developmental feedback is to create a genuine connection between the supervisor and employee through continuous positive communication. When feedback is effective, constant, and timely, employees do not have to wait until formal evaluations to gain insight into their job performance.

Human resources can assist in the transition from traditional evaluations to development feedback. During developmental feedback, supervisors express their “sincere and holistic” concern regarding the welfare of their subordinates, creating a

positive environment (Ali & Mehreen, 2019). Organizational culture plays a key component in the success of small businesses. Employee communication and motivation are two essential components in human resources management, prioritizing organizational communication (Lusnakova et al., 2020). In the same way, feedback is intended to communicate past job performance to improve future performance; the main purpose is to motivate employees to improve their performance and align individual goals with organizational objectives (M. Alam & Latham, S. D., 2020). Ideally, the communication during performance feedback should be transparent so employees may understand their performance progress (C. Sharma et al., 2022). Therefore, employees' feelings, interests, and needs should be understood while being encouraged to contribute to the company's planning and decision-making processes (C. Sharma et al., 2022). Performance feedback can be beneficial since it may be used in determining professional development requirements. Developmental feedback allows employees to communicate their wants and desires while providing the organization with valuable insight regarding the position. Professional development can be tailored to fit the organization's needs by aligning employee feedback and training to the strategy's mission and goals.

Supervisors are critical in job embeddedness and satisfaction (Stewart & Wiener, 2021). *Job embeddedness* is the collection of forces that benefit the organization by retaining employees (Ayola et al., 2019). Job embeddedness may assist in reducing costs related to employee turnover (A. J. Tan et al., 2019). Organizations can increase the individual's feeling of being valued, engaged, and purposeful by cultivating the

relationship between the supervisor and employee (C. Johnson, 2020). Embedded employees, who have easy access to the supervisors, can openly exchange opinions, and have their superiors' recognition and understanding, will demonstrate a feeling of security and confidence, which in turn will result in having motivated individuals willing to valuably contribute to benefit the organization with practical solutions and share their knowledge (C. Johnson, 2020; Stewart & Wiener, 2021; A. J. Tan et al., 2019). Ayola et al. (2019) asserted that when there are supervisor-employee-related issues, the employee may become less committed, lose hope and trust in the organization, and display cynical behavior. Quality employee relationships are crucial for improved connections to prevent turnover, decreased productivity, and decreased job satisfaction.

Developmental feedback allows leaders and employees to communicate and contribute organizational ideas openly. In addition, knowledge transfer is a form of communication through knowledge exchange between individuals (Grand et al., 2016). Developmental feedback allows knowledge transfer between the supervisor and employee to improve productivity and employee performance. According to Chmielewska et al. (2020), performance feedback was the starting point in planning professional development. Knowledge transfer may alleviate issues related to problem-solving, creativity, and employee work performance (Gilson et al., 2013). If supervisors are not polite, honest, and respectful, their subordinates may lack trust and fear communication's negative consequences (A. J. Tan et al., 2019). When employees feel that their leader is approachable, they may be more motivated to communicate work-

related issues and perform to their fullest potential. Employees may have an increase in job satisfaction during developmental feedback.

Job satisfaction is not the employee's sole responsibility but a shared one that can result in discontented, disengaged employees who become less committed to their position, organizational goals, and mission if not addressed (Romasanta, 2021). Negative feedback tactics are ineffective in generating positive employee performance results (Brown et al., 2016). Knowledge transfer may enhance industries' competitive advantage to better serve customer demands (Adomako et al., 2021). Therefore, implementing developmental feedback strategies may improve the relationship between the leader and employee while creating a transparent evaluation system.

The work environment is critical in impacting employees (Lusnakova et al., 2020). Organizations should strive to create an environment that allows informal and developmental feedback where leaders interact more frequently and openly with subordinates to develop and improve their abilities, resulting in information exchange, new ideas, and solutions generation (Thuan, 2021). Work environment improvement through integrity standards, transparency, and equality will positively impact organizational performance (Al-Tarawneh, 2020). Most employees prefer feedback that shares information and informally explains organizational objectives, plans, and strategies (Mazzei et al., 2019). Organizations can improve supervisor and employee relationships by combining strategy and employee management tools so that both parties are more open (C. Johnson, 2020). Open communication regarding organizational goals

and strategic direction assists the organization in aligning employee efforts with business goals and increases effectiveness (Masri & Suliman, 2019). Ethical leadership cultivates two-way communication, treats subordinates fairly, and helps solve work-related dilemmas (H. Zhou et al., 2020). Some supervisors may lead by example to increase trust by demonstrating honesty, kindness, and experience while performing tasks (Abdin et al., 2019). Mazzei et al. (2019) asserted the importance of employee communication for exchanging information to improve relationships, organizational culture, decision-making, and activity organizing. Developmental feedback strategies can be helpful in small businesses. Creating an organizational culture that encourages an open exchange of ideas may positively impact employee performance, transparency, innovation, fairness, and motivation.

### **Transition**

In Section 1, I presented the study's foundation, including the background, the problem statement, and the research question. I also conducted a comprehensive literature review explaining the conceptual framework, its constructs, and its applicability. The literature review included employee motivation, small businesses, strategic planning, sustainability, succession planning, job descriptions, assessments, organizational change, and developmental feedback.

In Section 2, I will present the project while detailing the methodology and design. More importantly, I will explain the data collection process and analysis in detail.

Section 3 consists of the findings and themes based on the conceptual framework. Recommendations for professional practices are provided. Implications for social change, future research, and a conclusion are also included.



## Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I reiterated the purpose of this study and further discussed peer-reviewed articles regarding the topic. In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored developmental feedback strategies that some business leaders implement to improve employee performance. I also presented the role of the researcher, the research method and its design, participant population criteria, and population sample techniques. I also explained the data collection, organization, reliability, and validity in depth.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the effective developmental feedback strategies used by leaders in small businesses that enhance employee performance. The implications for positive social change included the potential to provide knowledge to business leaders to grow and develop small businesses. This growth may help resolve job entry, retention, and employee performance by improving the health of local economies. The goal of the study was to equip the leaders of small businesses with insight regarding some benefits of implementing developmental feedback through (a) open communication, (b) employee motivation, and (c) knowledge transfer.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, the data collector plays a critical role during the interview process compared to data collected through questionnaires (Steils, 2021). Qualitative researchers attempt to understand how the individual engages in specific settings by hearing the voice and perspective of the participant (Headley & Clark, 2020). In this

situation, researchers should consider and address potential bias within their study regarding the research question, theoretical framework, data collection, and interview questions (Mackieson et al., 2019). The purpose of interviews is to understand the participants' deepest values, beliefs, and experiences (Collins & Stockton, 2022). For accurate results, bias must be admonished. *Bias* is the disconnection between reality and the researcher's beliefs (Bergen & Labonté, 2019). Therefore, all research questions should be open-ended, neutral, and transparent while avoiding leading language (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Numerous data collection tools are used in qualitative research to collect information, including structured interviews, semistructured interviews, organizational documents, and archival data. I collected data from semistructured interview responses, organizational records, and public information to perform data triangulation. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) confirmed that semistructured interviews allow the researcher to gather participants' experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs on a topic.

The best time to address and acknowledge potential bias is from the early stages of the research. J. L. Johnson et al. (2020) asserted that a researcher's beliefs, background, and experiences may impact the study. Thus, researchers must have an early reflection about the ethical considerations. *Social desirability bias* refers to the practice of presenting one's perception as the social acceptance of a demographic (Bergen & Labonté, 2019). Therefore, I presented facts and focused on evidence-based justifications in my thematic analysis to proactively address this bias.

## Participants

Steils (2021) suggested that one indicator of high-quality research was the participant recruitment criteria and not necessarily the number of respondents or length of observations. Instead, the researcher should focus on the data's depth, richness, and relevance to provide sufficient evidence to answer the research question (Steils, 2021). For this multiple case study, I interviewed five small business leaders. The participants were selected from small businesses in Little Rock, Arkansas. The participant eligibility criteria for this study were (a) implementing successful developmental feedback strategies, (b) being owners or employed as high-level leaders of a small business in central Arkansas, and (c) serving in a leadership role for more than 3 years. I used a non-probability purposive sampling and interviewed five small business leaders. I excluded employees who did not serve in leadership roles because they lacked the necessary experience and insight to answer the interview questions. I ensured that the selected participants possessed the skills, knowledge, and background that would allow them to answer the research question of what developmental feedback strategies leaders of small use to enhance employee performance. I did a purposeful sampling and recruited participants from a familiar environment and surrounding small businesses, where I observed their way of doing things. To reach data saturation, I completed three interviews, assessed the emerging information, and checked if new themes or ideas were discussed with each additional interview. At the fifth interview, I could not see new

information shared, and thus, I stopped the interviews and determined that I had reached data saturation.

### **Research Method and Design**

The three main methods for conducting research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. I used the qualitative methodology. This study used a qualitative multiple-case methodology to explore developmental feedback strategies that some business leaders implement to enhance employee performance.

#### **Research Method**

The three main types of methods include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Hennink et al., 2020; Strijker et al., 2020). I used a qualitative method for this study to explore developmental feedback strategies some leaders use to enhance employee performance. Knowledge is constantly changing, resulting in numerous research methods being used to accurately reflect the facts regarding the phenomena of the study (M. Moon, 2019). By using open-ended questions, qualitative researchers use interviews to collect in-depth information. While interviewing leaders of small businesses, I asked open-ended questions to obtain extensive knowledge regarding developmental feedback strategies from participants.

Quantitative research produces outcomes from experiments and observations in which data can be reproduced while remaining consistent (Sahin & Ozturk, 2019). Also, Strijker et al. (2020) asserted that the quantitative method tends to be used in natural sciences while qualitative studies implement the social sciences. When conducting a

quantitative study, the researcher tests hypotheses by selecting a population, measuring variables, and using statistical analysis testing (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). I did not select the quantitative method because collecting numerical data was unnecessary for this study.

A mixed method is used when a single method cannot achieve the research goal. Since the mixed method incorporates the quantitative method, it was outside the scope of my study. FitzPatrick (2019) asserted that conducting qualitative research can result in data saturation and quality data. Saturation is important and signifies no need to collect more data while contributing to the validity and credibility, and saving the researcher time and energy (Mwita, 2022). The qualitative approach was appropriate for this study since it allowed me to explore the research question through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions.

For decades, qualitative interviews have been used to collect research data (R. E. Roberts, 2020). By using qualitative research, I was able to ask local leaders of small businesses open-ended questions regarding developmental feedback strategies used to enhance employee performance. Structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews are the most common qualitative data collection methods (Mwita, 2022). Prioritizing interview questions from the most important to the least may ensure consistency across the sample (Hamilton & Finley, 2020). However, I prepared the interview protocol to ensure consistency and used the same probing questions to start the interviews. I explain the data collection process in detail in the following sections.

## **Research Design**

Researchers select the design that will allow them to explore the research question best. In a research study, a research design is an outline used to answer a specific research question (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Research designs include case studies, narrative designs, ethnography, and focus groups. The purpose of this study was to explore the developmental feedback strategies some small business leaders use to enhance employee performance. I interviewed and analyzed the responses to gain insight into the phenomenon. A multiple case study interviewing small business leaders from numerous organizations was best suited to answer the research question and replicate the results. K. Alam (2020) stated that qualitative methodology and case study allow the researcher to explore the answer to the “what” questions instead of only the “why” and “how” questions. A case study enables the exploration of the topic through data collection (K. Alam, 2020; Mattimoe et al., 2021). Researchers use case studies to explore groups, organizations, and environments (Yin, 2018). The multiple case studies design allowed me to collect data from different businesses to answer the research question.

I considered alternative research designs, including ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry. The ethnographic design observes a particular culture’s behaviors and attitudes (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019; Field-Springer, 2020). This design did not suit this study of exploring developmental feedback strategies leaders of small businesses use to enhance developmental feedback. The phenomenological design allows a researcher to understand a participant’s lived experience and was not necessary to study small

businesses (Pathirange et al., 2020). The narrative design may tell an individual's chronological and biographical account (Eichsteller, 2019). The narrative design was rejected because this study does not require telling an individual's story.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study consisted of five small businesses that successfully implemented developmental feedback strategies to enhance employee performance in central Arkansas. Leaders are the individuals charged with establishing organizational change. I obtained rich data regarding leadership strategies related to the topic using open-ended questions. The population within a study refers to the collection of cases the researcher is interested in, whereas the sample is a subset of the population (Knechel, 2019). The sampling technique was purposive sampling to interview five small business leaders who meet the study's criteria. Andrade (2021) found that most research conducted purposive sampling. By selecting participants in particular roles, purposive sampling helps the study remain consistent with the primary goal (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). Purposive sampling strategies differ from random selection (Campbell et al., 2020) and are used in qualitative research to identify the appropriate individuals to add value to the research without having a limitation of data saturation (Andrade, 2021; FitzPatrick, 2019). A disadvantage of purposive sampling, similar to other sampling techniques, is limited external validity, which increases as the sample size decreases (Andrade, 2021). Within qualitative research, sample sizes are connected to the phenomenon and not the particulars of the population, resulting in smaller samples than

in quantitative studies (McGinley et al., 2021). However, if I had failed to achieve data saturation, I would have interviewed more participants who met the criteria and collected more data until no new themes emerged from the interviews. I did not opt for random sampling because the business or individuals may have declined the invitation to participate in the study, and it would have delayed my study. I selected all the participants based on their backgrounds and experiences that align with the research topic.

### **Ethical Research**

Steils (2021) emphasized the importance of ethics, protecting the participant's identity, and gaining consent in qualitative research. Similarly, Goncalves (2020) acknowledged the importance of addressing ethical challenges regarding procedures and participant confidentiality. Researchers should recognize their role in the research, biases, personal emotions, and assumptions regarding a study and its potential impact on the results, including data analysis and conclusions (FitzPatrick, 2019).

I conducted data collection after receiving IRB approval #09-22-23-0555039. I adhered to the IRB approval process throughout the study. Consent forms were used to explain the interview process while communicating that study participation is voluntary. There was no penalty to the individual or business if they had chosen to withdraw from the study. The consent forms disclosed the research's purpose, interview procedures, and efforts to secure participants' privacy. I started the interviews after receiving the participants' written consent via email. During the interview, I ensured that participants



understood the research purpose and the interview process; I also emphasized that they could decline to answer any question that made them uncomfortable and withdraw from the interview at any time, even after we started. Some researchers rely on data repositories designed to secure access, securely store, and share quantitative and qualitative data (Antonio et al., 2020). Participant names and identities were kept confidential, and all data related to the study will be safely stored for at least five years after its completion. After five years, all transcripts will be shredded and soft copies will be destroyed.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Techniques**

#### **Data Collection Instruments**

This study is a qualitative multiple-case study research. I used multiple data collection instruments: me as the primary researcher and the semistructured interviews. Additionally, I used the interview protocol (see Appendix) as an auxiliary instrument in collecting my data. The interview protocol allowed me to have a basis to follow in my conversations with the participants to focus on the flow of the interview, remain on track and within the time allocation, and stay neutral while interacting with the participants. As a qualitative researcher, I was the data collection instrument. According to Mackieson et al. (2019), the researcher should clarify data collection methods, reliability and validity, and any gaps in the data. In this qualitative research, I used semistructured interviews and organizational documents as public sources of information. Mwita (2022) asserted that document analysis involves data collection of published information related to the study.

The researcher and interview questions serve as instruments when conducting qualitative interviews; as a result, the quality of the research depends on the strength of the interview questions and the researcher's experience (R. E. Roberts, 2020). R. E. Roberts (2020) stressed the importance of novice researchers using appropriate and robust interview questions that will allow the result to answer the research question. I followed my chair's input while developing the interview questions to ensure I followed solid standards, and I practiced the interviews before I conducted the actual ones to gain experience and be comfortable in the interaction.

### **Data Collection Process**

After receiving the IRB approval, I interviewed five high-level leaders of five small businesses. I conducted semi-structured interviews with five small business leaders to explore the strategies used to enhance employee performance through developmental feedback. The semistructured interviews comprised six open-ended questions and three sub-questions aligned with the research question. This sampling technique was purposive sampling.

In preparation for the semistructured interviews, I prepared the interview protocol (see Appendix), which was my roadmap to conducting the interviews. Before the start of the interviews, I emailed the participants a summary of the study and attached the informed consent, which they signed to share their approval to participate and their understanding of the requirements. In the same recruitment email, I explained the voluntary aspect of participation and the capability to withdraw at any time. After

receiving the consent forms via email, I called each participant to schedule the interview. I informed the leaders who were interviewed that I would maintain their confidentiality and would refer to them as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 in the transcriptions and, if needed, in the analysis of the findings.

I scheduled the interviews through virtual video meetings and recorded them to refer to when transcribing. The interviews averaged approximately 25 minutes and were conducted via video conference for transcription purposes. I used the otter.ai software to transcribe the interviews into Word documents and shared each transcript separately with the respective participant as part of member checking. In qualitative research trustworthiness, member checking is a critical technique to establish the credibility of results (Slettebø, 2021). Member checking is recommended as a validity and trustworthiness check that offers participant feedback for data interpretations (Motulsky, 2021). According to FitzPatrick (2019), researchers should give the participants access to their transcript and the interpretation for feedback opportunities. During member checking, the participant receives conclusions, interpretations, data, and categories regarding the study (Amin et al., 2020). Slettebø (2021) asserted that member checking allows the study participant to include feedback on the researcher's interpretation of the collected data.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

Qualitative research can be labor-intensive based on the collected data and the commitment required to generate themes (Mattimoe et al., 2021). Researchers commonly

incorporate computer programs to assist with data analysis. Computer software has been available since 1984 to support researchers and can handle large quantities of data, making the analysis process more manageable for the researcher (Cypress, 2019). Any qualitative analysis aims to produce a valuable study (Hamilton & Finley, 2020). Cypress (2019) explained that data analysis software assists the researcher with transcription analysis and coding in qualitative research. For instance, themes will emerge within the phenomenon through coding standard references in a study (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019) agreed that themes have subjective meanings, and cultural-contextual similarities can be grouped to assist the researcher in answering the question of *why*.

Data from interviews was analyzed through thematic analysis. I followed Braun and Clark's (2020) approach and Yin's (2018) five-step process for thematic analysis. Braun and Clark (2020) specified that there are six major phases for the thematic analysis: (a) data familiarization and notes, (b) systemic data coding, (c) general initial themes or categories from the collected data coding, (d) developing and reviewing themes, (e) refining and naming the themes, and (f) writing the report. In parallel, Yin (2018) identified five steps specific to the internal thematic analysis work. These steps are (a) compiling the transcripts, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling, (d) arraying, and (e) writing the conclusion based on the outcomes of the qualitative analysis.

I had to follow these two guidelines because the multiple cases were related to different businesses, and the original transcripts were extremely raw; thus, I needed to

complete additional steps before I could consolidate the transcripts to run the codes and follow Yin's process. I show in Table 1, side by side, the two thematic analysis approaches to help the reader keep track of the overall thematic analysis I conducted.

**Table 1**

*Braun and Clark's Approach Versus Yin's Process to Thematic Analysis*

Braun and Clark (2020)	Yin (2018)
1. Data familiarization and notes	1. Consolidating data
2. Systematic data coding	2. Disassembling
3. General Initial themes or categories	3. Reassembling
4. Developing and reviewing themes	4. Arraying
5. Refining and naming the themes	5. Writing conclusions
6. Writing the report	

Thus, the first step was to familiarize myself with the transcripts, then create tables per interviewee, where I used the interview questions as per Section 1, and then copy the answers in the second column, deleting unnecessary comments and repetitions. I uploaded this first document to ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH version 23.3.4.0. ATLAS.ti uses embedded Artificial Intelligence (AI) software to generate the codes. The first run in the software generated 83 quotations and 258 codes. When I started reading the codes and quotations, I noticed that the software was generating extra codes related to the questions and the raw transcript, which led me to complete phase 2, related to consolidating the data. I created one compiled table to

synthesize each participant's answers to the identified question. At this stage, I had a Word document with a two-column table with 12 pages.

To make sure I did not have irrelevant or wrong coding, I only uploaded the synthesized answers in ATLAS.ti. The AI generated 42 quotations and 152 codes. This second run of codes corresponded to the systematic data coding and disassembling steps (see Table 1 on page 65). Table 2 shows the reduction of codes till I reached eight themes.

**Table 2**

*Code Cleaning Count-Down*

Phase	Codes Count
First run with questions and raw transcripts	258
Second run with cleaned and synthesized answers	152
Third run; deleting 16 unrelated codes	136
Fourth Run during the general themes, reassembling, and arraying	
Theme 1 merged 27 codes	110
Theme 2 merged 20 codes	91
Theme 3 merged 9 codes	83
Theme 4 merged 18 codes	66
Theme 5 merged 18 codes	49
Theme 6 merged 21 codes	29
Theme 7 merged 16 codes	14
Theme 8 merged 5 codes	10
Fifth run: Incorporating the 2 remaining codes related to feedback with their respective counts	8

As of the third code run, I started doing manual arraying and developing general categories until I could generate the final eight themes. In the third run, I deleted 16 irrelevant codes to the study and reflected some private or confidential information. The

Fourth run of codes was to refine and name the themes. I was reading the quotations and the codes to gather them into categories, then logically refining them and naming the themes, keeping the conceptual framework and its intrinsic and extrinsic constructs in mind. The final eight themes that emerged from the data analysis were (a) growth opportunities and staff potential; (b) challenges, limitations, and mitigation; (c) workplace culture, diversity, and environment conditions; (d) workplace dynamics and relationships; (e) communication; (f) engagement, activation, and retention; (g) performance and productivity; and (h) leadership's impact on intrinsic constructs.

### **Reliability and Validity**

#### **Reliability**

Research attempts to connect knowledge and practice through rigor, reliability, and validity to determine trustworthiness (K. Roberts et al., 2019). Numerous criteria are used to establish trustworthiness: dependability, transferability, confirmability, and credibility (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Dependability replaces reliability (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). McGinley et al. (2021) defined *dependability* as a strategy to ensure that a study can be replicable in future studies by safeguarding the accuracy of the findings and interpretations. According to DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019), *dependability* is the ability to process consistently and sustainably over time. Replicating the study's findings increases confidence in the accuracy (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). This determination is based on replicating and applying the study's findings. Collingridge and Gantt (2019) confirmed that qualitative reliability focuses on collecting and analyzing data to produce

rich and meaningful descriptions of phenomena. Attempting to create reliability, I documented as many steps and procedures as possible during my research.

### **Validity**

Qualitative researchers are encouraged to increase trustworthiness in their study (Daniel, 2019). Daniel asserted that data triangulation is a vital component of validity and could be achieved by collecting data from two or more data sources, then triangulating the results. According to M. Moon (2019), triangulation is a strategy used in research that establishes validity for the accuracy and comprehensiveness of a study's data, analysis, and conclusions. I used data triangulation to construct validity, the data for this study were the semistructured interviews and public data from the organizations that were open sources and available online. After the thematic analysis, I presented the themes under “findings” in Section 3. While I analyzed the findings based on the thematic analysis, I also supported the emerging themes with evidence from the literature and correlated them to public sources of evidence available on the organizations’ websites (organizations where the participants worked).

FitzPatrick (2019) found that establishing and writing about the validity of qualitative research can be challenging because there are numerous benchmarks to account for validity, such as trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, confirmability, authenticity, rigor, plausibility, goodness, soundness, transferability, and quality assessment. The challenges to construct validity are similar to those of reliability. *Validity* is when research measures what it claims to measure by selecting an appropriate method



and applying it coherently, rigorously, and with justifications (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). FitzPatrick asserted that validity depends on the purpose and circumstance of the research; therefore, the conclusions are based on particular methods used to address threats related to the specific research. Researcher bias can impede achieving validity; however, familiarity with the subject may be useful in authenticating responses and findings (Slettebø, 2021). Even though achieving validity within a qualitative study is more tasking than quantitative research, it can be obtained when the research follows the established procedures, especially when conducting triangulation. Validity is often achieved through triangulation (Caretta & Pérez, 2019). *Confirmability* deals with the objectivity of the phenomenon and focuses on the participant's interpretation without including bias (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). I used data triangulation and member checking to ensure data saturation to establish credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

### **Transferability**

To ensure transferability, I used purposeful sampling to interview participants who would contribute to rich data, leading to data saturation. Specifically, I selected small business leaders who successfully implement developmental feedback strategies to enhance employee performance. *Transferability* using a study's findings in various contexts and other studies (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). It replaces the concept of external validity and generalizability, in which findings can apply to different contexts and settings (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). In an attempt to increase transferability, I asked the same interview questions to each participant for consistency. Consistency allows

researchers to replicate and decrease obstacles. Failing to address potential barriers early on may negatively impact the credibility and dependability of the study (Langtree et al., 2019). Another method of ensuring transferability is to compare the participants to the demographics of the study (Daniel, 2019).

### **Credibility**

Incorporating multiple sources of evidence helps reach a high-quality study. Researchers use triangulation to increase the credibility of their findings and create a richer and more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Amin et al., 2020). Credibility determines if the findings accurately and fairly represent the research data (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The study's credibility requires that the methodology is explained and justified (Steils, 2021), which I thoroughly elaborated in Section 2. Disadvantages of triangulation include time, effort, and expenses related to the process (Amin et al., 2020). Data triangulation occurs by collecting and analyzing data from numerous sources of evidence, resulting in increased credibility. I used data triangulation to construct validity and credibility to explain if the data collected from public sources of information explains or refutes the emerging themes. According to Steils (2021), credibility can be strengthened through member reflection in some studies. I used member checking to ensure the accuracy of interpreted information after the conclusion of participant interviews. In addition, I performed an audit trail during the data analysis process to ensure credibility.

## **Data Saturation**

Since qualitative research lacks the mathematical evidence that quantitative research provides, the study's validity and reliability must be proved. One way to achieve this goal is through data saturation. Data saturation is the most common tool used in qualitative research for estimating sample sizes (K. Alam, 2020; Guest et al., 2020). FitzPatrick (2019) defined *data saturation* as the point during data analysis at which there is no need for more participants. Therefore, adding more participants than necessary for data saturation does not increase the quality of the research or produce additional useful information (Guest et al., 2020). Guest et al. (2020) confirmed that most themes in a homogenous sample can be identified within the first five to six interviews. However, if I had failed to achieve data saturation, I would have interviewed more participants who met the criteria and collected data until no new themes emerged from the interviews.

## **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I discussed the research's purpose, the researcher's role, the participant selection, and data collection and analysis processes. I also explained the study's research method and design, population and sampling, ethics, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present the deliverables of the study, including the analysis and interpretation of the findings, their application to business practices, recommendations for actions, and conclusions.

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

#### **Introduction**

In Section 2, I explored the research method and design, focusing on the purpose of the study. I also reiterated the purpose of the research and my role as the researcher. I also presented an in-depth explanation of the participant selection and data collection processes, the importance and my choice of the study's design and method, the criteria for population sampling and recruitment, ethics, and reliability and validity.

In Section 3, I present the findings and the eight emerging themes. I also link the findings to the conceptual framework and their applicability in the business field, and recommendations for professional practice. Finally, I discussed the implications for social change, recommendations for further research, and the study's conclusion based on Herzberg two-factor theory.

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

I performed a thematic analysis of the interviews' outcomes while simultaneously supporting my findings with evidence from the literature, the conceptual framework's constructs, and public sources of evidence, whenever available. The result categories match the constructs of the theory that grounds this study. The themes I found relate to the following:

- Hygiene construct (extrinsic) in all components related to job environment (condition, salary, and benefits)

- Motivation construct (intrinsic) in all components related to development (decision-making, advancement, and recognition)

I conducted a multiple case design, which allowed me to compare the findings between leaders from different industries. Yin (2018) explained that multiple case study designs are more robust, especially when the findings of each case are similar or add to the other. In this study, I was able to present a robust analysis, and the evidence is more compelling, which will allow for replicability in other industries. I explored Herzberg two-factor theory in the conceptual framework sub-section in Section 1. I explained that Herzberg separated employee job satisfaction into hygiene (extrinsic) and motivation (intrinsic) factors. The analysis of the findings through the conceptual framework's lens allowed me to identify the following eight themes: (a) growth opportunities and staff potential; (b) challenges, limitations, and mitigation; (c) workplace culture, diversity, and environment conditions; (d) workplace dynamics and relationships; (e) communication; (f) engagement, activation, and retention; (g) performance and productivity; and (h) leadership impact on intrinsic constructs.

### **Analysis of Data**

The research question of this study was: what developmental feedback strategies do leaders of small businesses in Arkansas use to enhance employee performance? The qualitative analysis included data collected through semistructured interviews. The qualitative analysis also included thematic analysis. In this section, I presented the study's results under the relevant constructs from the framework. I presented the eight

themes, showed their support in the literature, and connected each theme to the constructs while analyzing them based on the literature review, the results, and my interpretation.

When I assembled the data, I transcribed the responses from the interviews. Table 3 shows the raw code distribution that I reached in the third run of the thematic analysis. At that stage, I had already compiled the transcripts and ran the first two analyses in the ATLAS.ti software. As of the third run, I started the manual categorization to reach the below distribution.

**Table 3**

*Raw Codes Distribution from Semistructured Interviews*

Code	Count of codes
Interviews Total Codes	210
Leadership	13
Communication	10
Feedback	8
Employee engagement	5
Liability	5
Employee satisfaction	3
Employee well-being	3
Open communication	3
Trust	3
Career advancement, Collaboration, Communication style, Continuous improvement, Cultural differences, Customer service, Exit interviews, Incentives, Organizational culture, Performance evaluation, Training and development, Work-life balance, Employee turnover, Teamwork	2 each
All other emerging codes	1 each

In step four of the thematic analysis, to reach the conclusions, I kept analyzing from the lens of the framework, and I identified eight key themes to address the research

question. The key themes found were (a) growth opportunities and staff potential; (b) challenges, limitations, and mitigation; (c) workplace culture, diversity, and environment conditions; (d) workplace dynamics and relationships; (e) communication; (f) engagement; activation, and retention; (g) performance and productivity; and (h) leadership impact on intrinsic constructs. Section 3 of this study is step five of the thematic analysis where I document, report, and analyze the findings.

### ***Key Themes and Their Support in the Literature***

In this subsection, I presented the themes, provided references to support their choice concerning my study, and showed the *table of codes* which included their respective reference counts. The reference count is the number of quotations correlating to the count of codes. The code is not the exact wording used by the participants but a general description of the concept. The count of code refers to the number of times the code was referred to in the quotations extracted from the transcripts. The major theme is the higher category I reached, corresponding to the theme. The minor themes are grouped codes that led to the emerging theme. When a theme name matched a code, I marked the code with *raw* afterward to ensure I avoided confusion.

### **Theme 1 – Growth Opportunities and Staff Potential:**

Growth opportunities and staff potential are key components contributing to advancement. Decision-making, advancement, and recognition are motivators that contribute to job satisfaction (Shannon, 2019). Findings from Herzberg et al.'s (1959) study prove that motivation factors are a source of employee satisfaction (Sobaih &

Hasanein, 2020). According to Zhang et al. (2019), developmental feedback is an information feedback method that focuses on employee growth instead of benchmarks. Recognizing employees' potential leaders provides a secure environment and motivates them to do more, engage in decision-making, and advance within the organization. To reach this theme, I merged 27 codes, and the total count of codes was reduced to 110. Some of the 27 codes could be merged on a micro level, leading to a total of 18 minor themes under the major theme. As shown in Table 4, the participants identified in 23 different quotations that growth opportunities can vary.



**Table 4***Details of the Growth Opportunities and Staff Potential Theme*

Major/Minor	Count of Code	Reference
Growth Opportunities & Staff Potential	27	23
Employee training and development	5	
Career opportunities: Professional and career opportunities	3	
Career advancement	2	
Career opportunities: Promotion opportunities	2	
Continuous improvement	2	
Career opportunities: Industry recognition	1	
Career opportunities: Industry sensitivity	1	
Career opportunities: Instant feedback	1	
Career opportunities: Leadership communication	1	
Career opportunities: Opportunity for advancement	1	
Employee evaluation	1	
Goal setting	1	
Goal-oriented	1	
Growth potential	1	
Job performance	1	
Role fulfillment	1	
Self-improvement	1	
Time management	1	

Leaders employ a variety of approaches to create benchmarks and monitor progress. Participant P4 considers turnover as a benchmark for development, stating that staff development and engagement reduce turnover. P4 emphasized that their approach is to "sit down with the staff and develop developmental plans with them and ensure they are on board with the outcomes leaders set." Following this strategy, the employee would have to hit the agreed-upon benchmark, and the leaders will provide the training needed, monitor, and check the frequency of checking to support employees in reaching their

goals steadily." "Setting expectations" benefits P4, and other participants supported this concept. P2 emphasized the importance of open communication to identify future possibilities and create a path to achieve organizational goals through professional development. P2 explained that: "Setting expectations is crucial to ensure developmental feedback aligns with the organization's mission and goals." P2 added that setting expectations is important in discussing what employees want and aligning their desires with the organizational goals. P2 said,

I ask my employees to provide me feedback on the expectations and see if they are realistic. I ask them what they see in their future path and discuss the possibilities and how we can achieve their professional growth, so open communication is the key.

Some participants shared that a part of growth and development is their ability as leaders to help develop the crucial conversation skills of their employees to ensure that they are ready to handle difficult situations. Another aspect of the growth and development of employees is related to "giving the employees honest feedback." Developmental feedback needs honesty, and leaders must train to confront their employees, even though these situations are delicate. Participants shared that an optimal solution that will help them tailor and individualize professional growth is to be present with the employees in their day-to-day work, be visible, and foster open and easy lines of communication. The participants' other growth elements include skill mix and partnering juniors with seniors, especially on new projects. Participants also shared that SBLs need

to be realistic about the job requirements and make them clear with expectations for the employees, and more importantly, to realize that every role needs continuing training; hence, including professional development plans for everyone. Incorporating such developmental plans will secure better acceptance amongst employees because everyone has a certain growth plan to follow, and more importantly, having a growth plan would not be correlated with low performance.

**Theme 2 – Challenges, Limitations, and Mitigation:** Small business communication efforts have challenges, limitations, and mitigation obstacles. Ethical leadership encourages employees to contribute innovative and creative ideas to solve industry-related issues reasonably (H. Zhou et al., 2020). The lack of communication may increase job dissatisfaction. Unsatisfied employees are unmotivated to perform duties and meet organizational benchmarks (Alhassan & Greene, 2020). The minor details in Table 5 summarize the participants' negative perceptions of their organization. It is important to specify that the *liability* code was one of the raw codes that emerged, and I merged nine corresponding codes under it, resulting in five counts of the liability code. For this theme, I merged 20 minor themes under the major theme of challenges and limitations, reducing the total code count to 91.

As shown in Table 5, the participant's responses generated major themes, including business liability, employee turnover, and workplace challenges. Minor codes include challenges, fear, and lack of benchmarks, communication, and growth opportunities. Behavioral issues, perception, and stereotypes are other minor codes

identified under the theme of challenges, limitations, and mitigation. P3 explained their thought process regarding workplace challenges, "in our line of work, we have many situations where we need to protect our agents, situations like wrongful termination, discrimination, sexual harassment, and unsubstantiated claims that can happen if you do not have the right practices in place." Small business leaders, like P3, are keen to address turbulent and unsettling matters up-front and assess the situations as they arise. For a more proactive and successful strategy, small business leaders must be visible and on the front end, stay open to communication, and listen to employees' suggestions to join efforts in finding the best solutions for the organization and the employees. Thus, it is very important to mitigate and include the associated risks in the risk management strategy to address the matter proactively.

**Table 5***Details of the Challenges, Limitations, and Mitigation Theme*

Major/Minor	Count of Code	Reference
Challenges, Limitations & Mitigation	30	15
Liability	9	5
Discrimination		2
Employee termination		2
Liability law		2
Sexual harassment		1
Unsubstantiated claims		1
Wrongful termination		1
Employee turnover	2	
Work-life balance	2	
Challenges law	1	
Fear of criticism	1	
Gender equality	1	
Gender stereotypes	1	
Insecurity	1	
Lack of benchmark	1	
Lack of constructive leadership	1	
Lack of feedback	1	
Lack of formal exit interviewing strategy	1	
Limited career growth opportunities	1	
Outdated mindset	1	
Perception	1	
Poor management	1	
Reputational risk	1	
Resistance to feedback	1	
Risk management	1	
Toxic behavior	1	

Turnover was identified to be a crucial challenge. Participants include the turnover rates in their benchmarks and work on mitigations to retain their employees. Participants feel that continuous development and decision-making engagement may

most likely retain employees. P4 asserted "It is about the package, not the salary," when SBLs want to compete in the market to retain their employees, they have to look at the overall and not only the monetary component. However, this challenge persists when the employee is only looking for the monetary return; in these cases, leaders must know how to let go, as they cannot match what is being offered to the employee outside, and they cannot hold their advancement.

Another challenge that the participants identified is *gender inequality*, where the majority felt they were offering the best and most equal opportunities to their employees, whereas P1 was making conscious decisions to promote females more than males, as he felt they were more productive in his line of business. An additional challenge was the lack of records for the exit interviews. P3 identified this area for improvement as the data collected will be crucial in changing the company's practices.

**Theme 3 – Workplace Culture, Diversity, and Environmental Conditions:** Workplace culture, diversity, and environmental conditions were identified as major themes. Job satisfaction is the response to one's work environment and conditions (Stewart & Wiener, 2021). The two-factor theory identifies job environment, such as work conditions, as a hygiene factor (Lamb & Ogle, 2019). Job satisfaction impacts employee behavior. P4 explained their aversion to the *boss–subordinate approach* and their tendency to have a more personalized approach, "So we walk around, we connect with our staff just really to get a feel for how they are doing." P2 shared that from their experience, seeing their

employees as "teammates who have valuable opinions" makes the process go a lot better.

Table 6 shows the details of major and minor themes.

**Table 6**

*Details for the Workplace Culture, Diversity, and Environment Conditions Theme*

Major/Minor	Count of Code	Reference
Workplace culture, diversity, and environmental conditions	12	11
Cultural differences	3	
Organizational culture	2	
Adaptability	1	
Approachability	1	
Comparison	1	
Consideration	1	
Cultural adaptation	1	
Cultural beliefs	1	
Gender diversity	1	

I merged nine codes to reach this theme, reducing the overall codes count to 83.

The minor themes in Table 6 showed the subjects mentioned by the participants. They identified multiple areas of concern, as shown in Table 6, which I gathered under the major theme. P5 noted that with an open management style, they "have the opportunity to hear people, who in turn listen to me differently because they know that I care." The participants also shared that when they are approachable and open with their employees, they identify with the leaders as managers who sit in their offices and are available, which, in turn, helps employees be more open and honestly share their concerns.

Part of the growth is also to secure employees' well-being, ensuring that they are not affected or demotivated by events at work that may hinder their growth. This idea aligns with theme one but is more embedded in this theme of workplace culture as it is

related to the work environment and its safety. P1 discussed their perception of the difference in culture. They are a first-generation immigrant to the US and started working the way they were used to in their country of origin, which was a very positive way. One major observation that this participant shared was that they felt that in the United States, employees are scared to approach their bosses and speak to them and took them a long time to instill a new behavior in their employees, who were afraid of retaliation if they spoke their mind or shared their feedback. Another observation the participant made is that they noticed how “intriguing how the team would have different tones and different opinions than when their leaders were around.” SBLs want to hear the truth, and all participants shared that they go in rounds, are visible, and have open discussions with their employees almost daily to be able to hear, see, and properly assess what is happening. Small business leaders have an advantage in doing this, unlike big corporations, whose leaders are unaware of what their employees do.

#### **Theme 4 – Workplace Dynamics and Relationships:**

The participants discussed that the dynamics and relationships forged on the job enhance open communication and create the appropriate work environment. Workplace communication allows the exchange of information that establishes relationships, organizational culture, and decision-making opportunities (Mazzei et al., 2019). A positive atmosphere can be created when the organization considers employees' needs and motivators (C. Johnson, 2020). The relationship between the leader and constituent is critical to job satisfaction. P4 identified that “about 70 to 80% of the time, the reason



for employees to be a little off base has very little to do with work, and the work environment or culture, and more to personal issues.” P4 shared that establishing connections with employees and being “the voice for advice, or the ear to listen to their issues” are the best practices to forge strong relationships and help in workplace dynamics.

**Table 7**

*Details of the Workplace Dynamics and Relationships Theme*

Major/Minor	Count of Code	Reference
Workplace Dynamics and Relationships	21	22
Supportive leadership	3	
Collaboration	2	
Teamwork	2	
Business management	1	
Commitment to work	1	
Empathy	1	
Employee-employer relationship	1	
Employer practices	1	
Gender roles	1	
Hierarchy	1	
Individualized development	1	
Organizational structure	1	
Project management	1	
Respect	1	
Responsibility	1	
Trust	1	
Work ethic	1	

Table 7 shows the details of this theme. To reach this theme I merged 18 codes under the major theme of workplace dynamics and relationships, reducing the total code count to 66. During the communication with participants, I realized they mentioned a link

between developmental feedback and knowledge transfer, as shown in Table 7. The participants acknowledged and understood the value of receiving input from employees.

During the interview, P2 mentioned,

I would like to say that getting into the ideology of the space on developmental feedback is interesting because it creates a space where the employees or your team members have a voice. Moreover, I think that is important because, as a leader, you cannot know everything. I think the idea of being a leader is sometimes convoluted, or at least for me, it has been, and so as I have grown, I have seen different things that made me change my thoughts on what a leader is when you are leading any organization or team.

Another participant, P4, shared that they foster a "pace car method, where the moment we walk in, we walk around, we touch base with everybody just to see how they're doing, no direction is given, no critical feedback." This approach may be crucial in a safe workplace dynamic where employees know they are safe. Participants also identified that SBLs must be able to listen to their employees' concerns, be honest with themselves, and escalate matters beyond their capability. If there are no other leaders to escalate to, they can refer the issue to the employee and listen to their opinion about the options or their colleagues.

### **Theme 5 – Communication:**

The strength of an organization lies in its ability to communicate freely and openly. Developmental feedback promotes a safe work environment (Zhang et al., 2019).

Communication may improve job satisfaction and assist the leader in understanding employee motivation. Motivated employees often outperform non-motivated employees (Minai et al., 2020). Table 8 shows the details of this theme. To reach this theme, I merged 18 codes under the major theme of communication, reducing the total code count to 49. I then added two additional counts of the code *feedback* to combine in this major theme.

**Table 8**

*Details for the Communication Theme*

Major/Minor	Count of Code	Reference
Communication	35	26
Communication raw	10	
Open communication	7	
Communication style	2	
Setting expectations	4	
Direct communication	2	
Active listening	1	
Communication challenges	1	
Communication skills	1	
Importance of communication	1	
Informal communication	1	
Non-verbal communication	1	
Open door policy	1	
Personal approach	1	
Transparency	1	
Written communication	1	

Developmental feedback allows employees and supervisors to use their voices on business issues without fearing retaliation. As emphasized by P3, effective communication is critical. P2 mentioned that "the biggest thing I focus on in the

developmental feedback is transparency and open-door communication." P4 asserted, "I do not believe in top-down communication. I believe in bottom-up communication because our team is the frontliner and knows and understands what is happening at a micro level.

Moreover, leaders need this micro information to make the macro decisions. Utilizing human resources is one of an organization's most potent internal powers (Skaff, 2023). Table 8 also shows the participants' details about having an open-door policy and open communication practices. P2 shared, "Even if we are managers, we do not have the best ideas, and we do not have the solution for everything, so we ask the employees to share their thoughts with us," stressing that they encourage open communication because it is a team effort. P2 stated that engaging the team will increase their participation where they approach the leader freely to help build the team's morale, especially when they are sure that "their thoughts are taken seriously and into consideration," and they can, as leaders, have a better product and much better effective solutions.

Participants shared a common idea about open-door and open-communication policies. They all believed that communication helps set clearer expectations, encourages dialogue, and gives feedback a higher importance because the employees are not afraid to speak up. Leaders seek employees with strong communication skills for better customer service and a better team dynamic. Informal meetings are a strong component of open-communication policies, allowing SBLs to collect timely, pertinent, and accurate information. More importantly, informal meetings will allow the leaders to close the loop

and give prompt feedback on the performance and outcomes of a solution, especially when the employees initiate these solutions. All participants in all other themes incorporated this communication theme; they believed that communication enhances growth, allows leaders to give feedback without avoiding difficult conversations, helps improve the team's dynamic, creates a safe environment and a better workplace culture, engages and activates employees, helps in their performance evaluation, and builds better leadership skills that will in turn, benefit the employees.

**Theme 6 – Engagement, Activation, and Retention:**

Businesses spend excess amounts of money associated with employee turnover, proving the importance of retention (Ayola et al., 2019). The two-factor theory identifies satisfaction from workplace engagement as an intrinsic or psychological motivator (Shannon, 2019). Table 9 shows the details of this theme. To reach this theme, I merged 21 codes under the major theme of engagement, activation, and retention, reducing the total code count to 29. I then added one count of the code *feedback collection* and two counts of the code *feedback* to combine in this major theme. The minor themes presented in Table 9 are discussed in the recommendation section.

P4 shared a situation regarding feedback:

I have received recent feedback from an employee who stated that they have never worked in a team where the leaders check on them personally. She is a high-performing staff and knows we trust her, but she felt interested that this practice is done. I assured her that we do that because we care about her as an

individual and make sure that she is in a good mind, body, and spirit, not just body. If something is off, I need to know, especially if it's something I can support you with. We love doing that and our team really loves that.

The open-door policy was one of the solutions shared by the participants to engage and activate the employees. Participants believed that their business outcomes are centered on the environment they provide to their employees and the levels of engagement they enable. When leaders create safe environments and increase engagement and activation, they immediately create better *benefits* and will have higher chances to retain their employees, as the package is more than a monetary return. Every employee needs to have safety and security at their workplace, and when they are engaged and listened to, they know they are actively participating in a better return for the business, the business will maintain its growth, and their jobs will be more secure.

**Table 9**

*Details for the Leadership Theme*

Major/Minor	Count of Code	References
Leadership		
Process optimization deficiency	1	8
Repetition of work	1	11
Inefficient Resource management	2	13
Change Management	1	1
Dependency on intuition	1	14
Need for Distributive leadership	2	39
Administrative Burden	1	13
Limited Personnel	1	13

**Theme 7 – Performance and Productivity:**

The thematic analysis of all discussions revealed that the leaders are conscientious about measuring and observing performance and productivity. Romasanta (2021) asserted that job satisfaction impacts organizational performance while indicating how a business operates because of its direct impact on employee behavior. There is a link between employee motivation and performance (Girdwichai & Sriviboon, 2020). The two-factor theory identifies productivity as an intrinsic motivator (Pradenas et al., 2021). P4 discussed using corrective action plans to engage employees in their development, which may lead to financial incentives and raises. Aligning organizational goals to performance and productivity is critical to the sustainability of small businesses. Table 10 on page 91 shows the details of this theme. To reach this theme, I merged 16 codes under the major theme of performance and productivity, reducing the total code count to 14. I then added two additional counts of the code *feedback* to combine in this major theme.

Through interviews, themes related to performance and productivity emerged. P4 noted an added benefit of developmental feedback: they "evaluate employee's well-being and satisfaction along their productivity" and felt it was important to listen and talk to their employees and check how they felt about their evaluation parameters. P4 stated that people have candor and can be honest with their leaders, but employees can be vulnerable around their bosses, and it is the leader's responsibility to make them feel at ease to engage them in their performance appraisals and improve their productivity. Participants also shared that performance appraisal is part of the developmental plan. When leaders

set clear expectations and find that the employee cannot meet them, they have a duty to develop the staff. Moreover, leaders must be mindful of their assignments and allocate the staff to a project that meets their skill set. If the employee is a junior staff member, the leader can document their baseline assessment, couple them with more senior staff to do a certain project, and then re-evaluate the shift in performance. This type of continuous performance assessment can be added to the yearly evaluation. P3 highlighted that performance assessment starts from the interview and reiterated, “If a candidate only focuses on the position and cannot see the role’s inclusion in the company, they are mostly not fit for the position.”

**Table 10**

*Details for the Performance and Productivity Theme*

Major/Minor	Count of Code	Reference
Performance and Productivity	19	12
Employee performance evaluation	4	
Customer service	2	
Customer relationship	1	
Effectiveness	1	
Efficiency	1	
Monitoring	1	
Observation	1	
Performance benchmarks	1	
Planning	1	
Productivity	1	
Quality assurance	1	
Quality control	1	
Seeking the best	1	
Skills assessment	1	
Soft skills	1	



### **Theme 8 – Leadership’s Impact on Intrinsic Constructs:**

Leaders influence impacting the psychological components of the employee. Herzberg et al. (1959) asserted that intrinsic motivation occurs when the employee is based on internal rewards instead of external outcomes. Intrinsic rewards are enjoyment, satisfaction, and personal achievement (Chand et al., 2019). Table 11 shows the details of this theme. To reach this theme, I merged 5 codes under the major theme of leadership impact on motivation constructs, reducing the total code count to 8 after I added the last 2 additional counts of the code *feedback* to combine in this major theme.

**Table 11**

*Details for the Leadership Impact on Intrinsic Constructs Theme*

Major/Minor	Count of Code	Reference
Leadership Impact on Intrinsic Constructs	17	16
Leadership raw		13
Effective leadership		1
Hands-on approach		1
Honesty		1
Leadership style		1

Participants agreed that leaders have a direct role in improving intrinsic factors. P2 felt that creating safe spaces for communication makes the work environment a “happier place to work” where people will take more ownership of a project because they are sure that their leader will listen to their feedback and suggestions without judgment or retaliation. P1 stated that developmental feedback aligns with the organization’s goals and mission through dialogue, honesty, listening to concerns, and open discussions on

professional topics, which is led by the leader and is the leader's responsibility. P5 believed that "incorporating two-way feedback in all aspects of work will show that leadership cares about their employees" and will allow leaders to work on the frontline, side by side with their employees, forging a bond with them that is seen and noticed by the customers. Employees' voices matter and make a difference; the leaders are responsible for allowing this voice.

### **Business Contribution and Recommendation for Professional Practice**

Even though small businesses are a pillar in local regions, they often lack resources compared to larger establishments. Operating with fewer resources can create a disadvantage in the marketplace, hinder the organization financially, and negatively impact employee performance. There is a critical issue related to communication between business leaders and employees. Open communication can allow employees to creatively offer solutions and improve processes and procedures without fearing retaliation or reprimand. Creativity improves sustainability, innovation, and profitability (Cai et al., 2019). An innovative establishment will improve sustainability by being able to produce creative ideas and products (Cheng et al., 2019). The study findings can potentially provide small business leaders in Arkansas with successful developmental feedback strategies to enhance employee performance by improving communication and creating an environment where everyone is comfortable contributing to the organization's mission. When employees feel valued and engaged, the business leader and employee relationship can improve (C. Johnson, 2020).

Findings from this research indicated that some small business leaders in Arkansas use effective communication efforts, such as developmental feedback, to boost their organizational culture. Small business leaders dealing with performance challenges, communication issues, and low employee engagement may adopt developmental feedback strategies to obtain solutions and recommendations to solve organizational challenges. Constructive communication efforts allow the organization to create job embeddedness. Job embeddedness can reduce retention-related costs (A. J. Tan et al., 2019). Therefore, business leaders should ensure an environment that encourages knowledge exchange is established to reach goals and increase motivation and satisfaction.

### **Implications for Social Change**

This research's findings suggest that potential social implications for social change may include equipping small business leaders with insight into the benefits of developmental feedback strategies. The findings offer the potential to grow and develop the organization by implementing developmental feedback strategies that may enhance performance, improve communication efforts and knowledge transfer, and increase employee motivation. Small businesses are the driving force for local economic growth (Hernita et al., 2021). Business growth could assist with obstacles related to job entry, employee retention, and employee performance by positively impacting local economies. Small business leaders must consider the impact of good communication on employee performance, creativity, innovation, and morale. Organizations implementing employee

communication strategies may empower individuals. An empowered workforce leads to better employee performance and increases the organization's competitive advantage (Masri & Suliman, 2019).

### **Recommendations for Action**

The study aimed to equip small business leaders with insight regarding some benefits of implementing developmental feedback. This goal was achieved by asking semistructured interview questions that were analyzed until eight themes emerged. The aim was to assist small business leaders with performance-enhancement strategies by improving communication. The study's findings allowed me to offer recommendations that should be easily implemented by creating an open-communication work environment that allows the exchange of constructive feedback, knowledge transfer, and opinions related to the organization.

Another recommendation is to create an environment that allows employees throughout the organization to communicate openly regarding solutions to industry-based issues. The reason for this recommendation is to create a team environment. A team environment ensures that the employee's psychological and philosophical needs are met. This collaboration is beneficial to the organization and the employee. The organization may gain insight by receiving innovative and creative solutions from those directly linked to the operation. The employee may gain a sense of satisfaction and motivation to contribute, causing job embeddedness. Embeddedness may be achieved by revising assessment efforts instead of the traditional annual reviews. Small business leaders

should consider developmental feedback, which is more informal and effective. Based on job descriptions, benchmarks may be set by the leader and the employee to reach organizational goals.

Small businesses should consider addressing or exploring these recommendations regarding developmental feedback instead of traditional employee assessments. Strategic documents, policies and procedures, and employee manuals may need to be revised. By doing so, employees may see the effort made by the organization and appreciate the efforts to be heard and more valued.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This qualitative multiple case study explored developmental feedback strategies that small business leaders implement to enhance employee performance.

Recommendations for future research provide direction and insight for other studies.

There were limitations present during the data collection process. Participants had a range of leadership experiences regarding developmental feedback. The study's participants also had different interpretations of development feedback strategies and success gauges of the implementation success. Further researchers may decide to locate participants with similar understandings, leadership experience, and implementation styles.

I used a sample size of five small business leaders who successfully implemented developmental feedback strategies to enhance performance. The research scope had a limit of five participants in Arkansas. Therefore, future research could expand the

location and the number of study participants. Studying a different area may produce richer results, and increasing the number of participants may prove beneficial.

An additional opportunity for further research would be to consider conducting a quantitative methodology to study the relationship between developmental feedback and employee performance to gain in-depth insight into the topic.

### **Reflections**

Even though this seems surreal, I cannot believe that I have accomplished a goal instilled in me as a child. Born into humble beginnings, I was always taught that education is the true equalizer. My parents emphasized the importance of striving to be the best version of oneself to contribute to society. With this doctoral degree, I have the *sense of responsibility* to be a change agent, a beacon of hope, and an inspiration to my community. With the distinct honor and privilege of becoming a *doctor* comes the responsibility to educate, encourage, and assist those willing to learn. I gladly accept the challenge.

This journey has taught me that character development and growth opportunities come with rigor. My goal is to share my journey to motivate those by being transparent and honest. Initially, I did not fully apply myself to my studies, which caused some delays in my progress and unnecessary challenges. I hope to assist and empower others while they face mental obstacles when chasing their dreams by reminding them to be consistent, self-disciplined, focused, and persevere.

Finally, I would like to align my education and background to assist small businesses and local congregations to improve their organizational culture. I am excited and looking forward to doing great work for my community.

### **Conclusions**

In addressing the specific business problem of how small business leaders implement developmental feedback strategies to enhance employee performance, a multiple case study was adopted by employing five small business leaders to contribute their experience by answering semistructured interview questions. As a result, the analysis of the findings through the conceptual framework's lens allowed me to identify the following eight themes: (a) growth opportunities and staff potential; (b) challenges, limitations, and mitigation; (c) workplace culture, diversity, and environment conditions; (d) workplace dynamics and relationships; (e) communication; (f) engagement; activation, and retention; (g) performance and productivity; (h) leadership impact on intrinsic constructs. Based on the shared strategies and recommendations, small business leaders are more equipped to implement developmental feedback strategies that enhance employee performance within their organization.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

Research question: What developmental feedback strategies do leaders of small businesses in Arkansas use to enhance developmental feedback?

1. Participation is voluntary, and consent may be withdrawn at any time before or during the interview process. It will be communicated to each participant that they may withdraw by contacting me via email, phone call, or text message at [angela.bradford@waldenu.edu](mailto:angela.bradford@waldenu.edu) or (870) 725-4774. If any participant decides to withdraw from the study during the interview, they may stop responding and depart or end the phone conversation at any time.
2. Participants will receive a copy of the consent form. I will explain and answer any questions from participants.
3. Before the interview, I will ask if there are questions related to the process.
4. I will clarify or reword questions if necessary.
5. I will express my gratitude and thank each participant for their time and contribution to the study. After the interview concludes I will also provide them with my contact information for additional questions.
6. An email summary will be sent to you within seven days of the interview for member checking.



<b>What I plan to do</b>	<b>What I plan to say</b>
<p>Introduce myself, the reason for the interview, explain the confidentiality of the information, and set the stage.</p>	<p>Good day, Mr./Ms. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. This interview is part of my doctoral study.</p> <p>For this interview, we need 30 mins. This interview aims to understand your developmental feedback strategies to enhance developmental feedback.</p> <p>As a reminder, this interview is confidential; your name, your organization's name, and any other personal identifying information will not be used anywhere in my study, and I will not share the interview transcripts with anyone. I will use an identifier P1, P2... when referring to you and the organization being referred to as "The Organization." In addition, please remember that this participation is voluntary, and you may decline to answer or stop the questioning at any time.</p> <p>As discussed and agreed upon, I will record the interview for authentic transcription. When I finish transcribing the interview, we will have a follow-up meeting where I will share the transcript and address any missing information.</p> <p>Do you have any questions or clarifications for me before we start?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin interview</li> <li>• Observe non-verbal communication</li> <li>• Paraphrase as needed</li> <li>• Ask follow-up probing questions as per the flow of the interview</li> </ul>	<p><b>Probing questions</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What strategies do you use to encourage developmental feedback?</li> <li>2. What tools do you use to enhance employee feedback?</li> <li>3. What criteria are used to create employee developmental benchmarks and incentives?</li> <li>4. What challenges have you witnessed while implementing developmental feedback?</li> <li>5. How do you ensure developmental feedback aligns with the organization's goals and mission?</li> <li>6. What exit interview information do you use to enhance and implement developmental feedback as an employee performance strategy?</li> <li>7. How do you determine the effectiveness of the strategies implemented?</li> </ol>

	<p>8. How do you communicate developmental feedback to your employees?</p> <p>9. What additional information would you like to include regarding developmental feedback related to employee performance?</p> <p><b>Targeted Interview and Follow-up Questions</b></p> <p>Additional questions may be asked during the interviews depending on the flow of the conversation, the interviewees' background, their role in the institution, and their levels of influence.</p> <p><b>Targeted Wrap-up Questions</b></p> <p>10. What else can you share with me about your organization's strategies for increasing the quality of the services?</p>
Wrap up the interview and thank the participant.	<p>That was the last question. Thank you once again for your participation and your time. Do you have any more information you want to add or any questions for me?</p> <p>I will email you the summary of the answers to the questions.</p>